



*ESAS Website:* ESAudubon.org *Eastern Sierra Bird Sightings:* ESAudubon.org/birds/

## 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.

## 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!**

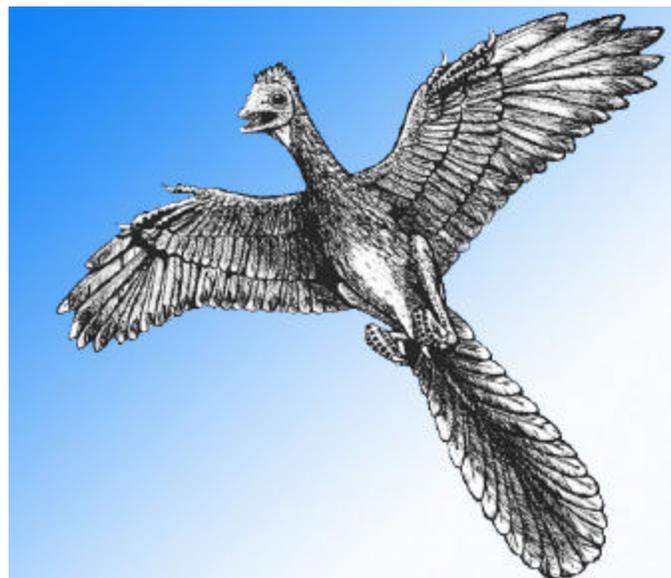
**May 10**

### **The Dinosaur-Bird Connection**

**Ron Smith**

The movie Jurassic Park gave us an intense drama centered around the intelligence and ferocious nature of raptor dinosaurs. The very word raptor means bird of prey. From an anatomical standpoint, there are an incredible number of similarities between small carnivorous dinosaurs and birds. In "The Dinosaur-Bird connection," Ron Smith will illustrate these similarities to show why most paleontologists believe that birds descended from dinosaurs. Perhaps dinosaurs did not become extinct. Instead, they ascended to the air and took their energy and vitality with them.

Ron Smith formerly worked for the Los Angeles Museum of Natural History. He has been on 3 dinosaur digs in Utah, Colorado, and Wyoming. In 1991 he completed a summer program at the University of Southern Illinois entitled "The Paleobiology of Dinosaurs."



Archaeopteryx © Sierra College, Dinosaur Day 2005

**June 14**

### **Spring Potluck Picnic**

The spring potluck picnic will be held at the home of Mary and Derrick Vocolka, at 2433 Apache Drive in Bishop. We will gather at 6 pm. Bring a friend, a dish and a beverage to share, and enjoy an evening of great food and conversation. Table service, coffee and tea will be provided. If you're inclined to bring a lawn chair, it would be appreciated. For more information, call Mary or Derrick at 873-4480.

### **Welcome New ESAS Members!**

**Karen Arcel**

**Larry & Ruth Blakely**

**Greg & Bettie Humphrey**

**Velma Kelso**

**Julie & Ted Metz**

**Jan Morin**

**Kathy Saladin Smith**

### **The Audubon Fish Slough Patrol Makes a Special Place Better**

Not long after Fish Slough – a rare desert wetland only 5 miles north of Bishop – was named an Area of Critical Environmental Concern, ESAS "adopted" it and began a weekend patrol. Volunteers take turns spending half a Saturday or Sunday cruising Fish Slough in a BLM truck, giving information to visitors; keeping an eye on petroglyph sites and rare, threatened and endangered fish and plants; checking for vandalism, picking up litter, raking out off-road tracks, and letting it be known that this is a special place. They report unusual activities, but never confront anyone. Fish Slough's land managers – BLM, Fish & Game and DWP – applaud the patrollers for raising visitor awareness, reducing problems and even averting an occasional ecological disaster. New patrollers are needed now! Call Sam Glasser, 873-3111.

## **President's Message – Birding Season**

There is some debate among birders in the Eastern Sierra about which season is the most exciting. Each season has its merits. I'm on the fence. Four fences actually.

Right now I'm really enjoying spring. Every day seems to bring a new species for the year. When the first hint of spring comes along, I start checking power lines for the first Western Kingbird. I listen for the chattering of the first House Wren along ditches and in thickets. I clean out and fill the Oriole feeder for Hooded and Bullock's Orioles. It's good to have all these birds back, in their bright breeding plumage, no less. Many will breed along the river, up in our mountains, or even under our eaves. However, not all our migrants are here to stay. The Rufous Hummingbirds we see in April and May are on

their way north to breed in the Northwest. They'll be back though heading south in July and August when they are our most common hummingbird. If you went to Owens Lake in April, the many thousands of Western and Least Sandpipers you saw will be arriving at their Arctic breeding grounds in mid-May, not bad for a bird weighing 20 grams.

