



Meetings

2nd Wednesday of the month,
September-June, 7:00 PM,
usually at
White Mountain Research Station
3 miles east of Bishop on
East Line Street.
Check local media for possible
changes.

ESAS Website: ESAudubon.org *ES Bird Sightings:* ES Audubon.org

Evening Programs

Evening programs will precede by announcements of interest to the membership, and recent bird sightings and other local natural history news. Come prepared to participate!

January 14

Refreshments: Connie & Klaus Englehart

Tanzanian Wildlife Safari Chris Howard and Rosie Beach

Last summer, Chris Howard and Rosie, Amber, and Marika Beach traveled to East Africa and spent eight days on safari in northern Tanzania. With their personal Maasai guide they toured the Serengeti Plain, Ngorongoro Crater, Lake Manyara, and the slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro. They saw 175 species of new birds and more wildlife than they imagined possible: Wildebeest, Giraffe, Zebra, Elephant, Rhinoceros, Cheetah and Leopard, to name a few. They also learned about private and public education in Tanzania, visiting a private school and establishing pen pals for Bishop Elementary children.



Chris Howard and Rosie Beach photo

February 11

Refreshments: Dorothy Burnstrom

The Search for Life in the Universe Rich Garner



Image from SETI Institute website, www.seti-inst.edu

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 – exist 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.

President's Message – Feathered Hope

Fall 2003 has left us and winter has settled in. This evening Kay and I went for a walk at dusk and the air was fresh and crisp, our cheeks were cold with the promise of night. This last weekend was our Bishop Christmas Bird Count and I think all of us had a good time. It was great to have the counters together breaking bread, and recounting the birds of the day. While the birds of winter seem sparse, they are all the more treasured when found. American goldfinches or buffleheads shimmer like jewels in the low, brittle, early winter sunlight.

This is the first newsletter in many years that is not being edited by Larry Blakely. Larry has done an amazing job of serving both Eastern Sierra Audubon and the critters that make our home such a wonderful place. Words seem inadequate to thank you, Larry, for a job well done. Larry's newsletters won praise and awards for their style and beauty. He was our president, maintained our website, and was in charge of our sign at Klondike Lakes. Larry has also resigned from our board, but it is my fervent hope that he and Ruth will continue to grace us with their presence and wisdom. Thank you again.

I would also like to thank our new editor, Joy Fatooh, for volunteering. Joy is a longtime eastern Sierra resident, a BLM biologist, and as you have seen in her wonderful articles, a big fan of birds.

These last few years have been difficult ones for people who care about the non-human members of our planet. Many valuable things do not show up on financial statements, or contribute to our perception of national security. The current administration in Washington DC does not value wild creatures or places. They only pay lip service to the value of clean air or water. The environmental laws of the last 40 years, which were designed to protect wildness and the health of our environment, have been reduced, removed, or altered to render them useless. However, that being said, there is hope. And, it is our obligation to be hopeful. While memory is our link to the past, hope is our tie to the future. Recently I read an interview with Terry Tempest Williams. She was asked if she was hopeful. She said yes, "Where there is life there is always hope." Clearly there is life. Just ask those who counted birds in the snow and rain on Sunday. Seeing flickers, goldfinches, hawks, and geese in their winter glory is the proof. These birds and other wildlife need our help to survive, they need our hope. Emily Dickinson said:

**"Hope" is the thing with feathers –
That perches in the soul –
And sings the tunes without the words –
And never stops – at all –**

We need to sing the tunes with the words, because we are the ones that can speak for the birds. May your new year be filled with feathered brilliance. – *James Wilson*

January and February Field Trips

Saturday, January 3rd – Mono Lake and Death Valley Christmas Bird Counts

Mono Lake Meet for a pre-count meeting/feast on Friday, January 2; spend the night at PRBO Mono City headquarters if you like; and count on Saturday, January 3. X-country ski routes, snowshoeing routes, and walking-down-the street routes; all levels of expertise are welcome. A contribution to the pre-count potluck will be appreciated/devoured. Contact Chris McCreedy at (415) 868-0655 extension 374 or cmccreedy@prbo.org or River Gates at rgates@prbo.org.

