



## Meetings

2nd Wednesday of the month,  
September-June, 7:00 PM,  
usually at  
White Mountain Research Station  
3 miles east of Bishop on  
East Line Street.  
Check local media for possible  
changes.

*ESAS Website:* ESAudubon.org *ES Bird Sightings:* ESAudubon.org/birds/

## Evening Programs

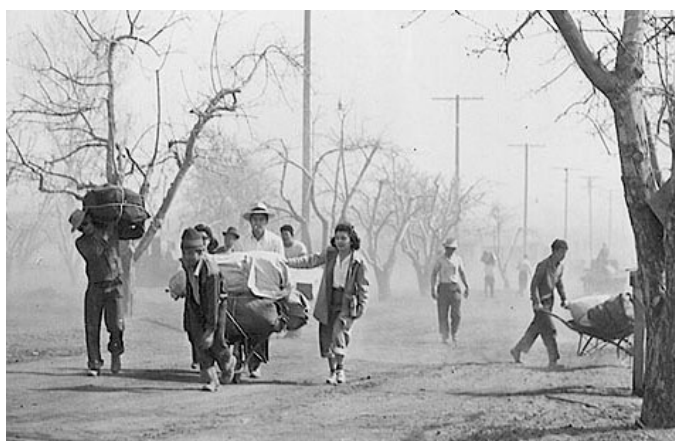
**Evening programs will preceded by announcements of interest to the membership, and recent bird sightings and other local natural history news. Come prepared to participate!**

### March 10

Refreshments: Marty Voght

#### **Remembering Manzanar**

Join a park ranger from Manzanar National Historic Site for a special preview of a new film entitled Remembering Manzanar. The film will be followed by a discussion of Manzanar's past, present, and future. Since its designation several years ago as a new unit of the National Park Service, the World War II Internment camp south of Independence has undergone historic surveys, artifact collection, and restoration in preparation for its official opening on April 24 this year. The old Manzanar High School auditorium, subsequently used as a garage by highway crews, will be the new interpretive center, where the film will serve as an introduction to the site for visitors. This is our chance to see it first. For more information on Manzanar National Historic Site, please visit [www.nps.gov/manz](http://www.nps.gov/manz).



Evacuees arriving at Manzanar, 1942  
Nat'l Archives & Records Administration, Clem Albers photo

### April 14

Refreshments: Margie & Ed Evans

#### **Birding is Becoming Big Business in the Eastern Sierra**



Phalaropes at Mono Lake county park, [www.birdchautauqua.org](http://www.birdchautauqua.org)

Lisa Cutting, Eastern Sierra Policy Director for the Mono Lake Committee, will present a program of interest to all who live or work in the Eastern Sierra (the right side of California). We all know how fun birding is and how fortunate we are to live in such diverse birding environs. But now our business communities are beginning to realize it too. Lisa will give a brief overview of the recent economic trends of birding and will update us on two exciting regional projects - The Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua and the Eastern Sierra Birding Trail Map. She will explain how community-based environmental protection working in concert with economically sustainable communities will help ensure our treasured bird habitats remain healthy. Eastern Sierra Audubon is a partner on both projects!

#### **Audubon Highway Cleanup March 27**

Weather permitting. Meet for optional breakfast at Tom's Place at 8:00; clean-up starts at 9:00. We supply all necessary pick-up equipment. Ros and John, 938-2023

## President's Message – Good Weather for Reading

As I write, promises of spring are in the air. It is warmer, however slightly; the days are perceptibly longer, and with each walk the possibility of regreening trees and neotropical migrant birds is felt. But it is still late winter. The last few years have been a renewal of my interest in birds and birding. I also have a penchant for collecting books. These interests take me to bookstores old and new, on the internet and to natural history centers in search of tomes about our feathered friends.

