

THE SIERRA WAVE

EASTERN SIERRA AUDUBON SOCIETY

ESAS Website: ESAudubon.org ES Bird Sightings: ESAudubon.org/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!**

May 14

Refreshments: **Connie Engelhardt**

Main Program: **A River Runs Through It**

Deanna Dulen, superintendent of Devil's Postpile National Monument, will present an educational show on this unique area. Besides the obvious geologic features, you will learn about bird surveys, plant inventories and research on seven species of bats. In the decade after the Rainbow Fire, much has been learned about fire recovery in the for-



Charles Webber © Cal.Acad.Sci.

est surrounding this small, but powerful landscape. Deanna has many beautiful pictures of all the aspects of our closest National Monument. So on your next visit to the DePo with relatives, you can point out more than just the river and the rocks.

June 4
Annual June Picnic

This year's potluck picnic will be held on the first Wednesday of June, the 4th, at the residence of Mary and Derrick Vocolka. The address is 2433 Apache Drive in the Meadow Creek subdivision. Bring food to share and arrive by 6 pm. Audubon still has an ample supply of picnic ware and will supply plates and utensils for the dinner. Please bring your own outdoor folding chair. Additional card tables are needed. If you can supply a table, please contact Mary or Derrick at 873-4480.

Chapter Notes

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

What is the point of learning the difference between plain little vireos, kinglets and warblers? It is difficult at times, occasionally even maddening. It won't increase your net worth, and it doesn't make your house warmer or drier. Furthermore, it doesn't increase the quality of your diet. But you get to associate with great people. As you learn more about the birds, you learn to tell them apart, and ultimately you may learn a bit more about the very complex world we live in. And that connects you to something very real.

My wife Kay and I just returned from a weeklong birding adventure to the East Texas Coast with several other Eastern Sierra residents. And we had a great time. The

company was great, the food was also, and boy did we learn a lot about our birds. And as we traveled we met some fascinating folks. The Texas coast in spring at times is completely buzzing with Neotropical migrants, songbirds returning to our part of the world to nest. When you are there and the weather is cooperative, it can be a magical experience. The trees can be dripping with vireos, orioles, tanagers, warblers, and thrushes. The tide flats and marshes are teeming with spoonbills, plovers, herons, egrets, sandpipers, gulls and terns. Seeing a Cerulean or a Blackburnian warbler, that weighs a third of an ounce and just flew in from South America, is a humbling experience. You could mail the warbler for one 37-cent stamp, yet it just crossed half the globe on its own power. That is amazing.

The fraternity of those seeking these feathered gems is a pleasure to experience. Birders and birds flock in a different ways to the same places. As you meet people, you help each other find birds and spots to bird, and you make new friends. As these people teach each other, and relate places that have been good to them, knowledge grows.

Both National Audubon Society and local Texas Audubon societies have been instrumental in preserving important habitat to help the birds. Sanctuaries at High Island, Sabine Woods, Bolivar Flats, and Aransas are the product of these efforts. We can be proud as Audubon members that we are part of this effort. I am.

James Wilson

NEW MEMBERS

A warm Eastern Sierra Audubon welcome to the following new, transfer, and returning members (as of December, 2002):

Bill Howton – Bishop

Carol & Paul Richman – Bishop

Ruth DeCray – Bishop

Jane Gillam – Bishop

Kimberley Flores - Bishop

Jim Parker



Phill leads the students on a migration around the classroom.

JUNE PICNIC POTLUCK ON JUNE 4 AND ELECTIONS TOO

A week earlier than usual

See announcement on page 1. Instead of the usual 2nd Wednesday, we will meet on the first Wednesday in June. It promises to be a congenial and scrumptious potluck in the beautiful Vocelka backyard. During the course of the event, elections will be held for the coming year. The slate will consist of the current officeholders (see back page).

EASTERN SIERRA AUDUBON BIRDS IN THE CLASSROOM 2003

During the week of April 14-18, Eastern Sierra Audubon brought birds into the classroom at the Bishop Elementary with an exciting PowerPoint presentation. Presentations were given to 2 kindergarten classes (1 in English and 1 in Spanish) and the entire 3rd grade (8 classes). Audubon was able to share with almost 200 young students the

amazing birds that live, breed or only temporarily visit the Owens Valley for a quick stop on a longer journey. Some of the key topics included bird diversity, migration and habitat with a focus of how they're connected and vital to bird survival/existence. During the weeks of May 12th-16th and May 19th-23rd, Audubon will be leading field trips to see birds in action. The response of these young birders has been very positive and enthusiastic.

