



**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](http://ESAudubon.org) Eastern Sierra Bird Sightings: [ESAudubon.org/birds/](http://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!

**September 10**  
**Birding Colombia**  
Santiago Escruciera



Santiago Escruciera is a Colombian-born American citizen residing in California for the past 29 years. He graduated with a B.A. in Cultural Anthropology and a minor in Environmental Studies from Sonoma State University, in northern California. He has taught Environmental Education - in Spanish and English - for the past 15 years, ten of which he has spent with the Mono Lake Committee, in the Eastern Sierra of California. At Mono Lake he manages an outdoor education program for Los Angeles' inner-city youth. Santiago is an avid birding enthusiast, and during the summer he leads bird watching tours for school groups and the public, including helping at the Mono Lake Committee's annual Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua. Santiago has also led kayaking ecological tours in Baja California, Mexico.

**October 8**  
**Partnering to Preserve Working**  
**Lands in the Eastern Sierra**  
John McGurke and Karen Ferrell-Ingram,  
Eastern Sierra Land Trust



The Eastern Sierra is known for its green valleys and pastoral vistas. Most of these are "working landscapes," managed by ranchers and farmers to produce crops and livestock. While agriculture is important to our local economies, working landscapes are also important to many birds and other wildlife. The Eastern Sierra Land Trust works closely with local ranchers and farmers who want to maintain their way of life by ensuring their lands are never developed.

## **President's Message – Hope Takes Wing**

*Hope is the thing with feathers.*

Emily Dickenson

So, I open the e-mail from Joy and it tells me the deadline for the newsletter is looming. What happened to the summer?

For the past few weeks, our house has been the site of a convention of hummingbirds. Lots of very small ones included. Last week, just as the sun was fading out there were more than twenty five in the back. It was as if there was a swarm of gigantic mosquitoes. In the early evening they are joined out there by quail groups searching in the grasses. We had nesting orioles and phoebes, a hawk that visited daily and our sundown bats and night hawks. Not remarkable sightings to be sure, but each is a reminder of the miraculous vibrancy of life that is a bird.

It is such a pleasure to begin another year as chapter president. As such, I have received a pile of mail and e-mail over the summer from national and state Audubon. Whatever the topic, they all talk about activities in which chapters can or should be engaged or promote in their communities. At the end of the day, what strikes me from reading them is that ESAS is a

remarkable organization. We have an award-winning newsletter, field trips and programs presented by acclaimed authorities, a role in the wonderful Mono Lake Chautauqua, an evolving presence in the future of Owens Lake and a student education program that could easily serve as a model for similar efforts in any part of the nation.

How does this happen in such a small “out of the way” chapter? The answer, as it always is here on the East Side, is lots and lots of hard work from many, many volunteers: our outstanding newsletter editor, a seemingly tireless board of directors, energetic and creative committee and project chairs, our trip leaders and program presenters and some very dedicated individuals. Please give these people a hand. Yes, applause is a great response, but it would be even better if more folks would share the load. Get involved, even just a little bit. Come to a meeting and bring a friend, share your ideas and your passions. We are poised at the start of another year of serving our community, our landscape, and its wonderful creatures; please join in the fun. **Pete Pumphrey**

### **Upcoming Field Trips**

**Saturday, September 20 – 3 Cleanup Sites: Owens River (at East Line), Mammoth Lakes Basin, Upper Rush Creek in the Mono Basin.** The California Coastal Commission, Inyo National Forest, Friends of the Inyo, and Eastern Sierra Audubon are hosting cleanups from 9 a.m. to noon. Choose the site most convenient for you. Bring a canteen for water, snacks, sun cream, protective clothing, wear closed toe shoes. Latex glove provided; bring heavy work gloves if desired. For more information contact Sara at 873-4320 or Darren at 873-6500.

**Sunday, October 26 - Rock Creek Birding** Join co-leaders Claus Engelhardt and Bill Mitchel for a popular birding and hiking trip along Rock Creek – weather permitting. Meet at the Sno-Park along the Rock Creek road at 9 am. Bring binoculars, water, lunch and warm clothing. Call leaders (Claus at 872-4596 or Bill at 872-4774) for more info and to check in case location needs to change.

