



*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!**

**January 10**

### **Willow Flycatchers – A Dirty Word or Not?**

**Chris McCreedy**

The PRBO Conservation Science staff have been collecting information about these delightful creatures for several years. Chris McCreedy of PRBO will present this topic in a lively and informative manner. Learn what is involved, what it means about the health of the land, rivers and streams and creative solutions. If we are lucky we might be able to get him to do some of his famous bird imitations as well!

**Refreshments: Connie**

**February 14**

### **Birds in Motion**

**Larry Arbanas**

This presentation is guaranteed to draw many oohs and ahhs. Larry Arbanas captures birds on his high-definition video camera like no one else in the Eastern Sierra. Larry is a professional bird videographer for Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Recently he was selected to film the birds of Mono Lake for an upcoming documentary. There is nothing like Larry's stunning footage of our summering birds to shake the doldrums of winter.

**Refreshments: Dorothy**



Larry Arbanas photo

## President's Message – A Merry CBC To All

Braving the icy temperatures and chilling wind of December 16, 45 intrepid observers tallied 115 species in the 2006 Bishop Christmas Bird Count, topping the previous high count of 109 in 2002.

Highlights include 2 Western Grebes at Nik/Nik Ponds (Nelson/Higley/Spenger); a Green Heron on Bishop Creek Canal east of Meadowcreek (Wilson/Engelhardt); an Osprey flying over the park (Peterson); a light-morph Rough-legged Hawk off airport road (Heindel/Chipman); a Burrowing Owl SE of the south end of Barlow along an abandoned canal seen Thursday, but not count day (Andrew Kirk); three Long-eared Owls in Round Valley (Dunn/Miller/House) and 1 photographed in a Starlite backyard (Zatorski/Hetzler/Carle/Miller); a Short-eared Owl over the pasture west of Meadowcreek (Parkers/Zdon); a count week Anna's Hummingbird at a Shepard Lane feeder; 2 Costa's Hummingbird, an immature male and an adult male at a feeder in Rocking K (Zatorski/Hetzler/Carle/Miller); and 470 Pinyon Jays near the Buttermilks (Zatorski/Hetzler/Carle/Miller).



Long-eared Owl

Stan Conger photo

Andrew Kirk found a Blue-Gray Gnatcatcher when trying to refind the Burrowing Owl. There was a Western Bluebird in Round Valley and another that Jon thought could be a hybrid with a Mountain Bluebird (Dunn/Miller/House); a Yellow Warbler in the Junipers bordering the dump (Howard/DeMoss/Duvall/Schuck/Toth); a Common Yellowthroat male along the Owens River (Nelson/Higley/Spenger); 4 Lark Sparrows on West Line near Reata (Gann/Nahm/Mogg/Massieon); a White-throated Sparrow in the Gann/ Nahm backyard (Gann/Nahm/Mogg/Massieon); and a "Pink-sided" Dark-eyed Junco at Millpond (Dunn/Miller/House).

Many thanks to everyone who contributed. We saw many really great birds on a day when I doubt any of us would have been birding at all! A very special thank you to James and Kay Wilson, who offered their warm, beautiful home for the tally potluck. – **Chris Howard**



Costa's Hummingbird

Chris Howard photo

## February and March Field Trips

**Saturday, February 10 - 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 further information call Tom or Jo Heindel at 938-2764.

**Saturday, March 3rd, 2007 - Pleasant Valley Reservoir Birding - leader Jerry Zatorski** 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 7:30 AM behind the Wye Shell in Bishop to carpool, or at Pleasant Valley Power House parking lot at 8:00 AM. This is a great trip for beginning birders and children. For more information call Jerry Zatorski at 872-3818.

