

SIERRA WAVE

EASTERN SIERRA AUDUBON SOCIETY

MEETINGS

Second Wednesday of the month, September through June, 7:00 PM (Board Meeting 5:45 PM), usually at the White Mountain Research Station (3 mi. East of Bishop on East Line St.)
Check local news media for possible changes.

ESAS Website: lnr.dragonfire.net/ESAS/
ES Bird Sightings: www.wmrs.edu/birds/

Evening Programs

Evening programs will be preceded by (1) announcements of interest to the membership, and (2) recent bird sightings and other news on the local natural history scene. Come prepared to participate!

September 13

Refreshments: **Bonnie Reed**

Main Program: **Gary Milano**, Inyo National Forest biologist, will present a slide program on the **Yosemite Toad**. This rare amphibian resides in wet meadows and spring areas of our own eastern Sierra Nevada range between Paiute Pass, north to Ebbetts Pass over 11,000 feet elevation. Gary will discuss how this colorful and secretive mountain dweller is faring, its life-cycle, management issues and why it is so special. Come and learn about this wonderful mountain jewel.



Yosemite Toad

October 11

Refreshments: **Mary Vocelka**

Main Program: **Sacha Heath**, a biologist with Point Reyes Bird Observatory, will present a slide program on a three-year bird study, entitled, "**Songbird Monitoring of the Riparian Communities in the Eastern Sierra Nevada and Western Great Basin Region**". Sacha has been heading up this study, with a substantial field crew of interns and volunteers, using a system of

point count transects, mist-netting, territory mapping and nest searching to discern the story of songbird use of riparian drainages along the western edge of the Owens Valley and Mono Basin. There are a number of partners involved who have helped with volunteer hours and monetary donations, of which Eastern Sierra Audubon is one. We are especially interested in her findings in relation to the impacts of brown-headed cowbirds to our region's neo-tropical migraters and look forward to hearing her results. Come and learn about this first rate research project, which could be one of the most inclusive bird research projects ever done in our area.



Arya Degenhart

Sacha Heath at work on Rush Creek

Chapter Notes

NEW MEMBERS

A warm Eastern Sierra Audubon welcome to the following new and transfer members:

Mason Begley - Bishop

Tom Boo - Bishop

Kathi Borgmann - Mammoth Lakes

Wayne Butterfield - Independence

Clive Kent - Bishop

Susan Kranz - Mammoth Lakes

Donna Lake - Bishop

Mike & Liz O'Sullivan - Bishop

Rich Pyles - Mammoth Lakes

Toni Richards - Swall Meadows

L. Saulque - Benton

Jim Parker

Chapter Notes, cont'd:

KUDOS AND THANKS!

Kudos to Mike Prather for his recognition in Audubon Magazine

The article on p. 115 of the July-August issue tells the story of Mike's major role in developing, and getting passed, the California Desert Protection Act. His current efforts aimed at publicizing and defending the bird habitat at Owens Dry Lake are highlighted. Congratulations, Mike!

Thanks for getting non-profit mailing status for the Chapter, Sandra Whitehouse

We talked about it for years, but Sandra finally took the bull by the horns and did it. Please note the absence of a stamp on this and future newsletters. Way to go, Sandra.

Thanks for your years of Service to the Chapter, John and Dee Finkbeiner

With the departure of John and Dee, several Chapter positions opened up, reflecting the extent of their involvement. Both served on the Board and as the newsletter mailing committee. John did publicity and spent many hours in our classroom outreach programs, as well as participating on Fish Slough patrols. They will be missed!

OPENINGS FOR CHAPTER VOLUNTEERS

Start off the new season by getting involved with your chapter's activities. Please talk to

Newsletter Information

Editor:

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415 Sierra Grande, Bishop, CA 93514
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The newsletter is sent to all Audubon Society members in our area. Non-members may receive the newsletter for \$6.00 annually (please send checks to the Membership Chair). Articles for the newsletter, or comments on it, should be sent to the editor (addresses above).

The newsletter is published in September, November, January, March, and May. Deadline for copy is 10 days before the month of publication.

President Jim Parker about opportunities for service.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM RECENT ESAS BOARD MEETINGS

* Concerns about the proposed housing development at Rovana by the Pacifica Corp. and potential loss of deer/riparian habitat if approved.

* Threats to Eastern Sierra Goshawks and the need for research and population surveys.

* Continued questions about the proposal of the installation of Cal Tech Radio Astronomy Telescopes at Harkless Flat and whether they are appropriate in the Inyo Mountains.

* USFS recommendation to close Alger Lakes and Bloody Canyon to domestic sheep grazing because of disease passing between them and SN bighorn sheep, resulting in the deaths of wild sheep.

* The importance of President Clinton's Roadless Initiative, writing letters to strengthen the plan and attending public meetings and hearings in support.

* Interest in the SN Frameworks Project, a region-wide planning document for the Sierra and for all users of USFS lands.

