



## Meetings

2nd Wednesday of the month  
(3rd Wednesday this April)  
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 Eastern Sierra 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!**

**March 14**

### **Animal Planet:**

**When the show was on the rocks**

**Courtney Smith**



Courtney Smith

A survey of bird and animal motifs in Southwestern United States Indian rock art. Courtney Smith, a knowledgeable and passionate guru of Indian rock art will share stories and photography of rock art encountered on his numerous wanderings.

**Refreshments: Chris**

### **Upcoming events**

**Yosemite Birding Festival** May 4-6

<http://yosemite.org/seminars/>

**Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua** June 15-17

<http://www.birdchautauqua.org/>

**April 18 (note: 3rd Wednesday in April)**

### **Mono Basin Geology**

**Angela Jayko**

Angela Jayko is a Bishop local and resident USGS geologist based at White Mountain Research Station. She will present an update of her current geological research in the Mono Basin. Angela will share with us some her observations and interpretations of the geologic record. Her recent work involves surface geology mapping in Panamint Valley, Coso Range, and Southern Owens Valley.

**Refreshments: Phill**



Angela Jayko

**Please bring your old field guides** to donate to the Birds In the Classroom program, now that everyone has bought Jon Dunn's new one!

## **President's Message – Wintering Over**

Winter birding in the Eastern Sierra is very different from other times of the year. Neotropical migrants have long since fled to warmer climes and our wintering visitors from the north have staked out their territories. The wintering birds are typically not as colorful or abundant as neotropical migrants. However, I've found that the wintering birds are more predictable than those migrating through; they establish a routine. For several weeks this winter, my evening commute coincided with the start of the nightly hunting sorties of a Short-eared Owl in the field behind our house. At dusk, like clockwork, the owl would fly up to a snag to survey its field, assess the locations of the nearby Red-tailed Hawks and Ravens who harass it when it catches something, and begin its evening hunting.

By February, I feel I know the sparrow flock behind our house pretty well. This winter we feel fortunate to have an immature Harris' Sparrow and one or two Golden-crown Sparrows with the 50+ White-crowns. The routine replays itself every few days: I emerge from the house, the sparrows scurry into the bushes, I throw out seed and retreat into the house. Slowly the sparrows emerge from the bushes to feast. I feel like I've got them trained to come to the seed, but then I think perhaps they've got me trained to religiously put out vast quantities of birdseed.

Some people might think that winter is also a slow season for ESAS. That might be true if it weren't for all the planning we're doing right now, preparing for

upcoming events this spring. The Birds In the Classroom programs and field trips are right around the corner, as is the Bird-a-thon, our 25th anniversary potluck, and the Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua, not to mention field trips, programs, and the newsletter.

Finally, winter provides an opportunity to consider how we contribute to our community. As I finish up my second year as ESAS President, I feel very proud of the work we've accomplished and the diligent efforts of the Board and numerous volunteers that make Eastern Sierra Audubon such a wonderful community. The Audubon community has brought people together who may have otherwise never met. I am privileged to be a part of this community and to have met fine individuals such as Larry and Ruth Blakely and Gordon and June Nelson. Larry earned an award for our fine newsletter, the WAVE, when serving as editor before passing the editorship to Joy. For many years, Gordon served as the coordinator of the Fish Slough Patrol, helping preserve the rich Fish Slough archeology and environment. Through Gordon's efforts, ESAS received the BLM Director's Health of the Land Award in 1996, among other awards. At the time of this writing, Gordon is in Reno with medical issues, so please keep Gordon and June in your thoughts.

The good news is spring is on its way: I saw two Turkey Vultures migrating north into a stiff headwind over Bishop today. – **Chris Howard**

## **March, April, May and June Field Trips**

**Saturday, March 3 - Pleasant Valley Reservoir Birding - Leader Jerry Zatorski** (872-3818) 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.

**Saturday, April 21 - Owens Lake Wildlife – Leader Mike Prather** (876-5807 or [prather@qnet.com](mailto:prather@qnet.com)) An amazing concentration of shorebirds and a great trip for all skill levels. Owens Lake has returned to life as a major migratory stopover for a wide variety of birds, including 15 species of special concern. Meet at Diaz Lake parking lot, 3 miles south of Lone Pine at 9:00AM. Bring a lunch, binoculars, scope, hat, and sunscreen. If you have a hard hat or safety vest bring them, as they are required near construction. We'll have extra hard hats and vests, binoculars and scopes on hand. The trip should finish by mid-afternoon.

