

# THE SIERRA WAVE

## EASTERN SIERRA AUDUBON SOCIETY

ESAS Website: [www.csupomona.edu/~larryblakely/ESAS/](http://www.csupomona.edu/~larryblakely/ESAS/) ES Bird Sightings: [www.wmrs.edu/birds/](http://www.wmrs.edu/birds/)

### MEETINGS

Second Wednesday of the month, September through June, 7:00 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!**

### September 12

Refreshments: TBA - sign up now!

Main Program: **Kevin Emmerich and Laura Cunningham**, husband and wife team of naturalists (Kevin is a DVNP ranger,

Laura volunteers her talents), have made an intensive study of the elusive **Panamint Alligator Lizard**. Come hear the fascinating story and see the special slides. For a preview visit their illustrated website:



Part of a magnificent oil painting of the Panamint Alligator Lizard and Scarlet milkvetch in the White Mtns., by Laura Cunningham - see the whole thing on the website.

<[cluster4.biosci.utexas.edu/deathvalley/](http://cluster4.biosci.utexas.edu/deathvalley/)>.

### October 10

Refreshments: TBA - sign up now!

Main Program: Historian **Jackson Newell**, President of Deep Springs College, will present an illustrated lecture on **Antarctica**.

Earlier this year he and his wife followed the historic sea route of Antarctic explorers from Buenos Aires due south to the Falklands, Deception Island, and the tip of the Antarctic Peninsula. They followed the Peninsula and Archipelago SW to the tiny station grandly known as Port Lockroy and the famous LeMaier Channel, going ashore in Zodiac rafts each day. They returned via Cape Horn and the Beagle Channel to Ushuaia and then spent several days on Tierra del Fuego. Jack's narrative will trace the history of Antarctic exploration and highlight the natural history of sea and bird life around the southern continent. He served on the faculty of the University of Utah for over two decades before coming back to Deep Springs in 1995.

He was formerly a student and faculty member at the college, and, in 1967, was the first seasonal naturalist to spend the summer at Schulman Grove.



Emperor Penguins

Source: [www.ims.usm.edu/antarc/antgalin.htm](http://www.ims.usm.edu/antarc/antgalin.htm); photo by Vernon Asper, Univ. Southern Mississippi.

## Chapter Notes

### NEW MEMBERS

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

**Penny & Paul Burdeno - Crowley Lake**

**Bartshe Miller - Lee Vining**

**Luceille Knighton - Bishop**

**Donald Krause - Bishop**

**Carol Broberg - Swall Meadows**

**Louise Gaul - Bishop**

**Ted & Lisa Schade - Bishop**

**Gerri Epps - Big Pine**

**Abby Sada - Bishop**

**Ursula Black - Bishop**

**Louie Bonetto - Boulder City, NV**

**Nancy Hadlock - Bishop**

**Lisa Cutting - Bridgeport**

**Lou Clark - Bishop**

**Danny Nolan - Chalfant Valley**

**Grace Cook - Mammoth Lakes**

**Charles & Ila Grobe - Los Angeles**

**Natasha Hrenoff - Big Pine**

**Norma Kervin - Bishop**

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Hello,

Eastern Sierra Audubon Society starts off its 20th year! This is both exciting and a bit daunting. ESAS has grown to be a presence in the community. From those "what do I do with the baby bird in my yard" phone calls that Audubon members field, to decisions about planning in the Eastern Sierra that will affect the communities both human and wild for generations to come, we have an influence. ESAS can make a difference when we participate in the public process or when we teach natural history awareness in the schools. I know from conversations with many of you that you deeply care for this place and the creatures that inhabit it. But we truly need everyone's help to make a difference. If you have a concern, an idea, or want to help, talk to me or another board member at a meeting, or give us a call. Remember the bumper sticker, "if the people will lead, the leaders will follow."

