



# The Chat



Kerncrest Audubon Society, Ridgecrest, California

February 2008

## FEBRUARY CALENDAR

Thu	Feb 14	6pm	Board Meeting, Gravelles'
Wed	Feb 20	9:30am	Field Trip: Col Allensworth State Park, Pixley

### **Field Trip:**

#### **THE RETURN OF TULARE LAKE**

Our February field trip (Wednesday, February 20<sup>th</sup>) features Dr. Stephen Laymon and The Return of Tulare Lake. As recently as 100 years ago, Tulare Lake was the largest lake west of the Mississippi. Water diversions caused the lake to dry up and farmers moved in to farm the former lakebed. Now in its 5th year, the Bureau of Land Management's Atwell Island project just north of Kern County in neighboring Tulare County is restoring valley grassland and alkali sink habitat to a 7000 acre portion of the former Tulare lakebed. Join us as Atwell Island project manager, Dr. Steve Laymon, tours us through restored habitat, home to several listed and sensitive species. Meet at 9:30am (or drive over the day before and camp) at Col. Allensworth State Historic Park 18 miles North of Wasco on Hwy. 43. An added feature of this field trip is the impressive evening fly-in of 1000s of Sandhill Cranes at nearby Pixley National Wildlife Refuge. Bring food and water to last all day.

Kerncrest Audubon members who have participated in our February field trips in prior years know that some members of Ridgecrest's local Chapter of the Good Sam camping group have camped with us and joined our birding drives. Some will undoubtedly do so again this year. They have in the past driven on up highway 43 to Hanford for a Good Sam function on the Thursday following the Kerncrest field trip. This year, the Hanford function has been cancelled, so instead they are planning on Thursday (the 21<sup>st</sup>) to tour through the Nearby Kern National Wildlife Refuge, which offers an abundance of waterfowl for convenient viewing. Kerncrest Audubon members are welcome to join them. Again, a departure from the Campground at Col. Allensworth State Park at or around 9:30 AM, in this case on the 21<sup>st</sup>, is in order. Contact: Lee Sutton, E: [2roadrunner@verizon.net](mailto:2roadrunner@verizon.net), P: 760-375-1981, C: 760-3826386.

## **APOLOGIES**

From time to time, your editor makes some really stupid mistakes, and gets the dates of events wrong in the monthly calendar. (Actually, it's likely more often than not!!) Like, in the last edition, the program was indicated as being December 20<sup>th</sup> on the calendar, when actually (and in the descriptive article on the program) the date was in January.

To avoid being in the situation some folks found themselves, that is standing outside a dark museum in the cold, you might wish to sign up for our EMAIL NOTICES and find out when things REALLY ARE.

If you would like to receive these notices please send an email to [webmaster@kerncrestaudubon.org](mailto:webmaster@kerncrestaudubon.org) requesting that your email address be added to the list.

Your address will not be shared with ANYONE.

## **SAVE THE DATES**

March's field trip is Saturday, March 22, to Mojave Narrows Regional Park in Victorville. There's a lovely campground there, run by San Bernardino County Parks Department. If you wish to camp the night before and/or after, you might want to make reservations early. For more information contact Dan Burnett at 375-8634 or email [imdanburnett@verizon.net](mailto:imdanburnett@verizon.net).

The First Ever **OWENS LAKE BIG DAY** is taking place April 19-20, 2008. To sign up contact Mike Prather, Eastern Sierra Audubon, email [mprather@lonepinetv.com](mailto:mprather@lonepinetv.com), or phone 760-876-5807 or write Drawer D, Lone Pine, CA 93545.

The Big Day is Saturday, with plenty of time to chase "rare ones" and to explore the area. A potluck and tally is planned for Saturday night.

## **CHECK THESE OUT**

For those of you who are members also of the American Birding Association and receive Birding magazine, check out Bob Steele's incredible photos in the January/February edition: of Rose-ringed Parakeets on page 33; and an absolutely spectacular one of a Streak-backed Oriole on page 39! Also, of course, check out his web site at [www.bobsteelephoto.com](http://www.bobsteelephoto.com).



## Valley Sightings –December 2007 & January 2008

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

### December 2007

A **Common Goldeneye** was at the golf course Dec 10-16 (JS).

An immature and adult **Tundra Swan** made a brief appearance at the ponds Dec 16 (SS).

An interesting hybrid duck presumably **Northern Shoveler x Mallard** was at the ponds Dec 16 (SS).

A **Hooded Merganser** was at the ponds Dec 11 and a **Common Merganser** was there Dec 16 (SS).

