Across the Fence
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TRANSCRIPT

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Today on Across the Fence it's our monthly bird notes program. And we're going to travel outside Vermont to a more westerly locale. Good afternoon and thanks for joining us; I'm Judy Simpson. As always on the fourth Wednesday of the month, I am joined by Mark LaBarr, Conservation Biologist for Audubon Vermont great to see you again.

Mark.: Always good to be here.

Judy.: So you've been traveling and this time to the West Coast?

Mark.: I did go to the West Coast but before we talk about that, I want to talk a little bit about something that happened to me last night which was kind of cool. And hopefully we'll turn the tide for one of our local well not so local teams. I was at the house cooking dinner and I got a call from Patty Bordelle at the Moretown General Store, and they had a hummingbird that was stuck in their store room. Because it was moving around seeing all the brightly colored soda bottle caps and was thinking...but it was high up and they couldn't get it out the door. So I suggested to her that she get a feeder but in the meantime get something red hang in the doorway and see if the hummingbird would come down. She called back 10 minutes later and said she found a fleece Red Sox jacket that she hung in the doorway and the hummingbird came right down and flew out the door and was back outside. I'm thinking it's a sign maybe to boost the Red Sox along because they've had a tough start.

Judy.: That is a good sign. All right; you just visited one of my favorite places.

Mark.: I went to California. My family lives out there my mom's brother and sister and in particular we went to a place called Ballenas. Ballenas is on the southern tip of Point Reyes peninsula just north of San Francisco and it's this great little spot it has an amazing lagoon called the Ballenas Lagoon and you can see it there to the right and Stetson beach which a big surfing place. It's an awesome place for birds so an important bird area in California and it's a really easy one. I saw a lot of birds so I thought I'd talk a little bit about some of the ones I saw. I can't fit them all in.

Judy.: Excellent, so what do we have?

Mark.: You get out there in the first thing I see walking on my aunt’s porch. Of course it's April here, so it's gray, but in California it's green, the flowers are going and right off the bat I get a little bush tit that
comes in and start flapping around. It's not a very colorful bird but it's one that we don't have here in the east so always a good one to see. After that and the same kind of brown toned existence I had a California tohee. Here in the east we have our eastern tohee and there's a lot of different tohee species but this is one again in the backyard as I am drinking coffee. These two birds are skittering around and having a great time and check, check- I can put two on my list. I went down into the town of Ballenas just to take a walk around and on my travels down into town I came across a chestnut backed chickadee. I love this bird; it was really nice you know you're walking along you hear something that sounds like a chickadee. Chickadee is all have a tendency and you look up and I knew it wasn't a black cap which is what we have here but the real brown on it and chestnut color was nice to see a chickadee with a little different flavor to it.

Judy.: That's beautiful.

Mark.: That of course buzzing around like bees out there are hummingbirds. And this is one of the hummingbirds are I saw the most which is Anna's Hummingbird. Again the flowers are prolific nobody needs to hang up hummingbird feeders and there all over the backyard twittering away. A great bird to see and make you think that our hummingbirds are on their way back as well. Right after that I got in the town and I hear this weird noise and you get a California quail. It's funny you see the little pompadour of feather there. To see this you wonder how stays of how I have was right down the bushes have in town SS making a whole bunch of noise. So that was great. Compared to our ruffed grouse here which is well our ruffed grouse when it fluffs up its neck feathers can become a nice but it doesn't have that little top that this guy has. Then of course walking around we have our blue jays one of the jays and they have out there is the Stellars Jay. It has a nice crown of dark head, he acts like a jay, it is a jay. They also have scrub jay which is a bird we don't necessarily see. Than it did a little walking the beach and the pops up but a Wilson's warbler. This is a bird that winters out there and you can see the little black cap. I actually had one of these ones I got back moving through the Audubon so they do migrate through but it's a bird that nests much further north than where we are here in Chittenden County so it was fun to see a little warbler bopping around too that I hadn't seen in a long time.

Judy.: You are obviously by the water so you must've seen a lot of water birds too?

Mark.: Yes Ballenas is right there; you have the Pacific Ocean. I was there with my kids and one of the things you see flying over you are big bomber squadrons of brown pelicans. These are great birds and when you first see them they're very slow moving and they just fly by so that was really cool for the kids to be able to see. Of course over the 10 days that we're there you see them pretty much everywhere so you got used to them but the first time you see them it's really great.

Judy.: And then watching them dive bomb the water is fun.

Mark.: You watch them hit the water and my son was doing a little surfing so you'd see Owen surfing and the pelican that is next to him are little further out. And that was a good. We did not see any great whites that's a big area for great white shark.

Judy.: Good glad to hear that.

Mark.: And then of course in the Ballenas bay itself we saw a lot of Western Grebe there were quite a number of shorebirds but we get a couple of Grebes; we got Pie-billed Grebe here is the one that breeds here and this is a little bit longer neck and a very graceful bird you could see once the tide came in and filled up Ballenas Lagoon. Then a bird that both coasts share the snowy egret. What I like about this egret are those who bring yellow socks or shoes or what everyone aside. This bird want to see those feet it's an
easy one to identify because there are not any other egrets with that really white color. We get the great egret which is white but it does not have the yellow feet.

Judy.: Did you stay in the San Francisco area or did you travel around.

Mark.: We did we actually drove down the coast and went to the aquarium in Monterey. So we spent a little time around Monterey which is great a different thing. We drove through artichoke country and we got to see where all the artichokes come from but we did pick up a couple of birds again birds that you don't see here on the East Coast which was nice. One of those was a pelagic cormorant. Here on Lake Champlain we have the double crested cormorant and that's a bird that you see pretty commonly. Out west you have a bird like this to pelagic cormorant a little bit smaller with a white patch on the back end that ties it in. There's another Cormorant called the brance cormorant but again it's nice to see a cormorant of different feather so to speak out in the water a little bit further out playing around with the sea otters and we would see some surf scoters. It's a sea duck but it has the really funky looking bill.

