

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

Deadline for the April issue is March 20



Virtual MARCH Program

Tuesday, March 23 at 7:00 pm

“Nest la Vie: From Elaborate Nests to None At All”

Presented by NOAH BURG

Noah Burg presents two research projects focused on birds found in the African savanna. In his talk, Noah will discuss the research he’s conducted and present photographs from his field work, highlighting some of the amazing wildlife found at the study locations.

The focus of the first project is using molecular genetic tools to trace the history of an introduced obligate interspecific brood parasitic finch, the Pin-tailed Whydah (*Vidua macroura*), which ranges from sub-Saharan Africa to the Caribbean and southern California. The Pin-tailed Whydah and other birds from its genus do not build nests. Instead, similar to the Brown-headed Cowbird, they deposit their eggs in the nests of unsuspecting host species and trick the host into incubating and rearing the whydah’s young.

The second project looks at weaverbirds (Ploceidae) in Ethiopia. Weavers are known for building elaborate nest structures, and the semi-arid savannas of the Rift Valley in Ethiopia are home to some of the highest diversity of weaverbirds anywhere on the continent. Noah will present preliminary findings from a study of weaverbird nest-site placement in Awash National Park.



Noah Burg received his PhD in biology from the City University of New York and conducted his laboratory work at the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) in New York City. Originally from the East Coast, Noah worked for almost two decades in the AMNH Education Department, where he was involved in youth programming and internships focused on increasing access and participation in science research for populations of students from historically underrepresented backgrounds. Noah has relocated to Southern Oregon, where he’s taught at Rogue Community College and Southern Oregon University and volunteered at the US Fish & Wildlife National Forensics Lab. He’s an Affiliate Assistant Professor in SOU’s Environmental Science and Policy Program.

ZOOM INSTRUCTIONS: If you haven’t registered for RVAS virtual programs you will need to do so. Once registered, you will receive a link with the virtual address for all future meetings.

Click on this link to register: <https://www.roguevalleyaudubon.org/zoom-signup/>

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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.

February Field Notes

By Frank Lospalluto

“There are simply no answers to some of the great pressing questions. You continue to live them out, making your life a worthy expression of a leaning into the light.”

Arctic Dreams, Barry Lopez (1945-2020)

A single **Snow Goose** was spotted with a flock of **Canada Geese** at Mingus Pond during a recent Bear Creek bird survey Feb. 10 (NV, SV, LH). And four were loafing near the Boise-Cascade Mill Pond in Central Point along with a flock of ninety **Cackling Geese**; 65 **Greater White-fronted Geese** and a multitude of Canada Geese (FL). There were numerous reports of Greater White-fronted Geese from around the valley the past few weeks including 40 along Brophy Rd. Jan. 27 (JL, GS, NB), 46 at Agate Lake Jan. 25 (DG) and 42 along Newland Rd. Feb. 11 (RA).

Tundra Swans have been reliably spotted in the Rogue River Ranch pastures at the big road bend on Table Rock Rd. below Lower Table Rock; 17 were there Feb. 21 (KM). Two **Cinnamon Teal** were on one of the small ponds near Table Rock Rd. in Denman WMA Feb. 8 (JK). A **Eurasian Wigeon** has been a regular on the Rogue Valley Manor Campus the last couple of months (GS). One Eurasian Wigeon was on Ousterhout Farm Feb. 13 (BH).

The annual gathering of **Canvasbacks** on Mingus Pond has continued despite last summer's fire with 41 Feb. 1 (NB, JL). Also a few Canvasbacks were in the Isabel Sickels Pond along the Bear Creek Greenway on the Lynn Newbry Park section with eight observed Feb. 11 (VL).

The big duck in the pond news was the sighting of a pair of **LONG-TAILED DUCKS** on Lost Creek Lake by Elaine and Howard Sands from the Peyton Bridge Trail Feb. 16. According to the Jackson County checklist this would be the fifth county record, and from ebird reports quite a few birders have taken the hike out to see these birds.

At the Long-tailed Duck location a good number of **Eared Grebes** were spotted with a high of 30 Feb. 17 (JK). Up to three **Horned Grebes** were also in the area (JK, BH).

Band-tailed Pigeons are returning with 16 near an Ashland Residence Feb. 15 (AA). Some do overwinter in our area, as witnessed by one experienced birder Jan 8 (PT).

