



## 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:* ESAudubon.org/birds/

## Evening Programs

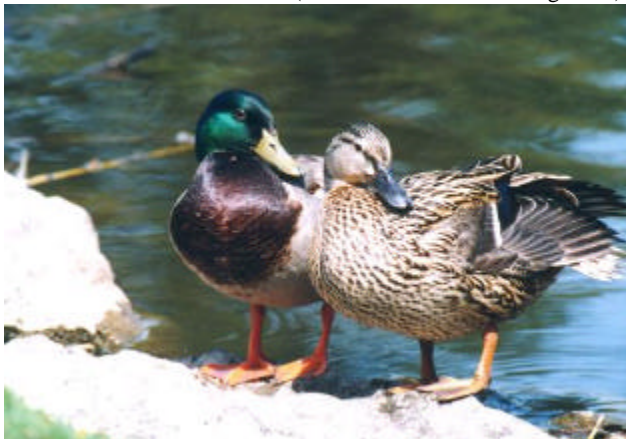
**Evening programs will be preceded by announcements of interest to the membership, and recent bird sightings and other local natural history news. Come prepared to participate!**

**January 12**

### **What About the Ducks?**

**Debbie House**

Debbie House has been monitoring waterfowl populations at Mono Lake, Bridgeport Reservoir, and Crowley Reservoir for the last three years. This long-term monitoring project is designed to evaluate the response of the waterfowl populations to changes in the level of Mono Lake. Debbie will present the first three years of data on waterfowl numbers, spatial use patterns, and habitat use at all three waterbodies. She will also discuss summer shorebird habitat use and spatial distribution at Mono Lake. Debbie is a Watershed Resources Specialist with the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power. (Refreshments: Connie Englehart)



**February 9**

### **The Traveler**

**B. Moose Peterson**



Bald Eagle

Moose Peterson

B. Moose Peterson specializes in photographing California's rare and endangered wildlife and wild places. To better understand California, Moose traveled to Alaska for years to explore its still vastly unspoiled wildernesses. There he witnessed grizzly bears up close and personal; the cold, brutal and beautiful world of the musk ox and Dall sheep; and the amazing winter of the Bald Eagle and summer of the Horned Puffin. Come join us in this journey of adventure and exploration.

Moose and his wife, Sharon, strive to educate the public about the goal of preserving our wild heritage. His images have received many awards and are published extensively. He is also the author of a shelf-full of technical books for photographers, and is an excellent speaker. We are excited to welcome Moose at our February program. (Refreshments: Dorothy Burnstrom)

### **The Tree-Friendly e-Wave Option**

Contact Chris Howard, [choward@telis.org](mailto:choward@telis.org) to receive an e-mail link to the full-color, electronic version of each new issue of this newsletter instead of a paper copy.

## **President's Message – Act Locally for Your Wild Friends**

It is Christmas day in the Owens Valley as I sit at my computer and reflect on our chapter, the year past and the year ahead. Last Saturday we had our annual Christmas Bird Count here in Bishop. When it was over we had over 30 people to our house for potluck and tallying. There is nothing quite like the energy of 30 bird nuts discussing the birds of the day, what they saw and what they learned. Big fun.

It has been a good year for Eastern Sierra Audubon. We have had field trips, our evening meetings, potlucks, garage sales; attended public meetings; and taken many children for their first birding outing.

In 2005 we will do it again. Our advocacy for wild creatures, including our feathered friends, is going to be even more important. For many years several legal tools, including the Endangered Species Act and the National Forest Management Act, have been important in our defense of the lands that are the homes of wild animals.

These laws are being attacked and weakened. The only tools we have left may be our local connection to the land and each other. I believe that if local people will collectively speak up for creatures with feathers and scales the managers will do their best to respond. So it is our job to talk to each other and commit a few hours a month to speak out for our animal friends that do not go to meetings.

Having been the President of ESAS for 3 ½ years, I would like to thank all who make ESAS possible: board members, committee chairs, newsletter people, and those who help with special events. In the future we will need more board members, a new program chair, and a new president. If you are interested in our society and the biological health of our region this is an opportunity to contribute. Talk to me or any other board member.

Happy New Year,  
James

## **January, February and March Field Trips**

**Saturday, January 22nd – Hawks, Hawks, and More Hawks – Leader: Earl Gann** Join Earl Gann and his traditional driving tour to see the hawks, falcons, and eagles on the way to Benton. Besides birds of prey, 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 early afternoon. Bring binoculars, water, lunch, and dress for the elements. A good trip for beginners and kids. Call Chris Howard at 873-7422 with questions.

