

MONO LAKE

N E W S L E T T E R

Winter 2007



EPA Dust Regulation Victory

Why We Love Mono Lake

Changes in LA Leadership

New Roof!

The word was out—it's time to ice skate! Watching the skies (and the local "Dweeb Weather Report") for snow was no use—clear and cold. Because it doesn't happen every year, you almost forget, but then suddenly someone walks in the back door with an ice report ... three inches, solid, smooth, clear ice on Lundy ... Trumbull ... Silver Lake.

It's a bit like an unexpected holiday. With Tioga Pass closed, the sun on its winter route, and the possibility that it may snow at any moment, you've got to just get out there when you have the chance. Snow debates turn to shoe-size discussions and everyone scrambles for a pair of ice skates.

I like to skate in the early morning. You start off mostly looking down—it is fascinating to see the lake below the frozen surface. Bubbles get trapped in other-worldly shapes in the ice, cracks are both neat and slightly freaky, and you may catch a glimpse of a fish darting by. And then you look up, and I swear it happens every time—"Wow." Surrounded by steep canyon walls, breathing the crisp clean air, soaking up the quiet—it's too good to be true.

What is it that happens in that moment? We've all had it at some point in our lives, and many of us have had it happen at Mono Lake. It's hard to find adequate words to follow-up on "wow." In this issue of the *Newsletter* we're attempting to do just that. Mono Lake inspires something within us—something strong enough that it motivates us to protect it. See if you can find it in the pages that follow.

And so, this is a symbolic raising of the glass (of water, of course) to Mono Lake Committee members and friends, cohorts in this journey to protect this place that we love. Here's to Mono Lake!

—Arya Degenhardt, Communications Director



COVER PHOTO, SUNRISE, PHIL LINDSAY

ARYA DEGENHARDT

Early December ice on Parker Lake.

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

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ANNA DEGENHARDT

Long Live Mono Lake

Putting the Committee's values up front

Taking on "Why?"

by the Mono Lake Committee staff

If you choose to move to Lee Vining and work for the Mono Lake Committee, you need to be ready to answer a lot of questions. There are the regulars: How deep is the lake? Where's South Tufa? And then there are the more personal questions which can be summarized as: why? Why do you live in Lee Vining? Why do you work for a nonprofit group? Why do you care about the lake? Why does the Mono Lake Committee do what it does?

What are people really asking with these questions? Part of it is curiosity about living in a small, rural town. Part of it is curiosity about working for an advocacy organization. And a lot of it is curiosity about what motivates a person and an organization to follow a certain path.

The Mono Lake Committee was founded on values that inspire staff, members, friends, and the organization today, and that motivate and guide our actions. So when it came

time to do strategic planning last year, we began with a series of conversations about values. We asked ourselves the *why* question: why work for Mono Lake? Why have a Mono Lake Committee? Why do we care?

A strong strategic plan and a moving list of statements about Mono Lake and the Mono Basin emerged from these discussions. The values that we as a staff articulated are very personal to us, and yet we know that they belong to many other people as well. They represent the spark for the Committee's 28 years of existence, and they are timeless—the common thread between hundreds of thousands of people who love Mono Lake.

What follows are excerpts from these discussions about values. Common themes developed that we think you'll find quite familiar. In the end, simple statements emerged that

Continued on page 14

Los Angeles improving relationship with the Eastern Sierra

Communication, commitment to environmental responsibility open new avenues

Now is the time to act on five key opportunities for Mono Lake

by Geoffrey McQuilkin

Environmentally friendly leadership from Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, the LA City Council, and the Department of Water & Power (DWP) Commission is ushering in a new era of improved relationships between the city and the Eastern Sierra. If acted upon, opportunities exist to establish forward-looking plans and partnerships that will move far beyond the historical disputes over water.

In December 2006, Mayor Villaraigosa made his commitments clear when he traveled to the Owens Valley for the ceremonial start to the rewatering of the Owens River. With the lowering of a gate, 62 miles of dry riverbed, located south of Big Pine in the Owens Valley, received regular flow again for the first time since the completion of the LA Aqueduct 93 years ago. The re-watering project, long delayed and completed under court order won by the Owens Valley Committee and Sierra Club, was embraced by Los Angeles leadership at an event that included City Councilmember Tom LaBonge, three DWP Commissioners, DWP staff, Inyo County Supervisors, Owens Valley Committee and Sierra Club leaders, and hundreds of Eastern Sierra residents.

The Mayor took a firm stand for environmental responsibility. “By opening these gates today, we will demonstrate to the world that the great city of Los Angeles is prepared to own up to its history and that we can thrive in partnership and in balance with our neighbors and with the environment of the Eastern Sierra,” Villaraigosa said. “We are here today because we need to change course.”

There are other signs of a new approach. DWP threatened litigation earlier this year over additional Owens Lake dust control activities ordered by local air quality regulators. By November, a settlement agreement had been negotiated in which DWP agreed to control an additional 12 square miles of dust-producing lakebed at an estimated cost of \$105 million. Earlier in 2006, the DWP Board of Commissioners—all recently appointed by the Mayor—hosted a workshop on Eastern Sierra issues at which Mono Lake featured prominently. The Commission then traveled to the Eastern Sierra for a series of talks with elected officials, environmental groups, and others. It was the first such trip ever made by the Commission in a century of water diversions.

Continued on page 5



Committee Board member Tom Soto, Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, and Committee Executive Director Geoff McQuilkin at the Lower Owens River rewatering ceremony. An improved relationship between Los Angeles and the Eastern Sierra is creating new opportunities for meaningful projects and partnerships at Mono Lake.

ELIN LUNG

What this means for Mono Lake

What we need to do now is turn good will into good works. Improved communication and shared values build a solid foundation for meaningful action. What should we be working on within the city at Mono Lake? By my count, we have five major opportunities.

1 First, the State Water Board has required DWP to undertake restoration of Mono Lake, its tributary streams, and waterfowl habitat. DWP and the Committee have generally worked well together to implement on-the-ground projects. Now is the time to jointly resolve outstanding questions about the requirements, to determine the fate of deferred projects, and to outline what DWP's long-term monitoring obligations will be.

2 Second, the Committee and Los Angeles have an education partnership that is over a decade old, through which LA youth come to the Mono Basin for five-day programs to learn about where their water comes from, the natural world, and why it matters. Now is the time to enhance the partnership in ways that will support the long term growth and stability of the program.

3 Third, Los Angeles owns some 20,000 acres of land around Mono Lake and three times that in Mono County. Now is the time to find a way to memorialize LA's current no-development policy for these lands in a long term agreement.

4 Fourth, the Committee is deeply invested in assuring that Mono Lake's protection is achieved through water efficiency measures taken in Los Angeles. The City will be pushing new initiatives in conservation, water reclamation, and stormwater capture, and now is the time for the Committee to help make these programs successful.