Mary Vocelka

AUDUBON'S BIRDING IN THE EASTERN SIERRA SCHOOLS

The Audubon Birding in the Schools Program was busy this year with two different classes visiting Bishop sewer ponds off East Line St. for field trips: Karen Nelson's class from the Seventh Day Adventist School, and Rosie Beach's Pine Street School third graders. These ponds offer close up views of shorebirds, water birds and ducks for the kids to see. John Finkbeiner, Debby Parker and Chris Howard brought their spotting scopes and were kept busy pointing out the birds and showing the kids how to keep a list of what they see. In spring, seven visits to classes to show our Audubon slide show kept Debby busy. The Mono County Summit Charter School, with Kris Langely, enjoyed seeing the great horned owl at Green Gate Cottonwoods off of Dixon, with won-

derful "Thank you"s coming in the mail full of drawings of this very same owl. A trip to Mammoth Lakes with Karen Gaines' elementary special education class and a walk into the forest behind the school with many nesting birds, like Mountain Chickadees, to view, got the kids really excited and more creative artwork was sent to me. A visit to Ilene Mandelbaum's "Gardening and Birds" special spring class at Lee Vining High School was another success story, with a hike along Lee Vining Creek to view nesting Bullock's Orioles, bright Yellow Warblers and mystery singers we never saw but only heard. The class kept our binoculars and put them to use watching bird banding with the Pt. Reyes Bird Observatory crew, a hike with Mono Lake Tufa State Reserve Ranger, Dave Marquart and another bird walk



Great Horned Owl, by Paden, student at Mono County Summit Charter School

with the Mono Lake Committee's Bartshe Miller. Back in Bishop, even the 28 Seventh Day Adventist Rainbow preschoolers enjoyed the slide show and walk behind their school to see birds that nest near Home Street. We also sat in the field, and with their teacher Mary Lou, making bird nests out of the field grass. Also a few visits to our local Bishop's Pine Street School for a bird slide show rounded out the year. We were able to give each class, which didn't already have one, a bird book to keep.

We thank James Wilson of Wilson's Eastside Sports for his discounted price to us so that we might share birds with the school children of Inyo and Mono Counties.

Debby Parker

BLM'S ADDINGTON PRAISES OUR FISH SLOUGH WORK

Sends letter to Gordon Nelson

Gordon Nelson, our Chapter's Coordinator for volunteer activities at Fish Slough, received the following letter from Steve Addington:

Dear Gordon,

On behalf of the public and our field office staff I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to your Audubon chapter for "adopting" the Fish Slough Area of Critical Environmental Concern, and especially to the volunteers who spend their weekends patrolling Fish Slough.

An Audubon volunteer has taken a BLM truck out to Fish Slough for one day of almost every weekend for several years. Volunteers make bird and other wildlife observations, note what kind of recreational activities are occurring, talk with visitors and give them information, read a rain gauge and help maintain a spring flow measuring device, check on petroglyph sites, rake out offroad tracks, pick up litter, and keep an eye out for unauthorized activities. Individual volunteers may not be aware how much difference they are making, sometimes just by being there. Here are some of the tangible benefits:

- During the years since the Audubon patrol began, offroad vehicle use has decreased in Fish Slough and old unauthorized routes have been successfully rehabilitated.
- There has been very little damage to the petroglyph sites patrolled by Audubon volunteers.
- Volunteers have detected vandalism to fences and signs and helped repair and replace them promptly, with the incidence of vandalism decreasing over time.
- Litter has decreased, with volunteers picking up trash and deterring would-be litterers by maintaining a clean environment and showing that somebody cares.
- Volunteers have found livestock out of place and their prompt reports have helped us rectify the situation before damage was done.
- Accurate spring flow measurements are obtained much more frequently than they would be without the volunteers' maintenance efforts. This monitoring is crucial to determine any change in the flow rate of springs critical to maintaining endangered fish habitat.
- Volunteers with birding skills have worked with a draft bird checklist for Fish Slough and

contributed information to be used in creating a more complete, detailed and accurate checklist to distribute to visitors. These and other wildlife observations also help us in planning management activities to have the maximum benefit and least negative impact.

- At the annual meeting of the Fish Slough Joint Management Committee we share a summary of the volunteers' field notes with all of the agencies involved with Fish Slough. The notes have often been helpful in answering questions that come up during the meetings, for instance, on the demographics and activities of Fish Slough visitors.

The Audubon volunteers often serve the public directly by providing them with information about Fish Slough and the outstanding biological, geological and cultural features that make it special. Indirectly and more profoundly, they serve present and future generations with their efforts toward maintaining the integrity of this rare desert wetland and the fragile and beautiful Volcanic Tableland.

Our small staff is responsible for 750,000 acres of public land, spread out between Topaz Lake and Owens Lake. Without the help of volunteers we could scarcely begin to give the gems of this area the attention they deserve. We thank Eastern Sierra Audubon for recognizing the importance of Fish Slough, and the volunteers for giving their own time to help maintain it. Your collective contribution is probably much greater than you realize, as is our gratitude.

Sincerely,

Steve Addington
BLM, Bishop Field Office Manager

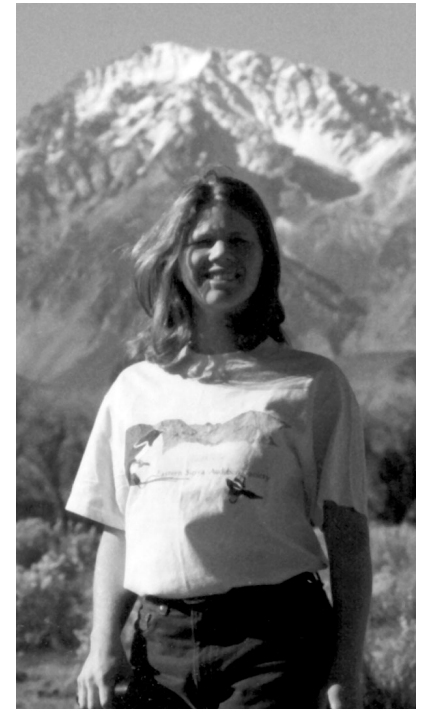
Gordon adds the following note:

Thanks are due to the current members of our weekend patrol. Those now involved are: John Finkbeiner, Derrick and Mary Vocolka, Dorothy Burnstrom, Martha Kramer, Dick Schneider, Earl Gann, and Sam Glasser. Any Audubon members that would be interested in joining our group, please contact me at 873-7489.

