



January 22 Program 7:00 pm

Marni Koopman on

Boreal Owls in North America:

an elusive species faces a changing climate



Boreal Owls were not even known to breed in the continental U.S. until the 1980's, even though they

breed, and are year-round residents, in at least eight western states. This is because breeding populations are found only at the highest elevations of western mountain ranges, in mature subalpine forest, where people rarely venture on cold winter nights. And when Boreal Owls were observed, they were assumed to be the result of irruptions from the northern boreal forests, where they are common. An intrepid doctoral student named Greg Hayward (now a Forest Service Ecologist) realized that Boreal Owls were breeding residents of the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness in Idaho, and set out to document where else they are found.

Marni Koopman is a Climate Change Scientist for the Ashland-based Geos Institute. She helps communities, agencies, and others understand the local impacts of climate change and helps them develop effective strategies to prepare for change. She works across natural and human systems to encourage integrated planning and reduce the potential for future environmental conflict.

Marni spent 5 summers and a few winters tracking and monitoring breeding boreal owls throughout the west.

Chapter meetings are held at 7:00 PM on the fourth Tuesday of the month at the Medford Congregational Church meeting hall, 1801 E. Jackson Street in East Medford. The meeting hall is located north of East Jackson Street between North Berkeley Way and North Barneburg Rd. It is most easily accessed from North Barneburg Rd. Just make a left turn into the church parking lot at the tree in the middle of the road.

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bh@ashlandnet.net

Vice-President Sooney Viani : 541-482-5146,

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Bob Black Fund Administrators: Gwyneth Ragosine,

gwynethr@mind.net & Denny Neibuhr,

rougeden@mind.net

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CBC-Ashland: Harry Fuller, 541-488-8077 & John

Bullock, jas@opendoor.com

CBC-Medford: Bob Hunter, 541-826-5569

Conservation: Pepper Trail, ptrail@ashlandnet.net &

Robert Mumby, 541-535-2934

Education: Lynn Kellogg, rvas.ed@gmail.com

Field Notes: Stewart Janes, 541-772-4595

Field Trips: Jeff Tufts, tallahto@aol.com,

541-779-4582

Holiday Party Potluck: Carol Palmer,

carol_p@charter.net

Holiday Party Raffle: Kate Cleland-Sipfle; sip-

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Membership: Robert Mumby, 541-535-2934

Membership Database: Stan McIntosh, 541-535-2053

Programs: Alex Maksymowicz, 541-482-1964, maks-

box1@gmail.com

Publicity: Katy Reed, 541-245-5095

CHAPTER COMMUNICATIONS

E-mail Address: roguevalleyaudubon@gmail.com

The Chat: chateditor@gmail.com

Webmaster: Maggi Rackley, imabrrder@yahoo.com

Web Site: www.roguevalleyaudubon.org

President's Column

Happy New Year!

2012 was a good year for birders, ending with the very successful Medford and Ashland Christmas Bird Counts, including three species that are seldom seen in December: Black-billed Magpie, Harris's Sparrow, and White Pelican. But for listers, the highlight of the year must surely have been the Phainopepla Harry Fuller discovered at Emigrant Lake in the first week of December. A good year, indeed.

It was also a good year for Rogue Valley Audubon. One especially noteworthy accomplishment was the establishment of the Bob Black Fund to honor the memory of Bob Black, an active Audubon member and avid birder. The intent of the Fund is to support activities that will promote birding, especially among those new to birding, in the Rogue Valley, and to support research about Southern Oregon birds. In November we received word that the National Audubon Society has awarded RVAS collaborative funding to produce a brochure on "Where to Bird in the Rogue Valley" with support from the Bob Black Fund. This multi-color brochure will feature birding hot spots, provide directions, and offer information on some species which might be observed. It should do much to encourage potential birders living in our valley—which is the primary focus of the Fund. It will also be a great help for visiting birders. The Fund is off to a great start, thanks to the leadership of Gwyneth Ragosine and Denny Niebuhr.

Finally, I want to thank Gwyneth Ragosine for offering to edit this issue of *The Chat*. Our regular Editor, Kaethe Fulton needed to take a month off, and Gwyneth stepped up to the task. (Many of you will remember that Gwyneth had been our Chat Editor for many years; she knows the territory.) Kaethe has quietly been serving RVAS by producing one quality issue after another for over two years. Thank you Kaethe, your contribution is very much appreciated.

