

THE SIERRA WAVE

EASTERN SIERRA AUDUBON SOCIETY

ESAS Website: www.csupomona.edu/~larryblakely/ESAS/ ES Bird Sightings: www.wmrs.edu/birds/

MEETINGS

Second Wednesday of the month, September through June, 7:00 PM (Board Meeting 5:45 PM), usually at the White Mountain Research Station (3 mi. East of Bishop on East Line St.)
Check local news media for possible changes.

Evening Programs

Evening programs will be preceded by (1) announcements of interest to the membership, and (2) recent bird sightings and other news on the local natural history scene. Come prepared to participate!

March 14

Refreshments: **Sarah Sheehan**

Main Program: **Eastern Sierra Wildlands – Edge of the Great Basin.** **Sally Miller** of The Wilderness Society and **Paul McFarland** of Friends of the Inyo (www.friendsoftheinyo.org/) will give a slide presentation on potential wilderness areas in the Eastern Sierra region. While the High Sierra mountains contain several million



Papoose Flat (photo by Andy Selters)

acres of designated wilderness, east of the crest there are over 1.5 million acres of unprotected, publicly-owned wildlands. These diverse lands, which encompass three biogeographic provinces, provide critical habitat for plants and animals, important recreational opportunities and form an integral part of the spectacular scenic backdrop of the Eastern Sierra. Come learn about the natural and cultural history of our Eastside wildlands and how we can preserve them for future generations.

April 11

Refreshments: **Joan Benner**

Main Program: **Steve Searles**, founder of the non-profit, **BearAffairs**, will present a program about his work with bears.

Steve heads up the Town of Mammoth Lakes' black bear program, in which he uses non-lethal tactics to deter the "bad habits" of dumpster-diving & nuisance bears. When these large animals wander into town, coming near people's homes, looking for food, Steve works with the bears in a humane way to change these habits. Besides working with local officials, he's being recognized in other states, as well, like New Jersey, which has adopted his program and has stopped a bear hunt in that state to solve their bear problems. Federal officials in National Parks, like Yosemite, have been trained by Searles and are using his methods. The Humane Society of America has adopted his program along with parks and law enforcement groups from Canada to help with their bear problems. We hope to also learn about Searles' Karelian bear dog, named Tucker, which is of Finnish and Russian descent. Raised from a puppy and known for its excellent sense of smell, Tucker will help Steve locate bears especially those that might have been hit

by vehicles, lay wounded and, if found, can be helped. Steve will also be showing some short video clips of his bear work. Visit the BearAffairs website to learn more, <http://www.bearaffairs.com/>



Steve Searles and Tucker, the Karelian bear dog (photo from www.bearaffairs.com)

Chapter Notes

NEW MEMBERS

A warm Eastern Sierra Audubon welcome to the following new, transfer and returning members:

Peter J. Metropulos - Atherton

Mr & Mrs Charles Hayler - McKinleyville

William Boyle - Bishop

Jonelle Anderson - Bishop

Patricia Foley - Bishop

Kenneth Looney - Bishop

Phil Williams - Bishop

Tirzah Zbinden - Mammoth Lakes

Olivia Giguere - Mammoth Lakes

Patricia Riggins - Swall Meadows

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Yard Sale!

April 7, beginning at 8 am, at **Derrick and Mary Vocolka's**.

Please set aside those good but no-longer-wanted items for the **Chapter's annual fundraiser**. Coffee will be provided and Jim Parker's delicious cupcakes will be available for sale. Starting April 1, take your **pre-priced** items to the Vocolkas' garage, located at 2433 Apache Drive, Bishop. Phone: 873-4480. Thanks!

New Co-editor

In recognition of her considerable contributions to the content and preparation of the WAVE, I am now listing Debby Parker as co-editor (see Chapter Officers and Committee Chairs, back page). I still take full responsibility for the final outcome, but you should know that Debby spends many hours on each issue getting input from a variety of sources and making editorial suggestions (in addition to her remarkable efforts to bring us outstanding programs at meeting after meeting). *Larry B.*

Thanks

Thanks to Terry Russi for the program he presented to us last month, updating us on the Sage Grouse scene, based on his years of research and concern. Thanks also to Paula Brown and Ted Williams of "Eastern Edge News" for videotaping the program. They will prepare an excerpt for our local television station in the near future.

