



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!**

November 12

Refreshments: Joan Benner

Main Program: **The Search for Life in the Universe**, presented by **Rich Garner**. As long as there have been humans, we have searched for our place in the Cosmos. Our ancestors 2 million years ago gazed out into the night sky as we do now, and they, like us, were transfixed by the questions: Where are we, why are we here and are we alone? In the last thirty years, radio astronomers have discovered that many organic molecules, the "stuff" necessary for life exists on worlds in the outer solar system, in the solar disks of newly formed stars, and the depths of interstellar space. Just in the last ten years astronomers have detected about one hundred solar systems beyond our own. With about 300 billion stars in our galaxy, the "Milky Way", about 22 billion or 7% have characteristics that are similar to our sun. Someday just maybe

SETI, (Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence), scientists may detect an artificial, unnatural signal from a distant sun-like-star letting us know that we are not alone. After the program, we will go outside to look at the night sky with binoculars. Also bring warm clothes and a lounge chair, if you have one.

Rich Garner has taught astronomy at the college level, spent time as a wilderness ranger, and is a retired naval officer and aviator. We look forward to his program.

December 10

Refreshments: **Holiday Potluck**. Bring a dish to share, and your plate, glass, and tableware. **Meet at 6 PM in the Dining Room**. There will be a fundraising **Raffle** (see below).

Main Program: We will have a presentation by **Marcus Libkind**. Details later - watch local media.

Chapter Notes

NEW MEMBERS

We warmly welcome the following new and transfer members:

Todd Vogel - Bishop

Marie Baca - Los Angeles

Robert Warren - Independence

Joan Hilker - Mammoth Lakes

Andy Zdon - Chalfant Valley

Diane Nichols - Hot Creek Ranch

Debbie Shater - Independence

Spenger - Big Pine

Christopher Tonra - Lee Vining

George & Nancy Appel - Idyllwild, CA

Brad Allan - Mammoth Lakes

Lillian Altman - Big Pine

Evelyn Crouchman - Independence

Dolores Cundiff - Bishop

Leslie Anne Klusmire - Bishop

FUNDRAISING

December Raffle

We will hold a reprise of the very successful streamlined raffle we had at the 1998 Holiday Potluck dinner. Prizes (varied and exciting, of course) will be displayed on a table in the dining room. Each prize will have an associated cannister in which you may deposit the tickets you have purchased. Those who would like to participate but can't make it to the dinner should arrange for another member to place their tickets in the cannister(s) of the prize(s) of their choice. The drawing will take place as dinner ends,

before going to the classroom for the evening program.

Tickets may be purchased at the dinner, or beforehand by contacting James Wilson (873-3859) or Ruth Blakely (872-1890). The cost is \$1 per ticket, or \$5 for 6. Contact the above also if you have **Prizes to donate**. These may be handcrafted or purchased items. Works by local artists are popular. Items of natural history interest are especially desired, but any high quality prize is welcome.

Raffle prizes should be submitted ahead of time, and will be on display at Wilson's Eastside Sports, 224 N. Main St., Bishop, beginning around Thanksgiving.

Bird Book Auction

A valuable bird book, donated to the chapter for fundraising purposes by **Gordon Nelson**, will be auctioned to the highest

Auction, cont'd:

bidder, taking advantage of the internet, and/or the phone company to get bidders in contact with the auctioneer, Larry Blakely (his first and last job as an auctioneer).

The book is **John Gould's Hummingbirds**, a beautiful 1990 reprint of a profoundly influential mid-19th century work. Gould (1804-1881) is often called the British Audubon, and, in a way, the prices asked for extant copies of his bird lithographs bear witness to that. Ten original prints from his Hummingbird collection are offered for \$1200 each by an online dealer. Several of his toucan prints are offered at \$4500. He painted thousands of birds of the old and new worlds, somewhat in the Audubon style. They were published in several books, one of the most successful being the one on Hummingbirds. Like Audubon, he was not professionally trained, but he, even earlier in life than Audubon, rose to prominence in ornithological circles. According to one biographer, "he was Victorian Britain's leading ornithologist". He was well acquainted with Darwin (and presented the latter with a copy of his Hummingbird book), but he was not sympathetic to Darwin's ideas. Gould thought that

each of his HB species were clearly and easily identified as distinct; Darwin demurred, but nevertheless thanked and praised Gould for his book.