WE CONTRIBUTE TO BOLIVAR FLAT

Why did Eastern Sierra Audubon Society send Houston Audubon Society a check for \$100 for their land acquisition program along the Texas gulf coast and the area known as Bolivar Flat? Here's why: This spring, Jim and I, tagging along behind Tom and Jo Heindel and a few other Owens Valley birders visited this area for two weeks. Each day we would race to the coastal areas of

T-Shirts



According to Debby Parker, a new batch of our t-shirts (100% cotton) came in (one is modelled above by her daughter Sarah). Two new styles are available: Womens scoop neck (\$14) and v-necks (\$14) in pastels and earthtones. To check out both old and new styles, see Debby at a meeting, or call her at 872-4447.

small oak forests, beach or grassland preserves in high anticipation of seeing new birds. I remember clearly one visit to Bolivar flat. As we approached the shore, a gorgeous Peregrine Falcon flew in, circled slowly, and flushed multitudes of shorebirds as it landed in clear view for us to watch on the beach. This regal hunter stayed, allowing us plenty of time to "ooh" and "ah", and study its distinct plumage. The shorebirds settled down again and with the tide out, they, along with gulls and terns were able to rest on exposed, warm sand and bask in the sun. As we studied this "bird show" through our scopes, we could see, beyond shimmering blue Galveston Bay, its industrial look, due to giant ocean-going tankers and oil refineries as its backdrop. We realized that these birds were using prime real estate to just live. Open space along the shoreline seemed a rare sight, and we saw the trend of more summer homes being built daily on tall pilings, in order that

Chapter Notes, cont'd:

they might survive the regular high-water storms. We realized also that Houston, one of the largest cities in the US and only a couple hours drive north, was having its influence over this area. It was only a matter of time before all spare land could be built upon.

But the birds need the land too: The hundreds of Black Skimmers that lay "beached-out" before us, kind of tilting to one side, the nesting Wilson's Plovers, the wading Blue Herons and the wintering Semipalmated and Piping Plovers. Even songbirds were present, as Jim found a Gray-cheeked Thrush on the beach and there were a few warblers and sparrows there too. But, the bulk of the songbirds were found 20 minutes inland, in the small oak forests, where from mid-April to mid-May, migrators such as warblers, buntings, orioles, tanagers, flycatchers and grosbeaks, spy this land and drop down into the seeming comfort of leafy oak branches. If they had faced strong headwinds and storms on their journey north across the Gulf of Mexico, they relished the open space and forests to land in, gobbling up juicy green caterpillars and resting before carrying on to their nesting and summering grounds farther north. It's a bird paradise and much of the land is privately held. To their credit, Houston Audubon Society owns at least two of the important small forest preserves we visited, Boy Scout Woods and Smith Oaks and birders from all over the world visit here annually to see this concentration of colorful birds. We, in the Eastern Sierra, are linked to this area because each time a Chestnut-sided or a Black-and-White Warbler shows up at Birchim Canyon or an Eastern Phoebe shows up at Mono Lake, these birds quite possibly came north through Texas but took a "wrong" turn on their southern journey and

ended up in our neck of the woods before continuing south. In a way, we might never see these eastern vagrants here, if it wasn't for Bolivar Flat or Smith Oaks or Boy Scout Woods. We thank the Texas birders for taking care of these birds and we hope our small contribution can help continue to protect the open space for these migrants to use. We hope to be able to give a gift annually. Visit these websites to learn more about these areas and the Houston Audubon Society:

<<http://www.camacdonald.com/birding/Hotspots/BolivarPeninsula.htm>>; <<http://texasbirding.simplenet.com/index.html>>; <<http://www.houstonaudubon.org/>>.

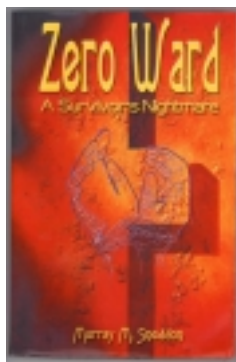
Debby Parker

BOOK REVIEWS

Zero Ward: A Survivor's Nightmare, by Murray M. Sneddon

2000. Writers Club Press, San Jose CA, 159 pp.

A few years back Eastern Sierra Audubon lost a devoted and valued member when Murray Sneddon passed away. All who knew him now miss this gentle, caring art teacher with his cheerful outlook and devotion to the natural world. Fortunately, a fascinating part of Murray lives on with the publication this year of *Zero Ward*, the story of his World War II experiences.



A couple years ago, Debby and I were visiting with Murray, when by

chance he began to tell us an amazing tale. He was taken prisoner by the Japanese army in the Philippines in 1942. *Zero Ward* tells the incredible story of his internment

and eventual escape (in 1944) in a personal narrative that makes the reader feel as though he or she had actually lived those events. As the conclusion draws near, the story becomes more unbelievable, page by page! Yet, all that is told in the book is a factual account. Even if one did not know Murray, *Zero Ward* gives a gripping insight into human nature and endurance that cannot leave the reader unaffected.

Jim Parker

Birds of Northern California, by David Fix and Andy Bezener

2000. Lone Pine Publishing, Renton WA. 384 pp.

This new Field Guide, aimed at the committed beginner and beyond, covers much of the Eastern Sierra, but does not extend to Death Valley proper. Thus it will be useful to birders of the Owens Valley and points north. Since only 328 species are covered, more space than is usual (an entire page) is given to each. Identification of regional birds is made easier by the absence of distractions caused by illustrations of birds from outside the area covered. A handy Reference Guide at the beginning of the book, complete with good thumbnail illustrations, helps with preliminary ID and, in conjunction with an even briefer quick guide on the back cover, and color-keyed tabs, gets you quickly to the part of the book where a bird-in-sight will be found. Quite a bit of natural history and ID information is crammed into each page, along with one generous-sized illustration for each species. Most illustrations are well done, but racial variation may lead to confusion in some cases - e.g., the Sage Sparrow shown is the coastal form, which is quite a bit darker than ours. The guide will be a useful addition to the serious beginner who recognizes the value of having more than one field guide (and this is an excellent beginners guide), but its usefulness is seriously limited for local birders by the absence of Death Valley coverage.

