

MONO LAKE

N E W S L E T T E R

Winter 2004



In the short amount of time that the cover to this Newsletter has been sitting on my desk, three staff members have made a point of commenting on it. My favorite was one observation from Information Specialist Greg Reis, “That’s a great cover—it looks just like that out there today.” I couldn’t have come up with a more perfect response if I tried.

There are many reasons for the Mono Lake Committee to have a newsletter, and I think Greg’s comment summed them up perfectly. With 25 years and counting under the Committee’s belt, we know that the actions of the Mono Lake Committee fit into the larger history and continuing story of Mono Lake. This Newsletter is but one piece of that story—a record of this moment in time.

Rick Knepp’s cover photograph captured the lake in one moment—perfectly glassy and amazingly still. Turn to the pages inside you’ll find that the staff has captured important snapshots too—in the fields of restoration, protection, and education—the pillars of the Mono Lake Committee’s mission. When all bound together the Newsletter should give you many answers to the deceptively simple question, “What’s going on with Mono Lake?”

The Committee staff is acutely aware of the fact that without active and interested members, this snapshot of the Mono Lake story would be lost like a flash in the dark. But because of thoughtful readers like you, this is not the case at all, and Mono Lake thrives in the spotlight.

So, as always, thank you for reading the Mono Lake Newsletter.

—Arya Degenhardt, Communications Director



COVER PHOTO BY RICK KNEPP

RICK KNEPP

Seeing snow on tufa is one of the many beautiful rewards for travelers making the trek to the Mono Basin in winter. The Field Seminar listing on page 18 offers many unique experiences including photography seminars with photographers such as Rick Knepp and Claude Fiddler.

Mono Lake Committee Mission

The Mono Lake Committee is a non-profit citizens’ group dedicated to protecting and restoring the Mono Basin ecosystem, educating the public about Mono Lake and the impacts on the environment of excessive water use, and promoting cooperative solutions that protect Mono Lake and meet real water needs without transferring environmental problems to other areas.



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MONO LAKE NEWSLETTER

Winter 2004 ~ Volume XXV, Number 3

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ARYA DEGENHARDT

Education for the Next 25 Years

Connecting the Next Generation to Mono Lake

By Bartshé Miller

Education played a strong role in gaining protection for Mono Lake, and it will be essential to the conservation of Mono Lake in the future.

The world of California water presents an intricate maze of plumbing, challenges, and competing uses that express and shape a slowly evolving Public Trust. Education gives us the map to find our way through it. It is the vehicle through which we spread scientific knowledge, evaluate solutions, and communicate values we believe will benefit tomorrow's water users and decision makers. Education presents us the opportunity to better navigate the future, and it's an investment we can ill-afford to ignore.

Education in Focus

Over the last 25 years the Mono Lake Committee has developed a sophisticated education effort that includes interpretive programs and exhibits, canoe tours, field semi-

nars, environmental education programs, a residential education program, special events, a quarterly newsletter, field guides, and five different websites. Education programs at Mono Lake reach a very diverse audience. In the last year, for example, we discussed conservation efforts with Russian exchange students from the Tahoe-Baikal Institute, led a South Tufa walk for the Schnell School of Placerville, and guided a group of students from Roosevelt High School in Los Angeles to the top of a local volcano. We canoed on Mono Lake with 3rd and 4th grade students from Lee Vining, and visited a local diversion dam to discuss western water issues with high school students from Minneapolis. We led a South Tufa program for a group of retired French and German tourists, and we brought youth from the Los Angeles Conservation Corps to observe bird banding on Lee Vining Creek. We co-

Continued on page 4



The future of Mono Lake is tied to Los Angeles; Mono Lake Committee education programs connect Los Angelenos to the lake.

organized the 2nd Annual Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua, and assisted students from all over the country in finding information for school reports and graduate studies.

Each year the Mono Lake Committee leads programs in the field for over 3,000 students and adults. We make contact with over 100,000 people in Lee Vining through our Information Center and Bookstore. The Mono Lake website and the Mono Basin Clearinghouse receive 1,400 visitors a day combined. Drawing on a network of scientists, educators, talented local residents, and a growing research library, we have slowly built a successful education program that serves a very wide audience.

The Los Angeles Connection

The Outdoor Experiences program (OE), one component of the Mono Lake Committee's broader education program, is now in its 11th of year bringing Los Angeles youth to Mono Lake. This unique program partners the Mono Lake Committee with the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power and Los Angeles area community and school groups to provide a great educational experience for youth from underserved areas of the city.

The kids that participate in OE rarely if ever have the chance to experience pure mountain streams, snow covered peaks, or dark skies with bright stars. OE has become successful because it emphasizes the value of water for people *and* the environment. It highlights powerful learning experiences that connect students with their land and their water, and it engages the true cultural diversity of Los Angeles and California—a constituency that is not widely represented among typical visitors to Mono Lake.

Sadly, the program has no more room to grow. The current site can serve no more than two dozen students, teachers, or adult leaders during a three to five day trip. In 1996, five groups from Los Angeles participated in Outdoor Experiences. In 2003 there were 18 groups, nearly all from Southern California, maximizing use of the existing Mono Basin Cain Ranch facilities.

Challenges and Complexities

In January 2004 a group of 21 Wilson High School students from Los Angeles visited Mono Lake for the first time. None of them had studied Mono Lake before, and they were unaware that some of their city's water was diverted from Mono's tributary streams. When the California State Water Resources Control Board issued order D1631, effectively concluding 16 years of prior controversy and legal struggle over the fate of Mono Lake and water use in Los Angeles, most of these students were just six or seven years of age. In 2014 when D1631 is revisited, these students will be leading professional lives. Some of them or their approximately 2,200,000 California high school peers will be working in the water industry or government, and they will be making decisions about water.

There is a real need for better water education in the State. California has a restless and growing population—more people leave the state than any other, yet the state's population swells by over 550,000 people each year (since 1998). California schools are overcrowded, chronically underfunded, and adding 100,000 more students each year. Water issues and decision-making processes are not specifically addressed in the California Science or History-Social Science Frameworks. Future water leaders and consumers may not be getting enough information to make decisions that balance competing water needs while maintaining or improving water quality. Considering the current population trends it's unclear if most people understand where their water comes from and where it goes.

Water issues are becoming more difficult in California. There is no magic solution to any of them, even in the realm of desalination, where significant coastal environmental impacts are readily dismissed over the excitement of promising new technology. Issues are evolving rapidly and the public is expected to digest past history and assimilate an overwhelming amount of developing issues that affect the world of water. Water resources are directly or indirectly linked within the state—including Mono Lake. Decisions in one part of Califor-



The Pasadena Police Department, working with Outward Bound Adventures and the Committee's Outdoor Experiences program brought this group to the top of Panum Crater.

nia affect another. Education provides us the only opportunity to make sense of it all, and with an overburdened public school system, environmental science and decision-making processes are not necessarily a priority.

There are teachers striving to make a difference, and many of them are taking advantage of Mono Lake Committee resources. For educators, the Mono Basin is a dynamic outdoor classroom offering a wealth of learning opportunities in one of the last, large intact ecosystems in California. Prominent land designation, protection, and continuing scientific research have created an impressive pool of knowledge about Mono Lake and the local Eastern Sierra. This is why more school groups either make Mono Lake their main destination, or a necessary stop during their trip to the Eastern Sierra.

Unfortunately there are limited accommodations available for school groups that come from beyond the Eastern Sierra. Also, there is a noticeable decline in education resources. Today for example, the Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area has a greatly reduced staff. There are fewer rangers available to lead education programs down at Mono Lake, and fewer program opportunities for educators. Some groups are turned away, even as the Mono Lake Committee increases its commitment to seasonal environmental education and interpretive programs.

A Solution and a Vision

With more people coming to Mono Lake, more complex water issues, and the increasingly limited education assets available to students and educators, there is a real need to improve and expand education capacity in the Mono Basin. The Mono Lake Committee envisions an Outdoor Education Center (OEC) in the Mono Basin that will focus more education opportunities at a site-specific location, improve existing programs, and serve more students from Los Angeles, the Eastern Sierra, and California. The OEC will serve up to 60 students at one time and will create more options, flexibility, and educational capacity in the Mono Basin, while allowing for reasonable growth in education programs without overwhelming the solitude and beauty of Mono Lake. The Outdoor Education Center will greatly enhance existing education programs, marrying education opportunities to ongoing research and restoration.

With accommodation and infrastructure on site, more school groups can afford to explore and learn in the Mono Basin. With a small indoor classroom on site, learning in the field can be advanced in such ways as focusing on aquatic invertebrate specimens under a video microscope, or entering data taken in the field to further a student research project. The Mono Basin Outdoor Education Center will have its own curriculum focused on water with themes and activities that apply to different grade levels and subject areas. Science-based education will be the foundation with a wide range of interdisciplinary applications also available through history, social sciences, mathematics, and English. A strong curriculum combined with the local community of researchers will lead to exciting possibilities for both education and continuing scientific research. The Mono Basin can further be trans-



DWP has suggested using the old Mendiburu Ranch site for the Mono Basin Outdoor Education Center.

formed from a place of absorbing facts and experiencing magnificent landscapes to a place of active learning, contribution, and lasting connection.

The Mono Basin Outdoor Education Center is an opportunity to positively affect the future of Mono Lake and California water. It will allow the Committee to reach more students from more diverse neighborhoods—connecting Los Angeles and California with this unique, remote, and compelling resource. It will inspire conservation and stewardship of our natural and urban watersheds.

For years the Los Angeles and Mono Lake water controversy was symbol of California and western water woes. Visitors to Mono Lake perceived the struggle and urgency when they visited the lake. Today Mono Lake it is a symbol of positive water solutions. Visitors and students still ask how the lake is doing, whether Los Angeles is still taking the water, whether or not water conservation is making difference. Inevitably questions lead to more questions about water recycling, desalination, and agricultural vs. urban water use. Mono Lake is more than just a scenic destination or natural history classroom, it's an example of successful, cooperative solutions that meet the real water needs of people and their environment. Mono Lake is a landscape of hope in world of increasingly difficult water issues.

The Mono Lake Committee is thinking hard about the future of water for California, Los Angeles, and Mono Lake. Education will not solve all of our future water problems, but it will better prepare tomorrow's water users and decision makers for the challenges they will face. Solutions come from the right combination of ingredients. Education is one of them.

Twenty-six years ago the challenge was simple, but daunting. If Mono Lake had any chance for protection, people had to see it, understand it, and care about it. As we look to the future, that challenge is very much the same. ❖

Bartshé Miller is the Committee's Education Director. He is also the office's beloved weather soothsayer—always looking just around the corner to the next season.

Many Questions Raised About the Mono Lake Shoulder Widening Project

DEIR Comments Swamp Caltrans

by Jen Nissenbaum

The beginning of December marked the close of the public comment period on the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) for the Caltrans Mono Lake Shoulder Widening Project. Over 1,300 comments were submitted, the great majority of which identified serious problems with the project.

