

WHAT WAS THAT GULL?

by Tom & Jo Heindel



The Gull at Bishop City Park by Tom Heindel

On 23 January 2014, we received a call from Chris Howard in the early afternoon to tell us he found a large, pale gull without black on the primaries at the Bishop City Park. We asked about bill size and he said that he thought that it was not large. Our response was, "We are on the way!" In the interior West, large pale gulls without black wing tips are rare. Inyo County has four records of Glaucous-winged Gulls and one record of a Glaucous Gull, both species with those characteristics. We knew that Chris had a really good gull but we didn't know just how "good" it was going to be.

When we arrived at the park, Chris and Nancy Overholtz were crouched near the edge of the pond and the gull in question was floating about ten meters from them. We joined them in taking images and each of us was describing what we were seeing, discussing size and shading, and asking questions. Shortly, a half dozen other active Inyo County birders began to show up. It was helpful to have Jon Dunn arrive since he and Steve N. G. Howell co-authored the *Gulls of the Americas* (2007). Discussions and questions kept coming from the growing group of observers and continued for some time.

This bird was visited daily by a variety of observers from northern and southern California, including California Bird Records Committee members; hundreds of images were taken of the gull sitting and

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Photo: Tom Heindel
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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

"We gain life by looking at life."

Dr. Mardie Townsend

It is always nice when you can look back at something and say "that was a good idea". The Eastern Sierra Audubon relationship with the Bishop Paiute tribe and its Conservation Open Space Area has been a true blessing for our chapter and its members. A week or so ago, I dropped in for the Saturday COSA walk which was initiated as a way to do a bird census on the COSA and also as a regularly scheduled outing for ESAS members and new birders. It seemed like it was going to be a nice spring morning and I had not been to one if the walks since last fall so I figured I ought to keep my hand in. It was really cool to see the smiling faces of a dozen or so folks assembled at the back gate of the Forest Service parking area. It was a very birdy day; we had nineteen species before we even got out of the parking lot, ending up with thirty or so overall. These were spring birds; brightly colored, bursting with song and charged up with energy and promise. It was a very enjoyable couple of hours of very leisurely walking and observing.

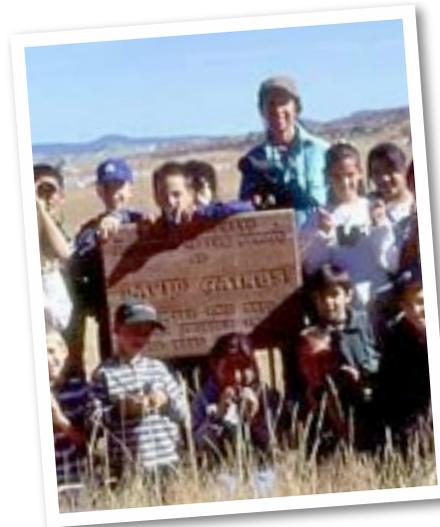
During our walk, I had a chance to talk with Hillary Behr who is the education chair for our chapter. She told me of some amazing things she is getting together through her employment with the Inyo schools and I am pleased that ESAS plays a role in that program. Speaking of which, Birds in the Classroom time is upon us again; starting on April 21 with the Benton school. We will be leading a program

at the Bartlett Pond in partnership with the Eastern Sierra Land Trust. I am not naturally comfortable

around children, but I have gained a great deal from spending a few hours asking "what is that bright yellow thing over there" in the company of students, some of whom have never seen a bird through binoculars. I have been asked some really thoughtful questions like "why do you bother about these birds" or "what

difference does it make to you if a species goes extinct". These questions help me put my own thoughts in order and I very much hope that my answers will ignite that spark in one or two students that will lead them to a closer relationship with the land and its creatures. We are doing programs in several schools this spring and looking to expand into more schools each year. Check out the opportunities by looking at our website or contacting Hillary for more information. By the way...it was a yellow headed blackbird.