Newsletter Information

Editor:

Larry Blakely
(760) 872-1890
415 Sierra Grande, Bishop, CA 93514
e-mail: larryblakely@sigmaxi.org

The newsletter is sent to all Audubon Society members in our area. Non-members may receive the newsletter for \$6.00 annually (please send checks to the Membership Chair). Articles for the newsletter, or comments on it, should be sent to the editor (addresses above).

The newsletter is published in September, November, January, March, and May. Deadline for copy is 10 days before the month of publication.

New Website: Bristlecone chapter, CNPS

Find them at <www.bristleconecnps.org/>. It has newsletters, links, great photos, and an excellent conservation page which addresses current local issues.

Mono Lake Count: Experienced volunteers are needed!

In April you can expect to find American Avocets, Eared Grebes, White-faced Ibises, Western and Least Sandpipers, ducks and geese, with the potential to see Snowy Plovers, Dunlins, Dowitchers, and much more!! This is a chance to explore remote parts of Mono Lake and count shorebirds, ducks, and other birds. Help us monitor birds and establish a growing database as changes to lakeshore habitat occur.

Details: Plan on a half to full day of hiking.



Sage Grouse on the wing, off the Owens River Rd
(photo by Eric A. Meyer, taken Feb. 2, 2001, 6:30 am)

Weather can be variable in April, from summer-like to winter-like, so be prepared with layered clothing and sun protection. Bring plenty of water and food for a full day in the field. There's a high probability of hiking through some mud or soggy areas. Binoculars are essential. Participants need to have a working knowledge of the common shorebirds. A spotting scope and 4WD vehicle would be useful, but not necessary.

Call: Bartshe (bar-shay) at 760.647.6595 at the Mono Lake Committee for more information, or email bartshe@monolake.org.

Kern Valley Bioregions Festival

April 27-29, 2001: The Kern Valley Bioregions Festival is a celebration of biological diversity in the Kern River Valley at the height of the spring bird migration and the spectacular wildflower bloom. This area has some of the highest diversity of species known anywhere in the United States. So far 331

species of birds have been recorded in the Kern River Valley - 135 species of butterflies inhabit the area - 2000 species of plants - and 115 species of mammals. Spring bird migration creates an exciting time for birders visiting the Kern Valley Bioregions Festival. You are invited to celebrate this one of a kind region. Post-festival field trips will be available from May 1-4 for those who can stay a week or more. Join us during the festival for workshops, field trips, exhibits, and activities. The festival has something for everyone. For all the exciting details of this Audubon-CA sponsored event, visit the website: <frontpage.light speed.net/KRP/bioregion.htm>; or, phone (760) 378-3044 for a brochure.

For the Record

Last issue's political cartoon was by a Mammoth High School student - not Lee Vining HS as reported.

BIRD-A-THON

The 2001 Eastern Sierra Audubon Society Bird-A-Thon will take place Saturday May 12th in the Lone Pine area. Each year our team attempts to identify as many species of birds in one 24 hour period as possible. The Bird-A-Thon team seeks pledges beforehand for an amount per species seen on the count day. In return pledgers receive a list of the birds identified and a narrative of the day's

adventure. From Whitney Portal to Owens Lake this marathon birding team scours all manner of habitats. Normally the species total surpasses, 100 and the record high was 119!

This year we are dedicating our pledges to the Chapter's work on the Lower Owens River Project. Education and possibly litigation money is needed to further this Audubon cause. Representing the rewatering of 60 miles of the formerly dry Owens River, this project that resulted from the Inyo County / Los Angeles Water Agreement is unique in its scale and opportunity. Miles of riparian habitat is slated to be restored as well as off-river ponds and marshes. Currently there has been an impasse between locals, the Department of Fish and Game, environmental groups, and the LADWP, resulting from Los Angeles's unilateral tripling of the size of its proposed pumpback station that would return water from the river to the aqueduct thereby reducing the amount of water that is allowed to reach the delta. Your Eastern Sierra Audubon Society has been surveying the river for years and has demon-

strated that the delta is one of the richest habitats for birds in the rewatering project area. With the additional water agreed to by LADWP, even more habitat will be created. The delta also links to the vitally important shorebird habitat out on the playa of Owens Lake. Remember that the Chapter worked for the designation of Owens Lake as a Nationally Significant Important Bird Area based on the large number of migrating shorebirds and nesting snowy plovers. What an exciting time to be an Audubon member and to work for such good causes.

