



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!

January 9

Why the Restoration of Rush Creek is So Exciting Greg Reis, Mono Lake Committee



The return of permanent water flows to lower Rush Creek in 1983 began the restoration of what had been destroyed by 42 years of unrestricted water diversions and 90 years of flow alterations due to hydropower operations. Learn about the rich habitats that were lost, and about the efforts during the past quarter century to reverse the damage. What more can be regained, and why is it worth getting excited about?

February 13

Tropical Austrasia: Six Weeks Down Under Bob Steele, Photographer

Inyokern photographer Bob Steele spent six weeks last summer birding and photographing in northeast Australia. He saw over 300 species of birds and photographed nearly 200 species. Bob is a passionate and accomplished photographer. Recent credits include the cover photo for the audio CD titled *Birds of the Pacific Northwest*. Bob was also Photo Editor and major contributor for the National Geographic book *Birding Essentials* coauthored by Bishop resident Jon Dunn. Bob's presentation will take you on a breathtaking ride through one of the most bird-rich continents on earth. For a preview of his work, see his website:

<http://www.bobsteelephoto.com>



Yellow-bellied Sunbird

© Bob Steele

Bob Steele

President's Message – Community Counts

*"...listening to the songs of the waters and winds
and birds would be endless pleasure"*

John Muir

This past Saturday, I participated for the first time in the Christmas Bird Count. Until now, I had been put off due to my less than stellar birding skills, but after many gracious re-assurances from Chris Howard and others, I signed on. I was rewarded with a really great experience. The day started cold and clear and warmed up by mid-morning. We saw birds the whole time I was there including 25 Mountain Bluebirds and a Ferruginous Hawk.

Especially rewarding was the fact that several people in the neighborhood we were walking came out to tell us about the birds which frequent their yards. These folks had read the articles in the newspaper, knew why we were on the streets and enthusiastically supported the effort. There was a real connection between this Audubon activity and the community.

Saturday night we went to the "results" pot-luck (graciously hosted by Kay and James Wilson) and tallied up the count. It was a privilege for me to sit among such accomplished and dedicated people. Their passion for the long day's work was contagious. All in all, we identified 101 species and counted more than 11,000 birds. I want to thank all who participated, with a special heap of gratitude to Chris for the huge amount of work he puts in on this every year. The Christmas Bird Count is one of the most important things our chapter does. The process generates useful data about avian life in Bishop and provided an opportunity for more than forty birders to work together. Even I was able to contribute. CBC is on my calendar for next year; put it on yours too.

Thank you to all of the folks who gathered at the December pot-luck to feed each other and enjoy an evening of friendship. Due to the effort of Denise and John of the White Mountain Research Station and Joan Benner's tireless decorating and organizing, the dinner was a great success. Jack Laws was terrific; we are working on getting him to come back.

– Pete Pumphrey

Upcoming Field Trips, Big Day, and Death Valley CBC

Rescheduled to January 3, 2008 - Death Valley Christmas Bird Count Compilers: Vicki and Gerry Wolfe, devawolfe@yahoo.com

Saturday, February 23 - Big Pine Winter Wildlife Tour Join Tom and Jo Heindel for this ever popular 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, and scopes. Should last until noon. Call Tom or Jo at 938-2764 for further details.

April 19-20, 2008 - Owens Lake First Ever BIG DAY Contact Mike Prather at mprather@lonepinetv.com or (760) 876-5807

Saturday & Sunday, May 24 & 25 - Deep Springs, Inyo County Kerncrest Audubon invites ESAS for a joint trip which will take participants north through the Owens Valley to Big Pine, then east over Westgard Pass at the southern end of the White Mountains to Deep Springs College below. The college is a working agricultural community, set in a desert valley with springs and wetlands. Expect late spring birding at its best in stunningly beautiful surroundings. This is also a prime time for the appearance of one or more eastern vagrant species. We'll camp at the county campground at the turnoff to the Bristlecone Forest, at the north end of Big Pine. For more details and reservations contact Dan Burnett by May 21, email: imdanburnett@verizon.net, phone: 375-8634.