Larry Blakely

NATIVE PLANTS SALE

The Bristlecone Chapter of the California Native Plant Society will be holding their



Bolivar Flat

David Sarkosi

native plant sale on September 9 at the Tri-County Fairgrounds in Bishop starting at 9:00 AM. Highlights from this year's sale include Yellow monkeyflower (*Mimulus guttatus*), Great basin wild rye (*Leymus cinereus*), Virgin's bower vine (*Clematis ligusticifolia*), Indian hemp (*Apocynum cannabinum*) and *Penstemon insertus*.

A preview featuring all the plants offered, along with growing tips, is scheduled for Tuesday, September 5 at 7:00pm at the White Mountain Research Station.

For more information or a plant list, contact Karen Ferrell-Ingram at 387-2913 or at ingram@telis.org.

BIRD-A-THON 2000

This year's Eastern Sierra Audubon Bird-A-Thon raised a little over \$800.00 thanks to all of you who pledged with us. Your pledge represents a real investment in the Audubon cause here in the Eastern Sierra. Our work monitoring the rewatering of the Lower Owens River in 2003 and the efforts to protect and enhance bird populations at Owens Lake continues. We hope someday to canoe from the aqueduct intake to the Owens Lake where we will witness the birds as well as the dust settling. The chapter's education program still reaches local classrooms taking kids on outings using chapter binoculars. In addition this year we have awarded Eliot Gann from Bishop High School the David Gaines Scholarship to the Golden Trout Camp Natural History Workshop. What a busy chapter you all belong to.

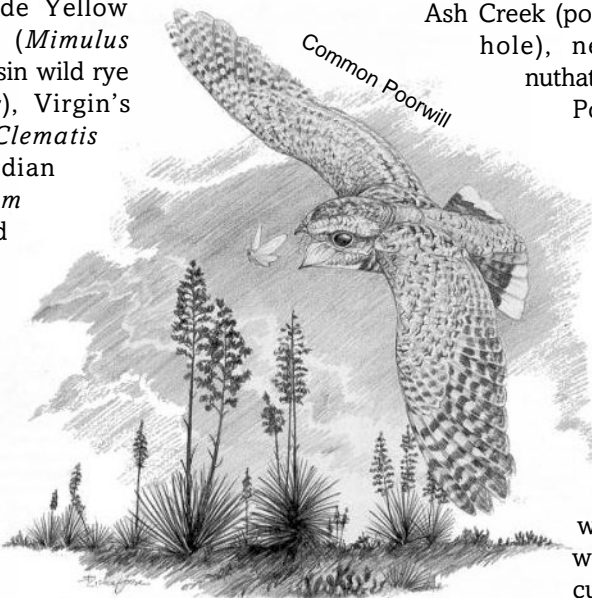
Our Bird-A-Thon team began at 6AM along the upper alluvial fans above Lone Pine looking for the desert scrub species and ended in near dark down along the Owens River. The entire day was filled with birds wherever we went. The trees literally dripped with birds of all kinds. Although we had no real rare or uncommon birds, we had never seen so many birds in total number. Recent winds might have played a roll in

forcing birds to stop over for a longer time in the area. Some of the species that we located include - burrowing owl near Ash Creek (possibly at a nest hole), nesting pygmy nuthatches at Whitney Portal, 36 spotted sandpipers on one small beach at Diaz Lake and white-faced ibis along the shore of Owens Lake. In the afternoon strong winds made our work more difficult, but by 7:30 PM along the Owens River we totaled 107 species. As we drove home up Whitney Portal Road along Lone Pine Creek we thought we should see a great-blue heron flying by heading for a fishing spot. Above us in the twilight sky the crooked-necked, longlegged grandfather glided down canyon right over the car. Sometimes we can even cue the birds, huh?

Mike Prather

DEEP SPRINGS RESOURCE MANAGEMENT TEAM

We have received a press release from Carla Scheidlinger, a member of the Deep Springs Resource Management Team. It describes the Team's activities over the past several years, its goals being improved management of cattle grazing of the Deep Springs College herds, to better protect environmental resources in the White Mountain grazing allotments without adversely impinging cattle raising revenues to the College. The press release is too long to print here, but I will put it on the web version of this issue of the WAVE, and will have a copy at the next meeting for anyone who might like to see this interesting report. - Ed



The illustrations on this page are by J. Zickafoose and are from Jack Siler's website (see p. 8)

AMARGOSA WORK PARTY

Mim Romero, who spoke to us last May on her conservation work over the years in the Amargosa area, writes of a need for volunteers on a BLM work party to be held Sept. 23. Help is needed to put up three barriers that BLM is going to place at the entrances to 3 of the canyons where ATVs and OHVs are now entering the Wilderness Area illegally, in an area 20 miles south of Shoshone. The work will begin very early in the a.m. and stop at noon at which time BLM is going to have a big bar b que for everyone, a free t-shirt, a band, and camaraderie and fellowship. The "OHV crowd" has pledged 100 volunteers; Mim would like to bring at least 20 "enviros". Details at the Sept. meeting, or contact Mim at: <mimromero@lvcm.com>.