The Mono Lake Committee submitted a comprehensive and detailed 64-page comment letter to Caltrans staff. Public agencies also submitted comments about the DEIR, as did many dedicated Committee supporters. Local residents participated in the public hearing at the Lee Vining Community Center. The Local Transportation Commission (LTC) discussed the Shoulder Widening Project during the 2003 December meeting. The Commissioners asked a number of questions during the meeting pertaining to the project's cost, demonstrating concern about the future of the project.

The proposed project plans to widen and straighten 3.1 miles of Highway 395 within the Mono Basin Scenic Area. The Fall 2003 *Newsletter* discussed the release of the DEIR, and the Committee's disappointment with the two build alternatives presented in the document.

The DEIR alternatives failed to include commitments made by Caltrans within the last several years of Project Development Team (PDT) meetings. The Committee, along with representatives from public agencies and other groups, has been a part of the PDT, trying to help create a balanced project that makes safety improvements while protecting the unique wetland habitat and scenic views along the west shore of Mono Lake.



Getting the facts: Committee staff Greg Reis and Jen Nissenbaum doing a field survey of one proposed fill slope site in the Caltrans project area to see how close it would fall to the future lake level.

Committee Comments

Committee staff coordinated with scientists familiar with the Mono Basin ecosystem, lawyers knowledgeable about the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), public agencies, environmental non-profit organizations, and local residents in order to provide a thorough analysis of the DEIR. The final product of the Committee's extensive analysis was a 64-page document identifying violations of CEQA, citing reasons why the project falls under federal Section 4(f) protections, and pointing out inadequacies in the scientific studies and attention given to human safety, visual quality, wildlife, vegetation, wetland habitat, and water quality provided within the DEIR.

Given the numerous deficiencies of the DEIR, the Committee called on Caltrans to draft a new DEIR that thoroughly analyzes the proposed highway impacts and to make the analysis available for a new round of public comment.

Committee comments ranged from broad Public Trust legal principles to detailed specifics. For example, Committee staff surveyed a cross section from the lake to the highway where a proposed fill slope looked precariously close to the future elevation of Mono Lake (see *Lakewatch* on page 14 for details). The results from the field survey are included within the Committee's DEIR analysis, revealing the potential for fill slopes to cover up perennial springs and for fill slope material to directly discharge into Mono Lake. To read the Committee's complete comments on the DEIR, visit www.monolake.org/caltrans/letters.

Highlights from Public Agency Comment Letters

Committee members were not alone in voicing their concerns: the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board, California State Parks, and the US Forest Service all submitted comments about the highway project. The complete letters are posted on the Committee website at www.monolake.org/caltrans/letters.

Lahontan – The letter of public comment from Lahontan states, "Board staff considers the DEIR incomplete as submitted." Lahontan cited the omission of public documentation as the reason for determining the DEIR incomplete; specifically referring to the absence of scientific data collected during the study period and agency letters of comment written prior to the release of the DEIR.

Forest Service – One of the major concerns identified by the Forest Service also includes the omission of relevant supporting documentation. Additionally, the Forest Service

maintained its assertion that the highway project is subject to the Section 4(f) provisions protecting park, wildlife refuge, and recreation areas. "All possible planning to minimize harm [in the project area]" is required of Caltrans if the highway project is subject to section 4(f) provisions. Refer to the Fall 2001 *Newsletter* for a general overview of Section 4(f) provisions.

California State Parks – California State Parks also requested more attention to the 4(f) provision requirements in its comments to Caltrans. Other issues identified by State Parks include Caltrans applying for the wrong US Army Corps of Engineers permit, the omission of Mono Lake's future elevation as mandated by the State Water Resource Control Board, and the "overly optimistic" mitigation plans for revegetation included within the DEIR.

Letters from Mono Lake Supporters

Committee staff was once again inspired by the dedication of Committee members who wrote over 1,300 letters supporting the "no build" alternative. Many people shared their personal connections to Mono Lake and the Committee within their comments to Caltrans. Some of the most memorable personal stories were written by Mono Lake advocates who spoke of their visits to Mono Lake spanning over 60 years.

Shoulder Widening Public Hearing

Shortly after the release of the DEIR, Caltrans held a public hearing in Lee Vining and almost 50 people showed up at the Lee Vining Community Center on October 29th. Despite the great turnout, the Committee was disappointed with the Open House format chosen for the public hearing, since this format does not lend itself to community interaction. For example, during the Open House for the proposed highway project, Caltrans staff set up displays in the Community Center and were available to answer individual questions posed by local residents. The Open House format disperses the public throughout the room with the court recorder located in a separate area. An alternative to the Open House format, which appears more conducive to community interaction, consists of each individual speaking in front of the rest of the community while comments are simultaneously registered by the court recorder.

Almost a half an hour into the Open House hearing, local residents revealed their dissatisfaction with the Open House format by removing chairs from the closet and placing them around the court recorder. For the remaining two hours, community members stood up one-by-one and formally registered their comments, having the opportunity to listen to each others' remarks. Of the people that spoke during the hearing, there was unanimous support for the "no build" alternative. Caltrans must respond to all substantive comments made during the public hearing as well as all written comments submitted during the public comment period within the Final EIR.

It was unfortunate that many of the Caltrans employees chose not to listen to the comments being formally registered. In fact, Lee Vining resident Carolyn Crawford was compelled to write about her interaction with several Caltrans employees during the public hearing in a letter to the local newspaper. She described her experience asking a Caltrans employee



Committee staff highlighted this freshwater spring in the project area where Caltrans' map delineated the vegetation as only "Brush."

speaking loudly during the hearing to quiet down, to which he responded, "No, this isn't a public forum. Those people are not supposed to be speaking and we're not going to be quiet!" To read the entire editorial go to www.monolake.org/caltrans/mlwidening.

Local Transportation Commission Meeting

At the December 2003 Mono County Local Transportation Commission meeting, the Shoulder Widening Project was on the agenda for discussion. The LTC is the decision making body for transportation projects in Mono County; essentially, the liaison for highway projects between Caltrans and Mono County. The LTC Commissioners raised a number of important questions regarding the project's cost to Caltrans.

What's Next?

During the LTC meeting, Caltrans said that it would take several months to respond to all of the public comments that had been received. Caltrans has given no response yet on the Committee's call for a redrafting of the DEIR, but has tentatively scheduled the release of the Final EIR for August. Prior to the release of the Final EIR, there will be a joint public hearing with Caltrans and the LTC. For the latest updates regarding this issue please check www.monolake.org or contact Jen Nissenbaum (jen@monolake.org) at (760) 647-6595. ❖

Jen is the Committee's new Eastern Sierra Policy Coordinator. She has just discovered the little-known joys of cross country skiing along the shore of Mono Lake.

Policy Updates

Keeping Track of Policy Issues in the Mono Basin

by Lisa Cutting

Commercial Motor Boat Tours

The Committee's last motor boat tour update (see Fall 2003 *Newsletter*) reported that Tom Crowe, owner of Mono Lake Charters, had been cited in August for running a commercial boat tour operation without a permit and that the arraignment was pending. Since that time, there have been several actions in the Mono County courts. In the first, Crowe's attorney filed a demurrer, arguing that California State Parks has no authority to issue such a citation in the State Reserve. The demurrer was denied. The current action before the courts is now a Motion to Dismiss—essentially advancing an argument that the State does not have permitting authority at Mono Lake. The court will be rendering a decision in late January.

The Cunningham Property Subdivision

The proposal to develop 24 units on the 120-acre west shore Cunningham parcel, in violation of Scenic Area development guidelines, is still on the table despite numerous efforts to finalize a land trade that would protect this Mono Basin Scenic Area parcel and provide land for the Mammoth Hospital expansion (see Fall 2003 *Newsletter*). A Specific Plan application has been filed

with Mono County which normally starts the environmental review process—specifically public scoping. But the owner has requested that the County “hold off” from processing the application for the time being, raising hopes that a land trade solution is still achievable.

North Mono Basin

Negotiations continue with interested parties committed to resolving an almost 20 year-old Federal Energy Regulatory Commission relicensing procedure and the development of a comprehensive water management plan for the north part of the Mono Basin (see Spring 2003 *Newsletter*). Specific proposals have been generated by four of the involved parties, resulting in some stimulating discussion and progress. Although the process has been moving slowly, all parties are still at the table and looking for the common ground that will serve as a foundation for settlement resolution.

For the Committee, central to a negotiated settlement is Mill Creek—the third largest tributary stream to Mono Lake. Mill Creek water has been diverted for over 100 years and the cottonwood-willow forest and bottomlands habitat continues to suffer from a shortage of water. The primary challenge remains: how to most effectively balance water between competing uses and distribute that water to serve both the existing natural systems and the goals of water rights holders. ❖

Lisa Cutting is the Committee's Eastern Sierra Policy Director. Her two main goals this winter are more time at the fly tying vise and some (notable) improvements with skiing.

Development in the Mono Basin: The Cedar Hill Subdivision

Land and development pressures continue to occur in the Mono Basin. The latest site in question is located in the remote northeast corner of the Mono Basin off Highway 167, three miles west of the Nevada state line. The applicant has applied to develop a 583 acre parcel into fourteen 40-acre lots.

While the parcel is outside the Mono Basin Scenic Area boundary, environmental issues still exist. The area is quite visible from points around Mono Lake and is adjacent to Trench Canyon which leads to Larkin Lake—an ephemeral lake playa that serves as a freshwater source for a variety of birds, animals, and unique plant life. Wildlife use the area as a migratory corridor and certain species could be negatively impacted.

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is involved in the process as BLM public lands border the proposed development site.

As this *Newsletter* goes to press, the Mono County Planning Division is beginning the environmental scoping process for this project. Scoping is the process that helps determine what environmental studies need to be done and what level of environmental review is appropriate. For more information contact Lisa Cutting (lisa@monolake.org) at (760) 647-6595.



A view toward the Cunningham property from Cemetery Road.

GEDIFF MCGOULKIN

Lower Owens River Settlement

by Mike Prather, Owens Valley Committee Outreach Coordinator

Editor's note: For those keeping track of the progress of restoration of both the Lower Owens River and Owens Lake, here is an update with good news on the horizon from Mike Prather of the Owens Valley Committee. Owens Lake is located 150 miles south of Mono Lake and was drained by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power starting in 1913. Since 1984 the Owens Valley Committee has served as a watchdog and advocate for the lake and its tributary waters.

A settlement of important obstacles may have been reached for the Lower Owens River Project (LORP), ending delays that kept promised flows from beginning in June of 2003. The LORP is planned to rewater 62 miles of the Lower Owens River as mitigation for destructive groundwater pumping impacts by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (DWP) from 1970–1990. During that period of time the Owens Valley suffered the loss of major springs such as Blackrock, Fish, Seely, and Hines as well as acres of marshlands and spring fields.