## Fall 2006 Yielded a Bountiful Avian Harvest

### Tom and Jo Heindel

While the glorious fall colors took away people's breath, the amazing parade of rare bird species that graced Inyo County this Fall made birders breathless as they ran or drove from one to the other. Seven species found are so rare in the State that all the pictures and documentation observers submitted are on their way to the California Bird Records Committee for review. Only the 2<sup>nd</sup> Inyo record of a Wood Thrush occurred 27 Aug when Bill Deppe found one at Crystal Spring, just southeast of China Ranch in the corner of Inyo county. It lost its tail and had to remain until it molted a new one before departing. It was last seen 10 Oct by Guy McCaskie. A Common Grackle, very uncommon in the West, made a brief and memorable stop in Tom & Jo Heindel's backyard on 31 Aug. These two excellent birds were forecasting a fabulous Fall but not until hindsight focused were they recognized as harbingers of a Fall to remember.



Wood Thrush

Chris Conard photo

A Harris's Hawk, usually seen in Mexico and southern AZ, NM, and TX, was found 25 Sep on Sunland Indian Reservation Road by Douglas Dunaway. Sadly, the bird had a band on its left leg indicating that it was a captive bird and will not be accepted as naturally occurring here. What a tale it could tell regarding how it got to Bishop! An Upland Sandpiper was found near Bishop by Carolyn Gann and Larry Nahm on 1 Oct just southeast of the sewer ponds. They did everything right by calling all the local birders and writing their descriptions before looking in a book. There are 6 records for Inyo but all are in spring. If accepted by the Committee it will be the first fall record for Inyo. What is fascinating about this record is that the State has only one record after Sep, a late Oct bird, so this shines a little more light on the timing of the Upland movement. The

very next day, 2 Oct, Justin Hite saw a strange small bird poking in the leaf litter at Scotty's Castle, DVNP. The bird teased him with bits and pieces but Justin finally got the look he needed of this walking, yellow and olive, ground-loving warbler...a Connecticut Warbler! There are only three Inyo records, all on 22 Sep in different years! While the State has almost 90 records they are predominantly from the coast and Southeast Farallon Island with only a few inland records in Inyo and Kern Counties. Less than two weeks later, 13 Oct, Jim Pike found a Yellow-throated Vireo at China Ranch. There were six previous Inyo records but only one was in fall, also on 13 Oct but in 1990 so it wasn't the same bird! On 21 Oct, Bob and Susan Steele found a male Rusty Blackbird at Furnace Creek Ranch. There are 55 Inyo records, all in fall, but declining occurrence nationwide since the late 1980s has resulted in this species being put back on the State Review List.

Those seven species were the rarest of the rare but the list of other rare, but not quite rare enough to require State review was amazing. Vagrants, species whose normal breeding or migratory routes do not include the Eastern Sierra, were out in force. To appreciate the bequest, curl up with your bird book and look at the range maps of the following species: Surf Scoter, Barrow's Goldeneye, Sandhill Crane, White-winged Dove, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Least Flycatcher, Vermilion Flycatcher, Eastern Kingbird, Red-eyed Vireo, Tennessee Warbler, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Magnolia Warbler, Black-throated Blue Warbler, Blackburnian Warbler, Blackpoll Warbler, Prothonotary Warbler, Clay-colored Sparrow, Lark Bunting, Swamp Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Painted Bunting, Dickcissel, Bobolink, Orchard Oriole, Baltimore Oriole, and Lawrence's Goldfinch. All were photographed or very well documented for Inyo County from 1 August through 30 November 2006.

This year both plants and birds provided a spectacularly colorful Fall in the Eastern Sierra. How lucky we are to be their beneficiaries!

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## Welcome New ESAS Members!