**The big event of September is our annual fund raising yard sale!  
Saturday, September 6, starting at 8:00 am**

Items can be left at any time prior to the yard sale at the home of Phill and Brenda Kiddoo, 2281 Longview, off South Barlow, in west Bishop. You can call in advance, 872-7226, especially if help is needed to unload items; or leave them in the driveway. If possible, price your donations. Please do not leave clothing as it is not generally saleable. Check your garage, closets and sheds for discards that will be treasures for others. If you have extra perennial garden plants, please pot them up and bring them to the sale. Leave donations before noon on Friday, September 5th.

The proceeds from the yard sale fund Audubon's conservation programs, and help pay for such expenses as meeting room rent, newsletter printing and mailing, and insurance.

**Baker Creek Ranch Field Trip, May 3**

How many potential nesting sites were obliterated at Baker Creek Ranch by the wildfires of July, 2007? The chapter's annual outing held the first Saturday in May found avifauna which was trying to survive the scarcity. After a pondside pause to observe a Green Heron, twelve participants, led by Larry Nahm and Carolyn Gann, enjoyed a fine morn in Norman Clyde's old lowland headquarters.

Tanagers, orioles and Black Grosbeaks lit the trees with their color. Lazuli Buntings and a Blue Grosbeak fronted the sky. Townsend's Warblers, Olive-sided Flycatchers, and the usual mysterious empidonax flycatchers had also returned. The nests of the two Calliope Hummingbirds are more often seen in alpine terrain. The few folks with downcast eyes could examine blooms such as sidalcea and blue-eyed grass.

**Larry Nahm**

**Rush Creek Field Trip, July 26**

On July 26th Greg Reis from the Mono Lake Committee led a half-day field trip to the "bottom lands" of rewatered Rush Creek. It was wonderful to explore a new area of the Basin and to learn more about the Mono Lake restoration story.

Greg talked about the Rush Creek twelve year restoration process as we gazed over tall green trees, native shrubs, grasses and flowering plants. We pushed through large stands of healthy willow and waded in icy cold water to view the new growth and mature creek channels with their gravel bars, water plants and shady vegetation. Nesting birds were very quiet although we did catch glimpses of Yellow Warblers, several shy flycatchers and a Song Sparrow.

We then visited a newly (since April 2008) rewatered narrow channel that had very little vegetation along the banks. The surrounding hot dry sandy soil with sparse native plants was a very impressive contrast to the cool green flora we had just walked through a few hundred feet away. Time will create new habitat on this channel, too. Water in the Great Basin is a special gift.

**Kathy Duvall**



**Owens Lake Field Trip, August 16**

Twenty-six birders from all over California spent the day enjoying the Owens Lake dust control project's thousands of shorebirds and waterfowl. This enormous wildlife heritage has returned to Owens Lake, attracted by the rich habitats created by the Los Angeles dust control efforts. Water being spread in sheets or in ponds fosters a rich food web of algae and brine flies - the table is set for migrating flocks.

Led by Eastern Sierra Audubon's Mike Prather and Jon Dunn, the group first visited a shallow flooded area that contained 6,000-8,000 phalaropes (mostly Wilson's phalaropes), several thousand American Avocets, a hundred or more Black-necked Stilts all being stirred up by a pair of juvenile Peregrine Falcons. Clouds of phalaropes wheeled wildly while dodging undulating swarms of American Avocets. Both groups were pushed and herded from one end of the habitat to the other, but no kills were observed.

Willits, Long-billed Curlews, Semi-palmated Plovers, Short-billed Dowitchers, Red-necked Phalaropes, White-faced Ibis, Baird's Sandpipers and California Gulls were all around the field trip participants. Jon Dunn provided his expected excellent instruction on shorebird fine points - Least versus Western Sandpiper and Red-necked Phalarope versus Wilson's Phalarope.

It was a bright day, but not an overly hot one. The group drove the entire length of the lake from north to south and witnessed several thousand ducks, mostly Northern Shovelers, rising and circling over the ponds before setting their wings and gliding back to the lake's surface.

Owens Lake is one of Eastern Sierra Audubon's Important Bird Areas. It was so designated by the National Audubon Society because of its tens of thousands of migrating shorebirds and waterfowl and also because of its large population of nesting snowy plovers.

