



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

Meetings

2nd Wednesday of the month
(but 1st Wednesday this April)
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.

Evening Programs

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

March 8

Wildflowers of Death Valley National Park

Stephen Ingram

Local photographer and botanist, Stephen Ingram, will present a slide show of Death Valley's plant habitats and some of the area's unique plant life. The program will cover the spring blooms of desert annuals, as well as a few of the park's interesting endemic plants such as the Panamint daisy, Death Valley monkeyflower, Eureka Dunes primrose, and others.

While Bishop is still cold and gray, come enhance your understanding of Death Valley while basking in the warmth of an early Spring through the colorful work of a knowledgeable botanist who is also one of the Eastern Sierra's finest photographers.

April 5 (NOTE: 1st Wednesday of April)

A New Tui Chub – Found and Almost Lost

Steve Parmenter

Steve is a fishery biologist with the Department of Fish and Game in Bishop. He works in the eastern Sierra and Mojave Desert to benefit native fishes and resolve water resources issues. Over the past 5 years, Steve has collaborated with the BLM on projects to safeguard and restore endangered Owens Valley fishes. The subject of his talk is the near extinction and successful rescue of a newly discovered strain of tui chub, with help from BLM, LADWP, UC and others.

Steve studied biology at U.C. Santa Cruz and aquatic ecology at Uppsala University in Sweden. He and his family have made Bishop their home for 17 years.



Desert Gold

© Stephen Ingram

President's Message – A 10.0 Sunrise

Did you see the sunrise the other morning? Amazing – clouds over Mt. Humphreys started to glow with the rising sun, then the mountains themselves turned from gray to intense orange in the span of a minute or so. What a great way to start a day. When I first moved here I was so excited; I rated each sunrise on a scale of one to ten and included a short critique: 9 – excellent color progression, 10 – stellar performance. As I became more experienced with Eastern Sierran sunrises, my expectations grew. I became more critical: 6.5 – needs more clouds, 5 – no colors. Was I unfairly harsh? I mean, how many places are there in California where you can get an unobstructed view of a sunrise on 13,000 ft peaks across miles of open space and wilderness? Was I beginning to take our Eastern Sierra viewshed and access to wilderness for granted?

It could be much worse; we could have endless sprawl and smog. When visitors comment, “you sure are lucky to live here,” I reply, “I know.” Yes, I really do feel lucky to live in the Eastern Sierra, but do I appreciate it enough? Do I do enough to ensure our Eastern Sierra landscapes and habitat last?

At Eastern Sierra Audubon Society (ESAS), our underlying goal is to appreciate and protect our wildlife, habitat, and open space. The evening programs we sponsor highlight enthusiastic researchers and activists, who shed light on their dedication to protect our native plants (March presentation) and native fish (April presentation).

One of the best ways to ensure a legacy of appreciation for our environment is to work with our youth. ESAS has a great program called Birds-in-the-Classroom, where ESAS volunteers give classroom presentations, then take the kids on birding tours. For many kids, it's their first time using binoculars and the first time really noticing our birds. You can help the Program by donating items to the ESAS Garage Sale (April 29th). We can always use volunteers – it's fun and rewarding – just contact any ESAS Board member.

Until next time, let's remember that every sunrise in the Eastern Sierra is a 10.0.

Chris Howard

March/April Field Trips and Events

Saturday March 4 - Pleasant Valley Reservoir Birding Leader, Jerry Zatorski. 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 8:00 AM behind the Wye Shell in Bishop to carpool. A great trip for beginning birders and children. For more information call Jerry at 872-3818.

Saturday April 22 - Owens Lake During Peak Shorebird Migration See Earth Day events on page 3!

Saturday April 29 - Eastern Sierra Audubon Society Garage Sale at Bill Mitchel's house, 716 Sundown Circle, Bishop. This is one of Audubon's primary fundraisers and the proceeds go to support our varied activities. We greatly appreciate any donations you can make in the form of items you no longer need or want. Please bring them on the day before the sale, Friday, April 28th. If you have questions, please call Bill at 872-4774.



