

Special Half-Day Field Trips

A Fitting Way to Celebrate the Mono Lake Committee's 25th

by Sally Gaines



Let's get in the way-back machine and go back to the summer of 1978 when we first lead field trips at Mono Lake. This summer we will be reenacting the original half-day tour: starting at Mono Lake County Park at 8AM walking down the boardwalk to the shore, then caravanning to Panum Crater for a short hike to the rim, then motoring

down to South Tufa area for a canoe paddle and a dip, finishing up by 1PM. And if you'd like to stick around, we'll head over to the Mono Cone for lunch.

Some things will be different from 25 years ago. Walking down to the muddy shore at the County Park we'll be on a wooden boardwalk and the tufa mountain we sat on to birdwatch is now an island. The highway passes over formerly desiccated creeks that now sing with water and life. South Tufa has a parking lot, interpretive signs, pathways and a restroom.

In 1978 these free field trips were our way of introducing people to the lake. The area was little known in those days: no signs, no State Park, or Forest Service Visitor Center. We realized in order to save the lake, it needed a bigger and well-informed constituency, so we

invited people to come learn first hand about geology, botany, and natural and unnatural history.

Back then we were camping, so you had to mail in your reservation. Nowadays, we have phones and email, so make reservations soon, as group size is limited. Wear walking shoes, sun hat, bring a snack, water and swim togs for a float in the brine. Contact Events Coordinator Shannon Nelson (shannon@monolake.org) at (760) 647-6114.

Tour dates are June 28, July 27, August 23, and September 14. If you were on a tour in 1978, please join me again to share your reminiscences—and if you missed the tours back then, here's your chance to catch up! I look forward to seeing you. ❖

Mono Basin Sage Grouse Listing Denied But Conservation Planning Could Restore Sagebrush Habitat

by Greg Reis

Sage Grouse are a fascinating game bird native to sagebrush habitats in the Great Basin. Populations of these birds have declined throughout their range, mostly due to habitat loss and degradation.

Since May 14, 1999, seven petitions

have been submitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to list various populations of Sage Grouse as threatened or endangered. On December 28, 2001, the Institute for Wildlife Protection submitted a petition to emergency list what it called the "Mono Basin population of the Greater Sage Grouse." Most local biologists who work with the birds agree that is an inaccurate term for the population, since most of the populations in the area also occur outside the Mono Basin. The largest population is in Long Valley, and while not enough research has been done to establish the relationships between the populations, some genetic distinctiveness has been found.

The Fish and Wildlife Service published a "90-day finding" in the Federal Register on December 26, 2002 that the information

presented in the petition for the "Mono Basin Population" was not substantial. For other populations, one other petition resulted in the same determination, two resulted in Candidate Status, and two have had no determinations due to insufficient funds. A March 19 submission based on two prior ones has not yet been decided upon.

The Mono Lake Committee, local agencies, and other stakeholders are participating in a bi-state conservation planning effort initiated by the State of Nevada. The goal is to develop a plan that has targeted conservation strategies for each population. Regardless of the population's name or legal status, this effort has the potential to initiate restoration and better management of upland sagebrush habitats in the Mono Basin.

