



ESAS Website: ESAudubon.org **Eastern Sierra Bird Sightings:** ESAudubon.org/birds/

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.

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!

September 12

**How Eastern Sierra Audubon is
Saving Fish Slough
BLM, Dep't of Fish & Game,
Friends of the Inyo**
Refreshments: Ron



Outdoor education at Fish Slough BLM photo

Just five minutes north of Bishop is a desert wetland with endangered fish, surrounded by alkali meadows with plants that grow nowhere else in the world, surrounded by prehistoric petroglyphs carved into volcanic rock. Soon after BLM declared this remarkable and vulnerable landscape an Area of Critical Environmental Concern, Eastern Sierra Audubon "adopted" it... and made more of a difference than you know! A dynamic presentation by other Fish Slough collaborators will show how directly and personally you can be involved in saving an ecosystem.

October 10

**The Plastics Problem:
Our Synthetic Sea
Sara Steck**
Refreshments: Bill

There is a place in the northeast Pacific twice the size of Texas called "the eastern garbage patch." If it were on land it would be the world's largest landfill. The garbage is dangerous to sea animals and birds because of choking, entanglement, and chemicals that end up concentrated in their bodies and their predators'. Come see the movie *Our Synthetic Sea* and learn more. Also see the article in this issue about the upcoming cleanup of Convict Lake and Convict Creek Drainage to learn how you can help keep floating debris out of our waters. Sara Steck is the Inyo County Coordinator for the California Coastal Commission's September cleanup and will share her knowledge on the subject along with her enthusiasm for being part of the solution.



Carcass of albatross that ate floating plastic debris
Photo by Richard Steiner

www.sfos.uaf.edu/news/sfosnews/2001/sfosnews0112.pdf

President's Message – Expanding the Experience

*“...Stair step of churning whitewater
above the roar
hear the song of the Canyon Wren...”*

Gary Snyder *The Canyon Wren*

This past week, I have been repeatedly impressed with how lucky we are to live here. An early morning trip to Lone Pine carried me through the astonishing landscape of the valley and its surrounding ranges. A series of conversations in which I tried to learn the Audubon ropes really brought home how knowledgeable, dedicated and enthusiastic people are who live here. Eastern Sierra Audubon has been a part of this landscape for 25 years and we all owe a big debt to those whose vision and hard work brought life to this organization and shaped and nurtured its development. It is truly a privilege to have the opportunity to serve as President.

Eastern Sierra Audubon is many things. It is a place to learn about birds, their amazing lives and natural environments. It is a way to spend time outside with new and old friends. It is a door which opens to what John Muir called “the infinite lavishness and fertility of nature.” It is a way to share knowledge and passion about birds, birding and nature with school children, families and neighbors. It provides a reminder of the

responsibility to make sure that these experiences will be available to generations to follow. It is an opportunity to work with our community to make it a better place in which to live.

This coming year we will be treated to terrific programs each month, exciting, challenging and fun outings and chances to socialize among ourselves and share stories of gardens, hikes, kids and yes, of birds. I hope we can expand our circle by consciously trying to bring a friend, co-worker or neighbor to an Audubon event. As always, this newsletter will be a great source of information about these activities.

My own goals for the coming year are to spend more time outdoors, become a better birder (I am aiming for mediocre) and to work to make the Eastern Sierra Audubon Society a relevant, useful and pretty big fun organization. I will need your help and feedback to accomplish this last thing. What do we do poorly? What do we do well? What should we do more of? What should we try that we do not do now? Let me or a member of our board know how we can make your Audubon experience more rewarding and fun.

– Pete Pumphrey

September and October Field Trips

Saturday, September 22 - Convict Lake Cleanup The California Coastal Commission, Whole Foods Market, Inyo National Forest, Friends of the Inyo, and Eastern Sierra Audubon will hold a cleanup of Convict Lake and Convict Creek Drainage from 9 a.m. to noon. Follow signs to the lower parking lot to sign in and enjoy refreshments. Bring a canteen for water, snacks, sun cream, protective clothing; wear closed toe shoes. Latex gloves provided; bring heavy work gloves if desired. For more information see pages 6-7 and contact Sara at 873-4320 or Darren at 873-6500.

See the ESAS website for other upcoming field trip announcements – ESAudubon.org

Meeting Locations: Our monthly meetings will be held at White Mountain Research Station as usual. Most meetings will be in the south classroom but the September meeting is scheduled for the north classroom, nearest the parking lot.

No Garage Sale: Our last issue said “Check the September newsletter for date and location” of the annual fall garage sale, but currently none is planned for this fall.