Checking bookfinder.com, I found 10 copies of the 1990 reprint on the used book market, ranging in price from \$150 to \$300; 9 of the 10 were going for \$200 and above. I will now begin accepting bids for the book, with a minimum starting bid of \$75. Bids can be sent to me by e-mail (larryblakely@sigmaxi.org), or phone (872-1890). I'll post the latest bid (but not the name of the bidder) on our website; those interested can also phone or e-mail me for the latest bid. Bidding will close on December 8. If the winning bidder is present and willing, the book will be presented at the December meeting.

I'd be glad to show it to anyone who would like to see it.

Larry Blakely

SAN DIEGO BIRD FESTIVAL

February 4-8, 2004

The eighth annual San Diego Bird Festival spotlights the natural diversity of the region with birding trips to the Anza-Borrego

Desert, Cuyamaca Mountains, San Elijo Lagoon home of the California Gnatcatcher, San Diego Bay, Coronado Islands and San Felipe in Baja California. There will be many speakers, field trips, and classes. Space is limited so register early on line at: www.sandiegonaturefestivals.org If you wish to receive a brochure, e-mail: registration@sandiegonaturefestivals.org and list your name and address.

FIELD TRIPS

Saturday, November 1st - Highway Cleanup Party- Leaders John and Ros Gorham - Meet at Tom's Place Cafe at 8:00AM for breakfast or 9:00AM for the cleanup. Takes around 2 hours. Call John or Ros at 938-2023 for more information.

Saturday, December 6th - Ducks, Swans, and Eagles of Crowley Reservoir - Join leader Jon Dunn at the "Y" in Bishop at 9:00AM. Wear warm clothes and bring binoculars, scopes, lunch and water. Weather may relocate trip to Owens Valley. Space is limited on this popular trip. Reserve your space by calling Chris Howard at 873-7422 and for more information.

Sunday, December 14th - Bishop Christmas Bird Count - contact Chris Howard at 873-7422 for more information.

A PRECARIOUS Foothold: THE SIERRA BIGHORN

by Joy Fatooh
Wildlife Biologist

A group of bighorn sheep dances up a rock face, silhouetted against the sharp blue sky. They run from an unfamiliar pursuer, not swift and secretive like a cougar or human, but large, noisy, airborne, slow and persistent. They are hasty but not panicked. They know where to go. They and their ancestors have followed these trails for thousands of years.

They don't know they are part of the last two herds of Sierra bighorns still surviving on their ancestral range. They don't recognize the helicopter. They aren't aware of us, hiding in the brush, holding our breath. They don't see the net.

I wrote that in 1986. I wasn't a wildlife biologist yet. I was a fledgling journalist working on a feature about wildlife translocations. But I arrived to find that - because this was to be the return of a charismatic megavertebate to a famous national park - reporters, camera-

Conservation

men and sound crews had descended en masse. I could see that the media swarm



Bighorn Sheep John Wehausen photo

threatened to disrupt the swift, sober business of moving wild animals. To disassociate myself from that embarrassing horde, I stashed

my camera, pocketed my notebook, took up a clipboard and volunteered, recording data at base camp and later finishing a spot on a capture net.

For the biologists this was just another crucial step toward getting Sierra bighorns reestablished in as many locations as possible. The sheep weren't going to do it on their own. To escape predators bighorn sheep rely on early detection and a vertical escape. There are enough of the requisite patches of habitat with steep cliffs and wide views to support some 1000 sheep, but with miles of unsuitable habitat in between. Although rams will wander that far, groups of ewes tend to stick to familiar ground.