**Saturday, May 5 - Baker Creek Birding – Leaders Carolyn Gann and Larry Nahm** (872-4125) A short, popular annual walk reliably turns up flycatchers, buntings, warblers, vireos, tanagers and other visitors. The great spring migration will be nearing its peak. Meet at 7:30 a.m. at the Triangle Campground just north of Big Pine off U.S. 395. Bring binoculars, water, snacks and sunscreen. Trip should end by noon.

**Saturday, June 23 - Mountain Walk – Leader Joan Benner** (938-2929) A moderately-paced morning walk along the South Fork Trail of Big Pine Creek to enjoy the wildflowers, the cascading creek and wildlife. Even in drought years, this trail has a good flower display. We'll see evidence of the 1983 flood and discuss the geology of the area. Walk will end by noon. Meet at 8:00 AM at the end of the Glacier Lodge Road, nine miles up canyon from Big Pine. Turn west on Crocker Street (which becomes Glacier Lodge Road beyond town). Bring water, snacks, sun hat, and binoculars.

## A Blue Winter Tom and Jo Heindel

This was the winter that the Bluebirds of Happiness chose to dazzle all of us with their electric company. This small bird, so intensely blue it catches your breath when sunlight hits it, made an otherwise drab season memorable for their sojourn. They were seen rising from fence posts, flying into the wind, and hovering with a motionless body attached to blurring wings. Just as cameras were focused, they dove to the ground for insects only they could see before returning to the post where they cocked their heads left and right before diving to the ground again. When they had enough protein they would flock to the pyracantha berries for dessert. Dozens were seen in green and red hedges that turned green over the weeks as the berries disappeared. There are other blue-colored birds in the eastern Sierra (jays, buntings, and Blue Grosbeaks) but they are not bluebirds with a capital B.



Mountain Bluebird

Jo Heindel

There are three species of bluebirds in North America with two found in California. The Western Bluebird and the Mountain Bluebird are both found in the eastern Sierra and this was the Mountain Bluebird winter. When the cold descends most Mountain Bluebirds withdraw to the southwest tier of states where snow-free land allows them to feed on insects and berries. This Nevada state bird spends the summer raising young in most of the mountain ranges in Inyo County. Some winters very few birds are seen in Inyo although typically numbers begin to show up in late winter or early spring as birds that wintered to the south begin their return route to northern U.S. and Canada into Alaska. It is a mystery whether our wintering birds are from the northern reaches or our local mountains or a mixture of both. They are seen all months of the year but are on the valley floor only from October to March.

The Western Bluebird is also electric blue but the breast and upper back are orange. The females of both species are faded copies of the males. The Western Bluebird is much less common than the Mountain Bluebird in the eastern Sierra. In summer the Western Bluebird is found in the Far West from Mexico to southern British Columbia. The only known breeding locations in Inyo County are mature pinyon-junipers of the Panamint Mountains and a few low elevations along the east face of the Sierra Nevada such as Gray's Meadow and Seven Pines. While a few are reported some winters from Round Valley and Owens Valley a reliable winter area is from Shoshone to China Ranch in southeast Inyo County.

William Leon Dawson, the original *Birds of California* author, reveals to mere mortals the magic of a Mountain Bluebird thusly: "Gentle and demure, as well as brave and high-spirited, is this sky-born thoroughbred of the Sierras, this bit of heaven's own blue incarnate."

## February Field Trip Report – Klondike to Tinemaha Claus Engelhardt

Jo and Tom Heindel led their ever popular Winter Wildlife Tour February 10 beginning at Klondike Lake north of Big Pine and ending at Tinemaha Reservoir. The rainy weather dampened neither the enthusiasm of the many trip participants nor that of the birds. The highlight of the day was a close and open view of the elusive American Bittern, one of several spotted at Klondike Lake. Other noteworthy sightings included Merlin, Prairie Falcon, Ferruginous Hawk, Tundra Swans and a lone Bald Eagle at Tinemaha. Cinnamon Teals and Tree Swallows were harbingers of Spring. Over 35 bird species were seen while Tule Elk and Mule Deer added to the wildlife count. Thank you Jo and Tom for a great day!