5 Last, largest, and most significant for the long term, climate change poses a whole new set of challenges for the understanding and management of water resources at Mono Lake. Changes in runoff amount and timing pose huge stream and lake management challenges and could someday reopen established water rights decisions. Tackling these issues cooperatively is the only viable approach, and now is the time to start. Mono Lake's future depends on it, and we have the potential, once again, to establish models of success for the rest of California. ❖

Air quality victory! Mono Lake supporters change planned federal policy

by Geoffrey McQuilkin

With the publication of the following words in the Federal Register, Mono Lake supporters scored a major political victory: "With regard to primary standards for particles generally less than or equal to 10µm in diameter (PM10), EPA is retaining the 24-hour PM10 ... standard." To translate, last fall the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) abandoned its plan to eliminate the Mono Lake clean air health standards!

Earlier in 2006, the EPA had proposed doing away with health standards for "PM10 particulate" in the Mono Basin and rural areas across the country. As a result, the toxic dust storms which lift off the exposed bed of Mono Lake would have been left unregulated. The dust threatens human health, and one of the reasons for raising the level of Mono Lake is to control these dust storms.

Thanks to Mono Lake supporters, the EPA heard loud and clear that the severe air pollution problem at Mono Lake must remain subject to federal regulations. Advocates submitted over 2,800 letters calling for clean air protection for the sake of Mono Lake, local residents, and visitors. The Committee submitted a detailed 22-page analysis, laying the groundwork for legal action if the EPA failed to respond. Letters of concern

came from individuals, Mono County, public health officials, elected state and federal representatives, and many more.

While public controversy remains regarding other portions of the new particulate regulations, which are generally more relevant to urban areas, Mono Lake supporters can be proud that together we protected Mono Lake from a major threat!



Maintaining EPA dust regulations is critical to Mono Lake's protection and restoration.

Policy updates

by Lisa Cutting

Cunningham attempts to exercise buy back option

In the final hour of the most complicated real estate transaction in the Mono Basin (to date!), Bill Cunningham notified Mammoth Mountain Ski Area (MMSA) that he would be exercising his option to re-purchase the 120-acre parcel that he sold to MMSA in the spring of 2005. Included in the original purchase agreement between MMSA and Cunningham was a one-time buy back clause that gave Cunningham the opportunity to regain ownership of the property by purchasing it back from MMSA.

However, Peter Denniston, representative for MMSA, strongly asserts that the language of the purchase agreement allowed for a one-time buy back option which MMSA reports was already exercised by Cunningham earlier this year. The matter may end up in court. Denniston has told the Committee that MMSA's plans for the Cunningham property remain the same: to use the parcel as part of a land trade with the Forest Service, ensuring the property's long-term protection as part of the Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area.

Caltrans' guardrail maintenance project completed

Visitors driving on Highway 395 along the west shore of Mono Lake will notice a secure and stable new guardrail system. While the supporting posts are new (metal instead of wood), the guardrail itself has been reused in most areas, maintaining a more weathered appearance as opposed to a bright, shiny new metal look—which can be quite visible throughout the Mono Basin in the sunny days of summer.

Replacing the guardrail on this section of highway was originally a component of the Mono Lake Shoulder Widening Project. The combination of the project remaining on hold since 2004 and the continuing dilapidation of the old guardrail pushed this part of the project to the forefront of Caltrans' work plans since it relates directly to motorist safety. The rest of the original project remains on hold for the time being.

The Committee is continuing to advocate for a more visually acceptable and unique guardrail since this stretch of highway is in the Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area. As new alternatives are developed and tested by Caltrans—

and State funding for this type of project becomes available—Caltrans has promised that this issue can be revisited.

Inyo National Forest staff changes

Molly Brown, Deputy District Ranger for the Mammoth and Mono Lake Ranger District, has left the Mono Basin and the US Forest Service, to accept a Field Manager position with the Oregon Bureau of Land Management. For the past year, Molly was the acting District Ranger for the Mammoth and Mono Lake Ranger District, while the position was vacant.

Jon Regelbrugge has been selected as the permanent District Ranger for the Mammoth and Mono Lake Ranger District. Jon was previously the Deputy District Ranger for the Mountaintop Ranger District of the San Bernardino National Forest. The majority of Jon's duties have focused on natural resource management, including the management of an extensive fuels reduction and forest health and restoration program aimed at reducing the wildland fire threat to fire-prone communities within the San Bernardino National Forest. Jon's other duties have included the

Continued on page 7



Caltrans' guardrail project for motorist safety has been completed without any lake-disturbing activity. The Committee continues to advocate for a more visually appropriate guardrail for this section of Hwy 395 that runs through the Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area.

management of a wide variety of activities including three ski areas.

The Committee is happy to see the permanent District Ranger position filled, and will continue to urge the Forest Service to fill the Deputy District Ranger position as soon as possible. These positions are crucial for effective protection and management of federal lands at Mono Lake.

Wilderness Land Trust hard at work in the Mono Basin

On October 19, 2006, the Wilderness Land Trust purchased 80 acres within the Granite Mountain Wilderness Study Area (WSA), which is located east of Mono Lake, between Highway 120 East and Highway 167. The parcel consists of sagebrush habitat and migrating sand dunes and is an important part of the Great Basin ecosystem.

At one time this parcel was threatened by the potential development of a geothermal plant as well as an open-pit gold mine. The Trust's acquisition of the 80-acre property will help facilitate the management of the Granite Mountain WSA and will help maintain the unique wilderness values of the area.

The Wilderness Land Trust is familiar with the Mono Basin. Earlier this year, they purchased the 3,700 acre parcel known as Cedar Hill. Development proposals for the property eventually led to a private auction, at which point the Land Trust stepped in to help prevent development. The Wilderness Land Trust purchased the Cedar Hill property and is currently in the process of transferring ownership to the adjacent agency land manager—the Bureau of Land Management—thereby ensuring its protection as wildlife habitat and open space.

The Mono Inn at Mono Lake

The Mono Inn and an adjacent ten acres is currently on the real estate market with an asking price of \$6.7 million. Included in the deal are conceptual plans for an “eco-lodge” consisting of 40 condominium/vacation suites, spa facilities, conference rooms, and staff housing.

While the plans include many desirable green building features (solar power, water recycling, sustainable building materials, and natural vegetation), the conceptual plans exceed development limitations established in the Mono Basin Scenic Area Comprehensive Management Plan. The Plan states that private property owners within the Scenic Area cannot build more than double the square footage of the buildings that existed in 1984—the date when Congress created the Scenic Area. The current conceptual architectural plans propose development at least three times above this limit.

The realtor representing the Mono Inn property is no stranger to Mono Basin Scenic Area properties and the rules and regulations under which they fall. Paul Oster was the listing agent for the Cunningham parcel (see Fall 2006 *Newsletter*). In that transaction he asserted that because the property was zoned “commercial” under the Mono County General Plan, development in excess of the Mono Basin Scenic Area Plan was allowable. Oster claimed, in short, that the county's authority supersedes the federal government's authority. The Committee disagrees with Oster and agrees with Mono County's legal counsel that neither supersedes the other. A developer must obtain approval from both government agencies to proceed.

The Committee is concerned that potential buyers need to fully understand the property's location within the Mono Basin Scenic Area and the development rules that apply to it, so they are prepared to modify the conceptual plans accordingly. Committee staff will continue to work with all parties involved to assure that a fair and thorough discussion occurs on potential projects on this property.

