



The Chat



Kerncrest Audubon Society, Ridgecrest, California

December/January 2012/13

December/January CALENDAR

Sun	Dec 16	7:00 am	Christmas Bird Count
Wed	Dec 19	6:00 pm	Board Meeting at Burnetts'
Wed	Jan 16	6:00 pm	Board Meeting at Ellises'
Thu	Jan 17	7:00 pm	General Meeting, Maturango Museum
Sat	Jan 19	8:00 am	Field Trip to Local "Hot Spots" with Bob Parker
Sat	Nov 17	9:00 am	BLM Travel Mgmt Wrkshp

JANUARY GENERAL MEETING TEJON RANCH CONSERVANCY

Tom Maloney, Executive Director of the Tejon Ranch Conservancy will speak about the historic Tejon Ranch Conservation and Land Use Agreement of 2008 and the formation of the Tejon Ranch Conservancy. Tom's talk will focus on the ecological significance of Tejon Ranch and all that the Conservancy is doing to plan for the stewardship of and public access to the 240,000 acres of conserved lands on the Ranch.

Tejon Ranch is the largest contiguous private property in California and sits at the confluence of four major ecological regions. Each of these ecoregions is represented on the Ranch and the configuration of the Ranch creates conservation linkages of continental significance. This significance led to the signing of a visionary agreement in June of 2008. The Conservancy started immediately on fulfilling its mission. Tom will update us on the active programs the Conservancy has in place.

(Editor's note: You may remember that the quest to preserve the ranch began with opposition to Ranch development by the Natural Resources Defense Council, Audubon California, the Sierra Club and the Center for Biological Diversity. In the end, the first three agreed to drop their opposition if a conservation plan was jointly developed, which it was. During the conservation planning process the Center for Biological Diversity felt too much had been compromised away and decided not to sign the final agreement, retaining their option to sue under environmental law.)

Thursday, January 17, 7 PM at the Maturango Museum.

Nominations are open for offices to be vacated at the end of this fiscal year. Our annual meeting and election will be in May. If you wish to volunteer or to provide ideas for nominees, please contact any board member. Nominations will also be open from the floor at the annual meeting.

DECEMBER FIELD TRIP CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Please join us for the 59th annual China Lake Audubon Christmas Bird Count. The count was started in 1953 by an illustrious group: Don Moore, Carl Heller, and Ron Henry.

Continuing with tradition, the count will be the first Sunday of the Count Period, December 16, from 0700 to 1700.

Count week is from December 13 to 19. Species that are seen during Count Week but not on Count Day also get tallied, so keep an eye out for interesting species you see during that period, and note where you see them.

We will meet at Leroy Jackson Park at 0700 on the 16th. The compilation will be at 5 pm at the Suttons', 518 S. Lilac. Please give Peter Woodman a call at 760-861-3961 or email (Kivabio@aol.com) **by December 9** if you plan to participate so Peter can get the range passes completed for everyone to be able to bird the base "ponds" in the afternoon.

Note that for the first time, there will be no fee for joining the count. There will also be no printed volume of the continent-wide count results; rather the report will be sent by email. You will still, however, be expected to chip in for a share of the pizza we consume at the compilation.

JANUARY FIELD TRIP LOCAL HOT SPOTS

Bob Parker will lead this trip to places in the Indian Wells Valley, including those we could not visit during the Christmas Bird Count because they were outside the count circle. It is also an opportunity for those who did not participate in the CBC to see our wintering birds, and for those who did participate to go to areas outside of those they were assigned to count. So bundle up and come find out what's out there! We will likely visit the college, the cemetery and old sewer ponds, maybe some Inyokern yards. If the weather is nice, bring a picnic!

Phone Bob at 760-446-2001 to sign up. Meet at the Ridgecrest Cinemas parking lot at 8am on Saturday, January 19th.

Local members and Chat subscribers: it may be time to renew your membership. Check your label, and if the date is 1/1/13, send a check for \$15 (membership) or \$7 (Chat only) to Kerncrest Audubon Society, PO Box 984, Ridgecrest CA 93556.



Valley Sightings November 2012

Please report unusual sightings to Susan Steele at 377-5220 (home) or 939-1722 (work), or by email at steele7@verizon.net.

Late October produced a number of exciting finds, so we will start with those sightings before the November sightings.

Oct 25 at the ponds five **Surf Scoters** (a new high count for the valley), two **Sabine's Gulls**, a **Palm Warbler**, a **White-throated Sparrow**, and two **Chestnut-collared Longspurs**, and at the cemetery an **Ovenbird** (the 4th fall record, latest record for the valley, and 177th species for the cemetery) (SLS).

Oct 26 produced two **Evening Grosbeaks** at the college (BB), a **Harris Sparrow** (178th species for the cemetery) and **Brown Creeper** at the cemetery (RW), and two **American Golden-Plovers** (6th valley record) at the ponds (CM). The **Harris's Sparrow** remained through the 10th.

Oct 27 had a **Black-throated Blue Warbler** (8th valley record) at the college (BrSi), and one of the **Evening Grosbeaks** was seen again (TL).

Oct 28 A **Townsend's Warbler** (a new late sighting date) was at the college (JS).

A **Cackling Goose** was at the old sewage ponds Nov 3 (L&SSu) and four were at the ponds Nov 19 (SLS).

A **Green Heron** was at the golf course Nov 21 (SLS).

A **Ferruginous Hawk** was at the ponds Nov 17 (DVB). Mid-November through December is peak time for this species in the valley.