Welcome, New Members

**Genevieve Collingnon
Noelle Deinken
Rhonda & Hank S.
Garretson
Ms. Penny Kehus
Mrs. Opaline Larson
Art Lillund
Mr. Ed Karl Sonnenberg
Martin & Beth Strelneck
R. Willey
Collette Zemitis**

Earth Day Celebration Saturday & Sunday, April 22 & 23

Eastern Sierra Audubon, along with our partners from previous years, is planning a great celebration of Earth Day and invites you to join us in the fun. Here is the tentative schedule of events:

April 22: Owens Lake Bird Trip with Mike Prather
 April 22: Friends of the Inyo Buttermilk Run
 April 23: Owens River Cleanup
 April 23: Potluck Picnic at Bishop City Park

April 22nd Friends of the Inyo 2nd Annual Earth Day Celebration And Fun Run:

Come celebrate the freedom of the hills on Earth Day weekend with a fantastic run through the famous Buttermilk Boulders. The course winds through the legendary Buttermilks directly under the towering Sierra Crest. Our course is moderately hilly on single track and dirt roads. The scenery is incredible, the air crisp, and the running is even better! Last year the weather was perfect and we had over 150 participants who enjoyed a great day of running in the Eastern Sierra. There will be prizes galore with raffle prizes by Patagonia and Montrail, and an after party to further hydrate your spirits. Come out and celebrate Earth Day and help support Friends of the Inyo.

Only 200 runners allowed, so sign up early, as we anticipate a large turnout this year.

Pre-registration: \$20 (includes running shirt). All participants pre-registered by April 1st are guaranteed a custom graphic tech wear running t-shirt from Patagonia. Register online, www.friendsoftheinyo.org

Race-day registration: (7:45 am - 8:30 am) \$25 all participants (shirts not guaranteed).

Race location: Buttermilks Boulders. Take Highway 168 heading west out of Bishop for 7 miles. Take a right on Buttermilk Road, continue for approximately 2 miles and follow signs. The race begins at 9 am.

This race is under permit by the Inyo National Forest and Los Angeles Department of Water and Power.

April 22nd Owens Lake Birds During Peak Shorebird Migration: A joint field trip with Los Angeles Audubon and Eastern Sierra Audubon. This is the peak migration period for shorebirds moving north as far as the Arctic to nest. Expect to see thousands of sandpipers and avocets. Meet at 8:30AM at the Ranch House Café in Olancho (22 miles south of Lone Pine). We will visit the shorebird and waterfowl habitats out on Owens Lake and, if time permits, look at the Owens River Delta. Plan on being out most of the day. Bring lunch, water, sun protection and dress in layers. If you have a hard hat and reflective vest (or if you can borrow them) please bring them to comply with Owens Lake safety regulations – a limited number will be provided. Contact Mike at 876-5807 or outreach@ovcweb.org

April 23rd River Cleanup: Meet at East Line St. at the parking area before the River at 8:45. Friends of the Inyo will provide coffee and bagels from Great Basin Bakery. We'll collect trash from 9 to 11:30. Wear sturdy walking shoes or boots, and leather or other heavy-duty gloves. Bring kraft paper feed sacks for broken bottles as glass shards tear through the plastic bags we will use for the other trash. If you can bring your pick-up truck, we can use it for hauling trash to the collection area.

April 23rd Potluck Lunch: After the trash gathering, at noon, we'll meet at the back of Bishop City Park (across from the Senior Center) for a potluck lunch. Bring food to share, eating utensils, and a folding chair. Audubon will provide paper plates and cold drinks.

For additional information on the river cleanup and picnic, contact Joan Benner at 938-2929.