As of 1979, before translocation efforts began, the situation was one of the scariest in conservation biology: nearly all Sierra bighorns - some 220 of them - were in one big subpopulation near

Mount Baxter, with a mere 30 in one other group at Mount Williamson. Biologists like to use the proverb “Don’t put all your eggs in one basket.” Everyone understands it, even though



Preparing a just-captured bighorn ram for translocation
Joy Fatooh photo

nobody puts eggs in baskets anymore. By 1986 a new herd had been established at Wheeler Ridge. Lee Vining Canyon, which just happened to be the gateway to Yosemite, was next in line. The ultimate goal was to have Sierra bighorn sheep thriving throughout the Sierra again.

I helped set up the net, a crazy X with extra legs crisscrossing their familiar trails. Now we lie in wait hidden under sagebrush as the helicopter carefully herds a group toward us, and watch the maneuvers of sheep and copter with equal awe. The sheep are in their element; the copter, darting like a dragonfly, is at the razor-sharp edge of its capabilities – a few months later this same skilled pilot will die when a stray wind slams his machine into a wall of rock.

Soft talk drops into dead silence as the sheep approach. Suddenly, wild-eyed, they run right over us and into the nets. Still silent, we leap into action. I learn to work wordlessly or whisper, fast and gentle, with a steady hand to soothe the sheep. We blindfold, hobble, disentangle, take temperatures; the hot ones are the first to be strapped to pallets for airlifting to base camp. The mountain’s own silence prevails until the copter returns.

At base camp, I knew from my morning’s work, a group of veterinarians and biologists and volunteers would surround each sheep with the same hushed efficiency. The vets had told me about capture myopathy, a consequence of prolonged escape attempts, “burning sugar without oxygen.” Once hobbled and

blindfolded they cease to struggle but are still “pumping adrenaline like crazy.” Overheating signals deadly levels of stress. We monitored temperature constantly while taking other vital signs, blood and fecal samples and nasal smears; recording age, sex, weight, length, girth, and any visible wounds or parasites; attaching ear tags and radio collars; and giving antibiotics, worming medicine, vaccinations, and stress-countering vitamins and minerals – all beneath a teeming mass of reporters, cameras and microphones that caused an observer a few feet away to remark, “Somewhere down there is a sheep.”

Within minutes each animal found itself unbound and standing in a darkened truck or trailer lined with sweet-smelling hay. Two or three hours of rumbling and swaying, and they would find themselves suddenly released into the freedom and perils of a suitable but utterly unfamiliar home.

Fast-forward to 2003, and while the calendar pages swirl past like in the old movies, here are the scenes you see:

Three new sheep herds are successfully established, but then in the late 1980s, apparently in response to too many mountain lions patrolling their winter ranges at the base of the Sierra escarpment, the sheep begin to cling to higher elevations through snowy winters and suffer heavy losses. Their numbers plummet to a low of around 100. Meanwhile measurements and mitochondrial DNA studies show that Sierra Nevada bighorns are distinct from other bighorn sheep. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) grants them endangered status, first under an emergency listing in 1999, confirmed by a final rule in 2000. Good weather and selective

lion control help bring about a rebound, and sheep numbers are up to around 300 by 2003. FWS releases a recovery plan for public comment; the deadline is extended to December 8.

That brings us to now, and to you. John Wehausen, who has studied Sierra bighorns and championed their cause since his graduate student days, is the recovery plan’s primary author. He encourages you to read it and send FWS your comments – even if only to express your support. “I would like people to support it and to say that it’s well thought out,” he says. “But if there are any glaring errors we would like people to point them out. A great deal of careful science went into this, but there’s always the chance that there’s something we missed.”

