

# The Chat

Kerncrest Audubon Society, Ridgecrest, California

May, 2016



## MAY CALENDAR

Sun	May 1	all day	<b>BIRDATHON</b>
Tue	May 3	all day	Big Day of Giving
Wed	May 20	6 pm	Board Meeting: Villalobos'
Thu	May 21	7 pm	Annual Meeting Some Surprises about the Yellow Billed Cuckoo
Sat	May 23	8:30	Field Trip: Cow Heaven Spring



## ANNUAL MEETING

Some Surprises About the Yellow-billed Cuckoo  
with Shannon McNeil

Shannon, a Yellow-billed Cuckoo/Data/GIS Specialist with the Southern Sierra Research Station, has a BS in Computer Science and Statistics from Macquarie University in Sydney Australia, and an MS in Natural Resources from the University of Arizona in Tucson (MS thesis: Population Genetic Diversity and Structure in Yellow-billed Cuckoos). After studying several threatened species in the field, including golden-cheeked warblers and long-wattled umbrellabirds, in 2002 she began her journey trying to understand the elusive yellow-billed cuckoo, as a seasonal field biologist with the Southern Sierra Research Station. Since 2008 she has been monitoring the return of breeding cuckoos to created riparian forests on the lower Colorado River, under the Bureau of Reclamation LCR MSCP (Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program).

Her talk will include Who Coos for Who?, How To Grow a Cuckoo Population, and Where Cuckoos Stop During Migration (from the project's latest GPS data to South America and back).

At the Maturango Museum, 7 pm on Thursday, May 21.

## DON'T FORGET the BIRDATHON

Paperwork was in last Month's Chat. Teams are forming! You may want to sponsor the Bushtits (Call Brenda at 760-382-4935) or some other team (Call Lee at 760-382-6386).

The compilation will be at the Pizza Factory starting at 5pm or so. You are welcome to attend the party and hear the teams' reports, even if you did not Bird. You may drop off your contributions there, if it has not already been mailed.

Call Lee Sutton at 760-382-6386 to sign up, join a team, or for more information.

## HOTSPRINGS VALLEY WETLAND ACQUISITION CALIFORNIA AUDUBON GRANT

Here's good news: Audubon California has committed \$100,000 from the Wimberly Wildlife Fund for Land Conservation toward the acquisition of the 189.26 acres adjoining the Bob Powers Gateway Preserve in the town of Lake Isabella. The money will be held in escrow until the balance of the needed \$700,000 or so dollars is obtained from individuals and from other granting agencies.

This land is next to the parcel where another grant obtained by Kerncrest Audubon helped fund some wetlands restoration work for breeding habitat for the now-California-endangered Tricolored Blackbird. The addition will provide needed foraging area to attract the blackbirds, as well as potential recreation area for residents and visitors to the area.

Several of you have contributed to the grass-roots campaign to fund this project. There is now an opportunity to make an even bigger "bang for the buck" as follows:

**\$1,000 Prize Opportunity** - KRVHF will be participating in California's Big Day of Giving on May 3, 2016, through the Give Big Kern program hosted by Kern Community Foundation. Funds donated to KRVHF through this program, during the 24-hour period, will be matched and prizes awarded.

Support the Hot Springs Valley Wetlands acquisition by helping us win the \$1,000 prize for the most donors. On May 3rd go to this site and make a small (or large) donation

<https://givebigkern.razoo.com/us/story/Kern-River-Valley-Heritage-Foundation>

## FIELD TRIP COW HEAVEN SPRING

Our planned Cow Heaven Spring field trip/work party scheduled for April was rained out! So we're re-scheduling it for Saturday, May 23.

Bring a picnic, hiking shoes, water, and maybe a chair, and meet at the Inyokern 76 gas station at 8:30 am, where we will form car pools.

This is a Saturday (we usually do this on a week day) and we hear there have been ORV incursions into the wilderness there, so bring a camera and a mean look.

Do call Lee Sutton at 760-382-6386 and let him know if you plan to go. We could get rained out again!

