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Rogue Valley Audubon Society
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Deadline for the September 2024 issue is August 20



Birdathon 2024 Was “Memorable”

By Carol Mockridge, Birdathon Coordinator

Birdathon 2024 is one for the record books in many ways. Friday night, May 3, was a mild spring evening which provided a productive start for teams birding around Lower Table Rock, White City Lagoons, and Lily Glen. But the weather forecast for Saturday, May 4 predicted a 20 degree drop in the valley’s temperature and constant rain and wind throughout the day. But when is the forecast 100% correct? Unfortunately, this year! Birds were hunkered down and visibility was low. “Miserable” was the word I heard most often from participants after the event. While “fun” is still a word to describe participating in the Birdathon, “memorable” can be added to this year’s adjectives.

The total Jackson County species list was 163 in spite of the weather. Team Great Greys had the highest count this year at 135. The coveted Birdathon trophy awarded to the team who raises the most money will be announced in the September *Chat* after all donations are counted.

The Brave, the Cold, the Stalwart Teams

Great Greys - 135 Species: Team Great Greys included Frank Lospalluto, Anne Goff, Brian Barr, Gretchen Ousterhout, Bob Hunter, Frank’s dog Violet, and Gretchen’s dog Wiley. Bob Hunter said, “This year’s strategy to camp on Heppsie Mountain on Friday night was not a good one. It turned out the weather report of storm warnings was accurate. It rained hard all night and there was snow on the summit, but we still managed to get a Ruffed Grouse.”

When they left the mountain and headed for lunch at the Ousterhout Farm, they found a Barn Owl keeping warm and dry in an owl box, a Yellow-breast Chat, and some Tri-colored Blackbirds.

Though rain was still persistently falling, they found a Yellow-headed Blackbird, a Bank Swallow, Caspian Terns, Bonaparte’s Gulls, and some Red-necked Phalarope at Ave. G and the White City Lagoons.

“We had a nice run at the end of the day on Emigrant Creek Road with a Pacific Wren, Pine Siskins, and a Pygmy Owl,” Bob added.

Chickadees - 130 Species: Carol Mockridge, Janet Kelley, Amanda Alford, Leslie Hart, and Kay Simmons (last year’s champs) were back again this year to defend their title. They proved to be the “Gutsy” Chickadees this year by sticking to their pre-planned route on Saturday morning and heading up Indian Memorial at 5:30 a.m. Soon the rain turned to snow while they listened for Mountain Quail up on Shale City Rd. Despite the worsening weather, they stuck with it, continuing to Howard Prairie and Hyatt Lake until 11:30 a.m. when it was impossible to see at times through a slushy curtain of white. With snow accumulating on the roadway, fearless driver Leslie Hart carefully descended back down to the rainy valley floor. They later found out that they were the only team that went up around Hyatt Lake that day.

Janet Kelly reported, “My favorite memory happened with only minutes to go on Saturday evening at White City Lagoons. A Peregrine Falcon came out of the blue at high speed, flushing up into a frenzy of all the birds on the

Birdathon, continued on page 3



Members of Team Chickadee early Saturday morning when the rain turned to snow on Shale City Road.

The Chat - June/July 2024

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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 of Christ.

NOTE: If deemed unsafe for gathering, chapter meetings will be held on Zoom.



Logos Charter School in Medford borrowed our binoculars for some birding activities and field trips last month.

Check out these shiny new birders!!



Since 2003, Southern Oregon Land Conservancy has awarded a Conservation Award to a special individual at the Annual Picnic. This year, on June 8, the award will be given to Dr. Pepper Trail! Many members of RVAS will be familiar with Pepper's work as the Conservation Committee co-chair, frequent chapter meeting presenter, writer, and poet - and for his life-long advocacy for the birds, bees, and all things in between. Congratulations, Pepper!



Status of upcoming events

Field trips: Denman Bird Walk - Jul. 3, Aug. 7, Sept. 4

The Chat - June/July 2024

Birdathon, continued from page 1



Anne Goff, Frank Lospalluto, and Bob Hunter (L-R) of the Great Grays express their true feelings about spending a stormy Friday night camped out in tents listening for owls.

pond.” The Chickadees had met up with the Binosaurians there, and witnessed this moment together for a spectacular grand finale to the Birdathon.