This recovery plan is unusual, John says, because “there’s not a habitat question. Most endangered species are suffering from loss of habitat.” The Sierra bighorn, he says, has ample habitat in public ownership. Indiscriminate hunting was probably a factor in the distant past, but not recently. Most likely, he says, insofar as can be extrapolated from the historical record, “the biggest thing that has brought them to where they are is domestic sheep grazing.” Bighorn sheep are known to be highly vulnerable to diseases of domestic sheep. There are still a few places where they may come into contact; the plan addresses this. It also addresses predator management. And there are provisions for habitat improve-



“Somewhere down there is a sheep!”
Joy Fatooh photo

ment, genetic studies, investigating disturbance factors, and ongoing monitoring and public outreach.

"The most important thing," John says, "is that we get them better distributed geographically." So a central component of the recovery plan is the action item, "Develop and implement a strategy for translocations." The criteria for delisting specify not only a minimum number of ewes, but also that they be distributed among 14 targeted "herd unit" areas spread among four "recovery units" that extend along a 170-mile stretch of the Sierra.

To the delight of their supporters, the sheep are doing some of that work themselves. John told me, "The most exciting new development is the natural range expansion that's taken place. We have a wintering population on the west side! Have I told you that story?" After the Baxter herd abandoned their winter range they split into two groups of females, and then one group disappeared in the mid 1990s. In 1999 John got a report from a back-country ranger who said a hiker told him she saw thirteen sheep west of the Sierra crest, in

the Gardiner basin. A small group of rams had been spending some time there, but thirteen was unexpectedly big for a group of rams. "I went up there and as I was crossing into the Gardiner basin, I saw lamb droppings. Then I found where they'd been bedded and there was definite sign of lambs and adult females."

Later that year at the Millpond music festival John saw the back-country ranger in the crowd – as we locals know, you see *everyone* at Millpond – and he asked if he'd gotten a name or any contact information for the hiker. "He said, 'Darn, I didn't, I should have done that,' and then he looked around and said, 'There she is!'" So John got to query her himself, and she confirmed that "there were little lambs and big curly-horned rams, all in one group." John and his team soon gathered good evidence that they were living west of the crest year-round, making use of south-facing slopes for winter range. The next surprise was to find that a group of ewes had colonized Lundy Canyon, which was one of the sites targeted

for translocation. "This," says John, "is our dream coming true."

"We're seeing some great positive signs," John says. "Besides the natural range expansion, there's the fact that they're gaining in number. After '95, when we had only about a hundred sheep in the Sierra, to now have more than 300 is amazing." Yet this still represents a precarious foothold on our mountains' rocky slopes.

For a copy of the draft recovery plan write to the Field Supervisor, Ventura Fish and Wildlife Office, 2493 Portola Road, Suite B; Ventura, CA 93003 or call (805) 644-1766. Comments may be sent to the same address or to fw1snbrp@r1.fws.gov. You can also find a PDF version at www.sierrabighorn.org, the website of the Sierra Nevada Bighorn Sheep Foundation – along with information, exciting updates, and how to join. You, too, may find a way to help make it possible for this most unique of Sierra mammals to grace our mountains for thousands of years to come.

Birding

THE MANDARIN DUCK



Mandarin Duck above, Wood Duck below.
Both photos by Bob Wicks.

Aix galericulata

The Mandarin Duck is closely related to our familiar Wood Duck (*Aix sponsa*), but it is native to the Orient - China, Japan, and Siberia. Mankind, charmed by the cute thing, has carried it to zoos and backyards far and wide. Some inevitably gain freedom; Sibley notes that "small numbers are feral in California". The one in the picture was found October 23 by an old friend of mine, Bob Wicks, at a park near his Southern California home. It was in with a group of Wood Ducks; it, and the Wood Ducks, were gone the next day.

Now birds, at least all the ones I *had* been familiar with (and before Bob sent me his picture, I was, I'm ashamed to say, ignorant of *Aix galericulata*) manage to fly most adroitly without rudders. This one appears to have two. So, it's off to the internet and Google, to find out what gives. Bob also did some digging.