2005-2006: The Winter That Was Not

Tom and Jo Heindel

Each fall, as migration slows down, birders begin looking forward to winter with anticipation. The Winter Season is the most unpredictable of all when trying to guess which species will visit us and in what numbers and when will they arrive and depart. The hope is that it will be a winter that brings visitors from the far north and drives mountain dwellers down out of the pines and into our parks, towns, backyards, and golf courses.

Bald Eagles and Tundra Swans are always welcome guests and this winter they arrived later than the average, but at least they got here! When the hunting pressure becomes too great they disappear for a few days but then return. This winter we had up to 16 swans and 3 Bald Eagles.

There have been no credible reports of Rough-legged Hawks this winter. In fall, one was well documented from Bishop 13 Nov 2005 by Jim and Debby Parker. Last year, 5 Feb 2005, they had one which was the only one reported that winter. This paucity is a continuing trend in recent decades. In the 1970s ten to twenty could be seen in a day, sometimes outnumbering Red-tailed Hawks.

There have been no reports of Northern Shrikes. They also seem to be in a down cycle with few reports over the last decade or two. There have been no reports of Barrow's Goldeneye from the Eastern Sierra this winter. In recent times they have appeared at Pleasant Valley Reservoir but not this year.

There were no Rusty Blackbird reports either. This species has become so rare throughout the state that the California Bird Records Committee recently (January 2006) returned it to the review list. Now, if one is found, documentation must be submitted to the committee for peer review to determine if it qualifies as a record.

Nor has this been a winter for mountains birds. Ted Williams found one, a Brown Creeper, feeding in the junipers at the East Line Street cemetery in Bishop 17 Dec. Compared to other winters the reports of both Western Scrub-Jays and Steller's Jays have been in short supply. The same is true of Mountain Chickadees and Juniper Titmice. There have been no reports of special sparrows like Harris', Swamp, and White-throated.

On the upside, there was a 12 Jan report by Debby House of a Turkey Vulture flying over Bishop.

There are only a few reports in Jan as this species is not expected until late February. Unexpected were Barn Swallows, seen in Inyo and Mono counties this winter. They usually depart in October and don't begin to return until mid March. After the early January snow storm Kay Wilson had a Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch consuming seeds at her feeder in Bishop. This species is seldom seen on the valley floor but when their food supply in the mountains is covered by deep snow they are forced down and can only be delighted to find certain restaurants open for business.



December Barn Swallows

Mike Prather photo

Another winter highlight was from the southwest of Inyo County where Susan Steele, Inyokern, has been conducting regular bird surveys in the Sierra canyons. She has found Winter Wrens in at least three canyons. While we have many reports of fall migrants in Oct and Nov we were surprised that these birds appear to be wintering; there are precious few data for the winter months of this species.

Chris and Rosie Howard found a very rare Yellow-bellied Sapsucker at the Bishop Country Club on 17 Dec in the same tree where they had one a year ago! Gerry Wolfe reported from Furnace Creek Ranch, DVNP, that a Gray Flycatcher has spent the winter.

But Spring is about to spring because Larry Nahm reported the first spring migrant, a Cinnamon Teal in late January! This is typically our earliest spring migrant and it always arrives in winter! Near Big Pine the Great Horned Owls are sitting on eggs and the Great Blue Herons are testing their nests. True migrant swallows will be arriving in February and March preceding only slightly our gale force spring winds. Birders, always hopeful, are eager to see what new birds the new season will bring.

Wildlife and Cars: A Dangerous Combination

Cindy Kamler

Most Americans do a lot of driving—to work or shopping or to the mountains to ski—and a part of that experience is the sight of roadside trash and road-killed animals. According to the Humane Society of the United States, more than one million wild animals are killed on the roads every day. *That's over 365 million each year!*

Why are these animals there? Some of them, like the chicken in the old joke, just want to get to the other side. Many are picking up dinner – hunting rodents, rabbits and insects, gleaning seeds, or dining on road-kill. Evolution hasn't caught up with technology, so while animals may know that vehicles are dangerous, they aren't always able to evade that metal monster moving at speeds of 65, 70, or 80 miles per hour.

