

# SIERRA WAVE

EASTERN SIERRA AUDUBON SOCIETY

ESAS Website: ESAudubon.org ES Bird Sightings: ESAudubon.org/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!

### September 10

Refreshments: Ruth Blakely

Main Program: **The Obsidian Trail**

A half-hour documentary, presented by **Tom Dayak**, on the prehistory of the Owens Valley region of California, as seen through the eyes of archaeologists, scholars, and Native Americans. The story is told through a montage of interviews, cutaways, animations, dramatizations, and off-camera narratives. Archaeologists have been working in Owens Valley and the surrounding region for over 50 years, trying to piece together the lifeways of its earliest inhabitants. This video helps to reveal the dynamic history of the inhabitants of the Owens Valley over the last 12,000 years.

This video was produced as part of the on-going effort to bring awareness, through Caltrans' Public Outreach and Native American Coordination programs, of the cultural resources work and research Caltrans is providing here in the Inyo-Mono Region.

Tom has lived in the Eastern Sierra for 20 years, working for Caltrans. He is currently Senior Environmental Planner.

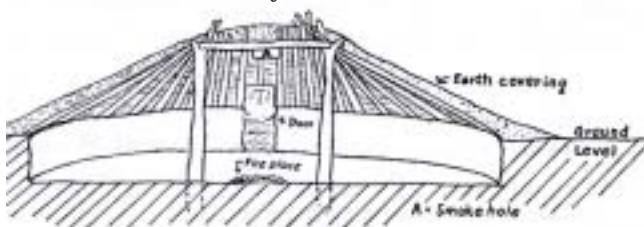


Fig. 4. Sweat-house at Big Pine creek.  
(Steward, 1933)

### PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

As I write this it is summer, but the local mountain trails have an autumn feel. The grasses are brown in the meadows and the odd aspen has a few gold leaves. In the valley the shorebirds are heading south, and the warblers and friends are trickling through. And fall begins another season of programs and activities for Eastern Sierra Audubon Society.

### October 8

Refreshments: Joan Benner

Main Program: **A Home for the Fishes in Fish Slough**

**Steve Parmenter's** talk will introduce the endangered native fishes of the Owens Valley and tell the story of a recent successful effort to give them a secure home. Fish Slough, a scant 15 minutes north of Bishop, is the site of three spring zones, 10 miles of waterways, and dozens of acres of wetlands. It is the site of the rediscovery of Owens pupfish and their legendary rescue from oblivion by Phil Pister in 1969. (If you don't know that story, check it out at [http://www.amnh.org/naturalhistory/editors\\_pick/1200\\_read5.html](http://www.amnh.org/naturalhistory/editors_pick/1200_read5.html)) It is also the site of present-day efforts by BLM, White Mountain Research Station, and Fish and Game scientists to return native fishes to a small corner of their original habitat. Come and learn about the needs of our native fishes; hear what explosives, Hawaiian slings, and MIT engineers have to contribute to conservation; and find out the real reason why Audubon volunteers clean up that green slime on their weekend patrols.



Owens Valley Pufffish

Steve studied aquatic ecology at Santa Cruz and in Sweden. He is currently a fish biologist with the California Department of Fish and Game in Bishop, and is interested in the conservation biology of Great Basin fishes and their habitats.

## Chapter Notes

Senator Boxer's California Wild Heritage Act of 2003 was reintroduced in July. Eastern Sierra Audubon members have been active in working on this bill. This bill would protect many important wild places in Eastern California. These include additions to the John Muir Wilderness, much of the White Mountains, additions to the Hoover Wilderness, and the source of our river, The Owens River Headwaters.

The support for this legislation is broad and growing. It includes many backpackers, climbers, fisher folk, naturalists, birdwatchers, hikers, skiers, and businesspeople. Like all visionary proposals, there is opposition. And people of good intent can have conflicting opinions about what is appropriate. But as the citizens working on this have talked to local folks, it

*Cont'd next page:*

is clear that the support is substantial. Our proposal is modest; it is only a portion of the suitable acreage. Stakeholders from many walks of life have been contacted, and their input has resulted in changes in boundaries to accommodate their concerns and needs.

But why do this, some ask? Is the land not well managed by the BLM and Forest Service? This is a good question, and by and large the agency staff does a good job. But problems and threats exist. There are proposals to expand ski areas that threaten wildlife habitat. Off highway vehicle activity continues to intrude on wild places. And with our technological skills, who knows what the future will bring? Wilderness protection offers assurance that some portions of our California inheritance will remain wild.

And why should we as ESAS members be involved? Conservation biology has shown larger pieces of undisturbed habitat are more valuable than smaller isolated pieces. For some creatures, furbearers, deer, bighorn sheep for instance, bigger is clearly better. And what we don't know about natural systems is far vaster than what we do know. Keeping the landscape wild retains more of the pieces of the puzzle, and that is good. Finally, our mission as Audubon members is to advocate for wild creatures and wild places. We need to remember that chickadees, pine martens, and collared lizards will never write letters and attend meetings to advocate for their homes. That is our job.

