

SIERRA WAVE

EASTERN SIERRA AUDUBON SOCIETY

ESAS Website: EasternSierraAudubon.org ES Bird Sightings: 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 11

Refreshments: **Sally Gaines**

Main Program: "Talkative Tree Rings of the Sierra Nevada", will be the title of **Tony Caprio's** slide presentation. Tony is a Fire Ecologist with Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks and does fire research there. Earlier in his career he was a Research Associate with the Laboratory of Tree-Ring Research at the University of Arizona and has worked in other National Parks including Yellowstone. He will share with us his work in the Sierra Nevada in fire history and climate information that tree rings have to tell.



www.kovr13.com
Measuring tree rings

October 9

Refreshments: **June Nelson**

Main Program: Our speaker will be **Judd Klement**, Regional Grassroots Coordinator, National Audubon's Policy Office. Judd covers California, Alaska and Hawaii (Region 7). He is based out of the Audubon's San Francisco Bay Restoration Office in San Francisco, California. Judd brings a strong science and marine biology background, as well as political trade association experience to the Audubon Grassroots Department. Judd spent a significant amount of time working with endangered species aboard hopper dredges on the east coast and Gulf of Mexico and also conducted research and conservation efforts with Leatherback and Hawksbill sea turtles in the Caribbean and Central America. Come see and learn about Judd's work with **Sea Turtles and how he came to Audubon's Policy Office**. He then will discuss what Audubon's Policy office is doing and how YOU can get involved... because remember... Birds Can't Vote But You Can!

Chapter Notes

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Fall is on its way. The northbound birds of a few months ago are now heading south. On a short birding walk at Mono Lake we recently saw phalaropes and eared grebes in abundance, and the first red color in my neighbor's Liquidambar tree appeared this morning. The days are cooler and shorter, and to fit gardening chores into the evening hours has become more difficult. And Eastern Sierra Audubon Society again begins its fall meeting schedule.

As I filled out our chapter's Annual Report a few weeks ago, I was amazed by what our chapter does. We have monthly programs September through June. At Christmas we have our annual potluck, in June our picnic. Last year we had 16 field trips, participated in International Migratory Bird Day, and were involved in Christmas Bird Counts. Our newsletter appeared 6 times, and we have a website.

We have an ongoing stewardship partnership program with BLM at Fish Slough. Our chapter had a successful year of bird education in conjunction with the Bishop Elementary School. School children in the third grade received individual slide shows introducing them to the wonders of birds in their classrooms. Then they all went on fieldtrips at the city park where many birds were observed. As a chapter our board has also been involved in local and national land use issues.

All of this participation was the result of a very involved membership. None of our programs could happen without the many hours of volunteer service our board and membership contribute. This column is to both thank them and request that those of you, who might want to help, come forward and contact a board member. Many hands make the work easier. Our board meets each month before the general meeting. Any and all are welcome.

Eastern Sierra Audubon Society is a means for those who love wild nature to meet and get to know each other, to help educate our members and the greater community about nature, and to advocate for creatures that cannot do that for themselves. Sometimes in the frenzy and hubbub of modern life we forget that we too are animals, and there is much to learn from other creatures if you take the time to get to know them. An hour spent with a chickadee or a yellowlegs will teach you more than any television nature program. And our home is a place that is remarkable for its diversity of landforms, plants, and wildlife. For this gift we should all be grateful; to maintain this gift we need be ever vigilant.

We welcome the help of all of you.

James Wilson

NEW MEMBERS

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

Carrie Tracy – Bishop

John Montin – Bishop

Norma Booth – Independence

Joanne Schneider – Bishop

Judith Villoria – Bishop

Lizanne Wheeler – Lone Pine

Mary Franke – Bishop

Alan Horwitz – Agoura Hills

Janelle Kent – Big Pine

Brock Thoman – Crowley Lake

Gary Walecke – Lee Vining

B. Wylie - Bishop

OWENS LAKE UPDATE

The 2002 field season at Owens Lake was given quite a boost by the addition of 12 square miles of habitat as a result of shallow flooding for dust control by Los Angeles. What a difference! The number of nests of Snowy Plover found at the lake this spring was 127. This is an all time high. In addition American Avocets had more than 250 nests which was also a record. During spring migration “peeps” (small sandpipers like Western and Least) had ONE day highs of 18,000 and American Avocets 7,000. Most of these nests and birds are in the Zone 2 shallow flood. Many are easily seen from the Sulfate Road that runs out onto the lake.