A male **Varied Thrush** was at the college Nov 7 (SLS). The last time this species was recorded in the valley was three years ago to the day.

A **Blackpoll** and a **Nashville Warbler** was at the college Nov 2 (TW). The Blackpoll is our latest sighting date by over a month.

A female Blue Grosbeak was seen at the old sewage ponds on Nov 3 (L&SSu). What is certainly the same bird was seen at the cemetery Nov 4-6 (CG). This is later than usual but missed being our latest sighting date by 2 days.

The 8th valley record of **Swamp Sparrow** was at the golf course Nov 24 (DVB). This was the 189th species for that location.

A **Lapland Longspur** was at the ponds Nov 6 (SLS). It has been three years since this species was seen in the valley.

The 6th valley record of **Rusty Blackbird** was at the ponds Nov 20-22 (SLS).

Three **Red Crossbills** were at the college Nov 21 (SLS).

A smattering of Pine **Siskins** was seen in SW Inyokern through Nov 11 (LK).

Thanks to the following observers: *Bob Barnes, David Blue, Cassidy Graton, Louise Knecht, Lisa Lavelle, Tim Ludwick, Curtis Marantz, Joyce Seibold, Lee and Shirley Sutton, Brad Singer, Tim Ludwick, Ryan Winkleman, Tom Wurster*

TRIP REPORT CHINA LAKE "PONDS"

The trip to the China Lake wastewater treatment plant on November 17th was awesome! There was a grey ceiling, with oblique winter sun shining in from the south, bathing everything in golden light. The effect made the speculums of flying ducks iridescent and glowing against the gray background.

When we arrived, there was a Golden Eagle perched on a tower across the first shallow pond. As we watched, he would perch for a while, then circle above the ponds, then perch again, repeatedly, as if surveying the possibilities. There were also 3 Northern Harriers working the ponds continuously. At some point the eagle disappeared for a while. Then as we watched he came shooting in from the east, using exactly the usual Harrier hunting technique! He skimmed above one pond, then barely cleared the berm between the two ponds, then plunged into a group of birds clustered on the east end of the pond we were watching. He sat very still for a few minutes, then lifted off with a Coot, moving it to a dryer spot to eat. We and a very envious raven watched him consume the coot.

At one point, one of us walked away from the crowd along the road and came back reporting 3 "very stripey-headed" shore birds with long straight bills. Those turned out to be Wilson's Snipe.

In addition to the usual tons of Northern Shovelers and Ruddies, there was also a Bufflehead, a few Green-winged Teal, an American Wigeon, some Pintails, a Canvasback or two, a pair of Lesser Scaup, 3 Bonaparte's Gulls, both Least and Western Sandpipers, 4 short-billed Dowitchers, some American Pipits, a Savannah sparrow and a Lincoln's sparrow, among other regulars. The single Western Grebe seen by the Jr. Audubon group on Oct 23 was still there.

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POLICY STATEMENT:

Please note that articles that run in this newsletter have not been cleared with and are not necessarily the opinion of the entire Board of Directors.

GOOD NEWS/BAD NEWS DEPARTMENT

by Brenda Burnett

There's some good news from an article in the June 13 issue of the Wall Street Journal. According to that article, "Millions of migrating song-birds are killed in collisions with communications towers every year, caught between growing demands for digital broadcast signals and efforts to ensure pilot safety, but the solution may be as simple as flipping off a light, conservationists and federal wildlife biologists say.

"After years of regulatory debate, federal aviation experts this month concluded that tower owners may turn off one type of warning light that most likely is a cause of bird collisions at night, without endangering aircraft."

Currently, towers over a certain height are required to maintain a steady red light. Birds get confused by the light and circle until they starve or hit a wire. Finally, the FCC has determined that a flashing red light is as effective in deterring pilot collisions, and that turning off the lights periodically allows the birds to escape. In addition, "After a decade of research, public meetings and litigation, the commission in December began requiring formal public notice of new towers over 450 feet tall and an environmental assessment that considers the impact on migrating birds."

No mandatory changes to regulations are expected, but since the flashing lights are cheaper to operate and maintain, tower operators are likely to use them voluntarily.

The bad news? While it is estimated that communications towers kill 6.8 million birds annually, outdoor cats and lighted buildings are estimated to kill 1 billion each.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Kerncrest Audubon Society

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____

____yr Kerncrest Audubon Society Membership @ \$15/year

(Includes subscription to *The Chat*)

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____ Please request the National Audubon Society to exclude my name from promotional mailing lists.

Please enclose a check payable to Kerncrest Audubon Society.

Clip out and mail to: Kerncrest Audubon Society
P.O. Box 984
Ridgecrest CA 93556

National Audubon Society membership includes membership in the local chapter, a subscription to the Audubon magazine and the Kerncrest newsletter, *The Chat*. It also provides the right to vote in society elections, and inclusion on national society mailing lists for informational materials and solicitations for contributions.

Membership in the Kerncrest Audubon Society includes a subscription to *The Chat*, (not to *Audubon* magazine) and provides the right to vote in local society elections. Inclusion on national mailing lists is optional.

A subscription to *The Chat* only does not provide the right to vote in elections.

To join the National Audubon Society you may also go to our website, www.kerncrestaudubon.org, click on "Membership" in the right-hand column of the page, then click on the Audubon logo with the flying egret. When filling in the form, select the chapter C45 KERNCREST AUDUBON SOCIETY from the pull-down menu to have your first year's dues credited to our chapter, please. By joining on line, you may pay by credit card.

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