Death Valley Meet at Furnace Creek Ranch Golf Course Parking lot at 7:00 AM. Participants pay individual \$5.00 fee. As usual, we'll provide chili, chips and cold slaw for a group compilation dinner at our house after the count. All participants please RSVP at (760) 786-2108 or desertwolfe1@ecoisp.com

Saturday, January 24th - Hawks, Hawks, and more Hawks Join Earl Gann and his traditional driving tour to see the hawks, falcons, and eagles on the way to Benton. This is also a great trip to see flocks of hundreds of Horned Larks and Mountain Bluebirds. Meet at 9:00AM behind the Wye Shell gas station in Bishop to carpool. Should last until mid-afternoon. Bring binoculars, water and lunch, and dress for the elements. A good trip for beginners and kids. Call Chris at 873-7422 with questions.

Saturday, February 7th - Big Pine Winter Wildlife Tour with Tom and Jo Heindel. This is a great driving tour between Klondike Lake and Tinemaha Reservoir. Meet at the Glacier View Campground in Big Pine at 8:00AM. Bring binoculars, lunch, water, scopes. Should last until noon. For more information call Tom or Jo Heindel at 938-2764.

Owens Valley conservation news

Mike Prather

Cartago Springs Wetland Acquired at Owens Lake

On November 18, the Wildlife Conservation Board approved the purchase of the 204 acre Cartago Springs property on the southwestern shore of Owens Lake. The California Department of Fish and Game will manage the site as a wildlife area and the Eastern Sierra Audubon Society and the Owens Valley Committee will help develop an interpretation program. Plans are underway to use the location as a gateway natural history site for the Eastern Sierra and reach some of the seven million passersby on Highway 395.

During World War I and into the 1920's, a large soda ash operation existed at Cartago with company housing, a school, post office and company store. Now all that remains of that story is a large white lime pile and a flowing artesian well. Water from that well has created two ponds in the old soda plant evaporator basins. And overflowing from these ponds the water moves further and braids out on to State Lands of the Owens Lake playa where more wetlands extend for up to a mile. The snowy plover, a Species of Special Concern at Owens Lake, nests along these marshy stringers. Owens Lake is the largest inland nesting site for snowy plovers in California. More than 140 other bird species use Cartago for breeding or during migration.

Securing the Cartago property has taken years of effort by many volunteers and the dedication of the California Department of Fish and Game's Bishop office. Many thanks to everyone who has helped to make this purchase finally come to fruition.

Directions to the site: In Cartago (just north of Olancho) turn off of Highway 395 east toward Owens Lake onto Whitney Street. When the pavement ends continue straight onto the dirt road a short distance and park near the fenced well site. Walk east down the grassy track and through the gate. Aim for the dike between the two ponds. At the end of the dike you can look out on to the Owens Lake playa and marshes.

More Shallow Flooding For Owens Lake – Good News For Birds

Last month, as required, the plan created in 2000 for dust control at Owens Lake was revised by Los Angeles and the Great Basin Unified Air Pollution Control District. The final work to be done before the Clean Air Act deadline in 2006 will now go forward. Ten additional square miles of the lake bed (6,400 acres) will be shallow flooded in an effort to suppress the hazardous dust emissions that escape from its surface. This will bring the total area of shallow flooding to approximately 25 square miles by 2006 and the area of native salt grass plantings to 3.5 square miles.

The great news for birds is that shallow flooding, the release of trickling water across the playa surface, promotes the growth of algae mats and alkali/brine flies

that "sets the table" for many species. It mimics the miles of shoreline that once made the lake a major wildlife stopover site. This water serves the dual purpose of suppressing dust and sustaining wildlife. Thousands of migrating shorebirds stop to feed each spring and fall during their marathon migration. Clouds of several thousand Least and Western Sandpipers undulate over the lake seeking foraging areas and avoiding falcons also looking for a meal.