To me, spring is a very exciting time of year, but is it *the* most exciting time of the year?

Ask me again in summer.

**Chris Howard**

## **May through August Field Trips and Events**

**Saturday, May 6 - Baker Meadow Birding – Leader: Earl Gann** Join us during the peak of spring warbler migration in this beautiful meadow above Big Pine. Expect warblers, vireos, flycatchers, tanagers, and orioles in breeding plumage. A great trip for beginners and children. Meet at Glacier View Campground at the junction of Highways 395 and 168, at the north end of Big Pine, at 7:00 AM. Bring snacks and water, and wear shoes that can get damp. Call Earl at 920-2203 for more information.

**Sunday, May 14 – Eastern Sierra Wildlife Care Annual Class** White Mountain Research Station, 3000 E. Line, Bishop. Morning (10-12): wildlife rehab, rescue, first aid, and volunteer opportunities; afternoon (1-3:30): training in care, feeding, diets, housing, and more. “Volunteers are the lifeblood of Eastern Sierra Wildlife Care. We depend on them in every aspect of the organization,” says Cindy Kamler (see page 5). Contact Cindy at 872-1487.

**June 16-18 - Fifth Annual Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua** Online registration opened at 5:01 a.m. and by 8:00 a.m. 99 people had registered! The Bird Chautauqua is an educational and entertaining weekend chocked full of field trips, workshops, science, history, art, music, auditorium presentations, food, storytelling, music, a bird-calling contest, and of course birds. Fifty events are being offered this year by 30 accomplished presenters.

The Bird Chautauqua traditionally ends with a picnic and concert at the Mono Lake County Park. This year's final event will feature bluegrass music by the Biscuit Burners. Hailing from the hills of North Carolina, the Biscuit Burners have inspired audiences from coast to coast with their immense talent, diverse backgrounds, and youthful energy.

The Bird Chautauqua is sponsored by Eastern Sierra Audubon, Mono Lake Committee, U.S. Forest Service, Friends of the Inyo, California State Parks and PRBO Conservation Science. The weekend's attendance benefits scientific research through the Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua Research Grant.

For information or to register please visit [www.birdchautauqua.org](http://www.birdchautauqua.org) or email your questions to [birding@monolake.org](mailto:birding@monolake.org), or call the Mono Lake Committee at (760) 647-6595 to find out how to register by fax or mail. Walk-in registration will be offered concurrently with check-in throughout the event but early registration is highly recommended since most events will have filled in advance.

**August 24-25 - Next Statewide California Partners in Flight meeting** at the White Mountain Research Station, 3000 East Line Street, Bishop. The focus of this meeting will be the conservation and management of upland birds in desert, sagebrush and grassland habitats in eastern California. The meeting coincides with the recent release of the Sagebrush and Draft Desert Bird Conservation Plans. The 2-day event will feature presentations on current avian research; updates on important local, state and national bird conservation issues; and discussions on integrating bird conservation into land use planning. See [www.prbo.org/calpif](http://www.prbo.org/calpif) under the “Meetings” link, and contact Kim Kreitinger, [kkreitinger@prbo.org](mailto:kkreitinger@prbo.org) for information and to confirm attendance. There is no registration fee.

## Take a tour of PRBO's Eastern Sierra Website, Bird Resource Extraordinaire!

PRBO Conservation Science's Eastern Sierra program has posted a new and improved website, packed with results, reports, and ongoing research. Let's take a quick tour and see what's up... at [www.prbo.org/easternsierra](http://www.prbo.org/easternsierra)

### EASTERN SIERRA PROGRAM STUDY SITES



Song Sparrow and Yellow Warbler Sacha K. Heath  
Two birds rare in many parts of the state but common in the Mono Basin. Thriving, or surviving? – one of the questions under investigation in the Mono Basin Riparian project: “By combining multiple techniques, we will identify long-term, community level patterns in riparian-breeding bird survivorship, productivity, species richness diversity, abundance, and density on Mono Lake’s recovering tributary streams.”



