



The Chat



Kerncrest Audubon Society, Ridgecrest, California

March 2008

MARCH CALENDAR

Thu	Mar 13	6pm	Board Meeting, Archibalds'
Thu	Mar 20	7pm	General Meeting, The Return of Tulare Lake
Sat	Mar 22	8am	Field Trip, Mojave Narrows RP

GENERAL MEETING PROGRAM THE RETURN OF TULARE LAKE

Our February program features project manager, Dr. Stephen Laymon explaining the Return of Tulare Lake. Just over 100 years ago, Tulare Lake was the largest (in terms of surface area) fresh water lake west of the Mississippi. Water diversions caused the lake to dry up and farmers moved in to farm the former lake bed. Now in its 6th 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 an 8000 acre portion of the former Tulare lake bed.

Before Europeans arrived in the central valley, 20,000 or so Yokut native Americans lived on and around Tulare Lake. They called it Coot Lake. The feature known as Atwell Island was actually a low sandy ridge between Coot Lake and an adjacent lake they called Little Coot Lake. It was only an actual Island when the water in the lakes was at a very high level

Come to the Maturango Museum on March 20 and learn about this project and how it is removing marginal farmland from agricultural production, improving the quality of water and restoring wetlands and native plant habitat for wildlife.

FIELD TRIP MOJAVE NARROWS REGIONAL PARK

Saturday, March 22 – Mojave Narrows Regional Park, Victorville. An extensive Fremont cottonwood and red willow forest along the Mojave River and several small lakes make this park an outstanding birding area. In addition to an impressive suite of wintering species, early spring arrivals are expected, including several swallow species.

Bring snacks, water, and picnic lunch.

For those who wish to camp at the San Bernardino County campground there call (760) 245-2226 for reservations. Those driving down for the day will meet in Ridgecrest at the SW corner of the big Albertson's parking lot, near the gas station at 8am.

For details and to sign up, contact: Brenda Burnett, E: chatbird@verizon.net, P: 375-8634.

EARLY NOTICE KERN RIVER VALLEY SPRING NATURE FESTIVAL

You are invited to the Kern River Valley Spring Nature Festival from April 30 - May 6, 2008, which is held annually at Audubon's Kern River Preserve in Weldon and Circle Park in Kernville!

This year, our festival artist, John Schmitt, is designing a new t-shirt featuring "Spring Warblers of the Kern River Valley and Southern Sierra Nevada". Our Friday night Keynote Speaker, Bob Steele [www.bobsteelephoto.com], will give a themed presentation about "Warblers: nesting, migrant, and vagrant of the Kern River Valley and Southern Sierra Nevada, plus bonus regional specialty birds". Saturday night's keynote speaker, John Muir Laws [www.johnmuirlaws.com], presentation is "An Evening Exploring the Natural World of the Sierra Nevada". Bob will give workshops on photography on Saturday and John will offer workshops on painting nature and will be available to autograph his book "The Laws Field Guide to the Sierra Nevada".

There are 30 different field trip choices (some offered multiple days) featuring birding, wildflowers, geology, natural history and butterflies. Weekend workshops are offered on bird photography; gardening with native plants; Native American uses of plants; how to draw nature; bird - reptile - amphibian and plant identification; with more being scheduled as experts agree to attend the festival. There will also be demonstrations on bird banding, pond turtles and falconry. There will be children's activities at both Circle Park and the Kern River Preserve.

There are numerous half-day field trips offered Saturday and Sunday. In addition to our traditional field trips, among new offerings for the upcoming festival are additional owling destinations, Little Lake/Owens Lake trips, and Frog Spring/Kelso Creek Sanctuary trips.

Field trip sign-ups are in full swing and several sections for specific days (but, no trip options overall) have already sold out.

(See Spring Nature Festival, page 2)



Valley Sightings February 2008

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

Until Feb 3 **Canvasback** had only been seen at the ponds; then, one appeared in the storm run off pond by Walmart (LA). Next was the first for the cemetery list, species # 173, when three males were seen at the old sewage ponds Feb 8 (SS).

A calling **Great Horned Owl** was heard in Ridgecrest the last week of January (LA). This is the peak time of year for their courtship.

The male **Willamson's Sapsucker** at the cemetery Feb 8-9 was species # 174 at that location (SS). It was also the 10th valley record and the first time this species has been seen on the valley floor. Of the 9 previous sightings 8 were from Sand Canyon and the other from Indian Wells Canyon.

