



The Chat



Kerncrest Audubon Society, Ridgecrest, California

March/April 2009

MARCH/APRIL CALENDAR

Thu	Mar 12	6pm	Board Meeting, Burnetts'
Thu	Mar 19	7pm	General Meeting Program: John Schmitt
Thu	Apr 9	6pm	Board Meeting, Robinsons'
Sat	Apr 18	?am	BIRDATHON

From the Editor:

I don't quite know what to call this issue of the Chat. It's late for March, since I was away at the beginning of the month. It also covers the first part of April, since I will again be away at the end of March. It also includes Susan Steele's Valley Sightings column from December, because there wasn't space to run that in January. And it includes news of the Kern River Preserve Spring Nature Festival in early May, because you need information on that to sign up for field trips early.

Anyway, here it is.

BIRDATHON

The 20th annual Kerncrest Audubon Society BIRDATHON will be held Saturday, April 18th. We need you! Form a team – even if it's only a team of one -- and sign up sponsors to contribute in support of the Kern River Preserve and our education programs. If you'd like to join, be, or form a team, phone Nancy Robinson at 375-2049. Teams may meet at any time or place they like, but it's best to let Nancy know where you plan to go, so that she may provide a "clearing house" to ensure maximum coverage of the area to maximize the number of species seen.

We'll bird all day (and all night, starting at sundown on the 17th, if you want to get owls) then meet at John's pizza parlor to compare and consolidate lists, and to celebrate!

Proceeds are split between the Kern River Preserve and our own education programs. This past year's education funds were spent primarily on expenses for the Faller Elementary School Junior Audubon Club, including buying personal bird books to be presented as "graduation" gifts to all regularly-attending fifth graders. We also purchased heat-treated owl pellets for dissection, and had a great time identifying what the barn owls had been eating.

So Sign up for a Birdathon Team, and sign up friends and acquaintances, too. Collect pledges from friends wishing to sponsor by species seen, or contributions from those making lump sum contributions, and bring them to the Birdathon. E-mail Nancy Robinson at nepr918@gmail.com or call 375-2049 for pledge sheets, to sign up, or for information.

If you can't participate, MAKE A CONTRIBUTION and mail it to Kerncrest Audubon Society, PO Box 984, Ridgecrest CA 93556. If you wish to contribute by species, please note the pledged amount by species and include your telephone number, so someone can call you after the event and let you know how many species were sighted.

GENERAL MEETING FEATHERS

John Schmitt is a man of many talents. He is perhaps known best locally for his wonderful artwork, being the person who for many years has designed and painted the beautiful T-shirts for the Kern River Preserve's Spring Nature Festival. (See this work at the website indicated in the article on that festival on page 3, and read his bio as a field trip leader. It talks of his world renown as a wildlife artist and many publications.)

He is also an expert birder, and has led many groups, including our society, on field trips in and around the Kern River Valley area.

He comes to us as a speaker at our general meeting the evening of Thursday, March 19th, as a collector of and expert on feathers, their structure, uses, and beauty. John has a spectacular collection of feathers from all over the world, which collection he will share with us and describe how they're constructed, how they work, how to identify them and what birds use them for.

Come see this beautiful and fascinating presentation at the Maturango Museum at 7pm on Thursday, March 19th.

REMINDER

Check your mailing label. If the date on the last line is past, your membership or subscription has expired. Use the form on page 4 to renew, or to sign up for National Audubon Society's Paper Free Renewal Program, call (800) 274-4201.



Valley Sightings Dec-Jan 2008-9

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

The five **Greater White-fronted Geese** continue being noted at the ponds Dec 14 (SS).

A **Snow Goose** with neck collar A-PR was seen for the 4th year in the valley. It was seen twice on the CBC first at the ponds (GW) and later at Burrough's High School (SS, AS).

The extremely rare form blue phase **Ross' Goose** was seen on base Dec 14 (GW). This is valley's 2nd record of this form.

A **Wood Duck** was at the pond Dec 5 (SS).

This has been a great December for **Canvasback** with an amazing 64 on Dec 22 (SS). To put this in prospective our previous high count was 29.

The 5th valley record of **Greater Scaup** was at the ponds Dec 14 and a **Common Goldeneye** was seen too (SS).

A **Western Grebe** was at the ponds Dec 14 (MH, SB, LB).

The **Great Egret** at the old sewage ponds Dec 13-14 was a rare bird in December (BB).

