



Meetings

Second 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!

January 13, 2010

Eye to Eye With Southern Nevada Birds: A Photographic Excursion with Scott Page



Photography reveals the rich beauty, color, texture, and form of birds in a unique way, giving insight into their endlessly fascinating and inspiring wild essence. Birder and photographer Scott Page from Henderson, Nevada and Red Rock Audubon takes us on a photographic excursion to southern Nevada's best birding locales, most of which lie within a half-day drive of Bishop and the Owens Valley. He will also discuss useful techniques, equipment, on-line and print resources for bird photography. Scott is a former member of the Nevada Birds Record Committee. He conducts breeding bird surveys for the USGS, and leads birding-focused field trips for UNLV. His images have been published in *Bird-Watchers Digest*, in Reno's "R" *Life Magazine*, on web sites

of Cornell's Laboratory of Ornithology, and in other natural history publications. He is a frequent visitor to the Eastern Sierra. For more info see www.ESAudubon.org or call Roberta at 872-7846. Everyone is welcome to attend! Non-members attending the meeting have a chance to win a free 12 month membership to the local chapter of Audubon!

February 10, 2010

Antarctica Photo Journal Bob & Susan Steele

Join local master photographers Bob and Susan Steele as they share their Antarctica Photo Journal. See stunning views of the landscape, flora and fauna as you have never seen it before! For more information see www.ESAudubon.org or call Roberta at 872-7846. Everyone is welcome to attend! Non-members attending the meeting have a chance to win a free 12 month membership to the local chapter of Audubon!

President's Message - Happy New Year

"A unique time in a person's life; an opportunity for change" — Kairos

I want to mark the start of this new year with a gigantic shout out to the many people who give of their time, skills and energy for the benefit of the Eastern Sierra Audubon Society. Thank you to the officers, board of directors, committee chairs, editors, publishers, trip leaders, program speakers and cookie makers. You have enriched our lives and sustained our organization. Warmest wishes for a rewarding 2010.

I am looking out the window at the first snow of the season. I remember thinking in July that it would never be anything but hot. Now, I can barely conceive of a temperature in excess of 100 degrees. I always marvel at how I am surprised by the repetitions of life. Every year brings the Christmas Bird Count and lo and behold there are birds to be counted. Every year seeds sprout, bear fruit and then retreat back into the ground to wait for the next turn of the wheel. Every year I am dazzled by this. The Ohlone people would gather each morning to greet the sun. It was their belief that the sun needed support and an expression of gratitude to encourage it to return every day. That makes sense to me.

We have just passed through the time of the winter solstice when increasing darkness is replaced by increasing light. Early peoples celebrated this passage for a period of up to ten days because many could not exactly measure the incremental change, but could see the difference in the period of a week. I usually miss that exact point of change; just suddenly notice the days

are longer or the buds have formed on the trees. Each year I resolve to pay enough attention to find those magic moments, but each year I am overwhelmed by all the things that are changing and can only attest to the magic of the whole. One of the few events that I am able to mark is the date of the first appearance of different bird species in our yard. No matter what the weather might be; spring is coming along with the yellow-headed blackbirds.

The solstice is about light and its persistence. Each of us has the opportunity to bring light into the world. We create that light by sharing something with someone who could benefit from what we have. People give their knowledge, skills, a coat, a special place to bird, hike or fish, some vegetables, some laughter, or just a helping hand.

At this time, resolutions appear. They generally focus on perceived shortcomings (I for example need to lose a bunch of weight). But really, resolutions represent a positive vision. For Eastern Sierra Audubon, this is a vision of habitat protection at Owens Lake, more and more school children enjoying the learning of Birds in the Classroom, a shared process to advance sustainability in the Eastern Sierra, stewardship of our extraordinary lands and days spent with friends checking out those birds. Let us continue to share our individual visions to form a strong and active voice on behalf of the birds, their natural habitats and their mysteries.