A **Red-breasted Sapsucker** was at the college Feb 8-9 (SS).

Mountain Species put in a big appearance in Freeman Canyon on Feb 9 with six **Steller's Jays**, sixteen **Clark's Nutcrackers**, two **Red-breasted Nuthatches**, thirty **Mountain Chickadees**, and thirty-five **Cassin's Finches** (SS, SE, KL, MP, CP). Clark's Nutcrackers were last seen in the valley on Aug 17, 2003.

The flock of interior form **Bushtits** continued at the ponds through at least Feb 7 (SS).

Six **Red-breasted Nuthatches** were at the cemetery Feb 8 (SS), one remained in SE Ridgecrest through Feb 17 (LS), and two more were in Ridgecrest Feb 26 (BB).

The 98th species for No Name Canyon was the all **American Robin** seen Feb 2 (SS, SE).

A **Sage Thrasher** was SW of Inyokern Feb 21-24 (SM).

A **Lincoln's Sparrow** was in Ridgecrest Feb 19 (BBu).

Six **Tricolored Blackbirds** were at Faller School on Jan 28 (AJ) with one remaining the following day (BBu).

Cassin's Finch sightings are continuing and every time a big storm hits, the numbers jump up again. Five were SW of Inyokern Jan 28, twelve on the 29th, thirty-six on Jan 31-Feb 7, and six Feb 18-26 (LK); a flock of fifteen was W of Inyokern Jan 27 with a few lingering until the 29th, then eleven on Feb 3, with six lingering to Feb 19 (PG); one continued S of Inyokern until Feb 2, this increased to twenty-five on the 4th, with two remaining through the 8th, and sixty-five on Feb 24 (SS); thirty were SW of Inyokern Jan 28-30 with fourteen

remaining on Feb 1, this jumped to thirty-nine on Feb 3 with twenty-two remaining on the 5th (PW); ten were in SE Ridgecrest Feb 23 (LS); four were at the cemetery Feb 8 and seven were at the college Feb 8 (SS).

A **Red Crossbill** was S of Inyokern Feb 8 and four were seen the next day (SS). The continuing flock of Red Crossbills was seen at the cemetery Feb 9 (BS).

If you've ever wondered about the chirp sound that Anna's Hummingbirds make in their display flights, check out:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/7216230.stm>.

Thanks to the following observers: Linda Anderson, Bob Barnes, Brenda Burnett, Shelley Ellis, Patrice Glasco, Annie Jorgenson, Louise Knecht, Karen Luhn, Susan Moore, Misty Pate, Chelsey Pate, Bob Steele, Lee Sutton, Peter Woodman

SAND CANYON ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION PROGRAM (SEEP)

Hooray for volunteers! It was previously reported that Kerncrest AS would not participate this year, but Susan Woodman has agreed to take over the classroom programs, and Shelley Ellis will head up the field station this year. Whether their intent is to do this as Kerncrest members or concerned individuals, hooray for them!

If you are interested in helping, call Shelley Ellis at 384-5426 or e-mail her at shelley_ellis@ca.blm.gov

(Spring Nature Festival, continued)

Except for the paid field trips, workshops and dinners: the rest of the festival activities are free and sponsored by Audubon California's Kern River Preserve, Bob Barnes and Associates, Kern River Valley Revitalization and Sequoia National Forest.

Contact Bob Barnes directly to register or get information on paid field trips and workshops. Contact Alison Sheehey for all other information on the dinners and free events. Visit the festival website to find out more about activities and to find up to the minute information on the latest offerings.

<http://kern.audubon.org/bioregion.htm>

In order to save paper and keep costs down; printed information is not available but there is a printable schedule available on the website.

Bob Barnes, Field Trips Chair,
P: 760-382-1260
E: bbarnes@lightspeed.net

Alison Sheehey, Festival Chair & Webmaster
P: 760-378-2029
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CONSERVATION CORNER

by Terri Middlemiss

How did you handle the pile of catalogs you received before Christmas? I hope that you recycled them, at least. To stop the deluge, tear off and use the last page to telephone the company and request no, or fewer, catalogs. When you can't get to do that right away, at least you have a shorter stack waiting for you. The Wall Street Journal has a column called "Cranky Consumer" and the author shows how successful, or not, she was with 5 different companies. The millions and millions of catalogs that are sent out by these 5 companies contain only a small amount of recycled paper. Several of them use paper from forests certified by the Sustainable Forestry Initiative, which is a start, but that still is a use of virgin wood. One company that I called said that they pre-order the catalogs that are sent endlessly pre-Christmas, and they couldn't be stopped. If we, as consumers, continue to make requests to catalog companies, we will start making a dent, and then maybe there will be a cascade started.

