



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 precede announcements of interest to the membership, and recent bird sightings and other local natural history news. Come prepared to participate!

March 9

A Bit of a Stroll

James Wilson and Walt Hoffmann

James' and Walt's hike from Death Valley to Bishop. An exceptional, hilarious journey by two friends covering desert salt pans, rocky washes, hot springs, high mountains, and wild rose thickets.

April 13

Our Local Lion: a Natural History of the Mountain Lion

Becky Pierce

Becky Pierce, a researcher for the California Department of Fish and Game, will deliver a general interest program (few graphs) on our local big cat. Becky has studied this native predator since 1991, and will cover its ecology in the Sierra Nevada. Most of us are excited yet nervous to see one face to face, and we can learn to prepare for possible interactions.



Mountain Lion painting by Joy Fatooh

Past Presidents Honored

A potluck dinner hosted last year by James and Kay Wilson honored past and present Eastern Sierra Audubon presidents including James Wilson, Jim Parker, Larry Blakely, Sylvia Colton, and Mike Prather.

Attendees saluted the present and past board members and all of their hard work for Eastern Sierra Audubon. In fact all in attendance were dedicated Audubon members; it was a gathering of people who make extraordinary

efforts to promote appreciation and conservation of eastern Sierra wildlife. All Audubon members lift our hats to all of you!



Above, Sylvia Colton and Mike Prather; right, Larry Blakely. Debby Parker photos



March and April Field Trips

Saturday, February, 26th - Bird Banding Demonstration - Tom and Jo Heindel will operate a bird banding station where the public is invited to watch wild birds being taken out of mist nets, 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 5 - Big Pine Winter Wildlife Tour with Tom & Jo Heindel. This is a great driving tour between Klondike Lake and Tinemaha Reservoir. Meet at the Glacier View Campground in Big Pine at 8:00 AM. Bring binoculars, lunch, water, scopes. Should last until noon. For further information call Tom or Jo at 938-2764.

Saturday, March 12 - 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. This is a great trip for beginning birders and children. For more information call Jerry at 872-3818.

Sunday, 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. Meet at 8:00 AM at the Diaz Lake parking lot 3 miles south of Lone Pine. Bring a lunch, binoculars, scope, hat, sunscreen etc. If you have a hard hat or safety vest bring them, as they are required on the lake. Otherwise hard hats and vests will be provided. Call Mike at 876-5807 for more information.

May 13-15: Sierra Spring Sojourn 2005

The Bristlecone Chapter of the California Native Plant Society will hold its 8th Biennial Sierra Spring Sojourn on May 13 through 15 at the Bernasconi Center in Big Pine. The Sojourn is a weekend of field trips and evening programs focusing on the flora of the White Mountains, Owens Valley and east side of the Sierra Nevada. If you would like to receive a registration pack by email when they are available in March, contact Sherryl Taylor at staylor@npgcable.com. To receive the registration pack by mail, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to Sherryl Taylor at P.O. Box 1638, Mammoth Lakes, CA 93546. For more information, call 760-924-8742.

Canada Geese in Inyo County

Tom and Jo Heindel

It is always exciting to see a bird with a USF&WS aluminum band on a leg in Inyo County. If the nine-digit number can be read it means it can be determined where and when the bird was banded as well as the age and sometimes the sex. But it is usually very difficult to be able to read a number on the band of a bird that is not in the hand. Recently Jon Dunn and Jo Heindel were able to do that at the Bishop City Park because the bird was a Canada Goose with a big leg band. On 17 November 2004 the banded goose was surrounded while it grazed on the brown grass and "0868-52185" was carefully read.

Later that afternoon the band number was sent to the Bird Banding Laboratory at Patuxent, Maryland (1-800-347-BAND or www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bbl/). In a week a certificate was mailed out with the BBL's thanks for the effort and for information that had been sent. The certificate informed us that this bird was banded on 30 May 1997 at Sunnyside, Nevada, which is about 150 miles north of Las Vegas and about 195 miles east of Bishop. This is not a great distance as far as band recoveries go but considering that some of our visiting winter geese breed in northwest Alaska, it is an important piece of information. It was an "AHY" female (After Hatching Year) which means it was not born in 1997 but earlier, with the exact year unknown, making the bird at least eight years old. Through early December, there were eight geese in the Park with this bird the only one banded.

This banded goose was found as the result of looking hard at Canada Geese, which used to be one species. In July 2004 the American Ornithologists' Union split the Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*) into two species: Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*) which includes all the large subspecies and Cackling Goose (*Branta hutchinsii*) which includes all the small subspecies. This has drawn birders back into the fields to look hard at "white-cheeked geese" to try to determine which are which. The smallest (*Branta hutchinsii minima*) is the only easy one because it is almost the size of a mallard and has a small bill and its size does not overlap any other subspecies. But the rest are challenging beyond belief. Sizes vary based on environmental and genetic factors which results in small birds of the larger group (Canada Geese) being smaller than large birds of the smaller group (Cackling Geese)!

Three of the eight in the Park were identified as two 'large' Canada Geese (*Branta canadensis moffitti*) and one 'small' Cackling Goose (*Branta hutchinsii minima*). The other five birds generated much debate regarding their identity. Some observers felt they were small subspecies belonging to the Canada Goose group and others felt they were large subspecies belonging to the Cackling Goose group. Never have so many people looked at so many 'white-cheeked geese' for so long! This issue has been studied for seven decades by a few and now, with the many, it will probably take a decade or more to sort this all out. Ahhhh, the joy of science!