As a result of court action by the Owens Valley Committee, Sierra Club, and the California Attorney General, tentative agreement was achieved in December 2003 by the above

plaintiffs and Inyo County and Los Angeles. If approved by all parties the settlement provides for the following:

1. DWP will build the 50 cfs (cubic feet per second) pumpback station that it had previously agreed to in 1991 instead of the 150 cfs pump that it unilaterally changed to later. This pump will return water from the lower end of the LORP to the aqueduct or to on Owens Lake for dust control. A small volume will flow past the pump into the delta habitat area.

2. DWP agrees to release the Final Environmental Impact Report in June of 2004.

3. DWP agrees to start beginning flows in the river by September of 2005 and to have full flows of 40 cfs running by April of 2006.

4. DWP will report their progress on all tasks to the Inyo Superior Court based on an agreed upon schedule.

A settlement would be a bittersweet victory since it results in an agreement to accept a two-year delay for flows to begin in the Lower Owens River Project, but the alternatives

could have been a ten-year delay or possibly never.

Don't forget to "Remember the Owens Valley," because now we hope it will be for positive reasons and not only the tragic ones from the past. ❖



American Avocets in winter plumage.

PHOTO COURTESY OF PETER MAAPP

More Shallow Flooding for Owens Lake Means Good News for Birds

In November 2003, as required, the plan created in 2000 for dust control at Owens Lake was revised by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (DWP) and the Great Basin Unified Air Pollution Control District. The final work to be done before the Clean Air Act deadline in 2006 will now go forward. Ten additional square miles of the lake bed (6,400 acres) will be shallow flooded in an effort to suppress the hazardous dust that escapes from its surface. This will bring the total area of shallow flooding to approximately 25 square miles by 2006 and the area of native salt grass plantings to 3.5 square miles.

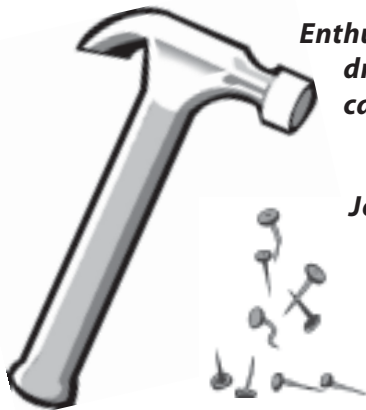
The great news for birds is that shallow flooding, the release of trickling water across the playa surface, promotes the growth of algae mats and alkali/brine flies that "set the table" for many species. Shallow flooding mimics the miles of shoreline that the lake once possessed and what made it a major

wildlife stopover site. This water serves the dual purpose of suppressing the regional dust problem and sustaining wildlife. Thousands of migrating shorebirds stop at Owens Lake to feed each spring and fall during their marathon migration. The lake is host to the largest number of nesting inland Snowy Plovers in California. Clouds of thousands of Least and Western Sandpipers undulate over the lake seeking foraging areas and avoiding falcons also looking for a meal.

To learn more about Owens Lake's history and future look for Eastern Sierra Audubon and Owens Valley Committee field trips to Owens Lake in spring and fall. You won't want to miss the spectacular birding action that occurs there. To help efforts to have the shallow flooding be officially designated for dust and wildlife, and for more information on Owens Lake visit www.ovcweb.org or www.esaudubon.org.

Volunteers Needed!

**Help turn this building into the
Mono Basin Science Field Station
for the 2004 Summer Season**



Enthusiastic helpers are needed for a variety of projects such as painting, drywall installation, cleaning, carpentry, roofing, electrical, carpet-laying, cabinetry, plumbing, and general handy-person support!

Join fellow Monophiles for some good hard work and lots of fun this April.

Interested? Please let us know your availability! Contact Craig Pyle (craigp@monolake.org) at (760) 647-6595 for details and to sign up. Limited shared accommodations available.

Seasonal Jobs With the Mono Lake Committee



Intern Naturalists

Birding Intern

Canoe Coordinators

Outdoor Experiences Coordinator

The Mono Lake Committee is now hiring for the summer 2004 season. For more information, job descriptions, and hiring guidelines visit www.monolake.org/committee/jobs.htm. Working with the Mono Lake Committee is a great way to gain real life experience with a highly-regarded non-profit organization while living in the beautiful Eastern Sierra. Contact Craig Pyle or Bartshé Miller at (760) 647-6595 for more information.

Witnessing Blind Faith

by Douglas Dunaway



Is it possible that Mono Lake can become invisible? With a surface area of over 70 square miles, it is hard to imagine that this vast inland sea could, at times, be hidden from view. Sometimes during the winter months, when conditions are right, fog forms over the lake's surface, completely hiding any clues that what lies beneath a thick veil of airborne ice crystals is a natural wonder that has captured the minds and hearts of tens of thousands of people. The native Kutzadika^a called this ice fog "poconip." Thick enough to hide all evidence of Mono Lake's existence, the poconip hovers over the Mono Basin, completely blocking the sun's rays as it picks up moisture from the lake's surface and gently deposits it throughout the Mono Basin in a delicate rime-coating.

People traveling through the Mono Basin in the winter are usually treated with breathtaking views of Mono Lake—images powerful enough to guarantee more return trips in the years ahead, often compelling them to become Mono Lake advocates. But there are occasions when the poconip shows up and hunkers down over the lake, daring Mono Lake Committee staffers to convince visitors to the Mono Lake Committee Information Center & Bookstore that Mono Lake does in fact exist—it's right down there under that dense curtain of fog. Really. The usual response is a hands-in-the-pocket saunter over to the front window, a cursory glance around the store and a hasty departure. It's hard work to enlist future members of the Mono Lake Committee when the lake plays peek-a-boo with Mother Nature.

The Information Center and Bookstore plays many important roles that are vital to Mono Lake Committee operations including providing visitor information, educational displays, regional books, and offering a chance to support restoration, protection, and education at Mono Lake through becoming a Committee member. The staff is dedicated to providing a friendly and comfortable atmosphere in the store that encourages people to ask questions about Mono Lake and to learn more about the area. In this way, the Information Center and Bookstore also becomes a central meeting place for members. This contact with the Committee membership is both fun and inspiring—providing staff with some of the best reasons to work for the Mono Lake Committee.

This past summer, during a busy day in the store, I was fortunate enough to have witnessed a truly unique membership experience. A woman opened the front door for an elderly man and his Seeing Eye dog. I greeted them warmly and offered my help. He informed me that he was a long time Mono Lake Committee supporter and was stopping in to renew his membership, as well as to stock up on new Mono Lake T-shirts.

His friend guided him over to the T-shirt display wall and, after careful scrutiny and help from his companion he came to the counter and told me his choices. I handed him the shirts he requested, and he spread them out on the counter—delicately tracing each shirt with his outstretched hands, gauging them for size and cut. One by one, he used his fingertips to follow the ridges of color on each image left by the ink transferring process. He carefully felt each shirt, rejecting some because they felt too dark, picking others because they sounded more colorful. By this time, everyone in the store was aware of what was happening. The normal fast pace in the store was replaced with a pleasant aura of serenity, and the noise level had dropped dramatically. Both children and adults were kneeling down, taking turns petting his dog. After he purchased his shirts and renewed his membership, he firmly shook my hand and thanked me for all of the hard work that the Mono Lake Committee does to protect his lake. With that said, he quietly left.

I still wake in the middle of the night thinking about that experience. How can someone continue to support a cause that can't be seen? Is beauty in the eye of the beholder, or is it the other way around? When the poconip rolls in and covers Mono Lake with its icy shroud, unknowing people will drive through the quiet little town of Lee Vining and imagine that they have not missed a thing. On days like that, when even long time residents of the Mono Basin wonder if the lake is still there, I am thankful that the Mono Lake Committee has members with the grit, determination, and blind faith that it takes to see something through to the end. ❖

Douglas is the Committee's Staff Assistant. He enjoys listening to people's experiences with the Mono Basin, so come on in with your story and say hello!

Weathering Climate Change

Another Reason to Keep a Watchful Eye on Mono Lake

by Arya Degenhardt

Evidence for climate change is mounting, with new reports from experts making newspaper headlines almost weekly. While the actual changes and their subsequent effects around the world are still hard to predict, climate change is becoming accepted as part of the reality of life on earth for humans, habitats, and ecosystems. What will climate change mean for Mono Lake? It's hard to say, but we're starting to see the effects of climate change in the Sierra Nevada, which directly affect the Mono Basin, and specifically, Mono Lake.

The Sierra Nevada Alliance, a coalition of Sierra Nevada environmental groups, recently released the report *Troubled Waters of the Sierra*. The report draws on existing research and evaluates the effects of climate change in the Sierra over the next 25–90 years and how these effects will significantly impact the water delivery systems of California and Nevada.

Sitting here at the base of the Sierra—where the snowline, snow pack, and spring runoff are not only part of daily life, but part of a larger structure of aqueducts, reservoirs, water consumption, stream restoration, and Mono Lake's level—the changes now and in the near future are very real.

Climate Change Facts

Broadly speaking, climate change is expected to affect both the type and timing of precipitation in California, but not the total amount. The majority of climatologists predict a rise in average California temperature that will shrink the Sierra snow pack by up to 48% by 2090. These scientists agree we will see a rise in the snow line by 500 feet in the next 25–30 years, reducing the total snowpack and leading to earlier runoff. Since 65% of California's developed



Aerial view of the Mono Basin taken in the early 80s when the land bridge connected Negit Island to the mainland.

water supply comes from the Sierra and its snow pack, this will mean significant change.

And changes are already occurring. University researchers report that over the past 50 years snowmelt runoff in Northern California has been occurring earlier in the year, and winter and springtime floods have increased due to rain-on-snow events. The Southern Sierra has experienced a 10% reduction in runoff during the spring and summer in the last 100 years. This trend is accelerating.

Data indicates that human affects are accelerating the natural warming that was already occurring after the end of the Little Ice Age in the mid 19th century. Researchers have documented that many glaciers around the world are shrinking. A recent survey of Sierra glaciers, including the Dana Glacier in Mono's watershed, are shrinking as well.

What Does This Mean For Mono?

If the snow line is rising and total precipitation is relatively constant, that means more water arriving in the form of rain and less in the form of snow. That, in turn, means a smaller spring runoff from snowmelt and a greater chance of flooding

due to large rain events. And that means a change for the Mono Basin ecosystem as well as for the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (DWP) aqueduct system.

The good news for Mono Lake is that the snow pack affecting the lake is less vulnerable to higher snowlines than other areas of the Sierra since much of Mono's snow runoff is from high elevations. Because snow pack reduction will be less at high elevations and more marked at lower elevations, the direct effects on Mono Lake may be tempered.

And the bad news? At this point, it's hard to say, so we asked hydrologist Peter Vorster for his perspective. On the subject of how climate change will affect Mono Lake he said, "All of the Water Board projections of future lake levels and DWP exports were made with models that assumed a stable climate—we know that will not be the case, and have already seen higher temperatures in recent summers. Warming could increase evaporation at Mono Lake and that would mean more runoff is needed to maintain the Water Board ordered lake level. This means that unless the total runoff increases, DWP would get less runoff to export."

