

Eastern Sierra Audubon

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Sandhill Crane (just to the left of center) with Great Blue Herons at the Bishop Sewer Ponds, January 23, 2002. (Photo taken with Nikon Coolpix 990, handheld, through the Parkers' Leica scope with 32x wide-angle lens.) *Inset: the magnificent crane in flight (handheld Nikon using a telephoto).*

Programs, Field Trips, Earth Day, Garage Sale, Bell's Vireo in Inyo, + Lots More!

THE SIERRA WAVE

EASTERN SIERRA AUDUBON SOCIETY

ESAS Website: www.csupomona.edu/~larryblakely/ESAS/

ES Bird Sightings: www.wmrs.edu/birds/

MEETINGS

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

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!**

March 13

Refreshments: **Warren Allsup**

Main Program: The Karakoram Odyssey. Come and experience a visual journey and hear the tales of **Skandar** as he shares a decade of adventures in Pakistan. This unique show will take you from a childhood dream to becoming a mountain climber and guide to exploring the vast mountain ranges in Pakistan and its deserts.



Skandar and Roxy

The show travels from the local Palisades to the Karakoram range, with an insight on the diverse cultures between the densely populated Islamabad and the Shangri-La feel of the

Hunza Valley. Skandar will give us an in-depth look into the lives



Central Hunza

of the Hunza people, and the family he lived with for eight and a half years. The show has highlights of ten years of exploring and climbing in Pakistan, camel safaris, and more! You're invited to a non-stop adventure for an hour with Skandar on the Karakoram Odyssey!

Skandar (AKA Alexander Reid) lives here in Bishop and works at Spellbinders when he is not exploring the Sierras or making art in any number of mediums. He recently retired from Mountain Guiding to focus more on his artwork, and is a member of the Inyo Arts Council.

April 10

Refreshments: **June Nelson**

Main Program: To be Announced

Chapter Notes

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

For the last two months the Eastern Sierra has been graced by a Sandhill Crane. It has been widely sought after by birders, and many have seen him in local pastures and near the sewer ponds. After a chance encounter with the crane in a south Barlow pasture, I fortuitously ran across Peter Matthiessen's new book, *The Birds of Heaven, Travels with Cranes*. With cranes already on my mind, I succumbed to temptation, and bought and read the book. The reading was a pleasure; Matthiessen chases cranes all over the planet, for they are on all the continents save South America and

Antarctica. The book also is enhanced by lovely illustrations by Robert Bateman. The central message is how the crane migration biologically stitches the landscape together. Our crane could have summered in Canada, Alaska, or even Eastern Siberia. Fortunately our Sandhill cranes are stable; their population totals as much as the other fourteen species together. And because of our landscape protection programs, at least for now their critical habitats are doing ok. This is not true for the Chinese and Indian cranes which are under population pressure I hope North America never experiences. And of course we have the harrowing story of Whooping Cranes, once down to a population in the teens, now in the low

hundreds. Matthiessen chronicles its struggle back from the brink. His pursuit of African Grey Crowned, Wattled and Black Crowned, Eurasian, Asian Demoiselle, Siberian, Sarus, Hooded, Red Crowned, White Naped, as well as the Australian Sarus, and Brolga are great travel adventure and ecological education. The book, as well as our recent family travel in Panama, has reinforced that western ecotourism in many third world countries, sometimes just to see birds, is a hopeful source of income for local peoples, an economic reason for them to preserve habitat and wildlife. This book is a great reading experience.

James Wilson



Members of the ESAS Board, Sara Steck, Bill Mitchel and Debby Parker, out on a bird study field trip. Friends Denise Waterbury and past Audubon Board member Larry Nahm joined the group at Bishop City Park and Bishop Sewer Ponds to see the Aleutian Goose, Sandhill Crane, & Vermillion Flycatcher. Sara's son Michael came along too and is enjoying learning about birds. (Text and photo by Debby Parker.)