Binosaurians – 117 Species: “B-B-B-B-B-B-Binosaurians! After all, it was COLD out,” exclaimed Norm Barrett. His team also included Jim Livaudais, Gary Shaffer, Howard Sands, and Brian Sands. Norm reported that his highlights of the day included two dowitchers that flew into Whetstone Pond, landing and swimming around with a large flock of ducks. They also found four owls and a poorwill despite the weather.

Biking Bushtit – 111 Species: “The Biking Bushtit flies in any weather,” proclaimed Nate Trimble. His feat of finding 111 species while riding over 100 miles in that awful weather on a bicycle is mind-blowing. His favorite sighting was of fledgling Dippers being fed at Lithia Park. His rarest bird was the Gray Flycatcher on the Bear Creek Greenway. “White City Lagoons were an amazing spectacle. Worth the effort just for that,” he added.

The Rusty Birders: Tim Johnston and his wife Mary Piccolo competed this year as a new team. Tim has participated on his bicycle as the Outlaw Biker for several years in the past.



The smiling faces at the compilation dinner were testament to RVAS' stalwart birders coming together for this important fundraising event. (Or it was their first time to dry out?)



Teams Chickadees and Binosaurians rendezvoused at White City Lagoons Saturday evening at the end of the 2024 Birdathon. And look, it finally stopped raining!

May Field Notes 2024

By Frank Lospalluto

New birds, new sounds; thought you knew all those songs but turns out maybe not as well as you thought. Lucky for everyone there is Merlin to help sort it out. But wait! Those pesky Black-throated type warblers abound and even Merlin stumbles. Everyone is surprised when the bird you most definitely most assuredly declare as a Townsend's is a Hermit or most assuredly declare is a Black-throated Gray is a Hermit. Turns out Hermit Warblers break all the rules! You've been warned.

The **BRANT** that was reported in late March continued to make appearances at White City Lagoons into the first weekend of May.

On April 29 at Whetstone Pond Scott English along with others photographed a **LONG-TAILED DUCK**. This would be the 7th county record as there is no evidence that this is the same bird as the Feb. 5 Emigrant Lake bird. There was a report that one was seen April 20 along the Rogue River near the Rogue River Preserve, possibly this



Western Cattle Egret
Credit: Jim Livaudais

Field Notes, continued on page 4

The Chat - June/July 2024

Field Notes, continued from page 3

Whetstone bird.

Two **White-throated Swifts** were observed May 5 on Lower Table Rock by a cohort of KBO surveyors-in-training on their day off. White-throated Swifts may breed in our area on the Table Rocks, or on Flounce Rock up past Lost Creek Lake.

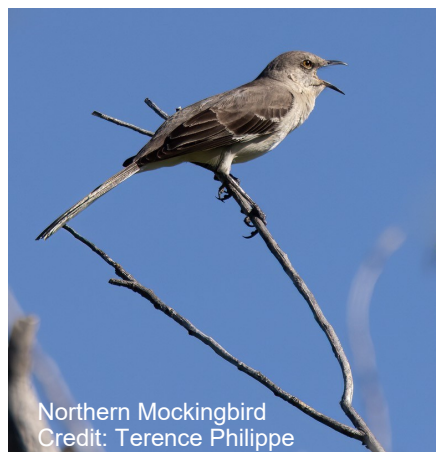
May also saw the passage of a few species we see yearly but often for only a day or an hour. Species like **Black-bellied Plover**, **Willet**, **Short-billed Dowitcher**, and **Wilson's Phalarope**. A **Whimbrel** was spotted flying over Whetstone Pond by Howard Sands May 2.

Jeff Miller and Tanner Martin witnessed a very brief appearance of a **Franklin's Gull** in breeding attire at the White City Lagoons May 10.

A **Black Tern** or Terns were seen at multiple locations (White City Lagoons, Denman Ave G and H Ponds, Agate Lake) on May 9 by multiple observers. This delicate tern feeds on both insects and fish.