What Does This Mean for DWP?

Due to the gradual onset of climate change, some people have been skeptical that it is even a real trend at all. However, with an increased amount of supporting data, people are starting to react. In 2000, ski areas across the country adopted the Sustainable Slopes Environmental Charter, which identifies climate change as a potential threat to the ski industry. In 2003 even the Bush Administration acknowledged climate

Continued on page 13

Governor Schwarzenegger Proposes a Sierra Nevada Conservancy

by Frances Spivy-Weber

The Mono Lake Committee has joined with many other organizations in the Sierra, Los Angeles, and the Bay Area to work with California's new governor and the legislature to design a Sierra Nevada Conservancy. The Committee's success in working cooperatively with urban communities to protect Mono Lake is the model we bring to this effort to gather broad support for legislation.

Like the Coastal Conservancy or the Lake Tahoe Conservancy, if a Sierra Conservancy is established by the legislature, it will be able to receive funding for designated purposes, with a defined governance structure and powers. As this newsletter goes to press, the governor's proposal has not been

fleshed out, but there are many years of thinking about this idea upon which he and the legislature can build.

The Mono Lake Committee thinks a Sierra Nevada Conservancy should serve many purposes. Among the most important ones are protection and enhancement of natural diversity and natural resources, open space, working landscapes, riparian areas, water quality and water supply both in the Sierra and in the urban areas that use Sierra water, watersheds, wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, interpretive facilities, sustainability of the local communities, public access, and the unique cultural, artistic, economic and historic resources within the Sierra that makes the region

so vital to the future of California.

The Committee expects a Sierra Conservancy will be able to lease, sell, exchange, and rent property acquired from willing sellers. And importantly, a Conservancy must consult with and coordinate its activities with public agencies, local land trusts, and other entities dedicated to land conservation or involved with the management of public lands.

By the time you receive this newsletter, we expect there will be a bill or possibly several bills introduced to create a Sierra Nevada Conservancy. Please check the Committee's website www.monolake.org for details. ❖

Climate Change – from page 12

change by announcing federal initiatives designed to organize the federal government's climate change science research system and to fund global climate observation. As recently as December 2003 the council of the American Geophysical Union, one of the nation's top scientific organizations, issued a new warning that human activities—most notably the greenhouse gas emissions from power plants and other industries—are warming Earth's climate at a faster rate than ever.

With evidence mounting, we spoke with Mark Hanna of the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power to hear DWP's perspective on climate change. On the subject of what DWP is doing to anticipate current and future changes Mark said, "DWP follows the studies being released and diligently tracks the data, but spotting trends is difficult with long slow change. The Department will address changes as they arrive. There are discussions of more rain, less snow, but it really is unknown. The Department's concerns are with supply as well as demand. So for now, before concrete patterns emerge, the Department will continue to emphasize water

conservation as the best way to prepare for change in the future, whether that change comes from climate, population growth, or any other variable."

As part of its supply and demand monitoring DWP currently collects very useful real time data on water flows and reservoir capacities in the Mono Basin, with data posted online at <http://web.ladwp.com/~wsoweb/Aqueduct/realtime/monorealtime>. According to Peter Vorster, "Real time flow monitoring will need to be followed by increased real time flow management in order to provide DWP all the exportable water they had hoped for as well as provide the expected benefits of stream restoration flows."

The Next Step: Responding to Change

The Sierra Nevada Alliance's report brings together data from the many watersheds of the Sierra, and in doing so paints a picture of where California and Nevada are headed in the coming years in terms of water supply, infrastructure, the demands of population growth, and the potential for shifts in natural cycles as we know them.

The effects of the warming trend will

be different throughout the Sierra, but two messages come through loud and clear: water conservation in both rural and urban areas will be increasingly essential, and evaluation of water infrastructure for efficiency is absolutely necessary.

The scope of the climate change challenge is now coming into focus; formulating specific responses at Mono Lake, in the Sierra, and for California will challenge our thinking and creativity. Already, the Committee's work on water conservation and infrastructure efficiency is part of the multifaceted set of responses needed. But climate change will demand much more from all of us, and the Mono Lake Committee will be asking the climate change questions that matter for Mono Lake—and hopefully finding creative answers as well.

For the Sierra Nevada Alliance's full *Troubled Waters of the Sierra* report see www.sierranevadaalliance.org. ❖

Arya Degenhardt is the Committee's Communications Director. She humors the town every time she walks (or more accurately gets walked by) her dogs to the creek trail.

At the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power's (DWP) bi-annual restoration meeting in Sacramento in November DWP staff and consultants provided updates on how 2003 operations and monitoring went, and informed the Mono Lake Committee of what the streams can expect in 2004. The following are just a few highlights.

Runoff Forecasting

Because DWP's runoff forecast model was not able to incorporate the significant increase in snowpack that occurred this past April, the May 1st 2003 Mono Basin runoff forecast was much lower than actual runoff and much lower than what was projected for all the surrounding watersheds. The under-forecast meant that peak stream flows for Rush Creek were 50 to 130 cubic feet per second (cfs) less than what they should have been had the forecast, and thus the year-type, been accurately projected. DWP is evaluating improvements to its runoff forecast models.

Committee Requests Flow Test

At the April restoration meeting the Committee requested that DWP release a test flow of 380 cfs down the newly-rehabilitated Mono Gate One Return Ditch (which releases water from

Grant Lake Reservoir to Rush Creek). This request was denied. In November, the Committee asked the State Water Resources Control Board to order this release in 2004. 380 cfs is the new capacity of the ditch as well as the flow required to be released when runoff exceeds 82.5% of average. Since the 1998 restoration order, Rush Creek has not received its required peak flow (see Policy Notes, Summer 2001 *Newsletter* for details), and the Committee believes it is important not to miss another year and to make sure the ditch can handle the flow. In December the Committee met with DWP and is currently discussing conditions under which a test flow may occur.

Fisheries Monitoring in Rush Creek

In 2004 there will be a fish movement study in Rush Creek conducted by Ross Taylor & Associates. The monitoring team has questions about where large fish move in the stream and why they find few fish past age three.

Tree Planting

In April 2004, the Committee plans to plant cottonwood and willow cuttings at the County Road culvert on Rush Creek. These will be the first trees planted on Rush Creek since 1997. The intention is to protect the culvert from erosion during high flows. ❖

On December 1st, 2003, Mono Lake stood at an elevation of 6381.3 feet above sea level. This is a half-foot lower than at the same time last year. The last time it was this low was in March 1997. This is 6.7 feet higher than at the time of the 1994 State Water Resources Control Board Decision; however the lake has dropped 3.8 feet since July 1999 during the last five fairly dry years.

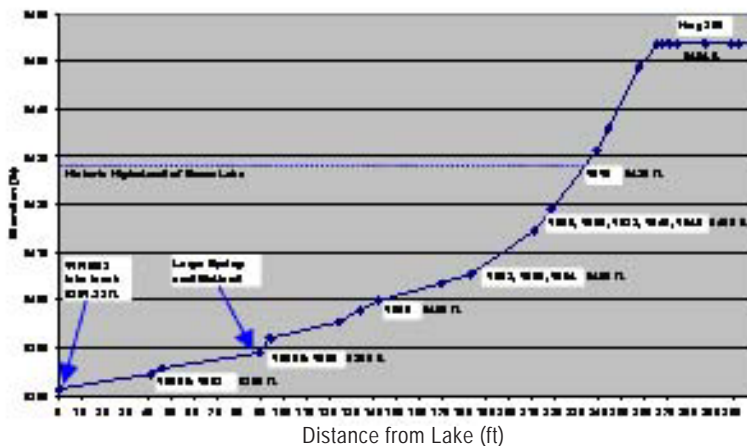
On November 19th, I investigated a section of the west shore of Mono Lake with Jen Nissenbaum, the Committee's new Eastern Sierra Policy Coordinator. We surveyed a ground surface profile from the lake to Highway 395. Our purpose was to check Caltrans' DEIR for accuracy and to see how close the lake will come to the proposed highway at higher lake levels.

In addition to what we were looking for, what we found were lake terraces and wavecut scarps that were created when the lake had risen briefly during its long decline—like fossil evidence of high runoff years. Terraces are created only as the lake rises and as waves beat back the cliff face, and are not created when the lake declines steadily.

About 42 feet from the lakeshore we found the first scarp: a steep 1.2 foot rise beginning at 6384.5 feet above sea level. This was created between January and July 1999, when Mono Lake rose from 6384.3 to 6385.1 (it receded back to 6384.5 by October).

Walking inland up the next 43-foot-wide

Lake to Highway Profile at Lone Olive Spring – Existing Ground Surface



terrace, we reached the base of the next scarp at the beautiful and gurgling Lone Olive Spring, named by Jen for the single (nonnative) Russian Olive growing there. This 3.2-foot scarp begins at 6388.8 and was created in 1967 and 1969, two very wet years, when Mono Basin runoff was 162% and 174% of average respectively, exports were minimal, and the lake level reversed its steady decline and rose approximately 3 feet in the winter and spring of each of those years. The sudden seasonal rises at similar elevations created this scarp.

After climbing this scarp, the next 29-foot-wide terrace led us to a final 4.5-foot high scarp, more gradual than the others, and mysterious in origin, created at 6395 feet. This is where Mono Lake was in 1962, and close to where it will be in 20 years, if the models are correct and the climate cooperates. ❖

6417

6392

6381

6372

Prediversion lake level, 1941

Target lake level

Current lake level

Historic low, 1982

Mono Basin Journal

A Roundup of Quiet Happenings at Mono Lake

by Geoffrey McQuilkin



The first big snowfall of the season came in December, a fine start to a hopefully wet winter. As white flakes fell onto faded orange fall leaves the sun stayed hidden and Mono Lake lay quiet, cold, and steely grey. But the Eastern Sierra is ever changeable; by noon, weak sunlight snuck through the clouds, making the snowy ground bright with light. Winds high overhead began to pull thin tendrils from smooth lenticular clouds, sculpting them to look a bit like spiders, and Mono Lake had abandoned its gloomy morning attitude for a new look of blue water and sun sparkles.

Prior to the snow, several of us were out roaming the western lakeshore, comparing the paper plans for the highway expansion to the real world. A strongly flowing spring, surrounded by willows and squishy wet ground was one of the highlights. Quietly, day after day, its waters flow to Mono Lake, offering deer, birds, and all manner of wildlife a fresh drink along the salty lake's shore—all while traffic zips by not 60 yards in the other direction, drivers focused on the road,

glancing at the panoramic view, oblivious to these smaller hidden rhythms of Mono Lake.