*Pete Dunne on Bird Watching*, a Houghton Mifflin book: Many books serve as an introduction to bird watching, and as a beginning birder for over 50 years, I have perused a few. What caught my attention with Pete Dunne's book were the breadth and the depth of his offerings. If want to know more of the science and sport of birds, birding, or listing, he has what you need. If you're an accomplished birder with a friend beginning, this is a good book for them. There are chapters on tools, resources, travel, difficult identifications and ethics. There are appendices with checklists, ethics codes, and

societies. Very useful is an appendix with the various name changes to our birds, which can be confusing for those of us who have tried to follow them for 5 decades.

*Dictionary of Birds of the United States*, by Joel Ellis Holloway: When I picked the book up I expected it to be a short "best of" compendium of the birds. It is instead an informative and entertaining dictionary of the names of birds. It references over 900 of our birds, both common and rare. The entries cover both the scientific name and the common, tracing the roots of the words. We learn that Northern Shrike, *Lanius excubitor*, takes its scientific name "from the Latin *lanio*, to butcher, to pull to pieces," and the common name "from the Old English *scric*, a thrush, or Anglo-Saxon *scric*, a shrieker." The more I learn about our feathered friends, the more I realize how little I know. This book fills in some fascinating gaps. Seeing the roots of the names places the birds contextually in human time.

Good reading and birding – James

## March and April Field Trips

**Saturday, March 6th - Pleasant Valley Reservoir Birding with Jerry Zatorski.** 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 13th - Bighorn Sheep Field Trip with John Wehausen.** We will look for bighorn sheep and John will teach us about the status of Sierra Nevada Bighorn Sheep 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, March 20th - Bird Banding Demonstration with Tom and Jo Heindel.** 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; stay for as long or as short a time as you wish. 280 Dewey St., Big Pine. Children are welcome; pets are not for obvious reasons. Wind or weather cancels. For more information call Tom or Jo at 938-2764.

**Saturday, April 17th - Owens Lake with Mike Prather.** Mike will show us the 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 information.

**Saturday, May 1st - Baker Creek with Earl Gann.** Spring migration in the Owens Valley at its finest: Baker Creek above Big Pine. Expect warblers, vireos, flycatchers, tanagers, and orioles in breeding plumage. A great trip for beginners and children. Meet at Glacier View Campground at the junction of Highways 395 and 168, at the north end of Big Pine at 7:00AM. Bring snacks, water, and wear shoes that can get damp. Call 873-7422 for more information.

## Eastern Sierra's Black-billed Magpie Mystery

Tom and Jo Heindel

Many visitors arrive in the eastern Sierra from southern California and are thrilled to see the flashy Black-billed Magpie (*Pica hudsonia*) as it crosses the road in front of them or flies alongside their car as if in welcome. They are not used to seeing this large, black-and-white member of the crow family, since the southern limit of its range in California is right here in Inyo County. The magpie occurs widely throughout the western United States, east of the Sierra Cascade axis, and north to Alaska.



There is an interesting mystery concerning the magpie's distribution in Inyo County. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Dr. A. K. Fisher headed an expedition to conduct bird surveys in southern California, southern Nevada, southern Utah, and parts of Arizona. Many of the most prominent names in ornithology at the time helped in this comprehensive work. C. Hart Merriam, Vernon Bailey, Edward W. Nelson, Theodore S. Palmer, and Frank Stephens plus a few lesser-known ornithologists took part in various areas of the survey. Some spent only a few months in Inyo while others spent most of a year here. The expedition covered not only all of what is now Death Valley National Park but all of the mountain ranges in Inyo, the east slope of the Sierra north to the headwaters of the Owens River, and the Owens Valley. They recorded most of the species we see today with many records from the vicinity of Little Owens Lake (Little Lake), Haiwee Meadows (Haiwee Reservoir), Olancho, Owens Lake, Long Pine, Independence, Big Pine and Bishop.

Imagine our surprise back in the 1970s when we read the expedition report for the first time and saw that "The Black-billed Magpie was not seen by the expedition but is known to be a common resident in the neighborhood of Carson in western Nevada." Wow! We

assumed that they had "always" been in the Owens Valley.

