



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!

September 9

A Globally Significant Shorebird IBA In the Making

Mike Prather

An enormous wildlife resource has returned to Owens Lake, a migration stopover to tens of thousands of shorebirds and waterfowl, lost nearly 100 years ago when the lake was dried as a result of water gathering by the City of Los Angeles. Now careful application of water to control dust storms creates roughly 35 square miles of shallow ponds and sheet flooding – rich feeding habitat for sandpipers, snowy plovers, ducks and geese, with more under construction. In 2001 the National Audubon Society designated Owens Lake an Important Bird Area, and in 2008 included it among 10 IBAs in our state that would receive staff time and resources from Audubon-California. A collaborative lakewide conservation action plan is being created by Audubon and partners. Today hundreds of birders and wildlife watchers join guided trips to see this amazing migratory spectacle. How much of this rare resource can be protected in perpetuity? Can a balance be found between LA's need for water and the need to protect wildlife?



October 14

Shape Shifters, Time Travelers, and Innovators: The Origin and Evolution of a Flora

Erik Westerlund

Join Yosemite Ranger Naturalist Erik Westerlund for this armchair tour of the California Flora. Travel back in time through California's great geofloras, discover some bizarre plant/pollinator relationships, and learn how a botanical innovation has been responsible for a wildflower's success story. Erik Westerlund has worked at Yosemite National Park since 1992. He received a bachelor's degree in Biology from the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire and a master's in Natural Resource Management from the University of Wisconsin Steven's Point. A popular presenter at the Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua, he spends his free time studying the natural history of Yosemite's birds, plants and insects.

President's Message – The Magic of Flying Beings

"I will do what I can in response to what is needed here." – Judith Lasater, *Living Your Yoga*

This past June, Roberta and I were walking along the County Park boardwalk at Mono Lake with Santiago from the Mono Lake Committee. It was the Chautauqua Sunday and we were at the park searching for the Tennessee Warbler. After this quest, we headed for the lake to watch Jack Laws lead his field sketching class. Two young boys were walking toward us and Santiago told us that the older one had been the star birder of the morning birdwalk. "He's young, but he has a spark of passion." Suddenly, the young man began yelling at Roberta and me. "I know you! You came to my school and took me to see birds in the park."

There you have it: the reason why Eastern Sierra Audubon does Birds In the Classroom every year. We have grown this program the past two years by adding schools. We plan to expand it further next spring. The program has won recognition from National Audubon which contacted me this summer asking for advice on school programs they were designing.

A lot of members and friends of ESAS have worked on Birds In the Classroom. There are those who developed the concept and put together the slide shows, the volunteers who have gone to the classrooms and led the birdwalks in the field, and the many folks who contributed financially in support of the ESAS Birdathon

which enabled us to purchase the binoculars and field guides. It is a big effort, but any question of its importance was resolved for me while talking to this young man .

A week later, I began to hear about logging operations in the June Lake Burn Area which reportedly had taken trees and snags which held nesting songbirds and/or woodpeckers. I was really impressed by how quickly people exchanged information and concern over these reports. Letters were written by a number of individuals and organizations, including ESAS, asking for an explanation of what had taken place and why. We are still working to sort this out and will keep you updated. Here again was a demonstration of why we are here. We strive to speak for the birds and we will continue to do so.

Two lines extend into the future. One is a commitment to the wellbeing of bird resources. The second is a desire to nurture the sense of the magic of flying beings in the hearts of those who will follow us. They intersect in the story of a child's appreciation for being giving a start at birding. ESAS is not just today's field trips and programs. We are here to continue to build on the foundation that has been laid down by twenty five years of dedicated people. We are here to sustain the natural world into the future by bringing folks along one by one.

- Pete Pumphrey

Upcoming Field Trip

Saturday September 12 - Convict Lake and River Cleanup The California Coastal Commission, Inyo National Forest, Friends of the Inyo, and Eastern Sierra Audubon will hold cleanups of three different sites from 9 a.m. to noon. Bring water, snacks, sun cream and protective clothing, and wear closed toe shoes. Latex glove provided; bring heavy work gloves if desired. For more information and possible additional sites, contact Sara at 873-4320 or Darren at 873-6500.



Yellow-throated Warbler by Debby Parker;
Glossy Ibis by Mary Freeman. See Tom and Jo Heindel's article on page 4 for more about these unusual Eastern Sierra sightings.



Benton Hot Springs Ranch Field Trip Report, May 16 2009

One warm Saturday morning in May, natural history enthusiasts from the Eastern Sierra Audubon Society, California Native Plant Society, and the Eastern Sierra Land Trust gathered at the Benton Hot Springs Ranch in Old Benton. This was a unique opportunity for birders and botanists alike to experience a private conservation easement. We began by circling the ponds through the alkali meadow, observing American Coots, Ruddy Ducks, and numerous Yellow-Headed Blackbirds in and around the ponds. We continued down through a narrow canyon, which used to be the old wagon trail before Hwy 120 was built. The morning culminated with a fantastic spotting of a family of Long-Eared Owls. The male flew around the canyon, trying to distract us from the female and baby owl in their nest. Thanks to Claus and Connie Engelhardt, and all the other leaders who made this morning a fabulous field trip.

