



The Chat



Kerncrest Audubon Society, Ridgecrest, California

May 2009

MAY CALENDAR

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| Sat | May 9 | 8am | Garage Sale |
| Sat | May 16 | 8am | Field Trip Galileo Hills |
| Tue | May 19 | 6pm | Board Meeting, Burnetts' refreshments by Middlemiss |
| Thu | May 21 | 7pm | Annual Meeting Program: Buzz Lunsford |

ANNUAL MEETING SNAKES AT THE MATURANGO

"Live snakes" will be appearing the Maturango Museum the evening of May 21st. No, we are not talking about a new rock band. We are talking about real live walking (well, crawling) snakes!

Buzz Lunsford, the Kern River Valley's extraordinary reptile expert will bring them for a show and tell lecture about our local reptiles, especially the venomous kind. One he plans to bring is a large Western Diamondback Rattlesnake.

Buzz will tell us how to be safe if you encounter a snake and to respect snakes. He points out that enzymes from venom are used to quite an extent in modern medicine.

He is the director of "Herp-ecology", established in the early 1970s to inform the public in the Southwestern States about snakes and other reptiles. The organization has established the reptile checklists for many of the National Parks and Monuments of the Southwest. They provide educational programs for schools and other organizations through the California Amphibian and Reptile Education Service (CARES). They also do reptile rescue.

Come see this fascinating presentation, sponsored by the Kerncrest Audubon Society, at the Maturango Museum at 7pm on Thursday, March 21st.

ELECTION

The meeting of May 21 will be the Kerncrest Audubon Society annual meeting. A nominating committee has proposed the following slate of officers to be voted on at that meeting:

President, Sherry Brubaker (incumbent)

Vice President, Lee Sutton (incumbent)

Treasurer, Lynne Thompson

Secretary, Nancy Robinson

Nominations will also be accepted from the floor.

GARAGE SALE

We will be holding a small (for us) garage sale at the home of the Burnetts, 735 W Sonja Avenue, on Saturday, May 9th, from 8 am to noon only. Pricing will be the day before, May 8th, also from 8 am to noon. Items may be left at that address any day that week.

Bring any items you want to contribute, but no used clothing, please. (We have no racks to handle a large amount of clothing. If you have something like a new sweater that didn't fit, that's fine.)

Or, for pickup call 375-8634.

FIELD TRIP

SILVER SADDLE RESORT AND CALIFORNIA CITY PARK

Join us for our biennial (I think that means every other year) peak migration-season trek to the desert oases of Galileo Hills and California City on Saturday, May 16th.

The migration seems to be getting under way slowly this year, so we could be in the middle of it; or, if we're lucky, the late-migration season contingent of vagrants could show up. Some seen in the past have included Worm-eating warbler, American Redstart and Least Flycatcher.

Meet near the gas station at the big Albertson's on south China Lake Boulevard at 8am. Bring a picnic lunch, hat, sunscreen and water.

For further information and to sign up, call Sherry Brubaker at 375-7245.

BIRDATHON

April 18, the day of this year's Birdathon, was absolutely gorgeous! It was a perfect day to go look at and for birds. Unfortunately, we had scheduled on the same day as the Owens Lake "big day" total bird population survey, so were missing some of our usual teams. (And some of them were just watching birds in Arizona.)

Nevertheless, the teams of the Bushtits (including a new member Annie Ewbank with great, young sharp eyes) Bob Barnes in the Kern River Valley, Denise LaBertaux in the Argus Range, and team Dan Burnett and Jane McEwan managed to spot 144 species.

Remember to mail your contributions to Kerncrest Audubon Society at PO Box 984, Ridgecrest. We need your support!



Valley Sightings Early Spring 2009

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

March

2000 **Snow Geese** at the evaporation fields Feb 28 was a large number for so late in the spring (LL). Twenty remained on Mar 16 (LL).