**Saturday, February, 26 – Bird Banding Demonstration – Leaders: Tom and Jo Heindel** Tom and Jo will operate a bird banding station where the public is invited to watch wild birds being taken out of mist nets, measurements made, aluminum bands placed on legs and the birds released back to the wild. Stop by between 8:00AM and 11:00 AM. Drop-ins may stay for as long or as short a time as they wish. The station is located at 280 Dewey St., Big Pine. Children are welcome; pets are not for obvious reasons. Wind or weather cancels. For further information call Tom or Jo at 938-2764.

**Saturday, March 5th – Big Pine Winter Wildlife Tour – Leaders: 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 at 938-2764.

**Saturday, March 12th – Pleasant Valley Reservoir Birding – Leader Jerry Zatorski** This is a great opportunity to see ducks, geese, snipe, raptors and wrens. This trip involves a 2 mile walk. Bring binoculars, scopes, snacks, and water. Meet at 8:00AM behind the Wye Shell in Bishop to carpool. This is a great trip for beginning birders and children. For more information call Jerry Zatorski at 872-3818.

### **April 15 – Registration opens for 4th Annual Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua June 17-19**

Join us for a weekend of workshops, field trips, auditorium presentations, music and more. We have another outstanding line-up of presenters and field trip leaders scheduled. More details available soon: [www.birdchautauqua.org](http://www.birdchautauqua.org)

## Another Exciting Fall in Inyo County: 2004

### Tom and Jo Heindel

Birdwatchers always look forward to migration when birds move north in spring to their breeding areas and south in fall to wintering grounds. Each migration brings the unexpected. This fall was an exceptionally exciting one.

Four species found in Inyo this fall are so rare in California that the observers' documentation must be sent to the Rare Birds Committee (CBRC) for review by ten members to determine if the report rises to the level of a scientific record. A Pine Warbler, 3<sup>rd</sup> record for Inyo, was photographed at China Ranch 16 October by Steven Myers. A Worm-eating Warbler, Inyo's 6<sup>th</sup> record, was found at Millpond 9 November by Claus Engelhardt and Bill Mitchel. It was seen by many local birders and photographed. A Black Rosy-Finch was found at Aspendell 14 November by Susan Steele of Ridgecrest and seen again at the same feeder 18 November by local ornithologist and author Jon Dunn of Rovana. This is the 2<sup>nd</sup> Inyo record since the species was split from Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch a few years ago. There are prior records for the county but this species is not of annual occurrence. A Painted Bunting was photographed at China Ranch 2 October by Jim Pike. The county has nearly ten records and the state is close to one hundred. The Committee is discussing the removal of this species from the state review list in the future.

A number of other species that are found more regularly in the state but very rarely in the county were reported this fall. A Stilt Sandpiper, 6<sup>th</sup> county record, was photographed at Klondike Lake on 30 August by Tom Heindel. A Ruddy Turnstone was photographed at Owens Lake on 9 August by Mike Prather. There are fewer than ten county records for the turnstone. A Common Moorhen was found at Deep Springs College on 9 October by Susan Steele. This species is not reported every year. Three Sanderlings and two to three Semipalmated Sandpipers were found at Tinemaha Reservoir and Owens Lake. As identification skills are increasing these two species are being reported more often than in past decades. A juvenile Sabine's Gull found by Susan Steele was photographed at Furnace Creek Ranch 2 October. That was only the 2<sup>nd</sup> documented record for that location. That same day Susan found a Ruddy Ground-Dove at the Ranch and it was photographed by husband Bob Steele. A Short-eared Owl was found and photographed by Tom Heindel at Klondike Lake on 9 November. Debby Parker found, photographed, and extensively documented a Calliope Hummingbird at her feeder as late as 9 October. While

this species breeds here, it is astounding that one was still around then and it may be the latest record ever for the state!

A Varied Thrush was found by Vicki and Gerry Wolfe, from Death Valley, at Furnace Creek Ranch on 3 October, which is a couple of weeks earlier than they normally appear in the eastern Sierra.

