

A voice for education and conservation in the natural world  
Rogue Valley Audubon Society  
[www.roguevalleyaudubon.org](http://www.roguevalleyaudubon.org)

*Deadline for the September issue is August 20*



## Letter From the Board

Dear Friends,

This is my final yearly summary as president of Rogue Valley Audubon. I've been on the board for six years and served as president for four. I feel grateful that all of us were able to keep the chapter going this past year despite the cancelation of most of our regular group activities. Thinking about our future, I encourage you to becoming more active in the chapter as we emerge from the pandemic and are able to once again come together to further bird conservation and education in Jackson County.

The board just had three goals for this fiscal year: keep RVAS going, succession planning, and saving the Hedrick Middle School chimney. I'll briefly describe what we accomplished. We did pretty well.

### Meetings

Chapter meetings went virtual with Pepper Trail once again launching our new season in September. We continued to have excellent speakers every month thanks to Program Chair Katy Reed. We even had a bonus meeting in May to compensate for the loss of our annual picnic. Attendance on Zoom matched the turnout at our in-person meetings.

Board meetings were held monthly on Zoom. The board monitored the state COVID guidelines in hopes of being able to resume our activities.

### Events

The Medford and Ashland Christmas Bird Counts coordinated by Bob Hunter, Carol Mockridge and Emmalisa Whalley were held with limited participation. This allowed our important 2020 data to be submitted to National Audubon.

Nate Trimble hosted the first Great Fall Migration Big Sit in September. Members counted their backyard birds for 24 hours and reported back to Nate.

### Hedrick Middle School Swifts

Kate Halstead coordinated the third annual nightly counts of the Vaux's Swifts' fall migration roost at Hedrick Middle School in August and September, and Erin Ulrich coordinated the second year of the spring counts in April and May. The nightly data was submitted to [vauxhappening.org](http://vauxhappening.org) and reinforces the importance of this vital roost.

The RVAS and Medford School District committee to save the Hedrick Middle School chimney was on hold during the pandemic. We hope to continue it soon.

### New Projects

The Bear Creek Community Bird Survey: Soon after the Almeda Fire, Conservation Co-chair Juliet Grable wrote an article in The Chat calling for the need to monitor the greenway habitat. Board member Nate Trimble worked

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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.**

*Board Letter continued from page 1*

hard to set up the survey protocols. Over the next several months, RVAS, Klamath Bird Observatory, Rogue River Watershed Council, and the Southern Oregon Land Conservancy joined forces to monitor bird populations in one of the most important pieces of lowland bird habitat in the Rogue Valley. Bi-monthly surveys are being conducted at several locations and will continue for several years to come.

Wetland Habitat Creation, Enhancement, and Public Access at Rogue Valley Sewer Services Lagoon: Rogue Valley Sewer Services reached out to Rogue Valley Audubon to partner with them to enhance mudflat habitat for shorebirds at its south sewage lagoon located on Kirtland Rd. in Jackson County. With the majority of the south lagoon no longer needed for sanitary sewage management, RVSS is interested in improving the remaining 13.7 acres for public access and usage. Bob Hunter is representing RVAS on the advisory committee. The planning and design phase is underway.

**Succession Planning**

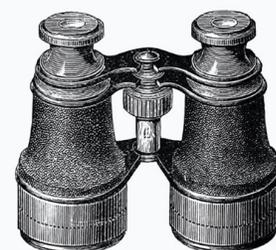
Kay Simmons and Noah Burg joined the board this year. Kay will take over the Treasurer position. Unfortunately, Noah Burg's time was short. His family is relocating and he brief tenure has come to an end. Susan Stone and Nate Trimble are retiring from the board after years of service. They will be missed and I thank them for their hard work. The board will continue discussing succession planning at our June retreat.

I am happy to report that Erin Ulrich will be taking on the role of RVAS President. We are all excited to see how our organization continues its important work under her leadership. Please take your next opportunity to welcome Erin to the position! I'm going to remain on the board to assist in a smooth transition. I look forward to birding with all of you as we emerge from our lockdown.

Good birding,

Carol Mockridge, President

Rogue Valley Audubon



**Status of upcoming events**

Field trips - Suspended until further notice

## The Conservation Column

By Pepper Trail

This last Conservation Column for the “Audubon Year” is a summary of updates on the priority issues for the Oregon Audubon Council, the consortium of Audubon chapters in Oregon. This is an abridged version of the summary prepared by Joe Liebezeit and Bob Sallinger of Portland Audubon. Lots of work being done, lots more to do! Meanwhile, let’s all take the time to get out and enjoy what we’re fighting for: our beautiful Oregon birds and ecosystems.