Enid Larsen, a chipmunk scientist, teacher, and dear friend, who had spent most of her life in the Owens Valley gave a one word retort when we told her that magpies were not here in 1890-1891, "Hogwash!" We told her about the expedition and highly respected ornithologists who conducted the surveys but she would not believe it. She remembered them as a little girl in southern Bishop as she played in the sage.

The next morning, just past dawn, there was a rap on our door...it was Enid. She was brimming with news to tell. It seemed that we were not the first ones she visited that morning. However, we will let her tell her story. "Well, I worried all night that I would die before I solved the Black-billed Magpie problem. If I had died and Saint Peter asked me to explain the distribution of the magpie in Inyo County, I would not have been able to answer and that would have killed me!" (She paused to let us enjoy her joke). "This morning I talked with my Native American friend who is *much* older than I" (another pause) "and I asked her if there were magpies in the valley when she was young. After thinking about it for some time, she told me that when she was a very little girl there were no magpies in the valley. Therefore, it is true! Now I have the answer for Saint Peter!" Happily, she did not need it for another couple of decades.

Whether her friend remembered correctly after all those years is hard to say but we can state with certainty that this hard-to-overlook bird was not found by extremely competent observers in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Today the species is fairly common throughout the Owens Valley although as one travels south they become fewer in number. Small numbers are reported south to Haiwee Reservoir. The earliest record for the county, so far, is an egg set collected near Laws 22 Apr 1916 that resides at the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, Berkeley. If anyone has further information regarding the early days and the arrival of the Black-billed Magpie in Inyo County, we would love to hear from them.

Another major mystery involves this species but that will have to wait for another time!

### Three Cheers For the Burnstroms and Bishop Big Band

Dorothy and John Burnstrom obtained a \$300 donation for our Chapter. They contacted the Bishop Big Band and asked that they donate the proceeds from one of their appearances to Audubon. And they did. Thank you, Dorothy and John and the Bishop Big Band!

## Birding

### Two bird festivals in northern California:

**6th Annual Aleutian Goose Festival** - March 26-28. "Join us for great birding on the extreme north coast of California and celebrate Spring with the return of the once endangered Aleutian Canada Goose. Our three day festival offers 65 workshops and field trips highlighting the birds, animals and awesome natural beauty found here in the home of Redwood National & State Parks." [www.aleutiangoosefestival.org](http://www.aleutiangoosefestival.org) 800-343-8300

**Godwit Days, Spring Migration Bird Festival** - April 16-18, Arcata, CA. "Keynote by Donald Janssen, 'Captive Breeding Programs and Conservation.' Over 100 field trips & workshops; bird fair/art show; live birds of prey." [www.godwitdays.com](http://www.godwitdays.com) 800-908-WING

### Winter Wildlife Field Trip 7 February

**Jo Heindel**

On a blustery Saturday in February, a large group of hale and hardy people went on the Eastern Sierra Audubon Society's field trip to look at the wildlife that prefers to spend its winter in the Owens Valley, primarily near Big Pine. Two days of steady gales continued so all participants were bundled up and car heaters were given a "warm welcome."

The bitter north wind nearly caused frostbite as the group tried to hold tripods still enough to scan from the south end of Klondike Lake for the ducks that were known to be there. At the northeast shoreline cars were pulled in at angles that allowed the observers to hide from the wind and get good looks of hundreds of ducks including Northern Pintail, Northern Shoveler, Green-winged and Cinnamon Teal, Ruddy Duck, Gadwall, Ring-necked Duck, and Common Merganser. A drive down County Road was extremely productive when a Great Horned Owl was found sitting on a nest and totally filled the view of all the telescopes trained on her. Nearby was a Brown Creeper who did not mind being looked at as it climbed up and along major willow trunks probing with its long, needle-sharp beak for insect bits. A pair of Red-shouldered Hawks were beginning their courtship display by wheeling above the admiring group.