The 11th Annual Central Valley Birding Symposium will be November 15-18 in Stockton, CA at the new Sheraton Stockton Convention Center. Evening programs include Joe Morlan’s “Digiscoping for Fun and Science: Confessions of a Reluctant Photographer” and Laura Erickson’s “Owls – the Inside Story.” Workshops include “Birding By Ear – Visually” by Arch McCallum, an e-Bird primer with Brian Sullivan, and one of Jon Dunn’s famous birding ID tutorials. Clay Taylor gives a digiscoping workshop and leads a post-Symposium field trip on Monday the 19th. Jon Dunn will lead a gull field trip on Monday as well. There are programs for beginning birders and for people who want to make their gardens bird-friendly. The Birder’s Market is full of artists and vendors with bird and nature related items. Test your skills along with the experts at the Bird ID Panel, and much, much more.... For more information, check the website at www.cvbs.org or contact Frances Oliver at hummer52@sbcglobal.net or (209) 369-2010.

Least Terns visit Inyo County this Summer

Tom and Jo Heindel

The Least Tern, all nine inches of it, is the smallest tern found in the U.S. It is a neotropical migrant that winters in Central and South America and in the far West summers along the coastal beaches and sandbars north to central California. While it is found inland as a regular but rare spring and summer visitor at the Salton Sea and along the Colorado River, it had been found in Inyo County only eleven times. Because this species utilizes the same beaches that man and accompanying dogs, cats, and rats do, the conflict has reduced the numbers to such seriously low levels that it has been given Endangered status in an effort to save it from extinction.

On 12 June 2007 Mike and Joy Bowen, visiting birders from New Jersey, stopped at Klondike Lake to add more western species to their trip list. To their surprise they found the twelfth county record of Least Tern and recognizing that this coastal species was probably unexpected here, photographed it and notified local birders. The observation was immediately posted on the Eastern Sierra Birds website and other birders came to see and photograph this wayward migrant.

On 18 August 2007 Tom Heindel found and photographed a first summer (one-year-old) Least Tern, again at Klondike Lake, for the thirteenth Inyo County record. This very late bird is two months outside the known temporal distribution in the Eastern Sierra. Kern County's spring window is 12 May to 23 June, all adults, while in Mono County there is only one record of two adults in early July.

Of the first twelve Inyo County records all are in spring from 19 May (2002 at Furnace Creek Ranch) to 16 June (2005 at Tinemaha Reservoir). This nicely frames the Bowen find and reflects passage of birds returning north in spring. All were adult birds except the June and August birds that were first summer birds. All records are single birds except when two were found 31 May 1987 at Tecopa. In the last decade, with greater coverage than in the past, Least Tern has been documented just five times. This is not an expected species in the Eastern Sierra and any observer who finds one needs to follow the protocol to prove their claim and add a significant record to the ornithological history of the county.



Adult Least Tern, 12 June

Tom Heindel



Immature Least Tern, 18 August

Tom Heindel

One good tern deserves another - Aesop

Chapter 2007 Bird-A-Thon a Big Success

Thank you, once again, chapter members and friends, for your generosity. Eastern Sierra Audubon's 2007 Bird-A-Thon has raised nearly \$1,300 for our education, science and conservation projects. Birds In the Classroom is set to expand, and our work to protect and share the rich bird resource of the Owens Lake Important Bird Area is growing. Support of the Bird-A-Thon is critical to all of our chapter efforts and your help is critical.

The total number of species seen by the counters on May 12 was 212! Remember that the Bird-A-Thon only covers Inyo County without the advantage of an ocean with all of its species. Inyo County has great diversity in its bird life and for that we are all grateful. Thanks again everyone. Please help us find more pledges next year and make our chapter projects even more successful. Thanks to Chris Howard and Bill Mitchel for gathering up the pledges after the count was completed. **Mike Prather**

Owens Lake Field Trip August 26 – WOW! Mike Prather

Eastern Sierra Audubon's fall field trip to Owens Lake was incredible - starting with a 7:20 AM phone call from Susan Steele who was already out on the lake with the news of a Buff-breasted Sandpiper, an Inyo County first record. Nearly thirty of us gathered at Diaz Lake near Lone Pine and drove directly to the Dirty Socks Habitat Shallow Flood Area (part of the Los Angeles Owens Lake Dust Control Project) near the south end of the Owens Lake. And there it was! A beautiful glowing-buff juvenal was seen closely by all and at times walked around us probably working on its own famous birder list. We all 'went to school,' with Jon Dunn as our teacher, on the identification of 'peeps,' the small sandpipers. Learning points included timing – adults migrate south first; age – telling fresh and rich juvenals from adults in more winter plumages; and distribution – many of these species are found on the west coast mainly during the fall. We soon were able to distinguish Western and Least Sandpipers as well as the much more uncommon Semi-palmated and Bairds Sandpipers. Along the shore we saw Killdeer, Snowy Plover and Semi-palmated Plover as well as dozens of Black-necked Stilts and hundreds of American Avocets. Out on the surface of the water were several thousand Red-necked Phalaropes and several duck species.