Above, Cackling Goose (*Branta hutchinsii minima*)
Left, Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis moffitti*)
Both photos by Jo Heindel
17 Nov 2004 at Bishop City Park

What If They Can't Fly?

Cindy Kamler, Eastern Sierra Wildlife Care

The Great Horned Owl's femur was broken in two places and her chances were not good. Some centers would have euthanized her immediately, but she was strong, fat and feisty and we decided to battle the odds. Femurs cannot be splinted, so we kept the owl in a small cage for over two weeks. She then was moved to a small flight where she could jump a few feet from branch to branch; a few weeks later, she went into a larger aviary. Her uninjured wings soon regained tone; she could perch, jump to the ground, and even catch and kill live prey. We all cheered when she was released, strong, fatter, and still feisty, with a lumpy but healed femur. A happy outcome against poor odds.

But all too often, rehabilitators must face even harder decisions. Recently, an immature Red-Shouldered Hawk was rescued on north Pa Ha Lane. X-rays revealed two fractures—one in the humerus, the other in the radius—close to the elbow joint. The bones were splintered, the injury several days old, and a gun pellet was lodged at the site. The fracture was contaminated and not repairable. The hawk would never fly again.

Flight is critical for any bird in order to find food, escape predators and, in many cases, migrate. Some species can tolerate a slight flight deficit; others, such as accipiters, falcons, hummingbirds, and flycatchers, cannot.

"Can't you keep him anyway?" Federal and state regulations govern the answer. Keeping an unreleasable bird for display or education requires a special permit; such permits are not issued if a wing is amputated at or above the elbow, something the Red-shoulder would probably require. This beautiful young bird had to be euthanized.

Sadly, rehabilitators everywhere see more unreleasable birds than there are places for them. Some do not have the temperament. We must assess the quality of life the individual would have in captivity.

Occasionally an unreleasable bird appears to be a good candidate for placement and we take on the time-consuming and sometimes heart-breaking task of looking. We found homes for two such birds last year. Here are their stories.

An adult Northern Saw-whet Owl was found at a Sierra resort on the ground beneath a light, not far from a window. She had probably been hunting insects attracted by the light and hit the window. She had head trauma

and her right wing drooped badly. No fractures were found, but over time it became clear that she had suffered nerve damage. After 5 months of rehab, her flight never improved beyond short, downward flights. She was charming and tolerated captivity well. We had all fallen in love with her and wanted to find her a home. Fortunately, Moonridge Animal Park in Big Bear Lake was looking for a small owl. After completing the required formalities, she was driven to a setting much like the one she had known. Since she completed training, she has become a popular addition to their education program. She rides quietly on a gloved hand, giving people a chance to see this beautiful little owl "up close and personal."



The juvenile Swainson's hawk arrived from Fish Lake Valley with his left wing dangling by a thread at the wrist joint. The metacarpals were desiccated. His parents had been feeding him and his overall condition was good, but he would never fly. Swainson's are a state-threatened species, so we needed to contact California Fish and Game before euthanizing him. They asked us to place him and we agreed to try.

Veterinarian Diana Drumm removed the dead wing end at Bishop Vet Hospital. After surgery, the hawk was on antibiotics and eating well. About 9 days post-op, the metacarpals on his other wing literally broke off. The wing had appeared normal on initial exam, but subsequently lost blood flow and died. We realized that the bird had been electrocuted. In some cases, what appears to be a slight abrasion or laceration is in fact the site at which electric current entered or exited the body. Sadly, in a process not fully understood, the cells often begin to die back, resulting in the loss of a wing or leg or even death.

We now had a bird missing the metacarpals on both wings. His spirit and appetite were good, he tolerated people well, and he was charismatic. In short, a good candidate for placement. Moonridge had the space and permit to take him and after several months of recovery, he too traveled to Big Bear Lake. He is undergoing training, successfully so far, and soon will take his place as a wildlife ambassador.



Eastern Sierra Wildlife Care 2004

360 patients (up 20%).

321 birds, 38 mammals, 1 reptile.

62 species of birds, 13 mammal species, 1 reptile species.

First time or rare species: Bald Eagle, Common Moorhen, Great Egret, Long-eared and Northern Pygmy owls, Peregrine and Prairie falcons, Western Wood Pee-Wee, Virginia Rail, Least Grebe (2 babies), Spotted Skunk, Townsend's Bat.

Of the animals received, 80% died within 24 hours.

9% were euthanized.

Of the remaining, 85% were released.

Don't be a fuddy-duddy.

If you're seeing the photos on these pages in black and buff instead of glorious full color, then you are also using up extra paper, catching the Wave a few days late, and costing your Eastern Sierra Audubon chapter the

printing and mailing expenses we'll save as soon as you sign up for the e-Wave Option. Contact Chris Howard, choward@telis.org to remove your name from the snail mail list and add it to the growing group of cutting-edge-type people who are e-mailed a handy link the moment each new issue of the Wave is posted online.

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Green-winged Teal

BLM photo

Laughs, roars, cackles, and more than one kind of success story - *Inside!*