

A voice for education and conservation in the natural world
Rogue Valley Audubon Society
www.roguevalleyaudubon.org

Deadline for the February issue is January 20



JANUARY Program

Tuesday, Jan. 26 at 7:00 pm

The Fascinating World of Forensic Ornithology

Presented by ARIEL GAFFNEY



Ariel Gaffney will explain how she got into forensic ornithology and will discuss some of the work she has been doing at the lab on identification of Bald and Golden Eagles. The lab is developing a new tool for identifying some of their more difficult feathers.

About Ariel

I am a forensic ornithologist at the U.S. National Fish & Wildlife Forensic Laboratory in Ashland, Oregon. I earned my Bachelor of Science degree in 2013 in Integrative Biology at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. It was there that I fell in love with birds, research, and fieldwork while working on a chickadee hybridization project. I earned my Master of Science degree studying the behavior, physiology, and genetic adaptation of hummingbirds from the University of New Mexico. In 2017, I moved to Ashland to accept the position at the forensics lab! I am a certified Wildlife Forensic Scientist through the Society for Wildlife Forensic Science (SWFS). In my free time, you can find me hiking, camping, kayaking, or birding.

Zoom instructions

The January chapter meeting will be live on Zoom on Tues. Jan. 26. If you're already signed up, you won't need to sign up again. To sign up for the first time, attendees will need to register by Jan. 24 via a new mailing list created just for RVAS Zoom events. Click on this link (<https://www.roguevalleyaudubon.org/zoom-signup/>) to register. After you register, you will be sent an email with the Zoom link on Nov. 25 and again on the day of the event.

Please check your junk mail as the messages can end up there. Contact RVAS via the website if you don't receive the link on the stated dates.

If you are new to using Zoom, OLLI has helpful information about using Zoom at <https://inside.sou.edu/olli/courses/zoom-for-students.html>.

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Chapter Program meetings are held on the fourth Tuesday of the month, September through April, at 7:00 pm. Meetings take place at 1801 E. Jackson St., Medford, in Lidgate Hall of the Medford Congregational Church.

NOTE: Until further notice, chapter meetings will be held on Zoom.

Christmas Bird Counts in a Pandemic Year

By Carol Mockridge, RVAS President

The RVAS board and the coordinators of the Medford and Ashland Christmas Bird Counts have agreed to continue this illustrious tradition in 2020, following this year's guidelines set by National Audubon. But expect many changes due to COVID-19. There will be no large teams or carpooling, and no compilation dinners. And for this year only, we won't be inviting the general public to join in, with the exception of sightings in their own neighborhood. Results will be announced in the February Chat.

Bob Hunter, coordinator of the Medford count (Dec. 19), and Carol Mockridge, coordinator of the Ashland count (Dec. 27), will be contacting potential area leaders soon. Area leaders will decide how best to manage the counts in their areas. This could mean that the area leaders count alone, or with a family member or person in their pandemic bubble. Or they could elect to divide up their areas and have volunteers count a specific location and report back via email, text, or phone.

This won't be as much fun as our traditional count days, sharing unusual sightings or lunch in often freezing weather. And we will certainly be nostalgic for the compilation events at day's end. However, we are very proud to be keeping the event alive and we look forward to a really BIG count in 2021.



Status of upcoming events

Field trips - Suspended until further notice

Christmas Bird Counts - See article above

January Chapter Meeting - Jan. 26 @ 7pm

(NOTE: No December Chapter Meeting)

Letter From the Board

The RVAS board wishes you a very merry holiday season and a bright start to the New Year! We appreciate each and every member for your unshakeable support in 2020 and a great big TIA (thanks in advance) for helping to keep RVAS strong as we move into 2021.

In lieu of a traditional letter this issue, we invite you to enjoy the beautiful poetry and artwork of our own Nate Trimble. Nate was inspired to write this piece about the enigmatic Black-backed Woodpecker after conducting surveys for the species in 2017.