Judy.: Yeah what is that?

Mark.: Well this is a male and it's just you know showing off in its own way. The little white on the back of the neck is what you see sometimes when you see them flying but this is a bird we would often see out on the water. Then a really cool gull, the hearman's gull. This is in its immature plumage. You're seeing all sorts of things out in their natural setting this was a bird that was actually feeding off of things that people had dropped when we're at the aquarium. But still, it's a good bird you can edit your list and I just like the bill and the brown color a bit separate some from of all our other white gulls. Then on the ride back I picked up this one which is the black neck stilt. This was a cool bird just the legs alone.

Judy.: Yeah it's a great name.

Mark.: When you look at this it's interesting. When you look at bird's legs and where the birds leg is bending, it is actually the ankle. That's why when you watch birds walk they are actually walking on their toes and the first segment that comes out is actually their foot. That would be their ankle and their thighs are tucked up underneath the feathers. It's a great example of how there's some modifications that birds take on. Then we drove north of there and we went to the top of Point Reyes and a great bird there was a common murre. We saw a colony of those off the tip of Point Reyes. This is kind of the penguin of the north. They nest here and the nest about 25 miles off the coast that a place called Farallon Islands which I went out to more than 20 years ago it was my first experience doing bird work and I did a lot of work with common murre so was great to see them as well.

Judy.: Excellent. You mentioned our rescue before the show?

Mark.: It was interesting we went down to the beach in Ballenas and we're looking at the tide pools and there sitting before us is what I think was an immature Pacific loon. It was just sitting there and it looked at us so we picked it up and I was able to bring it down to the water. I don't know whether it made it but once it got in the water it was fine and it floated around a little bit. It did not dive or anything but oftentimes loons you can see the feet there. There are so far back on their body that once they get stranded they can't walk or anything like that. They can push themselves a little bit about that much. So getting the bird back into the water was a big thing. It was kind of interesting to see a bird that big that close. It looks like I'm really squeezing it hard I'm not I'm just keeping the wings there. The feathers on that are pretty loose so I am not hurting the bird at all but we felt good at the end of the day that we had helped a loon get back in the water.
Judy.: That's great I know we have some time for some viewer mail. With a letter from Lorraine Tarbox of Coventry. Well she says we do enjoy watching birds at our feeder and I can identify most of them. But these recently came to a plate of sunflower seeds perched outside a window. We were a little stumped as to that of the pictures in our bird book look exactly like these. They resemble the pine Siskin but we see no yellow on them. They eat the sunflower seeds without flying off different from the chickadees which grab and fly off. She says earlier this year we were off from the pleasantly surprised to have a large flock of bohemian wax wings eating off of apples that didn't fall from the trees. After some research we decided they were not cedar wax wings after all.

Mark.: Yup and mentioned this earlier and was a good year for bohemian wax wings. And this is indeed a pine Siskin. Some of them can have a little more yellow and looking in your books they show pine Siskin sometimes with a lot of yellow in them but the narrow bill which is very much like a gold finch and just a streaking points and this is a pine Siskin and the behavior as well. To go to a feeder look gold finch and sit at the feeder and eat as opposed to a chickadee that goes back and forth with sunflower seeds. I think I have one letter here and this is from Gordon Hipco. You he writes he's from Cumberland head over in Plattsburgh New York. That noticed all the power poles had nesting osprey on them. So is talking about going across the sandbar up there. I live on Cumberland Head near the ferry dock I was wondering if the power poles behind my house are conductive for nesting or are they too far from the water. It's kind of tough birds up in the sandbar to use those power poles and the power poles are almost perfectly situated because they're out there in the middle of the marsh right next to the water so they provide all of what the osprey need there. I'm not exactly sure where the power pole is for Gordon but maybe in a situation where it's more inland not that close to water and so because of that the osprey haven't chosen that. Plus on South Hero power companies have also put some of the structures up there for them to nest. I think the osprey would have nested there anyway and the structures are just to get them away from the power lines.

Judy.: I have a question for you too I was out walking and I saw this bird it was dark gray it had a black tail and a blackish head and it was singing like crazy. I was thinking it looked like a cat bird but cat birds are supposed to make a cat sound.

Mark.: They do and the cat sound is actually their call so if you hear that meow that's their call but they're singing voice and they are mimics so they are in with the mocking birds and the thrashers. Cat birds have a very strong repertoire and very melodic, jumps around, almost incessant to some extent. My coworker said she has a couple of cat birds that are singing outside her house right now and they're driving her crazy so they can get a little bit over the top. But that's exactly what it was and if you probably got a little bit closer or had binoculars you would've noticed red under tail culverts. They like shrubby we have them in lilacs of the Audubon they liked shrubby edges and stuff so it's a bird that many folks would come across just normally.

Judy.: I had my first encounter in a blackberry patch.

Mark.: The up and they'll do. That's funny because cat birds, we used to band a lot of them and they eat a lot of fruit. Oftentimes they would stain your shirt as you're trying to ban them and we would call that lifer's because you couldn't get the stain out.

Judy.: Good to know; don't stand under a cat bird when you're in a blackberry patch. If you have a bird related question you can pass it on to Mark. You can write to him at Audubon Vermont, 255 Sherman Hollow Road Huntington VT 05462 you can also contact mark by e-mail the address is mlabarr@audubon.org. Send Mark your questions and he'll try to find the answers on an upcoming edition of Bird Notes. Thanks Mark.

Mark.: You're welcome.
Judy.: That's our program for today. I'm Judy Simpson will see you again next time on Across the Fence.

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