



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 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!

May 13

The White Mountains Daniel Pritchert

Daniel Pritchert of the White Mountain Research Station will present an informative program on the White Mountains and the work of the Research Station. In this delightful, humorous presentation, Daniel will share with us everything you wanted to know about the WMRS and more. Do join us and bring a friend.



June 10

Potluck Picnic 6:00 pm at Joan Benner's

Joan says, "Before you wince about having to drive all the way to Big Pine, it takes about the same time as when we met at almost-always-windy Millpond!" Bring an ample dish and beverage to share, your own place setting and a folding chair, and a friend or neighbor for an evening of good food and conversation while enjoying views of the Palisades to the south and White Mountains to the north. If the weather is not cooperative, we will picnic inside in cool comfort. We'll also elect the Board of Directors and officers – please contact a Board member beforehand if you're interested in serving on the Board or to make a nomination. From Bishop, south on 395 past Klondike Lake, turn right on Reynolds Road. Just beyond the 35 mph sign, turn left on Myrtle Lane; fourth house on the left. Questions, call Joan, 938-2929. See you there!

President's Message – The Miracle At Hand

*“Either everything is a miracle,
or nothing is”*
Albert Einstein

I have found a haunting quality to Owens Lake. This week I spent a day talking about the lake with a dedicated group of people who have been working for a year to craft a vision of its current and future wildlife habitat. I then spent the next day at the lakebed trying to put a reality to the abstractions of the day before.

I have been told that this is more of a contrivance than a lake. There certainly is a sense in which that is true. A lake connotes an open expanse of water. Here we find discrete “cells” surrounded by dozens of miles of levees and roadways. The scale of the dust control project is so massive that it is never out of sight or mind. Huge pieces of machinery are visible in all directions. Thousands of miles of drip tubing, miles and miles of pipelines as large as 5 feet in diameter carry fresh water to hundreds of risers, bubblers and discharge points in an effort to control dust emissions. It is an impressive engineering and construction accomplishment; and it has had a positive effect. The lakebed was rated as the number one source of pm10 particulate emissions; now it is out of the top ten. The commitment of resources, in terms of water and dollars is beyond impressive.

Still, the project is not the arresting thing. There truly is an otherworldly feeling to many areas. Expanses of white salt crust the surface and the relics of fences and other structures. I catch myself thinking it must have just snowed here. On this day there was not as much wind as earlier in the week. Still, there was still enough of a breeze to send up plumes of dust and send Phil Kiddoo's hard hat flying off to the side of a berm. The wind

seemed to constantly shift in velocity and direction, a constant enemy of the concept of clean air.

But these things are not what sticks in my mind's sight: it is the presence of water and the birds; the relation between these two things that I think about in the night. The water in the dust control cells does not look pristine; it must be significantly saline; but it supports enough life to be a food source for birds. So many birds. Mike Prather tells me that this is not a peak, but there are literally acres of avocets, flocks of sandpipers, at least seven kinds of ducks, yellowlegs, curlew, stilts, dowitchers; feathered life everywhere you look. Songbirds are found exploring newly established grasses and willow shoots in a managed vegetation sites. Freshwater seeps and springs flow onto the lakebed creating green splashes of life in the midst of all this desolation. To me, each of these is the work of some kind of magician.

You have to see this in person, on the ground, to appreciate why it is essential to work through the sometimes difficult process of seeking agreement about a conservation future at this site. I wonder what would happen if all these birds had to plan for our survival instead of the other way around. I wonder if I can bring the same dogged determination to the task that they bring to the process of migration and breeding. The people who are working on the Conservation Action Plan, from each and every group at the table, have shown that dedication to purpose and deserve a great deal of credit and appreciation. We humans have been given a gist of opportunity as a result of an engineering process developed to control dust emissions. It is important that we do not let it slip through our hands.

- **Pete Pumphrey**

Upcoming Field Trips

Saturday May 16 - Benton Hot Springs Ranch Co-led by the Eastern Sierra Land Trust, California Native Plant Society, and the Eastern Sierra Audubon Society. Enjoy a walk through alkali meadow down through a sagebrush scrub canyon on an ESLT conservation easement. Last year a peregrine falcon was spotted, so we'll have to keep our eyes open. An open-ended half day with 2-3 miles of moderate hiking through hills. Bring plenty of water, your lunch, sunscreen, hat, and make sure to dress for varied weather. Meet in Benton at the intersection of Hwys 6 and 120 at 9 am. To carpool from Bishop, meet at the “Y,” Hwy 6 and Wye Rd. at 8 am. Call Serena at 873-4554 or email serena@eslt.org.