*James Wilson*

## BINOCULARS IN THE CLASSROOMS

*by Rosie Beach*

3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Teacher, Pine Street School

Recall, as a child, the first bird you saw that caught your attention and curiosity. Was it the yellow eye of a male Brewer's Blackbird? Or the red breast of an American Robin? Or was it a gull stealing a sandwich crust off the lunch tables at school? Or a magnificent flock of seven hundred American White Pelicans flying over the playground?

The ESAS is helping local children develop their curiosities and experience the birds around them. As part of its Education Program, several years ago ESAS wisely invested its money in purchasing twenty pair of compact Nikon binoculars for use in local classrooms. The perfect size for small hands, children at Pine Street School, the Seventh Day Adventist School in Bishop, Mammoth Elementary, and Lee Vining Schools have used these binoculars.

For the past five years, the children in my third-grade class have enjoyed these binoculars immensely. Our study of birds and the water cycle starts out in the fall at the Bishop wastewater treatment plant and sewer ponds. Debby Parker, Chris Howard, Larry Nahm, Derrick Vocelka, and Noah Hamm generously donate their time to serve as birding guides for the children. These great volunteers frequently donate the use of their spotting scopes as well. In October the class goes to Mono Lake to see the migrating Eared Grebes. The students marvel at the spectacle of one million birds in one place. Frequent morning trips to the field behind our school afford great views of local nesters and migrants as well. During spring migration the class visits Baker Meadow near Big Pine, Finkbeiner Forest, Nik and Nik Ponds and the Owens River.

By the end of the year children are distinguishing between seed-eaters and insect-eaters by the shape and size of their bills. They have learned world geography by studying migration patterns. They know about breeding plumages, differences between males and females, and the habitats the birds occupy. They even know how to look up birds in *National Geographic's Birds of North America* and *The Sibley Guide to Birds*.

But the real rewards are watching Nicole Lanshaw run to the bird calendar hanging on the classroom wall to announce to the class "The Bird of the Day." Sorrel Nielson decides to research Peregrine Falcons and writes a thirty-eight page science fiction short story based on the life of a fictitious Falcon. Slowly the bulletin boards fill up with drawings of birds and articles found on the Internet by Sara Davison. Kenneth Chandler announces that when he grows up he will become a scientist and study Ruby-throated Hummingbirds. The back shelf becomes a natural history museum filled with bird nests found blown out of trees or victims of pruned branches. At nutrition

break the talk at the snack tables is about "stupid Starlings" versus male and female Brewers Blackbirds. "LOOK! The male has a yellow eye," one excited voice exclaims. Math is interrupted when a child from another class brings in a bird that just crashed into his classroom window. Two hundred children leave their classrooms to run outside and watch wave after wave of migrating American White Pelicans undulate overhead, binoculars passing from eager hands to eager hands, smiles gracing all faces. Thank you, ESAS, for this marvelous gift of wonder and excitement worth more than any money can buy.

## CNPS MEETING

The CNPS September meeting will be in the Mammoth Lakes area at the Green Church. Michael Honer, a graduate student at Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden, will give a slide-illustrated talk based on his research on the Flora of the Glass Mountains. Michael has spent two field seasons collecting in the range, and was one of the Bristlecone Chapter's first two recipients of a Mary Dedecker Botanical Grant. The meeting will be on Wednesday, September 26, and will begin at 7pm. The Green Church is on HWY. 395 at Benton Crossing Road.

*Steve Ingram*

## 2001 BIRD-A-THON RESULTS

Our Bird-A-Thon day was Sunday, May 14th. The three of us (Judy Wickman, Bob Hudson and I) were to begin at 5:30 AM, however my birding began at 3:15AM from bed when the Western Kingbirds and a Northern Mockingbird decided that it was close enough to sunrise to begin an awful racket! They were in the tall cottonwood outside our window and I counted them (from bed). At 5:20 AM I added Bullock's Oriole, California Quail and Say's Phoebe from somewhere out in the darkness. We allow ourselves to identify birds and count them by their call or song too. Often in heavy cover or forest this helps you avoid missing up to half the species around you. When 5:30AM did arrive we began to search the alluvial fans above Lone Pine and quickly picked up Horned Lark, Sage and Black-throated Sparrow and even had a Northern Harrier cruise by. There is always something surprising each time you go outside. That's why we go there. The sun rose at 6:05 AM and the day looked like it might bring thunderstorms and rain later. At Diaz Lake we found Caspian Terns, Belted Kingfisher, Swainson's Hawk and a Tricolored Black-