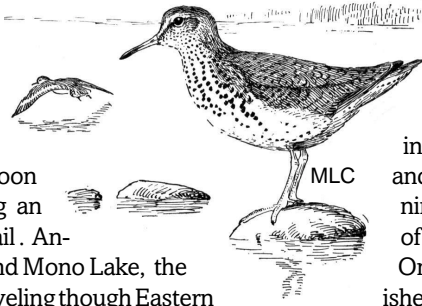
Help Audubon by pledging an amount of money per species seen or a lump sum if you like. Send your pledge now to Bird-A-Thon, Drawer D, Lone Pine, CA 93545 or prather@qnet.com Please include your name, address and amount of your pledge.

Mike Prather

EASTERN SIERRA BIRDING TRAIL

Mono Lake Committee staff and Eastern Sierra Audubon members will soon begin work on planning an Eastern Sierra Birding Trail. Anchored by Owens Lake and Mono Lake, the trail will be a roadmap traveling through Eastern Sierra to terrific habitats and birding locations. Visitors and locals alike will experience and be able to learn more about our local bird natural history. They will also receive an education in why these places are important and how we must protect them. Loops or spurs will spin off from the main trail to sites in the Sierra or out in the desert in the east.

Birding trails have been springing up across the country and are great opportunities to get out our Audubon message. Would you like to join



us? We need birders with good knowledge of the area and who are also photographers, writers and artists. Our initial meeting will be in March and will entail the rough planning of the trail and the creation of an overall format and design. Once the details have been finished the map will be profession-

ally laid out and printed. Eastern Sierra Audubon, the Mono Lake Committee and others in the trail area will distribute the maps which will demonstrate the importance of wildlife and wild places in the Eastern Sierra. Sponsorships will be sought from Federal and State land management agencies, local Chambers of Commerce, and local businesses.

To be a part of our project please contact Mike Prather, Drawer D, Lone Pine, CA 93545 (760.876.5807) prather@qnet.com

Mike

Field Trips

REPORTS

CALENDAR

March 10th: A birdwatching field trip to **Pleasant Valley Reservoir**. This is a great opportunity to see many ducks, geese, snipe, and wrens. This free trip is open to anyone and involves a 2 mile walk. Bring binoculars, snacks, water, and meet at 8:00AM at behind Wye Shell in Bishop to carpool or 8:20AM at the powerhouse parking lot at the upper end of the reservoir. For further information call **Jerry Zatorski** at 872-3818.

March 24th: A **Nature Awareness** field trip. **Cindy Kamler** will demonstrate Native American awareness techniques from **Tracker Tom Brown, Jr.** Enhance your outdoor experiences with listening, vision, movement, and tracking. Site to be determined based on weather. Meet behind the Wye Shell gas station in Bishop at 9:00AM. We'll be done by noon. For further information, please call Cindy Kamler at 872-1487.

Saturday May 5th: Spring Migration at **Baker Meadow**. Join **Earl Gann** to witness spring migration in all its splendor. Meet at 7:00AM at the Glacier View Campground in Big Pine. We'll walk around Baker Meadow until noon. The meadows are frequently wet or muddy so wear appropriate shoes. This is a great trip for beginning birders. Call Earl at 878-1914 for more information.

Saturday May 12th: International Migratory Bird Day

Chris Howard

Furnace Creek Ranch, February 17th, 2001

After a week of cold snowy weather, 11 enthusiastic Owens Valley birders headed south to join 4 Death Valley park personnel for a lovely day of birding at Furnace Creek. Quenching rains had fallen in Death Valley a week prior, and the fragrant muds and earth and newly rinsed vegetation were a gift in the cool morning. We met early at the golf course parking lot and first took a quiet stroll through the date palm groves. Leader Chris Howard pointed to a small wintering flock of Lewis's Woodpeckers gracefully flying palm to palm. Song Sparrows, Audubon's Warblers, American Pipits and flocks of Savannah Sparrows were there to greet us in the ground vegetation. Mourning Doves and Common Ravens perched high. Our most colorful sighting was a male Vermilion Flycatcher, brilliant red amongst the brown shrubbery. A young Red-Shouldered Hawk was sighted by Jo Heindel and called out by Tom. As we watched, the hawk continued to call excitedly as if establishing territory.