James Wilson

## EASTERN SIERRA AUDUBON BIRD-A-THON

Thank you for your support of this year's Bird-A-Thon/IMBD. It has been a record breaker in terms of species seen (219), number of participants (41) and total money raised

### Newsletter Information

#### Editor:

Larry Blakely  
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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.

(\$1575.80) for Eastern Sierra Audubon's conservation and education efforts. You are supporting Birds in the Classroom, wildlife conservation efforts at the Lower Owens River Project and at Owens Lake, as well as many other Eastern Sierra Audubon causes. We are already planning for next year and look forward to you all joining us again.

Chris Howard, Jo Heindel,  
Mike Prather  
ESA Bird-A-Thon coordinators

## EASTERN SIERRA BIRDING TRAIL MAP RELEASED

The Eastern Sierra of Inyo and Mono counties has now joined other important wildlife areas around the United States with the release of the new EASTERN SIERRA BIRDING TRAIL MAP (ESBTM). This vehicle-based birding trail map was developed jointly by the Eastern Sierra Audubon Society, the Mono Lake Committee and the Owens Valley Committee and covers 200 miles on and off of the Highway 395 corridor from Owens Lake to Bridgeport. Birders (formerly "bird watchers") using the map are guided to 38 different birding locations where hiking trails allow even further exploration. Visitor information, directions to the sites, seasons to visit, the types of habitats and what species of birds might be seen are all provided. Varied habitats from high in the Sierra Nevada and White Mountains down to the valley floors are a rich sampler of the incredible natural diversity that exists in the Eastern Sierra. From bluebirds and blue grouse to wood ducks and warblers, there are birds and other wildlife for everyone. This is in addition to the unparalleled scenic landscapes and natural quiet. Among the fastest growing outdoor activities in America, birding is attracting visitors to rural areas and thereby supporting local economies, helping with wildlife conservation and providing low impact recreational use. Many birders plan entire vacations designed around the species of birds that they hope to see. The Eastern Sierra Birding Trail Map will attract everyone with an interest in birds and nature and will surely rank as one of the top birding trail maps in the nation. The following Eastern Sierra Audubon members played a vital role in producing the ESBTM: Tom and Jo Heindel, Jim and Debby Parker, Chris Howard, Leah and Andrew Kirk, Judy Wickman and Mike Prather. Key Mono Lake Committee staff who made this all possible were Arya Degenhardt, Bartshe Miller, Lisa Cutting, and Greg Reis. For a free copy of the Eastern Sierra Birding Trail Map contact either the Owens Valley Committee (760.876.1845 [www.ovcweb.org](http://www.ovcweb.org)) or the Mono

Lake Committee (760.647.6595 [www.monolake.org](http://www.monolake.org)). Look on the web soon at [www.easternsierrabirdingtrail.org](http://www.easternsierrabirdingtrail.org) >

Mike Prather

## Field Trips

**Saturday, September 6th** - Fall Shorebird Migration on Owens Lake - Mike Prather - The fall shorebird spectacle at Owens Lake can be truly amazing. And with the new shallow flooding projects, there hasn't been this much shorebird habitat in decades. Mike will show us the best spots on the lake for birds. 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, Sept. 20th** - Fall Shorebird Migration on Owens Lake with El Dorado Audubon Chapter (Long Beach). If you can't make Mike Prather's September 6th Owens Lake field trip, here's a second chance. Mike will show us the best spots on the lake for birds. 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, September 27th** - Fall Migration in Death Valley. Furnace Creek Ranch is a resort oasis and has a reputation as a birder's paradise. And with special permission to bird the temporarily closed golf course, participants of this trip are bound to see some good birds, including rare eastern vagrants. Meet at 7:00 AM at the Furnace Creek Ranch golf course parking lot.

Call Chris at 760.873.7422 for more information.

## Birding

### BIRDING EVENTS

### Central Valley Birding Symposium, Nov. 20-23

"Our own" Jon Dunn and other topnotch birding experts will present workshops and talks. The schedule, registration form, etc. are on the website: [cvbs.org](http://cvbs.org). The non-computer inclined can contact Frances Oliver at (209) 369-2010.

