



The Chat



Kerncrest Audubon Society, Ridgecrest, California

October 2011

OCTOBER CALENDAR

Wed	Oct 19	6:00 pm	Board Meeting at the Burnetts' Refreshments by Middlemiss'
Sat	Oct 22	TBD	Field Trip: Aspendell

FIELD TRIP ASPENDELL

October is a beautiful month in the Eastern Sierra Nevadas. Fall colors are at their peak, the air is crisp, and usually late summer monsoonal rains are finished.

Bob and Susan Steele have most generously offered us their "cabin" (Mansion?) in Aspendell for our October field trip. It is adjacent to a lovely meadow to bird, and its seed feeders attract many mountain species such as Mountain Chickadees, Pygmy Nuthatches and Pine Siskins. In some especially cold years the Grey-crowned Rosy Finches have descended from higher elevations and can be seen at the feeders in October.

The cabin has 2 queen-sized beds (in addition to the Steeles' bed) plus 4 bunks, 3 sofas and abundant floor space for air mattresses. There will likely be plenty of room for all who want to go. If more beds are needed, some of us can take our RVs and park them on the cul-de-sac.

Our itinerary will depend upon the weather and the interests of participants. The wetlands at Fish Slough north of Bishop are a possibility. So are higher elevations in search of Rosy Finches. If the leaves are not yet turned at Aspendell, we'll go higher to find the beautiful colors.

We'll likely eat dinner Saturday evening in Bishop, and while there buy goodies at Schat's Bakery for Sunday breakfast. (Or some folks may prefer to go down the mountain for Sunday breakfast, too.) Bring your own beverages, and lunch for Saturday and Sunday.

Come prepared for cold weather! Mornings will likely be in the 20s.

There is also the option to go just for the day on Saturday, planning to drive up early Saturday morning, bird the Steeles' deck and high elevations on Saturday and driving home after (or before) dinner in Bishop.

Call Bob Parker at 760-446-2001 for further information and to let him know if you plan to go. He will coordinate arrangements for car pools, and will accept and attempt to accommodate your ideas for the itinerary.

BACK TO SCHOOL

Kerncrest Audubon is back at school again this year. Junior Audubon Clubs are meeting again at Inyokern School and at Faller School. About sixty eager 3rd, 4th, and 5th graders meet every Tuesday morning before school to learn about birds and wildlife. The kids feed birds, watch birds, do crafts and, best of all, go on field trips to exotic places like the sewage ponds at China Lake. Many thanks go to Mrs. Jorgenson at Inyokern and Mrs. Crouse at Faller, who make these programs possible at their schools. Thanks also to KAS member volunteers Elaine Wiley, Bob Parker, Terry Middlemiss, Mike Holland, Brenda Burnett and Dan Burnett who dedicate Tuesday mornings to budding birders.

SAVE THE DATES

November's general meeting on Thursday, the 17th, will feature Reed Tollefson, manager of the Audubon California Kern River Preserve as our speaker. Reed will talk about the Southern Sierra Alliance and will bring us up to date on the Kern River Preserve.

On Saturday November 19, Noel Gravelle will lead a field trip to local birding hotspots. Wintering waterfowl should have arrived by then, and this trip will be great for beginners. Bring your friends!

ELECTRONIC CHATS

Want to save paper and receive your copy of *The Chat* by email? Send an email to webmaster@kerncrestaudubon.org and let him know. You also have the option of receiving both an electronic copy *and* a paper copy. Just tell the webmaster you would like both. (Don't feel too guilty. We can only save paper down to 200 copies, after which we lose our 3rd class mailing price.)



Valley Sightings September 2011

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

FOF for **Greater White-fronted Goose** was from the ponds Sep 16 (SLS).

Ospreys were at the ponds Sep 5 and at the old sewage ponds Sep 10 (RAB).

The **Merlin** at the old sewage ponds Sep 10 was our earliest record by five days (RAB).