And to all -Good Birding!

Bill Hering

Thank you to the generous individuals who have donated to RVAS above and beyond their annual dues*:

Colin & Elizabeth White of Ashland

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Nancy Menken of Ashland

Biruta Loy (Lynne) of Medford

Denman Wildlife Management Area continues to be an excellent birding location year-round. The monthly RAVS bird walk follows old WWII Camp White roads along Butte Creek, past marshes and ponds and through oak savannah

"Great scope looks at a Pileated Woodpecker and a Varied Thrush were the highlights of this morning's RVAS walk at Denman WMA.

Four birders booted up and joined leader Murray Orr in splashing through the three-mile route that is covered every first Wednesday of the month.

Also among the 38 species recorded was a Green Heron spotted at the flooded backwater adjacent to a section of the newly-recreated meander on Little Butte Creek. The creek was running very fast, very high and very muddy." - from Jeff Tufts



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Meet Forrest English

Several RVAS members who use eBird regularly for trip lists or day lists may have received a polite little inquiry asking for details of a sighting we may have reported years ago. Reactions I have heard range from "why does he expect me to remember THAT?" or "who is this guy anyhow?" to "that's ridiculous!" (or maybe something ruder).

So I (Gwyneth Ragosine) met to talk with him and find out who he is and why he is doing this thankless job.

GR : What is your background and how long have you been birding?

FE: I grew up in Ashland and attended Ashland High School. I spent a lot of time outdoors with my folks helping them collect stream data (*Forrest's father, Scott English, is a biologist specializing in wetlands and stream and river restoration*) and that's where much of my interests in birds came from. Both of my parents actually published (with others) a study of the reproductive ecology of the Great Blue Heron and Herons of all kinds remain a family favorite bird to this day. I worked in the family business for a number of years doing hands on stream and wetland restoration work, and have also been a commercial fisherman (great birding opportunities!) a canoe guide, and currently work to protect streams and rivers.. Although as a kid we kept lists of birds seen on family trips I was never really a lister until I got into eBird.

GR: And how did that happen?

FE: I like working with data, I work with large amounts of water quality and geospatial data at work frequently. My computer skills are self-taught; I was learning to create webpages when other kids were going to class in high school. After dating an ornithological field tech I started using eBird to keep track of all of my bird sightings . While exploring the data throughout our region I kept seeing things which looked a bit "off" with regard to locations, or species and I asked enough questions of the eBird guys that two years ago they suggested that I take on the job of Regional Editor for Jackson and Josephine Counties. I want to help make eBird as accurate and as useful as possible and that means that sometimes I ask questions about sightings, but I hate to be thought of as the "bird cop".

GR: So if I enter the sighting of a Red-faced Warbler in my backyard I would hear from you?

FE: Well, the eBird software compares submissions against county level filters. A Red-faced Warbler is not in the Jackson County filter currently (climate change may change that, who

knows?), so when you submit your checklist eBird will now prompt you for additional details. The more details you give, the less likely it is that people like me will ask you for them later! Should no details be entered though, or if I feel I need more information for some reason, I'll send a form email asking for more details of that particular sighting. I'm not trying to be judgmental of anyone's birding skills, but I am trying to do a little due diligence where appropriate.

GR: You'd send me a form letter?

FE: Yes. I don't mean to be rude, but I have a beyond full time job as the Program Director for Rogue Riverkeeper, I volunteer my time to do this and I may have to send out dozens of these emails a month. I'm afraid I just don't have the time to handcraft a new letter every time when the form letter automatically includes all of the details that I need. Additionally I'm still playing catchup trying to verify observations submitted years ago without any supporting notes or documentation during the earlier years of eBird. When I have time I go through the Jackson and Josephine County maps and bar charts looking for what I call the outliers - birds in unexpected places or at unexpected times. My goal is to provide a first layer of data quality assurance to make eBird data useful to scientists using these data. As eBird is becoming more and more used by regional and international scientific studies, this is becoming increasingly important. My role is very similar to a CBC compiler but on a larger scale: I'm sure Bob Hunter would ask for more details if I reported an unusual species on the Medford CBC.

