

The Chat



Kerncrest Audubon Society, Ridgecrest, California

September 2007

SEPTEMBER CALENDAR

Thu	Sep 13	6pm	Board Meeting, Brubakers'
Thu	Sep 20	7pm	General Meeting: WindEnergy
Fri	Sep 28	7:30am	Field Trip: Little Lake
Fri	Sep 28	5pm	Turkey Vulture Festival begins

SEPTEMBER PROGRAM: WIND ENERGY

Alternatives to fossil fuel are being pushed strongly by both our Federal and State governments. A Bureau of Land Management Instruction Memorandum of April 4th, 2007, to all Field Officials is a good example. It says "...The BLM's general policy is to facilitate environmentally responsible commercial development of solar energy projects on public lands and to use solar energy systems on BLM facilities where feasible..." It further states "...applications for solar energy development projects will be identified as a high priority Field Office workload and will be processed in a timely manner..."

It just so happens that we live in a region that is rich in alternative energy sources, not only solar but also geothermal and wind. All of these sources have various and significant impacts on the habitat of our desert wildlife, including resident and migrating birds. As we at Audubon grapple with the impact (mostly negative) on our wild life habitat, we must keep in mind that loss of some habitat here will help alleviate other major concerns such as global warming (which will impact wildlife in many ways, probably mostly negatively) and the USA dependence on foreign oil. Mining coal is also extremely bad for habitat. These are not simple issues.

Our September program at 7 PM on the 20th at the Maturango Museum will give us an opportunity to address these issues with representatives of the wind energy industry. Linda Parker, Executive Director of the Kern Wind Energy Association, and Ed Duggan, a representative of the industry itself will present a brief history and current status of the wind energy industry in general and in Tehachapi in particular. Also they will give their perspective about the future of the Wind industry. Further they will address what the industry has done to minimize the impact on the habitat and wildlife, especially as it relates to birds. Expect a lively question and answer session.

Lee Sutton
Programs Chair

FIELD TRIP: LITTLE LAKE

Now is our chance to bird the wetlands and sage scrub around Little Lake from up close, in the height of migration season!

The caretakers of the ranch and Great Basin Foundation wildlife preserve at Little Lake have graciously invited us to bird the area and have lunch on Friday, September 28th. We'll meet at the Inyokern post office at 7:30, and plan to be at the ranch gate at 8am. We'll bird until about 11:30, then have lunch at the ranch house (where we can also go inside and see the wonderful collection of preserved waterfowl shot by Foundation members at the lake, including some unusually-plumaged specimens.) Then we'll proceed via a shortcut through a private gate to the BLM overlook above the lake to watch careening, migrating swallows and swifts at eye-level.

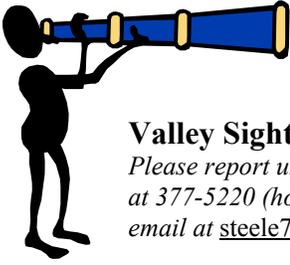
Lunch will be \$5 per person, with water provided. (Last time I was there, the lunch was delicious! Ed.) Bring your own drinks if you want something other than water (and bring extra water to drink along the way.)

The trip will be led by Susan Steele, and will be a joint field trip with the Eastern Sierra Audubon we'll be limited to 20 people, so sign up early! Those going from the Indian Wells Valley will car pool from Inyokern to minimize traffic at the ranch. Call Brenda Burnett to sign up, at (760) 382-4935, or leave a message at (760) 375-8634.

TURKEY VULTURE FESTIVAL

The 13th Annual Kern River Valley TURKEY VULTURE FESTIVAL begins with the vulture drop-in on Friday, September 28, and continues with two full days of field trips, events and festivities (including music) at the Kern River Preserve in Weldon. From the website: "The Kern River Valley Turkey Vulture Festival celebrates the height of fall Turkey Vulture migration through California's 'Valley Wild', the Kern River Valley. One of the two largest known migration sites in North America (north of Mexico) – seven-thousand six-hundred sixty-four Turkey Vultures were counted during the 4-day festival in 2004. ...Our late September festival dates also correspond with what is historically one of the finest weekends for observing fall land bird migration in California. ...This year we offer Booths/Exhibits/Children's Activities at the Kern River Preserve as well as field trips."

For a complete description of field trips and activities, and an opportunity to sign up for field trips, visit http://kern.audubon.org/tvfest_activities.htm



Valley Sightings –June - July 2007

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

The shorebird excitement continues with another new valley species. This time it was a **Hudsonian Godwit** at the ponds June 7-8 (SS). This makes 361 species for the valley and 287 at the ponds.

The **Clark's Grebe** at the ponds June 7 was unexpected for the date (SS).

The **American White Pelican** at the ponds June 7-8 was later than expected (SS).

The **Wood Duck** at the Inyokern ponds June 9 was our first June record and the second was at the ponds June 22 (SS).

The female **Common Goldeneye** at the ponds June 2 was later than expected (AH).

Bufflehead are not expected in the valley in the summer, so the male at the Inyokern ponds Apr 22 through June 23 was a surprise (SS, BS).