As this challenging year draws to a close, the Black-backed Woodpecker is a fitting symbol of the hope that life and joy may spring from the ashes of apparent devastation.

May you find that hope in our region and world this season. May only good health be visited upon you and yours. And may you be blessed with many righteous winter birds!!

- RVAS Board

The Black-backed Woodpecker

In Ashy woods among Stony Peaks
With a rattling snarl a creature speaks
In what would seem a ravaged place
Its drum dispells the guise of waste

It wears a cloak like trees killed by flame
From the color of death it draws its name
And this message it does proclaim
Destruction and rebirth is Nature's game

-Nate Trimble



Feeling inspired to renew your membership? Ready to join RVAS for the first time? Find our membership form here! <https://www.roguevalleyaudubon.org/membership/>

Or print our good-old-fashioned paper form from the October or November 2020 issues of *The Chat*: <https://www.roguevalleyaudubon.org/newsletter-archive/>

We'll be so happy to have you in our flock in 2021!!



Bear Creek Greenway Community Bird Survey to Start in January

By Juliet Grable

We are pleased to announce the launch of the Bear Creek Greenway Community Bird Survey. This will be an on-going citizen science effort to monitor how birds are responding to the Alameda Fire. We are excited to be partnering with scientists from Klamath Bird Observatory (KBO) on this important project.

Starting in January 2021, volunteers will collect observations at approximately six sites along the Greenway. Each site will include two 800-meter transects. Frank Lospalluto has been developing transects along both burned and unburned portions of Bear Creek. If you're interested in assisting with this effort, here's what the process will look like:

As a volunteer bird surveyor, you will walk each of the two transects at your site, recording all detectable birds within a 30-minute period. Each outing will take approximately 1.5 to 2 hours, and each site will be monitored twice per month.

After walking the transects, you will enter your observations on eBird. We are creating eBird Hotspots for each transect to ensure observations are entered accurately. If you've never used eBird, don't worry; we will provide detailed instructions on how to use this online database, including how to create an account.

We will post photos and descriptions of the transects to help you select the one(s) you'd like to survey, as well as locate them on the ground. Frank Lospalluto, Nate Trimble, and Pepper Trail have also offered to accompany volunteers the first time to help make sure they are in the right place. Also, if you are a less experienced birder but still want to participate, great! We will be sure to pair you with a more experienced birder at your chosen site.

Because of the increasing prevalence of COVID-19 in Jackson County and beyond, we are asking all volunteers to comply with safety protocols. We are limiting groups to no more than four people per site per visit, and request that all volunteers only carpool with people who are in their own household. Volunteers will need to wear masks and follow social distancing guidelines during their surveys.

We are still working out some details, but will be sending out an email with instructions for signing up and conducting surveys sometime in December. We may also host a volunteer orientation over Zoom. Meanwhile, enjoy the holiday season, stay safe, and happy birding! If you're interested in participating in this project and have not yet contacted me, please send me an email at julietgrable@gmail.com.

Thanks to Nate Trimble, Frank Lospalluto, and Pepper Trail of RVAS and the folks at KBO and Southern Oregon Land Conservancy for helping put this project together.

SOU *Fall in the Field*: Bringing Back the Birds @ Rogue River Preserve

By Kristi Mergenthaler

Stewardship Director, Southern Oregon Land Conservancy (SOLC)

I love birds, SOLC's Rogue River Preserve, and the graduate environmental education program at SOU. Check out the great *Fall in the Field* high school student videos (in lieu of actual classes with students this fall) and lessons developed by some amazing and lovely graduate students on birds at Rogue River Preserve. Discover why birds matter, why they are in decline, how to use the Merlin app to identify birds, how to use eBird, and investigate the use of Lewis's Woodpecker boxes at the Preserve. Please share these resources with teachers and bird-curious youth:

<https://virtualfallinthe field.org/bringing-back-the-birds/>

I am thrilled they also documented a Lewis's Woodpecker using one of our nest boxes this fall. If the boxes are fine for fall roosting, maybe they will actually use them to raise a family next year!