Black-throated Sparrow
Credit: Jim Livaudais



Northern Mockingbird
Credit: Terence Phillippe

A **WESTERN CATTLE EGRET** was seen and photographed by Jim Livaudais May 2. This is only the second confirmed record of this species in Jackson County. The other record was way back in 1980. This egret has expanded from its native range on the African continent to Europe, across the Atlantic to South America, and on through Middle America to North America. It only arrived in North America in the 1950's and out west in the 1960's. It is named because of its association with grazing areas and grazing animals: *Bubuculus* (belonging to cattle) *ibis* (its slightly decurved ibis-like bill).

On May 25 Leslie Hart observed 3 **Snowy Egrets** at White City Lagoons. This would be the 10th record of this species in the county.

Blue-gray Gnatcatchers have been busy as witnessed by the included nest photo taken out in the Applegate by Jim Sartorio and Marion Hadden. According to Marion, they were feeding young at the nest.

While **Northern Mockingbirds** have become established resident breeders in the center of the valley especially around Denman WMA, it is always a treat to see and hear them elsewhere. Terence Phillippe shared a photo of one at his place in Talent.

A **Black-throated Sparrow** was at Agate Lake May 11. Janet Kelly got a photograph May 12. Another Black-throated Sparrow was observed near Jenny Creek on the CSNM by Lin 'Caspian' Stern while doing a Vesper Sparrow inventory survey May 16. Every few years, especially in May, we see an errant Black-throated Sparrow or three in chaparral habitats.

Peace.

References:

Billerman, S. M., B. K. Keeney, P. G. Rodewald, and T. S. Schulenberg, Eds. (2022). Birds of the World. Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA. <https://birdsoftheworld.org/bow/home>



Black Tern
Credit: Jim Livaudais



Blue-gray Gnatcatcher
Credit: Jim Sartorio

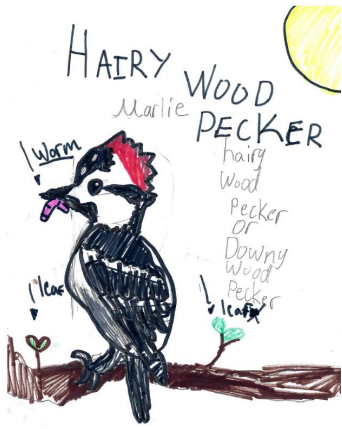
Project FeederWatch Gallery

Please enjoy this gorgeous gallery of avian art from Mr. Williams's 3rd Grade Project FeederWatch class at Jacksonville Elementary School. And a big thank you to "Miss Erin" Ulrich for helping to inspire so much love for our feathered friends in these wonderful kids!

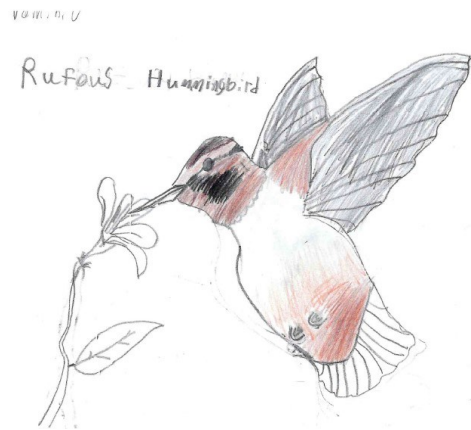
Western Tanager
to: Mrs. Erin
From: Georgia



Staller's Jay Sawy



Sion



Gallery, continued on page 6

The Chat - June/July 2024

Gallery, continued from page 5



BIRDCENTRIC EVENTS FROM AROUND THE REGION

RVAS

First Wednesday Bird Walks: July 3, August 7, September 4

Join RVAS for our monthly outing to Denman Wildlife Area. Walks begin at 8:30 am and end before noon, and are led by Jim Hostick. The gate will be open from 8:00 - 8:20 am. Participants need to purchase an ODFW Area Parking Permit at the ODFW Office, Sportsman's Warehouse on Delta Waters and Highway 62 in Medford, or at Bi-Mart. We request that all participants be vaccinated for COVID-19.