Eastern Sierra Audubon continues to promote a lake-wide comprehensive wildlife plan for Owens Lake and is seeking safe and responsible access as soon as possible for the public to be able to enjoy viewing California's wildlife. Owens Lake has the potential of enriching southern Owens Valley's ecotourism especially during spring and fall when bird populations are at the highest number.

The next field trip to Owens Lake will be in April of 2009 - look for it on the ESA website or in future WAVE issues. **Mike Prather**

**Thanks to Larry, Carolyn, Greg,  
Mike and Jon  
for leading these great trips.**

## The Loons of Inyo County

### Tom and Jo Heindel



Common Loon

Tom and Jo Heindel

There are three species of feathered loons that occur in Inyo County and untold numbers of the unfeathered kind. Most often recorded is the Common Loon, an uncommon spring and fall migrant and casual summer and winter visitor. Spring migrants are expected in early April and most have moved north by late May but lingerers have been found through early June. Usually 1 to 2 birds are seen, occasionally 3 to 4, but the spring maximum is 19 alternate-plumaged birds in a tight flock seen at Tinemaha Reservoir on 10 Apr 1975 on a rainy, early evening (T&J Heindel), behaving as though they had just arrived. Fall migrants begin to arrive in mid Sep but most move through from mid Oct to early Dec. Again, most sightings are 1 to 2 birds, but 3 to 4 are seen more often than in spring. The fall maximum is 16 birds in a flock at Haiwee Reservoir on a very windy day on 19 Nov 1996 (T&J Heindel). Windy days and days after strong winds provide the conditions whereby the birds drop into water bodies rather than fight the difficult conditions aloft. Winter birds average a sighting every other year, usually in January or February and there are three summer records, a pair at Tinemaha Reservoir 5 Aug 1989 (M.A. Patten), another pair at Tinemaha Reservoir 8 July 2003 (T&J Heindel) that responded to an imitated call by calling back, and a single bird at Second Lake, west of Big Pine 15 Jul 2008 (D. Holway), which set a county high elevation record!

The next most numerous loon is the Pacific Loon, a rare fall migrant recorded almost fifty times, with the vast majority of records from the Owens Valley where there are many more reservoirs, lakes, and ponds. Most birds move south from early Oct to early Dec although there is an avant garde in late Sep and a tail-end Charlie in mid Dec. Almost all sightings are of single birds but there are several records of two birds and the maximum is three seen at Tinemaha Reservoir 5 Nov 2001 (J.L. Dunn). There are two spring records, both in May (J.L. Dunn; M. Brady, S. Glover, M. Prather). This lopsided seasonal distribution is the result of most of the arctic breeders heading west to the coast and then south

to their wintering areas along the Pacific Coast to Mexico. But some birds head south and then move west to the coast leaving a sprinkling of records scattered over most of the western states to mark their passage. It is not known why there are so few spring records in the county but it could be because the birds remain along the coast and move north before turning east or they may head east from the coast and overfly the county completely.



Pacific Loon

Tom and Jo Heindel

The Red-throated Loon has been recorded eleven times in the county, all single birds and almost all seen in Nov. The earliest arrival is 9 Oct which corresponds with the rest of the state but it is an outlier in the Eastern Sierra and the eastern desert of Kern County. The latest record is 28 Dec 2002 (T&J Heindel) excluding a bird that arrived at Diaz Lake 21 Dec 1992 that was last seen 10 Jan 1993 (J.L. Wickman). All county records are since 1990 and likely reflect the increased birding coverage since then rather than a change in the distribution of this species.

A loon to be looked for is the Yellow-billed Loon, which has been recorded in Mono County 8 Dec 1976 (D. Gaines) and reported in late February 1976 at Tinemaha Reservoir (T&J Heindel), although not adequately documented to be included as a county record. A pattern of interior records indicates a window from mid Oct to early May with most records occurring Dec to Feb.

Field guides adequately depict the plumage differences between loons with basic plumage being the most similar looking between the species but each has distinct characteristics that clinch the identification. Bill size, shape and color, neck pattern, and floating posture will usually make a well-seen loon an easy call. Once you become proficient in loon identification you just may become a loon lover, also known as a "loonie"!