Other species departed later than expected. Andrew Kirk found a Western Kingbird near the Bishop golf course on 2 November, almost a month later than the previous late date. Jim and Debby Parker found a Warbling Vireo 5 November near Bishop 18 days later than the late record. There were three Gray Catbirds this fall but the one found by Tom Wurster and Liga Auzins, southern CA birders, at Furnace Creek Ranch 21 November was a couple of weeks later than the latest record. A male Rusty Blackbird found 5 December by Tom Heindel at Tinemaha Reservoir remained for three days. This species has become increasingly rare and this is the first record for the Owens Valley.

An amazing four hybrid Ladder-backed X Nuttall's Woodpeckers were found and well documented. The Owens Valley is one of the few locations where these two similar species occur. The Nuttall's occupies the willow riparian along the Owens River and creeks. The Ladder-backed prefers the drier Joshua Tree habitat. The birders observed the seven distinguishing characteristics and noted that their bird had conflicting marks, that is, it shared genes of both species. Two White-headed Woodpeckers, normally found high in the mountains, were on the valley floor. A Vermilion Flycatcher, normally found in the Death Valley area, remained at the Bishop Sewer Pond for at least a month. An Eastern Kingbird, a vagrant from back east, was found at Blackrock on 30 August by Chris and Rosie Howard.

The warbler list was amazing and filled with vagrants from the east: Northern Parula, Chestnut-sided, Magnolia, Black-throated Blue, Black-throated Green, Pine, Worm-eating, two Palm, two Bay-breasted, two American Redstarts, and three Northern Waterthrushes. It was a glorious fall and one that will not be soon forgotten by those who saw the *rara aves*.



Ruddy  
Ground-  
Dove

Bob Steele  
photo

## **Crowley Lake Field Trip Report**

### **Chris Howard**

Despite Crowley Reservoir being 50% frozen over, Jon Dunn's ESAS field trip on 4 December managed 41 species. Seventeen participants spent the clear, calm, chilly (24F-38F) day birding the northwest arm, delta, and marina areas. Highlights were the continuing Bewick's Swan (Siberian race Tundra Swan), first reported by Tom Wurster on 7 November, along with another 110 Tundra Swans, a late American White Pelican, 5 goose species: White-fronted (5), Snow (5), Ross's (10), Canada (200), and Aleutian/Cackling (9). Also, two adult Bald Eagles and 1 immature Golden Eagle, 4 Dunlin flying by, 15 Greater Yellowlegs, and 2 Rough-legged Hawks.



Rough-Legged Hawk (below)

Chris Howard



## **Bishop Christmas Bird Count**

### **2004 – Preliminary Results**

#### **Chris Howard**

The 23rd annual Bishop CBC was held on December 18, 2004. Fifty-two people formed 14 teams and scoured every bush, tree, feeder, and phone pole every bird in the 15 mile count circle. The weather was beautiful: a low of 23°F quickly warmed to a high of 66°F, no wind and not a cloud to be found.

The preliminary total number of species seen on count day was 107, just shy of the record of 108 set in 2002. Highlight sightings were two lingering Double-crested Cormorants and a possible Barrow's Goldeneye at Pleasant Valley Reservoir. The goldeneye was a difficult identification; at press time I'm awaiting further details and observation. A Black-Crowned Night Heron was found, always rare in winter. One Cinnamon Teal, normally absent in December was found at the Bishop Sewer Ponds unable to fly. One adult Sandhill Crane at the Sunland alfalfa fields was only the second seen on the Bishop CBC. A Barn Owl, hard to find in winter.

One White-Headed Woodpecker at Bishop Elementary School and two others the previous day in the count circle were exceptional finds at lower elevations. An adult male Yellow-Bellied Sapsucker at the Bishop Country Club was carefully scrutinized to separate it from the more expected Red-naped Sapsucker. Two woodpeckers with characteristics of Nuttall's and Ladder-backed were thought to be Nuttall X Ladder-backed hybrids.

Unprecedented in December was a very late Hammond's Flycatcher. For the second time on a Bishop CBC, the rarer Western Bluebird (15) outnumbered Mountain Bluebird (0). Rare in fall and winter, one Swamp Sparrow near Dixon Lane. Two Harris's Sparrows, one adult and one immature were at a backyard feeder. A Pink-Sided race of the Dark-Eyed Junco was carefully separated from other races.

At press time 'count-week' had not yet finished, but so far White-Throated Sparrow, Anna's Hummingbird, Costa's Hummingbird, and Cackling Goose were added to the 'count week' list. Notable misses were Wood Duck, Horned Lark, Pinyon Jay, Mountain Bluebird, Townsend's Solitaire, Hermit Thrush, and Cedar Waxwing.