Field Notes for Jackson County November 2020

By Frank Lospalluto

*the vastness of all that has been lost
it is still there when the poet in exile
looks up long ago hearing the voices
of wild geese far above him flying home
- W.S. Merwin*

Winter birds visit our feeders, our forests, and fields - what follows are few notable sightings as we give thanks.

Nine **Snow Geese** were seen flying over Emigrant Lake Nov 7 and four were there on Thanksgiving Day. (LJ, RA, SP) Four **Cackling Geese** were at Emigrant on Thanksgiving as well. A beautiful lone **Cinnamon Teal** male was being seen the last few weeks at Whetstone Pond. (BF, GS, JL) They are rare here during the winter. Another stunning duck, the **Eurasian Wigeon**, was at the wetlands and pond off of E. Dutton Rd. Nov 18. (BH) Twenty-five **Canvasbacks** were on Howard Prairie Lake Nov 1. (VL) A **Redhead** male was photographed below the Lost Creek Dam near the fish hatchery Nov 19. (JL, NB, GS, JK) Two **Surf Scoters** were scooting along on Agate Lake Nov 7. (NB) Fifteen **Common Goldeneyes** were on Keene Creek Reservoir Nov 25. Thirty-two **Barrow's Goldeneyes** were on the Rogue near McGregor Park at Lost Creek. A lone **Red-breasted Merganser** was spotted with a group of Commons at Emigrant Lake Nov 25. (ML, CM)

A lone **Red-necked Grebe** was on Lost Creek Lake Nov 6. (JK) A single **Western Grebe** was on Emigrant Lake Nov 26. (RA, SP)

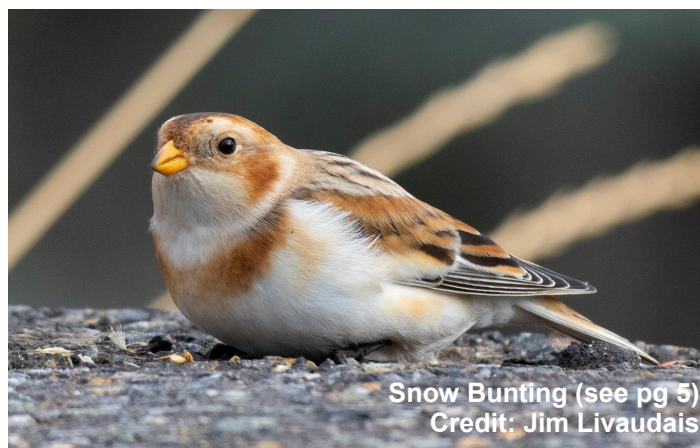
Two **Band-tailed Pigeons** were reported from the East Applegate Ridge Trail Nov 26. (EU)

Fifty-four **Sandhill Cranes** were observed circling and then landing on the shores of Howard Prairie Lake Nov 1. (VL) Twelve **Dunlin** were seen on the mud at Agate Lake Nov 9. (FE) A **Lesser Yellowlegs** was on the Ave. H ponds this month along with a **Greater Yellowlegs**. (JK)

Six **American White Pelicans** were on Agate Lake Nov 24. (KS) This is a bird that can still be seen into early December before disappearing for the winter. A **Green Heron** was spotted in Lynn Newbry Park along the Bear Creek Greenway Nov 20. (AC) **Black-crowned**

Night-Heron are being seen at a favorite roost at Whetstone Pond with two Nov 21. (JL)