### How to apply for the \$1500 Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua Bird Research Grant

The Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua's mission is to enhance appreciation and understanding of the Mono Basin's diverse and abundant bird life and to educate the public about this area's value to birds and people. The Mono Basin is one of the most intensively studied natural areas in California. In order to foster and continue the long history of ecological research and thus further understanding and conservation of the unique ecosystem, the Chautauqua's organizing members select one bird research project each year to receive a portion of that year's Chautauqua proceeds. To apply, go to <http://www.birdchautauqua.org> and click on Bird Research Grant Request for Proposals – due March 31.

## You Can Go Home Again (Sometimes)

### Cindy Kamler

Some wild birds that fall out of nests or trees are lucky enough to go home, thanks to Eastern Sierra Wildlife Care volunteers who are part of the Rescue and Return Team. In 2006, 40 young birds were returned to their nests, placed in artificial nests or, in the case of “branchers” or fledglings, into their nest tree. It’s always best to let the natural parents raise the babies, so we always ask the rescuer if they know where the nest is, exactly where the young were found, and other information that will help locate the nest or nest tree.

At ESWC, arrival of the first baby bird or mammal marks the start of “baby season.” Young mammals may have their nest or burrow destroyed by dogs or other predators; sometimes the mother is killed and the blind, hungry babies squirm out of nests in desperation. Baby birds may be plucked out of nests by aerial predators; nests are blown down or destroyed by high winds or mistakenly cut down. Cars, people or dogs may separate ground birds such as quail or ducks from their moms; near-fledglings over-balance or are caught by a gust of wind as they stretch and test their wings.

Great Horned Owls leave their nests while still downy bundles with large taloned feet. They walk on adjacent branches or hop from branch to branch, earning them the label of “brancher.” Last spring, R&R Team members Art Lillund and Kevin Calder returned a brancher to his nest tree in Hammil while sleepy siblings and mother looked on (*see photo*). Kevin is an accomplished climber; Art does the belaying.



A total of six young Great Horned Owls were returned to their parents, three of whom were placed in an artificial nest. The tree crotch selected by the parents—while just right for eggs—was too small for the growing babies!

Red-shouldered Hawks, American Kestrels, and a Swainson’s Hawk were among the 18 raptors returned home. About a dozen crows and ravens got a hand—some returned to their nests or trees while a couple of ravens went into an artificial nest. Some smaller birds got the same service—Lesser Goldfinches, House Finches, a Steller’s Jay, a fledgling hummingbird and a nuthatch.

One hummingbird nest housing two tiny nestlings was taken down by homeowners because “the mother hasn’t been here for two days.” When I went to pick up the babies, there were numerous droppings in the box so I knew they had been fed recently. If mom had been gone for 2 days, the babies would have died. When someone reports a “missing” hummingbird mother (the dads aren’t involved in raising the young), we recommend they sit a good distance away and keep their eyes on the nest consistently for 20 minutes. In most cases, the mother is seen. Other clues as to whether they are orphaned include constant high-pitched, squeaky calls and agitated movements.

In this case, we fed the babies and then, using the bottom of a Styrofoam cup and some pipe cleaners, fastened the occupied nest back up under the porch overhang. Mom showed up in less than 5 minutes after we had withdrawn from the area to observe.

While we urge people spotting a wild animal in trouble to secure them in a snug, padded box, sometimes the finders are unable or unwilling to pick the animal up or can’t reach them. This winter, during the freezing spell, an American Coot was reported frozen into the ice at Bishop City Park. When Sandra Kupelian, Art Lillund and Christina Ackerman arrived, they could see that fishing line tangled around a leg was what had frozen into the ice. Armed with Art’s extension pole, a sharp knife attached, Sandra hung from the gazebo railing and managed to cut the line. The Coot was quickly netted and brought to the Center for examination and treatment. Stress and a slight abrasion were found; the bird had a few days of rest and feeding before being returned to the Park.