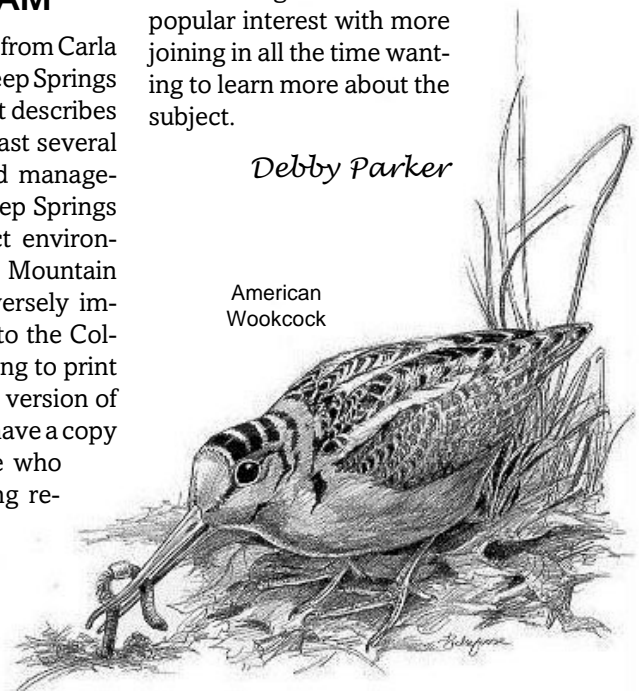
GOOD NEWS FOR TOADS AND BIRDING

Glass Creek Meadow will no longer have domestic sheep grazing, according to Inyo NF, due to the listing and protection of the Sierra Nevada big horn sheep. This should greatly benefit the Yosemite toads living there!

Naturalist Ranger, Dave Marquart, of the Mono Lake Tufa State Reserve, said he had to stop advertising his Sunday morning bird walks at the Mono County Park, as too many people were showing up (35 one day) and making such a crowd the birds were scared off. Goes to show that birdwatching is becoming an ever more popular interest with more joining in all the time wanting to learn more about the subject.

Debby Parker

American Wookcock



Field Trips

CALENDAR

Field Trip Signup Potluck, Sunday September 10th, 5PM at Chris Howard's and Rosie Beach's, 1763 Zuni Circle, Bishop. Bring a dish to share and your calendar. Call RSVP to Chris at 873-7422. Audubon Field Trips are a great way to meet new people and share the Eastern Sierra with others. Thanks to all former and future trip leaders!

Mono Basin Birding with Chris Howard, September 30, 8:00AM at the 'Y' behind the gas stations in Bishop to carpool, or 9:15AM at the Mono Lake Forest Service Visitor Center parking lot. Expect to see eared grebes galore: up to a million! Also, Shorebirds, ducks, and woodpeckers. Bring a lunch, water, and binoculars. Should last until mid-afternoon. Contact Chris at 873-7422 with questions.

Highway Cleanup with John and Ros Gorham. October 21st. Feel good about doing your part to keep the Eastern Sierra beautiful. Meet for breakfast at Tom's Place restaurant at 8:00AM or 9:00AM for the cleanup. Bring gloves and dress for the weather. Should last a couple hours. Call John or Ros with questions at 938-2023.

Chris Howard

BIRDING TRIP ALONG HIGHWAYS 6 AND 120 TO MONO LAKE

Eleven birders enjoyed cooler weather and great birding on Eliot Gann's field trip up into Mono County. The June 24 Audubon trip looped up Highway 6 to Benton and across Hwy. 120 to Mono Lake. A variety of species were seen in habitats ranging from the Benton Hot Springs ponds to 7200 ft Juniper-Pinyon on Benton Crossing Road and the Jeffrey Pines south of Mono Lake.

We briefly stopped along Hwy 6, getting great looks at 6 adult and immature Swainson's Hawks, as well as a pronghorn loping through a green field nearby. A search of Benton ponds revealed Ruddy Ducks, Western and Eared Grebes, a Gadwall family, and 2 motionless Black-Crowned Night Herons wading near the center of one pond.

A short hike off Benton Crossing Road yielded Pinyon-Juniper species: Chipping Sparrow, Green-Tailed and Spotted Towhees, and Stellar's Jays. Our intrepid leader, Eliot, scoured the up slope to find Ruby-Crowned Kinglets and a

band of Bushtits. The entire group enjoyed seeing Bushtits visit their wonderful hanging nest near the beginning of the trail.

An American Bittern was the highlight of our trip, found at River Springs Ecological Preserve, a green marshy oasis surrounded by sage desert on all sides. Many hundreds of American Avocets, Northern Pintail, and a few Wilson's Phalaropes were present at Black Lake.

Directions from Debby Parker led us to a large water tank, to which Cassin's Finches, Yellow-Rumped Warblers, Townsend's Solitaires, and Clark's Nutcrackers flocked. As the last birders prepared to leave, the family of Williamson's Sapsuckers at last appeared. Thanks to Debby for the great tip!

Carolyn Gann

BODIE HILLS FIELD TRIP

At the invitation of BLM and Mono County, a field trip was held Sat. June 3 near the Dry Lakes Plateau in the Bodie Hills. The purpose was to speak to the representative of the Colorado mining company, Deloro Minerals Ltd., and to walk the area in which the company was proposing to conduct exploratory drilling for gold. Deloro Minerals requested permission for motorized access to the drill sites, on private land. This would involve crossing the Bodie WSA (Wilderness Study Area) and adjoining Toiyabe NF land by surface grading to create new roads and using balloon-tired vehicles.