By taking the road just east of the Big Pine canal from Hwy 168 to North Fish Springs Road the group saw many Red-tailed Hawks holding tight onto poles facing north trying to keep upright. On a side trip down Steward Lane two Ferruginous Hawks were flattened on the ground deciding that was better than ruining their nails trying to hold onto a pole. A small flock of stunningly blue Mountain Bluebirds added color to the otherwise drab brown landscape. A Merlin sped by heading north into the wind as though the Beaufort was zero. A relief stop at Fish Springs fish hatchery yielded relief and a pair of Yellow-rumped Warblers and Lesser Scaup.



Yellow-rumped Warbler, Marcus Martin, [www.photobirder.com](http://www.photobirder.com)

The group headed for the last stop on Tinemaha Overlook knowing that the worse wind was yet to come. Again, cars were parked to block the wind, and people and telescopes huddled behind them as best they could. However, it all seemed worthwhile when three Bald Eagles were seen sitting in the same tree. One was an adult with pure white head and tail while the other two were immatures of different ages. Behind the eagles over the reed-edged shoreline a pair of Northern Harriers, talons clasped, tumbled and turned as they fell in their acrobatic courtship dance.

Amazingly, the group at the end of the trip was the same size as it was at the beginning. The only thing harder than the winter birds was this group of hardy winter residents who braved bitter cold winds and were rewarded with over 50 species of birds.



## Conservation

### Winter raptors, busy baby season

Winter has brought an influx of raptor patients to *Eastern Sierra Wildlife Care*. They began coming in November—a Barn Owl, Golden Eagle, two Red-tailed Hawks, and a Great-horned Owl by year-end. In 2004, a Northern Pygmy Owl, two Red-shouldered Hawks (an immature and an adult), an immature Red-tail, and a Rough-legged Hawk were admitted thus far.

The most common problems that bring raptors to a rehabilitation center in winter are emaciation and “HBC” (hit by car). Emaciation is seen more often in young birds still perfecting hunting skills, but is sometimes secondary to an injury. Raptors must work hard in winter to find food during shorter days and bad weather. Even a minor injury, if it prevents the bird from hunting for a few days, may set it on a downward spiral toward starvation. In winter, raptors hunt more frequently along roads or feed on roadkill; rain, snow or winds can affect visibility and maneuverability while on or near roads.



Rough-legged hawk at ESWC.

Chris Howard photo

The Rough-legged was found February 2 on Benton Crossing Road during a snowstorm. A diagnosis of severe head trauma and a swollen left eye strongly

suggest that the bird was hit by a car. Initial treatment included heat, fluids, medication to reduce pain and swelling, and antibiotics for the eye. The bird was force-fed for several days as it was incapable of eating on its own. By Day 6, it began to eat; it was flying in the aviary on Day 13, and on February 19 spiraled upward into a clear blue sky.

Three hundred and thirty patients were admitted for care in 2003, over half of them baby animals. Baby season was 6 months long, with Lesser Goldfinches being both the earliest and latest avian babies. Eighty-one species of animals were seen: 64 avian, 16 mammal, and one reptile (a baby coachwhip snake caught in a glue trap).

First-time or rare avian species included 2 Swainson’s Hawks, a Common Loon, Evening Grosbeak, Green Heron, Great Egret, Calliope Hummingbird, Pygmy Nuthatch, Peregrine Falcon, Northern Saw-whet Owl, Ruddy Duck, Blue Grouse and Ruby-crowned Kinglet.

ESWC’s Annual Training Class will be held April 25th. If you’re interested in learning more about wildlife rehabilitation or want to become a volunteer, contact Cindy Kamler at [lkamler@earthlink.net](mailto:lkamler@earthlink.net) for further information or to be placed on our mailing list.

### The Great Owens River Clean Up Celebrating Earth Day

In partnership with Bishop Rotary, California Native Plant Society, Caltrans, and the Sierra Club, we will be cleaning the banks of the Owens River in Bishop to celebrate Earth Day. The event will take place on Saturday, April 24<sup>th</sup>. Meet at the junction of East Line Street and the Owens River Bridge at 9 am. The clean up will be followed by a potluck picnic at the Bishop City Park.