A **Turkey Vulture** was drifting over Rogue River Preserve Nov 19. (FE) An adult light morph **Harlan's Red-tailed Hawk** was seen along Brophy Rd. Nov 21. (JK) Harlan's Red-tailed Hawk used to be its own species. It breeds in Alaska through the Yukon to British Columbia, and winters mostly in the Great Plains and Midwest, though we do see a few birds on the Pacific coast in the winter. The dark morphs seem to predominate, so a light morph is truly a rare treat. **Rough-legged Hawks** have been reported from a few locations recently. Two birds were reported Nov 23 from the Howard Prairie area and one bird was spotted from a residence in Ashland Nov 9. (MC, RT) A **Ferruginous Hawk** was over the north end of Ashland Nov 9. (KS)



Snow Bunting (see pg 5)
Credit: Jim Livaudais

A fierce and proud **Northern Pygmy-Owl** was observed in the Little Applegate with a Golden-crowned Sparrow in its talons Nov 13. (MH) Northern Pygmy-Owls are not uncommon in our area and once you tune your eye and ear for them you may be surprised at how often you encounter one. The **Burrowing Owl** of Agate Lake area has returned once again to its winter place near the rock dam and floating dock. It was first reported Nov 5. (JK)

Say's Phoebes are being regularly seen around the valley as winter settles in, with one photographed along Corp Ranch Rd. south of Ashland Nov 18 and one photographed at Agate Lake Nov 21. (FE, LH) A **Northern Shrike** was spotted at least three times in the past month at Ave G. Ponds, the most recent being Nov 22. (SP)

At least one **Clark's Nutcracker** continued around Mt. Ashland with one being reported from the Bull Gap Snow-Park area Nov 12. (JK) Twelve **Horned Larks** were at

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Agate Lake Nov 5 and 16 were counted on the Medco A flats Nov 6. (JK)

A late **Blue-gray Gnatcatcher** was heard at Emigrant Lake Nov 24 and seen in the same area the following day by the original observers. (CM, ML, FE)

An **American Dipper** was in the Applegate River near Cantrall–Buckley Oct 30, and one was spotted a couple of miles upstream on the Applegate Nov 22. (AG, MH)

Evening Grosbeaks are uncommon down in the valley during winter but two were over Rogue River Preserve Nov 19. (FE, ML) Up to 25 **GRAY-CROWNED ROSY-FINCH** were on Grizzly Peak recently. First observed by a local botanist and her dog Nov 22 (KM), they were foraging amongst the rocks in the old 2002 burn area. **Pine Siskins** are being seen in the valley with 50 reported from south Ashland Nov 17. (DK)

A **SNOW BUNTING** was up at the Mt. Ashland Ski Area, first spotted in the parking lot Nov 9. (VL) This was the third county record according to the Birds of Jackson County Checklist. During most winters Snow Buntings are regular visitors to the northern Oregon coast and the northeastern part of the state. There was a bird found at Wood River Wetland this fall as well.

A **SAGEBRUSH SPARROW** was found near the Ave. G entrance to Denman WMA Nov 16. (JL) This was the fourth county record. This is the sparrow that breeds in the shrub-steppe plant community of eastern Oregon and the Intermountain West. Formerly known as the Sage Sparrow, in 2013 it was split into two separate species: Bell's Sparrow and Sagebrush Sparrow. This was actually a return to the taxonomy of the early 20th century, as the Bell's Sparrow had been split into two

species but then lumped in the late 1950's. The Bell's Sparrow breeds in the coastal chaparral of California and in the Mojave Desert. Both species overlap in their wintering areas and can be challenging to separate.



Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch
Credit: Jim Livaudais

Three **Tricolored Blackbirds** were spotted along Modoc Rd. not far from the Upper Table Rock trailhead Nov 16. (FE)

Thank you to everyone who contributed observations. This month's observers include: Jim Livaudais, Norm Barrett, Gary Shaffer, Janet Kelly, Jim Hostick, Sammie Peat, Rene Allen, Bob Hunter, Howard Sands, Tanner Martin, Kristi Mergenthaler, Pepper Trail, Roxanna Tessman, Leslie Hart, Andre Carvalhaes, Marion Hadden, Anne Goff, Forrest English, Chris McCreedy, Michael Lester, Michael Carozza, John Sullivan, Erin Ulrich, Dianne Keller, Karl Schneck, Laura Johnson, and Violet.