Phill Kiddoo

Field Trips

For additions and updates check the *Field Trips webpage*, esaudubon.org/birds/field_trips.htm, or call *Field Trips Chair Chris Howard* at 873-7422.

Saturday, May 17th - Bird Banding with the Point Reyes Bird Observatory - Join PRBO staff at a bird banding demonstration on Lee Vining Creek. A short hike will lead to

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.

several mist nets, where staff will gently extract birds, and then return to a banding station to identify, band, and measure the birds before releasing them to the wild. The banding station will be open to the public from 6:30AM - 10:30AM. Drop-ins may stay for as long or as short a time as they wish. Children are welcome. Wind or weather cancels. Detailed directions and a map to the site are here: http://esaudubon.org/birds/images/leev_banding_map.jpg. For more information and directions, please contact River by phone at 760-647-6109 (e-mail: h_river@lycos.com), or Chris at 760-873-7422.

June 20th-22nd - 2nd annual Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua - Co-sponsored by ESAS. *See article on p. 4.*

Saturday, June 28th - Big Pine Hike - with John and Dorothy Burnstrom - The wildflowers and birding should be excellent on this hike up scenic Big Pine Canyon. Meet at the Bishop Y at 8:30AM. Bring all the essentials including water, hat, bug repel-

lant, and lunch. No dogs please. For more information, contact John or Dorothy at 873-3091.

August sometime (date to be announced) - Crowley Reservoir Shorebirds - Mid-August is the peak of fall shorebird migration and Crowley Reservoir is an exceptional place to find them. Join leader Jon Dunn at the Green Church at 9:00AM. Bring mud-worthy shoes, water, hat, sun and insect protection, and binoculars. Call Chris at 873-7422 for more information.

Saturday, September 6th - Fall Shorebird Migration on Owens Lake - Mike Prather - The fall shorebird spectacle at Owens Lake can be truly amazing. And with the new shallow flooding projects, there hasn't been this much shorebird habitat in decades. Mike will show us the best spots on the lake for birds. Meet at 8:00AM at the Diaz Lake parking lot 3 miles south of Lone Pine. Bring a lunch, binoculars, scope, hat, sunscreen etc. Call Mike at 876-5807 for more info.

Chris Howard

Conservation

I, BUREAUCRAT

by Joy Fatooh

Wildlife Biologist I, Bureaucrat

I'd been up since long before the sun, working my way up an Owens tributary stream, thrashing through the underbrush to find points along a bird count transect. In the heat of midday I trudged back down, foot-sore and hungry, with mud on my knees and leaves and twigs in my hair. A distant white dot low on the alluvial fan slowly resolved into my government truck. I turned the key, unwrapped my breakfast/lunch and channel-surfed on the radio as I bumped along toward civilization. I stopped twisting the dial when a familiar female voice announced the upcoming noontime news, including a story on the latest scandal about "a BLM bureaucrat at Fish Slough." Uh-oh! I thought: That's me!

Steve Parmenter, the state Department of Fish and Game biologist working with our local native fish, tells me that the derivation of the word "bureaucrat" is "one who rules from a desk." In the first place, I don't rule. I observe, gather data, write proposals, scabble for funding, and make humble suggestions to other people who make decisions. And besides, on that typical sweaty day high on the rim of the Owens Valley, I hadn't seen my desk in days – or even the pile of papers, books, feathers, bones, shells and scats that obstructs my view of it. But I knew "bureaucrat" was this newscaster's favorite word, applied uniformly to the many people in our area who work for the government at any level. And I knew what this story was about.

A few weeks earlier I'd conducted a field trip for local school kids at a spring in Fish Slough – a hands-on ecology lesson, showing how all the parts of an ecosystem depend upon each other. It used to culminate in discovering why native, endangered Owens pupfish thrived there. Now it involved solving the mystery of what disturbance to the ecosystem had wiped them out. The junior sleuths fingered the guilty suspect: non-native, introduced, voracious bass. I told the kids about the mighty efforts Fish and Game had been making to redesign the refuge and clear out the bass so pupfish could be reintroduced, everything from hand-netting to electrofishing. I mentioned as a grim last resort – an example of how badly things can go wrong when an ecosystem is tipped off-balance – that poison could be used to kill not only the bass within the refuge area but every living thing with gills. Afterward, the mother of one kid came up to me and demanded that poison should never be used. I tried to explain that it was a last resort and wasn't up to BLM anyway, but it seemed to be a cause she was eager to champion and she didn't seem to be hearing me. I went back to the office and wearily told my supervisor, "Don't be surprised if you see a letter to the editor about this."