EARTH DAY CELEBRATION SATURDAY, APRIL 20TH

April is the time for all good people to help their earth, though we are not referring to digging compost into your garden. We are talking about picking up trash along the Owens River to celebrate Earth Day. In partnership with the Sierra Club and Native Plant Society and with help from the Rotary Club and CalTrans, we are sponsoring a great clean-up event that will culminate with a picnic lunch at the Bishop City Park.

We will meet at the River at East Line Street at 9:00 a.m. on Saturday, April 20th. Wear sturdy walking shoes or boots and leather or other heavy-duty gloves. Bring drinking water and lunch for our picnic in the park. Bring kraft paper feed sacks for the broken bottles as glass shards tear through the plastic bags we will use for the other trash.

In addition to the River clean up in the Bishop area, there will be activities at Lone Pine and Fossil Falls. Mike Prather is leading a shorebirding trip to Owens Lake fol-

lowed by a river clean up. The California Native Plant Society is leading a desert plant trip to Fossil Falls followed by weed pulling and cleanup in that area.

Local llama owners will bring their gentle burden bearers to the event to assist in hauling trash. So bring your children and grandchildren to meet and help load the llamas with trash.

If you can bring your pick-up truck, we can use it for hauling trash to the collection area. For additional information, contact Joan Benner at 938-2929.

AUDUBON ANNUAL FUND RAISER April 27, 2002

The annual garage sale is one of our Chapter's primary sources of income, and its success is dependent on contributions to the sale from the membership. Check your closets, drawers, tool shed, and garage for any unneeded items and take them to Mary and Derrick Vocelka's residence any time after April 15th. Important: each item should be priced. We also need four volunteers to assist with the sale. If you can help or need assistance in transporting donations, call Mary and Derrick @ 873-4480. Their address is 2433 Apache in Bishop. Ruth & Larry Blakely can store items prior to April 15.

Joan Benner

RECYCLING

The Bishop landfill now has bins accepting plastics and glass for recycling.

PROGRAM CHAIR ASSISTANT NEEDED

Please phone Debby Parker if you are interested.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Golden Trout Natural History Workshop

Hike-in wilderness camp at 10,000 feet near Mt. Whitney. Naturalist-interpreted week sessions starting June 30, July 7, and July 14. Reserve early - limited space often fills. For brochure call 805-6888344, or e-mail paul.roark@verizon.net. See Website www.Istartists.com/gtc/

5th Annual Spring Wings Bird Festival, Fallon, Nevada, May 10-12, 2002

The Spring Wings Bird Festival coincides with the height of the spring migration in the Lahontan Valley wetlands. These internationally recognized wetlands are temporary home to over 250 species of birds, including tens of thousands of White-faced Ibis, Long-billed Dowitcher, American White Pelican, Black-necked Stilt, American Avocet, song birds, raptors, and many other waterfowl and waterbirds. More info: Janet Schmidt, Event Coordinator, Stillwater National Wildlife Refuge, P.O. Box 6332, Fallon, Nevada 89407; 775 428-6452; email: fourthcabin@aainc.com; website: www.springwings.org.

Ansel Adams: A DOCUMENTARY FILM

Don't miss this **Earth Day** special on American Experience Sunday, April 21 at 9 pm on PBS (Check local listings). Directed by Ric Burns. A coproduction of Sierra Club Productions and Steeplechase Films, Inc.

2002 Walker Lake Loon Festival

Take a short drive for a good cause to the 2002 Walker Lake Loon Festival on Saturday, April 20. Walker Lake Working Group's annual Loon Festival gets underway with free Walker Lake boat rides for visitors to see the Loons firsthand, plus Native American storytellers and Nevada Division of Wildlife presentations. Boat rides launch from Sportsmen's Beach between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. More info: Walker Lake Working Group, P.O. Box 867, Hawthorne, NV 89415; webpage: www.walkerlake.org/

Grays Harbor Shorebird Festival, 7th Annual

Celebrating the spring migration of shorebirds, Hoquiam, WA, April 26-28, 2002. For details call 800-303-8498, or go to www.ghas.org on the internet.