Join the chapter field trip September 14th to Owens Lake and see for yourself.

Seen from the Sulfate Road August 25th were 1500-2000 Wilson's and Red-necked Phalaropes, more than 1,000 American Avocets, dozens of Black-necked Stilts and hundreds of “peeps”. Derrick Vocelka described this resurrection as, “An instant lake – just add water and stir”. Water grows algae which feeds brine flies and thus attracts birds. In fact 3.5 square miles more will be flooded this winter.

Let's work to keep that water out there and not allow it to be converted to grass or gravel over time. Remember that the public trust wildlife values have never been balanced historically with Los Angeles' need for water export and dust control at Owens Lake. Right now is an excellent opportunity to dedicate the water for the dual purposes of dust mitigation and wildlife and make it in perpetuity. Even this is a small portion of what was lost when the lake dried in the 1920's.

Mike Prather

2002 BIRD-A-THON RESULTS

This year's Eastern Sierra Audubon Bird-A-Thon gathered \$944.46! Thank you to everyone who pledged. Next year we'll go over \$1,000 so be ready to help again. Those of you who haven't pledged before look for our 2003 announcement in the WAVE and help out your chapter. Our fundraiser took place as part of International Migratory Bird Day (IMBD). As you will read elsewhere, the counters had 199 species in Inyo County on that day. Let's break 200 next year!

Mike Prather

ONCE AGAIN! LORP DRAFT EIR DELAYED

LADWP and Inyo County agreed in a court ordered stipulation last May to complete the Draft EIR on the Lower Owens River Project (LORP) and release it to the public by August 31, 2002. However, in their last required progress report to the court on August 15th, they stated they will not make that deadline, but expected to release the DEIR by September 30th unless “issues concerning the project description are not promptly resolved.” There is a court hearing scheduled September 12th to discuss the matter with the judge in Inyo Superior Court.

Earlier this year the Sierra Club and Owens Valley Committee (OVC) sued LADWP and Inyo County over their failure to release the LORP DEIR. Release of the DEIR by June of 2000 was required in the MOU signed back in 1997 by LADWP, Inyo County, Sierra Club, OVC, California Department of Fish and Game, and the State Lands Commission. Last October LADWP failed to meet the second time extension deadline, leading to the lawsuit. Although LADWP is the lead agency on the DEIR, Inyo County was included in the lawsuit because the MOU requires the County as a responsible agency to jointly work with LADWP on the document.

The DEIR will eventually come out, maybe by the end of September, maybe not. When it does there should be a 60-day public comment period. You can keep abreast of developments through the ESAS website or the OVC website (www.ovcweb.org). Because this project has the potential, if properly implemented, to be of tremendous benefit to birds and other wildlife, it will be important that many of us comment on this document when it is finally released.

Mark Bagley

REQUEST TO BE PLACED ON THE MAILING LIST FOR THE LOWER OWENS RIVER PROJECT DRAFT EIR/S TODAY

Contact:

Inyo County Water Department
163 May St.
Bishop, CA 93514
760.872.1168
inyowaterdept@telis.org
www.inyowater.org

For more info:

Mike Prather 760.876.5807
(prather@qnet.com)

Mark Bagley 760.873.5326
(markbagley@qnet.com)

IN MEMORIUM

Bette Goodrich

All of us were saddened by the loss of Bette Goodrich this year. Our thoughts go out to Don and his family. Bette would ask all of us

Newsletter Information

Editor:

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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.

to keep working for protection of wild places and the living things that they support. She would ask that all of us go "outside" as often as possible seeking natural quiet by means of self-propelled, contemplative recreation.