## MEMBERSHIP

Note from the Editor:

Those of you who receive paper Chats may have noticed most labels no longer have an expiration date indicated for members of the National society. That is because the National Audubon Society membership database is so messed up (which is by about a magnitude of 3 the nicest way I could say it) that we have given up on trying to use it for anything but checking for new members. An example: last month I sent a note on one whose expiration date showed as past only to find out by phone that person really has a membership through 2017. Other examples are that some of our founding members are showing as having moved to places like North Carolina, and members we know moved away (or even died) long ago have reappeared in Ridgecrest. So we are keeping our own records.

This is not a problem for Kerncrest. We will continue to send your newsletters forever, unless you tell us to stop. The email ones cost us nothing, and between a subsidy from National and your chapter membership dues, we have sufficient funds to cover mailing paper issues to those who want them.

*The potential problem is you may stop receiving your magazine, even if you do not think your membership should have expired.* I'm not sure what we can do about that, but if you try to deal with the National and have a problem, let us know. We will attempt to help you.

## PROJECT REPORT INYO CALIFORNIA TOWHEE HABITAT MONITORING

During April, a couple of teams led by Bob Parker drove and hiked to several springs on the east slope of the Argus range to check on the condition of the fences surrounding some of those springs to keep out horses and burros that might trample the riparian habitat. These springs are home for the endangered Inyo subspecies of the California Towhee.

We were working as volunteers for the Ridgecrest Field Office of the Bureau of Land Management. Bob carried along fence repair material and fixed several cut fences.

Knowing the wild horses and burros had not been rounded up and removed for several years, we were primarily interested in seeing what kind of damage they were doing. The good news is: we saw no signs of recent trampling damage. Only a few droppings of very old, dried scat were found, all outside the fences. We had been concerned that fences were not enough to protect the habitat and that there would be trampling and damage around the fence perimeters. That was not the case. Apparently if the water is not accessible, the animals depart for greener "pastures."

Other good news is that at one of the wetter springs with more lush surroundings, we saw 3 pairs of towhees, and one pair each was seen at 2 other springs. Still, the area is very dry and foraging sparse.

We have one more spring to check. Call Dan Burnett at 760-382-4934 if you would like to help.

We have no idea who cut the fences, when, or why. Maybe campers with horses? They are only horse and burro proof fences. Humans and coyotes can go under, bighorn over.

We plan to continue to monitor these springs annually.

## FAREWELL TO SHELLEY ELLIS

It is with great sadness that we report the passing of our past board member, retired BLM biologist and friend, Shelley Ellis.

Shelley was a tireless defender of wildlife and compassionate person. She was always doing things like contacting the power company to obtain bird-proof perch-protectors for power poles where she saw turkey vultures roosting, pointing out where there were open pipes threatening to trap birds on BLM land and enlisting our help to cap them. She also was responsible for encouraging her son, Greg, to design our new color logo, seen on the title page.

Shelley's family has suggested that if anyone would like to make a gesture in her honor a small donation be made to any of her favorite charities: Turtle Island Restoration Project, Greenpeace, EarthJustice, or Food and Water Watch.





## Valley Sightings – April 2016

Please report unusual sightings to Bob Barnes at (760)382-1260, or by email at [bbarnes@lightspeed.net](mailto:bbarnes@lightspeed.net) (or submit to eBird for Bob to glean.)

KEY: FOS = First of Spring;  
IWV = Indian Wells Valley watershed;  
RWWP = Ridgecrest Watchable Wildlife Park;  
SSDC IBA = Southern Sierra Desert Canyons Important Bird Area

### REPORTS:

Two **White-Faced Ibis** at RWWP Apr 2 (LSu, SSu).

Two **Black-bellied Plovers** at China Lake ponds Apr 1 were Kern County's first report for 2016 (SLS).

A **White-winged Dove** continued at China Lake Golf Course Apr 1 (SLS).

A **White-winged Dove** returned to a NW Ridgecrest yard Apr 6 (EC) and continued throughout the month (BB, EC).

One **Black-chinned Hummingbird**, two **Anna's Hummingbirds**, six **Costa's Hummingbirds**, & two **Rufous Hummingbirds** south of Inyokern Apr 4 (SLS).

