



# The Chat



Kerncrest Audubon Society, Ridgecrest, California

March 2010

## MARCH CALENDAR

Tue	Mar 16	6:00pm	Board Meeting, Burnetts'
Thu	Mar 18	7:00pm	General Meeting, Mary Whitfield, SSRS & WIFL
Sat	Mar 20	8:00am	GARAGE SALE
Sun	Mar 21	8:30am	Field Trip, Cow Heaven Cyn
Sat	Mar 28	9:00am	Beginning Birding, Library

## GENERAL MEETING

### MARY WHITFIELD, RESEARCH DIRECTOR, SOUTHERN SIERRA RESEARCH STATION

The Southern Sierra Research Station is a non-profit organization located in the foothills of California's Sierra Nevada Mountains. Their goal is to understand the biological processes that control population sizes and species diversity by conducting basic and applied research. In collaboration with government, academic, and conservation organizations, they create and interpret scientific knowledge to inform environmental policy and encourage public appreciation of the region.

Mary has been studying Southwestern Willow Flycatchers (*Empidonax traillii eximius*), also known as WIFLs, in the South Fork Kern River Valley since 1989. She has long been interested in understanding the effects of Brown-headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*) parasitism on population dynamics and breeding biology of this endangered subspecies. Recently, she has expanded her focus, studying post-fledging parental care and dispersal, as well as wintering ecology of Willow Flycatchers in Latin America, traveling to Costa Rica, Panama, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico and Ecuador to determine whether Willow Flycatchers are present in areas where, historically, they were known to winter. Mary received a B.S. from University of California at Davis and an M.S. from Chico State University.

Come learn more about the Willow Flycatcher and the Southern Sierra Research Station at our March meeting at the Maturango Museum at 7:00pm on Thursday, March 18<sup>th</sup>.

## SAVE THE DATE

**KERNCREST AUDUBON SOCIETY  
ANNUAL BIRDATHON  
SATURDAY, APRIL 24<sup>TH</sup>**

## FIELD TRIP

### COW HEAVEN CANYON

There was no field trip on the calendar for March and the board of directors couldn't figure out where to go. But we've always maintained a guzzler at Cow Heaven Canyon, usually with some board members going quietly up there in the middle of the week to work. It's a beautiful place and always a wonderful outing: sometimes birdy, sometimes not. So at the last board meeting, someone wondered why we didn't do it on a weekend for a change, and invite everyone along for a field trip.

So here it is: a Field Trip to Cow Heaven Canyon! Meet on Sunday, March 21<sup>st</sup> at the Chevron gas station on Inyokern Road just east of Inyokern at 8:30am. (So late because the time has just changed the week before and your body will think it's really only 7:30.) Unless you really want to, you need not plan to work. If you do, bring a shovel and gloves; otherwise, a folding stool will be handy. Wear layers, sturdy shoes, and bring a picnic lunch.

We may see pinyon jays, the oak titmouse or white-breasted nuthatch Susan Steel reports on the next page, or some early migrants at the spring. Sometimes there are woodpeckers, and usually cactus wrens.

If you'd rather carpool from Ridgecrest, call Brenda Burnett at 760-375-8634 to arrange to meet at my house. It's along almost everyone's way.

## Garage Sale

*Saturday, March 20<sup>th</sup> from 8:00 AM to noon  
735 W Sonja Avenue, Ridgecrest*

*Donate! Bring items any time, (call 760-382-4935 first) or call any board member for pick-up.*

*Work! Come help price on Friday the 20<sup>th</sup> from 8:00 am to noon, come help sell on Saturday.*

*Shop! And bring your friends!*



## Valley Sightings February 2010

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).

The 100<sup>th</sup> species for No Name Canyon was a special one – a flock of **Greater White-fronted Geese** tried to fly up the canyon and over the Sierras, but gave up fighting the wind and turned north (SS). Two other **Greater White-fronted Geese** were at the ponds Feb 25-26(SS).

The **Cackling Goose** continues through at least Feb 26 (BS).

The immature **Tundra Swan** continues at the ponds (SS, BB). It was also seen at Lark Seep Feb 26 and became species #124 for that location (SS).

The first **Blue-winged Teal** of the spring was at the ponds Feb 22 (SS).

**Canvasback** are still being seen in big numbers with the 157 at the ponds on Feb 8 our second highest count (SS).

A **Red-breasted Merganser** was at the ponds Feb 25 (SS).

The four **Turkey Vultures** N of Inyokern Feb 24 were spring migrants (TM).