Happy 2010 to all. — *Pete Pumphrey*

Upcoming Field Trips and Events

February Date TBA - Winter Wildlife Tour - Tom and Jo Heindel Join Tom and Jo for this ever popular driving tour between Klondike Lake and Tinemaha Reservoir. Details at www.ESAudubon.org or contact tjheindel@gmail.com

Check ESAudubon.org for up-to-date announcements of trips and events.

Rock Creek Field Trip Report, October 25, 2009 - *Bill Mitchel, trip leader*

It was a beautiful fall day... well, maybe a little on the chilly side, when a group of enthusiastic birders met at the Sno-park on Rock Creek for the third annual Rock Creek Field Trip. We walked through open sage areas, forests and riparian places. This variety of habitats allowed us to see a variety of birds. Highlights of the day were two Brown Creepers, a Golden-crowned Kinglet, Red-breasted Nuthatch, two Belted Kingfishers and an American Dipper. Other birds we saw were Steller's Jays, many Mountain Chickadees, Ravens, Clark's Nutcrackers and Oregon Juncos. On our way back down to the parking area we were treated to a Quillwort, found by Steve McLaughlin. That was a great ending to a wonderful day in a very beautiful place.



Crowley and Tinemaha Field Trip Report, December 5, 2009 - *Jon Dunn, Trip Leader*

Our ESAS field trip began at the "Green Church" under blustery conditions with a strong northwest wind, but surprisingly mild (mid 40s) temperatures. Some 25 participants braved the winds which never really abated, and birded most portions of Crowley Lake. Highlights included eleven Ross's Geese and nine distant Cackling Geese, 69 Tundra Swans, three Bald Eagles including two adults, and an adult Golden Eagle which was extremely cooperative, almost remaining motionless in the air as the winds buffeted it.

Hearing that it was calm in the Owens Valley we broke up late in the morning and met again in Big Pine early in the afternoon. From there we headed to Tinemaha Reservoir where there was a nice selection of waterfowl and a flock of gulls (with more gulls arriving) under flat calm conditions. The waterfowl included 15 Common Goldeneyes, 10 Canvasbacks, and three Common Mergansers. Ten adult Tundra Swans flew in from the north while we were there. The mixed gull flock was composed mainly of Ring-bills and Californias, but also included four Herring Gulls (three adults and a second cycle bird), which according to Tom Heindel establishes a new high count for Inyo County. As we were studying the gulls, Justin Hite picked out a smaller and darker mantled (from an adult Ring-billed) gull which upon careful study proved to be a 2nd cycle Mew Gull, only the 2nd ever for Inyo County. In addition to the darker mantle we noted a distinct white tertial crescent and longer wings which gave it a different posture on the water. The bill was slender and petite and was greenish based with an entirely dark tip.

We attempted to get photos and then walked out the dam for closer views and better photos. This was initially successful, but all too soon the pristine day ended when a brown cloud, much colder temperatures and 40 mph winds arrived from the northwest. We followed the wind wave as it approached us ever so slowly, but surely. That brought a quick end to the field trip. A few stopped by Klondike Lake on the return where there was a single adult Ross's Goose.

Many thanks to all for braving the elements.

Fall 2009: Unexpected Bird Species Recorded in Inyo County

Tom and Jo Heindel

As stated repeatedly, each season brings its own surprises and this Fall was no exception. The biggest bolt-from-the-blue was a Little Stint, a Eurasian sandpiper, at Owens Lake 29-30 Aug found by Chris Howard and confirmed by Jon Dunn. This species has been found in CA only ten previous times and is a difficult identification problem, looking very similar to Western and Semipalmated Sandpipers as well as another vagrant shorebird from Eurasia, the Red-necked Stint. The array of photographs raises this sighting to the level of a scientific record, since they are as close to a specimen-in-a-drawer as is achievable sans specimen.



The next most unexpected sighting was the 4th Inyo County record of a Western Gull at Tinemaha Reservoir 25-29 Aug found by Jon Dunn and seen and photographed by many observers. This is a common species along the coast but seldom ventures far from the smell of salty air. The 9th Inyo County record of a Yellow-throated Vireo occurred 22 Sep when Debby Parker found and photographed it in Birchim Canyon. This is the earliest fall record for Inyo but Mono County has a 26 Aug record (1987 at Mono Lake) and CA has a coastal record for 23 Aug.

