



The Western Grebe

Redbud Audubon Society, Inc.,

www.redbudaudubon.org

Volume 41—Issue No. 5—January 2016

January meeting topic is “Why We Bird”

What makes birders get up early to walk through the woods or tromp through wet fields? Why do we drive a hundred miles to catch a glimpse of a rare species? Why do we keep the feeder full?

Our January speaker David Rice answers these questions with his book *Why We Bird*. Published in 2013 by Golden Gate Audubon, the

JANUARY MEETING

Thursday, Jan. 21

- * David Rice will present on “Why We Bird”
- * Refreshments: 7 pm
Announcements: 7:15 pm
Program: 7:30 pm
- * Methodist Church Social Hall, 16255, Second St. Lower Lake

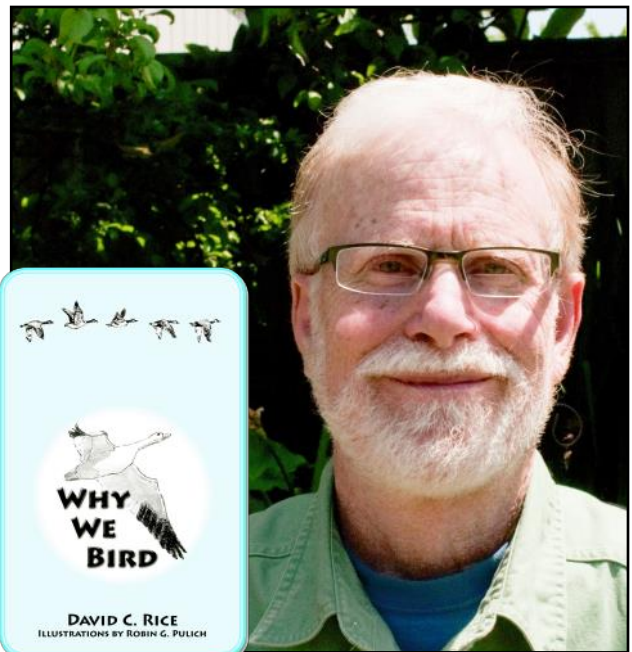
book organizes a lifetime of birding experiences into insightful short essays on the allure and attraction of birding.

There are as many reasons to bird as there are bird lovers. David Rice discusses seven reasons why we bird: Flight, Song, Color; Identifications; Games; Surprises; Conservation; Stories; and Solace.

Rice’s book is a collection of stories: birding with a friend after he gets dementia; telling a grandson about owls; analyzing a great misidentification; listening to cranes; chasing rare birds, pelagic birds, and life birds; canoeing on Christmas Counts; and more.

Why We Bird includes the reasons other bird lovers have watched, chased, or protected birds, and has an extensive reference list of birding — as opposed to bird — books. *Why We Bird* differs from these other birding books because it focuses directly on why we bird. *Why We Bird* is also a tour of many of the top birding spots in California, from Tule Lake to the Salton Sea.

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David Rice, author of book, Why We Bird.

Please note meeting place change

Starting in January Redbud Audubon will be meeting at the Methodist Church Social Hall, 16255 Second St. in Lower Lake as we did last year. The hall is across the parking lot from the Methodist Church. If you are coming through Lower Lake, turn left on Lake Street and then right on Second St. The church is on the right. We feel that moving our meetings to the south end of the county for half of our year is a way to accommodate all of our Redbud Audubon members county wide.

President's Message

by Roberta Lyons

New Year brings fresh start to Lake County birding adventures

As we look forward to the New Year, and a fresh start to our birding adventures in Lake County, it is fitting that our first speaker is David Rice who is going to lead us in a discussion of "Why We Bird." It should be a fun meeting; come prepared to join in.

I started birding in the late 1970s. I lived "off the grid," out in Morgan Valley and had started feeding birds with a single feeder. I was excited to identify Black-headed Grosbeaks; then, a large flock of Band-tailed Pigeons began to frequent the feeder. Although I had just started identifying birds, I had always noticed them.