**American White Pelicans** were first noted heading north Feb 25, which is when they are expected (SS).

Earlier than expected **Double-crested Cormorants** continue to be seen at the ponds with three Feb 1-4 and then a trickle throughout the rest of the month (SS).

The **Red-shouldered Hawk** at the ponds was last seen Feb 10 (SS).

A **Merlin** was at the ponds Feb 5 (BB) and another was at Lark Seep Feb 26 for species #125 (SS).

A male **Hairy Woodpecker** was in Sand Canyon Feb 6 and another in Nine Mile Canyon Feb 28 (SE, SS).

Two **Red-naped Sapsuckers** were at the college Jan 29 (AS), and one was seen on Feb 7 and 14 (JS). Another was S of Inyokern Feb 22 - 24(SS).

A **Red-breasted Sapsucker** was at the cemetery Feb 2 (BB).

The first **Cliff Swallow** of the spring was at the ponds Feb 5, which is a new early spring date (SS). Previous early dates were Feb 14 and Feb 26.

**Red-breasted Nuthatches** are still being seen at the cemetery and college (BB, SS).

**White-breasted Nuthatches** were in Cow Heaven Canyon Feb 5 (SS).

An **Oak Titmouse** was in Cow Heaven Canyon Feb 5 (SS).

The **Cactus Wren** SW of Inyokern continues (LK). **Mountain Bluebirds** were last reported at the golf course Feb 2 (BB).

A **Hermit Thrush** was at the college Feb 7 (JS).

The amazing story of the **Bullock's Oriole** in Ridgecrest on January 31<sup>st</sup> (JS), becomes incredible with what must surely be the same bird seen about a mile away on Feb 1 (LS).

The **Orange-crowned Warbler** at the college continued through at least Feb 11 (SS).

A **Golden-crowned Sparrow** was in Indian Wells Canyon Feb 6 (SS, SE).

A **Vesper Sparrow** was at the ponds Feb 8 (SS).

A **Pine Siskin** was S of Inyokern Feb 5-7, and 27-28 (SS), and two more N of Inyokern Feb 18 (TM).

Thanks to the following observers: *Alison Sheehy, Bob Barnes, Shelley Ellis, Louise Knecht, Terri Middlemiss, Joyce Seibold, Bob Steele, Lee Sutton*

## BIRD WATCHING 101 – BASIC BIRDING

The Kerncrest Audubon Society, in cooperation with the Maturango Museum and the Ridgecrest Library, is forming a bird watching class for beginning birders. This is an introduction to the hobby of watching birds. Each session will involve a short bird walk followed by a discussion of one or more topics. Topics to be discussed include "Local Birds of the Season", "How to See a Bird", "How to Identify that Bird", "Binoculars and Scopes", "Which Bird Book is for Me", "Where the Birds Are", "How to Attract Birds to my Yard", "Do You Hear that Robin?", and others topics of interest to the group.

Four sessions are planned. Each session will be independent of the others so participants don't have to commit to attending all the sessions. The first session will be at 9 AM Saturday morning, the 27<sup>th</sup> of March, at the Ridgecrest Branch Library on Las Flores Ave. The other three sessions will be at 9 AM at the library on the following three Saturdays. Each session will include a short bird walk and an indoor presentation/activity.

Tell your friends and neighbors! Bring your children and grandchildren! These sessions are free. Those interested, regardless of age, are welcome. For more information contact Dan Burnett at 760-375-8634.

## CONSERVATION CORNER

by Terri Middlemiss

One reason for declining bird species is loss of habitat. Therefore, we need to know about actions that are taking place to save that habitat. While the focus of the following 2 examples is not on birds, they will surely benefit and so we need to be aware and write letters.

I got this information from the Winter 2010 issue of the "Wilderness Record", a publication of the California Wilderness Coalition, [www.calwild.org](http://www.calwild.org).

The first item involves the California Gnatcatcher. Representative Darrell Issa who represents northern San Diego County has introduced the "Beauty Mountain and Agua Tibia Wilderness Act of 2009". These chaparral, oak woodlands and rock laden open spaces are priceless habitat for endangered wildlife, and critical plant and wildlife migration corridors between Anza-Borrego Desert State Park and the coastal mountains of Riverside and San Diego counties. Recreation holds the trump card, of course, but we have to accept that.

Their action suggestion (and mine), is to send a short letter to Rep. Issa thanking him for his efforts to protect these beautiful places. You can mention your support of the wildlife habitat protection as important to you.