Newsletter Information

Editor:

Larry Blakely
(760) 872-1890
415 Sierra Grande, Bishop, CA 93514
e-mail: larryblakely@sigmaxi.org

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.

2002 BIRD-A-THON

This year's Bird-A-Thon fundraiser will have a different format. Pledges will be sought by the counters participating in the International Migratory Bird Day (IMBD), Saturday May 11th instead of just Mike by himself. Pledge seeking will be on a volunteer basis, but we hope that most counters will join in the fundraising. IMBD is a day when a group of birders fans out all over Inyo County and tries to tally as many species of birds as possible. We have been close to 200 species, so pledgers watch out. Your pledges may need to be adjusted from previous years because the number of species seen will be higher. So look for an appeal this spring from Bird-A-thon participants and be generous. The money we raise helps our chapter in many ways. Thanks again.

Mike Prather

TOOLS FOR USING CHRISTMAS COUNT DATA

We've just released our new CBC output tools—these are now available through the “Historical Results” link on the CBC home page. Using these you can make just about any inquiry that you can imagine of the CBC database, and get the results in graph, table, or chart form. We've also developed species mapping output that accesses a vast library of pre-generated maps of bird distributions as viewed by the CBC.

And best of all, the results of your inquiry are downloadable to your computer in Excel format!

To get to the “Historical Results” link you can either use the CBC link on the www.audubon.org home page or go directly to the CBC home page using www.audubon.org/bird/cbc, or from the Audubon home page click on “birds and science”, then look for “Christmas Bird Count” under “Citizen Science.” The list of birds that is currently available to the inquiry tool is that of all the species of birds of the Western Hemisphere plus everything that's ever been reported on a CBC (“old names”), so you may get a large pick-list of birds to choose from with your initial inquiry. Right now this is necessary so that you can access information about species that have undergone name changes—like “Oldsquaw.” We're working on improving this, and hope to streamline that aspect of the inquiry tool soon.

Geoff LeBaron CBC Director National Audubon Society 413/268-9372 glebaron@audubon.org (via Mike Prather)

EAT CHOCOLATE AND SAVE THE ATLANTIC RAINFOREST

Chocolate lovers of the world can have their cake and save Brazil's endangered Atlantic Rainforest too, according to an article in the November/ December issue of *World Watch*. In “Chocolate Could Bring the Forest Back”, *World Watch* researcher Chris Bright proposes that the cocoa plant, which thrives below the forest canopy in this biodiversity hotspot, could be the key to preserving one of the world's most threatened areas, revitalizing a faltering industry and creating new livelihood opportunities for many of Brazil's poor. “Cocoa is a rainforest crop,” says Bright. “If we can create an environmentally-friendly form of production, we can supply an economic rationale for preserving existing fragments of the Atlantic Rainforest, and even extend the forest back into areas from which it has long since vanished.”

Bright suggests that Brazilian cocoa growers move towards organic cocoa farming to increase profits, create jobs, and improve Brazilian cocoa's competitive edge and consumer appeal. “There is an opportunity for growers of chocolate and other products coming out of the Atlantic Rainforest to build powerful links with

consumers in distant societies,” says Bright. “That should help maintain the health of the forest and the people who depend on the forest for their livelihoods.”

RESTORATION COULD PRESERVE MUCH OF RAINFOREST DIVERSITY

Today, less than 8 percent of the Brazilian Atlantic Forest's original cover remains. But restoration of the ecosystem is feasible, according to Chris Bright and Ashley Mattoon in “New Hope for a Rainforest.” The fragmentation of forests has probably put more than half of the region's plants and animals in danger of extinction because their populations are not large enough to be genetically viable over the long term. In such circumstances, Bright and Mattoon find that the only sensible strategy is to go beyond simple conservation, and begin to restore large areas of forest. In general, fragmentation is one of the gravest threats that tropical forests face. Restoration will therefore have to play an increasingly important role in forest conservation. More and more often, preservation of the wild will require restoration of the wild.