A distraught man once brought me a turkey vulture he had hit with his car. He explained that he had thought it was a raven, and “they always get out of the way.” But they don't always get out of the way. As a wildlife rehabilitator, I've seen hundreds of animals who were struck by cars or trucks.

Example: On October 20, volunteers at the Eastern Sierra Wildlife Care Center admitted a Golden Eagle. It was rescued by Laura Vios near Deep Springs College from the same spot on Highway 168 where she'd spotted a road-killed rabbit earlier in the day. The eagle was shocky, with head trauma and minor scrapes and bruises. He improved slowly, but was transferred to The Raptor Center at UC Davis because of continuing neurological problems. On last report, it appears possible that lingering neurological signs may prevent the release of this magnificent eagle.



Northern Pygmy Owl

Debbie Hilton

Example: On January 19, a stunned Northern Pygmy Owl was spotted in Murphey's Motel parking lot. He may have been hit by a car or flown into a window. During the rescue attempt, the tiny owl fluttered into 395, struck the windshield of a truck and

fell into the road. Apparently he had been killed instantly. A few hours later, the “dead” owl was found to have revived, and was transported to ESWC. Probably because this second smallest North American owl weighed only 60 grams (about the same as a large egg), he had suffered only slight head trauma and shock. On October 30, he was returned to Lee Vining and released.

Example: On January 23, a Fed Ex driver spotted a downed Golden Eagle on the road edge in Sweetwater, not far from Bridgeport. She knew that another eagle, one of a pair, had been killed in almost the same spot several months earlier. This bird was still alive, and she wrapped it in a jacket and took it to the Bridgeport Animal Control office. After getting the call, ESWC contacted Donnette Huselton at the Mono Lake Committee, who knew someone in Bridgeport who was driving to Lee Vining. So, the eagle was relayed from town to town until it arrived at ESWC around 7 PM.

This Golden was very large, nearly 12 pounds, compared to the earlier 7-pound male. Her crop was bulging with whatever road-kill she had been eating when hit. Despite head trauma and a fractured humerus, she was strong and difficult to handle. The wing was stabilized until she could be taken to Bishop Vet for xrays. The films showed shattered metacarpals along with the damaged humerus. Even with surgery—if it could be done at all—the prognosis was extremely poor. It was a heart-breaking decision, but this beautiful eagle was euthanized. Within a 6 month period Sweetwater had lost a pair of eagles due to trauma from vehicles.

Of the animals admitted to ESWC with physical trauma, 33% have been hit by cars—hummingbirds, mallards, raccoons, squirrels, raptors and snakes. Concussion, eye damage, fractures, and internal bleeding are the results. Some can be helped; many cannot.

How can we cut down on the numbers of wild animals hit by cars? I try to be more aware and slow down whenever I spot birds or mammals on or near the road. If you see one deer—or quail—crossing, there is almost always another one following.

I note the spots where I've seen road-killed animals, where water passes under the road or where I often see birds flying or perched. I stop and move road-kill to the verges of the highway. It's easy to carry a pair of gloves in the car for that purpose. (*Be careful of your own safety.*) Sometimes, the animal is still alive. A dead female opossum may have live babies in her pouch. If I can't help the animal, I can ensure its remains won't cause the death of another animal.

We are lucky to live in a place where we can see wild creatures easily as we go about our daily activities. The Swainson's hawks raising youngsters near the landfill, mallards in the park, hummingbirds and goldfinches at our feeders—we see them, we watch for them, and they become our neighbors. Let's slow down and help save some wild lives.