Gary Morgan

Longer term members will remember Gary as an active member in the '80s and early '90s, especially for his work organizing field trips and setting up our Adopt-A-Highway program. We are most sorry to have to report that he has passed away, after a brief illness. We extend the condolences of the chapter to his wife Marianne.

**GORDON NELSON,
AUDUBON ACTIVIST
EXTRAORDINAIRE, STEPS
DOWN AS FISH SLOUGH
ACEC DIRECTOR**

**Received Major Awards for
his Service**

1996: Mike Dombeck, then national Director of the BLM from Washington, D. C., presented a plaque to our local Audubon group for outstanding work on BLM lands. A large tent was set up at Fish Slough for the ceremony, which was attended by many dignitaries. Gordon (with ESAS President Chris Rumm) accepted the presentation of the plaque on behalf of our local Audubon group.

1997: Certificate of Recognition given to Gordon for outstanding work as a BLM volunteer.

1998: National award from U. S Dept. of Interior to Gordon as a BLM volunteer. Gordon was invited to Washington D. C. for the ceremony, with all expenses paid, but he did not choose to attend.

1998: Received the "Audubon Activist Award" from the National Audubon Society.

The chapter owes many thanks to Sam Glasser for taking over this important job. Those volunteers that will continue to participate are: Derrick and Mary Vocolka, Dorothy Burnstrom, Martha Kramer, Earl Gann, Gordon Nelson and Dick Schneider. More volunteers would be helpful to this public service program. If interested call Sam at 873 3111.

**VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY IN
THE BISHOP UNION ELEMEN-
TARY SCHOOL DISTRICT**

The Bishop After School Program is seeking individuals and/or professionals who would be interested in sharing their passions and expertise in birds (or any other skills of interest to young minds) with the youth of our community. There is no previous teaching experience required, just an interest to share what you know and love.

Your class or audience will consist of 20-25 students from the Bishop Union Elementary School District. They are just a part of the Bishop After School Program, which is a collaborative commitment consisting of the BUE School District and the City of Bishop, whose goals are to

provide cultural, recreational, and academic enrichment opportunities for all the children of Bishop. There would be a teacher present, you would be responsible only for sharing your love of the topic offered.

The commitment of your time is flexible, from one or two guest appearances to a weekly commitment if you desire. Our After School calendar is broken into trimesters. For more information please contact: Bobbie Stryffeler at 872-1826 or Howard Lehwald at 872-5135.

T-SHIRTS

We have a whole new shipment of Audubon t-shirts in great colors and some new colors available this fall. Folks can purchase our shirts at Spellbinder books where 100% of the profit goes to purchasing more binoculars for our Audubon in the Schools program.

Debby Parker and Sara Steck



Parker
Fledgling American Robin, in a Bishop backyard

Field Trips

CALENDAR

Saturday, September 14th - Fall Shorebird Migration - Join Mike Prather to see Owens Lake dust mitigation project ponds, and to see the birds use them. Meet at 8:00AM at the Diaz Lake parking lot 3 miles south of Lone Pine. Bring a lunch, binoculars, scope, hat, sunscreen etc. Prepare to be out until early afternoon. Call Mike at 876-5807 for more info.

Saturday, November 2nd - Adopt-a-Highway clean-up. Meet at Tom's Place for

breakfast (if you'd like to) at 8, clean-up at 9. Call John & Ros Gorham for more info: 938-2023.

Saturday, December 7nd - Crowley Reservoir Loons, Ducks, and Bald Eagles with Jon Dunn - Reservations are required for this always popular trip. Call Chris at 873-7422 for reservations, trip info, and meeting time and location.

Christmas Bird Counts: All skill levels are encouraged to participate in the annual

Christmas Bird Counts. They're a great way to become more familiar with wintering birds and meet new people:

Saturday, December 14th - Bishop Christmas Bird Count - Chris Howard 873-7422

Saturday, December 14th - Lone Pine Christmas Bird Count - Mike Prather 876-5807

The date of the **Death Valley** CBC will be announced later.

