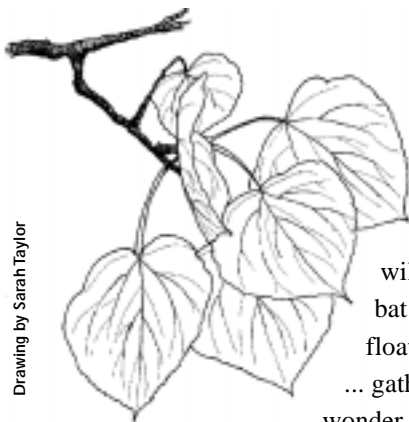


Naturalist notes

A Mono Basin chronicle



Drawing by Sarah Taylor

July: adult Bald Eagles over Lundy Canyon a Western Kingbird down on Lee Vining Creek ... an Osprey spotted on Mill Creek ... a Great Blue Heron down on Rush Creek ... Violet Green Swallows nesting on the Mono Lake Committee building ... high country wildflowers that take your breath away all the way up to the San Joaquin ridge ... a long-eared bat found on the bluff above Mill Creek ... trout fingerlings spotted on lower Rush Creek ... floating in Mono Lake is heavenly as thousands of phalaropes flock, bank, and stream overhead ... gathering at the mouth of Lee Vining Creek they occasionally lift-off in such large numbers you wonder if they're rising or if you're dropping ... Red-shouldered Hawk soaring over Reversed Peak ...

August: Sun cups (*Camissonia*) blooming along with Rubber Rabbitbrush (*Chrysothamnus nauseosus*) in the pumice flats below Black Point ... a solitary sulfur butterfly on Paoha Island ... two Caspian Terns mixing in with California Gulls on Java Islet, and a lone Franklin's Gull as well ... a Northern Goshawk, a Golden Eagle, and a Peregrine Falcon all spotted by Outdoor Experiences groups ... Canada Geese, Black-necked Stilts, and American Avocets all on the north shore ... several dozen Black Terns

Aurora borealis seen over Mono Lake

This account came from Committee member Richard Beebe of Tracy. Thank you for letting us know about this unusual sighting!

On the calm, cool night of August 10-11, I had the wonderful pleasure of observing an unexpected aurora borealis over the shore of Mono Lake. This occurred during the expected annual Perseid meteor shower overhead—two very different and contrasting celestial shows—until 03:30AM, occurring under a nearly full moon!

I was first aware of something above some of the tufa around 01:30AM: soft, faint (in the bright moonlight) vertical lines above some of the tufa formations. All I knew was that they weren't meteor trails, which were common that night, and have a very different appearance.

At around 03:45AM I became aware of the aurora lights "dancing" above the lake in the dark sky, and realized what had been seen two hours earlier! They extended from the northwest (to above Conway Summit) all the way to the eastern Anchorite Hills horizon. To the northeast, towards magnetic north, the lights reached about 20 degrees off the horizon, upward to just beyond halfway to the elevation of the "North Star," Polaris.

I didn't perceive any strong visual colorations, mainly very soft pastels, but I was aware of the vertical curtain appearance, as they drifted seemingly ever-so-slowly in an eastward moving arc. The lights faded only with the approaching dawn light, growing from the east.

During the light show the meteors were still blazing across the skies, radiating from the constellation Perseus, in nearly all compass directions. Many left brilliant trails in their wake, fast and long; dazzling lines.

spotted darting amongst the tufa on the south shore ... three Brants spotted off the County Park boardwalk early one morning ... a Northern Pygmy Owl along Lee Vining Creek was quite a rare sight for the middle of the afternoon ... Black-necked Stilts behaving as if they've got a nest they're protecting down at County Park ... seemingly unafraid White-tailed Ptarmigan in the high country just south of North Peak ...

September: Birds birds and more birds ... Forster's Terns in winter plumage between South Tufa and Navy Beach ... two Soras and one Virginia Rail seen amongst the tufa ... and close to 100 American White Pelicans circling overhead ... three White-faced Ibis seen flying low over the lake ... a bobcat bounding across the highway late one night ... mountain lion spotted down at the County Park ... and two Great Blue Herons perched atop two tufa towers look like they're wondering where the fish are, luckily some friendly Committee canoe tour guides gave them directions to Walker Lake in Nevada!