

# Mono Basin Journal

A Roundup of Quiet Happenings at Mono Lake

by Geoffrey McQuilkin



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The first yellow leaf drifted past in August, but we all ignored it—at the office we agreed that it was too soon for autumn. And it was, though the usual excuses about drought stress causing trees to drop their leaves didn't carry much weight in this wet year. Then the first of September took the thermometer to freezing overnight, and suddenly we're into a transition out of summer that can't be denied. Gloriously sunny days still allow shorts and T-shirts—as long as you pack much warmer wear for the evening. Crisp mornings speak of new weather patterns on the way. And the trees keep track of it all; more than a few yellow leaves lie on the road now. I'll ignore them for a week or two more, until the aspen groves light up with red, orange, and yellow colors. Then the time to celebrate fall will truly be at hand.

Not, apparently, that my garden will last that long. Growing vegetables in the Mono Basin is a constant race against frost,

and last night was the finish line. The victories were in the asparagus and peas already eaten; the photo finish was in the attempt to harvest the almost-ripe tomatoes from the vine before the 24° night turned them into solid rocks. So I got to learn some new things about frost damage as I worked out under the stars to clip a few as-yet-unfrozen fruits from their stems. Such as, did you know that tomato plants look vibrant and healthy when frozen solid? It's not until the morning thaw that they turn black and wilted. In addition, the frozen, serrated leaves of a zucchini plant can reasonably be considered weapons, given their ability to slice one's leg. Still, with the stars of Orion rising in the east and coyotes wailing off somewhere near Black Point beneath the first hints of morning light, who can really begrudge the cycle of the seasons? Bring on autumn, the migratory birds, the winter snows; Mono Lake is ready for it all. ❖

## Mono Basin Field Station—Personal Tours Available

The Mono Basin Field Station has been a lively place this summer! You may remember that two summers ago, the Mono Lake Committee bought the Kings Inn, a 16-unit motel. The goal of the Field Station is to support scientific research in the Mono Basin through providing much-needed and difficult-to-find housing for researchers. We have been gradually turning the facility into living quarters and workspace for visiting scientists.

This past spring and summer eleven scientists worked on a wide range of avian and vegetation studies. During the winter the number of researchers doing field work dwindles, but some remain, such as PRBO Conservation Science with various bird-related studies in the Mono Basin and Eastern Sierra, and



the US Geological Survey researchers are working on the Greater Sage Grouse project.

We would love for you to see our “work in progress.” And yes, we are looking for financial support to pay off the \$600,000 mortgage and an estimated \$400,000 of refurbishing expenses. But whether you can contribute a million dollars or nothing, please contact me to set up a half-hour tour of the Field Station if your trip brings you to Lee Vining. You will be inspired by the energy and promise of the people working on and in the Field Station. Once again, the Committee is making big things happen on a shoestring.

Contact Frances Spivy-Weber ([frances@monolake.org](mailto:frances@monolake.org)) at (310) 316-0041 if you're interested!