GR: And if I ignored you or insisted on my sighting without any convincing proof, what would you do?

FE: That sighting would be marked "possible" in the database, but it would still remain in your eBird checklist and life list. To be clear I would not, and more importantly CAN NOT, remove any sightings from the database, or from personal lists.

GR: How do you feel about those of us who habitually use the "X" instead of recording numbers?

FE: eBird welcomes all levels of specificity. We want to encourage folks to submit the most specific data that they are interested in submitting. Sometimes I submit very specific checklists, with a start time, an end time, distance, and exact counts for every species seen or heard. Also frequently when traveling I submit a checklist at the county level using only presence or absence (X). The more specific the data, the more valuable it is to scientists, but there is value in all data and the goal is also to make eBird a valuable tool to all of us birders! For example, I use eBird to keep track of my entire life list, and due to the structure it can also tell me any country, state or county list for any year or for all time.

GR: *About the locations - how do you identify a birding hotspot?*

FE: I don't do that - there's a different editor for Oregon hotspots.

GR: *What's the worst part of being a regional editor?*

FE: Upsetting people who think I am questioning their birding skills and who don't understand the role I play for eBird. I've been surprised, however, how often people are glad to know that someone is checking on the data and ensuring that it is valuable to science; only perhaps 5% are upset. There's a ton of information on the eBird website - I'd highly recommend that people read the FAQs and any other documents of interest at <http://ebird.org/content/ebird/about>. I definitely do not want to discourage anybody - expert or novice- from using eBird. If I can help answer any questions you may have, please e-mail me at forrest.english@gmail.com and I'll be happy to help.



Annual Dipper Walk Saturday January 5

Join us for the 14th annual Ashland Dipper Walk on Saturday, January 5, 2013.

Bob Quaccia will again lead this leisurely walk along Ashland Creek as the group counts these unique denizens of our local waterways. Meet at the Ashland Plaza (by the lithia water fountains) at 9:30 a.m.

The walk will cover approximately $1\frac{3}{4}$ miles, and this year all birds seen will be checked for special color-coded bands that were placed on nine members of dipper families that nested along the creek this summer.

During the previous thirteen counts, an average of five birds were seen each year.



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Holiday Potluck a Big Success

By Sooney Viani and Kate Cleland-Sipfle

Our annual RVAS Holiday Potluck and Raffle/Auction held at our meeting venue December 1st was a success. Attendees chose their places at tables adorned with greenery, cones and a scent of the forest.

Auction and raffle items were displayed with color posters along the periphery. We had 24 raffle lots for a total of 38 winners and 27 separate auction lots. There were tantalizing gift certificates for quality stores, restaurants, museums or nature centers, or entertainment, and opportunities for guided nature trips and weekend getaways. Guests browsed among the varied treasures, purchased raffle tickets from the master ticket seller and plotted plans for the auction.

The potluck was a varied and splendid array of delights. A better range of choices could not have been planned. Warm drinks were available and wine from home was shared.

After dinner, Jim Livaudais shared an exciting trip to Peru with a slide show of his fabulous photos, which he enhanced with good information on culture and wildlife, while Pepper Trail added helpful and often amusing commentary. Jim had shots of masonry at Machu Picchu, and spectacular butterflies, dragonflies and bugs as well as the marvelous birds of Peru. The Hoatzin may have been the most unusual of them, for it has a strange digestive system similar to that of a cow!

Now it was time for the auction and raffle, with Pepper Trail as emcee. As expected, he was stellar and kept the event moving along with his entertaining and often scientific comments. Nick Viani kept the raffle exciting with help from the audience reaching in to pull out tickets. Pepper was clever about squeezing every dollar that he could from the bidders; auction receipts totaled \$2,035. Raffle totaled \$925. We netted \$2,750!

A huge thank you to all the folks who helped make it a very pleasant evening: Cherry Gregory and Pastor Curt set up tables; Carol Palmer coordinated the potluck and decorated tables with Mary Sinclair and Lynda Stevenson; Katy Reed and Mary Stansell took charge in the kitchen and arranged the food and drink; Nick Viani sold raffle tickets; Alex Maksymowicz, Bill Hering, Sally Peterson, Linda and Peter Kreisman, Kate Cleland-Sipfle, Shelley Tanquary and Sooney Viani all worked on the auction and raffle in various ways, and we were both edified and entertained by Jim Livaudais and Pepper Trail.