Turkey Vultures stacked up due to inclement weather and when the weather turned nice on Mar 5 an impressive flock of over 500 were looking for roosting spots S of Inyokern (W&IMcG).

The immature **Red-shouldered Hawk** continued at the ponds through Mar 4 (SS).

The **Osprey** at the ponds Mar 10 was our first migrant this spring (SS) and another was SW of Inyokern Mar 22 (LK). They should continue to be seen in small numbers through mid June.

The **Wilson's Snipe** first seen Feb 24 N of Inyokern remained through Mar 3 (LB).

A **Red-naped Sapsucker** was at the cemetery Feb 26 (SS).

An **Acorn Woodpecker** put in a one day appearance at the college Feb 28 (LL).

Seven **Acorn Woodpeckers** in Grapevine Canyon on Mar 28 were simply amazing to see (SS, SE). Our previous high count for the valley was 4 on Mar 3, 2002 in Indian Wells Canyon. Other highlights include **Hairy Woodpecker**, **Western Bluebird**, **Townsend's Solitaire**, **Steller's Jay**, and **White-breasted Nuthatch**.

The **Pacific-slope flycatcher** S of Inyokern Mar 15 was 3 weeks earlier than expected (SS).

Red-breasted Nuthatches continued at the college through at least Mar 24 (JS) as does the one in SE Ridgecrest through Mar 13 (LS).

Although it was missed in Jan and Feb, what is probably the same **Brown Creeper** that was first found on Nov 14 at the college was seen again Mar 11-13 (SS).

A **Phainopepla** was N of Inyokern Mar 3-5 (TM).

Cedar Waxwings were at the college Mar 14 (JS).

A pair of **Red Crossbills** was at the college Mar 13 (SS). While it appeared the female was gathering nesting material, the birds haven't been reported since.

Three **Lawrence's Goldfinches** were at the college Mar 24 (JS).

FOS sightings include **Snowy Plover** Mar 17 and **Northern Rough-winged Swallow** Mar 12 at the ponds, **Orange-crowned Warbler** Mar 30, **Bullock's Oriole** Mar 17 from S of Inyokern (SS), and **Hooded Oriole** Mar 2 from N of Inyokern (LB), **Western Kingbird** Mar 29 from the college (JS), **Black-throated Gray Warbler** Mar 31 Sand Canyon (SE), and **Brewer's Sparrow** Mar 27 from SW of Inyokern (LK).

Thanks to the following observers: *Linda Bates, Shelley Ellis, Louise Knecht, Lisa Lavelle, Wayne and Irene McGill, Terri Middlemiss, Joyce Seibold, Lee Sutton*

April

The **Brewer's Duck** (Mallard x Gadwall hybrid) was seen again at the ponds Apr 24 (SS).

The breeding plumaged **Common Loon** at the ponds Apr 2 lifted off and 6:30AM and headed north (SS).

Green Herons were SW of Inyokern Apr 11 (LK), Lark Seep Apr 18 (TM, BBu), N of Inyokern Apr 23 (TM), and at the ponds Apr 27 (SS).

Our third **Opsrey** of the spring was S of Inyokern on Apr 2 and the fourth at the ponds Apr 20 (SS). The fifth was SW of Inyokern Apr 16 (LK).

A **Peregrine Falcon** was at the ponds Apr 19-20 (TW).

The **Common Moorhen** at the ponds Apr 19 was the first seen since May 3, 2008 (TW).

A **Snowy Plover** was at the ponds Apr 15 and 22 (SS).

Three families of **Killdeer** were at the Inyokern Ponds Apr 18 (TM, BBu).

The two **Baird's Sandpipers** at the ponds Apr 9 are rare spring migrants (SS).

A **Short-billed Dowitcher** was at the ponds Apr 20 22, and 27 (SS).

Seven **Franklin's Gulls** were at the ponds Apr 19 (TW) and two more were there Apr 27 (SS).