From the Western Meadowlark, via Debby Parker

MONO BASIN BIRD CHAUTAUQUA – June 21, 22, and 23

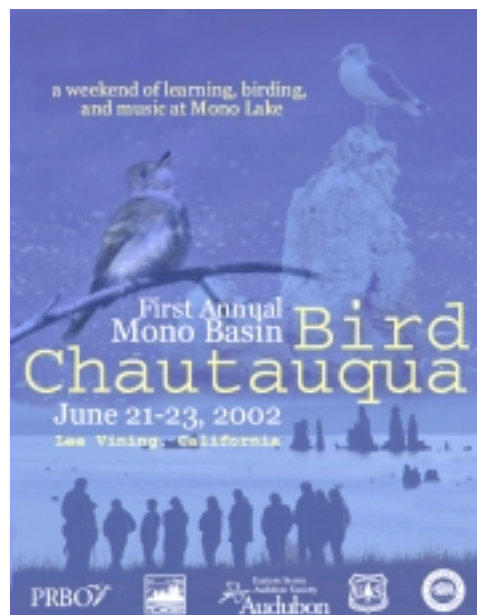
Mark your calendars now and plan on joining us in the Mono Basin for our first annual bird festival – the Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua – June 21, 22, and 23.

In case you don't know, Chautauqua was an institution that flourished in the late 19th and

early 20th centuries providing education through the combination of lectures, concerts, and other social events. These gatherings were often held outside in large tents and served to educate and connect the people of a particular community. Chautauquas were most popular in rural areas but pretty much died out by the mid-1930s as a result of the rise of car culture, radio, and movies.

The Mono Lake Committee, U. S. Forest Service, California State Parks, Eastern Sierra Audubon Society, and Point Reyes Bird Observatory are partnering to revive the Chautauqua in the Mono Basin. The bird festival will include educational components such as bird identification walks, field trip demonstrations, and presentations by various bird experts. And there will be plenty of other fun activities, too. On Sunday afternoon we plan to conclude the Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua by holding a picnic at County Park – plenty of food, music, and fun for all.

We are still hard at work developing the Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua program, but it's shaping up to be a great first event. For current information check our web site www.monolake.org or call Lisa Cutting or Bartshe Miller (760) 647-6595.



Field Trips

CALENDAR

Saturday, March 2nd - Pleasant Valley Reservoir Birding - This is a great opportunity to see ducks, geese, snipe, raptors and wrens. This trip involves a 2 mile walk. Bring binoculars, scopes, snacks, and water. Meet at 8:00AM behind the Wye Shell in Bishop to carpool. For more information call Jerry Zatorski at 872-3818.

Saturday, March 9th - Bird Banding Demonstration with Tom and Jo Heindel - Tom and Jo will operate a bird banding station where the public is invited to watch wild birds being taken out of mist nets, measurements made, aluminum bands placed on legs and the birds released back to the wild. Stop by between 8:00AM and 11:00AM. Drop-ins may stay for as long or as short a time as they wish. The station is located at 280 Dewey St., Big Pine. Children are welcome; pets are not for obvious reasons. Wind or weather cancels. For further information call Tom or Jo Heindel at 938-2764.

Saturday, March 16th - Bighorn Sheep Field Trip - The Eastern Sierra Audubon Society is pleased to sponsor a field trip to search for Bighorn Sheep. Leader John Wehausen will teach us about the status of Bighorn Sheep populations in the Eastern Sierra and their conservation issues. Meet behind the Wye Shell gas station at 8:00AM. Should last until early afternoon. Call John for more information at 873-4563.

Saturday, April 13th through Sunday April 14th - Join the local chapter of the California Native Plant Society this weekend for birding and botanizing Panamint Valley - Jerry Zatorski and Kathy Duvall will lead us to some of the canyons and springs in and around Panamint Valley. Expect to see springtime wildflowers at their peak and migrating and breeding birds. We'll explore from Darwin Falls to the canyons just east of Ballarat. 4WD may be necessary for Panamint Canyons. There is an optional Saturday night camp at Ballarat and a Sunday tour up Wildrose Canyon. Meet at Panamint Springs parking lot at

8:00AM on Saturday, April 13th. Call Jerry Zatorski at 872-3818 or Kathy Duvall at 872-1466 for more information.

