



The Chat



Kerncrest Audubon Society, Ridgecrest, California

November 2009

NOVEMBER CALENDAR

Sat	Nov 14	7:30am	Field Trip: Audubon Kern River Preserve
Tue	Nov 17	6pm	Board Meeting, Gravelles'
Thu	Nov 19	7pm	General Meeting Program Maturango Museum

FIELD TRIP

AUDUBON KERN RIVER PRESERVE AND LAKE ISABELLA

Alison Sheehy, Outreach Director for the Audubon Kern River Preserve in Weldon, has agreed to meet us at the preserve and lead us on our November field trip. That means, if the birding isn't exceptional, there will still be lots to learn – about the botany, geology, and anything else we might see.

The trip is on Saturday, the 14th of the month.

Those of us from the Indian Wells Valley will meet at the Inyokern 76 station at 7:30. (It will have been long-light by then, as we will be off of daylight savings time.) Those from the Kern River Valley may meet us an hour later, at 8:30 am at the Preserve headquarters.

It may be very cold by then, so come prepared with jackets! Also bring something to drink, and a picnic.

Call Dan Burnett at 1-760-375-8634 to sign up.



Shelley and Larry working on a guzzler
NOVEMBER PROGRAM

WILDLIFE GUZZLERS

Survival in our harsh Mojave Desert can be touch and go for birds and other wildlife. An ambitious program run by our local Chapter of Quail Unlimited (QU) certainly improves their chances to survive and thrive here. While conducted primarily for game birds, all of our wildlife seem to benefit. The hard working members of QU maintain over 100 water sources (guzzlers) scattered across the desert. At our November program, two Indian Wells Valley residents will detail the local QU effort to build and maintain these guzzlers and will also review some research from Arizona that shows a broad array of wildlife benefit from these water sources.

Shelley Ellis is a Biologist at the Bureau of Land Management. She has B.A. Degrees in Wildlife Biology from the University of Montana and in Botany from the University of Wyoming. She has a Master's Degree in Hydrology from Colorado State University. Prior to coming to Ridgecrest, Shelley taught Math, German, and PE to a variety of grade levels in a tiny town in WY. She moved to Ridgecrest 7 years ago shortly before the fabulous spring bloom of 2003.

Larry Boyer came to Ridgecrest in 1951 and has witnessed a lot of changes in the desert. He has spent decades exploring the desert here. He worked in the Research Department for the Navy at China Lake for 36 years and is now retired. He has been a member of Quail Unlimited (QU) for 15 years and is Chairman of Habitat Improvement.

The program will include photos of various animals that visit wildlife watering structures. Shelley and Larry will discuss a study that documented a variety of wildlife dependent on guzzlers for water. Larry will talk about the history of our guzzlers and the work that QU does to maintain the guzzlers of our local desert. He will also talk about the changes he has witnessed over the past 58 years in desert springs and water sources.

This informative program will be held in our normal location, the Maturango Museum on our normal evening, the third Thursday of the month (in this case, the 19th) at our normal time of 7:00 PM. See you there.

Lee Sutton
Programs Chair
760-375-1981



Valley Sightings October 2009

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

Well, last column I wrote about how the white geese typically show up in mid-October. So, naturally on Sep 30 a **Snow Goose** turned up at the ponds. By the 5th it was joined by five more (SS). **Ross's Geese** made their arrival on Oct 13, earliest fall arrival date by three days (SS).

Giving a new meaning to the name **Wood Duck** was the bird flying through the college pines Oct 6. The bird was flying low, fast, and twisting through the trees when it popped out, saw a human, and veered back to the pines to zigzag anew. Eventually it cleared the pines and headed off to the west not to be seen again (SS).

The **Great Blue Heron** SW of Inyokern Oct 14 was a fun yard bird (LK).

A **Northern Harrier** with identifying plumage marks returned Oct 11, 20 days earlier than usual, to SW Inyokern for the 9th consecutive year (LK).

Red-shouldered Hawks were seen Oct 9 at the college (BB, SS), at the cemetery Oct 17 (BB), and at the ponds Oct 19 (SS).

A **Golden Eagle** was over the residential area of SE Ridgecrest Oct 17 (LS).

A **Herring Gull** was at the ponds Oct 6-7 (SS). We average two sightings of this species each year.