Peter Pumphrey



RAPTORS: ROUND TWO

The first presentation of Raptors of the Eastern Sierra was such a hit that we have scheduled an encore to include those of you that missed the first one! This will be a repeat of the same presentation that was given in February of 2015.

The May 6th program will be held at the [U.S. Forest Service/BLM Building in Bishop on West Line Street](#), near the DMV. Please welcome back Ron Oriti, who will be giving his presentation on Raptors of the Eastern Sierra in an encore performance! Doors open at 6:30, with the presentation starting at 7:00pm. **Seating is limited!**



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flying at varying distances and with different lighting. At first, images were taken to gather as many postures as possible in hopes that all questions could be answered. Then later, images began to document, up close, specific features like eye color, primary pattern from different perspectives, bill size, etc. A compilation of all observers images comes as close as a record can come to a specimen without a body. This gull remained through 29 January and was last seen at 1630hrs by Rosie Howard. It was not there 17 minutes later when we stopped by and was never seen again at the park and not found at other watering holes that were checked in the following days.

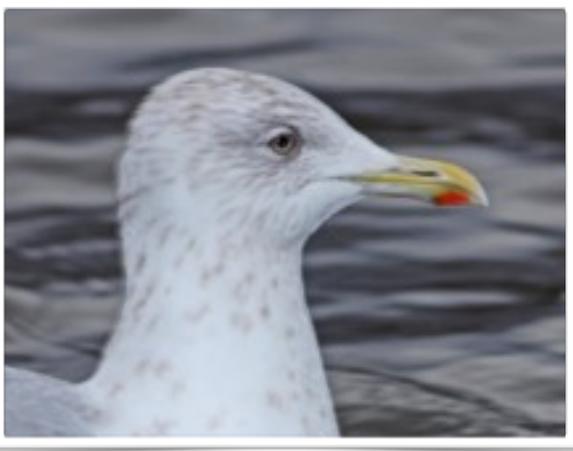
California has a widely respected Rare Birds Committee made up of birders who have demonstrated a high degree of knowledge of California birds. They pour over all the documentation (written, images, and audio tapes) submitted for a record and write their opinion in a series of rounds. Each succeeding round, they can read what all the other members were saying and respond. The collaborative knowledge base of this Committee is impressive as is the experience base. There are nine voting members and a record needs eight members voting "accept" for it to become a State record. A member told us that the amount of documentation and images the Committee received on this gull, submitted as an Iceland Gull of the subspecies *kumlieni*, was amazing and that this gull was one of the best documented records ever. The CBRC was very helpful in providing us with the member's comments and additional research materials.



Photo: *The Gull* by Tom Heindel

Some background on Iceland Gull is in order. There are two subspecies of Iceland Gull. *Larus glaucooides* has pure white primaries and breeds in Greenland and *L. g. kumlieni* may have pure white primaries or primaries with shades of gray patterns on the outer tips and breeds on southern Baffin Island and in northwestern Quebec. This later subspecies is often called "Kumlien's" Gull and almost all reports from the West refer to this group. The most well-informed ornithologists, who have studied the Iceland Gull/Thayer's Gull complex, do not agree on how many species are involved. Some authorities consider Thayer's, Iceland, and Kumlien's Gulls all full species but the American Ornithologists Union currently recognizes *L. g. glaucooides* (eastern Iceland Gull) and *L. g. kumlieni* (Kumlien's Gull) as one species.

To complicate this identification challenge is the possibility of "Kumlien's" Gull hybridizing with Thayer's Gull, a slightly larger and darker species with darker wing tips. Both forms breed in isolated populations, some in close proximity north of Hudson Bay, Canada.