As a kid growing up in Jago Bay on Clear Lake, we always got a kick out of the "Helldivers," (Western Grebes) and the big blue "Cranes," which of course are our Great Blue Herons. We also saw lots of mud hens (coots) and I remember fondly lying on the grass, enjoying the last warmth of summer, under the huge Valley Oak at the old Clear Lake Observer building in Lower

Lake (now the little antique store) and listening to the plaintive call of the Golden-crowned Sparrows when they arrived in the early Fall. I would walk down to the "paper" after school (my parents owned the Observer) and wait around until my grandfather could drive us home to Jago Bay as my mom and dad would often work late "getting the paper out."

My dad, Ross Hanchett, publisher of the *Clear Lake Observer*, loved birds too. He would be thrilled to see the numerous birds that we have on Clear Lake now. It is not uncommon now to see Bald Eagles and Osprey.

This winter, as many of you have probably noticed, there are huge flocks of Eared Grebes on the lake. And of course the Buffleheads and Mergansers are back. We are so lucky to live near this natural wonder.

So, think about "why you bird." If you are like me, you will probably come up with many reasons, but probably the main one will be simple: we just enjoy it.

Cornell Lab tips on bird feeding

Some interesting information gleaned from *The Birdwatching Answer Book* from The Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

Feeding Nyjer seed

What looks like seeds on the ground beneath a feeder filled with Nyjer seed are mostly just the emptied-out outer shells. Finches slit open the outer coat and use their tongue to extract the tiny seed inside. Of course, the seeds are so tiny that when a finch pulls out one seed, a few others do spill on the ground. But finches usually arrive at feeders in flocks, and while some birds are sitting at the feeders, others are on the ground picking up the spilled seed.

House Sparrows and Blackbirds

If these species are taking over your seed feeders and you would prefer they don't, Cornell Lab of Ornithology has this suggestion. Try offering striped sunflower seeds only, rather than seed mixtures or black oil sunflower seeds. Black oil sunflower is a little more nutritious but has a much thinner shell, easier for House sparrows and Black birds to open. Cornell also recommends this so that House sparrows are not being subsidized because they nest in cavities they cannot excavate themselves and therefore take nesting cavities away from other vulnerable native species.

Join us this year for the Great Backyard Bird Count

The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) is a free, fun, and easy event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of bird populations. Participants are asked to count birds for as little as 15 minutes (or as long as they wish) on one or more days of the four-day event and report their sightings online at birdcount.org. Anyone can take part in the Great Backyard Bird Count, from beginning bird watchers to experts, and you can participate from your backyard, or anywhere in the world.

Launched in 1998 by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon society, the Great Backyard bird Count was the first online citizen-science project to collect data on wild birds and to display results in near real-time.

Since then, more than 100,000 people of all ages and walks of life have joined the four-day count each February to create an annual snapshot of the distribution and abundance of birds.

We invite you to participate! Simply tally the numbers and kinds of birds you see for at least 15 minutes on one or more days of the count, **February 12-15, 2016**. You can count from any location, anywhere in the world!

If you're new to the count, first register online then enter your checklist. If you have already participated in another Cornell Lab citizen-science project, you can use your existing login.

During the count, you can explore what others are seeing in your area or around the world. Share your bird photos by entering the photo contest, or enjoy images pouring in from across the globe.

Then keep counting throughout the year with eBird, which uses the same system as the Great Backyard Bird Count to collect, store, and display data any time, all the time.

Each checklist submitted during the GBBC helps researchers at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society learn more about how birds are doing, and how to protect them and the environment we share. The 19th annual GBBC will be held Friday, February 12, through Monday, February 15, 2016. Please visit

the official website at birdcount.org for more information and be sure to check out the latest educational and promotional resources.

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2015 Breeding Season disastrous for the Grebes of Clear Lake

By Floyd E. Hayes and Dylan G. Turner, Department of Biology, Pacific Union College

For the sixth consecutive year we monitored the breeding activities of the Western Grebe and Clark's Grebe at Clear Lake. The first nesting activity was detected on June 13, when 13 nests were under construction and one egg was present. The last egg observed was on September 2. Peak breeding activity occurred during the latter half of July, with a second minor peak of activity at the end of August. Unfortunately this year turned out to be a disaster for the grebes. After our high count of 5,936 nesting attempts during the previous summer, we recorded only 888 nesting attempts this past summer, which was considerably lower than our previous low count of 1,248 nesting attempts in 2011. The nests were widely scattered across the lake in 21 colonies. Most of the nests (97.7%) were in the northern arm of the lake, with only 1.4% of the nests in the southwest arm of the lake at Anderson Marsh. The remaining 0.9% of the nests were in the southeast arm of the lake at Clearlake Oaks, where we had not observed nesting during the previous five summers.