Field Notes: The Changing Seasons

By Stewart Janes

It has been a relatively quiet month with one very notable exception. I'll get to that in a moment. The steady, soaking rains are welcome, but they do cut down on outside activities as well as limit the activities of the birds.

The exception was the **Phainopepla** found by Harry Fuller at Emigrant Lake on 12/4. It remained until 12/6. I went to see it on 12/7. To my knowledge this is only the second record for Jackson County. The other was in Sams Valley in 1989. I saw this one. There are only a couple of more sightings for all of Oregon. If you went to see the **Phainopepla** you probably saw birders from all over Oregon in addition to our local contingent. It was that unusual.

Phainopeplas have a passion for mistletoe berries. They are common in the desert southwest where mistletoe is common on mesquite. They also occur in southern California foothills with a few working their way up into the Central Valley where they frequent the mistletoe in the oaks. Banding studies have found that at least some have an east west migration following the mistletoe berry crop from the Sonoran Desert to coastal California and back. This bird obviously missed Interstate 10 and got on Interstate 5 by mistake.

Several birds missed closing call and hung around longer than usual. The most noteworthy is the **White Pelican** (maybe two) that decided it was

too much trouble to make the southbound trek. One was at Emigrant Lake on 12/9 (HF), and the same bird or another was at Agate Lake on the Medford Bird Count on 12/15 (JH). Then there were the 2 **Tree Swallows** at Lost Creek reservoir on 12/16 (BH) and the **Turkey Vulture** on 12/10 over the Ousterhout Farm (GH). Add a couple of **Green Herons** on 12/5 on Little Butte Creek (JT) and another on the Boise-Cascade Pond on 12/15 (JS) and its beginning to look like spring is here. The only occasional holdovers that were missing were Osprey and Orange-crowned Warblers.

Even though the climate is changing and the above sightings are evidence of this change, there were some visiting northern birds to remind us that it's not that simple. **Northern Shrikes** were well-represented with birds on Roxy Ann (JT), near the airport (BH), and along Brophy road (two birds, BH). The two shrikes were fighting. Apparently the valley isn't big enough for all of them.

Rough-legged Hawks breed in the Arctic and winter throughout central and eastern Oregon. They have become rare in Jackson County except in the high country around Howard Prairie. So it is unusual to have two in the Eagle Point area (BH, JT, NB) near Willamette Egg Farms and another at Billings Pond in Ashland (SJ). One of the birds in



RLHA Photo by Gary Shaffer

(Continued on page 10)

(Continued from page 9)

Eagle Point is the rare dark morph.

A **Ferruginous Hawk** was along the Eagle Point-Brownsboro Road on 12/12 (JT). We usually have one or two birds wintering in the valley. The **Barred Owl** hanging out in the Ashland area was encountered in Lithia Park on 11/28 (HF).

The boreal bird invasion continues. **Red-breasted Nuthatches** are raiding feeders throughout the valley. **Chestnut-backed Chickadees**, although not numerous, are scattered about with individuals near Jacksonville (RK) and southeast Medford (DF). **Red Cross-bills** have been with us since late summer and are still with us with two flocks reported on the Medford Bird Count (FE,NB,SJ). **Varied Thrushes** are once again a regular sighting on the valley floor. It has been several years since we have had this many.

Waterbirds loved the rain but few unusual sightings were reported. However, there were two **Long-tailed Ducks** on Lost Creek Reservoir on 12/10 (NB) as well as a **Pacific Loon** on 12/11 and 12/12 (JT,NB). **Hooded Mergansers** appear to be present in larger numbers than usual (MM,LM, JT), and they have been courting. If you haven't seen courting male Hooded Mergansers make fools of themselves, I invite you to make the short walk to Ashland Pond. It's quite a show.

Other sightings of note include the **Black-billed Magpie** near the Dry Creek landfill (JH). There has been a small colony there for years, but because access is difficult, they are rarely seen. It is good to know they are still there. The other sighting was the **Pygmy Nuthatches** near

Colestine on 12/8 (FL). I am beginning to suspect they are more regular along the southern slopes of the Siskiyou than we realize. Keep an eye (and ear) out for them in the drier areas.