Saturday May 23 - Wheeler Ridge Led by Karen Ferrell-Ingram. Spend a morning discovering new plants, spotting birds, and exploring the biodiversity of the Round Valley Mule Deer Corridor. 2-3 miles of moderate hiking off trail from 9 to noon. Bring a lunch, water, hat, appropriate clothing for weather, and ESLT will provide drinks. Meet at the gravel pit on Sky Meadow Rd in Swall Meadows at 9 am. Call Serena at 873-4554 or email her at serena@eslt.org.

Field Trip Report: Winter Wildlife Tour

On the morning of February 28 a large group of birders, both novice and experienced, gathered in Big Pine for the annual Winter Wildlife Tour led by Jo and Tom Heindel. The group followed the now familiar route from Klondike Lake to Tinemaha Reservoir with several intervening stops. Highlights included a first of spring Clark's Grebe, an active Great Blue Heron rookery, migrating Greater Yellowlegs and first of spring Sage Thrasher and female Great-tailed Grackle. Two soaring immature Golden Eagles were also spotted off Steward Lane and eight distant Tundra Swans were present at Tinemaha. Unfortunately, the expected Bald Eagle at that location eluded us. Many thanks to Tom and Jo for their continued service to ESAS and the Eastern Sierra.

- **Claus Engelhardt**



Winter Wildlife Tour 2009

Nancy Overholtz

Birds in the Schools

Our Birds in the Schools Program is currently gearing up for the 2009 field season. This program is offered to 3rd grade students at Pine Street School in Bishop, with similar programs in Lee Vining and Benton. Students are acquainted with common local birds, taught about different adaptations for survival, and given an overview of bird migration. Audubon volunteers show a slide and video show in the classrooms, and students have an opportunity to ask questions and discuss what they know. Then each class has a one-hour field trip to the Bishop City Park during spring migration for maximum viewing of birds. Audubon provides child-size binoculars and training in their proper use for each student. This year Bishop students had additional practice with binocular and birding skills in their art classes with Rosie Howard. Students also learn about and use birding field guides.

Volunteer docents for the field trips are always welcome. Please contact Sara Steck at 873-4320 if you are interested.

Mono Lake Osprey Foraging and Movement Study

Osprey began nesting at Mono Lake in 1985, with the first successful nest fledging 2 young in 1989. This wouldn't be considered extraordinary except for the fact that there are no fish in Mono Lake.

Osprey are a fish-eating bird that generally nest within 1 mile of fishable waters, yet at Mono Lake fishable waters are a minimum of 1.5 miles from nests. Despite this, the nesting birds fledge an average of 1.6 young per active nest since 2004 with a single nest fledging 4 young in 2008! How are they doing this? Just how far are they traveling for food? To answer these questions, and many more, we are embarking upon a study to band osprey nestlings at Mono Lake and use satellite transmitters to track the local and migratory movements of the adults. Banding will begin in 2009 with the deployment of satellite transmitters starting 2010 at the soonest, based on availability of grant funds.

The greatest need for this project is funding. The Sierra State Parks Foundation, a 501(c) nonprofit organization (<http://www.sierrastateparks.org/>), has been instrumental in funding the banding of osprey nestlings during 2009 and is accepting donations to help support this effort. If you would like to donate, indicate "Mono Osprey" on your check and send it to the Sierra State Parks Foundation, PO Box 28, Tahoe City, California, 96145. Every bit helps; thanks!

If you would like to learn more about the Mono Lake osprey, field trips will be led during the Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua on Saturday afternoon and Sunday morning. - **Lisa Fields, Environmental Scientist, California State Parks**

Registration now open for Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua, June 19-21

By request, an extra day has been added to this popular nature festival, to begin Friday morning, June 19 and end with the traditional picnic and live music at Mono Lake County Park on Sunday afternoon. Over sixty events will be offered including workshops, field trips and auditorium presentations for all levels, beginners to advanced. Subjects include birds, bats, flowers, furry critters, the night sky, storytelling, wilderness survival skills, art, music, photography, activities for kids and more. Special musical guest will be singer-songwriter Ray Bonneville from Austin, Texas. For more information or to register, visit www.birdchautauqua.org or call (760) 647-6595. The event is sponsored by the National Park Service, Eastern Sierra Audubon, California State Parks, Mono Lake Committee, U.S. Forest Service, Eastern Sierra Interpretive Association, Friends of the Inyo, and PRBO Conservation Science. Over 200 participants are expected this year.

Vireos of the Eastern Sierra

Tom and Jo Heindel

Vireos are small birds, in the genus *Vireo*, that superficially resemble warblers. While similar in size they are less colorful, slightly more heavy-bodied with thicker, slightly hooked bills, and less active than warblers. Although all species are in the same genus they are generally divided into two groups: those with wing bars and spectacles and those without wing bars but with light eyebrows.