California Gull chick Selena Humphreys  
More under Projects>Current: California Gull ecology; Mono Basin Willow Flycatcher; monitoring and education at Devil’s Postpile; songbird use of sage-grouse habitats; before-and-after studies of the LORP, aspen restoration and small-scale experimental pinyon thinning on public land, and habitat restoration on a private ranch; and more. Also check out the Graduate Research link for fascinating research on nest parasitism and predation.

“In 1998, we initiated a study to investigate [patterns in riparian breeding bird](#) indices and demographics across three watersheds and over 250 kilometers....We engaged with private and public land managers, conservation groups and other researchers and educators... to ensure that our data would inform bird and habitat management, restoration and conservation efforts.”



West and East Walker watersheds Sacha K. Heath  
“Bird monitoring and habitat assessment in the upper West and East Walker River watersheds, 1998-2003” – just one of several under the Projects>Recent link.

Reports: 29, 11 linked online! Publications: 5 peer-reviewed, 14 popular, nearly all linked. Partners: 51, from Eastern Sierra Audubon to Cornell University to Mono Market, all make it possible for *you* to know more than ever before about birds in the Eastern Sierra.

## Yellow-billed Cuckoo in the Owens Valley Tom and Jo Heindel



As a result of the proposed Yellow-billed Cuckoo projects at Baker Meadow and Hogback Creek areas we have fielded a number of questions and comments from concerned neighbors. Some of them indicate that misinformation is being disseminated as fact. We would like to offer some clarification on cuckoo distribution, habitat needs, and occurrence in our area, as well as costs, access, and fencing.

### **Myth: The cuckoo barely reaches Inyo County and doesn't really belong here.**

While the Owens Valley is now on the eastern edge of its range it was not always so. The Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo was originally found in British Columbia, Washington, Oregon, and Nevada as well as throughout California (San Diego to Sonoma Counties, San Joaquin and Sacramento Valleys, Kern to Shasta Counties, plus Siskiyou, Inyo, San Bernardino, and Imperial Counties). They have been extirpated from British Columbia (in the 1920s), Washington (by 1934), and Oregon (by 1945) and there are no proven breeding records in Nevada since the 1970s. The more than 15,000 pairs of breeding Yellow-billed Cuckoos in California have been reduced to 30 pairs in less than a century. This is recognized by science as a catastrophic range reduction and will result in the total extirpation of the Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo unless significant steps are taken to intervene. The primary causes of this precipitous decline are destruction or degradation of their preferred riparian habitat, pesticide use directly in orchards and indirectly through their prey, and grazing

which removes or reduces the understory and prevents willow and cottonwood growth.

### **Myth: There is very little or no cuckoo habitat in the Owens Valley.**

Cuckoos breed in open woodlands with a low understory of dense and scrubby vegetation. They have also been found in abandoned farmlands, overgrown fruit orchards, and dense thickets along streams and marshes. Nests are often placed in willows but nearby cottonwoods are used extensively for foraging. Their main foods are primarily large insects such as caterpillars, katydids, grasshoppers and crickets. All of these requirements are available in the Owens Valley albeit in less than bountiful quantities. The restoration of 62 miles of the Owens River will significantly enhance habitat that appeals to cuckoos as well as quail, fish and many other species.

Much can be gained by looking at the Kern River Preserve just south of us with a similar biogeography. A major effort was made to revegetate the riparian habitat along the Kern River, which had been degraded by man. The results were phenomenal with two endangered species, Yellow-billed Cuckoo and Southwestern Willow Flycatcher, making a remarkable comeback. The residents, ranchers, and conservationists worked together on a program that would benefit all parties. But the biggest beneficiaries were the flora and fauna that existed a century or more ago – being allowed, in fact, encouraged to flourish once again.

### **Myth: The cuckoo isn't being found in Inyo now.**

The paucity of professional researchers and serious birders is reflected in the few records of the Yellow-billed Cuckoo. The extent of cuckoo distribution or the numbers of this species in the Owens Valley for the last 150 years is not known by scientists or Owens Valley residents. There have been a few ornithological surveys throughout the last century and a half; none focused on the cuckoo. During the 1980s and early 1990s Dr. Steve Laymon, cuckoo expert, conducted studies in the Owens Valley that were cuckoo specific surveys. These most recent surveys were short-term and were but a peek into the biological picture but the results indicate that there is good habitat in the Owens Valley for the cuckoo.