Mono Lake Committee staff travels the conference circuit

Late fall was a busy time for policy staff as back-to-back conferences provided great opportunities to share lessons learned at Mono Lake with others in California and beyond.

Greg Reis, the Committee's

Information Specialist, and Lisa Cutting, the Committee's Eastern Sierra Policy Director, participated in a panel showcasing Mono Lake restoration for the California Society for Ecological Restoration annual conference at UC Santa Barbara in October.

The conference theme “Shovels to Science” was applicable since restoration in the Mono Basin has evolved during the past twelve years, allowing the study and exploration of many scientific questions. In addition to Committee staff, the two-day session included representatives from the State Water Resources Control Board, Los Angeles Department of Water & Power (DWP), the State Water Board-appointed stream scientists, and PRBO Conservation Science.

Next, Geoff McQuilkin, the Committee's Executive Director, and Lisa Cutting attended the Sierra Business Council's annual conference “Whose Sierra Is It? Bridging the Rural / Urban Divide” held in Yosemite Valley. Geoff made a joint presentation with DWP, offering expertise in the area of innovative partnerships by using the Committee's education and restoration partnerships with DWP as a working example.

The Sierra Business Council always hosts a dynamic conference and this year was no exception. Three conference tracks—Water, Infrastructure, and Heritage Economy—allowed participants to focus their energy and talents on not just talking about the challenges that lie ahead, but on beginning regional dialogues with each other, and in some cases taking the first steps towards active solutions.

Then, to round out the fall, in late November Communications Director Arya Degenhardt attended the 11th Annual International Living Lakes Conference at Lake Poyang in China. For more on this conference, please see page 12. ❖

Lisa Cutting is the Committee's Eastern Sierra Policy Director. This year she extended the fly fishing season with a late trip to the San Juan River in New Mexico to fish for huge trout with tiny flies!

Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua 2007 draws some pretty big names

John Muir wouldn't attend just any ordinary bird festival!

by Lisa Cutting

Every year about this time—mostly in an effort to dream of sunny summer days, bountiful bird songs, and the familiar faces of our Chautauqua friends—the Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua partners begin the exciting task of organizing new and returning presenters for the upcoming event. Each year we try to out-do the previous year's offerings, which keeps the planning process challenging. But with John Muir as our confirmed evening presenter for Friday night, the bar has been set high!

Historian, performer, and storyteller Lee Stetson will transport us back to the turn of the 20th century as he portrays America's foremost naturalist and conservationist—John Muir—through his unique living history stage performance. Stetson has been captivating audiences since 1983, and his one-person shows based on the life of Muir have fascinated more than a quarter of a million people in Yosemite National Park and throughout the country.

So mark your calendar now for June 15–17, 2007, another weekend that's definitely not your ordinary bird festival.



Northern Flicker.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CHRIS MCCREEDY



ELIN LJUNG

Butterflying at County Park.



ARVA DEGENHARDT

A field trip to Mono's shoreline.



ARVA DEGENHARDT

The Chautauqua is fun for bird lovers of all ages and abilities.

In addition to Mr. Muir, we'll have another year of interesting field trips, informative workshops, lively music, delicious food, and the now world-famous Chautauqua bird calling contest!

The program is not yet finished, but the list of presenters and leaders currently includes: Don Banta, Ryan Burnett, Roy Churchwell, Susan Colletta, Jon Dunn, Tom Hahn, Sacha Heath, Ann Howald, Jack Laws, Burleigh Lockwood, David Lukas, Jeff Maurer, Chris McCree, Paul McFarland, Peter Metropulos, Kristie Nelson, Melissa Pitkin, Mike Prather, Cathy Rose, Ane Carla

Rovetta, Dave Shuford, Rich Silver, Susan Steele, Greg Stock, Sarah Stock, Tim and Leslie Willoughby, David Wimpfheimer, and Ben Winger.

Registration for the 2007 Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua begins April 15th, and updates will be available at www.monobasinbirdchautauqua.org as the event draws near. ❖

Out on a limb for an Osprey

by Jim Pence, Mono Basin Tufa State Reserve

“Jim, we have a situation here.” I had just settled into the couch after my first dinner at home after a summer backpacking trip. Ranger Rourke was on the phone from South Tufa, calling to explain the plight of an Osprey fledgling.

If you look closely at some of the off-shore tufa towers around Mono Lake you may see a large pile of sticks that serve as an Osprey nest. As summer progresses, young Osprey stretch their wings and learn how to fly.

Rourke reported that one of South Tufa’s three Osprey fledglings had missed its landing on a nearby tufa tower—the youngster crashed into the tower, clipped its wing, and landed in the water. The bird was partially submerged in the lake and struggling to hang on to the base of the tower while salty, carbonate-rich water stripped valuable oils from its feathers.

It was too late to get a canoe from the Mono Lake Committee, and it was getting dark—something had to be done quickly to assist this bird in need of a boost.

The drive to South Tufa was incredible—the sun had just set and the remaining light in the sky was truly a driving force in my determination to help one of nature’s finest.

Still in my first year living in the Mono Basin, Every day in the Mono Basin is a new experience and this evening was proving itself to be another original. I assembled my gear: gloves, shirt, booties, fins, and rescue tube. Who would have thought this would be my first real swim in this inland ocean? Upon reaching the beach, I saw the struggling bird through a park volunteer’s spotting scope and immediately made the decision to enter the water. As I submerged my head I felt the harsh salts burn the back of my throat.

The swim was about 230 yards, making me glad I had experience as a lifeguard. I reached the tufa tower where the flailing bird was attempting to get a talon into the limestone. By now the sun was long gone and the summer sky was going through its spectrum of colors before darkness. I made my way onto the tufa tower—what an incredible thing! This was my first up close experience with tufa that was actually growing.



230 yards off shore, and in the very last light of the day, Ranger Jim Pence turns for the swim home after placing a stranded Osprey fledgling safely atop its tufa tower perch.

Unlike tufa on the shoreline which shows signs of human disturbance, this tufa is feather-thin and extremely fragile. I balanced myself on a submerged tower and reached for the bird.

The moment of truth had come—I had no idea what to expect. Was this fully-grown bird with a beak and razor sharp talons capable of tearing trout apart, ready for human intervention? Apparently he was. He looked at me as if to say ‘this time I will let you grab me, but there will not be a next time.’ The anti-climatic rescue moment consisted of grabbing the bird across the shoulders and placing him on top of his landing spot. That was easy!

As a ranger working for the State Park one never knows the outcome of a rescue event. But I began my night swim back to the shore with a wonderful feeling of having made contact with nature in a good way.

I know some people would say to let nature take its course. I thought about that. But then I thought about how Osprey nesting on tufa towers at Mono Lake is influenced by humans in the first place. The Osprey made this place home because we humans uncovered good nesting spots. One nesting pair back in the 1980s has become fifteen nests this year! Yes, another success story for the recovering lake.

The swim back to shore was less stressful than the swim out. I switched to backstroke and watched the fading light.

I reached the shore and traveled back home anticipating a warm shower to rinse off the salty lake water. While rinsing my swim trunks I noticed a distinctly oceanic smell. I put my hands into the pockets of my swim shorts, only to find handfuls of brine shrimp I had netted while doing the backstroke.