One of the joys of working for the Mono Lake Committee is the opportunity to stand at the edge of an intriguing natural feature like this near-shore spring and look into its multiple dimensions. Every place has history, and aptly named Lone Olive Spring has its own. The steep three-foot bank next to it tells of Mono Lake's fluctuations decades ago and is a clue to the underground water movement that creates the spring itself. Battered paths through the grass tell of the animals that use the spring, while the quality of the springwater can be divined in the diversity of the resident invertebrate community. The water and surrounding willows hint at the possible attraction of the site for endangered Willow Flycatchers, recently sighted nearby. Peering into all these facets of the spring is a reminder of both Mono Lake's deep significance and the larger, complex, alive, interwoven world in which we live. ❖

The Mono Basin Christmas Bird Count

by Chris McCreedy, PRBO Conservation Science

It is winter the Mono Basin, which means snow storms, less daylight, and freezing temperatures. If I had wings, and it was autumn, I would fly to Ecuador, Costa Rica, or maybe I would spend my Januaries in Oaxaca with millions of other Neotropical migrants. Yet for many migrant species of boreal North America, such as Rough-legged Hawks or Tundra Swans, latitudes like the Mono Basin *are* their Oaxaca. For year-round residents such as Steller's Jays and Mountain Chickadees, the Mono Basin is as good as it gets—none of this quixotic migrating stuff. So in the fall, when many birds go, quite a few stay, and quite a few more arrive. And for 27 years now, dedicated adventurers have been counting them.

On January 3rd, twenty souls gathered for the 27th Mono Lake Christmas Bird Count (CBC). There have been over 100 years of CBCs organized by the Audubon Society. All over North America, including at Mono Lake, brave bird counters pour into their thermals and earmuffs, and with binoculars and a checklist, jump into the winter side of the bird world.

This year the team was indeed lucky—the weather was amazing—clear and cold, no wind, and incredibly, no fog. Ten of us cross-country skied, three snowshoed, two scoped Mono Lake's western shore from Highway 395, and five did bird feeder watch—a respectable number for one of the highest-elevation counts (from Mono Lake up to Mt. Warren at 3758 m above sea level) in North America.

We all saw amazing things, and for the second year in a row, we broke the Mono Lake CBC's record for total species observed. There are stories of things like a Great Blue Heron in a tree, the first crow (crows are surprisingly rare in the Eastern Sierra, inhabiting only urban areas such as Bishop) seen on a count since 1980, and a radio-collared Sage Grouse followed into the count circle by the United States Geological Society. It was a completely beautiful day. Yet, one of the best parts was saved for last, when drooling from exhaustion we gathered for the Mono Basin standard: the celebratory potluck.

Taking Leave of Change

by Gary Nelson

Last year warm, calm weather let summer merge imperceptibly into fall, providing perfect conditions for spectacular color displays by quaking aspens. Mark Twain once said “all scenery in California requires *distance* to give it its highest charm.” That is partially true during the fall here in the Mono Basin where the vibrant colors of the aspen groves highlight their already spectacular physical settings. Glacial canyons radiate with vibrant golden hues that seem to fill them with color to the same measure that they were once filled with ice. The smaller, stream-cut canyons appear as rivers of gold flowing down the eastern slopes.

But while the clear autumn air allows one to see these displays from miles away, you need to walk into an aspen grove to really feel their presence. Entering the grove, you are enveloped by a shimmering aura of changing color. From green to gold to red, the leaves blend into a chromatic harmony that changes with each step you take. The slightest breeze causes the leaves to tremble—a vibrato added to the chorus of colors which touches your soul like music, though the only sound you hear is the rustling of leaves. This is a special time, when the beauty of the natural world gives you

haven from worldly concerns and thoughts of change.

But change always comes. At the end of October high cirrus clouds float over the Sierra crest like the fringes of old man winter’s beard. Gusts of wind and falling snow herald his prompt arrival.

A week or so later I go back to the aspen grove. It is now a world of gray and white. A handful of leaves still cling to a few of the branches. Most leaves are visible beneath the dimpled edges of the snow banks that surround the bases of the trees. The leaves are all brown now, the color of the soil they will soon return to. A breeze moving down the canyon causes a skeletal rattle amongst the empty branches, which is muffled by the blanket of snow. I say a silent prayer for more snow, and of thanks for the day when golden leaves caught the last rays of the autumn sun. ❖

Gary Nelson is the Committee’s Canoe Tour Supervisor. He has recently been converting his garage into a ceramics studio, after which, he notes, he will be qualified to clean out the Augean stables.



Off-Counter:

curious, comic, and compelling moments from daily life at the Mono Lake Committee

Mono Lake Committee staff sometimes get asked why we have so many employees just to run the Information Center and Bookstore. Well, the short answer is there's a whole lot more to the Mono Lake Committee than talking to visitors and selling books. The Mono Lake Committee offices run year-round, with policy, education, and communications projects active even in the quiet winter months when visitors are nowhere to be seen. The goal of this periodic column is to help paint a picture, not only of what it is like to work for a non-profit organization in the Eastern Sierra, but of the diversity of exciting and truly grassroots things we do for Mono Lake—off the front counter—be they curious, comic, or compelling.

The Daring Lives of Volunteers

As part of a cooperative Conservation Work Camp volunteer program with the Global Nature Fund, DaimlerChrysler Corporation, and the Mono Lake Committee, the Mono Basin was fortunate in 2003 to receive the help of five volunteers from Germany. During their three-week stay in Lee Vining volunteers Elke, Corinna, Mareike, Fabian, and Philipp, along with Committee staffers Greg Reis and Douglas Dunaway, experienced many adventures: some funny, some exciting and some painful. Highlights included the frantic downhill run of Mareike and Greg after they inadvertently disturbed a nest of hornets while doing trash removal along the Lee Vining Creek Trail. Many stings and bites later (25 for Mareike, 15 for Greg) their beeline dash ended in the soothing waters of Lee Vining Creek. Critters and bugs seemed to be the order of the day, as Corinna soon found out. While rolling an old wooden cable spool along the trail, Corinna spotted a rather large scorpion walking along the top of the spool, keeping pace as she rolled it along, acting every bit like a small pet. Her screams could be heard echoing up and down the canyon as the frightened scorpion quickly took

refuge back inside the spool and hasn't been seen since. Everyone here at the Mono Lake Committee hopes this transplanted arachnid finds a more peaceful home at the Pumice Valley Landfill! Special thanks to the Mono County Public Works Department for waiving the dump fees for trash collected during the Work Camp!



SANTIAGO ESCRUCERIA

The Big Bang Band Rocks the Mono Basin

The Mono Lake Committee's Outdoor Experiences program never misses an opportunity to bring quality education experiences to its participants. Recently, a group of traveling musicians working as docents for the Robert Ferguson Observatory, an astronomy group in the Sonoma Valley area, contacted the Committee with an offer to provide a free educational concert to an Outdoor Experiences group. The highlight of the evening's program was "The Constellation Rap," a compilation of all the constellations, including those visible in the sky over Mono Lake. It

Shown next to this impressive truckload of Lee Vining Creek trash (including one scorpion) is Paulina Cromer, the self-described "Dump Lady."

was a treat to watch and listen to, as the performer flawlessly named 88 constellations and had the group of tough, inner-city kids wrapped in sleeping bags completely engrossed in the experience.

"Do you know where I can get a truck load of rocket fuel?"

While leading interpretive tours and working in the Mono Lake Committee Information Center and Bookstore, Mono Lake Committee interns get asked hundreds of questions: some difficult, some easy and others, like the one above, are kind of kooky and off kilter. Odd questions and funny encounters are all part of the job. Here are a couple of highlights from the summer of 2003.

While leading an interpretive birding walk at County Park, Birding Intern Randy Arnold was asked by one bird-enthusiast if it would be "possible to encourage a more desirable species other than the California Gull to habituate the shoreline?" Defining what is desirable and what isn't is certainly up for debate, but if you ask Reagan Heater, the Mono Lake Committee's youngest intern, he would possibly nominate his sighting of this rare chick. While giving an interpretive program to a small group down at South Tufa, he came upon not an avian chick, but rather a human chick, posing for a photo shoot. When pressed for details, he said he was too busy distracting the younger members of his group to remember much, but he did notice that she was wearing a bright red, fishnet see-through scarf, and nothing else! Sorry, no photos available. ❖

This issue's Off-Counter was written by Douglas Dunaway.



GREG REIS

2004 Field Seminars



PHOTO COURTESY OF CLAUDE FIDDLER

Fly Tying Winter Weekend

March 5-7

Doug Virtue

\$270 per person/ \$250 for members

All materials and Friday and Saturday night dinners at the Mono Inn included

Limited to 8 participants



At its most basic level, tying flies for fishing is much like cooking from a recipe book. Popular patterns are well documented and recreating them from photos and good descriptions is relatively easy. A deeper, more interpretive level of tying also exists, and contrary to what most anglers think, you don't have to be an expert to do it. Beginning with careful observation that matches materials and design to conditions, interpretive fly tying is a rewarding way to immerse yourself more fully in the aquatic environment.



SAN JUAN STYLE & ALPER'S DAMSEL FLY
SKETCHES BY DOUG VIRTUE

Even if you've never tied, exposure to a few simple techniques will give you enough skill to translate your observations into personal fly patterns. The seminar will take place at the Mono Inn and will

include dinner and a slide show Friday night plus a special feast on Saturday during the last full moon of winter. Prepare for spring and bring your rods, reels and waders—there will be time for casting practice and tackle prep between tying sessions. An optional Sunday afternoon trip to the Lower Owens River near Bishop will let you test your creations on some of the smartest brown trout in California. Weather permitting we'll stretch our legs along a Mono Basin creek and investigate the progress of creek restoration with a Mono Lake Committee staff person. Instructor Doug Virtue has been flyfishing since 1975. He has a wealth of experience from operating a remote lodge in Alaska's Iliamna Lake to catching oceanic yellowtail in Baja California. He emphasizes a holistic, appreciative approach to fishing that's appropriate for the waters of the Eastern Sierra.

Call (760) 647-6595 to Register

Introduction to Flyfishing

May 14–16

Doug Virtue

\$220 per person/ \$200 for members

Rod, reel, and tackle provided for the weekend

Limited to 6 participants

Flyfishing is a subtle and aesthetic way to deepen your appreciation of aquatic landscapes, but it's sometimes fraught with complexity and expense. If you've wanted to learn but found the tackle too costly or the standard courses too intimidating, this seminar offers a simple alternative. This seminar is limited to six participants so everyone gets personal attention. With all tackle provided, you'll learn the basics of casting, fly selection, and aquatic entomology. Participants will also be introduced to the ancient fishing philosophy of "making a good day." The seminar begins Friday evening with a slide show at the Mono Inn, and continues on Saturday with a combination of casting instruction, and introduction to tacklecraft. After a late afternoon siesta, we'll fish until sunset. Sunday morning will be spent in float tubes (provided) at a local freshwater lake. An optional Sunday afternoon/evening post-seminar fishing treat is offered to those who don't have to get home Sunday night (think Lahontan cutthroat and fat brook trout). Instructor Doug Virtue has been flyfishing since 1975. He has a wealth of experience from operating a remote lodge in Alaska's Iliamna Lake to catching oceanic yellowtail in Baja California. He emphasizes a holistic, appreciative approach to fishing that's perfect for the waters of the Eastern Sierra.