Anna's Hummingbirds are busy now displaying and defending territories as we move into their nesting season. And by the time this article is published, a Rufous Hummingbird or three will be making their visits to local feeders if the past is truly prologue.

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The Chat – March 2021

Field Notes continued from page 2

Three **Ring-billed Gulls** along with two **California Gulls** were at Kirtland Ponds Feb. 20 (JK). Two Ring-billed Gulls were at Emigrant Lake Feb. 17 (KM).

A lone **Green Heron** was seen on the shores of Mingus Pond Jan. 17 (RA, SP). There seem to be a few isolated individuals who don't migrate south and do spend the winter. One has been seen up in Grants Pass at the Rogue Lea Estate Ponds since early January and has been reported numerous times recently (TM).

Turkey Vultures are beginning to move up and through in greater numbers with 30 over the Rogue River in Gold Hill Feb. 22 (MB). A juvenile **Northern Goshawk** was spotted in the CSNM off Pilot Rock Rd. Feb. 5 (VL). A **Rough-legged Hawk** has been spotted around Vesper Meadow quite frequently this winter (JM). A **Ferruginous Hawk** was reported near Whetstone Pond Feb. 21 (AA).

We are entering owl season where many owl species are beginning to advertise and reinforce pair bonds. Some owls are already on nests like the seemingly ubiquitous top gun of the night skies: the **Great Horned Owl**.

Hutton's Vireo are resident forest birds who are beginning to be more active and vocal in breeding areas, as an uptick in detections on ebird reveals. Two were reported by a number of the Long-tailed Duck seekers along the Peyton Bridge Trail. An out of season **Cassin's Vireo** was seen outside the Forensics Lab in Ashland Feb. 10 (PT).

The **Loggerhead Shrike** found during the Medford CBC continues as of Feb. 17 (HS,) seen by many observers on multiple occasions near the bend in the road where Newland meets Downing not far from the TNC's Whetstone Savanna.

Black-billed Magpies continue near the Valley View Transfer Station with three being reported on Feb. 21 (TM, SM).

One hundred **Tree Swallows** were reported from the mouth of Little Butte Creek Feb. 19 along with one **Violet-green Swallow** (JH). Two Violet-green Swallows were on Denman Feb. 21 (AA). Two **Barn Swallows** were along Newland Rd. Feb. 13 (SP, RA) and two were at Kirtland Ponds Feb. 20 (JK).

Rock Wrens have been found at their known locations with birds near the dam at Agate Lake and on top of Lower Table Rock (SH, GS, HS). A **Canyon Wren** was seen near the dam east of the RV Park at Emigrant Lake and two Rock Wrens were also seen nearby Feb. 16 (JK).

Five **American Dippers** were seen in Lithia Park on an unofficial annual Dipper Walk in January (BQ). A pair of dippers may be nesting in the railroad ties near the fish barrier falls at the Holy Water and Fish Hatchery below Lost Creek Lake Feb. 2 (KS). Three American Dippers were at Little Hyatt Reservoir Feb. 5 (FE).

A rare valley sighting of a **Mountain Bluebird** Feb. 7 occurred near the stakeout area for the Loggerhead Shrike (MC).

Two **Cassin's Finches** were in Jacksonville Feb. 19 (CM) and six were at a residence up in the Greensprings Feb. 19 (MK). **Pine Siskins** continue to be abundant in our area.

Two **Great-tailed Grackles** have reverted to form proving they are here to stay by being spotted fairly regularly in the commercial area in White City from the Apple Peddler to the Shell Station: parking lot denizens.

A rash of **Townsend's Warbler** sightings the last few weeks have brightened the eyes of a few observers. Three different birds were reported from Ashland on consecutive days Feb. 14, 15, and 16 (CC, AA, JK), and one was reported near Phoenix Feb. 11 (JK).

An out of season vagrant **Western Tanager** was photographed in Phoenix Jan. 26 (EL).

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, Stephanie Martin, Kristi Mergenthaler, Pepper Trail, Roxanna Tessman, Leslie Hart, Anne Goff, Forrest English, Amanda Alford, Matt Cahill, Cheryl Crawford, Cindy McDonald, Melia Biedscheid, Susan Harrison, Dave Garcia, Jeanine Moy, Bob Quaccia, Erin Linton, Nick Viani, Sooney Viani and Violet.