Look for Eastern Sierra Audubon and Owens Valley Committee field trips to Owens Lake this spring and fall. Join us for the spectacular birding action and help us in our efforts to have the shallow flooding be officially designated for dust *and* wildlife. For more information on Owens Lake email prather@qnet.com and visit www.ovcweb.org or www.esaudubon.org.



Red Knot at Owens Lake
Bob Steele photo

Lower Owens River Settlement

A settlement of important obstacles may have been reached for the Lower Owens River Project (LORP), ending delays that kept the flows from beginning as promised in June of this year. The LORP is planned to rewater 62 miles of the Lower Owens River as

mitigation for destructive groundwater pumping impacts by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power from 1970-1990 Committee, Sierra Club and the California Attorney General, tentative agreement was achieved in December by the above plaintiffs and Inyo County and Los Angeles. If approved by all parties the settlement provides for the following:

1. LADWP will build the 50 cfs pumpback station that they had previously agreed to in 1991 instead of the 150cfs pump that they unilaterally changed to later. This pump will return water from the lower end of the LORP to the aqueduct or onto Owens Lake for dust control. A small volume will

(LADWP). During that period of time the Owens Valley suffered the loss of major springs such as Blackrock, Fish, Seely and Hines flow past the pump into the delta habitat area.

2. LADWP agrees to release the Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) in June of 2004.

3. LADWP agrees to start beginning flows in the river by September of 2005 and to have full flows of 40cfs running by April of 2006.

4. LADWP will report their progress on all tasks to the Inyo Superior Court based on an agreed upon schedule.

A settlement would be a bittersweet victory since it results in an agreement to accept a two

as well as acres of marshlands and spring fields. As a result of court action by the Owens Valley

year delay for flows to begin in the Lower Owens River Project, but the alternatives could have been a 10 year delay, or possibly never. We all want a crystal ball for Christmas. "Remember the Owens Valley," only now we hope it will be for positive reasons and not the tragic ones from the past.

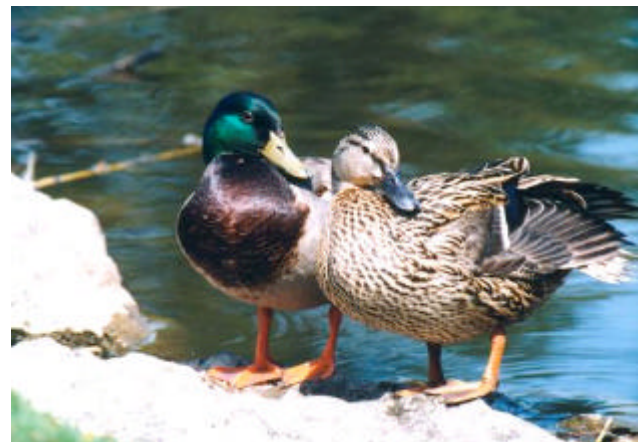
For a free copy of the new Eastern Sierra Birding Trail map that covers from Owens Lake to Mono Lake, please email prather@qnet.com and one will be mailed to you.

Birding

Happy Anniversary Bishop CBC! Chris Howard

For the 20th consecutive year, birders spent a chilly December day counting as many species they could on the Bishop Christmas Bird Count. The 2003 count was held on December 14th. Thirty-nine intrepid birders, bundled in every layer they had, braved snow showers, rain, and light wind while trying to keep their binoculars dry and un-fogged. Their efforts paid off, when at the post-count tally potluck, a whopping 98 species were checked off. With the exception of the past three counts, 98 is the highest in Bishop CBC history. (2000 had 100, 2001 had 103, and 2002 had 109.)

The 2003 CBC tallied new high counts for many species including Great Egret (4), Mallard (448), American Wigeon (95), Common Goldeneye (25), Red-shouldered Hawk (12), Red-tailed Hawk (117), Ferruginous Hawk (9), American Kestrel (33), Virginia Rail (3), Mourning Dove (24), Northern (red-shafted) Flicker (188), American Robin (235), Cedar Waxwing (165), and Orange-crowned Warbler (17). New species to the count were an adult male Anna's Hummingbird at Rocking K and a count-week female Indigo Bunting at Mustang Mesa. Notable misses were nuthatches, gulls, Common Merganser, Red-naped Sapsucker and Cassin's Finch.