Sat. April 20th - Join Mike Prather on an Earth Day shorebirding trip onto Owens Lake. Mike will show us the new shallow flooding projects to see what birds they have pulled in. This is the peak of spring shorebird migration, so birds should be plentiful if not abundant. Meet at 8:00AM at the Diaz Lake parking lot 3 miles south of Lone Pine. Bring a lunch, binoculars, scope, hat, sunscreen etc. Call Mike at 876-5807 for more info.

Saturday May 4th - Spring Migration at Baker Meadow - Join Earl Gann to witness spring migration in all its splendor. Meet at 7:00AM at the Glacier View Campground in Big Pine. We'll walk around Baker Meadow until noon. The meadows are frequently wet or muddy so wear appropriate shoes. This is a great trip for beginning birders. Call Chris at 873-7422 with questions.

Saturday May 11th - International Migratory Bird Day



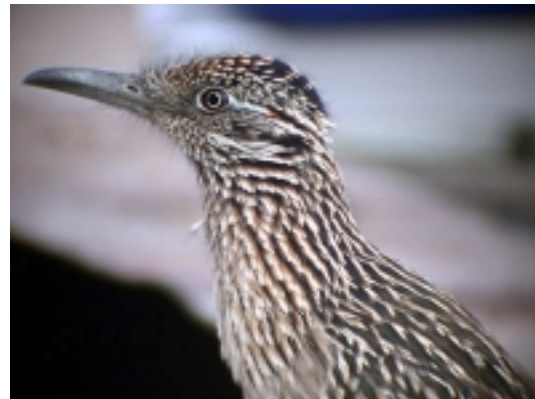
Clockwise from the left:

Inca Dove, Ruddy Ground-dove, Snow Goose, Greater Roadrunner.

Photos by Chris Howard

TRIP REPORT

Fifteen birders soaked up the sun and birds on the Furnace Creek Birding field trip on February 16th. The weather was perfectly balmy with, no wind, and temps up to the mid-70s. The highlight birds for everyone were certainly the pair of wintering Vermilion Flycatchers at the sewer ponds. Runners up were the 10 or so Lewis's Woodpeckers in the date groves, 10 Inca Doves, a female Wood Duck, 3 Snow Geese, a Red-naped Sapsucker, a Red-breasted Sapsucker, and an early sighting of Northern Rough-winged Swallow among 10 Tree Swallows. At other times during the weekend, Furnace Creek Ranch yielded views of other interesting birds such as a Ruddy Ground-Dove, a Sage Thrasher, and a Harris's Sparrow. A total of 58 species were seen over the weekend.



Chris Howard

Conservation

IT'S A WILD LIFE

by Joy Fatooh
BLM Biologist

Carcasses and Scats

I was looking for something in my boss's truckbed toolbox. I pulled out three shovels and two axes, a roll of smooth wire and a roll of quarter-inch hardware cloth. I pulled out hammers, sledges, jumper cables and tire chains. I pulled out wooden stakes, hose clamps, spray paint. I pulled out a Pulaski and a McCloud – firefighter's tools – I never remember which is which, but I pulled them both out. I pulled out several ammo boxes: one empty, one with big nails, one with fence clips and staples, one with MREs – Meals Ready to Eat, military surplus. I pulled out a bundle of some sort wrapped in a packing blanket. What's this? I unrolled it carefully. Pale hollow-shafted hairs fell out. A faint odor of carrion rose up. It was a pronghorn head.

Driving around with one long enough for it to get mummified was strange, but driving around with a severed head was not strange in itself. I myself have cut off a lot of pronghorn heads. My boss told me to. Whenever I found a dead pronghorn I was to bring him the head. I learned to always carry my pocket knife and a big plastic bag. Sometimes I found them fresh or dried, sometimes they were in between and green stuff would ooze out. Once I found one on Friday afternoon and kept it in the trunk of my car until Monday. I mentioned this to my sister, and she was either amused or impressed, I don't know which, but she likes to tell people her sister goes around hacking the heads off dead antelope.