Directions to meeting spot: We will meet at the entrance off Agate Rd. between 1/4 and 1/2 mile past the fire station on the left side of the road. Coming out Table Rock Rd., turn right on Antelope Rd. and go to the light on Agate Rd. and turn left. The fire station will be on your left at the corner of Ave. G and Agate Rd. Go 1/4 to 1/2 mile past the fire station and the gate will be on your left. Coming out on Highway 62 to Antelope Rd., turn left and go to the next light. Turn right and continue to the gate on Agate Rd.

Wild Birds Unlimited

Mt. Ashland Bird Walk

Max McClarnon will be leading a bird walk to Mt. Ashland this month. Get out of the heat and come see what birds are in higher elevations this time of year! Limited to 9 participants. To reserve your spot, come in or call the store at (541) 772-2107.

DATE: Saturday Jun 29

TIME: 9:00 am

Klamath Bird Observatory

"Up to the Siskiyou Crest (and Back)" - A History-and-Birding Auto Tour

Whether you're a newcomer to the region or an old-timer, participate in a fun- and information-filled auto tour led by historian/author Jeff LaLande and noted birders Frank Lospalluto (KBO consultant) and Stacy Taubner (KBO Board member). Trip will include a short hike near Mt. Ashland to identify birds and wildflowers. This event is limited to 25 people. For more info and to register, visit <https://klamathbird.org/callnote/activities/>.

DATE: Sunday Jul 14

TIME: 8:30 am - 4:30 pm

COST: \$50 minimum donation



Courtesy: Klamath Bird Observatory

The Conservation Column

By Pepper Trail

For those of you involved in the Bear Creek Community Bird Survey - and for all of you who simply enjoy walking and birding along the Bear Creek Greenway - brace yourselves. Jackson County Parks has authorized the "Bear Creek Greenway Fuel Reduction" project, and it is being carried out right now, at the height of songbird nesting season. This is no selective and "light touch" operation, but industrial in scale, with bulldozers and other heavy equipment creating massive amounts of ground disturbance, and removing most remaining snags.

There are five identified project areas, stretching from just north of Ashland all the way to Phoenix. Work is now essentially completed on the first section, which stretches north from the "Wrangler's Gap" parking area to the Greenway Bridge over Bear Creek south of Lynn Newbry Park. I encourage you to visit and see for yourself the habitat disruption caused by this operation, with heavy equipment tracks everywhere, leading to piles of logged snags and crushed riparian shrubs surrounded by raw dirt scraped bare of all vegetation.

According to Steve Lambert, director of Jackson County Parks, this work will continue until the officially-declared start of fire season; in other words, as long as they are legally allowed.

As RVAS members know, the riparian corridor of the Bear Creek Greenway is home to many ground-, snag-, and shrub-nesting songbirds that are federally protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Unfortunately, a huge loophole therein permits the "incidental take" associated with logging operations. Regardless, Jackson County Parks, as the custodian of the ecological integrity of this riparian corridor (a major reason for the Greenway's creation) should certainly refrain from this kind of industrial-scale habitat disruption in the heart of the breeding season.



I have submitted a guest commentary to the Rogue Valley Times protesting this project - its scope and especially its timing. As of this writing, I don't know if it will be published, so I include it here. In my opinion, the work should be stopped immediately, and resumed only after nesting (and fire) season. But even if that doesn't happen, we need to strongly advocate that future management never again be scheduled during nesting season. I encourage all RVAS members concerned with this Bear Creek Fuels Reduction project to communicate their concerns to Jackson County Parks director Steve Lambert, at: LamberSM@jacksoncountyor.gov.

Where Have All the Greenway Songbirds Gone?

(Guest commentary submitted to the *Rogue Valley Times*, 5/20/24)

As a longtime birder, I am often asked this question by people I meet walking along the Bear Creek Greenway. I've usually answered by listing global threats behind the declines, from habitat loss associated with climate change to collisions with windows to predation by feral cats. But right now, sadly, my answer must include "Their nests, eggs, and babies are being crushed beneath the bulldozers carrying out the 'Bear Creek Greenway Fuel Reduction' project."

This work is being administered by Jackson County Parks and funded by the Oregon State Fire Marshal's wildfire risk reduction grant program.