Many thanks to the brave participants who made the 2003 Bishop Christmas Bird Count a success. A special thanks to James and Kay Wilson who hosted the post-count tally potluck.

Mark your calendars for the 21st annual Bishop CBC, to be held on Saturday, December 18th, 2004. Birders of all ability levels are encouraged and welcome to participate. Contact Chris Howard at choward@telis.org for more information.

Fall 2003 in Inyo County

Tom and Jo Heindel

Believe it or not, fall migration lasts for almost half a year! The first southbound migrants are usually female Wilson's Phalaropes who return by mid June after laying the eggs in a nest and placing responsibilities on the males. This year the ladies were spinning around at Tinemaha Reservoir on 11 June, right on time. Concurrently some species, e.g. Yellow-billed Cuckoo and Common Nighthawk, are still winging their way north to breed.

This Fall, like all others, brought with it surprises such as early arriving birds, late departing birds, vagrants from the east, and sightings in locations or habitats that they wouldn't be found dead in the rest of the year! Some of the most surprising observations follow, but first thanks must be given to those who work very hard at gathering and substantiating county records that contribute to the valuable science that citizens can conduct following rigid standards. We want to acknowledge these important contributors: Paul Clark, Chris Conard, Jon Dunn, River Gates, John & Ros Gorham, Carolyn Honer, Chris Howard & Rosie Beach, Andrew & Vern Howe, Bob Hudson, Andrew & Leah Kirk, Sandy Koonce, Amy Lauterback, Kelli Levinson, Cathy McFadden, Jim & Debby Parker, Mike Prather, Bob & Susan Steele, Derrick & Mary Vocelka, Todd Vogel, Jim Weigard, Judy Wickman, James & Kay Wilson, Jim Yurchenko, and Jerry Zatorski.

Pacific Loons are often unreported but this year at least five were found between 30 Oct & 25 Nov.

A Red-Necked Grebe, only the third one found in the county, was at Tinemaha Reservoir 16-19 November. Great Egrets are regular in small numbers but an amazing 59, the most ever recorded in Inyo, were at Tinemaha Reservoir 7 Oct. Wood Ducks had a successful breeding season based on the 31 seen at Tinemaha Reservoir 26 Aug. Single Surf Scoters, rarely reported, were at Klondike Lake 16 & 30 Oct. A pair of Barrow's Goldeneyes, 11th county record, were at Death Valley Junction 16 Nov. A casual (not seen every year) White-Tailed Kite was in Bishop 7 Nov. Another casual species, Common Moorhen, was at Owens Lake 8 Oct.

A very late Spotted Sandpiper was at Tinemaha Reservoir 9 Dec. Red Knot, a casual shorebird, was at Owens Lake 20 Sep, and 11 Sanderlings, the high county count, were there 21 Sep. Two rare Semipalmated Sandpipers were found, one at Tinemaha Reservoir 24 Aug and the other at Klondike Lake 12 Sep. Two juvenile Stilt Sandpipers at Tinemaha Reservoir 21 Aug were the 6th county record. The seven Herring Gulls seen between 25 Oct & 9 Dec were the most ever recorded in fall. Five Sabine's Gulls were more than normally reported and one seen at Owens Lake 2 Nov was the latest ever.

Two Eurasian Collared-Doves, recent colonizers in the county, were seen with one being the first found away from Bishop when found in Independence. Some observers mistake the captive reared and very similar Ringed

Turtle-Dove for this species. Flocks of free-flying Ringed Turtle-Dove have been photographed in Bishop. A White-Winged Dove was at Owens Lake 5 Oct while 15 Inca Doves and 3 Ruddy Ground-Doves continue exciting observers at Furnace Creek Ranch.