So far, it appears to be a poor year in the valley for **Long-eared Owls** with only two reports. The first was from SW Inyokern Oct 5 (LK), and the other, an injured bird, from S of Inyokern Oct 10 (MM). Little Critters in Ridgecrest took the injured bird to rehabilitate it. If you have an injured bird, please call Terri Middlemiss 377-5192, or Little Critters 371-1177.

The **Calliope Hummingbird** in Ridgecrest Oct 2 was our latest fall sighting date (JS).

The **Lewis' Woodpecker** at the college Oct 5-9 was the first seen since Nov 11, 2007(SS).

A **Red-naped Sapsucker** was first seen at the college Oct 7 (SS).

The **Downy Woodpecker** at the college Oct 7 (SS) – 18 (JS) is a rare visitor to the valley.

A late **Hammond's Flycatcher** was at the college Oct 15 (SS).

A **Red-breasted Nuthatch** was at the college Oct 5-9 (SS) and another was in SW Ridgecrest Oct 9 (LS).

A **Bewick's Wren** blew all the way into Ridgecrest on Oct 14, and became a new yard bird there (BBu)

Cedar Waxwings were at the college Oct 9-18 (BB, SS, JS).

Male **Phainopeplas** were SW of Inyokern Oct 9 (LK) and at the college Oct 15 (SS).

A **Yellow-breasted Chat** was in SE Ridgecrest Sep 30 (LS).

A "Sooty" **Fox Sparrow** was S of Inyokern Sep 30 (BS).

An **Indigo Bunting** was at the college Sep 29 (JS).

The female **Western Tanager** SW of Inyokern lingered from Oct 6-14 re-growing her tail (LK).

LOF sightings include **Baird's Sandpiper** at the ponds Oct 23 (SS), **Pectoral Sandpiper** at the ponds Oct 16 (BB), **Willow Flycatcher** at the ponds Oct 7 (SS), **Warbling Vireo** at the college Oct 15 (SS), **Black-throated Gray Warbler** SE Ridgecrest Oct 25 (LS), **Townsend's Warbler** at the college Oct 9 (SS), **Nashville Warbler** SW of Inyokern Oct 4 (LK), **Yellow Warbler** SE Ridgecrest Oct 10 (LS), **Wilson's Warbler** SE Ridgecrest Oct 10 (LS), **Black-headed Grosbeak** SW of Inyokern Oct 2 (LK),

Thanks to the following observers: *Mike Martyn, Joyce Seibold, Bob Steele, Bob Barnes, Linda Bates, Brenda Burnett, Encar Card, Terri Middlemiss, Susan Moore, Joanna Rindt, Lee Sutton*

REMINDER

Kerncrest Membership Dues

It is that time of year again to pay your membership dues. Your membership expires in January if your mailing label has this entry at the end of the last line: 1/1/10 (K). If so please send your check for \$15 for full membership or \$7 for just the Chat newsletter subscription to:

Kerncrest Audubon
P.O.Box 984
Ridgecrest, CA 93556-0984

CONSERVATION CORNER

by Brenda Burnett (pinch-hitting for Terri Middlemiss)

There are a growing number of people who recommend not feeding birds. Ever. They call themselves "eco-freaks" and think those of us who feed birds are meddling too much with the natural order of things. One of their reasons is that in feeding ground-eating birds we are encouraging an increase in the population of brown-headed cowbirds, and those cowbirds are parasitizing the nests of, and having a disastrous effect on the nesting success of, the endangered southwestern willow flycatcher (WIFL). That effect is occurring especially in the breeding population of the Mono Lake basin, as reported by biologists conducting willow flycatcher surveys for the Point Reyes Bird Observatory (PRBO), which I support.

However, in this case I think there's another side to that story. Our own Kern River Valley breeding population of willow flycatchers has not seen such a

drastic decline, possibly because there is a local (and legal, to protect an endangered species) program of trapping and "dispensing with" brown-headed cowbirds. Not so with the PRBO researchers. Instead, they are banding and releasing cowbirds, as I found out when I spotted and reported a banded one at Convict Lake campground.

But whether or not we agree with what they're doing, I think we need to remember they are doing it, and should not add to the problem when it comes time to feed or not to feed birds in the Spring. It's always fine to feed finches at hanging feeders; cowbirds can't access those. And, of course, it's fine to feed hummingbirds and the others that share their sugar-water feeders. But it's likely a good idea to scatter seed on the ground or on platform feeders for the sparrows and juncos only until we spot a cowbird in the Spring. Then stop.