June 20-22 - Seventh Annual Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua Planning's underway! See Page 3

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

Bishop Christmas Bird Count 2007



Western Scrub-jay at Mustang Mesa Debby Parker

The Bishop CBC was held on 15 Dec 2007, a beautiful and clear day with hardly a breath of wind, a high of 48F and a low of 16F. Forty-one intrepid birders scoured as much of the 15 mile diameter count circle as they could. The total number of species was 101, down from the record high of 114 set last year, but still quite respectably over the 100 mark. Highlights this year were a female **Hooded Merganser** at the Bishop City Park pond, 6 **Chukar** at Pleasant Valley Reservoir, 3 **Bald Eagles** in Round Valley and Pleasant Valley Reservoir, 3 **Rough-legged Hawks**, 2 **Ring-billed Gulls** at the City Park, 1 **Anna's Hummingbird** at a downtown Bishop feeder, **186 Mountain Chickadees**, 3 **White-breasted Nuthatches**, 8 **Western Bluebirds** (golf course and W Line St), 1 **Townsend's Solitaire**, 2 **Lark Sparrows** (golf course and intersection: Line St and Reata Rd), and 2 **Golden-crowned Sparrows**.



Anna's Hummingbird Chris Howard

Notable misses were geese of any kind, Northern Pintail, Common Merganser, Barn Owl, Belted Kingfisher (only 1 total), Pinyon Jay, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Vesper Sparrow, and Brown-headed Cowbird.

Many thanks to all of you who make this count so successful. – **Chris Howard**

7th Annual Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua

Save the dates of June 20-22 for an educational and entertaining weekend of field trips, workshops, presentations, science, art, music, food, a bird-calling contest, and of course birds. Over fifty events are being offered this year by many accomplished presenters.

Donald Kroodsma, author of the recently released book *The Singing Life of Birds*, will present the opening evening program. Kroodsma has studied birdsong for over 30 years and was recognized by the American Ornithologists' Union in 2003 as "the reigning authority on the biology of avian vocal behavior."

The Bird Chautauqua traditionally ends with a picnic and concert at the Mono Lake County Park.

The Bird Chautauqua is sponsored by Eastern Sierra Audubon, National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, California State Parks, Mono Lake Committee, Eastern Sierra Interpretive Association, Friends of the Inyo and PRBO Conservation Science. Attendance benefits scientific research through the Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua Research Grant.

Registration opens online April 15th. Information will be posted on the website as details become available. Visit www.birdchautauqua.org or email your questions to birding@monolake.org.

The “New” Owens Lake Hosts “New” Birds

Tom and Jo Heindel

Each season brings avian surprises and this fall was no exception. Four species were found that had never been documented before in Inyo County and it should be no surprise that all four were found at the “new” Owens Lake. The habitat being restored has not been seen there for over a century and clearly supports the adage “Build it and they will come.” Because of ongoing construction the lake is not open to the public but several trained people are authorized to conduct shorebird surveys to document the impact of dust control measures on birds. These surveys, conducted every few days during spring and fall, are revealing the lake’s avian secrets. It is hoped that after construction is finished some level of access will be returned to the public.

Ornithologically speaking fall is primarily August through November, the main time most birds are moving south, although a few do start earlier. All four additions were photographed, which is supporting evidence of the validity of the identification. Two of the species are sufficiently rare in the state that they will be reviewed by the California Bird Records Committee.

Mike Prather organizes authorized field trips to the lake and on the August 26th trip all participants were treated to a juvenile **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** found by Susan Steele. “Buffies” breed in northern Alaska and across the Canadian arctic and winter in southern South America. Most California records are grouped from late August through mid September.



Buff-Breasted Sandpiper

Bob Steele

On 30 August a juvenile **Black Turnstone** was found by Mike SanMiguel and remained for at least three days. This species, usually found along the Pacific Coast with only a few inland records, is more unusual inland in fall than in spring. On 16 September a juvenile **Curlew Sandpiper** was found by Susan Steele. This

species breeds in Siberia and winters in the Old World from Africa, through southern Asia to Australia. It has been seen in California about 36 times before this sighting; most records are along the coast, usually in fall, while the few interior records are usually in spring. This sighting is unofficial until accepted by the CBRC.



Lesser Black-backed Gull

Bob Steele

On 18 Nov a second cycle (immature) **Lesser Black-backed Gull** was found by Susan Steele. This species breeds across Europe and west to Iceland and has become a regular wintering species at the Great Lakes, mid Atlantic states, and Southeast. Since the mid 1990s it has been recorded annually in California primarily mid September to late March with most after mid October. There are 31 state records with ten more under review not including this bird, which remains unofficial until accepted by the CBRC.