We then strolled through the Furnace Creek Ranch to the horse pens where 3 Inca Doves were pecking at grain alongside a huge reclining horse. Later we could hear the dove's soft 'no hope' call as we walked back through the employee housing. We also caught sightings of Myrtle Warbler, Say's

Phoebe and a male Anna's Hummingbird as we headed back to the cars.

The sewer ponds were our next destination, by special permission. The waters were alive with American Wigeon, Green-winged and Cinnamon Teal, Ring-necked Ducks, a female Ruddy Duck, and Mallards. One female Common Merganser mingled with them. A Black Phoebe and Marsh Wren were seen and heard in the surrounding vegetation.

We also took a look at the north end of the golf course. The sky was busy with Mountain Bluebirds, Tree and Violet-green Swallows, and White-throated Swifts. Verdin were combing the mesquite trees for insects. Peeking over a berm, we saw a Ross's Goose near a water hazard. A later visit near this location at dusk gave a few of us good looks at a Long-billed Dowitcher and a female Wood Duck.

After lunch, we joined up again and birded the gardens of the Furnace Creek Inn. Although quiet this time of year, April-May and September-October will be the months of activity. We did see a small flock of American Pipit, White-crowned Sparrow, Song Sparrow and a Northern Flicker. Gracious thanks to our leader Chris who led us to the best birding places on this tiny oasis. We all look forward to this wonderful glimpse of Death Valley in February.

Kathy Duvall

Conservation

Mountain Beaver (*Aplodontia rufa*)

by Dale Steele

Years ago, I was participating in mammal studies with David Gaines and the Mono Basin Research Group. One oven-like summer day I spied a strange animal scurrying among the tufa towers. I was sure the animal was a mountain beaver, even though all available information indicated that species couldn't possibly exist in this hot, dry climate. Nonetheless, some years later several roadkilled mountain beaver were in fact documented in the Mono Basin.

The mountain beaver is not a real beaver. It has been compared to a muskrat without a tail. It's a little known but fascinating rodent, which occupies a unique taxonomic and ecological niche. Aplodontia are considered to be the oldest group of living rodents, being the sole extant member of the superfamily Aplodontoidea, which has been found almost morphologically unchanged in the fossil record since the Miocene. It is thought to be ancestral to the squirrel family. The first published account of mountain beaver, *Aplodontia rufa* (Rafinesque), comes from the journals of Lewis & Clark in 1805.

Aplodontia are not considered game or fur animals today although, in the past, Native American Indians wore robes made of mountain beaver and valued their meat. The Indian robes, called "she-wal-lal," were the origin of the mountain beaver nickname, sewellel, which Lewis and Clark misunderstood to be the name of the animal.

What makes mountain beaver so interesting? The mountain beaver is sort of a living fossil. While their range has decreased from that in the fossil record, probably because of geological and climactic changes, very little appears to have changed morphologically. The species seems to have a number of physiological limitations that should decrease its ability to adapt to new environments.

Mountain beavers were used in early studies of kidney function because their primitive kidneys lack the structure to concentrate urine effectively. The animals need large amounts of water as a result. Other organ systems have not been well studied. There is a unique structure in their brains whose function is unknown. One

theory is that it provides high sensitivity to changes in air pressure.

These are mysterious animals. They spend most of their time in underground burrows and come out only to eat or during the short juvenile dispersal period when young animals leave the nest to establish their own burrow sites. They are difficult to study and so have not been given adequate attention by biologists.

At one time it was thought that mountain beaver were colonial animals because several animals may inhabit a series of interconnected burrows. However, it is now agreed that there is little interaction between animals except for territorial behavior within burrows. Each animal has its own burrow nest area that is connected with tunnels opening to the outside. It is difficult to determine how many animals inhabit a burrow system since an area riddled with holes may contain only a few animals.



Mountain Beaver (photo by Dr. Lloyd Glenn Ingles, California Academy of Sciences)

Mountain beaver are not pet material. They are crotchety, vicious animals that can't be domesticated. In captivity, many have lived for a period of time and then died suddenly from undetermined causes. When disturbed, they secrete a thick material from

their eyes which has been misinterpreted as tears. These behaviors combined with their poor eyesight sometimes lead to some unusual interactions between researcher and animal!