I never asked my boss what he did with the heads until I found one in his toolbox. I always assumed he was determining their age and condition. But he told me, "After I get the flesh and hair off, I use them when I give talks in classrooms. I have the kids look for variation in dimensions and bone density and so forth. It's a lesson on the mechanisms of evolution."

That answer satisfied me. My next question was, "How do you get the flesh and hair off?"

"I put the heads in buckets of water out in the garden and I let them rot."

"Are you serious?"

"The water makes great fertilizer."

"What does your wife have to say about this?"

"Well... I usually keep lids on the buckets."

I was glad he could get away with that at home. I would rather not have those buckets in our office space. My boss's cubicle is packed like his toolbox: books upon books, files upon files, piles of skulls and tortoise shells, a pronghorn foot with partial leg and hair, dried lizards push-pinned to a bulletin board, chuckwalla droppings in plastic bags tacked to the shelf over his desk. In the shared space between his cubicle and mine are rakes and shovels, dip nets and fish traps, chunks of fossil-bearing rock, vials of snails and leeches and aquatic larvae, a box labeled "Bighorn Scats" that dates from when he was doing his master's thesis on the parasites affecting bighorn sheep. That was thirty years ago, but a box full of bighorn scats is not easy to collect and not something you throw away lightly.

I've been working there half as long but my cubicle is starting to resemble his. There is a deer mandible, a rabbit cranium, an amazingly well-preserved hawk skeleton with the delicate bones still lightly bound with sinew. There are vials of pickled fairy shrimp and a dried lizard in a Budweiser bottle – apparently it crawled in for shelter and couldn't crawl out. There are owl pellets with their treasure of identifiable rodent bones, and raccoon scats I keep on hand for educational purposes. Animal droppings are very informative. Fascinating turds I have known: raccoon with crayfish; coyote with rose hips; bear with ants. When I spoke to

the Rotary Club about our outdoor education program I brought along a little baggie of raccoon scats. "This may be the first time anyone has brought animal droppings to one of your breakfast meetings," I observed from the podium as they passed it around.

When you find a road kill on your way to work, do you bring it to the office? My rule: Only if it's in excellent condition. Also, rabbits and coyotes are too common to bother with, and skunks and porcupines too difficult to handle. I brought in a good weasel once, and more than one owl before I learned that possession of dead birds is illegal. There was one beautiful moon-faced, golden-feathered barn owl that my boss and I admired before I stowed it in the refrigerator, well-wrapped in a big plastic bag. I thought our colleague the geologist might enjoy seeing it, but when I told her where it was, she shrieked: "With my lunch?!"

I got a better reaction when I brought it home. Our neighbor Mr. M. joined us for dinner and held forth about the barn owl's impressive facial disk and offset ears for fine directional hearing. He located the concealed ear holes and stuck pencils in them so we could see how offset they were. Other owls are crepuscular, hunting at dusk or dawn. Barn owls are truly nocturnal and rely on their ability to hear the rustlings of their prey. I pointed out the extraordinary softness of the wing feathers and the stiff fringe along the leading edge, adaptations for silent flight.

If you think dead animals are inappropriate at the dinner table – well, then I hope you're a vegetarian. Mr. M. is my kind of dinner guest.

In such cases as this and others of the like sort, there is good reason to believe that man is the indirect cause of an evil for which he pays so heavy a penalty. Insects increase whenever the birds which feed upon them disappear. Hence, in the wanton destruction of the robin and other insectivorous birds, the *bipes implumis*, the featherless biped, man, is not only exchanging the vocal orchestra which greets the rising sun for the drowsy beetle's evening drone, and depriving his groves and his fields of their fairest ornament, but he is waging a treacherous warfare on his natural allies.

George Perkins Marsh, 1874, *The Earth as Modified by Human Action*.