A basic plumaged **Common Loon** was at the ponds June 7-8 (SS).

The **Marbled Godwit** at the ponds June 11-14 was a rare June visitor (SS).

A worn adult **Semipalmated Sandpiper** was at the ponds Aug 1 (MSM).

South bound migration for shorebirds begins early, often before the official start of summer. This year the first **Long-billed Curlew** was on June 7, **Marbled Godwit** and **Spotted Sandpiper** on June 11, **Willet** on June 20, **Greater Yellowlegs** on June 21, and **Western Sandpipers** on June 22.

Franklin's Gulls were seen through June 14 (SS).

A female **Northern Harrier** was observed carrying food at the ponds June 4 and a male was seen with food on June 13. This indicates nesting in the valley (SS).

Cooper's Hawks were SW of Inyokern through the summer (LK) and in SE Ridgecrest July 3 and 11 (LS).

The five juvenile **Common Moorhens** at the ponds July 6 are only the 2nd breeding record for the valley (WF, CH).

Two juvenile **Burrowing Owls** were first noted with the adults June 7 SW of Inyokern (LK).

Band-tailed Pigeons are rarely recorded on the valley floor, so the one in Ridgecrest July 5 was a good find (JB).

Two **White-winged Doves** were noted in Ridgecrest June 10 with an attempt at nest building on June 20 (LT). This attempt was not carried through though one of the birds remained through July 10. While this species has been seen every summer since at least 1992 this is the first nesting attempt.

The first south bound **Rufous Hummingbird** was seen in Ridgecrest June 18 (EC). This is a week earlier than our previous first fall record.

An **Ash-throated Flycatcher** was in SE Ridgecrest July 30 (LS).

A **Common Poorwill** was SW of Inyokern May 17-20 (SM).

On June 24 at the college were a **Red-breasted Nuthatch** and a female **Western Tanager**. While the Western Tanager would seem to be a late north bound migrant, the timing on the Red-breasted Nuthatch defies explanation. (SS, SE).

A **House Wren** was in SE Ridgecrest July 20 (LS).

American Robins were nesting in Ridgecrest this June (JS). These are rare breeders in the valley. Over the last several years we've averaged about a nest attempt a summer. Another Robin was in SE Ridgecrest July 22 (LS).

The female **Blackpoll Warbler** at the ponds June 8 was the 6th valley record. This species is a vagrant species in the fall but completely unexpected in spring (SS).

The first **Hermit Warbler** of the fall was from the college July 28 (JS). This is a week earlier than our previous first fall sighting.

The **Black-headed Grosbeaks** SW of Inyokern through June 12 were later than expected for spring migrants (LK) and the first fall migrant was July 22 in Ridgecrest (JS, LS).

The **Blue Grosbeak** at the ponds June 21 was a rare summer transient (SS).

The male **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** N of Inyokern June 14 was our latest spring sighting date (TM). Later in the day while looking for the male, a female was discovered (AS).

A male **Indigo Bunting** was SW of Inyokern May 20 (SM).

The four **Lazuli Buntings** and one **Orange-crowned Warbler** at the ponds June 18 were unexpected and it is hard to say if they were heading north or south. One of the male Lazuli Buntings was still around and singing at the ponds June 21 (SS).

The first south bound **Western Tanager** was from SE Ridgecrest July 15 (LS).

A pair of **Scott's Oriole** was SW of Inyokern through July 8 (SM, LK).

The **Scott's Oriole** at the ponds July 6 was the 288 species for that location (WF, CH).

Thanks to the following observers: Bob Barnes, Judy Breitenstein, Encar Card, Andrew Howe, Louise Knecht, Susan Moore, Mike San Miguel, Ali Sheehy, Lee Sutton, Lynne Thompson

August 2007

An adult **Semipalmated Sandpiper** was at the ponds Aug 1 (MSM) and a juvenile was seen Aug 17 (SS).

The locally uncommon **Common Tern** was at the ponds Aug 23 (SS).

A **Peregrine Falcon** was at the ponds Aug 14 and 27 (SS).

A juvenile **Red-shouldered Hawk** was W of Ridgecrest Aug 23-26 (PP).

The **Canvasback** at the ponds Aug 23 was our first August record of the species (SS).

Long-eared Owls returned to SW Inyokern on Aug 21 (LK).

It has been a good month for **Red-breasted Nuthatches** with reports from SE Ridgecrest Aug 4 and 28 (LS), N of Inyokern Aug 26 (LA) and three at the college Aug 26 (JS).

A **White-winged Dove** continues to be seen almost daily in Ridgecrest (LL, LT).

House Wrens were seen SW of Inyokern Aug 11- 21 (LK).