Birding the East Side

June 16–18

David Lukas and Simone Whitecloud

\$110 per person/ \$95 for members

Looking to get a little focused birding in before the Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua? This field seminar will focus on the identification and ecology of birds in the Mono Basin and local Eastern Sierra. We will visit a wide variety of habitats including desert scrub, marshes, riparian forests, and mountain slopes, in search of breeding birds and a few late migrants. With over 300 species having been observed in the Mono Basin, this course will be of great interest to both beginning and more advanced birdwatchers. We will intensively explore a number of sites, mixing short leisurely walks with periods of observation and natural history discussion, taking time to learn about birds by watching them closely. Generally walks will be chosen for their accessibility, but participants should be prepared and capable of wandering off-trail in pursuit of special sightings. David Lukas has led over one hundred birdwatching and natural history programs for the Nature Conservancy, Yosemite Association, Audubon Society, Elderhostel, and other groups. He is the author of *Watchable Birds of the Great Basin*, *Wild Birds of*

California, and the revised *Sierra Nevada Natural History*. He is hard at work on an upcoming field guide to birds of the Sierra Nevada. Simone Whitecloud is a Bay Area naturalist with a biology degree from University of San Francisco. In addition to leading many popular classes in the Bay Area, she has conducted research on the birds of the Eastern Sierra for PRBO Conservation Science and co-led bird walks at last year's Chautauqua.

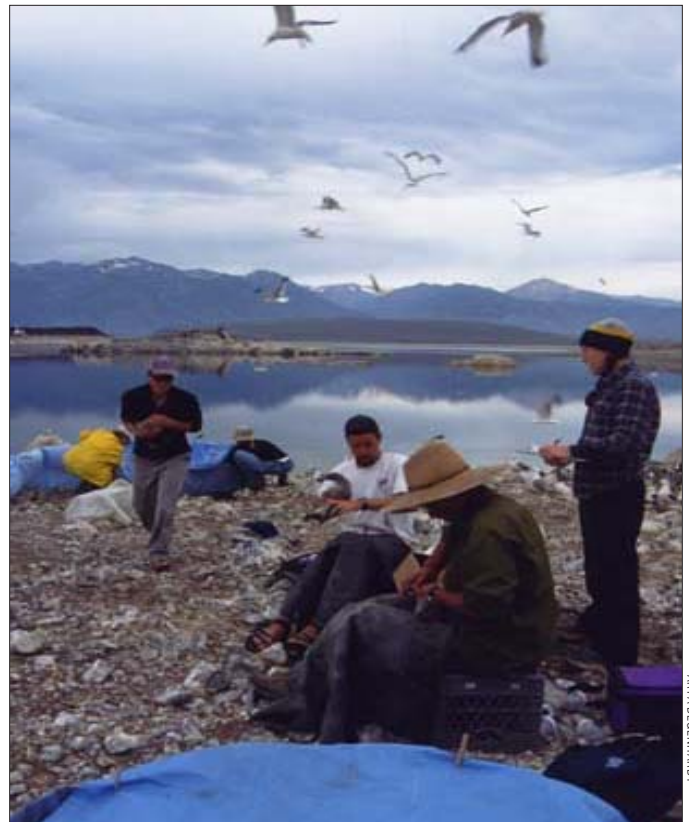
California Gull Research: Chick Banding

July 2–5

Justin Hite/PRBO Conservation Science

\$120 per person per day; overnight; meals included

Join a research team directed by PRBO Conservation Science and Cornell University in collecting data on the California Gull rookery at Mono Lake. Gain hands-on experience in field survey techniques while observing how the lake's changing chemistry—due to Mono's recent meromictic conclusion—is affecting gull reproductive success. Your help is needed in continuing this important research. The rare adventure of visiting Mono Lake's spectacular Negit Islets and observing at close quarters the second largest California Gull rookery in North America is for the stout of body and heart. Please talk to Bartshé Miller for more information on this unique Mono adventure. No previous research experience required.



Chick banding in the California Gull colony.

Call (760) 647-6595 to Register

The Tao of Flyfishing

July 16–18

Doug Virtue

\$320 per person/ \$300 for members

Rod, reel, and tackle provided for the weekend

Limited to 4 participants

Whatever your level of skill, this unique fly fishing seminar gives you the opportunity to direct your own learning. Instructor Doug Virtue will be contacting each participant prior to the seminar to identify goals and prepare individualized lessons, from fly tying to casting to catching and releasing large fish unharmed. With only four participants, you'll receive an unusually high degree of personal attention. Daily schedules will be developed with the input of participants, but you should plan on starting early and ending late, with mid-day siestas while the sun is too bright for good fishing. The seminar begins Friday night at the Mono Inn with an intimate meal (included) and a slide show. Saturday will be devoted to fishing with a special session on a nearby private pond where you'll have an honest chance of catching and releasing a trout over five pounds. Depending on conditions, the class may also be able to try for Golden Trout at one of the regional lakes. Participants will also be introduced to the ancient fishing philosophy of "making a good day." Although meals aren't included after Friday night, there will be ample time for picnics in the beautiful locales where we'll be fishing. Instructor Doug Virtue has been flyfishing since 1975. He has a wealth of experience from operating a remote lodge in Alaska's Iliamna Lake to catching oceanic yellowtail in Baja California. He emphasizes a holistic, appreciative approach to fishing that's appropriate for the waters of the Eastern Sierra.



COURTESY OF DOUG VIRTUE

Other Winged Wilderness

July 23–25

Verina Bird and Paul McFarland

\$110 per person/ \$95 for members



Not all things that fly have feathers. There is another world at flight during the height of summer, and the Mono Basin provides ideal habitat to observe it all. Join local naturalists Verina Bird and Paul McFarland on an exploration of the varied habitats of flying insects. On leisurely walks through alkali meadows to moraine ridgetops participants will learn the basics of butterflying, the insect lovers counterpart to birding. This seminar will focus on Jeffrey Glassberg's wonderful new field guide *Butterflies through Binoculars*. The class will cover identifying host plants, understanding the life cycle of butterflies, migration, habitat preferences, and their relationship to the entire ecosystem. Throughout this seminar, we will also be keeping an eye out for other creatures including, but not limited to, dragonflies, damselflies, moths, beetles, and of course, the larger winged creatures that eat them all. This seminar begins on a Friday evening and includes a long leisurely day of hiking on Saturday. Sunday will be a shorter day of hiking and the day will wrap up by early afternoon. Verina is a local lepidoptera enthusiast who has spent several summers chasing down butterflies. Paul McFarland, also a Lee Vining resident, is Executive Director of Friends of the Inyo, and is adept at chasing down pupae life stages, host plants, and birds.

Introduction to High Country Plants and Habitats

July 30–August 1

Ann Howald

\$110 per person/ \$95 for members

This class will explore the mosaic of habitats that make up the Eastern Sierra high country—lush flower-filled meadows fed by meandering streams, sagebrush-covered slopes, forests of hemlock, lodgepole and whitebark pines, subalpine lakes bordered by willows, and flowery rock gardens. The class will focus on sight identification of common trees, shrubs, and wildflowers, but won't neglect any birds, bugs, or critters that come to check us out. With any luck, we'll be zoomed by hummingbirds defending their patches of paintbrush and columbine, and we'll see noisy Clark's Nutcrackers collecting and storing whitebark pine seed. This weekend's seminar will begin Friday evening with an introductory slideshow session to introduce the basics of plant identification. Walks will be around the 10,000-foot elevation level with a modest pace over moderate terrain. Ann is a consulting botanist who has taught plant classes in the Eastern Sierra for many years.

Call (760) 647-6595 to Register

Identifying High Country Wildflowers

August 13–15

Mark Bagley

\$110 per person/ \$95 for members

At the headwaters of Lee Vining Creek there's a rich summer display of wildflowers, shrubs, and trees along cascading creeks, jewel-like lakes, green meadows, and rocky granite slopes. There, amid the towering peaks of the Sierra at the source of Mono Lake's water, learn how to identify this great diversity of plants using Norman Weeden's *A Sierra Nevada Flora*. This is the most complete small field guide to Sierra plants and provides identification keys and plant descriptions that minimize the use of special terminology and are suitable for use by beginners. This weekend's seminar will begin Friday evening with a three-hour hands-on session to introduce you to the basics of plant identification. Saturday and Sunday will be spent in the field on easily paced short walks (generally less than a mile) at high elevations (generally above 9,000 feet)—with much more time stopping and keying out plants than walking. Mark is a consulting botanist in the Eastern Sierra and Mojave Desert who has been leading field seminars in the Mono Basin since 1988. He is well known among past seminar participants for his easy-going pace and engaging teaching style in the field.

Tule and Cattail Basketry

August 20–22

Lucy Parker and Julia Parker

\$175 per person/ \$160 for members

primitive group campsite included

\$60 materials fee

During this three-day seminar participants will prepare materials and create a small tule and cattail gathering basket. Whole shoot tule and cattail will be used for both foundation and weaving. Participants will learn a plain-twining process with a half wrap around each foundation stick. Tule and cattail fibers are gathered in late spring when flowers begin to show. Participants will have enough time and material to finish a small basket during this seminar. You are encouraged (but not required) to camp with the group, and evenings will be spent around the campfire with traditional songs and stories. **This seminar is designed for weavers of all levels, beginning through advanced.** Lucy Parker is a descendent of the Yosemite Miwok, Mono Lake Kutzadika^a, and Kayasha Pomo Peoples. She learned traditional handiwork from her mother, a master basket weaver, and will pass on some of her knowledge in this special three-day/two-night camping seminar. Julia Parker is Lucy's mother and has dedicated her life to learning

and teaching basketry as well as continuing the traditions of her people. She is one of the famous basket weavers of California, and the only weaver still practicing who was taught by women that wove in the early 20th century.

Fall Bird Migration

August 21–22

Dave Shuford

\$105 per person/ \$90 for members

The east slope of the Sierra Nevada is a major migration route for birds traveling from northern nesting areas to warm southern habitats. As a result, early autumn is the time of year to see the greatest diversity of landbirds, shorebirds, and waterbirds in the Mono Basin and on Crowley Reservoir. Dave Shuford has been a staff biologist at PRBO Conservation Science for twenty years. He has conducted numerous surveys and research projects in the Mono Basin and beyond, and is well acquainted with where to find birds in the Eastern Sierra. This is one of our most popular field seminars so register early for this one!



Julia Parker preparing materials for basket weaving.