A **Peregrine Falcon** was seen at the China Lake ponds for the Inyokern School Junior Audubon field trip on April 21 (BBu).

Four IWV FOS **Willow Flycatchers** at SSDC IBA's Indian Wells Canyon Apr 23 (LSu, SSu).

**Hammond's Flycatcher 1, Pacific-slope Flycatcher 1, Hermit Thrush 1, Orange-crowned Warbler 1, Nashville Warbler 1, Western Tanager 1, Black-headed Grosbeak 12** north of Inyokern during a windy, migrant "fall out" day Apr 25 (TM).

**Western Wood-Pewee, Hammond's Flycatcher (also 4/22, 423), Pacific-slope Flycatcher, Orange-crowned Warbler, Yellow Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Wilson's Warbler, Lincoln's Sparrow, Green-tailed Towhee (also 4/22, 423), Hooded Oriole (also 3/20)** at a Ridgecrest yard during the same windy Apr 25 (JS).

Three **Gray Flycatchers** at SSDC IBA's Indian Wells Canyon Apr 9 (LSu, SSu).

A **Dusky Flycatcher**, a **Pacific-slope Flycatcher**, and a **Wilson's Warbler** were IWV FOS at an east side Ridgecrest yard Apr 13 (LSu, SSu)

**Loggerhead Shrike** and **Le Conte's Thrasher** nesting success have been thwarted thus far by several predators at a yard SW of Inyokern (LK).

A **Western Scrub-Jay** at a NW Ridgecrest yard on Apr 18 was new for that location (BBu).

A **Common Raven** "landed on the street near me, rushed under a neighbor's pick-up, caught a fledgling mourning dove, beat on it with that honking big beak, then flew off with it." (LSu).

A **Rough-winged Swallow** at SSDC IBA's Freeman Canyon was a new species for that location (SLS).

**Red-breasted Nuthatches** in Ridgecrest through at least Apr 26 (BB).

**Blue-gray Gnatcatcher & Brewer's Sparrow** at SSDC IBA's Short Canyon Apr 2 were bird species #84 & #85 for that canyon. (SLS, BS).

An **Orange-crowned Warbler** at an east side Ridgecrest yard Apr 3 (LSu, SSu).

A **Common Yellowthroat** at an east side Ridgecrest yard Apr 8 (LSu, SSu).

An IWV FOS **Yellow Warbler** singing profusely as it passed through a NW Ridgecrest neighborhood Apr 20 (BB).

An IWV FOS **Yellow-breasted Chat** at an east side Ridgecrest yard on Apr 22 & 23 (LSu, SSu).

A **Brewer's Sparrow** at RWWP Apr 2 (LSu, SSu).

An IWV FOS **Green-tailed Towhee** at SSDC IBA's Indian Wells Canyon Apr 23 (LSu, SSu).

A **Western Tanager** at a yard in Ridgecrest Apr 3 (LT).

**Black-headed Grosbeaks** showed up right on schedule, with 2 pairs in a NW Ridgecrest yard on April 25 (BBu).

Four **Hooded Orioles** and four **Bullock's Orioles** south of Inyokern Apr 4 (SLS).

Five **Red Crossbills** south of Inyokern Apr 4 (SLS).

*Thanks to the following for reporting: Bob Barnes (BB), Brenda Burnett (BBu), Encar Card (EC), Louise Knecht (LK), Terri Middlemiss (TM), Joyce Seibold (JS), Bob Steele (BS), Susan Steele (SLS), Lee Sutton (LSu), Shirley Sutton (SSu), Lynne Thompson (LT)*

**MAY BIRDING:** The first half of May is still peak migration, with a few vagrants showing up in late May. Watch for rare oddities such as Wood Thrush, Worm-eating Warbler and other lost eastern birds. Keep watching for empidonax flycatchers, especially Willow. Hepatic Tanagers have also been known to show up, as have Swainson's Thrushes. And while you may not get the "first of spring," you can still enjoy looking at the Yellow, MacGillivray's and Wilsons warblers coming through.

**Happy, productive, and rewarding May birding!**