Sometime during the night or early the next morning the Osprey flew back to the nest, joining his parents and two siblings. It is winter now, and the Osprey are off to warmer locations. I hope my buddy does well down south and comes back to visit and have a family of his own here at Mono Lake. ❖

Jim Pence is coming up on his one-year anniversary as the new Mono Basin Tufa State Reserve Ranger. The State and the Osprey are lucky to have him here!

PHOTO COURTESY OF WAYNE LEDERER

The streams wait patiently as we learn

by Greg Reis

On December 6th, 62 miles of the Lower Owens River were rewatered for the first time in almost a century. It is a great start, and will take years for water-dependent wildlife habitat to develop.

We can compare this to the roughly 20 miles of Mono Basin streams that were rewatered after being dry for 40 years. There is much to learn from 20 years of recovery on Rush, Lee Vining, Parker, and Walker Creeks. Here are a few things we've learned—though we seem to come up with questions just as often as answers.

It is a slow process. An individual black cottonwood tree can produce over 13 million seeds, most of which are deposited within 5 meters of the tree. Does this mean that a dry 500 meter gap in trees will be filled, at 5 meters per year (if we are lucky), in 100 years?

Perhaps. There are 227 plant species along Rush and Lee Vining Creeks, 20 of which are non-native. Some move faster than cottonwoods.

Riparian plant communities are most strongly affected by distance to groundwater (more so on Rush Creek than Lee Vining Creek), frequent disturbance, and availability of fine substrate. High streamflows move all of these in a beneficial direction. Rush Creek was deprived of high flows from 1999 until 2004 due to delayed facility upgrades and dry years. Have the last two wet years caught us up?

Vegetation surveys in 2001 and 2005 found that vegetation structure is mostly static. Without new channel openings or higher flows, only gradual changes in vegetation are likely to occur in the next 5–10 years. We are planting some trees to help things along, but will these trees be able to successfully regenerate into future generations? We are working to open channels, but will they stay open? We are hoping for higher flows, but will the dams and the dam operators—and the climate—be able to do it?

The pre-diversion acreage of woody riparian vegetation was 240 acres on Rush Creek and 109 acres on Lee Vining Creek. On average, all Rush Creek and Lee Vining Creek reaches

have recovered to 77% and 74% cover, respectively. Unfortunately, the most barren reaches of Rush Creek are only 30% recovered, and some reaches of Lee Vining Creek are only 36% recovered.

That is just woody plant cover. Structure and species composition are another matter. The beginnings of a cottonwood forest only exist in 47 out of 172 transects—and only 5 of those transects are in the cottonwood-deficient Rush Creek drainage.

“Channel 8” is a plugged stream channel in the Rush Creek bottomlands. The restoration plan calls for a year-round flow to be restored to the channel, however, the Water Board appointed scientists in charge disagree with the plan. They have deferred this, and so far have only turned it into a high flow channel. But every year it is opened up a bit more, and we are almost to the point of perennial flow. Vegetation surveys in the area showed a steady increase in riparian vegetation in 2005, and amazing growth in 2006. In fact, many cottonwood shoots grew 75 cm in 2006, when in previous years they only grew 5 cm. The good growing season conditions during the last two years, mainly high flows aided by additional channel opening work, influenced this phenomenal increase in growth.

Vegetation recovery is only one piece of the puzzle, and we are also learning—and asking more questions about—fish, birds, geomorphic processes, and flow management. These lessons will be shared with restoration practitioners on the Owens River, San Joaquin River, and on our very own Mill Creek. And we will continue to learn from other efforts as well. There is much to be hopeful about—and much work yet to do. ❖

Greg Reis is the Committee's Information Specialist. He sometimes embarks on superhuman feats, the most recent of which involved running from Mono Lake to Tioga Pass and then hiking to the top of Mount Dana.



PHOTO COURTESY OF JOHN BAIR

A remarkable 75 centimeters of new growth on a Mono Basin black cottonwood shoot.

Mono Basin Journal

A Roundup of Quiet Happenings at Mono Lake

by Geoffrey McQuilkin



ARVA DEGENHARDT

It was a crisp morning, the sun was strong, and there wasn't a breath of wind as our canoes and kayaks slipped past Eared Grebes diving for the last brine shrimp of the season. A distinguished group of environmental leaders from throughout the Sierra was visiting and I wanted to be sure they saw Mono Lake up close, with paddles and binoculars in hand.

We talked of brine shrimp and birds, water diversions and courtrooms, land development and education programs. And then we got to the "why" topic: why is the Committee here? Why does it have so many supporters?

There are many ways to answer these questions, but on that day, bobbing next to warm tufa bulwarks, above bushes recently covered by the rising lake, we took it back to the beginning. Why was the Committee founded in the first place?

To fight for Mono Lake against excessive water diversion—but that was a strategy, not a motivation. Desire to fight Los Angeles was not the reason David Gaines and so many others dedicated their lives to building an organization. It was this: *there are things of great value here at Mono Lake that must not be lost or destroyed.* And because we care about them we must take action.

At that moment in the conversation, the day's exploration changed from an enjoyable one to a meaningful one. It changed from a discussion about facts and figures, battles won and programs planned, to one about our shared values as people trying to do the right thing. And that gave us the luxury of paddling back across the lake's sparkling waters buoyed by a new sense of hope and optimism for the future. ❖

Benchmarks



November 11, 2006: After over 40 years of sheltering the building, the Committee's old roof was full of holes and patches.



December 11, 2006: The new roof is strong corrugated metal in a beautiful shade of blue, and best of all, no more leaks!

PHOTOS BY EMIN LUNING

Eared Grebes and brine shrimp disappear early; rotifers bloom

by Greg Reis

6417'

Prediversion lake level, 1941

On October 10th, UCSB Researcher Dr. Robert Jellison was sampling the lake's limnology with a third grade class, and he found the brine shrimp gone already! He also found a tremendous bloom of the rotifer *B. plicatilis*. Rotifers are microscopic animals that, along with brine shrimp, alkali flies, and a nematode, are the only multicellular complexed creatures in Mono Lake. This rotifer has not been seen in Mono Lake in four years—and four years ago, October shrimp numbers were also low.

6391'

Target lake level

6384.4'

Current lake level

6372'

Historic low, 1982

As a result of the early shrimp die-off, most Eared Grebes departed early on the next phase of their

migration to the Gulf California. By mid-October there were few grebes seen on the lake. This early migration was unexpected, since usually the Eared Grebes stay in large numbers on Mono Lake into November and December. Unfortunately some Eared Grebes were unable to fatten up sufficiently for the flight and there were birds found along the roadside and dead along the shore.

To further confuse explanation of this anomalous year, and for the third time since the counts began in 1996, researchers were unable to calculate peak grebe numbers on Mono Lake. The California Department of Fish & Game usually does aerial surveys in mid-October and sends the photos to researcher Dr. Sean Boyd, who calculates the number of grebes on the lake. Unfortunately the plane, which is based in Sacramento, was getting its windshield replaced and this year's survey was missed due to the grebes'

early departure.