## Newsletter Information

### Editor:

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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.

bird. The Tricolored was up in a cottonwood singing and spreading its feathers. It has a sound that is similar to the Yellow-headed Blackbird to me. The epaulets were blood red and white (instead of yellow). We then moved to Edwards Field behind the Carl's Junior near the town park. A Yellow-breasted Chat and Blue Grosbeak were among the species we found there among the rich riparian habitat. By lunchtime it was on to Whitney Portal where we always hope to pick up many of the mountain birds. Aspire, don't hope. At the Portal we had one Dipper and dozens of Steller's Jays. For more than an hour we looked and listened, but found no more. This shortfall was a disappointment, and it was now beginning to rain. Birds stick tighter when it rains. For the rest of the day we would need luck and have to step on the birds to get them up. We dropped out of the mountains and down to Cottonwood Marsh for some wind and rain. Turkey Vultures were huddled on a nearby sand bank making no attempt to find thermals and fly. They looked dreary. Avocets, California Gulls and Greater Yellow legs helped us here. Now as we were becoming colder and running out of steam at around 5:30PM, we visited Cartago marsh and ponds. Cartago gave us Virginia Rail, Black-necked Stilt, Common Yellowthroat and White-faced Ibis. And our day ended early, sorry. We usually make it until 7:00PM or later, but packed it in when wind and rain brought the darkness too soon. Our total for the day was 102 species, which pleased us. One hundred species is a goal each year. Thank you very much to all of you who pledged support for this year's Eastern Sierra Audubon Bird-A-Thon. Our total amount of pledges raised was \$837.00. Next year we'll try and do even better.

*Mike Prather, Judy Wickman,  
Bob Hudson*

## Field Trips

### REPORTS



Robert Paschall

### Eastern Brook Lakes

It was a great day for hiking, so the group of eleven did just that on Sat. July 21st. Going along were: Claus & Connie Engelhardt, Greg & Pam Gibbons, Norma Kervin, Larry Nahm, Robert Paschall, June & Gordon Nelson, and J. B. & Dorothy Burnstrom.

The cool breezes at the 10,000 foot level of Rock Creek Canyon kept most of those pesky bugs away. Our destination, the Eastern Brook Lakes, was shared by only a few others - a welcome respite from the crowds this time of year.

We even saw an interesting array of mountain birds, including: White-breasted Nuthatch, Hermit Thrush, Clark's Nutcracker, Mountain Chickadee, Calliope Hummingbird, Dark-eyed Junco, American Robin, California Gull, and Brewer's Blackbird.

A picnic along the lakeshore refreshed us for the return trip. We also had a group photo taken just to verify it wasn't all a dream, thanks to Robert Paschall.

*John Burnstrom*

Report your sightings at: [www.wmrs.edu/birds/](http://www.wmrs.edu/birds/)



Calvin & Hobbes can be found alive and well on the internet at: <http://www.ucomics.com/calvinandhobbes/>

Bill Watterson



## Field Trips, cont'd:

### ***Baker Meadow with Earl Gann, May 5, 2001***

Earl Gann continued the annual tradition of leading an early May bird walk to one of the best locations in the Owens Valley to witness spring migration in all its splendor. Many people in the group were afforded excellent views of neotropical migrants such as Townsend's Warbler, Wilson's Warbler, and Blue-gray Gnatcatcher. After exploring Baker Meadow, the group ventured down to Klondike Lake to find three Caspian Terns, an equal number of Spotted Sandpipers, and a couple of American White Pelicans. Many thanks to Earl for leading us to these wonderful birds.