### OAC PRIORITY UPDATES

#### Defense of federal lands and environmental laws

- The change in administration allows the conservation community to move from defense to offense. There is significant damage to be repaired from the last four years as well as opportunity to advance new initiatives.
- The Biden Administration is working to reverse the Northern Spotted Owl Critical Habitat Rule (reduction of critical habitat). A final rule is expected towards the end of the year. Portland Audubon joined in a lawsuit in March to reinstate protections on 3.4 million acres of critical Northern Spotted Owl habitat. That lawsuit remains in play.
- The Biden Administration is working to reverse the elimination of incidental take under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.
- The Trump Administration decision not to uplist the Northern Spotted Owl (warranted but precluded) will stand. A lawsuit brought by EPIC et al. (including Portland Audubon) to force the USFWS to make a decision on up-listing has been dismissed since a decision was in fact made (albeit the wrong decision).
- Kalmiopsis Audubon Society advocated for the Southwest Oregon Watershed and Salmon Protection Act to protect the headwaters of our region’s wild rivers from the threat of strip mining. Congressman DeFazio pushed hard to get it into the House public lands bill - the Protect America’s Wilderness and Public Lands Act - which passed the full House in February. We hope that our Senators will advance a companion bill soon.
- Portland Audubon is exploring litigation related to the EIS allowing the killing of more than 120,000 Double-crested Cormorants annually which could place the small western population at significant risk.

**Double-crested Cormorants**  
Courtesy: USFWS



#### Klamath National Wildlife Refuge

- The Klamath is facing [one of the worst water crises on record](#). Klamath Audubon, Portland Audubon and others are convening groups to develop a strategy to generate pressure at the national level to get water to the refuges. Last year more than 40,000 birds died at Klamath due to botulism related to drought conditions.
- Portland Audubon et al. are continuing to challenge the Klamath Comprehensive Conservation Plan through an appeal process to the lawsuit rejected in 2019. Portland Audubon and co-litigants are currently discussing an appeal and options for moving forward as well as a bigger picture Klamath strategy for the next few years.

*Conservation Column continued on page 4*

### *Conservation Column continued from page 3*

- Currently the USFWS released a Draft Environmental Assessment for water supply enhancement for the Lower Klamath NWR which evaluates alternatives for the Service to acquire and transfer water rights from willing sellers. Portland Audubon and partners submitted public comment on this EA on March 14. [Here is a link to the draft EA](#). Our basic comments are that USFWS should more fully consider other water supply sources for Lower Klamath NWR including use of Tule Lake NWR water from leaselands. The comment letter can be provided on request.

### **Forests**

- **Oregon Forest Practices Act (OFPA) Reform:** In January, formal negotiations got underway between conservation groups and timber companies focused on developing a Habitat Conservation Plan for federally listed aquatic species on private timber lands. Bob Sallinger is one of six conservation representatives in these negotiations. The negotiations have been moving at an intense clip with two two-hour mediation sessions per week.
- Kalmiopsis Audubon Society has collaborated with the Spray Free Coast coalition to conduct trainings to help citizens understand how to use the state FERNs (Forest Activity Electronic Reporting and Notification System), and is also participating as part of the Wild Rivers Forest Collaborative, aiming to influence forest management in a positive way.

### **Marbled Murrelet**

- **Uplisting Petition:** The decision for the ODFW commission on uplisting from threatened to endangered has now been set for the July 9 ODFW Commission meeting. Portland Audubon and members of the Oregon Wildlife Coalition have been meeting with Commission members to educate them on the need to reaffirm the uplisting. We will likely need to mobilize folks to provide testimony at this virtual meeting.



California Condor  
Courtesy: USGS

### **Greater Sage-Grouse**

- The annual SageCon Summit occurred in the winter of 2020. Sage-Grouse continue to decline in Oregon and across the west. Conservation groups are likely to pursue listing under the ESA under the new administration. Stu Garrett of ECAS is representing conservation interests on the SageCon Coordinating Council.
- East Cascades Audubon has been working with local federal and state agencies to improve habitat for Sage-Grouse. This spring ECAS collected seeds of Oregon Sunshine which is an important part of the Sage-Grouse chicks' diet in the spring. Seeds were planted in "Forb Islands" on private property in Sage-Grouse habitat east of Bend to begin restoration studies for the grouse. ECAS will be monitoring this spring and summer for results.