A dry autumn resulted in Mono Lake dropping to a low point of 6384.4 feet above sea level for the year on December 1st. This is 2.5 feet higher than a year ago and 3.8 feet higher than the previous year. In mid-December, snowstorms finally began arriving in the Mono Basin. The outlook for this winter is a moderate El Niño. Typically, El Niño brings a wetter-than-average winter to the central Sierra Nevada in four out of seven years. ❖



Eared Grebe snaps up an alkali fly.

PHOTO COURTESY OF RON WOLFE

eBird: Collective observations of birders make a difference!

by Brian Sullivan, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, bls42@cornell.edu

No longer will the observations of birders languish in dusty notebooks or on the crashed hard drives of home computers! eBird, an online collaboration between the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Audubon captures this data via the Internet, and makes it available to amateur birders, experts, scientists, and conservation biologists.

At the Cornell Lab of Ornithology we feel that people's observations, when pulled together, can be a valuable resource for gathering baseline data on the distribution and abundance of North American birds.

eBird is taking off across the Western Hemisphere, and it's time that birders in the Mono Basin start to contribute their observations to the collective.

Check it out at www.ebird.org.

It's free, and you get access to an extraordinary online checklist program and database. Plus, it's simple—you enter your observations into the database, and eBird keeps all your lists for you.

eBird is not only a warehouse of observational data, it's an online tool that allows you to record, retrieve, and archive your data, all while making your efforts available to scientists interested in using data for bird conservation.

eBird's geographic coverage is expanding—covering all of the US, Canada, and Mexico, and eBird has recently been launched in Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti, as well as across the Caribbean. Plans are in the works for collaborations in the near future with Cuba, Colombia, Costa Rica and Panama. The goal is to implement eBird across the whole of the Western

Hemisphere; allowing bird monitoring at scales heretofore unimaginable, and allowing birders to keep comprehensive lists on the site.

As more people participate in eBird the value of the data set will increase exponentially. As of last November we recorded over 500,000 bird observations, and gathered over 30,000 checklists—a massive amount of data. Browse the web site, explore the data output available in your area through the "View and explore data" pages, and enter your own observations into the system!

When you get out birding this winter make sure to record the birds you see at each location. Log in to www.ebird.org, and join the bird conservation revolution!

The Living Lakes Network grows up

by Arya Degenhardt

What began as a small collection of like-minded non-governmental organizations (NGOs) has become a full-fledged and highly professional organization championing lake protection around the world. As one of the founding members of the Living Lakes Network, Mono Lake has been a partner since the Network's inception in 1998. Far from its modest beginning, today the Network is comprised of 45 lakes, and as it approaches its 10-year anniversary, it is working effectively towards its goal of "the conservation and protection of natural resources, chiefly the drinking water reservoirs of the earth."

International conference at Lake Poyang

In November 2006 I attended the 11th International Living Lakes Conference held at Lake Poyang, China. The Network holds conferences each year at one of the partner lakes, where the host lake and its issues serve as the focal point. These are not your ordinary sit-down conferences, and it's not unusual to see activities such as cultural performances, meetings with local representatives, and nature hikes on the agenda.

Lake Poyang is the largest freshwater lake in China, and its health suffers due to pollution from agricultural runoff, siltation, and poverty. The visiting Living Lakes delegates had two days of non-stop field trips to learn about the place and to investigate these issues.

Highlights included visiting one of the only organic tea gardens in China—located in Poyang's watershed. We were also treated to a show of Buddhist, Mongolian, and Ming Dynasty traditional tea ceremonies complete with elaborate costumes and delicious teas.

We were invited into the small village of Cuijia where the whole population is involved in a sustainable energy project.

Led into the town by a parade of singing women and Chinese dragon dancers, the townspeople opened their homes to us—showing with pride their individual home biogas (methane from waste products) energy setups. Traditionally these townspeople lived with unsanitary sewage systems and coal-fired power plant electricity.



However, the Chinese government, along with the



Getting bearings at Lake Poyang.



The home biogas project.



Children in Cuijia Village.

PHOTOS BY ARYA DEGENHARDT AND THE LIVING LAKES NETWORK



Exploring the shores of Lake Poyang.

local NGO, has implemented a program that provides individual biogas production and conversion systems for every household. This has not only

increased the people's standard of living and helped reduce both air and groundwater pollution, but it has proven to be an inexpensive way to do so.

We also went birding down at the shoreline of Lake Poyang. Birding is still a foreign concept in the region, and there are no trails or lake-access facilities in the areas where birds are usually found. However, after bumping along a maze of dirt roads in our police-escorted motorcade we came to a spot where five cars were parked waiting for us with spotting scopes—positioned on Swan Geese, Greater White-fronted Geese, Eurasian Spoonbills, and many others in the thousands.

Along the way we met with numerous officials and stopped

Continued on page 17

capture and reveal the reasons we all—founders, staff, members, and friends—are motivated to take action on Mono Lake's behalf.

Beliefs & values

Articulating one's core values isn't simple. We began our discussions by filling in the simple phrase "I believe _____" For example: "I believe that the algae, brine shrimp, alkali flies, and birds are important. "I believe that both the planet and the people on it need places like Mono Lake." "I believe in saving places like Mono Lake for my children's children."

A simple truth emerged quickly from this exercise: we all love Mono Lake. Because we're always thinking in terms of watersheds and ecosystems, loving Mono Lake means from the headwaters to the lake-bottom, including the tributary streams.

But *why* do we love Mono Lake? For this we go back to the "I believe" statements. "I believe wild places should exist for their own right." "I believe people need places that are dominated by natural forces, not human ones." "I value the sense of solitude, the quiet, and the changing beauty of Mono Lake."

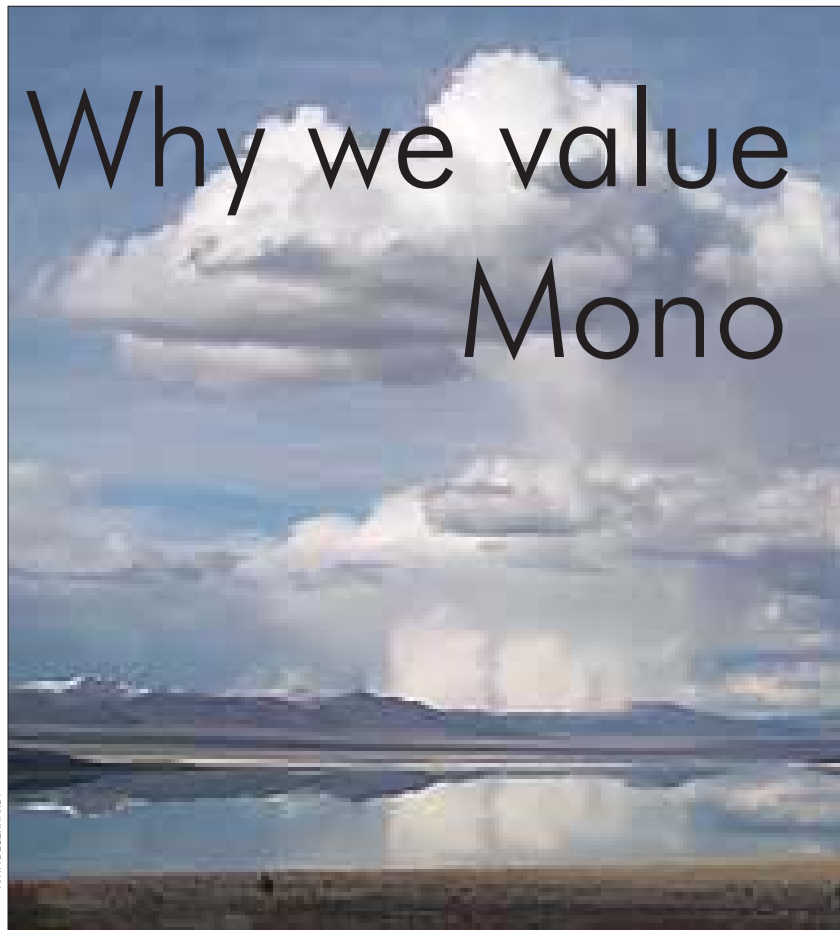
There is something about wild and natural places that clearly resonates with people. We see it on naturalist tours, when people walk into the store, when people call on the phone just to ask what the clouds are doing over the lake, and when we read it in the thousands of letters received from our dedicated members. As Committee founder David Gaines often said, the lake speaks for itself and it touches people's hearts.