*Chris Howard*

## CALENDAR

**Saturday, September 22nd** - Owens Lake Bird Tour - Fall is a great time for shorebirding Owens Lake. We'll visit Cottonwood and Cartago Marshes and look at the Lower Owens River Project (LORP) if time permits. Meet at 9AM at the Diaz Lake parking lot 3 miles south of Lone Pine. Bring a lunch, water, binocs, scopes, and shoes that can get wet. Call Mike at 876-5807 for more info.

**Saturday, October 13th** - Field Trip Sign-up Potluck - 5PM at Chris and Rosie's (1763 Zuni Circle, Bishop). Everyone interested in leading a field trip is invited to bring a dish and your calendar. You can help make the

ESAS Field Trip Program a success! New-comers welcome. Please RSVP to Chris at 873-7422 or [choward@telis.org](mailto:choward@telis.org).

**Saturday, October 20th** - Mono Lake Canoe Tour - The Mono Lake Committee will lead us on a canoe tour of the south shore of Mono Lake. Expect hundreds of thousands of Eared Grebes amongst the tufa towers. Limited to 12 people. RSVP to Chris at 873-7422 or [choward@telis.org](mailto:choward@telis.org). \$5 donation per person appreciated.

**Saturday, November 3rd** - Highway Clean-up. Meet at Toms Place at 8am for breakfast; clean-up starts at 9am. Call Ros or John at 938-2023 for more info.

## Conservation

### **SEN. BOXER ASKED TO HELP PRESERVE GLASS CREEK MEADOW**

#### ***A Letter from Debby Parker***

March 7, 2001

Dear Senator Barbara Boxer:

I'm writing to share with you why the San Joaquin Roadless Area needs protection from any kind of development, such as the current threat of roads, downhill skiing expansion and off-road vehicle users. Glass Creek Meadow lies within the San Joaquin Roadless area and the Citizen's proposed Owens River Headwaters Wilderness and if I showed you this area, this is what we'd see:

Imagine leaving our car behind and beginning a gradual climb up a winding volcanic-rock trail toward the Sierra crest. Immediately we skirt around a deep volcanic crater, with pink-colored rhyolitic rock, jumbled around the crater's edges and sides. Large Jeffrey Pines creating an open and contrastingly dark-green forest, shade us from the sun as we walk. As we gain in elevation, we reach the top of the first hill. Purple-blooming wildflowers envelope us with their sweet scent and like the rabbitbrush growing near it, they sprawl over the gray pumice at our feet. These ground-hugging plants display the growth habit that helps conserve water in this arid environ-

ment. We finally get to Glass Creek itself, and hear rushing water, which carries a breeze of crisp air along with it, which we can feel on our cheeks. We are invigorated and glad we came.

Following this creek up farther, we begin to see the snow topped peaks of the sprawling Sierra Nevada on the horizon ahead. Reaching yet another low summit we see the wide

point, it's hard to believe that one drainage over is the town of June Lake. Glass Creek Meadow sits in the center and looks like a gem.

If it's summer the meadow will be filled with an assortment of alpine grasses and wildflowers. Springs bubble up throughout the meadow, flowing into Glass Creek and if one looks



Glass Creek Meadow

Photo courtesy of Stephen Ingram.  
< <http://www.ingramphoto.com/> >

flat expanse of a high mountain meadow, contrastingly green, compared to the high, rounded, white pumice hill on the south edge of this meadow. This hill is called White Wing because of its unique shape, like the wing of a bird. The north edge of the meadow is another hill, which is covered with pine trees. At this

point, it's hard to believe that one drainage over is the town of June Lake. Glass Creek Meadow sits in the center and looks like a gem. If it's summer the meadow will be filled with an assortment of alpine grasses and wildflowers. Springs bubble up throughout the meadow, flowing into Glass Creek and if one looks closely tiny Yosemite Toads crawl and California Pacific Tree Frogs hop among the vegetation, looking for their favorite insect foods. The meadow is like a nursery for these two species, with hundreds hatching here each spring. The far end of the meadow is where, years back, I saw my first and only Pine Marten. At this end of the meadow the pines begin again but they hold a secret within their shadows. Deep within this pine forest is a grove of

huge, 8-foot diameter, red firs. The first time I saw these, I was in disbelief at their size and wondered how had they escaped the chain saws? Guess it's the lack of roads and the remoteness of this place. Also, fallen red firs, lie on the forest floor, just as they first fell, possibly hundreds of years ago, slowly decomposing in our dry mountain air, taking their own sweet time to rot and crumble down to almost a powdery nothing. Once again, if this area had been logged and roads built,

these patterns of fallen “ghost” trees would be gone, the story lost.