BIRDS IN THE CLASSROOM

Spring Classroom Visits and Field Trips

Once again, spring brought warmer weather, birds returning from warmer southern climes, and the Birds in the Schools program with Audubon volunteers.

We kicked off the season with a field trip to the Sewer Ponds with the Den 2 Cub Scouts and families. Larry Nahm, Jerry Zatorski, Bill Mitchel, and Sara Steck birdwatched with the enthusiastic scouts, and a Sandhill Crane was seen by all.

Then in late April, Sara took the 18- bird slide show to all of the seven third grade classrooms and two Kindergarten classes, one of which was taught in Spanish. It was interesting that at first the 5 and 6 year olds were much more interested in the slide projector, which seemed to be unknown to many of them, than the images of the birds! All of the children were very interested in

the birds and had MANY stories of their own to tell.

In May we had 6 field trips to various locations with the third grade classes: Baker Creek, the City Park, behind the schools,

by Audubon. The students were in groups no larger than 5 with each volunteer, and each student had a pair of Audubon binoculars to use. We had many Audubon members volunteering their mornings to help:

Chris Howard, Jerry Zatorski, Larry Nahm, Bill Mitchel, Derrick Vocelka, Debby Parker, James Wilson, Sara Steck, and Troy Kelly. We saw an amazing number of birds, and the students were very enthusiastic. We got a lot of thank you cards with beautiful drawings of birds and wonderful notes, some saying that they would continue birding with family members in the future.

The program was very successful, and hopefully we will have many more birders among us! We look forward to another year of third graders next spring.

Sara Steck



Artwork by Ellen, accompanied by a note that begins "Dear Bill, I appreciate you coming to help us look for birds. . . .", one of the many thank you notes from Bishop 3rd grade students.

and near Dixon Lane. Rosy Beach coordinated showing the teachers how to train children in use of the binoculars provided

will have many more birders among us! We look forward to another year of third graders next spring.

Conservation

IT'S A WILD LIFE

by Joy Fatooh
BLM Biologist

The Other Story of Arthur the Bear

"I don't blame people for being mad," Tim Taylor says. "They were acting on what they heard, and they only heard one side of the story."

Tim and his colleagues with the state Department of Fish and Game, Bruce Kinney and Eric Wang, are speaking reluctantly. They don't want to offend anyone, nor stir up dust that's started to settle. But the stories I tell here are from the perspective of wildlife professionals – the side that hasn't been told.

Fish and Game manages wildlife populations and preserves habitat. The care of sick or injured individuals isn't among their usual responsibilities, unless they become a public safety threat – as may happen when bears get used to people. Scene: Mammoth Lakes, resort town growing on a wooded mountainside.

"The gist of the problem is a high density of bears," Tim, a wildlife biologist, tells me. Bruce, Tim's boss, says they've been told as many as 30 live within town limits, and he

himself counted eight that make the golf course their home.

"They like to bed in the culverts," Tim says, "and go out at night to forage – and they do eat garbage. My professional opinion is it's garbage that makes it possible for that many big, wide-ranging critters to exist in such close proximity. As the population went up it was hard for Fish and Game to respond to all the calls: 'There's a bear under my porch and it won't leave.' So the Police Department under an agreement with us was trained in a hazing technique to move them out, combined with aversive conditioning – loud noises, flashes, rubber bullets, pepper spray – trying to make them avoid people."

The town hired former hunter and trapper Steve Searles to spearhead the program. Meanwhile, Bruce says, "There's been significant improvement in type and placement of dumpsters – and we've all witnessed dumpsters left open or overfilled. And there are quite a few rumors of residents leaving food out for the bears. Mammoth PD tries to counter all this and the level of problems has decreased."

Tim sums up the range of attitudes: "Some people see bears as warm fuzzy creatures that don't get enough love. Some see them as a nuisance and shoot them with a pellet

gun when they get into the garbage, and then there are those who are ambivalent or couldn't care less."