So we love Mono Lake for what it is, a wild and natural place, and we also value the sense of inspiration it creates within us.

Proactive education

"I believe that something amazing has happened here, and we need to tell people about it." "At the Mono Lake Committee education means sharing the truth." "I value empowering people with information." "This is a landscape of hope." The story of what is happening at Mono Lake is a strong and moving one with many lessons and a rare and inspiring message of hope.

"I believe that education is our most powerful tool for change." The Committee's education program serves two main purposes:



ARVA DEGENHARDT

Methods & philosophies

"I believe in defending public resources." "I believe in proactive solutions." "I believe in collaboration as a means to the best end." Since its inception, the Committee has valued cooperative solutions—they've become an important part of how we operate, and we feel strongly about this methodology. To us, cooperative solutions mean compromise without compromising principle. They mean collaboration in search of workable solutions.

"I believe in our mission statement." The Committee's

mission statement reads: *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.*

Our mission statement is a mantra around the office. At its essence, it highlights our three main focus areas: protection,

connecting people with Mono Lake and all it has to offer and teach us, and sharing the lessons learned at Mono Lake with future generations.

We know that with education comes awareness of the natural world and we value science-based learning because of the depth of understanding it can bring to students and visitors. Through understanding more about Mono Lake people develop a sense of belonging and stewardship, which are essential for protecting Mono Lake.



restoration, and education. The inclusion of “without transferring environmental problems to other areas” gives critical guidance. We value Mono Lake, but not at the expense of any other special place. It is through cooperative solutions that we can accomplish this important component of our mission.

Family of friends

The Mono Lake Committee is a place for the hopeful. We are a grassroots community of people who strive for thoughtful solutions. “The Mono Lake Committee stands for the right things.” “People think, ‘that’s how we should be doing things’ and we do.” “There’s a message of hope—people can right the wrongs of the past and choose a better path.” “I believe I can make a difference here.”

Finding solutions to problems in order to protect what we care about is an activity that resonates far and wide. At Mono Lake it has been happening

for 29 years with the support of hundreds of thousands of people. For a place-based environmental organization, this longevity and vitality is unique, and a testament to the connection that people across California and the world have with Mono Lake. It is also testament to the ideas that have changed the Mono Basin landscape for the better.

This extended Mono Lake family has great value because it has been and always will be the key to protecting Mono Lake. The Mono Lake Committee is 15,000 members strong—this place inspires the advocacy that Mono Lake needs, and so, the Mono Lake family of friends is a core value.

Moving forward

And so begins the Mono Lake Committee’s five-year strategic plan: “Values are the timeless, unchanging motivators of our actions. They are solid, steady points of reference for the next 50–100 years. They are the basis of this strategic plan.” All of our discussions were distilled down to three overarching values that motivate the Committee’s plans for the future:

- 1. We value Mono Lake, its tributary streams, the lands of the Mono Basin, and the sense of inspiration they create within us.**
- 2. We value positive, principled, proactive solutions to problems.**
- 3. We value the Mono Lake family of friends.**

Mono Lake and the Mono Basin inspire something within us, something many people have in common. It is why we visit, come back, check the Webcam when we’re away, and it’s why we continue to work together for solutions that will protect this place we love for many years to come. It is why we are here, and it is what we really mean when we say, “Long Live Mono Lake!”

Want to share what you value about Mono Lake?
You can! Visit www.monolake.org/valueblog.

Meet the Board of Directors

The Mono Lake Committee Board of Directors talk about their personal connections to Mono Lake

The Committee's Board of Directors is an experienced group of individuals brought together from different disciplines—bringing a diversity of expertise to the organization. The Board provides everything from big-picture visioning down to on-the-ground assistance with programs. Here we introduce four of the eight members of the Board: Sally, Tom, Martha, and Doug. What do they value about Mono Lake so much that it motivates them to put time and energy into the Mono Lake Committee? Find out below, and look to hear from the other half of the Board in the spring issue!

Sally Gaines, Board Chair, Mammoth Lakes



I want to save Mono Lake for the animals—from the diatoms on up to birds on the shore, in the water, on the wing. We have so few water resources left for migratory birds and the need for avian gas stations is critical and dire for individual birds.

I also cherish water bodies because I am a swimmer. I like to look at lakes, and immerse myself and splash around. We need to keep all the natural lakes we can; the ancient ones especially.

The visual aspects of the landscape draw the eye and soothe the soul. The vastness of this basin is remarkable. The tufa are one of the wonders of the world. But mainly I want to preserve the water for the animals that depend on it.

Tom Soto, Board Secretary, Santa Monica



The Mono Lake Basin stands at the physical and policy intersection of massive environmental questions related to California's future.

There are critical matters at stake here: the effect of climate change on our state's future water supply, the future and current status of lands owned by the City of LA in the Owens Valley and Mono County, the state's population growth and its effect on recreation, the Sierra's exposure to over-use and abuse, and the diverse, changing face of California.

We need to make sure that the new majority communities have an appreciation and understanding of the value that Mono Lake contributes to our spiritual and cultural well being.

Continued on page 17

Martha Davis, Riverside



I believe in our power to shape our future and to do it in a way that respects and preserves the environment.

Mono Lake represents an opportunity to undo past mistakes and to create a new future for the Mono Basin, one that shares precious water resources between Mono Lake and the needs of a distant urban

population in Los Angeles.

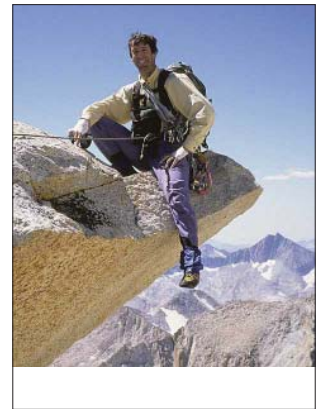
When I see the water flowing into Mono Lake and how the lake is rising, I realize how much can be done to restore and preserve our natural resources. For me, Mono Lake is a celebration of our united ability to make a difference ... and it is a promise to future generations that we can do better.