Red-throated Loon

Tom and Jo Heindel

### Missing Mary

The Eastern Sierra Audubon family suffered a profound loss with the passing of Mary Vocolka in June. Mary served our chapter in many ways: as Secretary, a member of the Board of Directors and as historian. She and Derrick made sure the newsletters were mailed and accounted for. We all appreciated her baking skills when she brought cookies for refreshments and she volunteered for countless other tasks.

But as valuable as her service to the organization was, she will be missed so much more as a part of our individual lives. When Roberta and I first came to Bishop, Mary came forward to welcome us with warmth and caring. She gave us encouragement, advice, humor in the times of our confusion and helped us over and over to figure out what was going on with our plants. She was a wonderful dinner companion sharing stories of food, gardening, Yosemite, books and a myriad of other topics.

As so many others have said, she was one of the most gracious persons ever on earth. Mary was kind and gentle with a welcome and warming smile. I never spoke with her about anything, no matter how briefly, without coming away feeling that my life had been made a little brighter. She was very special to us all and will be deeply missed.

Mary's husband, Derrick Vocolka, has agreed to join the Audubon Board and we welcome his experience and knowledge. – **Pete Pumphrey**

### Cookie Call

Thank you to the wonderful people who donated their time and money to bring refreshments to the meetings so far this year. We all enjoyed the tasty cookies and delicious cupcakes brought by Jan Bowers, Connie Engelhardt, Kathy Duvall, and Sally Gaines. If anyone else would like to contribute, please call Kay Wilson at 873-3859.

### Cleaning the coastlines of the Eastern Sierra

This year will mark the 24th Annual California Coastal Cleanup Day, Saturday September 20, 9 am to noon. All over the state, on ocean beaches and inland waterways, volunteers will clean trash and debris from over 2000 miles of shoreline. This year in the Eastern Sierra there will be three cleanup sites and volunteers can choose which they prefer. One site is the Owens River out East Line Street in Bishop, where the river crosses under the road. Another will be in the Mammoth Lakes Basin and the third is Upper Rush Creek in the Mono Basin.

California Coastal Cleanup Day is the premier volunteer event focused on the marine environment in the country. In 2007, more than 60,000 volunteers worked together to collect more than 900,000 pounds of trash and recyclables from our beaches, lakes, and waterways. California Coastal Cleanup Day has been hailed by the Guinness Book of World Records as "the largest garbage collection" (1993). Since the program started in 1985, over 800,000 Californians have removed more than 12 million pounds of debris from our state's shorelines and coast. When combined with the International Coastal Cleanup, organized by The Ocean Conservancy and taking place on the same day, California Coastal Cleanup Day becomes part of one of the largest volunteer events of the year.

Coastal Cleanup Day is a great way for families, students, service groups, and neighbors to join together, take care of our fragile aquatic environment and inland waterways, show community support for our shared natural resources, learn about the impacts of aquatic debris and how we can prevent them, and to have fun! For info: Sara Steck at 873-4320 or Darren at 873-6500, or the Coastal Commission at (800) COAST-4U or visit [www.coast4u.org](http://www.coast4u.org).

**The 12th Annual Central Valley Birding Symposium** will be held Nov. 20-23 in Stockton, Ca. at the Stockton Grand Hotel. Evening programs include Hans Peeters "Owls of California and the West" and John Muir Laws "Exploring the Sierra Nevada as a Naturalist and Artist." Workshops: "Raptor ID" by Joe Morlan, "Bird ID" by Jon Dunn, "Bird and Nature Digiscoping" by Clay Taylor, with John Muir Laws, ID Panel with the guest experts, and more. There are programs for beginning birders and for people who want to make their gardens bird-friendly. Field trips frequently turn up chasable goodies. The Birder's Market has artists and vendors with wonderful bird and nature related items. For more info, check the website at [www.cvbs.org](http://www.cvbs.org), or contact Frances Oliver at [hummer52@sbcglobal.net](mailto:hummer52@sbcglobal.net) or (209) 369-2010.

## Chapter Officers

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Vice- President: Joan Benner 938-2929  
Secretary: Barbara Schuck Kelley 873-6151  
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Board members: Kathy Duvall Connie Engelhardt  
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**Loons of the Eastern Sierra**  
**...some have feathers...**

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