As often happens with very difficult birds, the documentation and images are sent to other experts for their input. Bruce Mactavish, of Newfoundland and very familiar with "Kumlien's Gull", responded with a detailed analysis of each primary feather including how the bands and leading edge of the mirrors are within the characteristics of a "Kumlien's" Gull but at the rare end of the spectrum. He ended with "I feel there is no hard, cold answer to the identification of this bird. On the East Coast, it would not be noticed among a large flock of Kumlien's. In inland California, where Kumlien's is very rare, you might wish to have one of the other 99+% of the group that is more easily separable from a Thayer's."

Seven members accepted the gull as an Iceland Gull, subspecies *kumlieni* and two members did not accept the

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identification. One dissenter commented that while the bird is very close to "Kumlien's Gull", it is a bit of an outlier with darker primaries, details of the primary pattern, and felt the bill was slightly heavier. The other dissenter cited Mactavish's comments on the unusual primary patterns and stated that it was outside the norm. Members in favor of it being a "Kumlien's Gull" felt that the characteristics of the Bishop bird were within those accepted as "Kumlien's" in the past. One member cited Olsen and Larssen's Gulls of North America, Europe, and Asia (2003) which showed that the characteristics of this gull are within the cline but at the dark side, which is typical of a small percentage of the population. Another member stated that the CBRC has not been consistent in treatment of what constitutes a "Kumlien's Gull" and what constitutes a hybrid.

The range of variation for many of the characteristics is not well understood, or unanimously accepted, at this time and without genetic material from this gull, it is currently impossible to determine what species or subspecies the Bishop City Park Gull belongs to based on judgments of its appearance.

One of the most important functions of the California Bird Records Committee, with the assistance of the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology, is to archive the observers' submissions and committees' comments in perpetuity. The value of this collection is priceless. The decisions to accept or not are helpful currently and in the near future, but none are cast in stone. The Committee has a policy that allows a re-review of a record based on additional information not available at the time of the initial review. The result of this policy is that some records that were not accepted when first submitted have been re-evaluated and many times accepted on the second review based on convincing evidence or knowledge that was added to the record. For example, in December 1976 a Yellow-billed Loon was found at Grant Lake, Mono County by David Gaines and us. One of the main reasons the record was rejected was because there were virtually no inland records. During subsequent years, inland records were accrued and in 2004 a motion was made by a Committee member to re-review the Grant Lake bird. Almost three decades later, with the additional records added to the picture, the loon record was re-circulated and accepted. The future may hold further information that will be added to this gull record and with the abundance of written documentation by multiple observers and the library of images available in the WFVZ archives, a re-circulation may result in a different outcome. Science is never static!

In our opinion, this is one of the most interesting, exciting, and stimulating birds ever recorded in Inyo County. It is yet another reminder that we mere mortals don't have all the answers!

FIELD REPORTS

Antelope Valley (*Elena Espinosa*)
Here are some birding highlights in the Walker, Coleville and Topaz Lake areas:

The Yellow Headed, Brewer's, and Red Winged blackbirds are back along with the committees of Turkey Vultures. The Red Tailed Hawks are nesting.

We have quite a few pairs of Common Mergansers in Walker River and the White Pelicans are visiting Topaz Lake.

Bald Eagles are busy cleaning up the roads north of the Coleville Post Office.

We're meeting now on Wednesday mornings at the Sweetwater Cafe at 107537 Hwy 395 in Walker at 8:30 for our weekly morning birding. They make delicious beverages and serve croissant, burrito and bagel breakfasts. Arrive a little early to order before we head out.

Please come out and join us! We are usually out for several

hours in a car caravan. For more info call Ele @ [928.300.8088](tel:928.300.8088).

There will be a Mountain Gate Park Dedication Ceremony and Open House on Saturday, May 23rd from 11-2. The new park is located just before arriving into Walker on the 395. You'll see the big wooden engraved "Welcome to the Antelope Valley" sign on the east side of the road as you exit out of the canyon northbound toward Walker. Turn in here. I will have a booth set up for ESAS with materials to hand out.