Wear sturdy shoes or boots and leather or other heavy-duty gloves. Bring drinking water. We will work until 11:30, gather the trash, and then proceed to the Bishop City Park for a potluck lunch. Do join us to do good work in celebration of our Planet Earth.

After lunch, those planning to attend the grand opening of the auditorium at Manzanar National Historic Site can car pool down to Independence. National Park dedication will begin at 1:30 pm, with the auditorium open for exhibit viewing until approximately 5 pm.



### **Volunteer Opportunities For Hummingbird Monitoring**

The Hummingbird Monitoring Network (THMN) is a group of scientists, citizens, land managers, and property owners committed to the conservation of hummingbird diversity and abundance. The goal is to develop an effective program to include monitoring, research, education, and preservation. THMN began in 2002 with 9 monitoring sites in Arizona and 2 in southern California, expanded to 14 and 5 in 2003, and seeks to establish long-term monitoring sites in the eastern Sierra.

At monitoring sites, hummingbirds are baited with 5 feeders and are then trapped and banded once every two weeks. THMN would like to learn about potential sites, hear from those who could maintain feeders, and train committed volunteers to band hummingbirds. Barbara Carlson, the California Coordinator and Susan Wethington, the Program Director are certified by the North American Banding Council to train others to band hummingbirds. They would like to establish monitoring sites and train banders during 2004 and begin monitoring in 2005. To be part of the project, contact Dr. Susan Wethington at PO Box 1125, Patagonia, AZ 85624 or [swething@dakotacom.net](mailto:swething@dakotacom.net)

### **An election time note from our friends at California Native Plant Society**

The March 2<sup>nd</sup> primary offers voters a chance to elect Inyo County Supervisors in three of five districts. In deciding your vote, please consider the candidates' knowledge of the Inyo LA Long Term Water Agreement (LTWA) and their ideas regarding its enforcement. The LTWA is supposed to provide protection for the valley environment, native animals and plants. All candidates advocate enforcement of the LTWA. What urgently needs discussion is *how* the county should enforce it. The Bristlecone Chapter of California Native Plant Society sent all candidates six questions. Their responses are posted at [www.bristleconecnps.org/Conservation](http://www.bristleconecnps.org/Conservation).  
- Daniel Pritchett

### **Golden Trout Natural History Workshop**

Nonprofit hike-in wilderness camp at 10,000 feet in the eastern Sierra's Golden Trout Wilderness, with naturalist-interpreted hikes and evening talks. Meals and tent cabins are provided. Three one-week sessions in June and July. Reserve early - often full by April. Call (805) 668-8344, email [paul.roark@verizon.net](mailto:paul.roark@verizon.net), or visit the website at [www.1startists.com/gtc](http://www.1startists.com/gtc).

## **It's a Wild Life**

*In the last issue I promised another remarkable stuck-story from another college friend. After graduating, Sondra Grimm worked with Mexican spotted owls, brown-headed cowbirds, willow flycatchers, snowy plovers and more before ending up here in the eastern Sierra to work on sage grouse habitat mapping. A couple of years ago, when she headed a crew surveying for endangered Southwestern Willow Flycatchers on the Colorado River, she sent me this. - Editor*

## **Flycatcher Soup**

**Sondra Grimm**

The day starts at 3:30 AM – I swear, the next thing I study is going to sleep in until at least 9:00! The heat is extreme, 115 plus, and it doesn't start to cool off to 90 until eight or nine pm. The river level has dropped about 8 vertical feet since April and is still going. River navigation is requiring more intuition than anything else to avoid obstacles and shifting sandbars. When the water started dropping I told everyone where the shallow parts would be, where the rocks would start to pop up or be just under the surface, where the sediments would be dropping out, and what to do if you hit anything. And the following week, two of the crew plowed into a bunch of rocks and a rather large sandbar going full throttle. Thankfully no one was hurt and the only damage was two banged-up props. I had a group meeting and lectured for three hours on the dangers of hitting a sand bar going so fast and just how much damage to the boat, motor and the humans involved there could be and just how long it would be before help would be had. I think I scared them into a reality of safety and caution.