Without a concentrated cuckoo project where the protocol is specifically designed for that species and is a long-term study, no one can know how many there are in the county in an average year or decade and whether they are breeding or not. This bird is retiring and secretive and not easy to find. Therefore, the lack of proven records may reflect a lack of birds or a lack of looking for birds in general and not the result of cuckoo

specific surveying. One found in Bishop 5-6 June 2002 was photographed by Chris Howard (see page 4).

**Myth: The people of Inyo County should not have to pay all this money for just one bird on the edge of its range.**

The people of Inyo County will not pay for cuckoo habitat enhancement. The LADWP is charged by the court to enhance cuckoo habitat, as well as other enhancements, as restitution for the environmental damage they have caused to the Owens Valley due to their water export policies. The money comes out of their pockets, not from Inyo County residents.

**Myth: Motorized vehicle access will be denied to all and a chain link fence will be built all around Baker Meadow with human access denied.**

Motorized vehicle access is already denied at Baker Meadow to all without a key to the gate. There are no plans, or intent, for a chain link fence to enclose Baker Meadow and prevent access by people.

You need not believe anything in this article or any comments made by LADWP, Sierra Club, Owens Valley Committee, Inyo County, or your neighbors. You are encouraged to research the Yellow-billed Cuckoo yourself and decide which rumors are factual and which are not.

If mankind is to be judged by what he leaves behind, let it reflect his intelligence, not his ignorance.

## A Wonderful Bird...

An American White Pelican is recovering at Eastern Sierra Wildlife Care from an accident that cost her part of her wing, and nearly her life. Although she is sunbathing, taking hose showers, and eating trout—thanks to the California Dept. of Fish and Game (CDFG) Fish Springs Hatchery—her fate hangs in the balance. No longer able to fly, she would be left behind when the pelicans engage in their spring and fall migration flights high above the Owens Valley. Without companionship, she would not survive, never mate or raise young.

“We’re not ready to give up on this bird,” promised Cindy Kamler, ESWC’s director. “She probably hit a power line or cable that nearly severed the end of her wing, then survived a week or more in the desert, unable to fly, with little water and no food. She’s adjusted very well to her captive state; she’s unusually calm and easy going. She’d make a great education bird at a place that has other pelicans she could hang out with. We’re contacting places in California, hoping to find her a home.”

On April 7, ESWC got a call from CDFG biologist Alisia Ellsworth. She’d had a call from LADWP biologist Debbie House. Construction workers

at the pump-back station LADWP is building for the Lower Owens River Project had spotted the downed bird. ESWC volunteer Art Lillund drove to the area that night and searched for more than an hour in the dark and wind, but was unable to find the bird. He returned to the site the next morning accompanied by Cindy. They searched for two hours without success. Finally, they spotted the large white bird on the far side of the river bed, lying in the shelter of some sagebrush. Driving back around to the other side of the river, they stalked 200 yards into the brush, Cindy circling below the bird, who spooked and moved forward into Lillund’s net.

American White Pelicans stand 3-4 feet high and weigh 15-20 pounds, with a wingspan of 8 to 9 ½ feet. They prefer fresh or brackish waters; unlike the diving Brown Pelican, whites often hunt in groups by driving fish into shallow water or into the center of a circle, then scooping them up with their large yellow beaks. Locally, white pelicans can be seen during migration stopping over at Tinnemaha, Pleasant Valley and Crowley. Most of the birds summer at Walker or Pyramid lakes; a handful can be seen at the northeast end of Crowley near the river.

Volunteer Debbie Hilton has been making runs to the hatchery for fish and visiting the congenial pelican daily. “I never imagined doing this when I became an ESWC volunteer,” Debbie says. “I’m delighted to have such a great experience.” Sheryl Smith came up with a name, “Puff,” which all the volunteers agree is perfect for this gentle bird. Art Lillund has signed up to transport Puff to her new home, once she has one.

“Volunteers are the lifeblood of Eastern Sierra Wildlife Care,” Cindy says. ESWC’s Annual Training Class is coming up. If you’re interested in becoming part of the ESWC family, see p.2 and call Cindy at 872-1487.



Debbie Hilton brings trout to Puff. Eastern Sierra Wildlife Care

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## Eastern Sierra Audubon

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Eastern Sierra Ornithology Quiz: What's the most common territorial breeding bird found by PRBO in Eastern Sierra riparian areas – occurring twice as often as the three that nearly tied for second place? And which are *they*?

Clue: see page 3. Answer: next issue. Photo: Selena Humphreys.

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