Call (760) 647-6595 to Register



COURTESY OF PETER KNAPP

Thin Air and Steep Slopes: Sierra Bighorn Sheep in the Mono Basin

September 11-12

John Wehausen and Karl Chang

\$150 per person/ \$130 for members

The US Fish and Wildlife Service listed the Sierra Bighorn Sheep as Federally Endangered in 1999. This field seminar will involve discussions of the biology and conservation of these animals with attempts to view them on foot. John Wehausen is a research scientist at White Mountain Research Station in Bishop. He has been investigating various aspects of the Sierra bighorn and working for their conservation since 1974. In the late 1970s he initiated the restoration program that brought bighorn back to the Mono Basin. There is a very good chance of seeing Sierra bighorn sheep in the wild during this seminar, but no guarantee. In the words of one past participant, "this is a High Sierra-safari-salon experience if there ever was one." Some of the proceeds from this seminar will benefit the Sierra Nevada Bighorn Sheep Foundation. **This seminar involves strenuous hiking at the 10,000-foot elevation and above.**

Winging into Autumn

August 28-29

David Lukas and Simone Whitecloud

\$105 per person/ \$90 for members

This field seminar will focus on the identification and ecology of both resident and fall migratory birds. We will visit a wide variety of habitats, including marshes, riparian forests, and mountain slopes in search of migrating birds. This course is appropriate for beginning and more advanced birdwatchers. We will intensively explore a number of sites, mixing short leisurely walks with periods of observation and discussion, taking time to learn about birds by watching them closely. The natural history and ecology of the bird's habitat will also be discussed. Generally walks will be chosen for their accessibility, but participants should be prepared and capable of wandering off-trail in pursuit of special sightings. David Lukas has led over one hundred birdwatching and natural history programs for the Nature Conservancy, Audubon Society, Elderhostel, and other groups. He is the author of *Watchable Birds of the Great Basin*, *Wild Birds of California*, and the revised *Sierra Nevada Natural History*. He is hard at work on an upcoming field guide to birds of the Sierra Nevada. Simone Whitecloud is a Bay Area naturalist with a biology degree from University of San Francisco. In addition to leading many popular classes in the Bay Area, she has conducted research on the birds of the Eastern Sierra for PRBO Conservation Science and co-led bird walks at last year's Chautauqua.

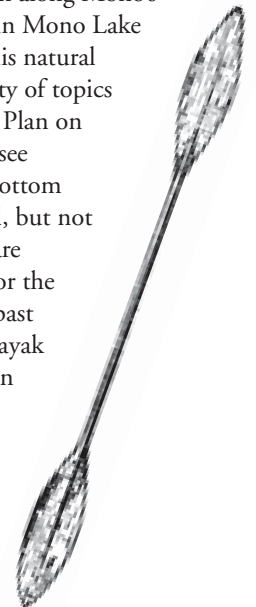
South Shore Kayak

September 12

Stuart Wilkinson and Mono Lake Committee Staff

\$75 per person/ \$65 for members

Early fall is an ideal time to kayak Mono Lake! Join Stuart Wilkinson and a Mono Lake Committee staff member for a guided naturalist expedition along Mono's south shore. Your leaders are well versed in Mono Lake geology, ecology, history, and politics. This natural history kayak tour will cover a wide variety of topics relating to this unusual Great Basin lake. Plan on four to five hours for the tour. Expect to see underwater tufa towers, birds, and lake bottom springs. Some kayak experience is helpful, but not necessary. Kayaks and safety equipment are provided. This seminar is being offered for the 9th year in a row, and is highly rated by past participants. Please note that this year's kayak seminar is on a Sunday. Space is limited in this popular seminar so register early!



Call (760) 647-6595 to Register

Paiute Coil Basketry

Sept 17-19

Lucy Parker and Julia Parker

\$175 per person/ \$160 for members

primitive group campsite included

\$60 materials fee

In this seminar participants will gather and create a miniature Paiute coil basket. Crafting miniature baskets became common after Native American contact with European-Americans. The Paiute utilized only a few materials, and willow was the only foundation used. During this three-day seminar students will prepare willow fibers—learning to split materials for strings. California Red Bud will be added for design. Willow, gathered in fall and spring, and Red Bud, gathered in winter, will be provided. Participants will be able to finish a miniature basket during this seminar. Participants are encouraged (but not required) to camp with the group, and evenings will be spent around the campfire with traditional songs and stories. **This seminar is designed for weavers of all levels, beginning through advanced.** Lucy Parker is a descendent of the Yosemite Miwok, Mono Lake Kutzadika^s, and Kayasha Pomo Peoples. She learned traditional handiwork from her mother, a master basket weaver, and will pass on some of her knowledge in this special three-day/two-night camping seminar. Julia Parker is Lucy's mother and has dedicated her life to learning and teaching basketry as well as continuing the traditions of her people. She is one of the famous basket weavers of California, and the only weaver still practicing who was taught by women that wove in the early 20th century.

Reading the Aspen Groves: Arborglyphs and Aspen Natural History

October 2-3

Richard Potashin and Nancy Hadlock

\$105 per person/ \$90 for members

Known for their breathtaking fall color displays and distinctive quaking, aspens border the high meadows of the Glass Mountains and the Mono Basin. A century of sheep grazing brought many Basque shepherders into these meadows. With their leisure time they left numerous carvings—or arborglyphs—on the aspens. Join us for an enchanting journey into the aspen groves to explore this historic, organic art form and the natural history of the trees themselves. We'll learn about the numerous wildlife, insects, and birds that are drawn to the groves. During our leisurely walks we'll discuss the history of the sheep grazing in the Mono Basin, the Basque culture, the cultural significance of the carvings, and efforts to document them. Richard Potashin,

aka Alkali Aspenowza, is a long-time Eastern Sierra resident and past Mono Lake Committee intern and canoe guide who has been discovering and documenting aspen carvings for many years. He's involved with numerous interpretive activities throughout the Eastern Sierra. Nancy Hadlock has her BS from the University of Nevada at Reno, her MS from California State University, Sacramento and has worked as an Interpretive Ranger since 1982. She has participated in UNR's Basque Studies Program and has been a passionate student of Basque culture, history and stories for over 20 years.

Mono-Bodie Fall Photography

October 8-10

Richard Knepp

\$250 per person/ \$225 for members



Autumn in the Mono Basin is one of the greatest photographic experiences in the country. Spectacular foliage and skies combine with exceptional light, presenting ample subject matter for photographers in both color and black and white. **And, for the first time, the class will spend Saturday in Bodie!** Join accomplished photographer Richard Knepp to explore varied shoreline locations at sunrise and sunset, and fall color in nearby canyons. Beyond his photographic expertise, Rick is intimately familiar with the Eastern Sierra and Mono Lake locale. In Bodie, Rick will be joined by Bodie expert, photographer, and good friend Jill Lachman. Jill has taught photo workshops in Bodie for many years. It is quite a special treat to have the opportunity to photograph *inside* some of the buildings. Subjects for discussion include composition, exposure techniques, filtration, basic theory of the Zone System, and developing a personal vision. Photographers of all levels are welcome; a fully adjustable camera of any size or format is suggested. This photographic seminar is offered for the 10th year in a row, with a new Bodie twist for 2004!

Late Fall Photography at Mono Lake: Finding Personal Vision

October 23-24

Claude Fiddler

\$365 per person/ \$345 for members

October is the time of year when the Mono Basin and surrounding High Sierra come alive with fall color. Claude Fiddler will guide participants to a grand and intimate landscape and help each workshop participant develop their personal photographic vision. All types of camera and photographer are

welcome at this workshop. Especially unique to this workshop will be Claude's thorough demonstration of the use of a large format, 4x5 camera. The workshop will begin with a personal portfolio review and reception. Field time will emphasize the role of personal photographic goals and how these influence photo composition. Camera technique will focus on the essentials needed for the creative photographic process. Participants will review their photos each day by recording compositions with a digital camera and displaying them at a workstation. Famous for making large format photographs of the remote and wild High Sierra, Claude Fiddler is also renowned for his climbing and

skiing exploits from the West Ridge of Mount Everest to a winter ski of the John Muir Trail. He is the author/photographer of Sierra classics: *The 100 Best Climbs in the Sierra Nevada*; *The High Sierra: Wilderness of Light*; *A Vast and Ancient Wilderness: Images of the Great Basin*; and *Yosemite Once Removed, Portraits of the Backcountry*.

Optional: on Monday, October 25th Claude will lead a photo excursion trek into the High Sierra. This excursion will be open to seminar participants for an additional fee of \$115.00. You may register for this event at the time of the seminar.

Field Seminar Registration Information

Call the Mono Lake Committee at (760) 647-6595 and ask for the seminar desk to register. More extensive seminar descriptions are available upon request or online at www.monolake.org.

We accept VISA, MasterCard, and Discover or personal checks payable to the Mono Lake Committee. Sorry, we cannot accept registration by mail or email.

Seminars are limited to fifteen people except where noted. If a seminar receives less than six participants (certain seminars excepted), the seminar will be cancelled two weeks in advance, and full refunds will be given. If you cancel three weeks prior to the seminar start date, we will refund your payment (less a \$10 processing fee). No refunds after that date, but tuition can be applied to another class in 2004.

Participants must sign a liability release form. All seminars operate under permit from the Inyo National Forest.

The Committee works with instructors and field leaders that have received high ratings from past seminar participants. We emphasize a spirit of learning and camaraderie in magnificent outdoor setting for a reasonable cost.

The Mono Lake Committee Field Seminars benefit research and education in the Mono Basin.

Mono Lake Committee Field Seminars are open to everyone, but Mono Lake Committee members get advance notice and class discounts. If you are not a current member of the Mono Lake Committee, you may receive the discount by joining when you register.



COURTESY OF CLAUDE FIDDLER

Staff Migrations

by Geoff McQuilkin



CARL DENNIS BUELL

You may be wondering, “Migrations in winter?” Yes! We’ve got some friendly new faces around the office just in time to settle in for the cold months and beyond.

We extend a warm welcome to Craig Pyle, the Committee’s new Office Manager. Coming to the Eastern Sierra from lower altitude regions such as Texas and Florida, Craig has enjoyed visiting the Sierra for many years. To the Committee he brings experience in management and administration. Craig’s “real world” experience will be invaluable in supervising interns, managing budgets, and generally keeping the office humming along. We’re excited to have him as part of the team.

We bid farewell to Eastern Sierra Policy Coordinator Craig Roecker, who departs to start his own firm called Common Ground Consulting. Craig will be active in policy issues in the Eastern Sierra and helping other nonprofits with planning, organization, and advocacy as well. Best of luck, Craig!

And how will the Committee will get by with one less policy person, given the many hot issues at the lake these days? Well, luckily local resident Jen Nissenbaum has stepped up to the plate! Jen brings a background in science, having recently gotten her Masters in Environmental Management with a focus in resource ecology from Duke University. Jen’s

ready to put her training to work in the rough and tumble advocacy world and already passed her first challenge of total immersion in tackling the Caltrans Shoulder Widening DEIR with the policy team.

We waved good-bye to Jessica Kirkpatrick, the last of the Interns of 2003. Jesse really enjoyed living in the Eastern Sierra, so she stuck around for the fall and lent her expertise to the local high school by coaching the Lee Vining Lady Tigers Volleyball team as well. We wish her luck and we’re pretty sure we’ll be seeing her out and about in the future!