Mountain beaver burrow systems support a community of vertebrates and other animals. Skunks, salamanders, moles, voles, shrews, chipmunks, ground squirrels, mice, woodrats, gophers, weasels, mink, hares and brush rabbits have all been trapped in mountain beaver burrows. These animals may have been present as commensals, predators, or by accident.

There is also a unique invertebrate fauna associated with mountain beaver. Perhaps the most striking example is *Hystricopsylla schefferi*, the largest flea in the world, which grows to 9 mm (almost 1/2 inch) in length. The coevolution of the two organisms has never been investigated but, given the ancient lineage of mountain beaver, may provide some interesting insights.

Mountain beaver are strict herbivores. They are known to eat a wide range of plant species, which often includes just about all species within reach of the burrows. Herbaceous plants are eaten whole while woody plants are discarded after the bark has been peeled off for food.

Clipped vegetation can often be observed near burrow systems.

Mountain beaver are voracious eaters. Studies have shown that the majority of their active time is spent gathering, handling and eating food. They seldom venture far from their burrows, which may open directly into suitable vegetative stands. The animals forage for short distances above ground, then carry or drag the cut vegetation, which may vary in length from a few inches to several feet, to the burrow. There the material is cut into short sections at the burrow entrance and carried into the burrow to be eaten or stored. Animals may eat vegetation outside of the burrow, but most often consume it in feeding chambers which are adjacent to the nest.

While mountain beaver gather much of the vegetation in their vicinity, there appears to be a decided preference for certain types of plants including shrubs and smaller trees. Some of their preferred foods include species that are unpalatable or toxic to other mammals such as bracken fern, sword fern, nettles, thistles, corn lily, salal, foxglove, larkspur, and skunk cabbage. This gives the mountain beaver a largely uncontested food niche. The ability to consume plants with such a variety of toxic secondary compounds is unusual and may involve a metabolic "cost" to the animal.

Mountain beaver require large amounts of succulent vegetation for survival. Distribution limits are associated with rainfall and edaphic conditions that promote succulent vegetation and high humidity within burrows. Studies suggest that the most important factors in habitat use are a cool thermal regime, adequate soil drainage, abundant food supply, and a high percent cover of small diameter woody material and soft soil.

Mountain beaver have a limited distribution along the west coast of the United States, from Point Reyes, California north and slightly into British Columbia. Of the seven subspecies of mountain beaver, four are effectively endemic to California. Two of these, the Point Reyes mountain beaver (*Aplodontia rufa phaea*) and the Point Arena mountain beaver (*Aplodontia rufa nigra*), are restricted to very small ranges. The Point Arena mountain beaver is a federally-listed endangered species. I recently completed a recovery plan for this subspecies for the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

In the Pacific Northwest, mountain beaver are considered a pest species by many foresters because they are abundant and eat seedlings and young trees. However, in California, they are limited and considered a species of concern. Habitat destruction due to human interaction is a problem. Natural disasters have, in many cases, exacerbated the problem. A recent fire in Point Reyes destroyed about 50 percent of the known habitat of the entire subspecies. Studies are currently underway to determine the extent of damage to the population. Mountain beaver are known to be prey of bobcats, fishers, coyotes, great horned owls, skunks,

eagles, minks, and other predators. Little is known of other mortality factors such as disease. The sensitivity of mountain beaver to disturbance is also not well known.

I welcome any observations or questions you might have about this most unique and unusual animal. Please contact me at dsteale@igc.org. If you end up agreeing that this is an amazing animal and want to know more, I will be happy to share stories and references that should hold

you over until you can go looking for them yourself! You can also visit a website (<http://www.inreach.com/infowright/mtbeaver/html>) for more information.

Dale is a senior environmental planner/biologist with Caltrans, and is especially concerned with conservation and recovery planning. He holds a masters in ecology from UC Davis, and has conducted independent research on

mountain beaver for years. He was a participant with the original Mono Basin Research Group. He has been a fan of the Eastern Sierra ever since, and comes over as often as he can. In addition to the website mentioned by Dale, more information can be found in "Mammals of the Mono Lake-Tioga Pass Region", by John H. Harris.