Cornell Lab of Ornithology has added a new citizen scientist program, "Nest Watch."

They are inviting all of us to really observe our backyard birds by monitoring their nests and sharing the information so that Cornell can spot shifts in reproductive timing and survival of baby birds and how climate change and habitat destruction affect them.

I have always been supportive of nuclear power, and recent articles in The Wall Street Journal and Reader's Digest, both conservative in nature, prompt me to bring up the subject. In conjunction with this subject are articles in several other publications that outline arguments against the biofuel project, simply because there is not enough land to grow biofuel crops. In fact, in a brief article in Conservation, Oct.-Nov. 2007, the author finds that reforestation of land "can lock up between two and nine times as much carbon as the emissions avoided if the same area were clear-cut and used for biofuel production. The bottom line? Biofuel can do more harm than good." (And that is a whole other subject) Increasing fossil-fuel efficiency while developing wind, solar and wave energy might be the better path.

Right now, nuclear generators are producing 20% of our nation's electricity from 103 plants. Their output is at 90% of capacity; coal is at 61%, oil and natural gas generators are at 10 to 29%. I was surprised to learn that 65% of Americans approve of building new nuclear power plants. I thought that most people were still behaving like Chicken Little and not educating themselves to think objectively. One third of the plants are privately run with federal government oversight on safety. Safety is paramount and operators are continuously training in simulators.

Radiation exposure is an issue. But radiation that is naturally occurring exposes each of us to 250-300 millirems per year, while sitting on the property line of a

nuclear power plant would add only 1 millirem. A study done by the National Cancer Institute in 1991 found "no general increase in cancer mortality" for people living near nuclear power plants.

All of this discussion involves the birds and nature we love. They are subject to the effects of pollution, habitat loss, and too many people needing more and more electricity, goods and food. How to best handle these very complex problems? Our need to replace fast disappearing fossil fuels involves using nuclear power. To be continued...

FEBRUARY FIELD TRIP FUN

Only four Kerncrest members and four guests participated in the annual trek to various venues in the San Joaquin Valley to watch birds and learn about the restoration project of what was once Atwell Island, but we had a wonderful time!

I'll not comment too much on the restoration project, since that will be the topic of our March General Meeting Program, other than to say the history of the area was interesting from an archeological as well as natural point of view, and it looks as if it will very soon result in a wonderful wetland habitat, in addition to native scrub.

Birding highlights at the Kern National Wildlife Refuge included a White-tailed Kite, something we never get to see on this side of the mountains. (The previous day, we had seen Golden-crowned Sparrows, likewise extremely rare here.) In addition, we had fantastically close view of a juvenile Red-tailed Hawk. We at first were afraid this bird was ill or injured, when it allowed us to drive within about ten feet of it, roll down the windows and take pictures!! When later this happened again, and then the bird flew down to a nearby muddy patch and picked up something (a mouse?) that appeared to be already dead, that we realized it was likely a young bird raised in captivity, released in the refuge, and being taught to hunt by having the area seeded with easy prey. How fun!! Though currently this technique has it looking as if it was trained by a Harrier, since its method is to swoop along near the ground. Hopefully, it will at some point discover that the technique of hunting from up high better fits its talents. We wish it well.

Of course, there was also the spectacular fly-in of White-faced Ibis and Sandhill Cranes at the Pixley National Wildlife Refuge. Those birds behave differently every year. The first year I attended, the Ibis greatly out-numbered the Cranes. Last year, the Cranes seemed to arrive all evening, wave after wave without end. This year, again with Cranes dominating, all the birds flew in to surrounding fields instead of directly into the shallow lagoons, and "staged" until it was almost too dark to see, then lifted off all at once to fly on into the water. Was it because we were there, or because there were two coyotes sharing prey in an adjacent field?

Maybe we'll find out next year.

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Ridgecrest CA 93556

Kerncrest Audubon Society

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website: www.kerncrestaudubon.org

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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