**Mike Bogan**  
**Lynne Bunn**  
**Arya Degenhardt**  
**Richard Erb**  
**Marge Evans**  
**Thomas Petruno**  
**Timothy Villanueva**



## **eBird - Gathering the Observations Of Birders To Make a Difference!**

**Brian Sullivan, Cornell Lab of Ornithology**

How many of you enjoy recording the birds you observe in the field? Probably most who are reading this. But how many of you feel that your personal observations are of scientific value? At the Cornell Lab of Ornithology we feel that observations made by birders can be valuable baseline data on the distribution and abundance of North American birds. We've developed eBird ([www.ebird.org](http://www.ebird.org)) to capture those data via the Internet, and to likewise make them available to interested parties whether they are amateur birders, experts, scientists or conservation biologists. No longer will the observations of birders languish in dusty notebooks or on the crashed hard drives of home computers, as eBird now has the capacity to gather, store, and disseminate these data to conservationists around the world!

eBird is really taking off across the Western Hemisphere, and it's time that birders in the Eastern Sierra start to contribute their observations to the collective. You live amidst incredibly diverse biological resources, and archiving information about this region's bird life is essential. I invite you to take a look at eBird ([www.ebird.org](http://www.ebird.org)). This collaborative project between the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Audubon has recently been updated (and soon will be again), and now provides birders with free access to an extraordinary online checklist program and database.

eBird is not only a warehouse of observational data, it's an online tool that allows you to record, retrieve, and archive your data, all while making your efforts available to scientists interested in using these data for bird conservation. New features include a more comprehensive listing capability found on the "My eBird" pages, which include automated listing capabilities down to the county level in each state. It's simple: you enter your observations into the database,

and eBird keeps all your lists for you. Coming soon will be the ability to bulk upload data from your personal databases and from listing programs like AviSys directly to eBird (contact me if you're interested in beta-testing!).

Geographic coverage is also expanding. We now cover all of the US, Canada and Mexico, and eBird has recently been launched in Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic and Haiti, as well as across the Caribbean. Plans are in the works for collaborations in the near future with Cuba, Colombia, Costa Rica and Panama. The goal is to implement eBird across the whole of the Western Hemisphere, allowing bird monitoring at scales heretofore unimaginable, and allowing birders to keep comprehensive lists on the site.

eBird is backed up by a group of regional experts who have created filters to control data quality. As these regions become more refined, and new filters are created, the database will be even more clean and precise. At minimum we have one filter working in each state/province, but in many states, like California, we are currently working on county-based filters. If you're interested in helping out in the Eastern Sierra counties please contact me.

As more people participate in eBird the value of the data set will increase exponentially. This November we recorded over 500,000 bird observations, and gathered over 30,000 checklists—a massive amount of data. I invite you to browse the web site, explore the data output available in your area through the "View and explore data" pages, and please enter your own observations into the system. If you get out birding this winter make sure to record the birds you see at each location, log in to [www.ebird.org](http://www.ebird.org), and join the bird conservation revolution!

– Brian Sullivan, Cornell Lab of Ornithology  
Monterey, CA [bls42@cornell.edu](mailto:bls42@cornell.edu)

## **Recycling for Audubon**

For those not aware of our recycling program, here is an easy way to make a contribution to Eastern Sierra Audubon. Just take your CA aluminum cans, bottles and plastic to the recycling center behind Manor Market. On the receipt where you would normally put your name, enter the words "Donation - Audubon #11" or something similar so they know it is for Audubon, and the proceeds will be sent directly to ESAS. With enough people participating in this program, the benefit to Audubon can be substantial; and of course, the proceeds go to support Audubon's ongoing programs.

## **You're Wanted for a Workshop: Developing Important Aquatic Bird Site Descriptions Don Paul, Intermountain West Joint Venture**

Do you have an interest in, or responsibility for, an important site for aquatic birds? The Intermountain West Coordinated Bird Monitoring partnership (IWCBM) offers a range-wide program for storing and sharing information in the western states, and wants to assist California partners – especially Eastern California – to develop aquatic bird site descriptions and monitoring strategies. You're invited to attend a one day workshop at the BLM/Forest Service conference room in Bishop, CA, March 20 at 10 a.m.