PANAMINT ALLIGATOR LIZARD

If you like lizards and remote desert canyons, visit the website by Kevin Emmerich and Laura Cunningham <cluster4.biosci.utexas.edu/deathvalley>, which focuses on their research work with the Panamint Alligator Lizard in the "sky islands" of the desert mountains, east of our Sierra Nevada. Kevin, a Death Valley National Park Ranger and wife Laura, who is a volunteer biologist at the Park, are investigating the population dynamics of this species, which is considered one of the top four species in the "Species at Risk" program by the USGS, Biological Resource Division. They will be presenting a slide program for ESAS about their work in September. If you visit the Park this spring be sure to attend one of Kevin's Naturalist programs.



"William" - a captive Panamint alligator lizard - basking.
(Photo by Laura Cunningham)

THE AUDUBON ADVISORY, Feb. 20

The Roadless Rule

The U.S. Congress has until May 12th, 2001 to offer a Joint Resolution of Disapproval that could overturn the U.S. Forest Services' Roadless Forest Protection Rule - the regulatory ruling that protects 58.5 million acres of pristine national forest land across 39 states from road building and commercial logging. As we reported last week, Rule opponents may use the previously untested Small Business Regulatory Enforcement Fairness Act, or SBREFA, to do so - making it the most immediate threat to roadless protection. And all they need to overturn the rule is a majority vote in both the House and Senate.

At risk are our wild forests in Alaska, including the Tongass National Forest, the world's largest temperate rainforest - and home to bears, whales, bald eagles, sand hill cranes, trumpeter swans, and rare shorebirds. Across the country pristine forests - bird and wildlife habitat large and small - in Washington, New

Hampshire, Florida, California, Idaho, Tennessee, Wisconsin, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, and 29 other states have been provided protection through the Roadless Rule.

Nearly 2 million letters and postcards from the general public urging the Forest Service to set aside these lands made the Roadless Rule possible. It may take that many letters and postcards into Congress to keep them from overturning it. That's why we're counting on you to please contact your two Senators and your U.S. Representative and urge them to OPPOSE EFFORTS TO OVERTURN THE ROADLESS PROTECTION RULE! Please encourage your family and friends to do so as well! To immediately identify and send a fax to your lawmakers through the web, go to Audubon's TAKE ACTION site @ www.capitolconnect.com/audubon/

Education on the Fast Track

The Bush Administration has come out with its education package, and to no one's surprise, it's on the fast-track in Congress. Members of the U.S. Senate and U.S. House of Representatives look to have a final, omnibus

education bill ready for the President's signature by June. The Bush proposal focuses on accountability and responsibility in education.

What it doesn't include at this point are programs that connect children with nature - environmental education programs - programs that have been proven to increase learning and test scores.

Environmental Education helps students perform better in science; helps teachers and students to respect the people and places around them; encourages students to get involved in community service projects, and improves accountability by helping teachers and schools meet state and national school standards. According to a recent Roper Poll, 95% of American adults support teaching children about the environment in schools. Audubon is committed to teaching children and adults about the environment, and to give them the experiences and tools to make better, informed decisions about protecting it. We're actively working with Members of Congress to see that any final education bill includes provisions that connect the lessons of the class-room with nature.

We also will work to see that they include language in any final proposal that support environmental education both in the school, and through community nature centers, particularly Audubon Nature Centers. Stay tuned - much more information on this to follow!

Verifiable knowledge makes its way slowly, and only under cultivation, but fable has burrs and feet and claws and wings and an indestructible sheath like weed-seed, and can be carried almost anywhere and take root without benefit of soil or water.

Wallace Stegner, 1954

P.E.S.T.E.R.

The Mono County citizens' group, Preserving the Eastern Sierra Tradition of Environmental Responsibility, has proven many times that public awareness and involvement can make a big difference in decisions affecting the quality of life in our region. P.E.S.T.E.R. works to "preserve the spectacular natural beauty of the Eastern Sierra and keep HWY 395 a scenic corridor now and in the future," and has a vital strategy for achieving that mission: the Eastern Sierra Agenda Network (ESAN).

The purpose of the weekly ESAN e-mail alert, produced by P.E.S.T.E.R. and sent to over 350 people, is "sending you the news you can use in time to make a difference." By providing late breaking news and upcoming agenda items for governmental and agency meetings on local environmental issues, the ESAN encourages public involvement in the decision-making process. Some of the 61 issues P.E.S.T.E.R. is currently tracking include Sierra viewsheds, the 395 scenic corridor, dark night skies, mining, airport expansion, and impacts of development. To learn more about P.E.S.T.E.R. and the Eastern Sierra Agenda Network, please check out the website at www.pester.org or e-mail Elizabeth Tenney, et@pester.org.