Doug Virtue, San Pedro

Beauty. The manifold beauty of Mono Lake and its basin is an endless source of inspiration. Wherever I am or whatever I'm doing, I can close my eyes, imagine a view of the lake, and feel refreshed.

Sanctuary. Thanks to the work of the Mono Lake Committee and other dedicated organizations and individuals, the Mono Basin continues to be part of the global skein of migratory bird refuges.

Public Trust. Mono Lake was the catalyst for this crucial concept of balance between public and private interests. The Mono Basin is now poised to be a "mentor region" for collaborative problem solving throughout the rural west.



Living Lakes from page 13

at the lake's visitor and science center as well. By the time we started the main conference sessions the group had a solid understanding of what the local NGO is working to protect, and the issues it is up against. In spite of the feeling that China's environmental problems are unfathomably huge, it is important to show the Chinese government that the world is watching, and also to encourage the people who are working towards healthier environmental practices—this conference helped to do just that.

Something else happens during these field trips—there's time to really connect with fellow delegates. Many joint initiatives and innovative collaborations have grown out of the connections made this way.

For example, there are exchange programs between students studying Barn Swallows at Lake Constance in Germany and Lake Baikal in Russia. Experts from Sri Lanka, Germany, and Spain have come together to address issues of sustainable livelihoods and the restoration of land and water resources in the

The Global Nature Fund is a non-profit, private, independent international foundation for the protection of environment and nature, and serves as the driving force behind Living Lakes. For information on the Living Lakes Network visit www.globalnature.org.

areas hardest hit by the tsunami of 2004. In 2006 nature work camps were held at St. Lucia and Lake Võrtsjärv and Lake Peipsi in Estonia. And there are many more examples of collaborations between Living Lakes Network members.

Bringing something meaningful back home

The Network supports one representative from the Mono Lake Committee to attend each Living Lakes conference. While the conference was stimulating, it is the exciting contacts and ideas for collaboration that are most valuable.

For example, this year the Jordan River, the main tributary of another of the world's saline lakes, the Dead Sea, will run dry. While the situation, which involves multiple countries with a long history of conflict, is different from Mono Lake, there are important things, like the Public Trust decision that underlies the principle on which Mono Lake now receives water, which might be able to help. Likewise, Friends of the Earth Middle East (www.foeme.org), with representatives in Israel, Jordan, and Palestine, surely has tools we could learn from to help bring people with different opinions and beliefs together over water issues.

Mono Lake is a good fit for the Network—bringing a much-needed message of hope, the wisdom of years of lake-protection experience, and a true story of the power of individuals to do the right thing. Participating in lake protection on an international level is doing the right thing too, and this type of collaboration is an exciting and meaningful way to do it. The Living Lakes Network has grown up to become a conduit through which these collaborations flow to create a healthier world for us all. ❖

Arya Degenhardt is the Committee's Communications Director. Going for a hike on the Great Wall of China was one of her top ten highlights of 2006.

2007 Field Seminars



TUFA & WILD BARLEY: RICHARD KNEIPP, FIELD SEMINAR INSTRUCTOR

Visions of the Past: First Discoveries

June 9–10

Terri Geissinger

\$130 per person / \$115 for members

The Mono Basin is filled with curious monuments to a bustling past. Take a journey back in time and discover the fascinating history behind the Mono Basin and the rich Bodie Hills. This unique tour will visit the historic sites of Dogtown, Monoville, the Bodie Bluff (privileged access), Mono Mills, Lundy, and Jordan. You will learn the fascinating history that stretches from the first gold discovery at Dogtown in 1857, to the wild days of Bodie and Lundy, to the Jordan Power Plant tragedy in 1911. The past will come alive as you hear the triumphs and tragedies of the discoverers, the prospectors, and the families who settled here and made the Mono Basin their home. Your guide, Terri Geissinger, is a Bodie State Historic Park Historian, Interpreter, and Guide. She is active in the Mono Basin Historical Society, and has a special talent for making history come alive.

South Shore Kayak

June 10

Stuart Wilkinson & Mono Lake Committee Staff

\$90 per person / \$80 for members

Limited to 12 participants

Late spring reveals snow-capped mountains towering over a glassy Mono Lake—a great time to kayak! Join Stuart Wilkinson and a Mono Lake Committee staff member for a guided naturalist expedition along Mono's south shore. This natural history kayak tour will cover a wide variety of topics relating to this unusual Great Basin lake, such as Mono Lake geology, ecology, history, and politics. Expect to see underwater tufa towers, birds, brine shrimp, 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 11th year in a row, and is highly rated by past participants. Space is limited in this popular seminar, so register early!

**Mono Lake Committee Field Seminars fill quickly every year—
register now online at www.monolake.org/seminars!**

www.monolake.org/seminars or (760) 647-6595 to register

Birding the East Side

June 13–15

David Lukas

\$140 per person / \$125 for members

Looking to get a little focused birding in before the Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua? This field seminar will concentrate on the identification and ecology of birds in the Mono Basin and local Eastern Sierra. Visit a wide variety of habitats including desert scrub, marsh, riparian forest, 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. The class will explore a number of sites intensively, mixing short leisurely walks with periods of observation and natural history discussion. 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 recently revised *Sierra Nevada Natural History*. He is hard at work on an upcoming field guide to birds of the Sierra Nevada. This seminar begins on a Wednesday morning, leading up to the 6th annual Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua.

Wildflower Macrophotography in the Mono Basin

July 13–15

David Gubernick

\$250 per person / \$225 for members

Limited to 8 participants

Learn to take creative and beautiful close-up images, further develop your artistic vision, and enhance your photographic skills in the warm and supportive learning environment of this workshop for beginning to advanced amateur photographers. The workshop will be conducted in the Mono Basin and upper reaches of the Sierra and includes classroom instruction, demonstrations, and individual coaching in the field that will help you take your photography to the next level. Evenings will be spent discussing and providing feedback on participants' fieldwork as well as prior work (please bring 10–15 examples). Both film and digital cameras are welcome. David Gubernick, Ph.D., is an internationally and nationally published and award-winning nature photographer and workshop leader. He provides fine art prints and stock images for the advertising, corporate, editorial, and home décor markets. His first photography book, *Wildflowers of Monterey County*, was published in 2002 and has been a best-seller, garnering rave reviews. He is currently working on several

other photography books, including one on the wildflowers of the Mono Basin.

Midsummer Birds at Mono Lake

July 13–15

David Lukas

\$140 per person / \$125 for members

It's surprising how many birds can be found in the Mono Basin during the heat of summer. Not only are desert birds conspicuously feeding fledglings or nesting a second time, but also high numbers of Wilson's and Red-necked Phalaropes are flocking to the shores of Mono Lake. And as a special treat, the birds and wildflowers of the high country are accessible and in full swing. It's a great time to visit the Mono Basin! In this field seminar we will explore far and wide, ranging from lake shore to mountain pass, concentrating on the identification and ecology of birds we encounter along the way. Expect to mix short leisurely walks with periods of observation and natural history discussion—taking time to learn about birds by watching them closely. David Lukas



Juvenile Sage Thrasher (*Oreoscoptes montanus*).