Being birdwatchers, we scan for what flies in this meadow and forest and we glimpse and hear a goshawk. High in the conifers, Hermit Warblers feed on insects. Low, where the forest interfaces with the wet meadow, Hammond’s Flycatchers, Orange-crowned Warblers and Lincoln’s Sparrows sing near their nests. Some nests are high in trees and others are low to the ground in shrubby willows near Glass Creek itself.

Continuing to wind our way toward San Joaquin Ridge, we see a huge waterfall tumbling down, the beginning of Deadman Creek we figure. We lose track of any clear route and begin to follow wildlife trails, and find the scat of black bear, filled with rosehips, they must live here too, we decide. Finally we reach a place that is scattered with flakes of obsidian and a place to sit. Looking to the east, Bald Mountain is clearly seen and looking to the south, there’s a clear view of Mammoth Mountain and Mt. Morrison. We find ourselves wondering, if the early Native People who lived here before us had sat in this same place, hearing the waterfall and enjoying the scene before us in all its grandeur like we are today. We decide it was probably so.

So, that is my idea of how the day would go if I showed someone this area. With this letter you see that I am speaking out in favor of protection of this area, but it’s not the first time. When the Inyo National Forest was rewriting its management plan 15 years ago, I asked that any ski area expansion not occur in this area. I’ve met personally with Inyo National Forest personnel on at least two occasions, hiking into Glass Creek meadow with them, discussing erosion problems from overuse by sheep and off-road vehicle use by dirt bikes. Last summer, I talked with Inyo N.F. Rangers, in the meadow, showing them where dirt bikes had gone through the meadow and spring areas, creating deep ruts. I feel that until this area is finally protected it might fall victim to logging, erosion of the creek banks and ski area development. Erosion can put fine sediments in the creek and springs, which causes problems for tadpoles and fish that use the shallow waters. Wilderness designation will help to protect Glass Creek Meadow and its enveloping lands. Wilderness designation will offer protection for what many locals feel, is a place they can easily hike to and enjoy their favorite recreational past-time in, such as hiking, remote camping, photography, studying botany, studying our volcanic history, bird watching, seeing and hearing Yosemite Toads and fishing.

## ROUND VALLEY DEVELOPMENT

*By Karen Ferrell-Ingram*

For most travelers and residents of the Eastern Sierra, the green, pastoral oasis of Round Valley at the bottom of Sherwin Grade is a beloved landmark. For the Round Valley mule deer herd, it is a historic winter home. For a developer from Costa Mesa, Round Valley could be a gold mine.

Pacifica Development, Inc. is proposing to build 355 dwelling units on 280 acres in Round Valley. The development would encompass the old mining village of Rovana and many acres of wet meadows, riparian areas, irrigated pastures and Bitterbrush and Blackbrush scrub. This subdivision, which would be about 12 miles from Bishop, defies the logic of good planning and the recommendations of the Inyo County General Plan, which encourages development to be contiguous to established infrastructure and communities and to avoid destroying environmentally sensitive areas.

Besides being the largest development ever proposed for Inyo County, Pacifica’s scheme could strike a fatal blow to the Round Valley deer herd. This herd, which has been hit hard by recent droughts, habitat encroachments, and highway mortality, migrates every year from their winter range in Round Valley, through Mono County over to the west side of the Sierra and back again. The California Department of Fish and Game (DFG) considers the development site critical habitat, but several attempts by DFG to purchase the property for wildlife habitat were met with rejection. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) also made an unsuccessful attempt to pursue a land trade with the developer. Biologists from both DFG and BLM consider the mitigation plan and so-called “Wildlife Corridor” proposed by the developer to be inadequate. The “Corridor” is dissected by three roads and considered too narrow and too closely bordered by dense housing to be effective.