Heart Lake and Rock Creek
(Photo by Larry Blakely)

----- cut out or copy, and save! -----

WILDLIFE RESCUE: *What to do; Who to Call*

If you approach a wild animal and it doesn't fly or run away, it needs help. It may be injured, sick, or emaciated—or too young to fly or walk.

Step 1: Secure the animal.

Small Birds: Drop a T-shirt, towel, or jacket over it, bundle it gently, and pick up the whole thing. Baby birds can usually be picked up easily. Once inside a confined space, bring your hand over the bird's back, make your fingers into a "cage," and gently lift the bird out. Go to Step 2.

Large Birds: Ravens, gulls, and hawks need careful handling. Wear gloves and follow the procedure above, using a heavier piece of material. Be careful of beaks and talons! [If you don't feel able to do this, confine the bird by placing a box, cooler, trash can over it and monitor it while calling for assistance.]

If you have bundled the bird, one option is to place the entire bundle in a box, making sure there's enough air. To transfer from bundle to box, wear glasses and keep your face away from the bird. Grip the bird's legs in your gloved hands (be gentle if there is a leg injury) and have another person hold the wings close to the bird's body. Some birds have powerful wings; you don't want to get hit with one.

Mammals: All mammals should be handled with gloves. Never use your bare hands! They could have a disease you could get. If it's an adult, place a box over it (weighted if necessary), and call for assistance or advice.

Step 2: Housing

Place in a box or paper bag—not much larger than the animal—with padding on the bottom, and close or cover. The "snug fit" helps the animal save energy, retain body heat, and prevents further injury. [For mammals, you may need something "chew-proof" such as a pet carrier or wire cage.]

Step 3: Initial Care

WARM; DARK; QUIET. The animal is in shock, so warmth is vital. Put box halfway on a heating pad (on low) or fill a small bottle with hot water and wrap in a towel. Don't give food or water until you consult a rehabilitator.

Step 4: Call An Expert

Eastern Sierra Wildlife Care—director is licensed rehabilitator Cindy Kamler—has trained volunteers who can give advice, receive an animal, or assist in the rescue. If you are unable to reach them, Animal Control officers or California Fish and Game personnel may help with rescue or pickup and transfer to ESWC. If you have the animal in your possession, you can ask your local veterinarian to hold the animal for pickup by ESWC.

Almost all wild animals are protected under state and federal law to varying degrees, so get the animal to a licensed rehabilitator or veterinarian as soon as possible. If there is a delay of more than 24 hours, notify your local Fish and Game office that you have the animal.

Eastern Sierra Wildlife Care: *Cindy Kamler* (Bishop) 872-1487; **Susie Goss** (Bishop) (drop-off during business hours) 872-4141; **Janet Titus** (Crowley Lake) 935-4712.

California Fish & Game: 872-1171 (B); 876-4125 (LP) **Animal Control:** 873-7852 (B); 878-0235 (I); 935-4734 (CL)

Veterinarians: Consult the yellow pages.

Prepared by Cindy Kamler, Feb. 2001

Birding

WOODPECKERS OF INYO COUNTY

By Tom and Jo Heindel

Most birders enjoy woodpeckers. In fact, many can relate a favorite birding experience that involves a woodpecker. In a conversation with Roger Tory Peterson, a decade before his death he recounted to us that the first species that really got him hooked on birds was the Yellow-shafted (now Northern) Flicker. He said that it was still one of his favorite birds.

Woodpeckers are usually easy to watch due to their habits. They are not small or obscurely colored birds. They are not hyperactive, in view for a second and gone the next. In addition, they are not secretive, perching in plain view often for many minutes allowing a leisurely observation.

An even dozen species have been reliably documented for Inyo County and three-fourths of these are resident birds and relatively easy to find. The LEWIS'S WOODPECKER is an erratic visitor in the county. It is primarily a spring and fall migrant although it has nested rarely. Some years they winter at Furnace Creek Ranch and this past winter 15 were regularly reported. In 1973, two hundred spent the winter there feeding on dates.