Many thanks to all the participants. Mark your calendars for the 2005 Bishop CBC on Saturday, December 17, 2005.

## 2004 – Year of the first Owens Valley West Nile Positive Birds

**Andrew Kirk**

During 2004 employees of Inyo County Environmental Health shipped approximately 30 dead birds to a California Dept. of Health lab for testing for West Nile virus (WNV). Each bird was reported by a concerned Owens Valley resident.

Twelve Owens Valley birds tested positive for WNV. The first bird found to be positive for WNV was a Lesser Goldfinch which expired at Eastern Sierra Wildlife Care on 28 August. All twelve WNV-positive birds were found in the north-west quadrant of Bishop.

If the pattern from elsewhere in North America holds true for the Owens Valley, next year the virus will “amplify,” resulting in many more dead birds. Then in subsequent years the virus will attain “maintenance” level, with fewer infected birds.

Here is a complete list of the 2004 WNV-positive birds:

1. Mallard
2. American Crow (4 birds)
3. Common Raven
4. Orange-crowned Warbler
5. Yellow-rumped Warbler
6. White-crowned Sparrow
7. Brewer’s Blackbird
8. American Goldfinch
9. Lesser Goldfinch

## Just Add Water: Instant Owens Lake!

Although not that simple, the addition of significant amounts of water at Owens Lake for dust control continues one of the largest wildlife resurrections in the west. It was not the intention of Los Angeles to create new habitat that has lured tens of thousands of migrating shorebirds back to Owens. It was not their plan to foster the largest inland snowy plover nesting site in California. But because of the Clean Air Act, the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) is trickling water onto the dry surface of Owens Lake in order to control the extremely hazardous regional PM<sub>10</sub> dust particle emissions. This in turn grows algae, nourishing seething masses of flies, and that sets the table for the return of the birds.

By the December 31, 2006 deadline for clean air at Owens Lake there will be approximately 25 square miles of shallow flooding for dust control. Much of this recreates the historic shallow lake food stopover that was Owens Lake before it was dried up in the 1920s. However, current policy of Los Angeles is that water is for dust and not necessarily for birds. Methods of dust

## Your Local Land Trust: Public Benefits and Opportunities

**Karen Ferrell-Ingram**

The Eastern Sierra Land Trust (ESLT) invites the public to an upcoming introductory forum to learn more about its tools and programs that benefit the environment and culture of our region. The land trust movement is involved in protecting millions of acres of critical wildlife habitats, working farms and ranches, historic buildings and beloved scenic vistas across the nation. Locally, the ESLT is focused on programs that benefit the public, private landowners, and the land so that the unique assets of the eastern Sierra can be enjoyed by residents and visitors far into the future. The ESLT seeks to involve all interested local residents so that all elements of our community are represented.

The introductory forum will cover land trust tools, ESLT programs and plans, and volunteer opportunities. Volunteers are needed in a variety of areas. There is much interesting and important work to be done!

Please join us at one of the following events:

**Wednesday, February 2, 7:00-8:30 PM** at the Town/County Conference Room, above Giovanni’s Restaurant, Mammoth Lakes.

**Thursday, February 3, 7:00-8:30 PM**, South Classroom, White Mountain Research Station, 3 miles east of Bishop on East Line Street.

Please call the ESLT office at 873-4554 to reserve a space or for more information.

control may be changed to ones that don’t use water, such as gravel; or that use less water and have less wildlife value, such as managed vegetation.

As part of its permits for dust control Los Angeles was required to mitigate loss of habitat by creating and dedicating in perpetuity 1,000 acres of shorebird habitat where water would serve the dual purpose of dust control and wildlife enhancement. LADWP has submitted a habitat management plan for this area to the California Department of Fish and Game. Further permitting has required up to 1,000 more acres of habitat for shorebirds to be dedicated in perpetuity. All of this is a good start on the road to a final resolution of how much land should managed for the dual purpose of dust and wildlife. May the birds as well as the dust settle on Owens Lake.

**Mike Prather**

**Photo credit goes to Kelly Grady** for the excellent Yellow Warbler and Veery that illustrated River Gates’ “A Veery Good Day” story in the November/December 2004 issue. The Veery reappears on this issue’s mailing cover page –*Editor*

## Chapter Officers

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