A belated congratulations to Janet Kelly for a great Jackson County birding year in 2020 with 250 species total, tying the record set by Russ Namitz in 2016.

All errors and omissions are my own. Peace.

Super Sharpie Sunday

By Nick Viani

We had just finished the final hand of our weekly online bridge game and were catching up on family news before tuning into the Super Bowl. Suddenly there was a flurry of small bird activity near our feeder and then, in an instant, they were gone. As if settling into a comfortable chair, the neighborhood Sharp-shinned Hawk had landed on the large rock near the feeder, ostensibly looking for a feathery meal. Thrilled to see this beautiful bird again, I excused myself, grabbed my camera, and started shooting. And shooting. And MORE shooting. The bird surprisingly flew down from the rock onto the dwarfed species of Oregon Grape surrounding the rock and we couldn't figure out what that was all about. It was awkwardly flapping its wings while attempting to find something substantial on which to land. After a moment of fumbling around the woody foliage, it decided the feeder itself was the best vantage point and settled upon it for a while.



My first couple exposures were through the window for documentation in the event the bird flew. I then quietly opened the slider and kept shooting while slowly (and carefully) walking toward the bird while keeping my eye glued to the viewfinder. I actually got to within 10 feet at one point. The hawk was fully aware of my presence and, while wary, didn't appear to be threatened. It just ignored me—a little preening, periodically gazing down at the feeder in the unlikely event some goldfinch showed up—just hanging out.

After 10 minutes, I was getting sore holding my position. After 250 exposures (film is cheap, after all), I secretly hoped that it would just leave and, in doing so, allow me a chance for some “takeoff” shots. No such luck. I should have asked Sooney to do her cat-eradication-arm-waving freak dance but she was chatting with some friends who happened by while on a walk. It was surreal; they were taking photos of me taking photos, all the while the four of us visiting as if nothing unusual was going on. The bird simply ignored us.

There's one thing that's been consistent throughout this year-long Covid confinement. We look forward to a daily regimen of spending an hour or so together outdoors, regardless of the weather, with binoculars and camera part of our costume. The natural beauty of our neighborhood provides us numerous alternatives to hours spent indoors, and we're grateful having so many engaging walks right outside our door. Today, the natural world came to us, and I've shared a gallery of photos documenting the unusual event. Visit <https://bit.ly/3aARTCGE>

Sharpie or Cooper's?

Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks are notoriously difficult to distinguish, especially if you don't have the luxury of studying (and photographing them) for minutes. For some great tips on IDing these raptors, check out Nick's blog at <https://www.viani.us/2021/02/08/sharpie/>



How to Submit Photos on the RVAS Website

By Nick Viani

It's easier than ever to post your favorite photos onto the RVAS website. A talented group of photographers have submitted their favorite shots recently, and there's absolutely no limit to how many more can grace the site.

Here's how to share *your* favorite. I know it's tough, but choose the very best image you've taken recently. (For some examples, take a look at those contributed by other photographers.) If your subject is too small to be seen easily, go ahead and crop it. If necessary, you may also brighten it up a bit. Then save the photo to a special place on your computer and open up the RVAS Submission Page. After filling in some important information, you'll need to select that photo you saved (click on "Browse Files"). Please limit your submissions to one per week. That's all there is to it. So many have contributed, and there's room for yours, too!

URL for submitting photos: <https://www.roguevalleyaudubon.org/bird-photo-submission/>

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The Conservation Column

By Pepper Trail

As we move toward spring, let's continue to celebrate the positive (and how delightful it is to have positives to celebrate!). In this column I highlight three proposals that, if enacted, would represent tremendous victories in long-running conservation struggles.

The first proposal is the River Democracy Act (RDA). Introduced by Senator Ron Wyden and co-sponsored by Senator Jeff Merkley among others, this would add nearly 4,700 miles of Oregon's free-flowing streams to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. This would expand 42 existing Oregon wild and scenic rivers (WSRs) and establish 81 new ones. Here in southern Oregon, newly protected rivers and expanded river segments would include the Rogue, Illinois, Rough and Ready, Applegate, Little Applegate, Chetco, Jenny Creek, and Scotch Creek. In addition, lakes would now be included in the designation, including Babyfoot Lake in the Siskiyou and Parsnip Lakes in the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument.