All errors and omissions are my own. See you all in the New Year. Peace.



Sagebrush Sparrow
Credit: Jim Livaudais



The Conservation Column

By Pepper Trail

Well, the election is over – right? Despite the outrageous attempts by the Trump administration to contest President-Elect Biden's clear victory, we WILL have a new president on January 20. Unfortunately, there are plenty of anti-environmental decisions being rushed through in the meantime. I start this Conservation Column with two of the worst, both concerning irreplaceable wilderness in Alaska. But if you read to the end, you'll find a hopeful story closer to home.

Rushing to Log the Tongass National Forest

President Trump opened up more than half of Alaska's Tongass National Forest to logging and other forms of development a few days before the election, stripping protections that had safeguarded one of the world's largest intact temperate rainforests for nearly two decades.

As of October 29, it became legal for logging companies to build roads and cut and remove timber throughout more than 9.3 million acres of forest - featuring old-growth stands of red and yellow cedar, Sitka spruce, and Western hemlock. The relatively pristine expanse is also home to plentiful salmon runs and imposing fjords. The decision, which will be published in the Federal Register, reverses protections President Bill Clinton put in place in 2001 and is one of the most sweeping public lands rollbacks Trump has enacted.

The new rule states that it will make "an additional 188,000 forested acres available for timber harvest," mainly "old growth timber."



For years, federal and academic scientists have identified Tongass as an ecological oasis that serves as a massive carbon sink while providing key habitat for wild Pacific salmon and trout, Sitka black-tailed deer, and myriad other species. It boasts the highest density of brown bears in North America, and its trees - some of which are between 300 and 1,000 years old - absorb at least 8 percent of all the carbon stored in the entire Lower 48's forests combined.

"While tropical rainforests are the lungs of the planet, the Tongass is the lungs of North America," Dominick DellaSala, chief scientist with the Earth Island Institute's Wild Heritage project, said in an interview. "It's America's last climate sanctuary."

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Rushing to Sell Oil Leases in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

The lame duck Trump administration is making a rushed last-minute push to sell leases to oil companies in the long-protected Arctic National Wildlife Refuge before Inauguration Day, numerous outlets reported. On November 16, the Interior Department issued a "call for nominations" asking oil companies to request specific parcels of land to be made available for drilling.

"Any company thinking about participating in this corrupt process should know that they will have to answer to the Gwich'in people and the millions of Americans who stand with us," said Bernadette Demientieff, executive director of the Gwich'in Steering Committee, in a statement. Despite the Trump administration's efforts, oil companies may still struggle to drill in ANWR, given substantial logistical costs and recent moves by major financiers to stop funding drilling there.

Completing the lease sales before President-elect Joe Biden takes office on Jan. 20. would make it harder, though not necessarily impossible, for the Biden administration to prevent oil drilling in ANWR.

Important Saline Lakes Legislation Introduced in US Senate

This past summer, U.S. Senator Jeff Merkley (D-OR) and U.S. Senator Mitt Romney (R-UT) introduced the *Saline Lake Ecosystems in the Great Basin States Program Act of 2020*. Nevada Senators Rosen and Cortez-Masto, also have joined as co-sponsors. The legislation recognizes the ecological and economic benefits of saline (salt) lakes in the American West. This legislation will establish a program within the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) to assess, monitor, and benefit the hydrology of saline lakes in the Great Basin and the migratory birds and other wildlife that depend on them. Though less well-known than Utah's Great Salt Lake and California's Mono Lake, Oregon's Lake Abert, north of Lakeview, is one of the most important of these saline lakes for migratory shorebirds and grebes.



