

For the birds: Mono Lake and the Mono Basin

by Lisa Cutting

To the casual tourist driving along the shoreline of Mono Lake it may not seem readily apparent that the Mono Basin is home to millions of birds. But if you're adventurous enough and willing to travel beyond the paved road down to the lake, quite a treat awaits you.

California Gulls, Eared Grebes, phalaropes, American Avocets, Western Sandpipers—the list goes on and on. And the reason is simple. In addition to providing a permanent home for nearly 100 species of birds, Mono Lake is also a major migratory bird staging area for approximately 200 different species. These birds depend on Mono Lake as a critical food source—feeding on brine shrimp and the alkali flies before continuing their intercontinental journeys.

With the significance of Mono as

critical habitat clear, in 1991 the lake became an international member of the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN). WHSRN's goal is a commitment to shorebird conservation and the protection of valuable wetland areas critical to migratory birds in North and South America.

But that is not enough. The tributary streams and upland sagebrush of the Mono Basin also provide important habitat for species such as the Yellow Warbler, Song Sparrow, Warbling Vireo, and Sage Grouse. Recognizing this, the Mono Lake Committee has just recently nominated the Mono Basin as an Important Bird Area (IBA) through the National Audubon Society—California. If granted, the designation would be another way of formally recognizing this area's global significance to healthy populations

of resident and migratory birds.

Currently, our IBA application is under review by both Audubon—California and the American Bird Conservancy. It is important to note that the IBA program is not regulatory nor does it create any additional management restrictions. The purpose of the designation is to systematically identify areas important for birds. By promoting good land stewardship and management practices, the Mono Basin will remain healthy and functioning. And whether the Basin provides a permanent home or a rest and a meal, birds will be able to depend on this corner of the world for what they need. ↪

Lisa Cutting is the Committee's Environmental Resource Coordinator. She is gearing up for her first complete winter in the Mono Basin!

Birders from England explore Mono's shores

Mono Lake's renown as an excellent spot for birdwatching continues to spread world wide! Over Labor Day weekend, this group of 16 bird enthusiasts from the United Kingdom explored several sites at the lake as part of a larger California birding expedition. Birdwatching Magazine editor David Cromack (kneeling, center) and crew were as knowledgeable about the lake and its avian migrants as many California visitors!

Their visit not only underscores Mono's spot on the list of key California natural areas, it also is an example of the benefits to the local economy of lake protection. In fact, local business owners have happily noted increasing numbers of visitors focused on bird watching and photography, particularly in the slower economic shoulder seasons.



Photo by Geoffrey McQuilkin