First of Fall include: **Sharp-shinned Hawk** Aug 26 at the college (JS), **Olive-sided Flycatcher** Aug 11 at the college (SS), **Willow Flycatcher** Aug 10 S of Inyokern (SS), **Pacific-slope Flycatcher** Aug 20 at the college (JS), **Warbling Vireo** Aug 26 at the college (JS), **Blue-gray Gnatcatcher** Aug 11 at the college (SS), **Orange-crowned Warbler** Aug 6 SE Ridgecrest (LS), **Nashville Warbler** Aug 11 at the college (JS), **Yellow Warbler** and **Common Yellowthroat** Aug 1 at the ponds (MSM), **Black-throated Gray** and **MacGillivray's Warbler** Aug 20 at the college (JS), **Wilson's Warbler** Aug 9 SE Ridgecrest (LS), **Blue Grosbeak** Aug 30 SE Ridgecrest (LS), **Lazuli Bunting** Aug 1 at the ponds (MSM),

Thanks to the following observers: Linda Andrews, Louise Knecht, Mike San Miguel, Pam Pritchard, Joyce Seibold, Lee Sutton, Lynne Thompson

Conservation Corner

By Terri Middlemiss

I had 2 months this summer of Rufous Hummers zooming around the yard creating chaos and filling the air with their boisterous calls. It was great! I miss them, but I'm sure the residents don't. I hope you enjoyed this year's intense migration of those Rufous. The Orioles left early and I miss their cheery calls. I still have 1 of 3 Willow Flycatcher juveniles in my yard. It was fun listening to them practice their "fitz bews".

I hope you join Cornell Lab. of Ornithology's Project FeederWatch this winter. You collect data November through March and give it to them electronically or on paper. It costs only \$15 and you get a great report from the season's findings.

This is only one of several very valuable Citizen Science Projects that you can participate in. One you are already familiar with is The Great Backyard Bird Count done in February. This year they had a record-breaking number of birds reported leading to this statement –"There has never been a more detailed snapshot of a continental bird-distribution profile in history." And some of you were part of that!

Their *Birdscope* publication gives great reports on how our citizen input can give answers to bird questions like "Why do House Sparrow number rise, then fall?" It seems that House Finches outcompete them. Great news! Part of the science to prove this came from us reporting the decline of House Finches in the mid-90s when an eye disease caused a Finch die-off and House Sparrows rebounded from their decline. Then, as Finches regained their foothold, House Sparrows again declined. I don't know what is happening locally, but several of us have noticed that the usual August re-gathering of House Sparrows at our feeders is not happening. Are the desert native House Finches showing their native toughness?

Visit them at www.birds.cornell.edu, and www.ebird.org and www.birdcount.org for a start. You might choose to also participate in their Birdhouse Network study, or the Urban Bird Studies (which has acquainted urban kids with nature through birds)

PLANNING MEETING

The Kerncrest Audubon Society Board of Directors' planning meeting was held at new President Sherry Brubaker's house on August 28th and conducted with great success. For one thing, new Field Trip Coordinator Bob Barnes made us get organized and plan field trips for the whole season. His fresh ideas also made us get out of the rut

of going the same places year after year. Among the new trips: Tillie Creek campground in January, to be led by John Schmitt, and Atwell Island BLM Preserve in the bed of ancient Tulare Lake to be hosted by Steve Laymon, manager of the Preserve restoration project, in February. In March we'll go to Mojave Narrows Regional Park in Victorville, a place we've been before but not for many years, and In May we'll return to Deep Springs College, another haunt from many years ago and a good place and time for vagrants. A complete schedule will be included in next month's issue of the Chat.

In addition, new Vice President and Program Coordinator Lee Sutton has lined up an impressive list of programs for the year. They include, after this month's interesting topic of Wind Energy, two programs in November: an update on Owens River water issues by Mike Prather; and a joint program with the Sierra Club, the Maturango Museum, and Heifer International on Quetzals in Guatemala. In January Bob Steele will share photographs of birds from his recent trip to Australia, and in March Steve Laymon will describe restoration work on the Atwell Island Preserve (see also the February field trip.)

WATCH THESE PAGES for exact dates and more detailed descriptions of events.

CENTRAL VALLEY BIRDING SYMPOSIUM

The following information came in an email from Cheryl Pillsbury of the Central Valley Birding Symposium, which is scheduled for Nov 15-18 at the Sheraton Stockton, CA. I'm running it this early, because this is a great symposium, and events and workshops fill up early. From Cheryl:

"Our evening programs include Joe Morlan- "Digiscoping for Fun and Science: Confessions of a Reluctant Photographer", and Laura Erickson's "Owls- the Inside Story". We have many workshops such as, "Birding By Ear- Visually" by Arch McCallum, an e-Bird primer with Brian Sullivan, and one of Jon Dunn's famous birding ID tutorials. Clay Taylor is giving a digiscoping workshop and leading a post-Symposium field trip on Monday the 19th. Jon Dunn is leading a gull field trip on Monday as well.

"We have programs for beginning birders and for people who want to make their gardens bird-friendly. The Birder's Market is full of artists and vendors with bird and nature related items to take your breath away (and they also take credit cards). Test your ID skills along with the experts at the Bird ID Panel. And we've planned much, much more...

"For more info, check the website at www.cvbs.org, or contact Frances Oliver at hummer52@sbcglobal.net or (209) 369-2010.

"Come and we promise you a great time. See you there!"