The Honorable Darrell Issa, US House of Representatives, 1800 Thibodo Rd. #310, Vista CA 92081, email to <https://forms.house.gov/issa/webforms>. or fax to 760.599.1178.

The "California Desert Protection Act of 2010" (S2921) has just been introduced. Among other protections, are nearly 2 million acres of threatened and beautiful (and wild) desert. For us, there is the Golden Valley Proposed Wilderness Addition and Great Falls Basin Proposed Wilderness. And, of course, all the other proposed wilderness areas and additions that will be good for wildlife. To see it all, visit [www.californiadesert.org](http://www.californiadesert.org), and <http://Feinstein.senate.gov/public/>.

Importantly, a letter to our esteemed Representative Kevin McCarthy would be useful. While he is so "un-environmental", it is important to let him know that many of his constituents think differently. We must not remain silent.

His contact info – 4100 Empire Dr., Suite 150, Bfield 93309, [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov), 661.327.3611, field rep Vince Fong, [vince.fong@mail.house.gov](mailto:vince.fong@mail.house.gov)

### **TRIP REPORT PIXLEY & KERN NWRs**

The February birding outing was to the Pixley and the Kern National Wildlife Refuges. This was a joint outing with the Sagebrush Sams camping club. We stayed at the Colonel Allensworth State Historical Park. The Burnetts, Gravelles, Goodsons and Robinsons represented Kerncrest Audubon. The Sagebrush Sams added four other couples.

Rainy weather did not stop us from two visits to the Pixley Preserve to watch thousands of Sand Hill Cranes come into their night roost. The sight of lines and lines of these birds coming in and dropping down to the protection of shallow ponds at sunset is something everyone will remember. The sound of this diurnal event is maybe even more memorable. Sand Hill Cranes aren't the silent wallflowers of birddom. They constantly bark and squawk loudly at one another over a

wide tone range. Their sounds can easily be heard from about a mile away.

No really rare birds were observed over the weekend outing. A possible exception might be what possibly might have been a Swainsons-Red Shouldered hybrid debated over at the Kern National Wildlife Refuge. Brenda Burnett remains certain that it was Red Shouldered Hawk but Lee Sutton, with his inferior optics, remains equally certain it was a Swainson's. Others amongst the party agreed it was a hawk (one even said a small hawk) but would go no further.

This is a great outing that we do every year or two. Plan on joining us when we do it again.

From THE BACKYARD QUESTION BOX  
BY KEVIN J. COOK

### **BIRD WATCHER'S DIGEST**

Q: We have eastern kingbird, great crested flycatcher, and eastern wood-pewee during the summer; but they depart in fall migration. During winter, we have eastern phoebe and on rare occasions vermilion flycatcher or western kingbird. Last winter, we even hosted a Say's phoebe near here. Why can some flycatchers make a living here during winter while others can't? Are they that specialized in what insects they take for food?

Phil Hardy, Americus, Georgia

A: The species that depart from your part of the continent in winter do so because they cannot find enough food there to survive during the winter months. So they migrate farther south, to the insect-rich tropics. These are the eastern kingbird, great crested flycatcher, and eastern wood-pewee – all insect-eating specialists.

The eastern phoebes that overwinter in Georgia are able to do so because they can alter their diet to take advantage of the food that is available, namely fruits. In winter, many insect-eating birds change their diet in order to survive. Excellent examples of this include the American robin, yellow-rumped warbler, eastern bluebird, and tree swallow.

The "western" birds you mention as occasional visitors – western kingbird, vermilion flycatcher, and Say's phoebe – are not choosing to overwinter in Georgia. More likely these are vagrant individuals that migrated east instead of south, and they may or may not survive the winter, depending on the severity of the weather. In much of the Southeast, a mild winter day will have some insect activity – much more than the winter days in the Great Plains wood lots or farmyards where the phoebe and the kingbird might have nested during the summer.

So while the eastern phoebe in an expected winter bird, able to make a living by changing its diet, the other species either "got out of Dodge" or might wish they had.

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(Includes subscription to *The Chat*)

\_\_\_\_ yr Subscription to *The Chat* only @ \$7/year

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

Please enclose a check payable to Kerncrest Audubon Society.

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P.O. Box 984

Ridgecrest CA 93556

## Kerncrest Audubon Society

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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*

Newsletter of the Kerncrest Audubon society  
P.O. Box 984, Ridgecrest, CA 93556

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U.S. Postage

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Permit No. 75  
Ridgecrest, CA

March, 2010