The ACORN WOODPECKER is a casual visitor, that is, it is not reported every year. Most records are from the oak belt in the Sierra foothills at or south of Oak Creek Canyon. However, there are a handful of records scattered over the county. The most reliable site, when they are in town, is at the Mt. Whitney Fish Hatchery.

WILLIAMSON'S SAPSUCKER, an uncommon resident, breeds high in the Sierra and



Hairy Woodpecker (photo by Dr. Lloyd Glenn Ingles, California Academy of Sciences)

has recently been documented as a breeder in the Inyo Mountains. There are also summer records for the White Mountains but there is no proof of breeding. In fall, many depart and move to lower elevations for the winter where the sap will continue to flow. They have been reported on the Death Valley Christmas Count a few times.

THE YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER is an eastern and northern species represented in Inyo County by two dozen records. One was a late January record from Furnace Creek Ranch; the rest were in October and November. Almost all sightings are of juveniles and great care must be taken to eliminate the more expected and very similar looking female Williamson's and Red-naped sapsuckers. Any report requires solid documentation to verify it as a record.

The RED-NAPED SAPSUCKER is most often recorded in small numbers almost any day during fall migration. In winter, it is an uncommon visitor in the towns and riparian lowlands. There are but a few breeding records at Whitney Portal and in the White-Mountains.

The RED-BREASTED SAPSUCKER is a fairly common summer breeding bird in the riparian canyons of the Sierra. During the rest of the year, it is uncommon in Owens Valley towns and along the Owens River. Interestingly the 1891 Death Valley Expedition did not record it even though they conducted many surveys of the east slope of the Sierra.

The LADDER-BACKED WOODPECKER is an uncommon species most often found in the south and east part of the county. Their preference for Joshua tree and desert riparian limits their distribution. They have nested north to Olancho and 27 miles east of Big Pine at Joshua Flat. Rarely is the species found along the Owens River. Great care must be taken to separate it from the very simi-

lar Nuttall's Woodpecker. Hybrids have been found exhibiting characters of both species. The most reliable location in the county to see this bird is China Ranch, southeast of Tecopa.

NUTTALL'S WOODPECKER is a fairly common breeder in riparian habitat of the Owens Valley and the lower canyons of the Sierra. It is also found in towns throughout the valley. It was not discovered here until 1933 even though experienced ornithologists had conducted fieldwork. After nesting, a few wander to higher elevations in the Sierra.



White-headed Woodpecker (photo by Dr. Lloyd Glenn Ingles, California Academy of Sciences)

The DOWNY WOODPECKER, smallest of all, is uncommonly found in the same locations and habitat as the Nuttall's. There are just a few reports to the east of the Owens Valley.

The HAIRY WOODPECKER is the larger look-alike to the diminutive Downy. This species is found fairly commonly countywide in coniferous forests of all mountain ranges. A few have been found nesting on the floor of the Owens Valley.

The WHITE-HEADED WOODPECKER is a very uncommon resident of the Sierra above 8000'. It is found in fir, lodgepole and Jeffrey pine forests and has nested at Whitney Portal. This is the best location to search for this elusive species.

The NORTHERN FLICKER is probably the most familiar woodpecker as it regularly inhabits towns and often comes to feeders. It feeds primarily on suet, sunflower seeds, and in summer especially, ants. Our race, the Red-shafted Flicker, breeds countywide in the riparian of the Owens Valley to high in the mountains. The eastern Yellow-shafted Flicker is found every fall usually from the Death Valley region. A few weeks ago, we banded an intergrade. That is, a cross between a Red-shafted and a Yellow-shafted Flicker. This is called an intergrade, as it is the offspring of two races while a hybrid is the offspring of two species.

For the most part woodpecker identification is straightforward and given good views, the observer will generally have few problems with this group. The danger zone is within the sapsucker group and separating Nuttall's from Ladder-backed and Downy from Hairy. A little homework and a little luck will bring you all the woodpeckers of Inyo County.

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L. Blakely

Cassin's Finches (part of a flock of about 100) feeding at a Wilkerson home with a Gray-crowned Rosy Finch plus a couple of other species, Feb. 13.

Programs, Field Trips, Furnace Creek Report, Announcements, Bird-A-Thon, Birding Trail, Mountain Beaver, Wildlife Rescue, Inyo Woodpeckers, and even more!