Most of the grebes (96.8%) nested on floating platforms out in the open water, with only 3.2% of the nests attached to vegetation along the shore. The grebes tend to nest in shoreline vegetation more fre-

quently when water levels are high, and in open water more frequently when water levels are low. Nesting in open water is more risky because the nests are more visible to predators and more vulnerable to being blown ashore by strong winds. Although water levels were higher this summer than during the previous summer, when all nesting attempts took place in open water, they were still lower than normal due to California's prolonged drought. Let's hope that this winter's storms will fill up the lake!

On August 7 we conducted a survey by motorboat along the perimeter of Clear Lake and tallied 5,077 grebes, revealing that only a small proportion of grebes attempted to breed during the summer. On September 27, at the end of the breeding season, we conducted another survey by motorboat along the perimeter of Clear Lake, and observed only two juvenile grebes. Extrapolating the ratio of juveniles to adults observed within 100 meters of our motorboat to the total number of adults grebes counted (juveniles beyond 100 meters are more difficult to recognize), we estimated a total of nine juveniles for the lake. Only nine juveniles! The major causes of nesting failure appeared to be nest abandonment, presumably due to

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In July of 2015 strong winds blew nests ashore at the north end of Clear Lake.

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a low food supply for the grebes, and wind-generated waves which blew a few hundred nests to shore.

During 14.5 hours of observing nests, we recorded three predatory attacks by the American Crow on grebe eggs and one Great Blue Heron displacing a pair of Clark's Grebes from their nest. A trio of Northern River Otters twice swam near a nest but did not prey on eggs.

For the second season we used motion-activated cameras to focus on one or more active grebe nests for a combined total of 4,690 hours. The cameras documented an American Crow preying on the eggs of a nest. Several other predators, including an American Mink and a Northern River Otter, were photographed as they entered the colony, but no predation occurred. A camera also documented the inadvertent destruction of an egg by a swimming Common Carp. The cameras documented frequent breeding activities at night, including courtship, mating, and egg laying. The grebes were so active at night we wondered when they managed to sleep! Most surprisingly, a camera documented an incident of two male Western Grebes simultaneously mounting a female Western Grebe, a somewhat bizarre behavior that often occurs in ducks and a few other species of birds, but has never been reported for any species of grebe. Finally, the cameras documented numerous nests being blown ashore by strong winds on July 18. Immediately after the nests were blown ashore, many grebes inexplicably began mating on the nests and dumping eggs on the nests without incubating them.



American Crows are known to feed on grebe eggs in the nests.

January meeting topic is "Why We Bird"

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Author David Rice did not buy a pair of binoculars and start birding until his mid-twenties. When he wanted to know more, he took Joe Morlan's bird identification classes in San Francisco and joined the local Golden Gate Audubon Society. He is a knowledgeable birder, not an expert.

Rice's birding resume includes conducting censuses for two breeding bird atlases, co-leading a Golden Gate Audubon Society (GGAS) birding backpack trip to Lassen Volcanic National Park for thirty-plus years, and finding at least 150 birds in each of California's 58 counties. He was on the board of directors of GGAS in the 1980s, and is a co-author of the Alameda County Breeding Bird Atlas. He works as a psychologist in private practice and lives in Berkeley, California.

At the January chapter meeting, David Rice will share selections from his book and engage with the audience to answer questions and share birding experiences. Please join us for a very enjoyable evening!

Welcome new and returning members

Welcome new and returning members Elizabeth Roeper, Pope Valley; Agnes Brown, Clearlake Oaks; Susan Dannenfelser, Lakeport; Nancy McCarrick, Lakeport; Doreen Dickson, Lucerne; Susan Wilms, Pope Valley; and Gary Babwin, of Cobb.



Olympic BirdFest 2016 Sequim, Washington, April 15-17

Grab your binoculars and join the 12th annual **Olympic BirdFest 2016** celebration at the Dungeness River Audubon Center, April 15-17, 2016.

The stage is set...quiet bays and estuaries, sandy beaches, a five-mile-long sand spit, and a protected island bird sanctuary on the Strait of Juan de Fuca; wetlands, tide pools, rainforests, and lush river valleys.