A **Barn Owl** was at the cemetery Apr 18 (DBu).

A **Long-eared Owl** was at the college Apr 18 (JS).

A **Common Poorwill** was in the Spangler open area Apr 15 (BBu).

The **Vaux's Swift** Apr 15 in Ridgecrest has been our only report so far this spring (BB).

Two **Calliope Hummingbirds** were S of Inyokern Apr 8 (SS). The wind seemed to concentrate the hummingbirds that day and four other species were seen: Anna's, Costa's, Rufous, and Black-chinned. Apr 23 and 26-27 had the same 5 hummingbirds at this location (SS). Another **Calliope Hummingbird** was in SE Ridgecrest Apr 23 (LS).

A **Belted Kingfisher** was at the ponds Apr 20 (SS).

Two juvenile **Horned Larks** were SW of Inyokern Apr 26 (TM).

Two **Red-breasted Nuthatches** continue at the college through at least Apr 18 (JS).

Yard bird #153 N of Inyokern Apr 23 was a **Marsh Wren** (TM).

A **Phainopepla** was at the college Apr 18 (JS).

The **Painted Restart** in Wilson Canyon in the Argus Mts Apr 18 was a very rare visitor to our area (DLAB).

A "thick-billed" **Fox Sparrow** was S of Inyokern Apr 15-16 (SS) and a "slate-colored" N of Inyokern Apr 23 (TM).

The **Common Grackle** S of Inyokern Apr 22 was the 2nd valley record and the 179th species for that location (BS).

The **Red Crossbills** continue to be seen occasionally at the college (JS).

Eleven **Pine Siskins** were N of Inyokern Apr 4 (BB) with one remaining on Apr 26 (TM).

Two juvenile **Lesser Goldfinches** were N of Inyokern Apr 26 (TM).

The **American Goldfinches** in Freeman Canyon Apr 17 were the 103 species for that location (BB). **American Goldfinches** are still being seen SW of Inyokern (LK).

FOS sightings include **Western Grebe** Apr 8, **Black-crowned Night-Heron** Apr 2, **Black-bellied Plover** Apr 1,

Semipalmated Plover Apr 15, **Lesser Yellowlegs** Apr 14, **Spotted Sandpiper** Apr 16, **Whimbrel** Apr 7, **Marbled Godwit** Apr 2, **Dunlin** Apr 15, **Red-necked Phalarope** Apr 27, **Bonaparte's Gull** Apr 9, **Caspian Tern** Apr 8, **Forster's Tern** Apr 22, **Bank Swallow** Apr 6, **Cliff Swallow** Apr 9, **Chipping Sparrow** Apr 20, from the ponds (SS), **Cattle Egret** Apr 18 at the Inyokern ponds (TW, BBu), **Solitary Sandpiper** Apr 18 at the Inyokern ponds (TM, BBu), **White-faced Ibis** Apr 8, **Yellow Warbler** Apr 14, **MacGillivray's Warbler and Green-tailed Towhee** Apr 6, **Common Yellowthroat** Apr 9, **Wilson's Warbler** Apr 8, **Black-headed Grosbeak** Apr 14 from S of Inyokern (SS), **Violet-green Swallow** Apr 8 and **Lesser Nighthawk** Apr 26 from SW of Inyokern (LK), **Black-chinned Hummingbird** Apr 4 from N of Inyokern (BB), and **Ash-throated Flycatcher** and **Scott's Oriole** Apr 17 at Freeman Canyon (BB), **Dusky Flycatcher** Apr 13 at the college (SE, SS), **Nashville Warbler** Apr 23 from N of Inyokern (TM), **Warbling Vireo** Apr 18 from Sand Canyon (NR),

LOS sightings include **Snow Goose** Apr 8 from the ponds (SS)

Thanks to the following observers: *Bob Barnes, Brenda Burnett, Dan Burnett, Shelley Ellis, Louise Knecht, Denise LaBerteaux, Lisa Lavelle, Wayne and Irene McGill, Terri Middlemiss, Nancy Robinson, Joyce Seibold, Lee Sutton, Tom Wurster*

CONSERVATION CORNER by Terri Middlemiss

I have a variety of brushes that I use to clean my hummer feeders. I recently found some very nice ones at Bed, Bath and Beyond (first time in store!). They are a nice bristle brush with a cotton rag-type piece on the end. They come in a set of 3 and work very well.