### **California Condors**

- In March, the USFWS published a final ruling on the California Condor release site in Redwood National Park. The final rule designates this population as experimental and exempts most incidental take "provided the take is unintentional and not due to negligent conduct". Certain activities are prohibited within 656 feet (200 meters) of an active nest. These include habitat alteration (e.g., removing trees, erecting structures, altering the nest structure or perches near the nest) and significant visual or noise disturbance (e.g., tree felling, chainsaws, helicopter overflights, concrete cutters, fireworks or explosives). There are two exemptions: emergency fuel treatment activities by federal, state, tribal, or local government agencies to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires and responses to wildfire or other emergencies.

*Conservation Column continued on page 5*

## The Chat – June 2021

### *Conservation Column continued from page 4*

- The Condor release facility may be operating as soon as this fall (2021), but next fall is more likely (2022).

#### **ODFW Reform and Funding**

- Portland Audubon and the Oregon Wildlife Coalition successfully recruited and advanced the nomination of Dr. Kathayoon Khalil to the ODFW Commission. Dr. Khalil will broaden representation on the Commission and is expected to be a conservation vote. Her first commission meeting will be in June.
- There are several bills related to ODFW in the 2021 legislature (see highlights at start of this document).
- ODFW has appointed an advisory committee on beaver and a trap check requirements committee that will convene shortly. Portland Audubon has been tapped for the trap check committee. Work on these committees is now beginning.
- Portland Audubon and Humane Society of the United States have been advocating for a task force to look at statewide capacity to address wildlife conflicts and distressed wildlife situations. Both organizations provided invited testimony before the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee after ODFW killed an orphaned black bear in Southern Oregon.

#### **Climate Change**

- This fall has provided a stark example of what the future might look like under various climate scenarios: Massive fires in Oregon and Washington; drought in the Southwest, Southern Oregon, and Northern California; one of the earliest snowstorms on record in Colorado. The plight of birds is writ large with massive botulism die-offs in the Klamath and hundreds of thousands of birds found dead in New Mexico.
- There are several climate related bills in the 2021 legislative session spearheaded by Oregon Conservation Network (OCN). Audubon has not been particularly active on these bills.

#### **Beavers**

- The ODFW Commission rejected a petition to eliminate beaver trapping on federal lands. They have appointed a stakeholder committee to look at this issue in the near future.
- There were two good bills related to beaver in the 2021 legislative session. Unfortunately neither advanced.

#### **Columbia River Hydropower System**

- In early 2021, Rep Mike Simpson of Idaho (R) released a [proposal to breach the four Lower Snake River Dams](#). This mammoth proposal marks a major but very controversial development in the decades-long effort to remove the Snake River Dams. It includes a \$33 billion implementation fund but also includes several concepts of concern including a suspension of ESA litigation on the Columbia River System for 35 years. Portland Audubon has been tracking this issue and is part of the Save Our Salmon Coalition. The proposal has split the environmental community in terms of strategy with some groups focused on trying to build momentum behind the proposal (and deal with the concerns later), and other groups pushing back on the proposal due to its significant flaws. Portland Audubon has been part of discussions about how to reconcile the two approaches.

#### **Predator Control**

- **Cormorants:** The Trump Administration finalized a rule which will allow large-scale killing of Double-crested Cormorants and potentially put western populations at risk. Portland is looking at strategies to oppose this rule.
- Portland Audubon has been working to ban the bird poison Avitrol via comments to the EPA. Many chapters signed onto comments written by Portland Audubon on this issue.
- **Coyotes:** Portland Audubon worked to support HB 2728, legislation to prohibit cruel coyote killing contests. However, it appears that this bill has died in the Senate after passing the House.
- **Ravens:** ODFW and USFWS have brought back a proposal to kill ravens in Baker County to protect Sage-Grouse. The new proposal is better than the one chapters opposed in 2019 (the agencies conceded many of our points), but is still unsupported by science.