There are fourteen to fifteen regularly occurring species in the United States, the number depending on which authority's definition of "regularly" one accepts. Eleven vireo species are reliably documented for the Eastern Sierra. Only four regularly breed here with the rest occurring either as migrants or vagrants (species that are not breeders or regular migrants but for various reasons wander to the Eastern Sierra).



White-eyed Vireo

Jo Heindel

The **White-eyed Vireo** is a vagrant that has occurred only four times in Inyo, three times in Mono, and twice near Dyer, NV. This vireo summers in the eastern U.S. with a few wintering along the Gulf Coast while the majority head south to southern Texas south to Honduras, Cuba, and the Bahamas. While physically secretive, its loud and snappy "Chick, get me a beer, quick!" is often the first clue that an observer has of its presence.

The **Bell's Vireo** was fairly common in the Owens Valley as a summer resident and breeder through 1891. There followed, on a statewide basis, extensive habitat destruction, overgrazing by cattle, and the invasion of Brown-headed Cowbirds, nest predators that love these small, open-cup nesters. For over a century the damage done to the Owens Valley extirpated these little, bubbling singers as breeders from our area although they did persist as breeders in the southeast

corner of Inyo, especially at China Ranch, south of Tecopa. During the last decade occasional reports of Bell's Vireo occurred in the Owens Valley and in 2008 a pair was found breeding near Big Pine. This may be the result of extensive habitat improvement and intensive cowbird trapping in southern California where their population numbers have risen sharply during the same timeframe.

The **Gray Vireo**, the most often mis-identified vireo, is only known in Inyo County from the Grapevine Mountains along the CA-NV border where it breeds. There are many published reports which are far more likely to be Plumbeous Vireos, based on habitat and timing. This species is interesting in that they are seldom found migrating. They magically appear on their summering grounds, disappear, and just as magically appear on their wintering grounds. There is a story that needs to be written about the biology of this vireo!

The **Yellow-throated Vireo**, a vagrant from the East, has made it seven times to Inyo County and six times to Mono County. Most birds are seen from late May with a few in October.



Blue-headed Vireo

Jo Heindel

The **Blue-headed Vireo**, a fall vagrant from the East, has been found twice in Inyo County and once in Mono County. Any claim of this species requires the highest level of evidence to be accepted by the California Bird Records Committee as a state record.

The **Hutton's Vireo**, a mostly sedentary species from southern CA and west of the Sierra, has been reported six times from Inyo and twice from Mono. Serious documentation and/or photographs should support any claim of this species in the Eastern Sierra. Specimens and banded birds away from known breeding territories suggest that this bird can be found away from expected areas but evidence standards are high.

The **Cassin's Vireo** can appear brightly colored but at times is almost as dull as a Plumbeous. This spring and fall migrant passes through mainly from April to June and again late August to October.

The **Plumbeous Vireo** is uncommon to fairly common dull-gray, summer resident in the White-Inyo Range as well as other ranges east of the Owens Valley, primarily in pinyon woodland. They are very sparingly found along the east slope of the Sierra into Mono County.



Warbling Vireo

Jo Heindel

The **Warbling Vireo** is a fairly common breeder in the Sierra and other ranges to the east. Its song has been rendered "If you squeeze me, will I squirt!" and they are known to sing while incubating eggs. There are also spring and fall migrants who use the Eastern Sierra as a freeway to and from their breeding areas.

The **Red-eyed Vireo**, a vagrant that summers in the eastern U.S. and Canada, has been found about 50 times in Inyo County and over a dozen times in Mono County. Most birds are seen late May well into June and again late August into October.



Philadelphia Vireo

Jo Heindel

The **Philadelphia Vireo**, a vagrant from northeast U.S. and Canada, has been recorded seven times in Inyo County with six birds seen from September to October and one in late May. In Mono County there are a few records from late 23-31 May with summer birds in June to July 2005 and June 1998.

Observers are encouraged to gather breeding data of vireos and other species and submit them to the authors for inclusion in the county database. Courting birds, nest building, feeding nestlings or recent fledglings are all valuable data. Besides, it gives one the chance to hear the bubbling, rasping, melodious, complex, and funny songs of our vireos!

Yard Sale: the Big Event of Fall!

Please start saving your items to donate to this annual fundraiser. Tentative date is October 10. Proceeds fund Audubon's conservation programs, and help pay for such expenses as meeting room rent, newsletter printing and mailing, and insurance. Place to be determined; if you are willing to have it at your home, please call 872-7846.

The ESA Bird-A-Thon will now take place in coordination with the Bishop Christmas Bird Count every December. So look for the pledge appeal letter to arrive in November and be as generous as you have been for so many years. Thank you, loyal supporters!

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Warbling Vireo

Jo Heindel

If you squeeze me...

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