AUDUBON BIRD CONSERVATION NEWSLETTER

The Audubon Bird Conservation Newsletter is an electronic periodical that brings you up to date on the accomplishments and work of Audubon's Bird Conservation Program, the progress of the Important Bird Areas Initiative, and issues and events in bird conservation.

*To Subscribe to Audubon's Bird Conservation newsletter send an e-mail to LISTSERV@LIST.AUDUBON.ORG with the following text in the body of your e-mail: SUBSCRIBE Bird-Conservation-News

Two excerpts from the Feb 14 issue:

1. **SEARCH FOR THE IVORY-BILLED WOODPECKER:** For 30 days starting in mid-January three teams, two people per team, will be searching the Pearl River Wildlife Management Area, in Louisiana, in the hope of finding an Ivory-billed Woodpecker. The Ivory-billed Woodpecker, also known as the "Lord God bird", has not been seen in LA since 1943 and was last observed in Florida in 1950. Expected to be on the verge of extinction, hope came alive two years ago when a credible sighting of a pair of Ivory-bills was reported. In addition to the

three teams of expert ornithologists and birders, the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology will be setting out listening devices, throughout the Pearl River WMA that will record sounds continuously. The hope is if an Ivory-billed Woodpecker cannot be seen it may be heard. For more details on the search, as well as daily updates from the searchers, visit: <http://www.museum.lsu.edu/~Remsen/IBW.html> [*The search was unsuccessful - Ed.*]

4. **PROTECTING THE ARCTIC NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE FROM OIL DRILLING:** It was the biggest conservation issue facing Congress in 2001, and likely will be again this year. After an August setback, when the U.S. House of Representatives passed legislation to open the pristine Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil and gas drilling, Audubon and our partners in

conservation worked with the U.S. Senate to fight back efforts to do the same in 2001. But it's 2002 and the fight will be back. Pro-drillers in the Senate are more determined than ever to push through a measure that will open this area to oil drilling. Much like we did last year, we'll need your help to win in the Senate. As you know, it's more sensible to make substantial investments in energy efficiency. It's a smart investment for the long term and means energy independence, security, and self-reliance for America's energy needs. The necessary technology currently exists to do this and even small gains in efficiency would eliminate the need to drill in the Arctic. In the meantime, to keep apprised of all new developments, or to communicate with your two U.S. Senators on this critical conservation issue, please visit our special site dedicated to the subject at: <http://www.protectthearctic.com>.

Man has too long forgotten that the earth was given to him for usufruct alone, not for consumption, still less for profligate waste.

George Perkins Marsh, 1864, *Man and Nature*

Birding

CHILDREN'S CORNER



CACTUS HOTEL by Brenda Z. Guiberson Illustrated by Megan Lloyd. Henry Holt & Co., NY 1991

This book about a saguaro cactus growing in the Sonoran Desert tells the story of the myriad animals and birds that live in and around this giant "hotel". Gila woodpeckers, White-winged doves, and Elf owls, among others, make their homes in the cactus hotel. But, when the long-lived saguaro dies, after 200 years, we learn that it makes room for new seeds to sprout and grow, helping the cycle of life to continue.

The illustrations are beautiful watercolors that inspire the reader to find out more about the saguaro cactus and Sonoran Desert. Another children's book about the saguaro cactus is called "DESERT GIANT: The World of the Saguaro". Read these books to find out more about all the different critters who share this habitat, and then a trip to visit the Sonoran Desert is in order!!

These books can be purchased at our great local bookstores, including Spellbinder Books, which carries our Audubon T-shirts, where sales go toward buying binoculars for our classroom bird education program.

Sara Steck

BELL'S VIREO IN INYO COUNTY: An Endangered Species

By Tom & Jo Heindel

The Bell's Vireo, the smallest vireo found in Inyo County, usually returns in late March with an outlier arriving 17 Mar. Each year we wonder if any will return to spend spring and summer with us before retreating to a warmer and more hospitable climate in Mexico in fall and winter. There are so few pairs breeding in the county that some natural or man caused event could extirpate them. It was not always that way.