To see the destruction for yourself, take a walk along the Greenway between Ashland and Talent, on the section south of the Greenway bridge over Bear Creek. (You may need to go on the weekend, as this section is closed Monday-Friday while the work is being conducted.) You will see heavy equipment tracks everywhere, leading to piles of logged snags and crushed riparian shrubs surrounded by raw dirt scraped bare of all vegetation.

This vegetation once sheltered ground-nesting Song Sparrows and Spotted Towhees; the shrubs supported the nests of Yellow-breasted Chats, Bewick's Wrens, Bushtits, and Lesser Goldfinches; and the snags were essential for cavity-nesting Northern Flickers, Acorn and Downy Woodpeckers, Tree Swallows, and Black-capped Chickadees, among others. And every other Greenway-nesting bird, from Yellow Warblers to Black-headed Grosbeaks to

Conservation Column, continued on page 8

The Chat - June/July 2024

Conservation Column, continued from page 7

Bullock's Orioles, is being subjected to the noise and disruption of this industrial logging operation - right in the height of nest-building and egg-laying season.

The management of the Bear Creek Greenway requires a challenging but essential balancing act among competing priorities, including public safety, fire hazard reduction, and the ecological integrity of this vital riparian corridor and its creek. This is especially true since the Almeda Fire, which killed many of the cottonwoods and other large trees along Bear Creek, creating an abundance of snags. In the months following the fire, many large snags near the Greenway bike path were removed for public safety. At the time, local environmental groups including the Rogue Valley Audubon Society advocated for the ecological value of the remaining snags, both as wildlife habitat when standing, and as woody structure for the creek and nutrient sources as they decay after falling.

Unfortunately, aggressive snag removal has continued, reportedly in response to public pressure on Jackson County Parks. Some of this pressure may simply reflect distaste for the "ugly" appearance of snags - an opinion that should have no influence on the management of the Greenway. More significantly, snag removal has been justified as fuels reduction. In fact, standing snags with few remaining side branches - the condition of the vast majority of snags along the Greenway - contribute very little to the spread of wildfire. The proven ecological value of snags far outweighs any hypothetical reduction in fire risk. Indeed, the extensive ground disturbance associated with this industrial logging operation could well INCREASE fire risk by promoting the growth of blackberries and other highly flammable invasive plants.

But even if we were to accept that yet another round of snag removal is justified, there is NO justification for carrying out this work now, at the height of nesting season. And there is no justification for the industrial scale of this operation - any work should be carried out with a light touch, with experienced crews working with chainsaws and hand-piling cleared vegetation. Yes, we understand that the county contracting process is complex and leads to delays. Yes, we understand that it can be difficult to find contractors willing and able to carry out the project with a light touch. But if the work cannot be done in an ecologically responsible manner, and at a time of year that does not result in the destruction of countless nests of protected bird species, it should not be done at all - and should be stopped right now in its bulldozer tracks.

Bird Day Recap!

By Kay Simmons

Bird calls and shrieks rang out at N. Mountain Park Nature Center on May 11th in honor of 2024's Rogue Valley Bird Day! Organized by Ashland Parks and Recreation under the coordination of Jenifer Aguayo, Bird Day attracted almost 250 participants for bird and pollinator activities. Children performed spirited calls of Red-tailed Hawks, Doves, Woodpeckers, and even a Kookaburra in the bird calling contest - and were joined by vocalizations of the resident Red-winged Blackbirds, Black-headed Grosbeaks, and Northern Flickers. Bird walks led by Sooney Viani, Shannon Rio, Vince Zauskey, and Kate Cleland-Sipfle had enthusiastic participation. Sooney, Shannon, and Vince also led the bird contests, and Rogue Valley Audubon provided prizes. Other partners with exhibitions and activities were Klamath Bird Observatory, the Pollinator Project Rogue Valley, and Jackson County Library Services.




Prize table! Credit: Kay Simmons



Bird Walk leaders Vince Zauskey, Shannon Rio, Sooney Viani, and Kate Cleland-Sipfle.
Credit: Kay Simmons



Jen Aguayo, Coordinator
Credit: Kay Simmons

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Agate Lake on 2024 RVAS Birdathon day, with poor visibility and snow. Amanda Alford still gives it a try!



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