Ruddy Ground-Dove
Chris Howard photo

The two latest ever goatsuckers were interesting with a Lesser Nighthawk near Trona 11 Nov and a Common Poorwill near Fish Springs 2 Dec. Anna's Hummingbirds continue their new winter expansion visiting various feeders in the Owens Valley. Thirty Lewis's Woodpeckers are wintering in the date palms at Furnace Creek Ranch. Acorn Woodpeckers continue their expansion in the county with 3 reported from DVNP and 1 on top of Mt. Barnard (13,990') on 11 Sep setting a new high elevation record and suggesting that this species may not see the Sierra as much of a barrier as thought.

A Least Flycatcher, 10th county record, was at Birchim Canyon 10 Nov and a record setting late

Pacific-Slope Flycatcher was there much of Nov and into Dec. Steller's Jays, Western Scrub-Jays and Mountain Chickadees are reported from the lowlands this fall as are Brown Creepers and Golden-Crowned Kinglets. An elevation record was set when a Mountain Chickadee was found on top of Mt. Tyndall (14,018). Lost Gray Catbirds were at Furnace Creek Ranch 20 Sep and Deep Springs 19 Oct. A Sprague's Pipit, 3rd county record, was found at Furnace Creek Ranch 19 Oct. Warblers made their colorful appearance with a Magnolia in Big Pine 30 Sep, a stunning male Black-Throated Blue at Panamint Springs 18 Oct, a Blackpoll at

Surprise Canyon 11 Oct, American Redstarts at Birchim Canyon 12 Sep and Panamint Springs 18 Oct, and a Prothonotary at Deep Springs 28 Oct.



Black-throated Blue Warbler
Kathy McFadden photo

The latest ever Yellow-Breasted Chat was at Stovepipe Wells 13 Oct and a Summer Tanager

persisted at Rovana until 19 Nov. Rose-Breasted Grosbeaks were at Independence 8 & 27 Nov and a male Indigo Bunting was at Big Pine 26 Aug. Three Painted Buntings were seen, Big Pine 18 Aug, Deep Springs 7 Sep, and Furnace Creek Ranch 20 Sep. A Common Grackle was at Independence 13 Nov and a Lawrence's Goldfinch was there 16 Nov.

In summation, this was another interesting and sometimes spectacular fall thanks to all who helped find these feathered wonders and document them for posterity. The birds, too, are grateful, believe it or not!

It's a Wild Life

To be a field biologist, one must venture forth into all kinds of terrain and soil types at various levels of saturation, as we might politely say when we manage to get out again. Everyone in this line of work has at least one good story about getting stuck. Two of my college friends who became field biologists have the habit of sending me great stories by email, and both sent me stuck stories that rank among the best.

Dean Tonenna was a Lee Vining kid getting his master's when I was getting my bachelor's. A few days after his email announcing that he'd become an ecologist for the Carson City BLM, I got another headed "Field Work."
– Editor

Field Work

Dean Tonenna

My first week of orientation as a new employee with the federal government was fairly intense, with videos to watch, forms to fill out, fingers to be fingerprinted and allegiances to swear. When a coworker offered to take me out into the field to acquaint me with the area I would be working in, I jumped at the chance. Katrina's truck was in the shop that fateful June morning, so we borrowed someone else's and headed out.

A bumpy dirt road led us through wonderful scenery to the first stop at one of Katrina's allotments in the Pine Nut Mountains. Katrina put the truck into four-wheel drive as we prepared to cross a dry gravelly wash. Halfway through the wash our tires began to lose traction and we were unable to climb the sloping bank on the other side. Further attempts to "give it the gas" only spun the rear tires, propelling our bodies and spirits ever downward. We would have spun ourselves even deeper had it not been for the rear axle coming into firm contact with the fine gravel, preventing further movement in any direction. We then realized that the 4-wheel drive was not working.

We found some old boards nearby and worked for about an hour to back ourselves out of the wash...inch by inch. Great relief swept over us as the rear wheels started gaining traction. Not wanting to lose our momentum, Katrina gave it the gas and the truck suddenly shot backward, bouncing and bashing erratically through the very shrubs and herbaceous vegetation that we were there to care for. But at that moment we didn't care. We just wanted to get out. Our hopes were dashed, however, when the rear axle came to a jolting halt on top of a large granite boulder.