Three **Chukar** were in SE Ridgecrest where they are unexpected, Dec 24 (LS).

The **Double-crested Cormorant** at the ponds Dec 27 was a rare winter visitor (SS).

A **Merlin** was at the golf course Dec 16 (JS).

The **American White-Pelican** at the ponds Dec 13-14 was a late fall migrant (SS).

The **Short-eared Owl** at the ponds Dec 16 was a rare valley visitor (SS).

Hunger forced a bobcat near a house SW of Inyokern. After it finished off the rabbits, it ate five **Long-eared Owls** and two **Burrowing Owls** (LK).

The **Red-naped Sapsucker** N of Inyokern Dec 29 was a new yard bird (LB).

Two **Red-breasted Sapsuckers** were in Sand Canyon Dec 23 (SS).

The intergrade **Northern Flicker** in SE Ridgecrest Dec 20, could be a returning bird from last year based on the nape and whisker markings (LS).

**American Crows** have only been seen in the valley 7 times before and only single birds, so the flock of thirty-one N of Inyokern Dec 16 was amazing (TM).

The **Verdin** in Short Canyon Dec 22 was the 80<sup>th</sup> species for that location (SS).

The flock of interior type **Bushtits** continued at the ponds being seen through the month (SS).

Two **Cactus Wrens** were seen Dec 16 on the valley floor (SS, BS).

Three **White-headed Woodpeckers** were in Sand Canyon Dec 23 (SS).

**Red-breasted Nuthatches** continue at the cemetery, college, and SE Ridgecrest (BB, SS, BS, LS).

**Red Crossbills** continue to be seen at the cemetery and college (BB, BS, SS).

A “slate colored” **Fox Sparrow** was at the college Dec 14-16 (SS).

The **Harris’ Sparrow** N of Inyokern continued through the month (TM).

A **Golden-crowned Sparrow** was at the college Dec 3-8 (SS).

The **Common Yellowthroat** at the ponds Dec 16 was a rare winter sighting (SS).

Thanks to the following observers: Bob Barnes, Linda Bates, Louise Knecht, Terri Middlemiss, Joyce Seibold, Bob Steele, Lee Sutton

### January 2008

An immature **Tundra Swan** was at the ponds Jan 16 - 22 (SS).

An extremely weird looking teal was at the golf course Jan 15 - 18 (SS). It clearly had some Green-winged Teal in it as the face had the general pattern of a male of that species with additional white areas and the body was mostly plumaged like a female Green-winged Teal.

A **Common Merganser** was at the ponds Jan 14 (SS).

The first **Turkey Vulture** seen in NW Ridgecrest on Jan 26 was a sign that Spring is here (BBu).

Just being a predator doesn’t mean you’re not on the menu as was evidenced by the **American Kestrel** eaten by a **Cooper’s Hawk** in SE Ridgecrest on Jan 10 (LS).

**Great Horned Owl** was one of the expected species that was missed on the Christmas Bird Count. Just to show that they still exist in the valley one was heard calling in Ridgecrest on Jan. 24<sup>th</sup> (BBu).

The four **White-headed Woodpeckers** in Sand Canyon Jan 27 were the 9<sup>th</sup> valley record (SS, SE).

While the weather didn’t seem too spring like to me, the male **Vermilion Flycatcher** at the golf course Jan 18 was certainly a sign that it can’t be too far away (SS). This is the first report of the species since 27 April 2007.

Two **Common Ravens** forced a **Golden Eagle** to the ground and kept it there for at least 15 minutes. This was SW of Inyokern on Jan 4 (LK).

Two male **Mountain Bluebirds** were at the golf course Jan 18 (SS).

Two **Red-breasted Nuthatches** and the two intergrade **Northern Flickers** continue to be seen in SE Ridgecrest (LS).

The **Swamp Sparrow** at the ponds Jan 5 was only the 5<sup>th</sup> valley record (WF, CH).

**House Wrens** are typically seen in the valley from mid-March to mid May and again in the fall from the end of July through the end of September. The **House Wren** at the ponds Jan 16 was only our second January record (SS).

The two male **Cassin’s Finches** N of Inyokern Jan 13 were life birds (LB).

Then the winter storm blew in and **Cassin’s Finches** showed up in big numbers. A flock of six was S of Inyokern Jan 25, and an amazing flock of forty-three was there on the 26<sup>th</sup> with twenty-two remaining on the 27<sup>th</sup>.

(SS). Twelve **Cassin's Finches** were in SE Ridgecrest on Jan 26 with three remaining on the 27<sup>th</sup> (LS). Six were N of Inyokern on Jan 27 (TM).