Last October Searles noticed an adult male limping. He saw what looked like a bullet hole in the right hind leg. Concerned, he asked a local vet to provide a tranquilizer and a police officer to bring a dart gun. "Illegally," Tim says. "They weren't trained or authorized. It didn't work. The officer darted the bear, it didn't go down, they darted it again, it didn't go down, and then with a bear running around with two darts in its butt they felt compelled to call Fish and Game for help."

Game warden Eric Wang's phone rang the following day. "At 10:00 I got the call, at 10:30 I met with Searles, and at 12:00 I called Bruce." To Wang, the darting attempt was cause for grave concern. "You need the right drug, the right dose, the hobbles and eye mask. Especially during bear hunting season: if it runs off a hunter could end up ingesting the drug. You need the anti-drugs. And say you're successful, it drops and it's drugged – then what? The vet wasn't even requested to be on the scene!"

Searles said the bear fled through a residential area, climbed a fence and went to its preferred den, a culvert under the golf course.

It hadn't acted aggressively, and he planned to keep it under observation. "We talked with our folks in Sacramento, including our wildlife vets," Bruce says, "and concluded it was not a public safety situation and the bear was not in such a state of injury that it needed to be euthanized. The recommendation was to leave the animal in its familiar location and see if it recovers." Bears have a great capacity for healing, he explains, especially during their inactive winter; whereas a bear taken in for treatment would likely get too accustomed to humans and have to be kept captive forever.

Eric, Bruce and Tim tried several times to see it, but each time Searles told them he couldn't find it just now. "The fact that it couldn't be located showed that it was moving and surviving," Bruce says. After a week Eric finally saw the bear, which was indeed limping but promptly climbed 60 feet up a tree.

But Searles felt convinced that the bear, which he'd named "Arthur," needed help, and local news media began accusing Fish and Game of subjecting Arthur to unnecessary suffering by failing to respond. Searles asked the Humane Society to send a veterinarian. Bruce says, "The information that it was moving, foraging and seeking water was not reported to the Humane Society. They were told the bear was suffering, had lost weight, was holed up in its den and apparently dying, with an extremely strong smell as if from a serious infection.

"Our Sacramento office told us they'd agreed to have the Humane Society vet come over and look, and asked us to be there. We went to meet them and were told the vet was not available. We looked for the bear ourselves and could not find it in the culvert it was reported to be in." Given the information that it was mobile and foraging, "the Humane Society agreed the bear's best opportunity to remain in the wild was to be left alone and the visit was cancelled.

"I talked to Tim and Eric and said, 'We need to make every effort to go out and keep observing this bear.' We got there the next day and told the police chief we were going out to look. He said, 'I thought you were here for the meeting at 9:00!'" The vet had flown in, not knowing his visit was cancelled. Searles, the media and a representative of a Tahoe-based bear advocacy group were there too.

It was agreed they'd try to assess the bear's condition, tranquilizing it only if necessary. The bear was in a culvert. Searles hazed it out; it went into an adjacent culvert. He

threw golf balls until it emerged and returned to the first culvert. He put a log across the end of the other culvert, lobbed more balls and the bear came out, flipped the log away with a paw and went back into Culvert Two. Fish and Game, by phone with their vets, decided darting wasn't warranted, although the Humane Society vet said he'd like a closer look. "He understood the reasons not to dart as well," Eric says. "He realized it was not some scraggly-looking animal about to drop dead."

Fish and Game decided to continue to leave it as undisturbed as possible, given all the publicity. "Then we got blasted tough by the media," Eric says quietly.

Tim explains, "That's when Searles stepped in front of the camera and made a plea: 'Let's help this suffering bear,' and Bruce said it's not going to happen. The Tahoe Bear League lady said 'You're kidding' and started a huge e-mail campaign to the governor, and it became a state-wide issue."