### Morro Bay Bird Festival, Jan. 16-19

Field trips, workshops, and evening programs, with focus on the many species of wintering birds to be found in and around Morro Bay. Website: [www.morro-bay.net/birds](http://www.morro-bay.net/birds); phone: (805)772-4467

## INTERNATIONAL MIGRATORY BIRD DAY 2003

By Tom & Jo Heindel

On Saturday, 10 May 2003, a group of birders celebrated International Migratory Bird Day by vacuuming the County to find as many bird species as they could. However, what lead up to this particular IMBD has a little history that should be shared. In



Black-backed Wagtail found by Chris Howard & Rosie Beach. (Photo by Chris Howard)

2000 an amazing 196 species were found and opened the question "Can 200 species be found in an inland county without access to pelagic birds?" In CA, coastal counties and those fronting on the Salton Sea can usually break the 200 mark without too much trouble but "dry" counties are another story. IMBD in 2001 was a bust due to horrific weather but in 2002, as observer after observer replied "Yes" as the list of bird species was read, we knew the day was one of the best ever but did we break the magical 200? No, we ONLY tallied 199 but the competitive gleam in the eyes of the group was electric, and vows were made to bring bigger and better vacuums next year!

A couple of months before IMBD, the guerilla war council convened and all species that were seen every year in good numbers were eliminated because they will come to us. We worked the list of target birds, and each group identified where each species could be found in their area. The lists were worked and reworked until each species had at least three groups looking for it in three different areas. Some species

could only be found in one area and these were the "Don't come home 'til you get it!" species. Now all we needed was a large turnout of birds, birders, and great weather.

From dark o'clock until dusk o'clock, 41 observers (the most ever) scoured the Owens Valley, White Mountains and Deep Springs, Inyo Mountains, Eastern Sierra canyons, Saline Valley, China Ranch, and Death Valley looking and listening for all the birds they could find. Tradition, and exhaustion, has determined that the countdown (and the best potluck in the Valley) is held the next day. Again, the observers were replying "Yes" repeatedly and, as the checklist filled up with checks, everybody knew they were a part of something special. At the end of the countdown, the group let out a collective "Wow!" at the 219 species that were found! From hoping that we could break 200 to blowing right past it was exhilarating for everybody involved. Some had wondered if emphasizing the

search for species would lessen the numbers of total individuals. The group found 16,780 individual birds, almost a 50% increase over the previous high of 11,242. This reflects on the wide coverage by a large number of observers on a day that the birds chose to migrate. **B i o l o g i c a l** confluence is beautiful!

Never let it be said that an individual does not make a difference. Of the 219 species, 40 were seen by only one person or group (usually only two people). Chris Howard and Rosie Beach were the only ones to find Cassin's Kingbird, Juniper Titmouse, Red Crossbill, and, incredibly, a **BLACK-BACKED WAGTAIL**, an Asian species new to the County; Jim Parker had American Wigeon, Red-breasted and Pygmy

Nuthatches and White-throated Sparrow; Debby Parker found Wilson's Snipe, **MEW GULL** (which she added to the County list 2 days earlier!) and Black-and-white Warbler; Judy Wickman found an amazing Long-tailed Duck, Cooper's Hawk, and Cedar Waxwing; Susan Steele had Mountain Quail, Willow Flycatcher, and Canyon Towhee; Kelli Levinson added Red-breasted Merganser, Cactus Wren, and California Thrasher; Andrew and Leah Kirk found Least Bittern and Black Swift; Derrick Vocelka had Cattle Egret and Sharp-shinned Hawk; Barb Toth found two Evening Grosbeaks; Mike and Nancy Prather added a Whimbrel; Gerry & Vicki Wolfe found a Peregrine Falcon; Sacha Stuart had Ring-necked Pheasant in her yard; Bob Maurer, Jr. added Franklin's Gull; James Wilson had a Lucy's Warbler, Tom Heindel found Gambel's Quail, Brown-crested Flycatcher, Bell's Vireo, Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, and Summer Tanager; Jo Heindel added Canada Geese (2 adults with 5 goslings), Canvasback, Greater Yellowlegs, Long-billed Dowitcher, and Calliope Hummingbird. Others who helped count and added substantial numbers were Kathy Duvall, Lee Dykus, Jack and Marilyn Ferrell, Tim Forsell, Carolyn Gann, Betty Gilchrist, John & Ros Gorham, Steve Holland, Bob Hudson, Bill



Mew Gull in Bishop Park found by Debbie Parker. (Photo by Jo Heindel)

Mitchel, Larry Nahm, Richard Potashin, Beverly Schroeder, Michael Thornton, Bob Toth, Lynna Walker, Drew Wickman, John Williams, James Wilson, and Jerry Zatorski.

Inyo County received national recognition for ranking 3<sup>rd</sup> in the Nation for total number of species found in a county (or parish) in one day on IMBD. This may be a record that will stand for a long time, on the other hand....

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**John James Audubon** (1785-1851). *Left:* self portrait, perhaps not long after his arrival in the US [Peattie, Singing in the Wilderness, 1935]; *Right:* portrait by his son, John Woodhouse Audubon, 1843 [Maria Audubon, Audubon and His Journals, 1897].

**Programs and Field Trips you won't want to miss; Reports on the phenomenal IMBD /Bird-A-Thon and the Birding Trail Map; James discusses wilderness - Inside**