Intensifying the impact to the deer is the fact that about 10,000 acres of remaining winter range have burned in recent years.

There are many questions and far-reaching impacts related to this proposed development. Some of them are:

- impacts of placing close to one thousand people 12 miles from services such as police and fire protection, and emergency medical care,

- impacts to water resources and vegetation from water usage of a large development,

- impacts to Native American cultural sites,

- impacts on people, pets, and wildlife from predators such as Mountain lions that follow the deer herd,

- impacts to federally endangered Sierra Bighorn Sheep which winter two miles from the proposed development,

- impacts and legality of destroying wetlands and changing stream courses,

- impacts to migrating and nesting birds due to loss of riparian habitat.



Mule Deer

Photo by Dr. Lloyd Glenn Ingles, California Academy of Sciences

Part of the proposal includes a land trade which would give the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power 50 acres on or near Pine Creek. Details of this deal remain unknown.

Most people agree that Inyo County and surrounding areas need more housing opportunities, but should growth take place at the expense of our local deer herd, public safety and good planning? Perhaps there are better places than Rovana for this large development? Public officials and the developers need to hear the questions and comments of everyone who cares about the Eastern Sierra.

For more information about this project, call Inyo County Planning at (760) 878-0263 or 872-2706. The recently released Initial Study listed 52 “Potentially Significant Impacts” associated with this development. The Public Scoping Period ended on August 24 and the Planning Department plans to release the Draft Environmental Impact Report in the near future.

## IT'S A WILD LIFE

By Joy Fatooh  
BLM Biologist

### *Boring and Conventional*

My father-in-law, a man of few words, said to me out of the blue one day: "I guess with a job like yours you have to do something else for excitement."

That surprised me. I realized I'd assumed most people would think the life of a wildlife biologist was sort of exciting. I mulled this over and then asked him, "What was the most exciting work you ever had?"

"In the oil fields in Venezuela, I guess."

"That was exciting?"

"Sometimes."

"Like when?"

"Well, like when the Indians were shooting at me."

One question at a time I learned that my father-in-law had spent an entire night clinging high on an oil derrick and defending himself by throwing down wrenches from his tool belt while justifiably hostile Indians shot poison arrows at him. Okay, so my job is not so exciting.

The day before yesterday I described someone to a friend as "unconventional" and my friend said, "But is anyone really 'conventional'?" He began a story about a plumber he knows: "Most people would think that's a pretty conventional job. Like yours."

"My job? Conventional?"

"Well, you know, you have a *government* job. Not exactly radical."

Huh. So my job is not only dull but conventional. I gave that some thought while I worked yesterday. It was as typical a work day as any. I'd spent last week assessing vegetation on songbird transects along Owens Valley creeks in 100+ degree heat, in no immediate danger except from heat stroke which I averted by dunking myself in the chilly streams. The first part of this week I was drafting a brief for a case involving water rights, wielding words like "appellant" and "appurtenant" and "appropriate" – strenuous brain exercise but I wasn't risking anything other than, since I keep a hard desk chair to remind me to get out in

the field, a sore butt. Finally on Wednesday afternoon I loaded the truck, drove a hundred miles to the base of Bodie Mountain, hiked to the 10,000-foot peak, clambered up the jumbled cap of volcanic stone and deployed an antenna in search of signals from radio-collared sage grouse. The rock on which I stood has a can underneath it that holds a peak register. I never write in it – what would I say? "Ha ha, I climb this peak every two weeks and the government pays me"? A pronghorn antelope sprang ahead of me as I descended, a crescent moon brightened in the west as I made camp, a bear called gruffly as I settled into my truck-back bed, and mixed flocks of foraging songbirds chattered among the wild currants as yesterday dawned and I began my typical day.