– Serena Dennis, AmeriCorps Education and Outreach Coordinator, Eastern Sierra Land Trust



June Picnic Report

Despite having to drive to Big Pine, the turnout for the annual Audubon picnic was great, with over 35 members and friends gathered in the back yard for good food and conversation. With a pleasant overcast and moderate temperatures, the conditions were perfect – and no wind! The most amusing part of the gathering was the propensity of members to gather in my dreary little laundry room to hang out and talk, instead of taking advantage of ample seating elsewhere. We were happy to see long-time Audubon supporter John Burnstrom attend. The other good news is that Larry Nahm and Carolyn Gann have offered to coordinate field trips for the coming year. If you missed the fun, do mark June 9th on your 2010 calendar for another Audubon picnic in my backyard. – Joan Benner

Birdathon Moves to a New Spot on the Calendar

The annual Eastern Sierra Audubon Birdathon was not forgotten this past spring. It is moving to coincide with the Christmas Bird Count. Your help and support of the Birdathon is vital to the health of our chapter.

You can help by participating in the count (get that species total up there). But more importantly, you can help by making a financial pledge in support of the chapter. Even better, you can make your pledge and then recruit a friend, family member, co-worker, business or organization to match that pledge. The Birdathon is our major fund raising effort and we really need it to be a success. Your pledge helps pay for the insurance for our field trips and programs, supports Birds in the Classroom and other forms of community education, enables us to help with events like the Mono Lake Bird Chautauqua, and will help the chapter continue to work on behalf of Owens Lake and other Important Bird Areas in Inyo and Mono Counties.

There will be pledge forms in our next newsletter and at our meetings and field trips. Be sure to take one and sign up. If you need any information of any kind about why this is something you should do, contact me at 872-7846. Please help us make this a really successful Christmas Count and Birdathon year. – Pete Pumphrey

25th California Coastal Cleanup Day California Coastal Cleanup Day is the premier volunteer event focused on the marine environment in the country. In 2008, more than 70,000 volunteers collected more than 1,600,000 pounds of trash and recyclables from our beaches, lakes, and waterways. In 1993 the Guinness Book of World Records called it “the largest garbage collection”! Visit www.coast4u.org for more information, and see Field Trips (page 2) to join the Eastern Sierra event at Convict Lake.

Spring 2009 in Inyo: Just Like the Good Old Days

Tom and Jo Heindel

Many of the older birders said they could not remember a spring like this one for decades, while the younger ones experienced for the first time an abundance of rare birds that were being seen on an almost daily basis. They had heard tales about how-it-used-to-be but couldn't really imagine the magnitude described based on their experiences with what they knew as a "normal" spring. This past spring made believers out of most of them as they ran from one rare bird to another!



Mississippi Kite

Bob Steele

A "good" spring can be loosely defined as one with a handful of birds not seen on a regular basis in the county and maybe one species so rare in the state that it requires review by the California Bird Records Committee. This spring produced 41 species that are considered rare (seen in very small numbers at least 7 out of 10 years) or casual (seen 6 or less out of 10 years) and four birds that are so rare in the State they are undergoing review before the records are added to the California list. Thirty of the species were photographed and the rest were adequately documented to convince those who didn't see the bird that it could not have been anything else.

Those awaiting official acceptance by the CBRC are a photographed (MF, JLD, T&JH) Glossy Ibis at Nik & Nik Gravel Works, north Bishop, 19 April (JLD); a photographed Yellow-throated Warbler at Bishop 30 April (J&DP); a photographed (RJS) immature Mississippi Kite at Mesquite Springs, DVNP, 23 May (VH); and a photographed (RJS, CBH) White-eyed Vireo at Aspendell 31 May (B&SS). The Glossy Ibis will be the first record ever for Inyo County while the Yellow-throated Warbler will be the 8th, the Mississippi Kite the 18th, and the White-eyed Vireo the 4th.

There also was a surprising number of species unexpected in spring in Inyo that were recorded. One

Pacific Loon at Owens Lake 25 May (KHL) was the 2nd spring record ever. One Arctic Tern at Owens Lake 30 May-1 June (WDS) was the 2nd spring record ever. Two Lapland Longspurs at Owens Lake 18 Apr (B&SS) was the 3rd spring record ever. One Red-necked Grebe at Klondike Lake 29 Apr-2 May (T&JH) was the 5th record ever. One Heermann's Gull at Klondike Lake (T&JH) was the 5th record ever.