I didn't read all the details in the 4,660 sites resulting from a search on the duck's scientific name, but it was certainly a most fascinating story that emerged about this delightful creature. Some of the facts are in paragraph one above. According to honolulu.zoo.org, "they are regarded in China and Japan as a symbol of love, happiness and marital fidelity." A Dutch waterfowl breeder says they are "very hardy, beautiful and easy to care for" in the aviary, and thus very popular among collectors of waterfowl. The distinctive "sails", which I thought looked like rudders, are "formed from elongated 12th tertial [wing] feathers" according to the UK's Wildlife Information Network; I haven't been able to find out what happens to them in flight.

For more info, go to Google - you'll be glad you did. And if one turns up at the Bishop Park pond, please post immediately to the Bird Sightings page!



Larry Blakely

BIRDING DEATH VALLEY NATIONAL PARK

by Tom & Jo Heindel

Those of us who live in the Eastern Sierra are fortunate that we are relatively close to the largest National Park in the contiguous United States. Death Valley National Park offers great opportunities to explore a myriad of habitats that begin with desert scrub below sea level to sub-alpine forests that reach over 11,000' in the Panamint Mountains.

The major attractions are the oases that offer refuge, food, and water to migrants passing north in spring and south in fall. Birds fly for many hours over a sea of creosote or desert scrub that provides little in the way of necessary amenities. As exhaustion sets in, an oasis of tamarisk, willow and cottonwood, grass lawns, or small ponds serves as a magnet offering rest and respite from travel.

The largest oasis in the Park, and most attractive to birds and birders, is Furnace Creek Ranch. This is, for the most part, a private in-holding that was formerly the Greenland Ranch. Today it consists of an 18 hole golf course, motel, inn, various stores, shops, restaurants, post office, palm groves, and stables with horses. Adjacent are a small airport, the Park sewer ponds, gas station, and visitor center with a gift shop and a small museum. All are surrounded by the greenery provided by an abundance of spring fed water from the hills to the east. The golf course is private property, and present management has gone to great lengths to insure that all others, birders included, are aware that only golfers are allowed on the course. We urge you to restrict your birding to the edges of the course and, instead, seek out the other hot spots at the ranch. The lawn and trees near the motel, the corrals, the



Magnolia Warbler Tom Heindel photo

residence area behind the restaurant, and palmery near the fire station, the picnic area, the visitor center, the road to the airport, the lawn and trees at the post office, the trees near the grocery store, etc. are all proven areas that have produced many remarkable records. The airport sewer ponds are accessible by parking your car in the lot and walking north along the edge of the lot and down a dirt road to the fenced and gated ponds. Ducks and shorebirds, including those chased up by golfers on the course, are the attraction here. Always search the skies for aircraft and be cautious when they are landing or taxiing.

The other smaller oases are Scotty's Castle, Mesquite Springs, Stovepipe Wells, Saratoga Spring, and Panamint Springs (another in-holding). All are easily found on a DVNP map or are road signed. Scotty's Castle is particularly nice and always cooler than the other, lower sites. The tree-ringed lawn is especially productive as is the picnic area and maintenance area up canyon. There is a small pond right next to the old bridge with large drive through doors that are permanently closed. Mesquite Springs has a nice riparian area at the entrance to the campground that often has a small amount of flowing water. At Stovepipe Wells the dining hall area and isolated trees are sometimes watered, which is where the birds will congregate. A Sabine's Gull was photographed enjoying the swimming pool! The sewer ponds have had the vegetation removed, and the dikes are so high that the water is not visible. Birds accessing the water may be found outside the fence, but the ponds are no longer a hot spot. Saratoga Spring is a large series of ponds surrounded with reeds and a trail. Camping is no longer allowed, but birding is, and some remarkable birds have been found there. Panamint Springs is private property, but birders have

been allowed limited access. The newly planted campground is particularly attractive, and a walk around the restaurant/store accesses most of the good habitat. Birders have been asked not to bird the trees near the residences behind the motel unit.