Sure enough, within a week there was a scathing letter about how bass were native, pupfish were introduced and BLM insists on poisoning the entire slough, destroying the bass fishery, ruining the ecosystem and corrupting the minds of schoolchildren. I

waited patiently and soon native fish authority Phil Pister sent a letter setting straight the historical facts. I figured anyone who really cared about this issue would know better than to jump on such a cattywumpus bandwagon. And it did disappear into the sunset, but not until Ms. Bureaucrat Beat took a run at it.

She never asked to interview me. She did interview Steve Parmenter, and aired his excellent explanation of the actual bass eradication program and its very small extent. Steve told me later that he told her, "I don't believe Joy advocated the use of poison. I know Joy and she wouldn't kill a fly if she didn't have to." (This is true. I trap houseflies live between my hands and carry them outside.)

It's a mystery to me why anyone would court popularity by calling all our local public servants "bureaucrats," when there are so many of us in the Eastern Sierra radio audience. I don't know about some anonymous archetypical fat cat on the gravy train, but all my friends and neighbors and colleagues on the public payroll are doing their best on ever-shrinking budgets to carry out city, county, state and federal mandates and serve the public well. Via their elected legislators the public has assigned me to do my little part to be a voice for the wild animals on public land, who cannot speak for themselves. I'm proud to be a bureaucrat – a bureaucrat with bug bites on my arms, burrs in my socks, rocks in my shoes, mud on my knees and leaves and twigs in my hair.

HELP REMOVE TAMARISK ALONG RUSH CREEK

During National River Cleanup Week, Saturday May 17, 2003

Tamarisk is an invasive weed that crowds out native species, uses a lot of water, and provides little habitat value. You can help the ongoing effort to eradicate it from the Mono Basin!

Meet at 9:00 am Saturday May 17, 2003 in front of the Mono Lake Committee Information Center and Bookstore in Lee Vining.

We will carpool from there to Rush Creek. Some shovels and gloves will be provided, but please bring them if you have them. Bring water, hat, sunscreen, shoes that can get wet, and lunch if you plan to stay the whole day. We will finish by 3 or 4 pm.

If you wish to join us later in the day, turn off Hwy 395 onto Test Station Road about a mile south of Lee Vining. Turn toward South Tufa when the pavement ends and park where the road crosses Rush Creek. Walk downstream on the right side until you find us.

If you can help, please notify Greg Reis at

the Mono Lake Committee at greg@monolake.org or 647-6386 x41. If we get enough volunteers, we may split up into two groups and target some lakeshore areas as well.

WEST NILE VIRUS HEALTH ALERT

State and Federal health officials are predicting that West Nile Virus (WNV) will complete its march across the country and arrive in California by summer of 2003. WNV is carried by many species of bird and transmitted between birds and to humans

and horses by certain species of mosquitoes. The majority of people and animals infected with the virus have a mild illness or no symptoms. A small percentage of those infected develop encephalitis or meningoencephalitis. The elderly are at higher risk for these diseases. In 2002, over 4,000 human cases were reported in 44 states including 250 fatalities. Greater than 5,000 equine and 12,000 bird fatalities attributed to WNV infection were also confirmed in 2002.

Because conditions required to establish and maintain this disease exist in Inyo

County, local Health Officials have developed and are implementing a WNV Disease Prevention and Response Plan. The plan consists of four components including public education, disease surveillance, case investigations and mosquito control.

To detect the virus early after its arrival, the general public is being asked to report any sightings of recently dead birds – particularly crows, raven, magpies, jays, hawks, owls, sparrows and finches. Anyone finding a dead bird should immediately contact the California Department of Health Services

Dead Bird toll-free hotline number at 877-WNV-BIRD (877-068-2473).

Steve Frederickson,
Environmental Health Specialist, Inyo
County Department of Environmental
Health Services.