The IWCBM program has made significant progress in many states; check the website to see what's happening (<http://greatbasin.nbio.gov/iwcbm/>). The Intermountain West Joint Venture (IWJV) is assisting in developing the initiative, joining forces with USGS and Partners In Flight. We hope you can see the power and economy behind a coordinated effort to monitor and share data. Data management will involve Avian Knowledge Network ideas developed by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and collaborators. The aquatic portion of IWCBM is site-based, as western aquatic habitats are normally very discrete. We have identified important sites to be surveyed in each state (see website). To best coordinate monitoring we need uniform site descriptions.

We would like to hear from you by March 1, 2007 if you can participate; we will then send out some additional instructions to help you prepare. Ann Manning, USGS Idaho Field Station and Don S. Paul, IWJV Great Basin Bird Conservation Region Coordinator, Utah will conduct the workshop. Don will be the workshop contact [avocet@qwest.net](mailto:avocet@qwest.net), (801)643-5703 and Joy Fatooh, BLM Bishop Field Office is the local contact, [jfatooh@blm.gov](mailto:jfatooh@blm.gov) (760)872-5029.

## **A River Does Run Through It – December 6, 2006 Mike Prather – Eastern Sierra Audubon and Owens Valley Committee**

Water is finally back into 62 miles of the Lower Owens River after more than 90 years! Three and half years behind schedule, Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and Inyo County Supervisor Susan Cash together flipped the switch that opened a gate allowing water to flow from the Los Angeles Aqueduct into the thirsty river bed. More than 200 people attending the event at the Intake near Aberdeen listened to words of thanks and encouragement for the future from local conservation leaders and officials from Inyo County and Los Angeles.

Everyone anticipates, with excitement, the return of a rich riparian habitat of willow and cottonwood with its associated wildlife populations. Riparian habitat is the richest habitat on land. Sacaton bunchgrass and salt grass alkaline meadows will become ground cover, wild roses and wild grapes will make up the under story. Desert olive and reeds will form a mid story and willow and cottonwood will create the upper canopy of the riparian community. Each layer of habitat supports its own wildlife. Neotropical songbirds (blue grosbeaks, orioles, warblers), game birds (dove and quail), elk, bobcat and swallowtail butterflies will benefit from such a large addition of habitat to the Owens Valley. Species that disappeared from the Owens Valley will have the opportunity to return. Visitors eager to fish look forward to bass, catfish, bluegill, bullfrogs and crawdads. Stretches of water will allow canoeing; expect a slow glide due to the valley's gentle gradient. A California heritage will reappear in the Owens Valley landscape.

New fencing is being constructed to protect the emerging riparian plant community along the banks of the river. Young willow and cottonwood need a helping

hand to establish themselves from hungry cows that look at them as "ice cream." Once the habitat is far enough along, limited grazing (season of use, duration of use and number of animals) can take place that will not damage understory plants and soils and thus meet the wildlife goals of the Lower Owens River Project.

A mimicked snowmelt runoff flow (habitat flow), five times larger than the regular base flow of the river, will take place in late May or early June that is timed with the fuzzy seed production of willow and cottonwood. These seeds are viable only for a few days and must fly or float to a muddy surface for germination. This snowmelt habitat flow will also raise flows into side channels and benches and spread nutrients that will help widen the riparian habitat band. The wider the habitat the more diversity of species can be possible.

Permanent photo points for recording the changes in the river over time are in place. Three years of bird data along permanent transects have been collected and will continue. Vegetation and channel structure have been mapped. Local Owens Valley school science classes have been collecting data of all kinds along the river also and will continue to do so.

Nature herself will be the prime architect along the river. When necessary, for example, if a goal for the project is not being met, a human handprint will appear and help out. All of us can start to visit and watch the river and its life return to the valley. It is easily accessed on foot or horse and numerous dirt tracks allow vehicle touring, although be careful for road conditions (sand, mud, high centers) when driving. Pack your picnic, grab your camera and binoculars and get out there.