Inca Dove Jo Heindel photo

While visiting any time of the year can be productive, the optimal time for vagrants is mid May to early June, and again mid September to mid November. The list of eastern species that have been discovered in the Park is long and glorious and includes Mississippi Kite, Zone-tail Hawk, Smith's

Longspur, Purple Gallinule, Sprague's and Red-throated Pipits, Tropical Kingbird, Snow Bunting, Varied Bunting, Rufous-backed Robin, Red-necked Grebe, Ruddy Ground-Dove, and Inca Dove. Then there is the "colorful" list of warblers such as Cape May, Northern Parula, Magnolia, Black-throated Blue, Black-throated Green, Blackburnian, Yellow-throated, Prothonotary, Kentucky, Connecticut, Mourning, Hooded, Canada, and the list goes on and on.

One observer, Guy McCaskie of San Diego and California's premier birder, has observed over 325 species at Furnace Creek Ranch! Granted that the rest of us probably couldn't see that many there in two lifetimes it is certainly worth the beautiful drive to see what gems we can find. A check of www.nps.gov/deva/ with links to the DV Weather Report, Events, and the Morning Report for road conditions might be helpful.



Greater Roadrunner Jo Heindel photo

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Join **National Audubon** *and*

Affiliate with our **Chapter**

\$20 / yr [**\$15 SENIORS (62+) / STUDENTS**]

Receive **Audubon Magazine** and the **WAVE**

Name _____ (Please print)

Address _____

C-53

City _____ State/Zip _____ Chapter _____

For Gifts:

Mail Application to: _____ Your Name _____

National Audubon Society _____ Your Address _____

Membership Data Center _____

P.O. Box 51003 _____

Boulder, CO 80323 _____ Your City/State/ZIP

7XCH

OR, Join the Chapter only

\$12 / yr - full Chapter Benefits and the **WAVE**

Send check to: Membership Chair
Eastern Sierra Audubon
P.O. Box 624
Bishop, CA 93515

For National membership status call: **1-800-274-4201**

OR, click on Customer Service at www.audubon.org

CHAPTER OFFICERS

President: James Wilson873-3859
 Vice-President: Joan Benner938-2929
 Secretary: Mary Vocelka873-4480
 Treasurer: Bill Mitchel872-4774
 Board Members: Sally Gaines934-9782
 Carolyn Gann 872-4125
 Chris Howard873-7422
 Phill Kiddoo872-7226
 Sara Steck873-4320

Committee Chairs

Adopt-A-Highway: John & Ros Gorham938-2023
 Birdathon: Michael Prather876-5807
 Conservation: OPEN
 Education: Michael Prather876-5807
 Rosie Beach873-7422
 Sara Steck873-4320
 Field Trips: Chris Howard873-7422
 Fish Slough ACEC: Sam Glasser873-3111
 Historian: Carolyn Gann872-4125
 Membership: Jim Parker 872-4447
 Newsletter Editor: OPEN
 Newsletter Mailing: Mary Vocelka873-4480
 Programs: Sally Gaines934-9782
 Publicity: Joan Benner938-2929
 Refreshments: Joan Benner938-2929
 T-shirts: Sarah Sheehan872-4039

Eastern Sierra Audubon

P.O. Box 624

Bishop, CA 93515

Postmaster: Address Service Requested

NONPROFIT
ORGANIZATION
U. S. POSTAGE
PAID
BISHOP, CA
PERMIT NO. 54



A portion of one of the 418 plates in John Gould's Hummingbirds, a valuable book to be auctioned for Chapter fundraising (see page 1-2.)

Holiday Potluck and Fundraising, Joy Fatooh updates us on the Sierra Bighorn, The Heindels give us a timely article on Birding Death Valley - *Inside!*