A male Common Ground-Dove was photographed at Furnace Creek Inn 10 Oct by Bob & Susan Steel and many other observers for the 25th Inyo County record. A Black-throated Green Warbler was seen at Deep

Springs 18 Oct by Susan who wrote a description and provided a drawing. Two Gray Catbirds were in Inyo this fall; one photographed at Birchim Canyon 22-26 Sep (Jim & Debby Parker, et al.) and another photographed at Furnace Creek Ranch 18 Nov (Justin Hite). An amazing 4 Baltimore Orioles were found from 10 Sep to 15 Oct in the southeast region of Inyo (Jim Pike, Bob & Susan Steele, Debbie House, and Jon Dunn). The species in this paragraph have been found only 20-30 times in Inyo over the last 150 years!

A White-tailed Kite was found (Kelli Levinson) and photographed (Tom Heindel) at Olancha 8 Nov. An immature male Yellow-bellied Sapsucker was photographed at Shoshone 15 Oct (Jim Pike) while another brown juvenile was at Deep Springs 18 Oct (Bob & Susan Steele). A female/immature Blackpoll was at Deep Springs 7 Sep (Chris & Rosie Howard, well-documented), a Lark Bunting was photographed at Furnace Creek Ranch 3-4 Oct (Chris & Rosie Howard, Carl Lundblad), and 2 Grasshopper Sparrows were photographed in Inyo: 1 at China Ranch 14-15 Oct (Jim Pike) and 1 at Furnace Creek Ranch 31 Oct (Debbie House). The species in this paragraph have been only recorded 35-50 times in Inyo over 150 years!



The Inyo County Fall 2009 report contained 213 important records, accompanied by 94 pictures of 128



species with 61 species significant enough in Southern California that they were submitted to the editors of *North American Birds* for consideration to publish. This chronicle could not be completed without the exceptional effort of many... in this case 36 people. This cadre of serious birders recognizes that science is served best by providing evidence in the form of a picture, documentation, or a 1-3 sentence description to substantiate their claims thus providing material for an archive that will exist long after we are all gone and forgotten. In the last two decades they have filled a 4-drawer file cabinet with priceless proof of what happened in Inyo County during their tenure. Our deepest gratitude to all of them for leaving so much of themselves behind and insuring that a reliable record of avian fieldwork endures for the future.

Photos:

*Little Stint, Bob Steele; Western Gull, Jon Dunn;
Yellow-throated Vireo, Debby Parker*

Last Issue's Mystery Bird - Debby Parker

The mystery bird is a Sage Thrasher photographed along the Owens River this fall. The folks who emailed me got it right! Note the thrasher bill and the yellow eye and the streaks on the breast.

Bishop Christmas Bird Count Report
Chris Howard, Bishop CBC Compiler

The Bishop Christmas Bird Count was held on December 19, 2009. Many thanks to the 57 participants who spent an unseasonably warm and windless day scouring the Bishop area for every bird. The Bishop Airport recorded a low temperature of 26F and a high of 56F. At press time, immediately following the count, the tentative species count is 102. Highlight reports of the day include Greater White-fronted Geese at the Golf Course, Ross's and Cackling Geese at the Sewer Ponds, 13 Bald Eagles in Round Valley, 3 Rough-legged Hawks in Round Valley, a dark "columbarius" Merlin, an Anna's Hummingbird at a feeder in Bishop, a "Sooty" Fox Sparrow, a Golden-crowned Sparrow in a Rocking K yard, and 2 "Gray-headed" Dark-eyed Juncos. New birds to the count include a photographed Tundra Swan at Nik and Nik Ponds off Five Bridges Road and a report of a briefly seen female-plumaged Purple Finch at Starlight Estates. Documentation for these observations is under review.

We all extend our gratitude to James and Kay Wilson for hosting the tally potluck.