From Bodie Peak I'd picked up the 060 signal from one of our hens in a direction toward my campsite, so I walked up a nearby hill. Nothing from there but I enjoyed descending through needle-and-thread grass with its long swaying stems. I tried a higher hill, picked up 060 and with compass and GPS unit, soon had two bearings that would cross on a computer map back at the office and reveal her location. I could tell where she was: in the golden grassy convergence of arroyos where the outflows of two springs would meet, were it not late summer in a dry year.

Next I looked for 050, a male whose signal had seemed to come from the direction of Meadow Canyon. I drove along a bumpy dirt road that traverses a 9000-foot contour and stopped at the foot of a rocky ridge that ascends Potato Peak. I sneezed as I climbed – I'm allergic to sagebrush when it blooms – and admired the bright red-and-yellow tips of Indian paintbrush and pungent blue pennyroyal. At the first high point I unfurled my antenna, tried all frequencies and got nothing. Nothing but the view out over Rough Creek with all its wild steep tributaries, green aspens clinging to rugged red walls, across to the serene sagebrush flats of Dry Lakes Plateau and the symmetrical cinder cone of Beauty Peak. Hundreds of square miles with no visible trace of human stuff. No wonder it's proposed for official wilderness status. Can't say if I'm in favor – that would be radical.

I skirted an aspen grove as I climbed toward the next high point and paused in a stand of wild currants to fill my hand with red and golden berries, roll them around to rub off

the dried flower remnants, and savor a subtle cool sweetness. I took three more steps and eight sage grouse burst from the brush in a flurry of noisy wings. Two young-of-the-year stayed and exchanged gazes with me for a long moment; then in unison they slowly sank downward, as smoothly as if by some hydraulic linkage. I looked up and saw a northern harrier rocket straight down to where their kin had gone, mount into a thermal, circle high and angle toward another hill. The two grouse rose up and resumed regarding me, cocking their heads to take me in from various angles and finally flying off. Ten more steps and I was startled by an awkward thrashing beside me: a mule deer's spotted fawn giving up its hiding place to bound away.

From a dizzyingly high boulder I picked up a signal: not 050 but 070, a wandering female who nested near Mount Biedeman and whom I last found in Aurora Canyon. Well, what do you know – she does get around. I triangulated on her and then headed back to the office. I had a grant proposal that had to be in Washington by Monday.

On the long drive down I had time to reflect upon my typical day. I'd seen more people than usual because it was bow-hunting season – three carloads, in fact – but nobody shot at me and their arrows probably weren't poisoned anyway. I didn't do anything radical. If I were a government employee in a mystery novel I would have at least found a dead body but all I found were the mangled feathers of one sage grouse, probable raptor kill, case closed.

And yet I do love adventure, and I went for this government job because I knew I would love it as long as my aging legs will carry me up mountains, over rocks and streams. Is that unusual? Why does the sunlight flashing off the underside of a hawk's wings or glinting in a grouse's eyes stir my adrenaline? What's so exciting about being within arm's length of a fawn? If balancing atop a tall boulder while swinging an antenna in a circle raises my heart rate a notch or two, what if it isn't Half Dome or El Capitan? Is working on the side of wildlife just a little bit radical in a society half-paved-over, its god the dollar and its cathedral the mall, ruled by profit and technology and consumption and demand? Is it odd to be thrilled by walking with pronghorn and sleeping with bears, and to catch in wild currants a little taste of bliss?



# Birding

## INYO BIRDS IN ALASKA

by Tom & Jo Heindel

One of the great things about birding is that wherever you travel there is an excellent chance that you will run into old friends...and some of them may have feathers! You probably expect to see new birds as that may well be one of the reasons you travel.

But seeing birds you know from back home in different surroundings



A northern birder (neither Tom nor Jo) gets a good look at an Ivory Gull. Photo by Stuart Tingley <<http://personal.nbnet.nb.ca/tingley/Ivoryindex.html>>

ings or behaving differently is almost like seeing a "new" bird.