Wilson's
Phalarope
Credit: Jim Livaudais

As human communities grow, so does agriculture and urban development and the corresponding need for freshwater. The ever-growing demand for freshwater, combined with frequent drought conditions and climatic changes, has led to terminal saline lakes with declining water levels. This is especially true in the Great Basin of the American West, which includes Utah, Nevada, and portions of Idaho, California, and Oregon. The communities near saline lakes rely on the lakes for their businesses, livelihoods, and quality of life. Less water leads to increased concern for public health, the economy, and environment.

For wildlife, including shorebirds, these changes in saline lakes are also devastating. Contrary to what you might think, salt lakes are a highly-productive system that supports the life cycles of thousands of species, among which are dozens of species of shorebirds.

But what makes these sites so attractive for some birds? Terminal saline lakes are able to efficiently accumulate and recycle nutrients that sustain many flora and fauna. However, living in a hypersaline environment is a physiological challenge to which not all living things are adapted. Fish, for example, cannot survive in lakes with extremely high salinity. In the ab-

sence of these predators, the few species of invertebrates that inhabit these environments reach high levels of abundance and are exclusively available as prey to birds. But the abundance of invertebrates is not the only factor; the seasonality of their life cycles is also of vital importance. Thousands of shorebirds and Eared Grebes descend on the salt lakes, which serve as migratory stopover sites, at the exact moment when the invertebrates are at their maximum abundance.

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Wilson's Phalarope is one of the bird species that is best adapted to hypersaline environments. Imagine for a moment that you are a little phalarope at the end of the reproductive season. You are exhausted after the great investment of energy you have undertaken during the last few weeks, molting your feathers to a colorful dress, performing courtship and building a nest, laying eggs and taking care of your chicks. The time has arrived for you to begin your migration south, but ahead of you lies a journey of thousands of kilometers to South America. There will be days and days of uninterrupted flight. To be successful you will need to store all the energy you can in your little body. As if that wasn't enough, you don't need your breeding plumage anymore and you have to molt your feathers again! All of this needs to be done in a couple of weeks, but how?

Fortunately, as a phalarope, you can count on the resources offered by the salt lakes of the western United States for help. The few species of invertebrates that inhabit these environments (mainly crustaceans of the genus *Artemia* and dipterans of the genus *Ephydra*) reach high levels of abundance, and are an abundant food source that is rich in lipids and proteins. Feeding on them allows you to rapidly raise your body weight, so that it may almost double in just a couple of weeks.

If you imagine yourself as the phalarope again, traveling through the arid western part of the United States, you must have these saline refuges available every year. The long-term monitoring and assessment plan with the USGS proposed by the *Saline Lake Ecosystems in the Great Basin States Program Act* will support the protection of the habitat that phalaropes need. Comprehensive monitoring and assessment of saline lake ecosystems will help managers understand changes and promote coordinated management across the Great Basin.

"Saline lakes contribute significantly to local communities and their economies, as well as habitat for millions of birds," said Marcelle Shoop, Audubon's Saline Lakes Program Director. "While there have been efforts to study and protect these saline lakes at a local level, this effort also will support birds across the flyway, while benefitting communities locally. Improving our scientific understanding of the hydrology and habitats of these unique natural resources can inform coordinated approaches to management and conservation across the Great Basin."

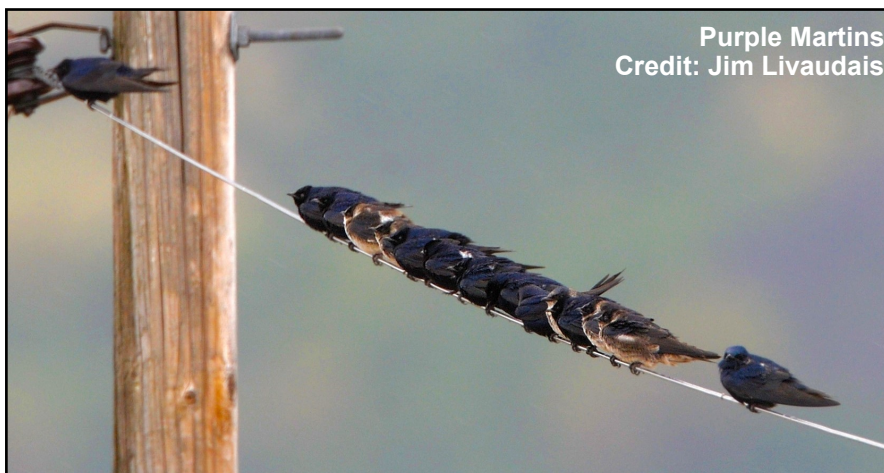
On that hopeful note - see you all in 2021. It's GOT to be better!