Ed. note: Mike Prather sent us this URL for a National Audubon page on the disease, which members might like to see for further information: www.audubon.org/bird/wnv

BUSY SEASON BEGINS AS ESWC RECEIVES ORPHANED AND MIGRATORY BIRDS IN NEED OF HELP

By Cindy Kamler

Director, Eastern Sierra Wildlife Care

Eastern Sierra Wildlife Care marked the start of “baby season” with the intake of 21 birds in just 10 days. First babies to arrive were 3 newly hatched (and an egg) from a Steller’s Jay nest in Wilkerson. Just after the three eggs hatched, the mother was injured by a cat and disappeared; the father had been killed a few weeks earlier. Sadly, but not unexpectedly, the tiny jays did not survive their first 24 hours. Other orphans soon followed. Two nestling House Finches, a House Sparrow, an injured Mallard mom with 4 tiny ducklings, a Lesser Goldfinch, and a week-old Raven received treatment and care. Adults receiving care and treat-

ment included an Audubon’s Warbler, California Gull, American Crow, Evening Grosbeak, and American Robin.

This is also the time when migratory birds are returning or passing through. A late afternoon caller reported a White Pelican down in the parking lot at Coso Junction. The finder, with instructions from Cindy Kamler, was able to get the pelican in a box and keep it warm. ESWC volunteer Bob Newman of Independence drove down to pick up the bird; Dennis and Bonnie Jahn, also volunteers, then met Bob in Independence, and brought the pelican to ESWC. An exam revealed exhaustion, dehydration, and borderline emaciation, but no injuries. The small female, nicknamed “Gertrude,” has been resting up, eating 2-3 pounds of trout a day from the Fish Springs hatchery, and should be back on her way by the time you read this.

A migrating Great Egret found itself caught in an unexpected snowstorm and landed on the parking lot of a Mammoth Mountain restaurant. From the air, birds often think that pavement is water.

Picked up by ESWC Renee Good, the egret was examined and hydrated by volunteers Carmen Van Noy and Janet Titus, rested overnight, breakfasted on a dish of goldfish, and was released successfully the next morning.

With their busiest season underway, increasing demands are made on ESWC’s resources, both human and financial. While our Annual Training has passed, people interested in volunteering can still get involved. Just call Cindy at 872-1487. Supplies and materials are needed. Heating pads, pet carriers, and birdcages are among items that would be useful. Donations can be sent to ESWC, 800 Keough’s Hot Springs Road, No. 24, Bishop 93514.

Birding

BIRD CHAUTAUQUA TO BE HELD AT MONO LAKE

Mark your calendars now and plan on heading to Lee Vining for the second annual bird festival – the Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua – June 20, 21, and 22.

Bird Chautauqua highlights include a wide variety of birding field trips and hikes around the Mono Basin: a “Big Day” bird event with Dan Cooper, storytelling with Ane Carla Rovetta, a beginning bird photography clinic with Marie Read, mist netting and bird banding with Point Reyes Bird Observatory staff biologists, presentations by Dr. David Herbst and Dr. Robert Jellison from the Sierra Nevada Aquatic Research Lab, Dr. David

Winkler, Cornell University, Jeff Maurer, Jon Dunn, and many, many more. The weekend Chautauqua will conclude at the Mono Lake County Park with live music by Malcolm Dalglish, a performer of original folk choir and dulcimer music, stories, mime, rhyme, rhythm, and song.

Chautauqua is an institution that began in the late 19th century to provide higher education opportunities through the combination of lectures, concerts, and public events.

The Point Reyes Bird Observatory, Mono Lake Tufa State Reserve, U. S. Forest Ser-



vice, Mono Lake Committee, and Eastern Sierra Audubon Society, are jointly sponsoring this popular event. *cont'd -->*

THE CALIFORNIA BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE

By Tom & Jo Heindel

The California Bird Records Committee (CBRC) is the official body that oversees the rare bird records in the state. Most states have such bodies, which are made up of experienced, dedicated birders from widely scattered parts of the state who are familiar with the status, distribution, and identification of birds found there.

The CBRC is composed of ten members who serve one term of three years and then sit out at least one year before being eligible for re-nomination. The secretary is presently a non-voting member with a one year term but can serve an unlimited number of terms. Jon Dunn of Rovana and Kristi Nelson of Lee Vining represent our local area. Three of the four who were just elected are neophytes to the committee. Every effort is made to have different areas within the state represented as well as finding new members with expert ability in and knowledge of field identification of birds as well as being a member of Western Field Ornithologists in CA. Any policing organization takes heat for "bad decisions", and the CBRC receives its share, but most charges are based on the same differences of opinions and philosophies that are represented within the committee itself.