A **Peregrine Falcon** was at the ponds Sep 1 and 6 (SLS).

Sanderlings were at the ponds Sep 1-5 (SLS, RAB).

FOF for **Pectoral Sandpiper** was from the ponds Sep 3 (TEW).

FOF for **Dunlin** was from the ponds Sep 24 (SLS).

Our 2nd year **Sabine's Gull** remained through Sep 6 (SLS). This bird was first seen on Aug 16 (TL). Our first juvenile **Sabine's Gull** was seen Sep 17 (TEW).

A **Common Tern** was at the ponds Sep 29 (SLS, TL).

A **White-winged Dove** was seen in Ridgecrest Sep 24 (RAB, EC). It is hard to say if this is one of those seen earlier in the year since they were last seen Aug 22.

A **Calliope Hummingbird** was S of Inyokern Oct 17 (SLS). This is within their expected fall migration window of Aug 15-Oct 2.

A **Belted Kingfisher** was at the golf course Sep 19 (SLS).

The **Eastern Kingbird** at the ponds Sep 10 was the 7th valley record and the first seen since Sep 21, 2004.

Red-breasted Nuthatch were at the college Sep 8 -20 (RAB).

A **Townsend's Solitaire** was at the college Sep 30 (SLS).

A **Virginia's Warbler** was at the college Sep 4-5 (SLS).

The valley's 4th record of **Chestnut-sided Warbler** was at the college Sep 10-17 (SK).

FOF for **Yellow-rumped Warbler** was from the college Sep 20 (SLS).

An **American Redstart** was at the college Sep 16-17 (SLS) and another was in SE Ridgecrest Sep 19 (LS).

A **Yellow-breasted Chat** was S of Inyokern Sep 16 (SLS), and another was in SE Ridgecrest Sep 25, 29-30 (LS).

A **Clay-colored Sparrow** was at the college Sep 16 (SLS).

FOF for **Vesper Sparrow** was from the old sewage ponds Sep 10 (RAB).

FOF for **White-crowned Sparrow** was from S of Inyokern Sep 17 (SLS).

A **Blue Grosbeak** was at the ponds Sep 17-19 (TEW).

A **Bobolink** was at the ponds Sep 18-19 (SLS).

Thanks to the following observers: *Robert Barnes, Encar Card, Andrew Howe, Sandy Koonce, Tim Ludwick, Lee Sutton*

HELP SAVE TURKEY VULTURES

(Article submitted by Shelley Ellis)

A few weeks ago, I was driving down Brady St. and noticed several turkey vultures roosting on top of power poles waiting for the thermals before taking off on their fall migration journey. I realized that raptors are at risk of electrocution when they use power poles as perches. Electrocution occurs when the bird's wings touch both wires simultaneously. I dashed home for my camera so I could document the vultures using the poles. I wrote down the pole numbers, which are on metal plates tacked to each pole; then I e-mailed the information to Kara Donohue of Southern California Edison. Within a couple of weeks, the poles were retrofitted with a new style of insulator that allows bird to continue to use the pole as a perch.



RAPTOR-PROOF POWER LINE INSULATORS

Electrocutions can reduce raptor populations in certain areas. Condors are taught to avoid power poles to prevent their population from declining. In 1987 only 22 California condors were left in the wild. Numbers rose through captive breeding and reintroduction programs. Today condors are subjected to mock power poles and low electrical shocks to deter perching before they are released.

Measures that minimize electrocutions also minimize power outages, saving utilities money and improving system reliability. For example, on May 9,

2000 the southern half of Portugal, including the capital Lisbon, had a massive power outage that lasted 2 hours and affected several million people. All this occurred because a raptor caused a short circuit on a power line.

Disturbed by electrocution of increasing numbers of raptors, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has stepped up enforcement of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA), the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, and the Endangered Species Act. The first utility cited for violation of the MBTA was Pacific Gas and Power of California. In 1993, the utility was fined \$1500 for violations and agreed to retrofit lines to safer standards.