Many of the birds we are seeing in Alaska are friends from back home. Some look and behave just as they do in the Eastern Sierra. The Spotted Sandpipers we saw in Nome in early June looked and behaved just like those back home. They have large bold spots on their underparts and run along the stream edge teetering, and then fly away with bowed wings quivering below the horizontal plane. If there hadn't been so much snow around we may have thought we were back home! When we enjoyed Spotted Sandpipers in the Bolivian Andes in the late 1970s they looked and behaved just like our Inyo birds in late fall, that is, without spots.

But many of the birds while the same species as in the Eastern Sierra look and behave quite differently on their breeding grounds in Alaska. The Lesser Yellowlegs, which is casual to rare in spring and uncommon in fall in Inyo County, is a common breeder in much of Alaska. In Inyo we don't get to see them stand in the top of a conifer (mostly spruce in Alaska) and sing. Neither do we get to see them hover, facing into the wind, while pouring forth with "Toodle-doo, toodle-doo, toodle-doo". The Semipalmated Sandpiper, casual in spring and uncommon in fall in Inyo, reminds one, in Alaska, of a hummingbird as it hovers into

the wind with buzzing wings and pours forth a churring melody. Almost all of Inyo's records for Horned Grebe involve fall or winter birds in drab basic plumage. In Alaska they are all in their finest go-to-meeting apparel. The same is true of the Pacific and Red-throated Loons common breeders in Alaska but very uncommon migrants in the Eastern Sierra.

It is fun seeing many of the sparrows that winter back home all dressed up and breeding in Alaska. Golden-crowns are gorgeous with their black and gold hats, American Tree Sparrows singing from every available perch, and Lincoln's still skulking but occasionally found singing from a high perch. One of the most common sparrows here is the Gambel's White-crowned Sparrow, the same race that winters in the Eastern Sierra. We have strained our eyes but haven't found any with bands!

So seeing old friends in different places, doing different things, and dressed fit-to-kill is just as much fun as seeing your first King, Steller's and Spectacled Eiders, Ivory Gull, and Bristle-thighed Curlew. Well, almost!

Tom & Jo left for Alaska in May and are still up there. Thanks Tom & Jo for taking time out in your adventures to keep your series on Inyo birds going without a break since January 1993!

## THE OTHER BIRD DISCOVERED BY LEWIS & CLARK

Two wonderful western birds are named for the intrepid explorers Lewis & Clark: Lewis' Woodpecker and Clark's Nutcracker. They were first described and named for science by Alexander Wilson, who was given the Corps of Discovery's collection of bird specimens for proper scientific study. Wilson found in the collection another bird new to science, which he also first described and named. He called it the Louisiana Tanager, "Louisiana" then covering all of the Louisiana Purchase. We know it now as the Western Tanager. Wilson painted a plate with all three new birds for vol. III of his *American Ornithology*, which came out in 1811.

Lewis, who became a close friend of Wilson, did most of the collecting on the famous expedition. He prepared the specimens of these 3 bird species while waiting, in what is now Idaho, for the snow to melt before attempting to cross the Rockies on



Alexander Wilson's painting of a Western Tanager, based on specimens collected and prepared by Capt. Lewis.

the way back home. His journal entry for June 6, 1806, devoted to a field description of the new tanager, begins "we meet with a beautiful little bird in this neighbourhood about the size and somewhat the shape of the large sparrow." Beautiful indeed.

Wrote Wilson, in the 1811 volume:

"This bird, and the two others that occupy the same plate [Clark's "Crow" and Lewis's Woodpecker], were discovered in the remote regions of Louisiana, by an exploring party under the command of Captain George Merriwether Lewis, and Lieutenant, now General, William Clark, in their memorable expedition across the continent to the Pacific Ocean. They are entitled to a distinguished place in the pages of American Ornithology, both as being, till now, altogether unknown to naturalists, and as natives of what is or at least will be, and that at no distant period, part of the western territory of the United States."

Larry Blakely

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A California Tortoiseshell, one of hundreds found one August day near Jenny Lake in Grand Teton NP, by another displaced Californian.

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