Our prospects were very dim at that point with the rear end of the truck high-centered on the boulder and the front end still pointing downward into the wash. To go backwards seemed impossible with only

one rear tire on the ground and the other, thanks to the boulder, in the air. To go forward would mean that we would get stuck all over again. To do nothing was somehow the preferred choice.

As we stood there trying to figure out what to do, another truck drove past, backed up and then stopped. Two coworkers, who happened to be passing through the area, jumped out and after a round of teasing, chained our vehicle to theirs and pulled us out of the wash. We decided to hike in to finish up our work.

Stop number 2 was further down the road amid the charred skeletons of an earlier forest fire. Our rescuers, before they left, had warned us of the deep water-filled ruts further down the road. They told us to be sure to keep our tires out of the ruts and travel only on the high ground. We tried, but the earth caved in under one of the tires and within an instant all four wheels were in the ruts. We tried to back up but almost immediately we heard the sickening sound of spinning wheels and mud splattering against the sides of the truck. We jumped out to survey our situation even though we already knew. Katrina's face was flushed and when she only saw the upper half of our wheels she let out a round of expressions that I never heard her express before.

We were really stuck this time, with both axles high-centered on the rock-hard berm of earth that separated the parallel ruts. We lined the ruts with dead branches from the burned out pinyon forest and then tried to jack up the rear end to put branches under the tires, but couldn't because the frame was so close to the ground. We made about six inches of progress before becoming very stuck again.

It was getting late so I suggested that we call for help. We tried several times but could get no response from Dispatch. We were to later learn that we were in a weak signal area and a major fire had just broken out, and so Dispatch never even heard us.

At that point we realized that we were the only ones who could save ourselves. We had to crawl under the truck to dig out a spot deep enough so that we could place the jack beneath the axle. This was the worst part because the mud was gooey and smelled like fresh cow manure. We got it all over our clothes, hands, arms, faces and hair. We also had to chip away at the rock-hard dirt between the ruts because both axles were high centered on it. We couldn't use a shovel with the truck so low to the ground. Instead, we used a metal rod to chip away pieces about the size of a peanut.

Talk about an exercise in futility! It was the weirdest feeling to crawl under the truck, lie in the mud and chip away, all the while wondering if this strenuous effort was really worth it or not. As it turned out, it did

help, I think. After about four hours our arms were like rubber, but we managed to get out.

Once we got the truck turned around, Katrina asked, "Do you want to drive, seeing all of the trouble that I've gotten us into?" I was caught completely off-guard. "That's okay," I lied, "you're doing a fine job."

And so we left the way we came, stopping in Gardnerville to get gas. It was just our luck to find that the only gas station open was the type where one has to go inside the mini-market and prepay. With some hesitation and ultimate resignation Katrina, in all of her muddiness, went inside. The cashier just stared wide-eyed at the Mud Being before her, and watched incredulously as two Mud Monsters filled up their Mudmobile with gas and drove off into the night. We didn't care; we were just glad to be on our way home!

Katrina was eager to get back to the office because her mother and sister were waiting for a ride home that evening. The three of them packed into Katrina's Isuzu pickup. Katrina told me the next day how both mother and sister, after a few whiffs of the mud plastered all over her, insisted that all windows be rolled down for the duration of their journey. It was a good thing that it all happened during the summer.

Next issue: Stuck in the quicksand with Sondra Grimm



Wood rat and cholla cactus
Joy Fatooh

New editor invites new contributors

If you have news, stories, art or photos of local wildlife and conservation that you would like to share with Eastern Sierra Audubon members, send them to antimatter@qnet.com or send your email address to be added to the list of potential contributors who are notified of upcoming deadlines. – Joy Fatooh

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**From Owens Lake to Tanzania to the depths of interstellar space;
feathered wonders, feathered hope, and the ultimate stuck truck story
from Dean Tonenna - *Inside!***