Turkey Vultures are rare in the valley in winter with one noted in NW Ridgecrest Dec 26 (BBu).

Predator numbers in the valley are low again this year with no **Golden Eagles** and only two **Long-eared Owls** being seen on the CBC. On the positive side a **Merlin** was spotted at the cemetery (BB, GW) which is the first seen in the valley this year, and a **Red-shouldered Hawk** was at the golf course (AS, SS).

A **Long-billed Dowitcher** was at the ponds Dec 14 (SS).

A **Red-naped Sapsucker** was at the golf course Dec 14 (D&BBu, LL).

A male **Vermilion Flycatcher** showed up at the golf course Dec 2 and stayed for the CBC (BS).

The two **Tree Swallows** at the old sewage ponds Dec 6 were later than expected (BB).

A **White-breasted Nuthatch** was in SE Ridgecrest Dec 14 (P&SW).

The **Brown Creeper** continues at the college being seen on the CBC (RC).

Bushtits were noted at the ponds Dec 14 (AS) and in NW Ridgecrest Dec 26 (BBu).

A **Cactus Wren** was in Inyokern Dec 14 (BS).

The House Wren at the golf course Dec 14 was a rare December treat (D&BBu, LL).

The thirty **Mountain Bluebirds** at the golf course (D&BBu, LL) and nine on base (GW, KP) Dec 14 are only the second and third reports this year. The other

was at the golf course Jan 18. This is much reduced from previous years when small groups are seen Jan-Mar and Oct-Dec.

Our third **Varied Thrush** of the year was at the golf course Dec 14 (D&BBu, LL). We average one sighting of this bird a year with the prime sighting months being October-December.

The thirty-eight **Cedar Waxwings** at the college Dec 14 was our 2nd highest count for the species (RC). The high count was 40 on Mar 21, 1998.

Orange-crowned Warblers are extremely rare here in winter making the one in Ridgecrest Dec 30-Jan 13 quite notable (BW). There are eight December records with the last one on December 29, 2003.

"Slate-colored" **Dark-eyed Juncos** were at the college Dec 14 (RC) and at the cemetery (GW).

Single flyover **Red Crossbills** were noted in Ridgecrest Dec 7 and at the cemetery Dec 12 (BB).

Pine Siskins were in Ridgecrest Dec 14 (BBu). While we have good numbers of these birds in October, November, and February-May, this is only our 8th sighting in December.

Our 9th December **Pine Siskin** sighting was from SW of Inyokern when up to two birds were seen occasionally from Nov 9-Jan 4 (LK). Impressive numbers of **Lesser Goldfinches** sixty on Dec 20 and **American Goldfinches** seventy-two on Dec 31 were also visiting the thistle socks (LK).

Thanks to the following observers: *Bob Barnes, Lloyd Brubaker, Sherry Brubaker, Dan & Brenda Burnett, Russell Cox, Mike Holland, Louise Knecht, Lisa Lavelle, Ken Pringle, Alison Sheehy, Bob Steele, Lee Sutton, Barb Walls, Peter and Sam Woodman, Gary Woods*

Valley Sightings – February 2009

While most of the nation thinks of February as winter, here in the Indian Wells Valley it is spring. Our resident birds are starting to nest and migrants are beginning to trickle through.

Fifteen **Canada Geese** were in Ridgecrest in late January (M&JR).

Above average numbers of **Canvasback** continue with 176 at the ponds Feb 23 (SS).

The **Black-necked Stilt** at the old sewage ponds Feb 11 was our earliest spring record (SS). The previous early date was Feb 18 and next a more typical Mar 11.

The **Wilson's Snipe** N of Inyokern was a new yard bird (LB).

Red-shouldered Hawks continue to be seen on base. An immature was seen along Blandy Feb 5, at the golf course Feb 5 and 11, and at the ponds Feb 13 and 18. On Feb 11 two adults were calling in what might be territorial displays (SS).

An interesting observation about a **Prairie Falcon**, coyote, and **California Quail** was related by Louise

Knecht. She was watching the falcon swoop on the quail which were hunkered down in a bush when a coyote showed up and appeared to try and flush the quail out into the open.

Yard bird #178 in Inyokern was a **Sora** on Feb 14-16 (SS). This is the 4th record of this species that has turned up in a residential area. It is also a good data point for how early in the spring this species migrates.