About twenty persons in all, representatives from Deloro and other mining interests, employees from BLM, State Lands Commission, California State Parks, Mono County Planning Dept., the Mono County Mining Committee and concerned citizens, some affiliated with the Wilderness Society, Sierra Club, ESAS, and the California Wilderness Coalition, participated in the trip.

High-clearance, 4-WD vehicles were necessary to drive the six miles beyond Bodie to the end of the road where we would continue on foot. The pristine beauty of the Dry Lakes Plateau became more evident by the moment. The stillness, the clarity of the air, the soft light of the high desert, and the layered colors of the distant mountains were breathtaking. In the canyon before us, we saw meadows, streams, stands of aspen, possibly, also of lodgepole pine - a surprisingly beautiful springtime oasis.

Descending into the canyon, we were shown the formation where drilling sites would occur,

and why that particular area had exhibited such potential. Our walking route was marked with colored flags, showing where various proposed roads leading to those sites would be created. Traversing the WSA, we skirted important archaeological sites and a cave that contained a midden five thousand years old.

The walking was strenuous, the day grew hot, and as it lengthened, so did many questions. Why mine for gold at all anymore? Where and how would it be processed from this mine? How would the landscape be altered and could it be reclaimed? What alternatives could be utilized? Could vehicles be used over snowpack instead of grading new roadbeds to avoid disturbing the sage grouse leks? What precedent would be set by approval for one mining company to explore? Why degrade an unspoiled area?

An informative and interesting day, we left in awe of the beauty of the Dry Lakes Plateau, and thankful for the foresight of those who helped set aside the area as a WSA. Our determination to question the need and wisdom of the mining proposal solidified.

Because of the cost of environmental studies required, and the length of time needed to complete them, Deloro Minerals recently withdrew its applications to BLM, the State Lands Commission and Mono County to conduct exploratory drilling in the Bodie Hills.

Mary Vocelka



The April 29 Highway Cleanup crew; Dorothy and John Burnstrom, John Gorham, and Martha Kramer. Not shown, the photographer, Ros Gorham.

Conservation

THE MUSSEL MYSTERY

by Joy Fatooh

When I came to work as a biologist for BLM in Bishop, I soon learned that Fish Slough, the marshy wetland at the northernmost end of the Owens Valley, was rich in both biological and cultural resources - and in mystery. Among the most fascinating features left by ancient residents were piles of mussel shells. These freshwater mussels obviously had once been an abundant food source. But now there were no mussels living in the waters of Fish Slough. There were, in fact, none known to be living anywhere in the Owens River system, although there were 9000-year-old fossils on the dry bed of Owens Lake.

What became of them? I heard nothing but vague speculation. Probably the environment had changed somehow. But how? How does the available habitat today differ from what was here in the past, and from other regions where *Anodonta californiensis* still survive? And why is it a candidate for threatened status throughout the West? My own time was taken in efforts to understand and conserve living species; I had none to spare for studying those already locally extirpated. I hoped some ambitious graduate student would latch onto the question.

Then one day last year Dawne Becker, an aquatic biologist with California Department of Fish and Game (DFG), told me some remarkable news: "We've found mussels in Bishop Canal!" Retired DFG employee Warren Allsup was doing volunteer biological survey work along ditches maintained by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (DWP) when he noticed shells in dredge material piled next to the ditch. He brought some into the DFG office, sparking a search for live mussels. By now *Anodonta* have been found in several locations, mostly in Bishop Canal, with some in the Owens River itself.

But not at Fish Slough.

The mussels are more or less the size and shape you would expect a mussel to be, with a pearly shell that fits neatly in the palm of your hand. Dawne describes them as "gorgeous - they have a salmon-orange flesh. They look as if they'd be tasty!" Apparently other creatures agree. The mus-

sels usually inhabit semi-silty areas, burrowing into the muck. "With the river so low this year," Dawne says, "a lot of habitat is exposed in just a couple inches of water. So predators are finding them - raccoons, other mammals, probably herons - and they have such a thin shell, it's easy for predators to break into." She says populations of the same species elsewhere have a thicker shell than these Owens Valley residents, for reasons unknown.

It would be good to see this rare variant of a rare species regain a strong foothold here. Little can be done to raise water levels in a dry year or to slow predation, but DFG biologists are recommending that DWP avoid dredging canals where the mussels are present. There have also been some experimental efforts to study the habitats where they appear to thrive and to translocate mussels into similar, unoccupied habitats.

And what about Fish Slough? Although it was considered as a transplant site, some biologists consider its waters too slow-moving and mucky for the *Anodonta* to survive there today. In fact, Dawne says that all the biologists with whom she's discussed this think the habitat at Fish Slough was *never* suitable for mussels. They believe Native Americans collected the mussels along the Owens River and brought them to Fish Slough to eat.

Why would people walk for miles with baskets full of mussels just so they could have their clambake at Fish Slough? They wouldn't, says BLM archaeologist Kirk Halford. He told me archaeologists know of no evidence, tradition, or logic to suggest that Native Americans didn't find the mussels where they ate them.

Old DWP flow meter data show Fish Slough putting out 200 times as many cubic feet per second in the 1920s, compared to now. Biologists are debating the validity of those data and want to look at the physical evidence - such as channel dimensions and old deposits - that could repudiate them. Meanwhile, archaeologists have been finding bits of moisture-needing plants in old packrat middens, showing that conditions were much wetter at Fish Slough before 9,000 years ago and again during various wet periods between then and now. If Fish

Slough's waters were faster-flowing at any time in millennia past, they may have been more hospitable to mussels when those fragile, iridescent shells were discarded in heaps on the wetland's sandy margins.

And so there is still a mussel mystery.

(Where is that graduate student?)