MONO BASIN BIRD CHAUTAUQUA REGISTRATION NOW OPEN

The Fourteenth Annual Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua is set to take place June 19-21, 2015 and online registration is now open. Based out of Lee Vining, this celebrated event is among the best of the nature festivals blending science, art, and music into one 3-day event. The event's official slogan, "not your ordinary bird festival," is for good reason. Subjects offered, in addition to birds, will include flowers and plants, butterflies, mammals, geology, nature awareness, photography, and storytelling. A variety of art classes and kids events will also be offered. For the first time, two fly casting clinics will be offered for those wishing to improve their fishing skills. Ninety field trips, workshops, and auditorium presentations will be offered by 50 knowledgeable and experienced instructors from California and the West.

As always the event will end on Sunday, June 21st with a free, public picnic and concert at Mono Lake County Park. This year's musical guests will be Mumbo Gumbo.

The event is based out of Lee Vining and is organized by the Mono Lake Committee and California State Parks. Other partners include: Eastern Sierra Audubon, Inyo National Forest, Eastern Sierra Interpretive Association, National Park Service, Yosemite Conservancy, Friends of the Inyo, and Point Blue Conservation Science.

The schedule and detailed program information is posted on the web site. For more information please visit: www.birdchautauqua.org.

STORIES OF DISCOVERY: CITIZEN SCIENCE & RARE REPTILES OF EASTERN CALIFORNIA

The Great Basin Desert of eastern California supports a remarkable, yet mysterious assemblage of squamates (snakes and lizards). Hear a primer on squamate biodiversity in the region, discuss how citizen science can help improve our understanding of that biodiversity, and finish with an overview of Adam's personal research on the Panamint alligator lizard.

The June 3rd program will be held at the [U.S. Forest Service/BLM Building in Bishop on West Line Street](#), near the DMV. Please welcome back Ron Oriti, who will be giving his presentation on Raptors of the Eastern Sierra in an encore performance! Doors open at 6:30, with the presentation starting at 7:00pm. **Seating is limited!**



HAPPY BIRTHDAY MR AUDUBON!

APRIL 26, 1785: NATURALIST JOHN AUDUBON IS BORN.

This lithograph was drawn by Audubon's son from one of his watercolors as the elder's eyesight was failing.

Audubon was known for painting birds, but we have lithographs from his "Viviparous Quadrupeds of North America:" <http://bit.ly/1yyfZtP>



BUTTERMILKS BIRDING SATURDAY, MAY 16

Leader Jerry Zatorski.

In the upper Buttermilks, May is an excellent time to catch many resident birds in full spring song and many others on their way to mountain breeding locations. This will be a 4 mile round trip hike, beginning at 7400' and slowly ascend to 7900'. In the lower portions the various sagebrush specialists can be seen and heard, and in the upper portion the Jeffery Pine forest hosts many mountain species from warblers to grosbeaks. Bring binoculars, scopes (if they can be easily carried), field guides, camera and an ear for bird song. We should be done by afternoon. Participants should bring food & fluids, and dress for the spring weather and hiking. Meet at 7:00 AM at the Buttermilk Rd. and SR 168.

Because parking is limited, carpooling is encouraged. Vehicles with 4WD and clearance are recommended. For more information contact Jerry at 387-2920 or "jerryzat@gmail.com".

MONO LAKE NEEDS YOU!

Volunteer Program at Mono Lake this summer

The Mono Lake Committee, US Forest Service, Eastern Sierra Interpretive Association, California State Parks and the Bodie Foundation are teaming up to sponsor the 12th season of our 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. Free training will be held on May 27 & 28 and June 3, 4, 10 and 11th in the Mono Basin (Wednesday and Thursday afternoons).

Please contact Jessica at jessica@monolake.org or 760-647-6595 for more information or to sign up. You will be sent details and a training schedule.

**OPPORTUNITIES FOR MEMBERS**

Opportunities to help ESAS with getting the word out and encouraging membership abound! We'd love to have your help growing the membership, attendance at field trips, and involvement with Eastern Sierra Audubon Society. Contact one of the Board members for more information.

