

# Mono Basin Journal

A Roundup of Quiet Happenings at Mono Lake

by Geoffrey McQuilkin

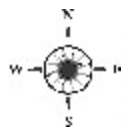


**M**any mysteries lurk at Mono Lake, and one recently crawled across my hand. A small tan spider, no more than a quarter-inch in size, made a quick trip from finger to finger and then disappeared back into the grey pumice pebbles that mark the lake's 1999 high water mark. A closer look revealed dozens of arachnid compatriots in and among the small stones. What might they be doing there, what do they eat, and who eats them? The questions are easy to ask, the answers harder to find. Mono Lake natural history lore offers little help. Mono expert entomologist Dave Herbst can give you a day's briefing on the developmental phases of alkali flies at the lake, but as to the spiders there was not much to be said; they are, he responded philosophically, "another Mono mystery awaiting the eye of science."

The fire that swept down from the Lundy powerhouse in late April, narrowly missing Mono City and blazing across Conway Ranch, was noticed by just about everyone; who could miss the thirty-foot flames crossing the road, the blackened terrain left behind, the four-hour shutdown of the highway, or the two-day power outage? In the midst of the firelines, though, less noticed events occurred. While volunteer firemen and Forest Service pros alike kept watch for spot fires caused by wind-borne embers, blackbirds flew past the flames and patrolled nearby ground. Much more concerned with an easy meal than the human structures nearby, they dined on the gourmet palette of insects fleeing the flames that burned through sagebrush, bitterbrush, and power poles alike. ❖



*May 1998, the newly installed lake level gauge—in anticipation of the lake's rise. Lake level: 6383'*



*May 2003, lake level: 6382'. Yearly fluxuations in the lake level were anticipated in the Water Board Order, which is one of the reasons why the future average lake level of 6392 is projected to take 20 more years.*



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