But then the cell phone rang again from Susan, now at the far northern end of the lake with an unidentified golden plover. So off we drove to the dust project's upper area and there Jon Dunn was able to

identify an adult American Golden Plover – possibly the first or second ever adult seen in fall in all the western states. What a day!

We also studied and learned to identify swallow species by size, flight and subtle markings. Bank Swallows are small, with some light feathers in their rump and back and rapid flight; Northern Rough-winged Swallows are larger and have slower, more 'floppy' flight; Cliff Swallows have an obvious buff rump and Tree Swallows show small patches of white rising up onto the sides of the rump. Young California Gulls are dark under the wing and Ring-billed Gull lighter. Juvenal Short-billed and Long-billed Dowitchers can be told apart by the look of their tertial feathers – the last three feathers on the wing before it meets the body.

The trip closed with dozens of White-faced Ibis, a dozen Long-billed Curlews, a Marbled Godwit, a Willit, four Lesser Yellowlegs and five Black-bellied Plovers (one in breeding plumage). WOW – 22 species of shorebirds in one day! The trip included people from San Diego, Los Angeles, Pasadena, Santa Rosa, California City, Mammoth and Ridgecrest as well as our usual chapter hometowns. Look for the next Owens Lake field trip in April 2008 around Earth Day weekend.

Special note: The Owens Lake Dust Project is not open to the general public due to safety and environmental concerns. For possible trips to the lake contact Mike at mprather@lonepinetv.com



Buff-breasted Sandpiper – juvenal

Bob Steele

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American Golden Plover - adult

Bob Steele

What is Owens Lake Important Bird Area?

In 2001 Bird Life International designated Owens Lake a Nationally Significant Important Bird Area because the lake hosts the highest number of nesting Snowy Plovers in California and provides nourishment for tens of thousands of migrating shorebirds during migration. Important Bird Areas, IBAs, are now being monitored by Audubon in the United States. Other organizations look after IBAs throughout the rest of the world. To be designated an IBA the site must meet specific criteria such as having high numbers of birds, breeding colonies, important wintering or migration value or threatened or endangered species. The IBA program is to catalogue the most important sites for birds and use the information to educate land owners and land managers.

Owens Lake has had 246 species of birds seen in its immediate area - 36 species of shorebirds, 37 species of waterfowl, 16 species of raptors and 400-600 adult nesting snowy plovers. Tens of thousands of shorebirds migrate through and thousands of waterfowl spend the winter attracted to the rich food sources such as brine and alkali flies that once again thrive at Owens Lake. Rarities have continued to appear even into this summer. In August two new Inyo County records were located – Black Turnstone and Buff-breasted Sandpiper. In

addition, an American Golden Plover and Long-tailed Jaeger made an appearance.

The populations of numerous species of shorebirds in North America are in slow to rapid decline. There are many explanations for this, but habitat loss is certainly at the top of the list. Owens Lake bird populations have benefited tremendously from the Los Angeles Owens Lake Dust Control Project. Owens Lake is reversing the continental trend of decline and is exploding with birds. At present over 25 square miles of the dust areas now have trickling or ponded water. Historic habitat has been re-created even though the project is a dust project and not a wildlife project.

Eastern Sierra Audubon has taken on the challenge of seeking protection of the exciting bird resources at Owens Lake IBA. Because our chapter is small we plan to build partnerships with large Audubon chapters in California and with Audubon-California (the National Audubon entity in California). Through education and advocacy we hope to bring widespread attention to this important bird area that belongs to everyone in California. In addition, we invite chapter members to join our efforts and be a part of history. *Owens Lake is Returning to WILDlife!* **Mike Prather**

California Coastal Cleanup Day in the Eastern Sierra



The California Coastal Commission is proud to announce the 23rd Annual California Coastal Cleanup Day at over 700 locations around the state. Volunteers will clean trash and debris from 1100 miles of the California coast as well as another 1000 miles along the inland shorelines of bays, creeks, rivers, and lakes throughout California. The local Eastern Sierra cleanup will occur on **Saturday, September 22 at Convict Lake and the Convict Creek Drainage from 9 am to Noon – see Field Trips, page 2, for where to meet and what to bring.**

Our local cleanup forms a part of an international cleanup of waterways. The Ocean Conservancy compiles the numbers of items cleaned from land and underwater cleanups in countries all over the world. People from Argentina to Canada in the Americas, from South Africa to Egypt, from many countries in Europe and Asia, and from Australia and New Zealand will be working to make the world a cleaner place in September. The information that they

get is used to make new legislation to protect our waterways.