## Field Trip Reports

### September

Nancy and Ron Overholtz joined Claus and Connie Engelhardt on a fine late September day for a birding hike along Rock Creek starting at the Rock Creek Road Sno-Park. Birding highlights included a Juniper Titmouse, good views of Golden-crowned Kinglets and a hunting Sharp-shinned Hawk. Most unexpected was the sighting of three Sierra Big Horn Sheep crossing the trail a short distance in front of the hikers. – **Claus Engelhardt**

### October

A rainy day did not deter leader Debby Parker and Carol Richmond from birding in the Dixon Lane area of Bishop with the object of finding fall migrating sparrows and warblers on this October field trip. A Green Heron was sighted among other more common species. – **Claus Engelhardt**

### December

On a bright December day over 20 Audubon members and friends gathered at the Bishop “Y” for a birding trip to Crowley Lake led by Jon Dunn, Eastern Sierra resident and birder extraordinaire. Moments after arrival at the trip’s first stop on the lake’s north end, Jon identified a tawny speck a half-mile distant as a rare Mountain Plover. As it seemed advisable to get a closer look, the group set off over the semi-frozen muck of the lake shore using tussocks of grass as stepping stones while avoiding the cow patties and treacherous areas of thin or slippery sheer ice. These efforts were ultimately rewarded as the group got close enough for ordinary mortals to identify the birds. At least two and possibly as many as four Mountain Plovers were present. Other species seen included Greater Yellowlegs, Least Sandpipers, Dunlins, Horned Larks and an immature Bald Eagle. Brilliant Mountain Bluebirds flitted among the rabbit brush inland.

The day’s second notable event occurred while traveling along Benton Crossing Road when a dark morph Rough-legged Hawk was spotted on a fence. As excited birders started across the meadow toward the bird, it wisely took off, but then circled lazily overhead giving everyone a wonderful view of its distinctive underside plumage.

At the last Crowley stop on the lake’s upper arm the group arrived to find a large assembly of waterfowl and gulls. Large numbers of Tundra Swan dominated the scene with California Gulls and Northern Pintails. Other waterfowl species included American Wigeon, Northern Shoveler, Ring-necked Duck, Lesser Scaup and Gadwall. Upon leaving Jon spotted several Snow Geese

previously unnoticed among the white mass of swans and gulls.

The final event of the day involved an unscheduled drive to Mono Lake to see a rare Long-tailed Duck reported earlier by member Kathy Duvall. Upon arriving at the lake near the Lee Vining Creek, the duck was quickly located, a distant white spot, but identifiable to some using spotting scopes. A majestic flock of swimming American White Pelicans illuminated by the setting sun provided a more satisfying view. When last seen Jon Dunn and a smaller group of followers had departed in pursuit of a lost and bewildered kittiwake which had flown by, in a search, no doubt, for the open Pacific Ocean. – **Claus Engelhardt**

### December as described by leader Jon Dunn

December is always an iffy time to have a field trip at upper elevations on the east side of the Sierra, as at Crowley Lake. We have had decent weather in the past on some years but in others the heavy snow made it impossible to even get up the grade north of Bishop. On this year’s trip we couldn’t have asked for more splendid weather. It was one of those sunny, warm (into the 50’s) and dead calm days where every ripple made from a diving duck was visible. After meeting in Bishop and then picking up the rest of the crew at the Green Church near the Mammoth Airport we went to the McGee arm of Crowley Lake. Arriving on the shore we immediately saw and heard many Tundra Swans, their loud yodeling reverberating across the Lake. We could compare their calls to the many Canada Geese which were present. Just after we arrived, a juvenile Bald Eagle flew off the shore, dispersing many of the waterfowl that were there.