White-throated Sparrows continue to increase in number. Four were seen at one time near Ashland Pond.

Thanks to this month's contributors including Norm Barrett, Forrest English, Debbie Frierson, Harry Fuller, Jim Harleman, Bob Hunter, Gretchen Hunter, Frank Lospalluto, Lisa Moore, Marjorie Moore, Joe Shelton, and Jeff Tufts. Deadline for contributions to the Field Notes in the next edition of The Chat is January 15.

Parking Alert!!

Denman Parking Permit

Local birders are reminded that a parking permit is required when you visit the Denman Wildlife Area in Central Point. Permits can be purchased on a daily basis (\$7.00) or an annual basis (\$22.00), and they are transferable between cars, but each car must have a permit displayed on the dash while parked at a wildlife area.

Permits can be purchased online or at an ODFW office that sells licenses or at a license sales agent.

Proceeds from the sales of parking permits are used to improve habitat and infrastructure and to enhance wildlife viewing opportunities at wildlife areas, while augmenting funds obtained from federal excise taxes on sporting arms and ammunition and hunting license fees.

The Conservation Column

By Shelley Tanquary

On Saturday, November 10, three RVAS board members, Katy Reed, Robert Mumby and Shelley Tanquary, attended the Oregon Audubon Council Meeting in Yachats. The meeting was hosted by Portland Audubon Society and led by Bob Sallinger. Members of Audubon chapters from around the state gathered to discuss conservation issues and set conservation goals for 2013.

The morning was devoted to sharing information and progress relating to 2012 goals. The Oregon Council has designated Important Bird Areas statewide for conservation efforts. These areas include:

Steens Mountain - opposition to wind energy development in important wildlife areas

Lake Abert - water pollution issues

Malheur NWR - problems with grazing, invasive plants and invasion of wetlands by carp

Klamath NWR - water delivery issues related to assurance of flooded wetlands

East Sand Island - questions regarding management of Double-crested Cormorants

Marine Protection - Marine Reserves and wind and wave energy generation development questions relating to protection for birds.

Information was shared concerning Spotted Owl critical habitat and Barred Owl lethal control experiments by USFWS scheduled to begin next spring. Portland Audubon shared a summary of the PAS position paper strongly opposing the critical habitat proposal.

Audubon chapters and others have filed suit in federal court against the State of Oregon for violations of the Endangered Species Act relating

to the Marbled Murrelet. The Federal Government, in seeking to settle a lawsuit brought by the American Forest Resources Council, wants to suspend 1996 critical habitat designations and work on re-designation until 2018.



In the afternoon, the council members voted to continue ongoing efforts in the above concerns. The goals for 2013 also include protection of Greater Sage Grouse, Golden Eagle and native plants in Southeastern Oregon, Streaked Horned Lark in the Willamette Valley, as well as, plastic bag legislation, wind development restrictions and old growth forest protection.

On Sunday Paul Engelmeyer of PAS led a field trip to Cape Perpetua, Yaquina Bay and Ten Mile Creek. These sites are part of 100,000 acres from north of Yachats south through Cummins and Rock Creek Wilderness to Heceta Head designated by Birdlife International as a "Globally Significant Important Bird Area" for the Marbled Murrelet.

It was a productive weekend. Critically important work is being done by many groups, including the RVAS conservation committee that has provided leadership in many of these ongoing OAC conservation issues. As a result of the information received and the contacts made at the conference RVAS has already signed letters supporting important conservation policies and legislation being considered in Oregon and by the US government.

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Every first Wednesday of the month, RVAS conducts a count of bird species seen during a 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ mile walk at the Denman Wildlife Management Area in White City. This citizen science project began at Denman in the fall of 2009, and will continue at that site at least through the fall of 2013. Participants are encouraged to join in the identification and counting of all birds seen during the walk which lasts 2-3 hours and takes place every first Wednesday regardless of weather.

Meet at the Agate Road entrance (approximately one-quarter mile north of Avenue G). The gate is normally locked, but will be open for a half-hour preceding the count. Start time is usually 8 a.m. but may change depending on weather conditions. Check the RVAS website or contact leader Murray Orr (541-857-9050,