Within a few days Fish and Game decided the limp wasn't improving and the bear had little chance of resting undisturbed, given

"They were all looking for some kind of hole," Eric says. "Nothing was there! Meanwhile the media had been saying the bear was 'helpless' and was being attacked by other bears."

Tim adds, "The first thing Arthur did after waking up in the bear trap was to take a big dump and it was full of garbage: a plastic bag, paper, a tube sock! So he had definitely fed on garbage within a few days.

"We took him to our Wildlife Investigations Lab in Sacramento and our vets and the U.C. Davis vets went to work." X-rays revealed a degenerative bone condition, and three small lead pellets that may or may not have caused the bone problem. Arthur weighed 309 pounds and was in good health other than having limited use of his right leg.

The bear was made comfortable with a balanced diet, antibiotics and pain medication. "As he began to recover," Tim says, "he showed some aggressive behavior toward the caretakers. Because of that and because he was a garbage-dependent bear he was not a good candidate for return to

Mammoth Lakes or release into the wild." Meanwhile national media had picked up the story and there was a flurry of bear rallies. "The cry was 'Save Arthur, Save Arthur!' until we caught him, and then it was 'Free Arthur, Free Arthur!'"

Arthur now lives at a retirement home for movie animals. A lawsuit against Fish and Game has been dropped, as have charges against Searles for the darting incident. Bruce says, "It's unfortunate this bear's ended up in a captive situation versus trying to survive in the wild. Is there anything at the end that shows us we should change our policy?

I'd venture that nothing could have been done to change his condition in the field."

Wild bears lead a rough life – even those who never pay for a meal of garbage by taking a load of birdshot. The old ones are battle-scarred survivors of fights and close calls. "The concern for medical attention we share with domestic pets isn't necessarily best applied to wildlife. Often the best thing we can do for a wild animal is to leave it alone and let it survive on its own terms.

"Our professional concern is for not only the wild animal, but for its ability to remain a wild animal."



American Black Bear Alison M. Sheehy

the number of people visiting the golf course to try to see it – also creating a public safety concern.

A Fish and Game vet, equipment and drugs came from Sacramento. Mammoth PD assisted and the golf course loaned a golf cart as gurney. They found, darted and transported Arthur, with the vet monitoring its respiration and the media taunting, "Hey, you sure you got the right bear?"

Bruce says, "There was no external evidence of a wound, no fluid indicating an infection. Only the vet by articulating the leg could detect an injury."

Birding

THE QUEST FOR INYO'S GRAY VIREO (*Vireo vicinior*)

By Chris Howard, Rosie Beach, and Jon Dunn

It all began in 1891 when the A. K. Fisher expedition found and documented Gray Vireos in the Grapevine Mountains, east of



Howard

An Inyo County Gray Vireo

Death Valley, on the border of Nye County, NV and Inyo County, CA. The state border generally runs down the crest of the Grapevines. Unfortunately, the expedition didn't specify if the vireos were found on the Inyo side or the Nye side. The Grapevine Moun-

tains are, to this date, the only known breeding location of Gray Vireo in Inyo County. And, they are very rarely found in migration, so to see this bird, means a trip to its breeding ground.

In 1940, Miller (of Grinnell and Miller) found and published a new record of Gray Vireo in the Grapevines, but only on the Nevada side.

In 1991 Tom and Jo Heindel, one hundred years after the A. K. Fisher expedition, thoroughly researched the literature, studied Gray Vireo life history, and analyzed topographic maps. Their 1991 expedition to finally find and document Gray Vireo in Inyo County was a success. They succeeded by finding one Gray Vireo in Inyo County, pinpointed the location on a map, and detailed their observations. Despite the rarity of this breeder in Inyo, they vowed never to make the trip again...the road was the worst they had ever driven. Nobody else had made the arduous trek to see the Gray Vireo since Tom and Jo's 1991 observation until now.

