

Mono Basin Definitely An Important Bird Area

Official Designations Recognize Global Significance of Mono Lake

by Lisa Cutting

The American Bird Conservancy and the Audubon Society have recently confirmed what Mono Lake enthusiasts have known for quite a while—the Mono Basin is important to birds. Through separate programs, both organizations have officially designated the Mono Basin as an Important Bird Area (IBA).

Important Bird Areas are just what the name implies—areas that are important to birds. Habitat that provides nesting and feeding opportunities is increasingly difficult for birds to find. The IBA program is a way to systematically identify critical habitat areas and educate others as to their importance.

After sites are identified and officially designated, land managers are inclined to continue practices that promote healthy bird habitat. The program imposes no regulations, restrictions, or costs. In fact, with the increasing popularity of recreational birding, IBA

designation may help to boost the economies of local communities.

So why is the Mono Basin important for birds?

- Mono Lake is a critical stopover for birds traveling the Pacific Flyway. As many as 1.8 million Eared Grebes stop in the fall, doubling or even tripling their weight before continuing to the Salton Sea and the Gulf of California. Over a hundred thousand phalaropes (Wilson's and Red-necked) descend upon Mono Lake in the summer and then fly 3,000 miles (4828 km) non-stop to their South American wintering grounds.
- Islands within Mono Lake support 70–80% of California's nesting population of California Gulls (between 44,000–65,000 individuals). In fact, Mono Lake is the second-largest California Gull rookery in the world after Utah's Great Salt Lake.

- Mono Lake's dynamic shoreline, lagoons, and ponds attract numerous shorebirds including Caspian Terns, Snowy Plovers, Least and Western Sandpipers, and American Avocets.
- And Mono Lake's recovering tributary creeks provide riparian habitat for migratory and resident songbirds. This is especially important for some species—such as Yellow Warblers, Wilson's Warblers, Warbling Vireos, and Willow Flycatchers—as their numbers have significantly declined in other regions of California.

Mono Lake and birds—it's a wonderful combination. But don't take our word for it. Come see for yourself why Mono Lake is so special. ❖

Lisa Cutting is the Committee's Acting Eastern Sierra Policy Director. She recently got an adorable Golden Retriever puppy named Abbey.



A Snowy Plover guarding its clutch at Mono Lake.