NORTHERN INYO BIRD-A-THON SEPTEMBER 2015

Dear friends of Eastern Sierra Audubon Society and birders all over, ESAS is planning to do its first annual Northern Inyo County Bird-a Thon. The dates for the event will be selected pretty soon, however, the event will take place in the month of September.

You can spend several hours, a morning, or an entire day birding looking for Fall migrants. If you are interested in participating and/or know somebody that would like to participate in the event, please contact us for more information at:

<http://esaudubon.org/about/contact.php>

Thank you,
ESAS (Santiago)



Photo: Black-headed Grosbeak by Santiago Escruceria

TO FEED OR NOT TO FEED

“Feeders can bring unexpected species together and bring birds together more frequently than normal, creating ideal conditions for parasites and other contaminants,” [Daniel Becker](#), a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Georgia’s Odum School of Ecology says. That birds often crowd into tight spaces to get at the tasty morsels also makes it easier for pathogens to leap between birds.

So should we stop feeding birds? “Absolutely not,” says Becker, “there are plenty of simple things we can do to avoid many of these potential outcomes.”

Stephen Kress, director of Audubon’s [Project Puffin](#), says safe bird feeding includes completely scrubbing out feeders with a 10 percent non-chlorinated bleach solution at least a few times a year, and certainly between seasons. It also means [researching](#) the favorite foods of the species you want to attract, the feeder styles they like best, and where to hang feeders.

“Bird seed mixtures targeted to a wide range of species are the cheapest, but most wasteful, packed with fillers like milo that most birds pick through, resulting in a mess under the feeder,” says Kress. The mess can quickly become a sludgy mixture that can make birds sick, so it should be cleaned up in the winter or raked out when conditions are drier, says Kress. To avoid exposing ground-feeding birds to the goo, he adds, put up a platform that drains well.

Read the entire article here: <http://www.audubon.org/news/to-feed-or-not-feed>

BIRD OF THE MONTH: COMMON YELLOWTHROAT

SANTIAGO ESCRUCERIA



The Common Yellowthroat is a small, stocky, broad-necked warbler, with short wings and a long rounded tail. The male has a grayish-white band bordering a distinctive black mask, and a bright yellow throat and breast. The female has a yellow throat contrasting with a dark cheek and a faint eye ring. Its song sounds like "your money, your money, your money!" Seen at **COSA** reserve, common spring and fall migrants and sometimes in winter casual in the Owens valley.

BIRDS IN THE CLASSROOM: CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS

Hello trusty birders and volunteers!

Below is the schedule for this year's Bishop Birds in the Classroom, a program offered by the Eastern Sierra Audubon Society. Please let me know which dates you will be able to volunteer.

Volunteering means leading a small group (5 ish) of 3rd grade students birding on the COSA (Bishop Paiute Tribe's Conservation Open Space Area, located directly behind the Bishop Elementary School). Students will know how to use binoculars and have some idea of how to find birds and focus on them. Your job is to lead them around, help find birds, be enthusiastic and excited about looking at birds, and help students gather information in order to identify birds. By the way, the students absolutely love this and it's very fun for the volunteers!

There will be an **optional training on May 1st** for volunteers who want to brush up on their birding skills or become familiar with the area where we will be birding on the COSA.

Thank you for giving 3rd graders a chance to experience the wonder of birds! Please forward to anyone you think would be interested.