Eastern Sierra Wildlife Care 2005

370 patients admitted: 57% were youngsters; 42% had physical trauma (hit by cars, caught by cats or dogs, hit windows or fences, shot, electrocuted, poisoned, other). Released: 48% (of those living >24 hours, 68% released)
Died 34% (53% of these died in <24 hours)
Euthanized 11%
Transferred 4%
Other 3%

Species: Avian 65; mammal 18; reptile 3
Uncommon or first-time: Common Nighthawk, American Bittern, American Wigeon, Belted Kingfisher (2), No. American Badger, Costa's Hummingbird (baby), Flammulated Owl, Long-eared Owl (2 babies), Pacific Loon, Blue-winged Teal (baby), Pine Grosbeak, Williamson's Sapsucker, Golden Eagle, Green-tailed Towhee, Gray Fox, Desert Tortoise

2006 ESAS Bird-A-Thon - PLEASE Pledge!

Your support is urgently needed right now. In order to continue all of the valuable activities and programs of Eastern Sierra Audubon Society please pledge as much as you can to the 2006 Bird-A-Thon. 'Birds in the Classroom,' wildlife restoration at Owens Lake and monitoring of the re-watering of the Lower Owens River will all benefit from your generosity. Coinciding with International Migratory Bird Day (IMBD), the Eastern Sierra Audubon Bird-A-Thon fields 40-50 birders who fan out across Inyo County to attempt to identify as many different species of birds as possible in a 24 hour period. Our highest species total has been 219 and we are always around 200 species plus or minus ten. Inyo County has one of the highest species totals in the U.S. for an inland county.

Supporters pledge an amount of money per species seen on the Bird-A-Thon day. For example, a pledge of 10 cents per species would be a total of \$20 donation if the bird searchers found 200 species. You may contribute a flat amount if you prefer. This year's count is on Saturday, May 13. Pledgers will receive a narrative of the day's fun plus a list of all birds seen.

How much will you pledge this year?
I(we) pledge \$_____ per species or
I(we) pledge a flat amount of \$_____
Name_____
Address_____

Mail to: ESA 2006 Bird-A-Thon
Drawer D, Lone Pine, CA 93545

ESAS Mailing List Policy

Recently the Eastern Sierra Audubon Society board reviewed our policy concerning loaning of our mailing list. The board has authorized one time usage by other organizations with compatible goals, three times in the last five years. Each request has provoked considerable discussion. Because the other groups are supporting conservation goals that are important to us we have agreed to loan our mailing list. Any member who does not want your name loaned or traded, please contact our mailing list chair, Kay Wilson, at 2689 Highland Drive, Bishop, Ca. 93514. Thank you. - James Wilson

Owens Lake International Shorebird Survey

This volunteer long-term census of bird use at Owens Lake takes place each spring and fall. Its protocol calls for three visits during each third of the month April 1 - June 10 and July 15 - October 10. Shorebirds, waders, waterfowl and raptors are counted for a data base that continues to show the tremendous importance of Owens Lake for wildlife. Anyone who enjoys birds and adventure is invited to join these surveys. Your skills will improve and you will enjoy the beauty and biological wonder of Owens Lake. Become a supporter of Owens Lake wildlife. Call Mike Prather at 876-5807 or email prather@qnet.com to set up your participation.

Mono Lake Needs You!
Volunteer Program this summer
Training Begins in Late May

The Mono Lake Committee, US Forest Service, and California State Parks are teaming up to sponsor a volunteer program at Mono Lake this summer. Volunteers will have the opportunity to meet people from all over the world and share their knowledge of the Eastern Sierra. Participants may staff information desks and/or rove and answer questions at the lakeshore. With additional training, volunteers may also get involved in guiding formal tours for groups.

Free training will be held during the last week of May and first two weeks of June in the Mono Basin. Volunteers are required to attend six half-day training sessions and are asked to donate 8 hours per month from June through September. Participants must be at least 18 years old, and be able to walk short distances and stand for 2 hours.

Contact Janet Carle at 760-647-6431 or Fran at frances@monolake.org for more information or to sign up. You will be sent details and a training schedule.

Lower Owens River Project Update

Work on the LORP has finally begun: rebuilding spill gates at the intake near Aberdeen, clearing the upper channel, clearing and running power to the pump back station site below the Keeler Bridge. Court order requires flows to begin by January 2007. Birders from everywhere will flock to 62 miles of rich riparian habitat along the Lower Owens River. Stay tuned!