Volunteers responded to well over 65 rescue calls resulting in the admission of more than 85 animals, mostly birds. In some sad cases, like that of an injured Tundra Swan and its mate in the middle of a partly frozen marsh, the bird could not be reached and rescued.

In other cases, the animal can't be found, leaving volunteers to worry and hope that there were no serious injuries or problems.

Along with the Rescue and Return Team, ESWC volunteers donate more than 10,000 hours each year helping injured and orphaned wildlife. Some work directly with the wildlife, others participate in fundraising, education, transport, facility, grant writing, and publicity teams or help with other administrative work. One volunteer may donate a few hours a month,

*ESWC 2006*

Admitted: 371

Released (survived first 24 hours): 61%

Died or Euthanized: 36%

Transferred: 3%

Species: 73 avian; 14 mammal; 4 reptile. First-time or rare species include: Burrowing Owl, Cedar Waxwing, Coachwhip Snake, Big Brown Bat, Evening Grosbeak, American Bittern, Common Nighthawk, Orange-crowned Warbler, Pacific Loon, Vaux's Swift, Violet-green Swallow, White-faced Ibis.

others more. There is a place for everyone who would like to help ESWC continue its work.

***A Volunteer Orientation will be held Sunday, March 18, from 3-5 PM, at the Union Bank Meeting Room, Main Street, Bishop. Those interested in learning about the work of ESWC, basic rescue information and volunteer opportunities are invited to attend. Call Linda at 872-3926 with questions or to reserve a spot. Come join the ESWC team of volunteers.***



This little Great Horned Owl receives first aid before returning to his nest.. Cindy Kamler

## **May Birds As Well As Dust Settle on Owens Lake**

**Mike Prather**

More shallow flooding dust control is coming to Owens Lake and shorebirds everywhere smile; so do birders. Another 9.2 square miles will be added by 2010 to the already constructed 25 square miles as the result of an agreement last December between the City of Los Angeles and the Great Basin Unified Air Pollution Control District. Eastern Sierra Audubon has been collecting shorebird data at the lake since the mid 1980s and has seen numbers soar off the chart due to the habitat created by the enormous dust control project. The largest wildlife numbers anywhere in Inyo County exist today at Owens Lake because of efforts to control hazardous dust. A valuable California wildlife heritage that was lost when Los Angeles diverted water south has returned albeit accidentally. It has returned, but it has not been restored. No permanent protection exists for the clouds of sandpipers and armies of foraging American Avocets. Could this huge public trust resource be lost a second time?

The problem is that the water spread on Owens Lake is from the Los Angeles aqueduct. It is of high quality, is collected at a lower cost to the City and it also produces some hydropower. Los Angeles logically would like to use less of their aqueduct water. Increased water conservation and the purchase of replacement water are expensive. Their policy at Owens Lake is that not one drop of water and not one dollar is to be used for anything except dust control. "We're not building a wildlife refuge," reported Richard Harasick, LADWP Owens Lake Project Manager. Where does this leave us?

Los Angeles now proposes to study the pumping of water from under Owens Lake for dust control use. Would that threaten the natural springs and wetlands that remained after the lake disappeared in the 1920s? Would this water be of poor quality and harm the food web that has been created in the shallow flood dust control areas? Los Angeles proposes to begin shrinking their shallow flood zones by 10% a year to save water. What impacts will this have on shorebirds and waterfowl?

It is now time for a comprehensive wildlife assessment and management plan for Owens Lake. Funding for this work must be secured and the results shared with the public, Los Angeles DWP and the California DFG and State Lands Commission. Let's look at the past, present and the possible future. How can this wildlife heritage, which belongs to all Californians, be protected and not lost for a second time? How can Los Angeles have flexibility in their dust project and reasonable water savings, but still ensure that the tens of thousands of birds are not negatively impacted? Eastern Sierra Audubon has had an excellent working relationship with the LADWP staff at Owens Lake. Yearly spring and fall bird surveys have been allowed to continue at the lake which is closed to the general public. Field trips every April and September have been permitted (the next is April 21). All of the data collected is shared with LADWP as well as the California Department of Fish and Game. Our goal will be "May the birds as well as the dust settle at Owens Lake."

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**P.O. Box 624**  
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Yellow-bellied Sapsucker

Chris Howard

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**Wrapping up Winter and ringing in Spring – Inside**