The list of rare species, not unexpected but always a pleasant surprise, was lengthy. A Common Moorhen was at Buckley Ponds, Bishop (J&DP); a Herring Gull at Owens Lake (JLD); Least Terns at Klondike Lake (DJH), Tinemaha Reservoir (RJS), and Grimshaw Lake, near Tecopa (SG); Ruddy Turnstone, Red Knot, Sanderling & a few Baird's Sandpipers at Owens Lake (JLD, B&SS); Band-tailed Pigeon at Aspendell (B&SS); White-winged Doves at Furnace Creek Ranch, DVNP, (C&RH), Bishop (J&DP), and Pearsonville (L&CL); Black Swift near Big Pine (NJO); White-headed Woodpecker at Pine Creek (J&DP); Cassin's Kingbird at Bishop (JLD), a species seldom reported in the last few years; Scissor-tailed Flycatcher at Death Valley Junction (SG); immature Northern Shrike near Bishop (J&DP); Tennessee Warbler in Bishop (C&RH); three Black-and-white Warblers at China Ranch (DJH), Bishop (J&DP), and Deep Springs (B&SS); two American Redstarts at Deep Springs (KHL) and Bishop (J&DP), a singing male Prothonotary Warbler at Birchim (J&DP); two Northern Waterthrushes at Deep Springs (C&RH); Harris's Sparrow at Big Pine (T&JH); one Dark-eyed "Pink-sided" Junco at Big Pine (T&JH); six Rose-breasted Grosbeaks and 12 Indigo Buntings from mid to late May; a Dickcissel at Mesquite Springs (PC); male Bobolink at Death Valley Junction (PC); Bronzed Cowbird at China Ranch (JEP); four Evening Grosbeaks at Big Pine (T&JH); two Bell's Vireos at Big Pine (T&JH) and Wyman Canyon (fide KHL, T&JH); and six Summer Tanagers!

A cursory look at the distribution maps of these species in your field guide will illustrate just how amazing this spring was. It is one that those who took part in will never forget and they will share their stories over and over. Nothing like redemption for us old-timers!

Cited observers: Peter Colasanti, Jon L. Dunn, Mary Freeman, Steve Glover, Tom & Jo Heindel, Debbie J. House, Chris B. & Rosie Howard, Vern Howe, Kelli H. Levinson, Leslie & Cindy Lieurance, Nancy J. Overholtz, Jim & Debby A. Parker, Jim E. Pike, Bob (R.J.) & Susan Steele, W. Dave Shuford and 17 others who shared in this exciting avian event.

Outflight

Sorcha Fatooh

Dusk. The moon is beginning to rise behind us, a pale crescent against the magnificently purple sunset. We barely look at it – we're crouched amongst the sagebrush and bitterbrush, round metal clickers in our hands, our eyes focused intently on a hole in the ground, maybe two feet wide by three feet high. A dark shape flits out, silhouetted momentarily against the sky, each bone in her pale brown wings visible. We press the 'out' clicker - *click* - just before she flies in again. She swoops back and forth several times, never venturing more than a few feet from the portal – *click click click*, in out in. Finally on her third flight out several others follow her, then more, swooping over and around us with indescribable grace. We grin and lean forward for a better look at the portal, clickers poised in our hands.

Townsend's big-eared bats (*Corynorhinus townsendii*) are listed as a sensitive species by the California BLM, although bat expert Dr. Patricia Brown and others believe that they should be recognized as threatened. Many coastal colonies have already been lost, and although their situation is to some extent less dire in the Eastern Sierra, they still face hazards, particularly from human interference with the mines they populate. Although presumably they relied on caves previous to the mining era, they now typically rely on abandoned mines for shelter. Maternity colonies are usually in a shallow south-facing mine in order to keep the pups warm, while the same bats will in winter use a cold north-facing mine to hibernate – the cold prevents them from warming up,

waking up, and wasting energy. The bats also use other mines at other times for roosting and resting.

Though bats rely on them, the hazards of abandoned mines to us can be extreme, which has prompted the BLM and other agencies that own the land on which mines are found to try to prevent humans from going in – or falling in. The challenge is to ensure that mine entrances that are hazardous to humans but crucial to the continuing survival of bats are gated in such a way as to allow the bats to move freely from mine to mine, while humans can't disturb hibernation and maternity colonies – and aren't at risk themselves.

So that's why we're crouched on the ground staring at a hole in the hillside. A few days earlier Pat Brown had taken one step into this hole, before backing out and whispering with a smile, "I can hear their wings fluttering! This must be the maternity roost."

We're conducting an outflight survey, keeping track with the clickers of how many bats fly to and from that hole. That night we count 225 out, 39 in – a total of around 186 bats, fairly evenly divided between pups and their mothers. The bats have only one baby a year, and the undisturbed warm roost is critical to their survival. If we hadn't been there to count the maternity colony, that mine might have been closed off entirely, preventing the bats from returning to use it as a maternity roost next year. Townsend's big-eared bats rely on both volunteer and seasoned batters to make sure they still have somewhere to raise their young next year, and the year after.



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White-eyed Vireo – here? See page 4

Bob Steele

The magic of *all* things with wings...

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