Proposed EPA Rule Change would strip federal air quality protection for Owens, Mono, and rural America
Make your voice heard before April 17

The Mono Basin and the Owens Valley are the largest sources of windblown dust pollution in the United States. Dust storms originate on dry lake bed areas exposed by excessive water diversions to the City of Los Angeles. Not only is this dust a threat to human health because the dust particle sizes are so small that they pass through the nose and throat and get directly into people's lungs, but the dust contains toxins such as arsenic, cadmium, nickel, and sulfate salts. Currently, a working solution is in place to solve these Eastern Sierra air pollution problems and attain the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) standards for safe air quality. Under a new proposal, those standards themselves would dry up and blow away.

Unfortunately, just a few days before Christmas the EPA introduced amendments to the rule for particulate matter (PM) National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS). The amendments would entirely remove the existing particulate regulations in rural areas – and replace them with nothing. That's right: there would be no federal particulate standard left to meet at Owens or Mono lakes! Based on the PM rule changes there would be no protection for citizens living in cities or town with less than 100,000 people—37% of the US population. The EPA is charged with upholding the interests of the public; however, this amendment unfairly disregards the health of people living in rural areas.

The current EPA regulation provides a science-based standard for measuring and regulating levels of dust in the air, and mitigation work at Mono and Owens

lakes would eventually achieve safe air quality standards under the current rule. The proposed changes would undermine these successful solutions that are already taking place. The current standards are a cornerstone in these long-fought environmental solutions. The proposed changes have serious implications for all of rural America, and threaten to unravel decades of progress at Mono Lake and Owens.

If you want to comment on the proposed EPA rule change for National Ambient Air Quality Standard Particulate Matter you have until April 17, 2006. For more information on where and to whom you can address your comments go to the Mono Lake Committee's website at www.monolake.org.

A copy of the Great Basin Unified Air Pollution Control Districts' excellent comments is also available at the Mono Lake Committee website. You can contact the Mono Lake Committee directly at (760) 647-6595 or by email clare@monolake.org. www.monolake.org



Mono Lake dust storm

Mono Lake Committee file photo

Bird Chautauqua Turns Five

As the earth wobbles about its axis and perpetually falls through the space warped by our nearest star, we mark the changes in our days and seasons. The birds are doing the same, preparing for the hectic days of migration that will soon begin. In mid June when the earth's wobble points the North Pole towards the sun, we will be celebrating the Fifth Annual Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua – an educational and entertaining weekend packed full of field trips, workshops, science, history, art, music, auditorium presentations, food, storytelling, music, a bird-calling contest, and of course birds! About 250 people are expected to participate in this year's event.

This year's Bird Chautauqua will be held June 16-18. Over 50 events will be offered by 35 presenters throughout the weekend. The weekend's attendance benefits scientific research through the Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua Research Grant. The Mono Basin is one of the most intensively studied natural areas in California. Research includes early surveys by Joseph Grinnell in 1915, the pioneering birding/conservation work of David Gaines and David Winkler in the late 1970s, and continues today with biologists from PRBO Conservation Science. Chautauqua is sponsored by PRBO, Eastern Sierra Audubon, U.S. Forest Service, Friends of the Inyo, Mono Lake Committee and California State Parks.

Online registration begins April 17, 2006. Check for complete details at www.birdchautauqua.org or call the Mono Lake Committee at (760) 647-6595 for more information and to find out how to register by fax or mail. Walk-in registration will be offered concurrently with check-in throughout the event, but do not count on getting your first choice of field trips and events if you wait till the weekend of the Chautauqua.

As the earth wobbles toward the Summer Solstice, grab your sunscreen and binoculars and head on up for another unforgettable annual event in the Mono Basin. The Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua – not your ordinary bird festival!

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Golden Eagle Eastern Sierra Wildlife Care
Debbie Hilton photo

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