- Thursday, May 7th: 8:15- 11:30
- Friday, May 8th: 8:15- 11:30
- Friday, May 15th: 8:15- 11:30
- Friday, May 22nd: 8:15- 10:00

Hillary Bebr

Outdoor Education Coordinator
 Inyo County Superintendent of Schools
 166 Grandview Drive, Bishop CA
 Work: (760) 873-3262 ext. 431



CALENDAR

Wednesday, May 6:	Raptors: Round Two 7:00 pm BLM/USFS West Line Street, Bishop
Saturday, May 9:	COSA monthly walk 8:30 am BLM/USFS West Line Street, Bishop
Wednesdays, weekly:	Antelope Valley / Topaz Bird Walks 8:30 am Sweetwater Cafe, Walker
Saturday, May 16:	Buttermilk Birding 7:00 AM at the Buttermilk Road and SR 168.
Wednesday, June 3:	Panamint Alligator Lizard Program 7:00 pm BLM/USFS West Line Street, Bishop
Saturday, June 13:	COSA monthly walk 7:30 am BLM/USFS West Line Street, Bishop
June 19-21:	Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua! Mono Lake County Park
Saturday, July 11:	COSA monthly walk 7:30 am BLM/USFS West Line Street, Bishop
Saturday, Aug 8:	COSA monthly walk 7:30 am BLM/USFS West Line Street, Bishop
April 10-12:	Wildflower Festival Maturango Museum, Ridgecrest
September TBD:	Northern Inyo County Birdathon Check esaudubon.org for details

NEWS

BIRDS IN THE CLASSROOM IN LONE PINE

As a part of the OLBF, Mike Prather, Nancy Hadlock, and Hillary Behr organized activities at the Lone Pine schools. Mike gave an assembly lecture to the middle school on Birds of Owens Lake, Nancy did activities in the lower grades about Owls, and all led bird walks for the 5th, 6th, and 7th grades with the help of Myrna Two and Barbara Kelly.

It all went great and we basically have some sort of Birds in the Classroom in Lone Pine now, although it is with middle school and not 3rd grade. I'm assuming that the OLBF will happen again next year because it was really well attended, so the activities in the school will probably also continue.

BOARD MEMBERS & COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Chapter Officers:

President: Peter Pumphrey (872-7846)

Vice-President: Jenny Richardson (920-8541)

Secretary: Ann Hoffmann (933-2318)

Treasurer: Lacey Greene (920-3606)

Other Board Members:

Bart Godett (938-2959)

Jenny Richardson (920-8541)

Maggie Riley (258-9694)

Roberta Lagomarsini (872-7846)

Santiago Escruceria

Hillary Behr (603-953-3690)

Paul McFarland

Vickie Taton

You can find a list of our current ESAS Board Members and Committee Chairs [here](#).



Join us on [Facebook!](#)

MEMBERSHIP

If you would like to join or renew and help support Eastern Sierra Audubon, there are two ways you can do it:

Join as a National Audubon Society Member, designating ESAS as your chapter affiliation (your zip code will associate you with the chapter nearest you). Includes Audubon Magazine subscription. This is \$20 for the first year, and goes up to \$35 annually thereafter.

Join as an ESAS Chapter-only Member for \$20 per year. 100% of your donation stays here in the Eastern Sierra this way. Your chapter membership is a way to give back, and show your appreciation for all that ESAS does, and to help support our mission locally. Your membership helps pay for scholarships, programs, special events, education programs, research, and more. Click [here](#) for a membership form to join or renew, or pick up a membership form at any Audubon event! Please contact me at hoffmann@qnet.com or 760-933-2318, if you have concerns or questions.

Ann Hoffmann, Membership Chair.

MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

This newsletter is for you, the members, and I appreciate all the wonderful contributions you've made. We publish bi-monthly with the exception of the summer months, so our next newsletter deadline will be **August 15th** for the Sept-Oct issue. You are always welcome to send submissions for future newsletters and also the monthly email at any time before the deadline.

All of our content is supplied by our awesome members... if you have anything to share for newsletter publication, whether an article, a news item, update, correction, poem, essay, artwork, photo, field trip report, neat birding experience, letter, etc, please send it, along with any comments or suggestions, to the [newsletter editor](#). We'd love to hear from you! Thanks for reading, and happy birding!

Vickie Taton, Editor