On 28 June 2002, we left Bishop in the afternoon. It was dusk by the time we neared the Grapevines and our truck flushed 6 or so Common Poorwills up off the dirt road. Parts of the road required four-wheel-drive, and one particular section of steep loose cobbles was too much to attempt in darkness. We camped under the stars in the pinyons. At 6AM, we again tried low range to get up the impasse in the road. The deep, steep cobbles and large boulders and holes were too much for our Toyota 4X4. We

were just spinning our wheels, so we packed a bunch of water and lunch, and hiked about 3.5 miles over very difficult, steep terrain, much of which was trail-less

The habitat of the Gray Vireo is dry, impoverished, scattered juniper trees with good shrub cover. When we neared the proper habitat, Jon played a tape every couple hundred yards hoping to gain a vireo's interest. Nothing but curious Bewick's Wrens and Blue-gray Gnatcatchers. Finally, as we approached the area where Tom and Jo documented Inyo's first certain Gray Vireo eleven years ago, Jon heard one singing partial songs down-canyon. Eager to see the bird, we hurried toward the song, stopped and played the tape again, and then waited a few seconds in breathless silence. The tape was echoed almost note for note, cadence for cadence by a pair of Gray Vireos approaching us, small, inquisitive and lovely to behold. We stood in a clear space surrounded by four or five juniper trees thirty feet away. The pair flew from treetop to treetop completely encircling us and echoing the tape until we truly could not tell the difference between the tape and the real birds. When we first heard them, their song was slower and slightly lower pitched than the tape. But soon they mimicked the tape exactly.

This area is so remote, the last people down here could have very well been Tom and Jo eleven years ago. To date, the Grapevines hold the only known population of Gray Vireo in Inyo County...but there surely must be more awaiting future explorers!

A LOCAL CHAUTAUQUA !

The first annual Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua was held June 21 (the beautiful Summer Solstice) through 23. This first event was professional in presentation, offered lots of variety, was richly educational and immensely successful. It was just a wonderful way for many people to celebrate birds in and around the Mono Basin.

Traditionally, a Chautauqua was popular in the early 1900s and was a traveling drama, oratory, musical or lecture event. To give you an idea of the the Mono Basin style, this year's workshops included a variety of field

sessions: birding by ear, bats (mammalian birds), mist netting and bird banding, song-bird monitoring techniques, bird photography, birding for beginners and radio tracking. There were also fun activities for kids such as learning to build a birdhouse! Field trips included 3-4 hour birding trips to Upper Lee Vining Canyon, the June Lake Loop, around Mono County Park, up Lundy Canyon and even an all day extravaganza bird count on Saturday. Special events included a welcome reception at the Mono Inn on Friday night, lectures such as wildlife rescue and a music filled picnic at the Mono County Park. Evening presentations were Mono Lake's California Gulls by David

Winkler and Peter Wrege on Friday, Bats by Joe Szewczak, Eastern Sierra Riparian Songbird Conservation Project by Sacha Heath and Warblers of the Eastern Sierra by Jon Dunn on Saturday. Mike Prather introduced the Eastern Sierra Bird Trail Map soon to be published and given away free!

People came from all over the United States for this first annual event. You may want to mark your calendars for next year's Chautauqua to be held on June 20 - 22, 2003. Watch the Mono Lake Committee web site or this newsletter for early registration information. See you there!

Kathy Duwall

INTERNATIONAL MIGRATORY BIRD DAY: 11 May 2002

By Tom & Jo Heindel

Again this year's IMBD was outstanding and the best ever in a couple of categories. Twenty six birders began before dawn and continued through dusk covering the Owens Valley, White & Inyo Mountains, eastern Sierra canyons, Deep Springs, and Death Valley. The goal, as always, was to see how many different bird species and how many individual birds can be found in Inyo County on the second Saturday of May.



Acorn Woodpecker

Heindel

When 196 bird species were found on the 2000 IMBD the realization that 200 was a possibility raised the ante for this count. Inland counties, without an ocean boundary and the many species tied to that specialized habitat, are hard pressed to break 200 species in a day.