## A Brief History of Avian Drag

In honor of Pride month (belatedly, as you are reading this), we'd like to share an excerpt of a piece published by National Audubon titled "A Brief History of Avian Drag" and written by Miles Griffiths. Despite the name, it is a bit lengthy but a fascinating and worthwhile read. As drag has gained mainstream popularity recently in great part thanks to "RuPaul's Drag Race", it is enlightening to get a glimpse into the historical intersection of this art form with appreciation of nature's most fabulous and free creatures -- birds!!

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This winter, backyard birders in Pennsylvania obsessed over a Northern Cardinal exhibiting bilateral gynandromorphism, a rare phenomenon where individuals display both observable male and female characteristics evenly split down their body. Beige female coloring dominated the cardinal's left side, while bright red male coloring overtook the right. Birds exhibiting the condition are more commonly known as chimeras, or "halfsiders."



Coverage of the sighting quickly ignited conversations about another chimera cardinal—possibly the same bird—that was captured on camera two years ago in the same region during the winter of 2019. Queer Twitter took notice and quickly stanned the bird (*Editor's Note: to "stan" mean to be an ardent fan of something*), deeming it a trans and non-binary icon. Pattie Gonia, an environmental drag activist, even created a look inspired by the cardinal shortly after it went viral: She highlighted half of her face in scarlet red while keeping her facial hair, and on the other side she painted her shaved face light brown, applied a dramatic eyelash, and finished with a bold lipstick and brow.

"We see queerness and gender queerness demonstrated in birds like the [chimera] cardinal so vividly," Gonia says. "Birds are drag queens in the sky. I say it in a funny way, but I mean it literally because [in most bird species] the

males are more colorful and decorative than the females."

Since debuting in 2018, Gonia has gathered a large online following as a leader in a growing eco-focused and social savvy drag movement that advocates for queer rights, equality, and responsible conservation. She believes that intersectional environmental activism that welcomes and elevates marginalized voices historically excluded from the outdoors is the key to building a new, robust generation of conservationists. In the past year, Gonia has dressed as a Blue Jay, a Red Avadavat, a Mandarin Duck, and a Western Meadowlark, the state bird of Nebraska, where she was born and raised and took a liking to birds. "Often when I birdwatch, especially in spring, birds are these pops of flying color, and I say 'Hello, drag queen, I see you,'" she says, laughing.

How Pattie Gonia shares her message and creations might be new, but her bird-inspired looks are part of a rich drag tradition. While men dressing as women in performance dates back at least as far as ancient Greece, the niche of drag that is avian influenced can trace its roots back to the 20th century alongside the evolution of the modern drag we know. Many of these bird homages remain some of the top moments in cult cinema and reality television.

Visit <https://www.audubon.org/news/a-brief-history-avian-drag> to read the rest of the piece and view the wonderful images included, including Pattie Gonia's chimeric Northern Cardinal-inspired look.

Is your green thumb feeling a bit wilted? Are you already pining for fall planting season and daydreaming about what new shrubs and perennials might join your garden this year? And also wondering what local native plants might provide the best bird and pollinator habitat -- but also where you might find such botanical treasures? While away some long summer afternoons with the [National Audubon Society's Native Plant Database!](#)

This nifty tool allows you to input your zipcode to receive a list of native plants for your area. Listings in the "Best Results" tab are hand-selected by regional Audubon experts and include photos of the plant as well as birds that may use them. All listings can be filtered by type (e.g., grasses, trees), plant resource (e.g., nectar, seeds), and type of bird attracted (e.g., woodpeckers, sparrows). Best of all, the "Local Resources" tab gives you a listing of nurseries where these plants can be purchased, and entities like plant societies where you can seek more info.

Happy green dreaming!

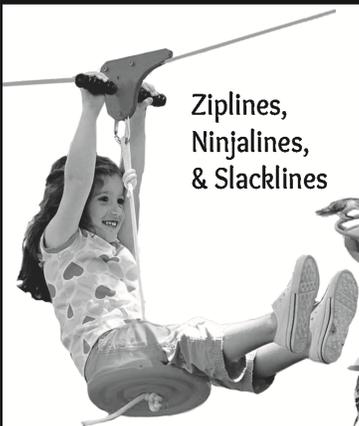


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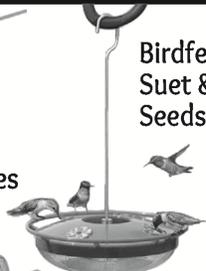
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Credit: Frank Lospalluto



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## THE CHAT

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