

EDUCATION IN FOCUS

FIELD SEMINARS

by Bartshé Miller

Every year the Mono Lake Committee offers a field seminar program designed to provide focused and specialized education opportunities within the Mono Basin and Eastern Sierra. The Committee's field seminar program began in 1979 when David Gaines, David Winkler, and John Harris offered a handful of weekend field seminars for between \$30 and \$40. Considering the consumer price index, the value of the dollar in 2004 vs. 1979, the relative cost of field seminars has remained exactly the same. Unlike 25 years ago, today there's much more to choose from.

The Committee's field seminar program represents an eclectic mix of natural history, art, and physical activity. This year participants can learn how to flyfish, band California Gull chicks, photograph tufa towers amidst winter fog, identify an alpine elephant heads flower, or paddle a kayak on Mono Lake. You might also learn to weave a Paiute coil basket, or compare the difference between a spring white and a checkered white butterfly. There is a chance to see aspen carvings made by Basque sheepherders, observe Pinyon Jays among Lewis's Woodpeckers, or catch a glimpse of the elusive Sierra Nevada Bighorn Sheep.

The field seminars offer a world of learning at Mono Lake, with some of the best field instructors in California.

The seminar program is home-spun, built from a community of Mono Lake friends and supporters—people who are passionate about Mono Lake, science, and art. They are excellent teachers, and have a wealth of experience or knowledge in their field. Instructors include: John Wehausen, the veteran biologist and acknowledged expert on the federally endangered Sierra Nevada Bighorn Sheep; Lucy and Julia Parker, two of the few remaining skilled and experienced, native basket weavers in California; Dave Shuford, a PRBO Conservation Science biologist with over twenty years of research experience in the field; and Ann Howald, a consulting botanist and leading expert on Eastern Sierra flora.

Some of the seminars are hugely popular and fill quickly. Seminars are open to everyone, but Committee Members get advance notice through the *Newsletter*, and thus get the first opportunity to register.

Seminars are designed for learning in the field where participants and instructors can exchange knowledge. Learning need not be a one-way relationship, and there is a sense of camaraderie among field seminar participants. People have ample opportunity to socialize, and share experiences and knowledge.

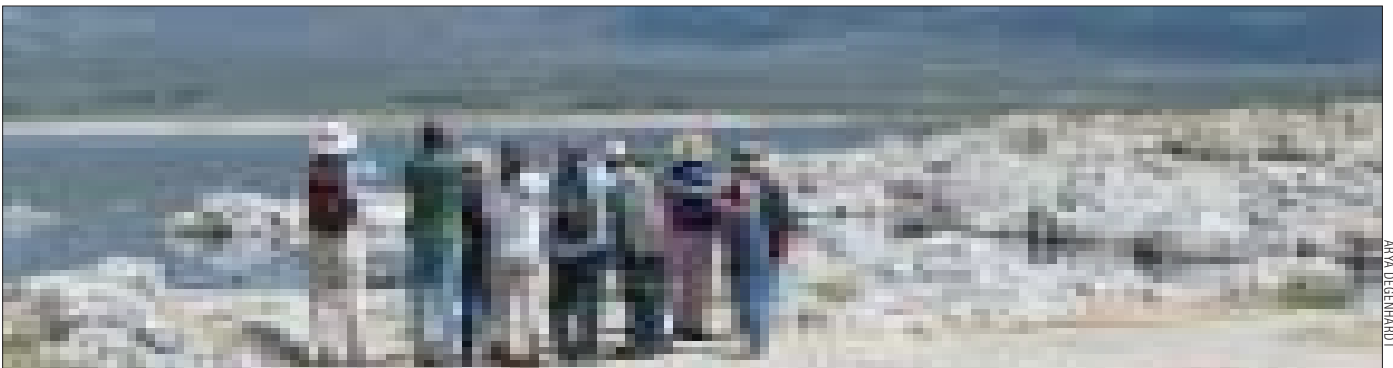
Who participates in field seminars?

Typically it's professionals, retirees, or semi-retired individuals and couples, but locals and students also take the field seminars. In the last year, participants included doctors, teachers, business owners, lawyers, junior college instructors, engineers, biologists, nurses, artists, a navy climate modeler, a non-profit executive director, a geologist, and a Caltrans employee.

Proceeds from the field seminars benefit education and research at Mono Lake. In some cases, seminar proceeds also benefit other regional organizations with parallel interests. In 2004 the Mono-Bodie Photography field seminar will co-benefit the Friends of Bodie, while the Sierra Nevada Bighorn Sheep seminar will also benefit the Sierra Nevada Bighorn Sheep Foundation.

If you're looking for an atypical experience in the Eastern Sierra, and a chance to broaden your knowledge in a specific subject—whether artistic or intellectual—sharing humor, or new experiences, sign up for a Mono Lake Committee field seminar. For more information, or to register for a seminar you see in this *Newsletter*, call (760) 647-6595. ❖

Bartshé Miller is the Committee's Education Director. He is gearing up for the coffeehouse season at the Latte Da Cafe next door.



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