The statistics from this year's count: 26 observers was fewer than in the past but they found 199 species, an all time record, totaling 11,252 birds (a record by almost a thousand birds). Of the 199 species 142 were neotropical migrants (5 fewer than the record) who spend the winter in Mexico, Central and South America and the Carib-

bean and were migrating north to breed in North America. This year's most numerous species were Barn Swallow (609), Mourning Dove (473), and California Gull (339). Eight species were new to the count (Dunlin, Ruddy Ground-Dove, Lewis's Woodpecker, Williamson's Sapsucker, Northern Waterthrush, White-throated Sparrow, Dickcissel, and Red Crossbill) bringing the total species seen during IMBDs to 243. Eleven species were seen in larger numbers than ever recorded in the county before: Vaux's Swift (319), Calliope Hummingbird (10), Acorn Woodpecker (9), Hammond's Flycatcher (42), Gray Flycatcher (122), Dusky Flycatcher (79), Steller's Jay (78), Common Raven (310) Violet-green Swallow (241), Townsend's Solitaire (32), and Cedar Waxwing (156).

The hail, hardy, and eventually exhausted observers were Jim Parker (north Bishop to Aspendell), Mike & Nancy Prather, Bob Hudson, and Judy Wickman (Lone Pine area), Bob & Barb Toth (Haiwee Reservoir, Sage and Cactus Flats and Dirty Socks), Bill Mitchel, Larry Nahm, Andrew and Leah Kirk (Independence area), Chris Howard and Rosie Beach (Deep Springs and White



Cedar Waxwing

Heindel

Mountains), John and Ros Gorham (south of Big Pine), James Wilson (McElvoy Canyon, Inyo Mtns), Debbie House (Buttermilk area), Steve Holland (Starlite area), Jack Ferrell (Rocking K area), Zach Smith and others from PRBO (Horseshow Meadow), Jo Heindel (Big Pine area to Glacier Lodge), and Tom Heindel, Vicki & Gerry Wolfe, and Michael Thornton (Death Valley National Park).

This is the 11th year this international count has been conducted and the sixth for Inyo County. This is a cooperative global effort to inventory birds during migration. Many species are in serious trouble because of habitat destruction in both their wintering and summering grounds so counts like this one help scientists determine the severity of the problem and which species are most heavily impacted. While the observers benefited from their dis-

coveries and the camaraderie shared with those with the same goal, the birds benefited with another year of data collection by a dedicated group of committed citizens. If you are interesting in becoming a part of this endeavor call Jo Heindel (938-2764). Previous birding experience is necessary and there is plenty of time to get ready for next year's effort to break 200 bird species.

BRAINY BIRD

Brilliant female crow goes from using to making tools

The New Caledonian Crow, native to the small island east of Australia, is one of only 3 bird species known to use tools - i.e., twigs to help them get at insects, according to a



fairly recent book in my library. Of course, Jane Goodale first showed that chimpanzees used such tools, and it was interesting for me to

learn that some birds used them also. What brought this on was reading a research report in the journal *Science* (9 August, 2002, p. 981) which described behavior in the New Caledonian Crow that does even chimps one better.

The female, a captive in the authors' Oxford University zoology laboratory, was presented with a short length of flexible wire and food in a little basket, which, fitted with a handle on top, had been lowered into a plastic cylinder. The bird tried to lever the basket up with the straight wire, but, when success failed, she did an amazing thing. Struggling a bit, she bent a hook in one end of the wire, which she then deftly used to bring up the basket by its handle. She did

this in 9 out of 10 future trials; in the one failure, the hook was not deep enough to work well, and the 2 minute time limit ran out. There's a movie available which is amazing to see, and which would be a revelation for anyone convinced that animals are only instinct-driven automata. Her male companion did not try to bend the wire in his trials, although he was able once to use the straight wire to get the basket up. Perhaps there was less incentive for him because often he would snatch the food away from the female when she was successful. Don't think too ill of him, though, as the female appeared to need his company in order to perform her toolmaking feat. Alone, she wouldn't or couldn't do it.

Larry Blakely

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