Once we all arrived we carefully scanned along the shore of the McGee arm and soon found a Mountain Plover, first one, then another and finally three. This species is strictly casual here on the east side. It breeds on the central and northern Great Plains and has two wintering areas, one being in California (Central and Imperial Valleys) and the other being in Texas. We chose to walk over to them, the thin layer of ice rather than mush allowing access, albeit slowly. We eventually got stunning views of one bird that came over to visit. Dunlins and Least Sandpipers were also present here as were a flock of Mountain Bluebirds. Once everyone had the chance to study the Mountain Plovers, we carefully reviewed the ducks offshore. Nearly all of the regular species were present, most of which were present in substantial numbers. Over the grasslands we spotted Rough-legged Hawk. Earlier we had seen a Prairie

Falcon and a female/immature *richardsoni* Merlin. These pale Plains Merlins closely resemble Prairie Falcons in coloration. A single American White Pelican stood on the mud.

At other points around the Lake we found a late Marbled Godwit, a single Common Loon, four Snow Geese, and three juvenile Herring Gulls amongst the several hundred California Gulls and a few Ring-bills. Near the crossing of the Owens River we were treated to a beautiful dark morph adult male Rough-legged Hawk, first perched, and then hovering above us. By mid afternoon some of us chose to chase the Long-tailed Duck that Kathy Duvall had found at Mono Lake. We arrived fairly late in the afternoon, but we found this female feeding amongst the tufa towers. Returning back towards US 395, I looked up and spotted something pale flying over the sage. My first thought was an adult male Northern Harrier, but then thought, no, it's a gull. Even more startling when I raised my binoculars was that it was a juvenile Black-legged Kittiwake, the first one on the east side of the Sierra here (no previous records for Inyo or Mono Counties, but one was found dead in Ridgecrest and another was seen at the Lancaster sewage ponds north of Lancaster just east of highway 14 on 22 November 1988. It was with a small group of four Ring-billed and three California Gulls just resting on the water.) It flew past us and then north along the shore. Sadly, we were unable to find it despite searching for the remainder of the day. Soon after seeing it, we ran into Justin Hite who has it turned out had seen this bird very distantly well off the Rush Creek mouth. He had noted the Sabine's Gull like wing pattern but with binoculars hadn't been able to make a certain identification. When we mentioned Kittiwake, he immediately realized that it was the bird he had seen earlier.

The following morning several of us drove back north, arriving at the Rush Creek mouth of Mono Lake about 8:25 a.m. Within a few minutes two California Gulls and the Black-legged Kittiwake flew in and drank the comparatively fresh water there. It remained for ten to fifteen minutes and while we were there the Long-tailed Duck flew in for close views. Soon it picked up and flew off, first to the northeast, then the southeast disappearing as a tiny speck into the fog several miles away. Later in the day we stopped back at the McGee arm of Crowley Lake where we were able to spot two of the three Mountain Plovers. Debbie House then spotted a small loon which when it swam closer proved to be a juvenile Red-throated Loon, a strictly casual species on the east side (not of annual occurrence).

Later we continued on down to Tinemaha Reservoir to look for the Parker's Pacific Loon found the day earlier, but it had migrated on. A count of 40 Hooded Mergansers with many Common Mergansers

and single Red-breasted, was an Inyo County high count. Our day finished at Klondike Lake where a single sentinel American Bittern stood motionless at a small pool away from the Lake as the sky darkened with the setting sun.

Certainly late November and early December can be a very exciting time to be birding here on the east side of the Sierra, weather permitting.



Lark Sparrow – Bishop CBC

Lulu Mogg photo

## The Sierra Nevada Conservancy License Plates Registration

The Department of Motor Vehicles will begin issuing plates only after 7,500 plates are reserved. People who want to pre-register for plates can do so at

[www.sierraconservancy.org](http://www.sierraconservancy.org)  
or at 222.sierrafund.org



Pine Siskin – Bishop CBC

Chris Howard photo



## Chapter Officers

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Yellow-throated Vireo Jim Pike photo

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