If you see anyone from the PRBO Eastern Sierra project office, you might tell them there no chance they will succeed in stopping all of us from feeding birds, and you hope their "holier-than-thou" attitude doesn't result in a total crash of the local WIFL population.

THIS JUST IN: The Kern River Preserve has cut way back on feeding birds due to nest predation. Brown-headed Cowbirds have been shown to not only parasitize nests by laying eggs, they also will monitor the nests and then if the host removes its eggs, they will go and peck holes in the host eggs or even kill hatchling chicks. On top of that, Western Scrub-Jays have moved into the forest. likely as a direct result of bird feeding. One was seen predating a WIFL nest. So, as a result, we now only feed thistle. No more bird seed or suet.

New subject: Solar Energy. There was an excellent article in the LA Times on October 19th titled Environmental concerns delay solar projects in California desert. You may read that article at latimes.com/news/local/la-me-solar19-2009oct19,0,2124650.story. Or I have a paper copy.

JR. AUDUBON NOW AT TWO SCHOOLS

For the past four years Kerncrest Audubon has sponsored a Jr. Audubon Club at Faller School. Mrs. Annie Jorgensen was the teacher who sponsored the club until this year. In the spring Mrs. Jorgensen started teaching at Inyokern School and began a club there. At Faller Mrs. Shirley Crouse has taken over sponsoring the club.

The clubs are open to 3rd, 4th and 5th graders. Both clubs meet once a week before school starts in the morning. About twenty-five enthusiastic and dedicated young birders regularly attend from Faller and 15 from Inyokern. Sometimes it is hard to tell who is having the most fun, the teachers, the kids or the Kerncrest members who support the clubs.

If you would be interested in helping out with these clubs call Brenda or Dan Burnett at 1-760-375-8634.

TRIP REPORT OWENS LAKE FIELD TRIP

On possibly the nicest day of the year nine Kerncrest birders traveled to Owens Lake for a wonderful day of birding. This late in the year, October 24th, we weren't expecting much activity. This was also the first day of duck hunting season, but we saw no hunters except at the hunting club at Little Lake. Despite our concerns Owens Lake provided us a good day of birding. By the end of the day we had spotted 36 species.

At the first stop in Cartago we were greeted by a large group of about 370 American White Pelicans rising from the lake and heading south. Some in the group had never seen this many pelicans in flight. Later in the day we saw another migrating flock of about 100. Other notable sights were 6 early Greater-white-fronted Geese, American Wigeon, Greater Yellowlegs, American Avocet, a flock of Killdeer, a kiting Prairie Falcon, and Dark-eyed Junco.

During the lunch break among a mixed bunch of horses and cattle, Mountain Bluebirds gave us a good show of color.

MORE REMINDERS

It's not too late to plan to attend a couple of excellent birding festivals coming up.

First is the 13TH Annual **Central Valley Birding Symposium**, November 19-22, at the Stockton Hilton hotel, Stockton, California. Evening programs include Murrelet Halterman (our very own local expert from the Southern Sierra Research Station in Weldon) on Yellow-billed Cuckoos and Stephen Shunk on "The Magic of Birding". (BTW, Murrelet has a reputation for being a very entertaining speaker.)

Registration is available on-line at <http://www.cvbs.org>. Click on the Regonline link. Or, brochures and registration forms are available here in Ridgecrest by calling Brenda at 1-760-375-8634.

Then, in January, there's the 14th Annual **Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival**, January 15-18. This one always has great workshops, field trips, and vendors. To register and for more information about the Festival, check out their website at www.morrobaybirdfestival.org, or call (805) 772-4677. Both the brochure and online registration are available. The registration deadline is December 31, 2009 but early signups are encouraged as the most popular events fill up quickly.

PLAN AHEAD

Don't forget to schedule Christmas Bird Counts in your holiday plans! For schedules and contacts, visit <http://www.natureali.org/cbcs.htm>

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

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Includes 1 year of Audubon magazine, Local chapter membership

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MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

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____ yr Kerncrest Audubon Society Membership @ \$15/year

(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.

Clip out and mail to: Kerncrest Audubon Society

P.O. Box 984

Ridgecrest CA 93556

Kerncrest Audubon Society

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Dan Burnett	Education & Membership	375-8634
Nancy Robinson	Birdathon	375-2049
Newsletter Ed.	Brenda Burnett	375-8634
Webmaster	Noel Gravelle	375-2325
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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