Raptor electrocutions fluctuate seasonally. In the winter, power poles allow raptors to seek prey without expending energy on active hunting. In spring raptors increase their exposure to electrocution by using poles as nesting sites. Seasonal fluctuations of prey abundance also influence the number of raptors electrocuted in a particular area. Age is a significant factor in golden eagle electrocutions. Parents feed the immature eagles for the first few months after fledging. As these birds begin to hunt for themselves, they rely on stationary perches. The young eagles are inexperienced in takeoffs and landings and less adept at maneuvering than adults. Short flights from perch-to-perch, hunting from the perch, and inexperience at take-off and landing put young eagles at a high risk for electrocution.

Feathers are good insulators unless they become wet. Raptors with wet feathers are ten times as vulnerable to electrocution above 5,000 volts. Dry birds contacting live wires with their beak and foot however can still be killed at voltages below 5,000.

Many utilities reduce eagle electrocutions by providing increased conductor separation, often by providing 60-inches of separation between primary conductors. The Raptor Research Foundation recommends a minimum of 60-inch spacing between phases and phase-to-ground to minimize eagle electrocutions. A large female golden eagle can have a 90-inch wingspan. The 60-inch spacing was selected to minimize electrocutions of immature eagles when they take off or land.

If you see raptors frequently perched on certain poles or find a dead raptor under a pole, contact Kara Donahue if the lines could be owned by SCE:

Kara.Donohue@sce.com

CONSERVATION CORNER

by Terri Middlemiss

Do you know where the fish you eat come from? And how birds as well as other animals are affected? Think farmed seafood is the answer?

"The End of the Line" - "our oceans are being picked clean" . I read in many different publications about the empty oceans, the smaller catches, the

drowned albatrosses (100,000/year), other seabirds, turtles, seals, dolphins, on and on. So what about farming? Welllllll..... U.S. Aquaculture accounts for only 5% of Americans' seafood consumption (where the environmental issues are managed) . China is a huge user of aquaculture, but its recently expanded exports of catfish, shrimp and tilapia are requiring it to pack ponds more tightly, bringing on disease and pollution from fish waste, thus requiring it to use antibiotics and other drugs. The waste run-off creates dead zones and dead sea areas.

Thailand and Chile are big producers of shrimp in areas that were formerly rich mangroves, having removed those important lands for use by birds, young fish and numerous other life-forms. Now there is just pollution of nearby waters. And, the most horrifying of all is that the most popular farmed fish are carnivores, high on the food chain, thus requiring 2 lb. of wild fish meal to produce 1 lb. of farmed fish! That's insane!

What is being tried in forward-looking companies is raising a better fish, one suited to a plant-based diet, not fussy about environment nor the rigors of farming. Barramundi is the answer for one company. Fish farmers have been quietly breeding salmon and other species to grow faster and require less meal. Land farmers have been doing this with cattle, chickens and pigs for hundreds of years...The next step is genetic engineering. Are you gasping? Other countries won't. Are they more practical? The new transgenic trout can pack on 15-20% more muscle than a conventional one.

There are no easy answers. Just as I saw in Ireland and Scotland, where former fishermen are now leading bird and seal life watching tours in their boats, where they proudly show their salmon pens in the harbors - I don't have enough information to judge whether it is a good thing or not. But these men are out of work and others are "in" work tending the huge pens. I eat very little seafood as a boycott and miss it, especially shrimp, but like a vegetarian does, I made a choice. If we still want seafood are we going to accept different fish varieties, GM fish, pay more for sustainable wild-caught fish? Educate yourself and make the wisest choices you can. Maybe influence others.

Thanks to "Time" magazine, July 18, 2011.

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P.O. Box 984

Ridgecrest CA 93556

Kerncrest Audubon Society

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Webmaster	Noel Gravelle	375-2325

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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