I found a very good article addressing the cat people vs. bird people issue in the March/April 2009 issue of "All Animals", published by The Humane Society.

"Prowling the Divide" ("From Adversaries to Allies").

The article starts with the horrifying report of a local birding guide in Galveston, Texas, who shot a female cat who was living and being fed under a bridge. She suffered with the spinal wound for over 30 minutes before dying. The "do-gooder" claimed she was a threat to endangered "Piper (? Ed.) Plovers" nearby. Well, that set off a firestorm and escalated the birds versus cats controversy.

This is a complex issue and this is a good article which is hard to briefly summarize.

The trap-neuter-return method, "TNR" neuters and vaccinates feral cats, adopts out the tame ones and releases the rest back to where they were under the long-term oversight by local caretakers. They are not released just anywhere. Obviously, their numbers decrease through attrition, but maybe not fast enough for some. Free-roaming "owned" cats (and dogs) are also a huge problem and not well handled.

A shift has happened in Oregon, New Jersey and California. The Audubon Society of Portland, Oregon issued a press release in 2008 asking, "Is there such a thing as a cat-person or a bird-person? It's not about birds versus cats; it's about protecting birds and cats." Not to forget here that habitat loss and degradation are primary causes of the free-falling bird populations.

The New Jersey Feral Cat & Wildlife Coalition formed. Comprised of state health officials, conservation groups and animal protection groups, they "designed a protocol that balances the need to reduce feral cat populations with the need to protect rare wildlife species. The New Jersey Division of Fish & Wildlife used a computerized map to allow easy identifications of wildlife-sensitive areas. If feral colonies are within a quarter-mile of cat-vulnerable species, the groups discuss the situation and the best way of handling it, which could be TNR, relocation of the cats, or a combination of the two."

In the San Francisco Bay area, Sequoia Audubon Society and the Homeless Cat Network, identified 10 zones along the Bay Trail by Foster City where the feral cats would not be a threat to birds. They used feeding stations to gradually move cats away from wildlife-sensitive areas. By adopting out tame feral cats and sterilizing the rest, Project Bay Cat has decreased the 4-mile area's cat population by 44 percent in less than 4 years. Bird populations are thriving.

Everywhere education campaigns are popping up to encourage cat owners to keep their cats indoors. My cat magazine has a nice variety of portable outdoor enclosures for cats, to be outside and not a threat to wildlife. More people are discovering that, contrary to what the cat says, a harness and leash can also be the ticket to some time outdoors.

I learned a lot from this article and am now supportive of well-managed TNR programs. I don't like seeing feral cats live a life of hardship and I am very pro-conservation for protecting wildlife.

I am a bird watcher/avid conservationist who also is owned by cats. I have set up a "feliary" for them to enjoy the outdoors but not be a threat to birds and other wildlife. I was not always such an educated pet owner, however. (which I find hard to believe, but...) Once I got "religion" I helped 2 people build their own "feliaries", only to see them go unused. I have to deal with a neighbor's barn cats, and another one's pet visiting my bird feeders. I also have dogs running through harassing my rabbits and quail. I attempt to educate these pet owners, but I can't make them see the value of the wildlife. I keep trying.

Education and working together are keys to this cat vs. bird issue, as well as supporting conservation of habitat programs for birds.

[Note this column does not reflect the opinion of the editor, nor does it represent an official position of Kerncrest Audubon Society.]

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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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