Purple Martin Nest Gourd Project

By Jon Deason, RVAS Board

This was our second year attempting to establish Purple Martin colonies at known nesting sites. We have been unsuccessful so far, but we plan to keep trying. Let me give some background for the project:

Purple Martins normally live in colonies, but much of their natural nesting habitat has been destroyed. In Jackson County there are only a few identified sites of one or two nesting pairs. Our plan is to add habitat by placing clusters of gourds at those sites to encourage the growth of the colonies. For the past two nesting seasons, we have placed gourds at the Rogue River Preserve and the Karl Schneck property with the hope that the fledglings will identify the new nesting sites and return next season. Other areas in Oregon have had success with this system. We will keep trying. Watch for next year's report.



A Pine Siskin Irruption Year

By Laura Fleming
Wild Birds Unlimited

It looks like the 2020-2021 winter season is going to be an irruption year of winter finches! We are having many reports of large flocks (100+ birds) of Pine Siskins in and around our area. Watch for them at your feeders where they are primarily sunflower chip and nyjer seed eaters, along with American and Lesser Goldfinches. While siskins are reported in our area throughout most of the year, their numbers vary from year to year. We often see large irruptions, approximately every other year, of winter finches (which include Pine Siskins, Purple Finches, Evening Grosbeaks, & Common Redpoll). These birds have been driven south from the northern boreal forests of Canada by poor winter coniferous cone crops.



Pine Siskins are very social and travel in large flocks, thus they can be susceptible to Salmonellosis. This is a bacterium that is primarily transmitted by fecal contamination of food and water by sick birds, though it also can be transmitted by bird-to-bird contact. Occasionally, outbreaks of the disease cause significant mortality in certain species including Pine Siskin and American Goldfinch. To reduce the risk of disease at feeders, we encourage people to **clean feeders regularly**. Once a month is not too often! It is also a good idea to avoid crowding at feeders by adding extra feeders and providing ample feeder space. Crowding is a key factor in spreading disease and also creates stress which may make birds more vulnerable to disease.

Because feeders offer you an up-close view of birds, and because birds seek out easy meals especially when their health is compromised, you might occasionally see a sick bird at your feeder. If you see sick or dead birds near your feeders, minimize the risk of infecting other birds by **immediately cleaning your feeder and the surrounding area thoroughly**. Be sure to take extra care in your own personal hygiene when handling soiled feeders, baths, or houses by washing your hands or even wearing disposable gloves as the Salmonellosis bacteria also has the ability to infect humans. **Note:** Wild Birds Unlimited offers a feeder cleaning service, \$5.00/feeder. Drop them off and pick them back up the next day!

BIRDCENTRIC EVENTS FROM AROUND THE REGION

Klamath Basin Audubon Society

An Advanced Raptor Identification Weekend With Bill Clark (via Zoom)

This weekend event will begin with an ID review. Additional topics will include accipiters, eagles and buteos, unusual plumages, and how to document vagrants. To sign up or ask questions, send an email to: dsamuels@charter.net.

Send checks (\$100) to: KBAS, PO Box 354, Klamath Falls, OR 97601

DATE: Friday, December 18th - Saturday, December 19th

TIME: Friday evening through Saturday afternoon

PLACE: Zoom

COST: \$100

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THE CHAT

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