RECYCLING

This month's recycling honors go to Dorothy Burnstrom of Bishop, who recycled boxes of magazines and old business manuals from her retired husband's business recently on a trip to Ridgecrest. She could have tossed them into the hole at Sunland Landfill, but instead, she disposed of them in a responsible manner. While John was at his appointment, Dorothy braved the 102-degree temperatures, drove to the Naval Air Weapons Station, China Lake, got her 'Visitors Pass' from the guard at the gate and started the difficult task of finding the "drop-off area" at building 01032. She said this was no easy matter as her map wasn't very explicit and all the buildings looked the same. It turned out the recycling facility was located in a hidden alcove and a fellow helped her unload her car and recycle the boxes of paper. Hooray for Dorothy and a job well done. Below are some ideas on how we can all generate less "garbage" for the landfills.

- Cut back on the number of catalogs we receive.
- Recycle colored glass, like mayonnaise jars, at Manor Market Recycling.
- Recycle cardboard at Sunland Landfill (cereal boxes included).
- Return plastic nursery pots to Sierra Gardens in Bishop for reuse.
- If by chance you're visiting Ridgecrest, take a box of magazines for recycling.
- Recycle used motor oil at Sunland Landfill.
- Compost your kitchen and yard waste.
- All other ideas on how to recycle in the Eastern Sierra are appreciated!

Debby Parker

Birding

FEATURED BIRDING WEBSITES

Mono Lake Bird Sightings

<http://www.monolake.org/live/bird.htm>

A potpourri of bird sightings, from common to rare, within the Mono Basin or nearby Eastern Sierra. All sightings have been reported to the Mono Lake Committee by staff or visitors.

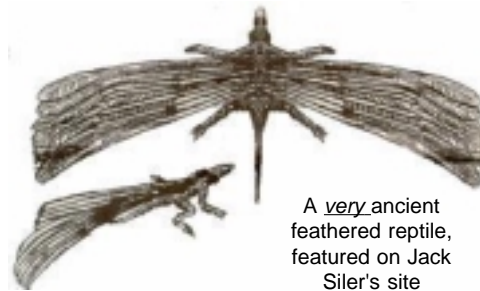
Birdingonthe.Net

<http://birdingonthe.net/>

At this latest version of Jack Siler's comprehensive internet birding site, you will find

several recent hot stories of interest to birders ("Droppings") links to a comprehensive list of birding chat and mail lists (with archives), lists of birdalerts, comprehensive links to worldwide birding sites, a section on birding equipment, and a gallery.

When Jack Siler isn't birding, he is Adjunct Associate Professor of Statistics (graphical



A *very* ancient feathered reptile, featured on Jack Siler's site

methods of data analysis) at The Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania

AVIAN ORIGIN OF "CALIFORNIA"?

One of the many speculations (though perhaps one of the less likely ones) on the origin of our State's name is that it derives from the Greek words *kalli*, meaning 'beautiful', and *ornis*, meaning 'bird'. Just connect *kalli* and *ornis* with an "f" and you've nearly got it. If true, one wonders which bird might have been the inspiration, lo so many years ago.

DUCHESS ANNA'S HUMMINGBIRD

Yes, our common Anna's Hummingbird was named for a duchess - Anna Masséna, Duchess of Rivoli, a French noblewoman who lived from 1802 - 1887. Her husband was

Victor Masséna (1799-1863), Duke of Rivoli and Prince of Essling - an avid amateur naturalist. A young physician, just returned from an around-the-world voyage in 1829, presented the Duke with a collection of preserved birds made during his



Duchess Anna (Mearns & Mearns)

voyage; many of the birds were from California. The Duke in turn loaned the specimens to ornithologist René Primevère Lesson (1794-1849), of the Museum d'Histoire Naturelle in Paris. Among the collection Lesson found a new hummer with a bright red head, and named it in honor of the Duke's wife (Lesson first described and named the Greater Roadrunner, from this same collection).

Audubon met the Duke and Duchess on a trip to Paris in 1828 to solicit subscribers to

his *Birds of America*. They were among the few who signed up. Audubon wrote that Anna was "a beautiful young woman, not more than twenty, extremely graceful and polite." In 1846, the Duke sold his bird collection to the Philadelphia Academy of Natural History, where the original (type) collection of Anna's Hummingbird (and also the Greater Roadrunner) now resides.

The young collector, Paul-Emile Botta, was surgeon-naturalist on the French merchant ship *Héros*, under genial Captain Auguste Duhaut-Cilly. They spent a year trading at ports in California; in frequent idle times, the Captain enjoyed accompanying Botta on his natural history excursions. The Captain later wrote of an outing:

During our stay at Yerba Buena [San Francisco] we spent most of our considerable leisure time hunting. Trading was desultory and often without result. The country abounds with hares, rabbits, and tufted partridges, and especially an astonishing variety of ducks and sea birds. All this for our table.

As for the collection that I was making with Dr. Botta, our efforts were equally successful: by the sea a multitude of beautiful shore birds; in the woods and on the hillsides, several fine species of hawks and other birds of prey; in the thickets, magpies, blackbirds, sparrows, and several fruit-eating birds quite different from

ours; and finally, in the heath, a pretty species of hummingbird, perhaps the smallest that exists, with head and throat of glowing fire.



Duhaut-Cilly (Frugé & Harlow)

When this bewitching little creature lights for a moment on a dry branch, you might think it a ruby sphere or, rather, a little ball of red-hot iron, sending out rays of sparks. When several were on the same branch an Arabian, admirer of marvels, might have mistaken it for a branch loaded with the jewels of which he dreams when reading the Thousand-and-one-nights.