And then we have the wonderful difficulties of that ever elusive WIFL. I just read a paper that estimated that even after 10 visits to a site there is still only a 20 to 30 percent probability of detection. And the odds get even more slim depending on where the birds are in their breeding cycle. And even if we are lucky enough to find

a pair, finding out what they're doing is a whole other story. And finding a nest, well, that's another complicated endeavor.



Southwestern Willow Flycatcher on nest  
USFWS photo by Jim Roribaugh

And the water level dropping is making it more challenging as well. Our sites are either partially inundated or dry or in varying states in between, which means mud. Now the mud isn't regular mud. No. It's more like sticky quicksand with no bottom, a rather slimy liquid that looks like it's solid and wobbles like jello right before it sucks you in. We like to call it soup. There is no one method to traveling in it and anything goes to keep yourself from sinking. It makes surveying a very creative and dirty job, but somebody has to do it!

I have had a few near death experiences – I guess I could just as easily call them life experiences. I wonder how many times we come close to death and never really notice. Maybe we walk a fine line between both worlds, on the very edge of each rather than in the middle of either.

So here I am today, slopping my way (with all the grace of a pig) through that soupy liquid and I realize that I am up to my navel in it and still sinking. And, hope all that I might, there's no solid bottom to be found under my feet and none for several meters in any direction.

I knew I was in deep (no pun intended) trouble and it was getting worse by the second. I tell you, it didn't look very promising. This was, without a doubt, a life or death moment. I didn't even panic – I kid you not, I just started laughing. I found it near impossible to stop. I had a vision of my crew searching for me and finding only my hat, my last and final remains, resting peacefully on the top of the soup. It wasn't like I didn't care what the outcome was. I guess I just wasn't

worrying about it. It was absolutely wonderful to just experience something with complete trust.

I manage to stifle some of the laughter back so I can breathe enough to move. I wonder how far I could sink before hitting bottom. I wonder if it is truly a bottomless quagmire (interesting metaphor none the less). I wonder what it feels like to breathe heavy mud – so with extreme effort and skill and several moves I must have picked up watching Tarzan movies, mostly clumsy wiggling and a type of movement I guess could be described as swimming, 45 minutes later I'm on solid ground, which is very relative: I'm up to my knees in goo, but my feet are resting comfortably on hard clay underneath me.

It still makes me giggle thinking about it. I know, death is no laughing matter – but why not?

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## Welcome, New Members Winter 2003-2004

**J & R Bolser – Bishop**  
**Susan King – Rock Creek Resort**  
**Craig Pyle – Lee Vining**  
**Aaron & Annalisa Storey – Bishop**  
**River Gates – Lee Vining**  
**The Gaimy Davis Family – Lone Pine**  
**The Gerri Glines Family – Lone Pine**  
**Janet & Dave Carle – Lee Vining**  
**Ken & Cindy Butner – Mammoth Lakes**  
**V. Hamilton – Swall Meadows**  
**Martin & Beth Strelneck – Lee Vining**  
**Rod Dunnnett – Mammoth Lakes**  
**Kathy Zack – Bishop**  
**Troy Kelly – Bishop**  
**Mr. & Mrs. Eugene Rispaud – San Clemente**  
**Christy Eytchison – Mammoth Lakes**

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**PRBO Conservation Science's Eastern Sierra field station** just completed 3 new reports on their 6 years of intensive songbird monitoring and outreach projects. I recently overheard Debby Parker loaning one to Cindy Kamler and saying, "They're indispensable!" For your own indispensable hard copies contact River Gates, rgates@prbo.org, 647-6109 or see <http://www.monobasinresearch.org/online-reports/esrscp.htm> (some new reports may not be online yet). More about PRBO's Eastern Sierra work next issue – *Editor*



## Chapter Officers

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Treasurer: Bill Mitchel 872-4774  
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Chris Howard 873-7422  
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Recuperating Rough-legged Hawk

Cindy Kamler photo

**Helping hawks and hummingbirds; blustery birding, a magpie mystery,  
and stuck in the soup with Sondra Grimm – Inside!**