The CBRC has published a list of species that have been recorded so rarely in the state that any claims of sightings must be submitted for evaluation (see www.wfo-cbrc.org/cbrc/review.html). If one observes a listed bird and wants it accepted as an official record, they are required to provide documentation and send it to the secretary. The secretary organizes a package containing 15-18 records and sends them to the first CBRC member on the list who reviews

the records. When finished he/she sends the package on to the second member listed while sending the Acceptance/Rejection comments to the secretary. On the first round, the reviewers do not see the comments of the other members, and no discussion is allowed about a specific record between members who have not yet reviewed the record. A record must receive nine accept votes to pass. If two members are not convinced by the documentation of the correct identification, the record is rejected. If identification is unquestioned, but natural occurrence is, it takes three reject votes to reject the record. Re-circulation of any record is up to the discretion of the secretary, or a request by any reviewer. Any reviewer may ask that it be discussed at the annual meeting, and the decision at the meeting is final. It differs from year to year, but 200-250 records pass through the committee annually. The average acceptance rate oscillates between 70-80%, which reflects not only the philosophical composition of the committee but the quality of documentation received.

Some become upset when the committee does not accept their observation but they must realize that this usually reflects on the quality of the documentation, not on whether or not they correctly identified the bird. On occasion, the observers may have been unfamiliar with the diagnostic characteristic that would have insured the sighting's acceptance, and either did not notice it, or did not describe it. Some of the sightings submitted were incorrectly identified birds (some with unequivocal pictures), and the value of keeping these out of the literature is of critical importance. Few committee members can claim that they have never had any observation rejected, so the argument that committee members always accept each other's sighting is baseless. The service rendered by this committee allows science

to benefit from those who may lack professional ornithological credentials, but not the passion for knowledge and accuracy.

With the growth of citizen scientists, and a massive influx of birders and field ornithologists, it is possible to add to the ornithological body of information on status and distribution without the need to collect every bird to prove where it was seen and when. Many bird records are based on photographs, video and audiotapes as well as written documentation. An observer of a rare or less often seen species must write a convincing description telling the circumstances of the event including how long the bird was seen, the distance to the bird, lighting conditions, time of day, etc. An online electronic report form is at www.wfo-cbrc.org/cbrc/cbrcform.html. Also included should be how the observer eliminated a similar looking and more common species, and any photographs or tapes taken of the bird. The "rule" is the more rare the species is, the more out of season it is, the more difficult it is to separate from a similar looking species, the more detail must be provided.

The results are published annually in *Western Birds*, the journal of Western Field Ornithologists. The rejected sightings are of particular interest because the reason for rejection often provides cutting-edge knowledge that is not yet published in any field guide. Rare bird photos taken from submitted records are at www.wfo-cbrc.org/cbrc/photos/index.html. Of the current 170 reviewable species, 39 have been recorded in Inyo County, representing 23% of the total list. A number of Inyoites have followed the protocol for changing a personal, exciting, sighting into a scientific record insuring the advancement of ornithological knowledge in the County and State... and none have a Ph.D. in ornithology!

Chautauqua, cont'd

Mono Lake is a Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN) site, and was recently designated a globally significant Important Bird Area (IBA) by both the American Bird Conservancy and the Audubon Society. The natural beauty of this area and its diverse bird life will pro-

vides the ideal backdrop for the second annual Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua. Throughout the course of this festival, we will experience, explore, and celebrate the connection between birds and people.

Cost is \$25 per person and includes any combination of events as long as space is available. Register early to get your first choice of programs and field trips. Pro-

ceeds benefit continuing research in the Mono Basin, and, ultimately, the birds.

Registration began April 15, 2003. For more information on how to register and complete details go to www.birdchautauqua.org. or contact the Chautauqua staff at birding@monolake.org or call (760) 647-6595.

CHAPTER OFFICERS

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Bonaparte's Gull, first winter plumage, Bishop Sewer Ponds, April 22, 2003. Photo by Debby Parker.

May Program on Devil's Postpile; June 4 Picnic; 'Birds in the Classroom' Program in Full Swing; the CBRC (what's that? - answer inside!)