The players are ready ... Marbled Murrelets, Rhinoceros Auklets, Harlequin Ducks, Black Oystercatchers, Peregrine Falcons, Barred and Pygmy owls will be sporting their finest spring plumage for this celebration. Enjoy guided birding trips, boat tours; and a gala banquet. Our featured speaker this year is noted artist Tony Angell, "Revealing the Secret Lives of Owls".

Experience with others the spectacular landscapes of the Olympic Peninsula ...you just might go home with a new bird for your life list! Check out the offerings by going online (www.olympicbirdfest.org).

Precede your BirdFest weekend with a three-day, two night birding cruise of the spectacular **San Juan Islands** on April 12-14, 2016. Visit San Juan and Sucia Islands, and more. Stay at the historic Roche Harbor Resort. Get cruise information and register online at: www.pugetsoundexpress.com/audubon.

Extend your Birdfest weekend with the **Neah Bay post-trip**, April 17-19, 2016: two days exploring northwest coastal Washington, a region rarely seen by birders.

Contact us by phone, at 360-681-4076, E-mail us at info@olympicbirdfest.org, Or write to us at:

*Dungeness River Audubon Center
P.O. Box 2450
Sequim, WA 98382*



The Redbud Audubon Society group observing waterfowl at the Colusa National Wildlife Refuge last year.

Annual field trip to the NWRs will be Jan. 23.

The Jan. 23, field trip hosted by the Redbud Audubon Society will be to the Colusa National Wildlife Refuge and the Sacramento Wildlife Refuge in the Sacramento Valley.

Carpooling is available. Participants leave Lower Lake around 8 a.m. and meet on the east end of the Main Street to park in a place that won't interfere with merchants in town. Don't miss this great opportunity to view a wide variety of migrating wildfowl

with expert Audubon birders.

For more information and to make reservations, contact Pat Harmon at 263-4977. Information about the Redbud Audubon Society is also available at www.redbudaudubon.org.

Please note the field trip is the Saturday after the regular Audubon meeting. The listing in the calendar has been incorrect; it is Jan. 23, not Jan. 16. We regret the error!!!!

Field Trip Calendar 2015-16

Following is the field trip calendar for the Redbud Audubon Society for 2015/16. Prior to each field trip a description will appear in the *Western Grebe* and on our website with more information about the upcoming outing. You can also call Pat Harmon at (707) 263-4977 for information. Outings start at 9 a.m. unless otherwise noted.

Jan. 23 – Colusa and Sacramento National Wildlife Refuges

Feb. 20 - Clear Lake State Park, Kelseyville

March 19 – Highland Springs Reservoir

April 23 – Laguna de Santa Rosa. Hwy. 12 near Sebastopol

May – Heron Festival - TBA

Would you like to receive the Western Grebe by email?

If you have looked at our newsletter, The Western Grebe, on our website where it is published in color, you probably have noticed how great it looks! If you send us your email, we can add you to our email list to send you the Grebe newsletter every month so you can enjoy the beautiful photos and graphics in color. Also, receiving the Grebe by email provides a substantial savings to the Redbud Audubon Society as we do not have to pay the mailing cost. Please let us know if you would prefer to receive your grebe electronically and we will take you off of our "hard," mailing list and add you to our email list to receive the Grebe. If we already have your email, but have not heard from you that you would like to receive the Grebe by email instead of through the mail, please let us know!!! You can accomplish this by emailing us at redbud.audubon@gmail.com. Thank you!

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New Member Introductory Rate — \$20 for the first year

- ☐ **YES** Enroll me in both the **National Audubon Society** and local chapter **Redbud Audubon**. Start my subscription to **Audubon Magazine**, and **The Western Grebe** chapter newsletter.
- ☐ From time to time, National Audubon may share its mailing list with other environmental organizations. If you do not wish to be contacted, please check this box.

- ☐ Save printing and mailing costs by sending my newsletter to my email address.
- ☐ I want to receive the newsletter by regular mail, but please email notifications to me.

My Email Address is:

- ☐ In addition to my membership, I would like to make a contribution to the local work of Redbud Audubon Society:
____ \$10 ____ \$20 ____ \$50 ____ \$100 ____ Other

Name _____ Phone: _____

Mailing Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Please make check payable to Redbud Audubon Society.

Mail your application and check to POB 5780, Clearlake, CA 95422

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