Perhaps your next sighting of our noble hummer will bring to mind these words of the Captain, and how the bird came to be known to the society of naturalists in the early 19th century.

Larry Blakely



Female Anna's HB on nest, collected by Thomas Nuttall, painted by Audubon

Lesson named the fiery headed hummer *Ornismya Anna*, (common name Oiseau-Mouche Anna). *Ornismya* and Oiseau-Mouche mean, in their respective languages, "fly-bird". The current scientific name is *Calypte anna*. For more on Duchess Anna, see Mearns and Mearns, 1992, *Audubon to Xantus*, p. 320-323. The quote by the Captain is from Duhaut-Cilly, *A Voyage to California, the Sandwich Islands, and Around the World in the Years 1826-1829*; translation by Frugé and Harlow, 1999 (the last sentence is the translation of Susan McKelvey, *Botanical Exploration...*, 1956/1991). Audubon painted the nesting female in his Anna's HB plate from a specimen (nest, female, plus 2 eggs) collected at Santa Barbara in 1835 by Thomas Nuttall. Nuttall also collected a Yellow-billed Magpie while in California, which Audubon later first described and named for science (*Pica nuttalli*); the magpie mentioned by the Captain must have been a Yellow-billed, but perhaps either Botta did not collect it, or Lesson did not believe it to be a new species; the Black-billed Magpie (*Pica pica*) is common not only in the inland western US but all across Europe.

INTERNATIONAL MIGRATORY BIRD DAY: 13 MAY 2000

by Tom and Jo Heindel

This year's IMBD was the best ever regardless of which indicators are used. From dawn until dusk thirty-eight observers (a record) covered the Owens Valley, White & Inyo mountains, eastern Sierra canyons, Deep Springs and Death Valley (record coverage) looking and listening for all the birds they could find. The goal of the day was to see how many different bird species could be seen in one day as well as how many individual birds. Some interesting statistics from this year's count: 196 different species were found (up 14 from last year and a new record) totaling just over 10,000 individuals; of the 196 species 147 were neotropical migrants (up 2 from last year and another new record). Neotropical migrants are birds who spend the winter in Mexico, Central and South America and the Caribbean and migrate north to breed in North America. This year's most numerous species were Mourning Dove (665), Wilson's Warbler



Western Wood-Pewee



Photo by George Jameson

(554), and Yellow-headed Blackbird (507) easily "beaking" out the European Starling the usual winner. Over 331 observer hours were recorded (a record) which is like one observer looking for birds for 331 continuous hours or almost 14 straight days and nights! Fifteen species seen this year were new to the count (a record) bringing the total species seen during IMBDs to 226. An amazing 17 species were seen in larger numbers than ever recorded in the county before: Spotted Sandpiper (165), Mourning Dove (665), Olive-sided Flycatcher (24), Western Wood-Pewee (132), Hammond's Flycatcher (34), Dusky Flycatcher (47), Western Kingbird (169), Warbling Vireo (55), Wilson's Warbler (554), Yellow-breasted Chat (22), Western Tanager (231), Song Sparrow (84), Black-headed Grosbeak (154), Blue Grosbeak (23), Lazuli Bunting (59), Yellow-headed Blackbird (507), and Bullock's Oriole (99).

Rather than having each town competing with each other the coverage was expanded to include the entire county (rather than just the Owens Valley and adjacent mountains as in the past). The observers devoting a day to this count were Bea Cooley, Jack Ferrell, John & Dee Finkbeiner, Noah & Erin Shafto, Debra Hawk & Troy Kelley, Steve Holland, Jim & Debby Parker, and Chuck Washburn doing the Bishop area; Penny Ashworth, Carolyn, Earl, & Eliot Gann, Ellen Harbert, & Jo Heindel in the Big Pine area; Bev Schroeder & Lynna Walker at Deep Springs; Rosie Beach, Chris Howard, Andrew & Leah Kirk, Larry Nahm, and the Pt. Reyes Bird Observatory crew (Chris, Keith, Sue, Vera & Will) covered the Independence area; Mike and Nancy Prather, Bob & Barb Toth and Judy Wickman were near Lone Pine; Tom Heindel & Karen Gilbert covered the southeast area of the county from China Ranch to Keeler; and Bob Mauer, Jr. birded Saline Valley.

This is the 9th year this international count has been conducted, the fourth for Inyo County, and is a cooperative global effort to inventory birds during migration. Many species are in serious trouble because of habitat destruction in both their

Western Kingbird



D.A. Rintoul

wintering and summering grounds so counts like this one help scientists determine the severity of the problem and which species are most heavily impacted. Fun was had by all and exhaustion by most but the birds benefited from another year of data collection by a dedicated group of concerned citizens. If you are interested in helping out contact Jim Parker (872-4447) or Jo Heindel (938-2764) as soon as possible as some previous experience is important and there is plenty of time to get ready for the Y2K+1 count where the goal is to break 200 species!

(Photos: www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/Infocenter/infocenter.html)

BIRDING IN NEWSDAY

From an article in Newsday, 7/7/2000:

Call it semantics. But bird-watching is to "birding" what butterfly collecting is to "butterflying."

And both rather new outdoor activities are hot.

Take birding, which no longer involves merely observing birds through binoculars, as it was in the past. Now, it's also the feeding and photographing of feathered creatures, and studying bird calls, bird habitats, bird migration routes, bird population counts...in other words, the total avian experience.

Some 60 million to 70 million people say they bird in one form or another, according to a study by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

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Macaw petroglyph at Petroglyph National Monument, Albuquerque, NM, made by Southwest Native Americans ca. 1300-1600.

**Program and Field Trip notes, Mussels in the Owens Valley, Birding features,
 Chapter news, plus LOTS more - inside!**