Three **Red-crowned or Lilac-crowned Parrots** have been hanging around Ridgecrest (NN). According to [www.californiaparrotproject.org/](http://www.californiaparrotproject.org/), Red-crowned are more likely in southern California.

*Thanks to the following observers: Linda Bates, Brenda Burnett, Shelley Ellis, Wes Fritz, Cher Hollingworth, Louise Knecht, Terri Middlemiss, Naomi Norris, Lee Sutton*

### **January Field Trip: Tillie Creek Campground**

If you missed the Tillie Creek field trip, you missed a good one. The morning of January 19<sup>th</sup> dawned clear and cold. By the time we gathered at the campground, the weather was simply perfect for our relaxed morning of birding. Those participants with whom I reviewed the field trip thought our guide, John Schmitt, was really great. John is an internationally known wildlife artist and feather expert. His work appears on many tee and sweat shirts hawked at Kern River Valley Spring and Vulture Festivals. (Surely you own one or more by now). His birding expertise was evident as he identified a Merlin at a quarter mile. His many interesting stories about species habits and his own experiences with birds added to our enjoyment of the trip.

Tillie Creek campground is located in Oak woodland on the shore of Lake Isabella. The good habitat, combined with the large size of the nearly deserted campground and running water in the stream, yielded a lot of bird species. The telescopic views of Lake Isabella added a few more. We saw 35 plus species. Highlights were Bald Eagle, Osprey, two Merlins that stayed perched for a long as we wanted to look at them, a White-tailed Kite pestering a Red tailed Hawk, Phainopepla, the many Purple Finches, Acorn Woodpeckers, Red-breasted Saplicker (John said that family of birds is misnamed) Golden-crowned Sparrow and Oak Titmouse. A Wrentit responded beautifully (both in location and in song) as John played a recording affording many their best ever views of that interesting bird. The California Thrasher must have been elsewhere as it did not respond to the recorded song.

And if the great birding wasn't enough, as we were slowly walking back toward the campground entrance, Noel Gravelle spotted a large, beautiful Bobcat. He (or she) was very cooperative. At a distance of just 30 yards, we watched as he strolled slowly away, taking time to roll in the dirt, and sit up on a rock for a spell. His relaxed manner afforded us not

only good binocular views, but full telescope views as well.

Submitted by Lee Sutton

### **CONSERVATION CORNER by Terri Middlemiss**

Most of us tend to not think much about individuals in bird species that occur in flocks.

Even though we don't have too many American Crows in the valley, we do see them when we travel to other places. The news about the West Nile Virus that killed massive numbers of crows in 2002 and 2003 caused barely a ripple in our consciousness. "Oh well, there are plenty of them, they are not in danger of a severe decline."

An article in the Autumn 2007 "Birdscope" from Cornell Lab of Ornithology, starts out like this – "Suddenly families were ripped apart, says Anne Clark. Young birds, adult pairs, nonbreeding helpers, they all died." That got my attention and suddenly I care.

Anne Clark, an associate professor at Binghamton University, and colleagues, studied how this die off affected the very complex society of a group of American Crows. Their published paper showed how the deaths disrupted the lives of crows who live in extended families.

In the second year of losing yet another third of the crows in the study area followed since 1989, there was confusion among the crows when new territories opened up, when males would lose their whole families, when there were orphan young. It seems that being in groups is important to crows and helps to order their lives.

One of the many interesting things that happened was that when territories opened up because of deaths, other crows did not move right in. They have good memories and know their neighbors and were reluctant to simply take over their territory. They had not encountered this kind of suddenly empty territory.

The end of this article also made me think, because the author surmises that if the virus were to hit hard in more than 2 consecutive years, the net decrease in the population could snowball into a severe decline. Makes me think of Passenger Pigeons. Makes me more aware.

### **SOMETHING NEW!**

All the compilers of this Winter's Christmas Bird Counts kindly sent me copies of their species' lists, so I put them all together in a spread sheet and am including the combined list as an insert.

Any errors therein are mine. –Brenda--

### **SAND CANYON ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION PROGRAM (SEEP)**

Kerncrest Audubon Society will not be participating in the program this year. If you are interested in running the "Bird Station" call Shelley Ellis at 384-5426 or e-mail her at [shelley\\_ellis@ca.blm.gov](mailto:shelley_ellis@ca.blm.gov)

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### Explanation of membership categories:

National Audubon Society membership includes membership in the local chapter. It also includes a subscription to the Audubon magazine, and to 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.

## *The Chat*

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