“California Coastal Cleanup Day has long been the state's largest volunteer event,” said Eben Schwartz, Statewide Director of the Cleanup. “Recent actions by our state government have challenged us to build even further on this success. The California Ocean Protection Council recently passed a Resolution on Marine Debris that calls on the Coastal Commission to expand our coastal and watershed cleanups. We are taking this challenge to heart, and expect this year's Cleanup to be our biggest ever.”

Last year 56,273 volunteers turned out to remove just under 1 million pounds of debris from California's shorelines – the largest single event in the Cleanup's history. The Coastal Commission estimates that 60 to 80 percent of the debris found on California's beaches originates from inland or urban areas and washes out to the ocean. And although our creeks in the Eastern Sierra do not flow to the ocean, it's just as



important for the health of wild animals and our environment to keep our local creeks clean.

This event is made possible by the hard work of hundreds of local non-profits and governmental agencies throughout the state and 50,000 volunteers annually. Our local event is sponsored by the California Coastal Commission, The Inyo National Forest, Friends of the Inyo, and Eastern Sierra Audubon.

Join us on September 22 and be a part of cleaning our waterways. For more information, please see page 2, contact Sara Steck at 873-4320 or Darren at 873-6500, or the Commission at (800) COAST-4U or visit www.coast4u.org.

California Coastal Cleanup Day 2007 is supported by the California Coastal Commission, California State Parks Foundation, and the Ocean Conservancy

June Nature Walk South Fork Big Pine Creek

On a sunny Saturday morning six people joined Joan Benner for a walk up Big Pine Creek. Attending were John and Dorothy Burnstrom, Penny Maciolek, Connie Spenger, Lorraine Masten and Mike Loughman. Our goal was to look for flowering plants, discuss the geology of the area and talk about the terrain-changing 1983 flood.

We worked together as a team with everyone sharing their knowledge and tales of the area – education while walking! We discussed Norman Clyde and looked at the effects of the drought on plants. We pondered on the theories of the slow vs. fast rise of the Sierra Nevada, on the mystery of the north-traveling and still rising mountain range.

Due to the drought, there were few wild flowers. Many plants sprouted then turned yellow. Others were much smaller than usual or did not produce flowers. Many shrubs showed frost burn from the lack of protective snow cover. Some shrubs did not flower; others produced a few flowers but no fruit. The gorgeous white lupine that normally crowds the trail hardly made a showing and even the reliable Indian paintbrush and penstemons were in short supply. Plants that seemed to be coping best with these unusually dry conditions were

sagebrush, mountain white thorn, manzanita and bitterbrush.

The 1983 flood was caused by an intense tropical front that dumped heavy rain in the canyon. Engineers referred to it as a “once in 500 years” event. Every bridge in Big Pine Canyon was severely damaged or washed out and three feet of water boiled over Hwy 395 during the height of the storm. The sound was awesome with huge boulders rolling and grinding as they plunged down stream and tree trunks along with picnic tables being flipped end over end in the turbulent waters. A road, campground, parking area and trails were washed away. So much glacial rock dust was released into the floodwaters that the Big Pine Lakes turned opaque lime green or opaque turquoise. Though there has been considerable recovery, the post flood rock debris is still visible both along the south fork trail and along lower Glacier Lodge Road below the bridge. Since Big Pine Creek has two runoffs, one in the spring and the second in midsummer when glacier melt adds to the flow, there is still ample stream flow for nice views of both First and Second Falls on a late summer walk.

J. Benner

Seen Any Burrowing Owls?

Burrowing Owls are listed as a “sensitive species” by the Bureau of Land Management in California. The BLM Bishop Field Office is collecting information on the locations of their burrows and other sightings. You can help ensure BLM knows where the owls’ habitat is so they can be taken into account in land use decisions: send information about your Burrowing Owl sightings to BLM biologist Joy Fatooh, jfatooh@blm.gov (a.k.a. your newsletter editor); please be as specific as possible regarding where and when you saw them, and any indications that they were breeding. Thanks! **jf**

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Adult Least Tern

Tom Heindel

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