Eastern Sierra Wildlife Care: Highlights 2009

Cindy Kamler

2009 was an unusual year for Eastern Sierra Wildlife Care. Our off-and-on again spring, with its heavy winds, meant that many songbird babies were late in arriving. We raised fewer orphaned House Finches, Lesser Goldfinches, House Sparrows, Brewer's Blackbirds, and swallows (only a mixed handful of Cliff, Violet-green, and Barn) than usual. The same held true for Black and Say's Phoebes and Western Kingbirds. Also seen, again in smaller numbers, were baby Mallards, California (and one Mountain) Quail, American Crows and Common Ravens.

In August, a large number of raptors — Great Horned and Barn owls, Cooper's and Red-tailed hawks, a Golden Eagle, an American Kestrel — were admitted, most of them first-year birds. Some were thin and weak; others had suffered injuries.

Here are a few special stories:

Great Horned Owl: Nicknamed "Elfie," this mature owl was rescued from Highway 395 near the golf course. He was suffering from head trauma and severe injury to the right eye. After weeks of 5-6 treatments daily, the eye was saved, and even had response to light. He was released.

Golden Eagle: Struck by a truck going 55 mph, this magnificent, 14-pound bird slid up and over the hood into the windshield, shattering it and shoving it into the truck about a foot; then continued up over the cab, finally landing in the road. She was standing and conscious. Rescued by ESWC staff and volunteers, the eagle was treated for impact injuries, especially to her left side and shoulder. She made steady progress for the next 26 days, going outside into a small flight, perching, bathing, and moving around. Suddenly, she



was down, and despite all the efforts of both ESWC and Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care, she continued on a downward spiral and died.

Northern Goshawk (immature): Found on the edge of Mammoth in the fall, this young bird was borderline emaciated. It was about 5 days after the first big storm; his feet showed minor injuries, possibly a bite. Whether that pushed him toward starvation or his weakened condition led to the injuries we couldn't tell. He recovered rapidly, gained more than 200 grams, and was soon hunting and flying. The day before his planned release in Mammoth, he found a weakness in the flight cage wall and released himself!

Karma the Red-tailed Hawk: This beautiful bird had been ESWC's "Wildlife Ambassador" for about two years. When admitted, he was a year old (just growing in red tail feathers) and showed evidence of having been an illegally captive bird. All the primaries on one wing had been pulled, and left beside

him when he was abandoned unconscious in the desert. After a long rehabilitation, Karma learned to fly, but never climbed high or soared. His hunting skills were present, but he didn't show much interest in wild prey.

On November 5, during his daily flight session, the wind came up and he took off. He disappeared from sight and, despite 5 days of intensive searching, no sign of him was found. To this day, his fate is uncertain.

Skunk: This animal was spotted in the dumpster at the Paradise Transfer Station with her head wedged into a small drainage hole in the floor. Two Paradise residents offered to help with the rescue, along with



two of us from ESWC. It was ascertained that the head was too swollen to be pushed/pulled out of the hole once the animal was tranquilized. Returning to his Paradise home, Mike returned with metal saws and drills, I knocked the skunk out, Debbie guided him from below, and the hole was cut larger. I lifted the skunk out and into a carrier and took her to the Center for observation. She was doing fine the next day and, after some skirmishing and spraying, I re-captured her and returned her to Paradise where, hopefully, she has stayed far away from the dumpster.

Ringtail: This shy and infrequently seen mammal was caught in a trap in a CalTrans

outbuilding east of Main Street. They thought that a feral cat was in the building and set a humane trap. This charming animal was frightened, but otherwise in great shape. Several ESWC staff and volunteers scouted for an area not too far from there that would support the Ringtail while, hopefully, keeping him from returning to human structures.

As I write this, a Burrowing Owl is recovering in our Critical Care Cage. Found near the Sad Boulders, he was favoring one foot. He is eating well, alert and strong, and I'm sure he'll be back up above Chalk Bluff long before you read this article. *Photos: Golden Eagle; Karma the Red-tailed Hawk*

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