One of the most important provisions of the River Democracy Act is that it would prohibit all mining not only on the newly designated WSRs, but also on all "scenic" and "recreational" river segments established previously. This is especially vital for Rough and Ready Creek, a watershed of unmatched botanical diversity that has been targeted by many major mining proposals over the years. The legislation would also increase the protected buffers to an average of half a mile on each side of the streams. Finally, it is written to specifically include the headwaters of these streams, fixing problematic ambiguity in the usual language conferring protection "from the headwaters."

While it is early days for this legislation, there is good reason to hope that it will be enacted into law. It has powerful co-sponsors, including Raul Grijalva, the chair of the Committee on Natural Resources in the House of Representatives. And recent polling indicates that an amazing 87% of Oregonians support establishment and expansion of more wild and scenic rivers – including 75% of Republicans. Come on, Congressman Bentz: make your constituents happy and become a co-sponsor now!

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The second proposal is before the Oregon Legislature: HB 2843, which would prohibit the taking of beavers on federal land in the state. Our own Pam Marsh is a chief sponsor of this bill. Beavers are unmatched natural engineers and provide tremendous ecological benefits by creating wetlands and ponds that store surface and groundwater for slow and sustained release. The riparian areas surrounding beaver ponds are habitat for many neotropical migrant birds, including Willow Flycatchers, Yellow Warblers, Warbling Vireos, and Bullock's Orioles.

An economic analysis shows that the market and non-market benefits of passing this bill are worth hundreds of millions of dollars in ecosystem services and restoration savings. These benefits would increase in value over time. The proposed legislation would affect fewer than 170 beaver trappers and hunters in Oregon. Between 2000 and 2018, these trappers killed over 58,000 beavers in the state.

HB 2843 would affect about 32 million acres in Oregon, or roughly 50% of the state. It is important to emphasize that this proposal would not restrict the ability of federal land managers to manage beaver-infrastructure conflicts. It would also not apply to private lands.

The biggest hurdle faced by HB 2843 is simply getting a hearing. It has been assigned to the House Committee on Agriculture on Natural Resources, which has also been assigned around 100 other pieces of legislation. Thus, HB 2843 faces stiff competition for time and attention. If a bill does not get a hearing, it "dies" in committee, and will not move forward during this legislative session. RVAS is strongly supporting the bill and advocating that it gets the attention it deserves.

The final positive proposal is just that – a proposal, and not yet a written piece of legislation. But it is highly significant in that it is an attempt by a Republican legislator to break the decades-long deadlock around the salmon-killing dams on the Snake River. This proposal has been put forth by Congressman Mike Simpson of Idaho. Given Simpson's very conservative record, it is highly significant that he has stated: "I am certain that if we do not remove [the lower Snake River dams], our salmon and steelhead are on a certain path to extinction."

Simpson is proposing a \$33.5 billion (yes, billion) package of infrastructure investments that would remove the four lower Snake River dams and advance salmon recovery, clean energy, agriculture and economies around the region, and honors treaties and responsibilities to Northwest tribes.

The high price tag is due to sweeteners for a dizzying array of interest groups. Dam removal itself is expected to cost "only" \$1.4 billion. On the conservation side, the proposal includes \$3 billion for watershed partnerships, \$600 million for sturgeon and lamprey conservation, and \$1.4 billion various investments in salmon. It would also include such things as \$10 billion for energy replacement from the removed dams, \$2.8 billion for replacement of lost wheat barging and rail shipping, and \$200 million for compensating Lower Snake River ports. Something for everyone, in other words.

Some of the proposed payouts are hard to swallow, but as famed Oregon environmentalist Andy Kerr is fond of saying, "It's only money." Months or years of negotiation will be needed before Simpson's proposals are shaped into actual legislation, but this is likely the last, best chance to remove the lower Snake dams and save these endangered salmon runs. We will continue to monitor this proposal as it moves forward.

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Status of upcoming events

Field Trips: Suspended until further notice.

Chapter meetings: Virtual until further notice. Check website for updates.

May Birdathon: To be determined

May Picnic: To be determined




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