As if the “fabulous four” weren’t enough, Inyo was also treated to other slightly less rare species like three different American Golden-Plovers (2nd, 3rd, and 4th county records), a juvenile male Ruff (4th county record), an immature Long-tailed Jaeger (4th record), and a juvenile Ruddy Turnstone (11th county record). It is not surprising that all of these sightings occurred at Owens Lake as well. While the avian significance of this county’s crown jewel will continue to grow as long as LADWP continues to enhance and maintain wetlands habitat there as a result of required dust control mandates, it will be a long time before it returns to its former status.

State records information from the newly published “Rare Birds of California” by Hamilton, Patten, and Erickson. Photos by Bob Steele.

First Ever – Owens Lake Big Day – April 19

Eastern Sierra Audubon is looking for people who love birds and Owens Lake to be a part of an historic conservation effort here in the Eastern Sierra. On Saturday, April 19, birders will spread out over the entire surface of Owens Lake to survey all habitats in a single day. Never before has such a complete survey of birds taken place at Owens Lake. We expect a total of 50,000 to 100,000 birds, based on a partial survey last October that recorded over 33,000.

After orientation Saturday morning, groups will survey their assigned “slice of the lake,” followed in the afternoon by a tally and lots of food. Camping sites and motel rooms are available in the Lone Pine area for Friday and Saturday nights. Sunday is open for exploring the southern Owens Valley or relocating any rarities found at the lake on Saturday.

To sign up for this unprecedented project or if you have questions, please contact Mike Prather, Eastern Sierra Audubon at mprather@lonepinetv.com

October 19, 2007 at Owens Lake

The following is a partial data list from a rapid assessment of a portion of the Los Angeles Owens Lake Dust Control Project that covered approximately 9,000 acres in 6 hours. This clearly demonstrates the importance of Owens Lake as the largest wildlife resource in Inyo County. Its biological significance and value to future local ecotourism is still being revealed.

- 49 total bird species
- 32,997 total birds
- 17,788 total ducks
- 14,755 Northern Shovelers
- 4,848 Eared Grebes
- 4,568 American Avocets
- 2,329 California Gulls
- 1,522 Least Sandpipers
- 167 Greater Yellowlegs



Female American Avocet
Owens Lake, October
Photo by Bob Steele

<http://www.bobsteelephoto.com/>





Rock Creek Field Trip Report - October 28, 2007

It was a brisk 35° morning when 14 birding enthusiasts joined Claus Engelhardt and Bill Mitchel at the Rock Creek Sno-Park for a walk up Rock Creek. As we entered the Lodgepole Pine forest we were immediately greeted by numerous Townsend's Solitaires giving their call and flying from tree to tree. That started the day off well as they are often seen only one at a time.

The group was in a mood to hike so we walked up the creek through the campgrounds to the pond just below Rock Creek Lake. We had lunch at the pond and were back to the Sno-Park by 2 pm. Overall we saw about 18 species of birds including the expected Clark's Nutcracker, American Robin, Mountain Chickadee and Oregon Junco. We also found a Cassin's Finch, Brown Creeper, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Hairy Woodpecker and a Belted Kingfisher. At the pond were two Ring-necked Ducks and two Buffleheads and we found a flock of Bushtits on the return trip.

All had a good time, found enough birds to keep us busy and enjoyed a perfect day doing what we like to do in the Eastern Sierra.

Bill Mitchel

Winter Birding with Jon Dunn - December 1

This year's ESAS field trip to Lake Crowley will be remembered for the bitterly cold weather. It started at 13 degrees and with ever increasing winds during the day, our day was cut short due to the elements. Most memorable was the show of eagles, both Balds and Golden, and we had excellent views of both species. Several Rough-legged Hawks were also seen. There are somewhat more of this species present in California this winter, than in the past several winters. A sitting Prairie Falcon was also of note. We had a nice variety of waterfowl, although it was disappointing not to have Tundra Swans, and where were the geese? Of our four species of Gulls, one individual seen at the McGee arm of the Lake Crowley (first stop) was a 2nd cycle (1½ years of age) Mew Gull, perhaps only the third sighting for Mono County and the 4th for the east Sierra region. It fed with a few Ring-billed and California Gulls allowing excellent comparisons. Unfortunately it flew off before it could be photographed. It was certainly the best bird of the day. Many thanks to all that endured!

Jon L. Dunn



**A Dark-Eyed Junco in Bishop City Park
Watercolor by Nancy Overholtz**

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Hooded Merganser Ron Overholtz

Solitary in winter? Join the Eastern Sierra Audubon flock - Inside!