Two **Loggerhead Shrikes** were carrying food to nestlings on Feb 7 (LK). The male carries food to the female while she is on the nest, and then both parents carry food to the young. It appears these extremely early nesters failed in their attempt on Feb 17, perhaps due to the stormy weather on Feb 16 (LK).

Jan 31 proved to be a good day for woodpeckers with the continuing **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** at the college (AS), and **Northern Flicker**, **Downy**, **Hairy** and **Nuttall's Woodpeckers**, and **Red-breasted** and **Williamson's Sapsuckers** in Sand Canyon (SS, SE). Another **Red-naped Sapsucker** was at the cemetery Feb 26 (SS).

A **Red-breasted Nuthatch** continues at the college Feb 11-18 (SS).

A swirling mass of at 300 **Cedar Waxwings** and 200 **American Robins** were devouring the cotoneaster berries at the college Feb 11-14 (SS).

"Slate-colored" **Dark-eyed Juncos** were at the college Jan 31 (AS), S of Inyokern Jan 31-Feb 16 (SS), and at the cemetery Feb 18 (SS). A "Pink-sided" **Dark-eyed Junco** was at the cemetery Feb 18 (SS).

Pine Siskins were SW of Inyokern Jan 21 and 26 (LK), and on base Feb 11 (SS).

Huge numbers of **American** and **Lesser Goldfinches** continue SW of Inyokern (LK). An example is sixty American Goldfinches on Feb 8 and 15 and thirty-six Lesser Goldfinches on those dates (LK).

FOS include **Greater Yellowlegs** at the ponds Feb 5, **American White Pelican** at the ponds Feb 18, **Rufous Hummingbird** S of Inyokern Feb 25, **Tree Swallow** Feb 5 (SS)

Thanks to the following observers: *Linda Bates, Shelley Ellis, Mick and Joanna Rindt, Alison Sheehey*

Conservation Corner by Terri Middlemiss

"Slipping toward extinction, one potato chip at a time." So starts the article in the Summer 2008 issue of "Living Bird" from Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology.

"It is the story of an impending ecological disaster in Southeast Asia: extinction by potato chip, cookie, and cooking oil." This is about the planting of millions of acres of oil palms for palm oil(!). It is not a simple problem, but it is one we need to be aware of and do what we can to help to avert this disaster.

Forests are disappearing at a faster rate than in South America as they are cut down to be replaced with

a sea of oil palms. In Malaysia, it is secondary (logged) forests that are being converted, not virgin ones. However, these secondary forests have themselves become crucial to the "survival of Southeast Asia's beleaguered wildlife." Indonesia, the other biggest producer, does not have forest conversion data available.

Complicating all of this is, as always, is that the people who work in the industry get vital housing, medical care, education, etc. Palm oil is a highly profitable export. It is used throughout Asia as cooking oil. "It is also used around the world in as an ingredient in countless food items and household products, from potato chips to margarine, to dishwashing liquid to lipstick. "It is hard to avoid. New plantations may be created with the interest in biofuels growing.

This is an unfolding story as the more progressive oil-palm companies and environmental organizations are gathering at the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil. Meanwhile Southeast Asia's Hornbills and other endemic birds, butterflies, mammals, insects and plants "are slipping closer to extinction, one potato chip at a time."

Every choice that we make in what we buy has repercussions. Most of the time, they are complex repercussions. We can choose where we want to take a stand for the health of the nature we love.

COME CELEBRATE SPRING in the KERN RIVER VALLEY

The 15th annual Kern River Valley Spring Nature Festival exhibits and activities will take place the weekend of May 2-3, 2009. Bob Barnes' Kern River Valley Birding will again handle the field trips from April 29th through May 5th.

Keynote Speakers: On Friday evening, Dr. Jason Saleeby and Zorka Saleeby of CalTech will give an interesting presentation on the Geology in Your Backyard. On Saturday evening, Bob Barnes will give a presentation on Birding the Kern River Valley & Southern Sierra Nevada. Both presentations should be fun and really informative.

On Saturday and Sunday, find many events at Audubon California's Kern River Preserve, 18747 Highway 178, Weldon, including bird walks led by Kerncrest Audubon Society volunteers, bird banding by the Southern Sierra Research Station, and information booths and exhibits located in the large, shaded front yard of Preserve Headquarters.

For summary information on the festival and field trips, visit

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

Here you will find trip descriptions and schedules, workshop schedules, and much more information.

To sign up for individual trips, contact Bob Barnes at **bbarnes@lightspeed.net**

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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

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