The first record of Bell's Vireo in Inyo County appears in the pages of the Death Valley Expedition of 1891. This survey covered not just Death Valley but all of Inyo County and adjacent areas, e.g. Mono County, western Nevada, and limited areas on the western slope of the Sierra. This reports calls Bell's Vireo a "tolerably common" summer resident in the Owens Valley. They found adults with young in Lone Pine in June 1891, saw them at Olancho 16-23 May 1891 and at Bishop Creek 4-10 August 1891 and considered them "not uncommon" near Furnace Creek Ranch 21 June 1891.

When Joseph Grinnell, the dean of California ornithology, visited Furnace Creek Ranch in 1917, 1920, and 1923, there were still a few Bell's Vireos there. Observers have noted one or two at a few locations in Death Valley National Park during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s.

Tragically, two breeding pairs were eliminated at Scotty's Castle in the mid 1990s when the NPS, without adhering to the laws, destroyed their breeding habitat by removing the dense willow and scrub understory in order to upgrade the water sys-

tem. We, and others, have checked annually at Scotty's Castle and other historical breeding sites and it seems the species has been extirpated as a breeder from the Park. If an endangered species is not protected in a National Park can it be safe anywhere?

No one knows just how many pairs currently breed in the county, but a good guess would be less than a dozen and it could be half. All recent records are from the Amargosa River drainage in the extreme southeast of the County. So what happened?

For breeding success, the species requires dense, low shrubbery near water with healthy willows or mesquite nearby. The mean nest height is 1 meter (3 feet) making it vulnerable to disturbance. There appear to be two major factors operating against the recovery of the Bell's Vireo in Inyo. First is that cattle are allowed to graze in riparian habitats which eliminates the dense low shrubbery and limits young willow growth. Second is the Brown-headed Cowbird, a nest parasite, which lays its eggs in small passerine nests and lets the host family raise its young.

It is possible to overcome both factors with a two-pronged approach. Cattle must be prevented from destroying riparian habitat and cowbirds must be removed from the area. In the Lower Owens River Project, sections of the river are planned to be fenced

to prevent cattle from entering. This excellent step should restore the habitat that used to house Bell's Vireos a century ago. Cowbird trapping and habitat enhancement have been incredibly successful in Michigan where the Kirkland's Warbler was on



Bell's Vireo (Photo by S. Maslowski, USFWS)

the verge of extinction and has made a remarkable recovery. The San Diego and Orange County Supervisors gave permission for cowbird trapping in an effort to save the few Bell's Vireos they had left. Again, the vireo has made a dramatic recovery. The Kern Preserve also turned to cowbird trapping in an effort to save their Willow Flycatcher population. And again, they were successful. These success stories are only a part of the picture as there must be habitat in which the birds can breed.

The Bell's Vireo is an indicator of the damage man has done to the State's habitats, first because of ignorance, then as a matter of public policy. More than 50% of the population has disappeared in the last century. How much more has to be lost before the public says, "Enough is enough!"

SELF-BANDING BIRDS?

About the surest way to determine bird migratory patterns is by banding, but the chances of finding a banded bird in any given locale are pretty slim. Recent studies offer a promising new approach - taking advantage of rare naturally occurring non-radioactive isotopes, which vary in abundance by region. Carbon, hydrogen, and other elements have been used. For example, the abundance of deuterium, the

rare isotope of hydrogen, decreases northwesterly across North America, being highest in the Southeast and lowest in northwestern Canada. When new feathers form following molt, they incorporate the elements of the region. Analysis of a single feather from a wintering migratory bird can be enough to identify its summer breeding region. Studies have now been

done for populations of Black-throated Blue Warblers, Wilson's Warblers, and also Cooper's Hawks (as well as Monarch Butterflies). The journal Science, for 8 February, 2002, contains two articles on this; a general 'Perspective', and the research report on the Black-throated Blue Warbler.



Black-throated Blue Warbler
Birds of Nova Scotia:
museum.gov.ns.ca/mnh/nature/
nsbirds/bns0318.htm

Larry B.

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