With winter upon us, there are a lot of challenges facing Mono Lake and a lot of new ideas and opportunities for the Mono Lake Committee (see 25th Anniversary *Newsletters* for details). It always strikes me that many visitors to the Committee Bookstore have no idea that in the rest of our building we have a remarkably talented and dedicated staff juggling education programs, public policy work, science, attorneys, websites, newsletters, data analysis, fundraising, and so much more, all on behalf of Mono Lake. As we move into the Committee’s 26th year, all the Committee staff deserve special recognition for many, many jobs well done! ❖

Local Learning Express Fundraiser Benefits Mono Lake



SHANNON NELSON

Learning Express owners Tammy and Charlie Lloyd in their store in Mammoth Lakes.

On Sunday November 9th, 2003 the Learning Express in Mammoth Lakes held a great fundraiser for the Mono Lake Committee. The Learning Express just opened this past spring, and offers a great range of fun and educational toys for kids.

For the fundraiser Committee staff helped out in the store and the Learning Express donated 20% of the sales from the day-long fundraiser back to the Mono Lake Committee.

It was a very fun day, and a great local fundraiser. Lots of Committee members and friends pitched in by shopping for the holidays and had a chance to chat about the Mono Lake Committee too. If you missed the fundraiser or don’t live in the area, please stop by the Learning Express the next time you visit to shop and thank them for their support.

Many thanks to Charlie and Tammy Lloyd, owners of the Learning Express in Mammoth Lakes, for supporting the Mono Lake Committee in this way.

A Different Intern

by Randy Arnold

Editor's note: The Committee's Internship program draws enthusiastic participants each summer to lead interpretive tours, staff the Information Center front counter, and help staff with a wide variety of projects. Most often interns are college students out for the summer, but occasionally people in different stages of life come on board. Following is one such example from summer of 2003 Intern Randy Arnold.

My involvement with the Mono Lake Committee started in the early 1980s. I heard about a young couple taking on the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (DWP) in an effort to save Mono Lake and I thought, "I have to find a way to help them!" I volunteered in the visitor center for two one-week stints in the mid-1980s. Over the years I've managed to return to my favorite lake at least once each year and have watched the success of the Mono Lake Committee with amazement and great thanks.

Ever since those weeks of volunteering I dreamed of doing a full summer internship for the Mono Lake Committee. I had always thought I might do it when I got older, but last spring a little voice inside me said, "Do it now." I applied and was accepted as the Birding Intern. The next step was to ask my employers for a sabbatical....

I am the National Sales Manager for the Barefoot Cellars winery and have worked for the winery for 14 years. The owners of the Barefoot Winery—Michael Houlihan and Bonnie Harvey, granted me a sabbatical. Michael called and said, "You are so lucky you're going to be outside every day hiking!" He also said, "You can only go if you give Bonnie and me a tour of the area." Showing off the Mono Basin is my favorite activity so when they came to visit we hiked in Lundy Canyon and to Saddlebag Lake. To celebrate this unusual partnership we had a champagne celebration right on the shore (with Barefoot Bubbly of course) to honor Michael and Bonnie and their commitment to Mono Lake.

Michael and Bonnie love hiking and the outdoors and are avid environmentalists. They donate thousands of cases of wine every year to non-profits for various benefits and support dozens of environmental organizations every year. Michael and Bonnie want to help people through donations to worthy causes in all the communities where Barefoot wines are sold. Barefoot Cellars has donated wine to the Mono Lake Committee for the past 12 years. Michael says, "supporting worthy causes like the Mono Lake Committee with time and products is one way we in the business world can make a difference in preserving the environment. It was a pleasure to grant Randy the time to follow his dream as it is ours as well. 'Cause' marketing is our main form of advertising at Barefoot Cellars, and our customers really appreciate our company's focus on community and the environment. As a native Californian

myself, I am happy to help preserve our natural heritage." Bonnie, Michael's partner and co-owner of Barefoot Cellars, is also an avid hiker and naturalist. Bonnie says "as an enthusiastic practitioner of what I call the 'Church of Mother Nature,' I enjoyed our time with Randy in the beautifully unique Eastern Sierra. The canyons, cliffs, forests, and waterfalls are the perfect cathedral to appreciate nature's precious gift of creation."

During my four-month sabbatical I was able to serve Barefoot wines and champagnes at the well-attended 25th Anniversary party during the Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua, a reception for local photographer John Dittli, and the Sierra Nevada Alliance's celebration for the Mono Lake Committee's 25th Anniversary. I also held two benefits for bird research at the Lee Vining Community Center—one was a talent show, highlighting the great and diverse talent in the Mono Basin. The other was a Country Dance that featured the wonderful local band Wild Mountain Thyme with State Park Rangers Janet and Dave Carle as callers. Another great pleasure was assisting Sally Gaines on her half-day tours, which she held as part of the 25th Anniversary celebration.

Doing interpretive work is one of my great pleasures and I was able to take nearly 500 people on Bird Walks, South Tufa Tours, and Canoe Tours during my summer internship. Helping California Gull researchers in the gull colony was one of the most incredible experiences of my life.

I will forever be connected to the Mono Basin and the great work of the Mono Lake Committee. I'm currently working on organizing a benefit Wine Tasting and Silent Auction during the 3rd Annual Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua held on June 19th, 2004 at the Double Eagle Resort at the base of Carson Peak on the June Lake Loop. The Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua is becoming one of the premier bird festivals in the country and I'm very excited about supporting this wonderful event.

So, if you are one of those people thinking about taking a break from your hectic life and spending time at Mono Lake, all I can say is, "apply now!" My sabbatical summer was one



The Barefoot crew: John Ballew, Bonnie Harvey, Randy Arnold, and Michael Houlihan with Barefoot Bubbly at Mono Lake.

COURTESY OF RANDY ARNOLD



From the Mailbag

News from Members and Friends

by Erika Obedzinski

“I would say that there exist a thousand unbreakable links between
each of us and everything else,
and that our dignity and our chances are one.
The farthest star and the mud at our feet are a family.”

—Mary Oliver, from *Winter Hours*

Quietly, in winter, big white and gray clouds are making their way over the crest of the mountains to the east side of the Sierra Nevada. They move over Mono Lake, bringing moisture, movement, reflections. Watching this, it's easy to wonder, how much snow will the clouds bring? How much snow pack? Will it rain? How will the creeks flow this spring and summer? How much *water* will there be? That water is essential to life is a fact perhaps more magnified here at the edge of the desert, though it is true all over the world, everywhere.

Last September, this concept took on new meaning for me as I attended the 8th Annual Living Lakes Conference in Norwich, England. Living Lakes is an international network of grassroots groups protecting bodies of water all over the world, of which Mono Lake was a founding member. Each year Living Lakes sponsors one Mono Lake Committee staff member to attend the annual conference. Delegates from 29 countries participated in the conference, and throughout the week of lectures, workshops, discussions and smaller conversations, it became quite clear that wherever we are on earth, we are facing the same challenges. Among many other issues, increased population and development is leading to lack of enough water, or too little clean, drinkable water—and for animals, too few waterways healthy enough to live in or survive on. Disputes abound over this precious resource.

The conference helped to put things into perspective: At Lake Baikal in Russia, a pipeline for transporting oil is proposed to be built next to the lake. A handful of dedicated individuals there are working hard to divert this threat. Perhaps the situation at Lake Baikal is in some ways similar to where Mono Lake was 25 years ago, but it made me wish there were 15,000 advocates there to be a voice for Lake Baikal and its ecosystem, like we have here in support of Mono Lake.

In China at Lake Poyang, 1 million people are being moved from their homes alongside the lakeshore to homes on higher ground in an effort to restore the lake's ecology, which has been damaged by overuse. The government is paying people for the expense of moving, but what the livelihood will be for these 1 million people in their new upland home is uncertain.

The conference was like looking into the past and perhaps the future as well. What I enjoyed most and what was most inspiring was meeting so many lively, committed people from all over the world, dedicated to protecting a body of water and willing to work hard for that purpose. The Living Lakes network offers a way for us to share information and experiences, and reminds us that all of us on earth share the challenge of finding creative solutions for wise water use in the years to come. To learn more about Living Lakes, visit www.livinglakes.org. ❖

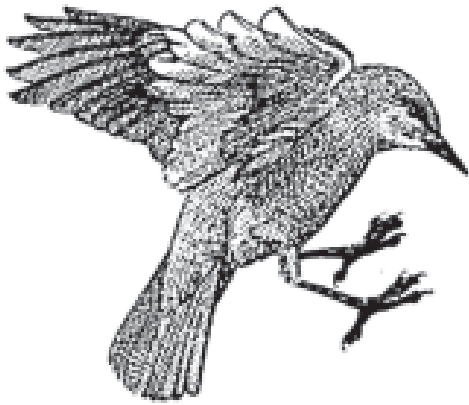
In Memory

Gifts were made in memory of **Katherine Beatie** by **Shirley J. Byrne** of Rancho Palos Verdes and **Ray and Anne Destabelle** of Rolling Hills Estates. **Helen Green** of Berkeley made a contribution in memory of her husband **Paul Green**. A gift in memory of **Paul Green** was also made by his longtime friend **Chris Swarth**. **Mary Elliott James** of Cambria gave a gift in memory of **Bryce Tingle**. **Martha Johnson** of San Jose made a donation in memory of **Tom Jordan**. **Jane and Courtenay Owens** of San Mateo gave a gift in memory of **Dr. Daniel Tolmach**. **The Owens'** also gave a gift in memory of **George Remelman**. **Helen L. Robinson** of Mountain View made a contribution in memory of her husband **Russell Robinson**. **Ms. Nancy Southern** gave a gift in memory of her husband **Mr. Charles Bommer** of Deer Harbor, WA.

Secure Mono Lake's Future

Consider remembering the Mono Lake Committee in your will or living trust, or name the Committee as a beneficiary of your IRA, qualified retirement plan, or life insurance policy. Your thoughtful gift will help us protect and restore Mono Lake, educate youth and young adults about water and the environment, and move the state toward a strong ethic of conservation and water use efficiency. For more information contact Frances Spivy-Weber (frances@monolake.org) at (310) 316-0042.

Erika Obedzinski is the Committee's Membership Coordinator. The trip to England for the Living Lakes Conference was her first ever experience off of the North American continent.



The 3rd Annual
Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua
June 18-20, 2004

Birds • Field Trips • Music • Art • And More

Wine Tasting Fundraiser June 19th, 4-6PM

With Cello Music by Priscilla Hawkins

Proceeds benefit the new Mono Basin Field Station

Call for information and tickets (760) 647-6595

**Travel to the Galapagos Islands ...
AND benefit Mono Lake!**

Cruise the Galapagos Islands for 11 days
aboard a sailboat with Mountain Travel Sobek!

August 9-19, 2004

The 15-person group will be accompanied by an expert naturalist guide
for 11 days of sailing, hiking, snorkeling, and island-style relaxation.

The trip benefits the Mono Lake Committee

For more information, contact Susanne Methvin 1-800-282-8747 x6023 or email Susanne@mtsobek.com



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