PHOTO COURTESY OF CHRIS MCCREERY



PHOTO COURTESY OF PAUL MCFARLAND

Weidemeyer's Admiral (Limenitis weidemeyerii).

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 recently revised *Sierra Nevada Natural History*. He is hard at work on an upcoming field guide to birds of the Sierra Nevada.

Moths & Butterflies of the Mono Basin

July 20–22

Paul McFarland & Bartshé Miller

\$130 per person / \$115 for members

Join local naturalists Paul McFarland and Bartshé Miller for an exploration of butterflies and moths in the Mono Basin. This seminar will focus on using Jeffrey Glassberg's field guide *Butterflies through Binoculars* to learn the basics of "butterflying." Identifying host plants, understanding the life cycle of butterflies, migration, habitat preferences, and their relationship to the entire ecosystem will all be covered. The group will also spend a night with moths, venturing out to observe a world of Lepidopterae not found in daylight. In recent years, participants have identified over 50 species of butterflies, moths, and dragonflies from the shore of Mono Lake to the headwaters of Lee Vining Creek near Yosemite National Park. Paul McFarland lives in Lee Vining, is the Executive Director of Friends of the Inyo, and has spent the last several summers chasing down anything with wings near Mono Lake. Bartshé Miller is the Mono Lake Committee's Education Director. He has been raising a few moths at home, and has taken to bright lights on moonless summer nights.

Identifying High Country Wildflowers

July 27–29

Mark Bagley

\$140 per person / \$125 for members

At the headwaters of Lee Vining Creek a rich summer display of wildflowers, shrubs, and trees thrive 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 include a hands-on session to introduce the basics of plant identification, and time in the field on a couple of easily paced short walks (generally less than a mile) at high elevations (generally above 9,000 feet above sea level) with much more time stopping and keying out plants than walking. Mark Bagley 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.

Los Angeles Aqueduct Tour

August 4

Greg Reis

\$90 per person / \$80 for members

The Mono Basin extension of the Los Angeles Aqueduct began exporting water 350 miles south to the City of LA in 1941. Join Mono Lake Committee Information Specialist Greg Reis for an investigation of the north end of the aqueduct system. We'll visit all the major aqueduct facilities in the Mono Basin, and learn about the aqueduct's effects on Mono



GREG REIS

The Grant Lake reservoir spillway, just days before spilling during the summer of 2006.

Lake, its tributary streams, the Upper Owens River, and land management in the area. We'll also discuss the history of water diversions, the effort to save Mono Lake, and where habitat restoration is headed in the future. Greg Reis is the perfect guide for unraveling the Mono Basin's complex and fascinating plumbing—he has a dozen years of experience in Mono Basin hydrology and restoration and keeps close track of Mono Basin water management.

Introduction to High Country Plants & Habitats

August 10–12

Ann Howald

\$140 per person / \$125 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 pine, 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 the group out. With any luck, you'll be zoomed by hummingbirds defending their patches of paintbrush and columbine, and see noisy Clark's Nutcrackers collecting and storing whitebark pine seed. This weekend's seminar will include an introduction to the basics of plant identification, a slideshow preview of some of the habitats and plants to be seen during the field trips, and walks around the 10,000-foot elevation level with a modest pace over moderate terrain. Ann Howald is a consulting botanist who has taught plant classes in the Eastern Sierra for many years.

Traditional Paiute Basketry

August 17–19

Lucy Parker & Julia Parker

\$185 per person / \$170 for members

\$65 materials fee

Primitive group campsite included (please, no pets)

During this three-day seminar participants will prepare materials and create a small Paiute basket, similar to a traditional work basket used for gathering pine nuts, berries, and other foods. This seminar is designed for weavers of all levels, beginning through advanced. You are encouraged (but not required) to camp with the group, and evenings will be spent around the campfire with traditional songs and stories. Lucy Parker is a descendent of the Yosemite Miwok, Mono Lake Kutzadika^a, and Kayasha Pomo Peoples. She learned traditional handiwork from her mother Julia, a master basket weaver, and will pass on some of her knowledge in this special three-day/two-night camping seminar. Julia Parker has



PHOTO COURTESY OF TOM CAVANO

A participant weaving in the Paiute Basketry seminar.

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 who wove in the early 20th century.

Fall Bird Migration

August 18–19

Dave Shuford

\$140 per person / \$125 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 land birds, shorebirds, and water birds in the Mono Basin and on Crowley Lake reservoir. Dave Shuford has been a staff biologist at PRBO Conservation Science for 20 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!

Birding the Mono Basin: Season's Change

August 24–26

David Wimpfheimer

\$140 per person / \$125 for members

Late summer is a great time to see and enjoy birds in the Mono Basin. Most of the breeding birds are still present in diverse habitats near the lake and up to the higher meadows and forests; their numbers are also swelled by thousands of phalaropes and other shorebirds visiting Mono Lake. In sagebrush meadows and riparian and montane forests we will

focus on the identification, behavior and ecology of corvids, flycatchers, vireos, warblers, and other passerines. This weekend's seminar will begin Friday evening with a slideshow preview of what we will see during the field trips. David Wimpfheimer has been educating and interpreting for over twenty years, for groups such as Point Reyes Field Seminars, San Francisco Bay Whale Watching, Elderhostel, and various Audubon chapters. His seasoned focus and knowledge make for an enjoyable and educational outing!

Living on the Edge: Sierra Nevada Bighorn Sheep in the Mono Basin

September 8-9

John Wehausen

\$150 per person / \$130 for members

The US Fish & Wildlife Service listed the Sierra bighorn sheep as Federally Endangered in 1999. This field seminar will involve discussions of the fascinating biology of these animals, their relationship with other mammals (including mountain lions and humans), and the conservation of Sierra bighorn in the field. Past participants saw bighorn five out of the last six years—there is a very good chance of seeing Sierra bighorn sheep in the wild during this seminar, but no guarantee. John Wehausen is a research scientist at White Mountain Research Station in Bishop who 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. Some of the proceeds from this seminar will benefit the Sierra Nevada Bighorn Sheep Foundation. *Please be aware that this seminar involves very strenuous hiking at the 10,000-foot elevation and above.*

Visions of the Past: Bodie, Masonic, & Aurora

September 15-16

Terri Geissinger

\$130 per person / \$115 for members

This guided tour is for folks who love history, enjoy the outdoors, and don't mind miles of dirt roads. In the beautiful Bodie Hills, all within 20 miles, lie three ghost towns. Their stories are filled with pioneer families, prospectors, muleskinners, heroes, and gunslingers. As you tour the town and the cemetery of Bodie, once the second-largest city in California, you will hear the fascinating stories of those who lived here and the ones who never left. Today Bodie is the largest unrestored ghost town in the west with over 170 buildings remaining. Next visit the rock cabins and foundations of Masonic, where nearly 500 people resided in a beautiful canyon, mining gold with great hope and eventually producing \$600,000. The last stop is Aurora, once a bustling

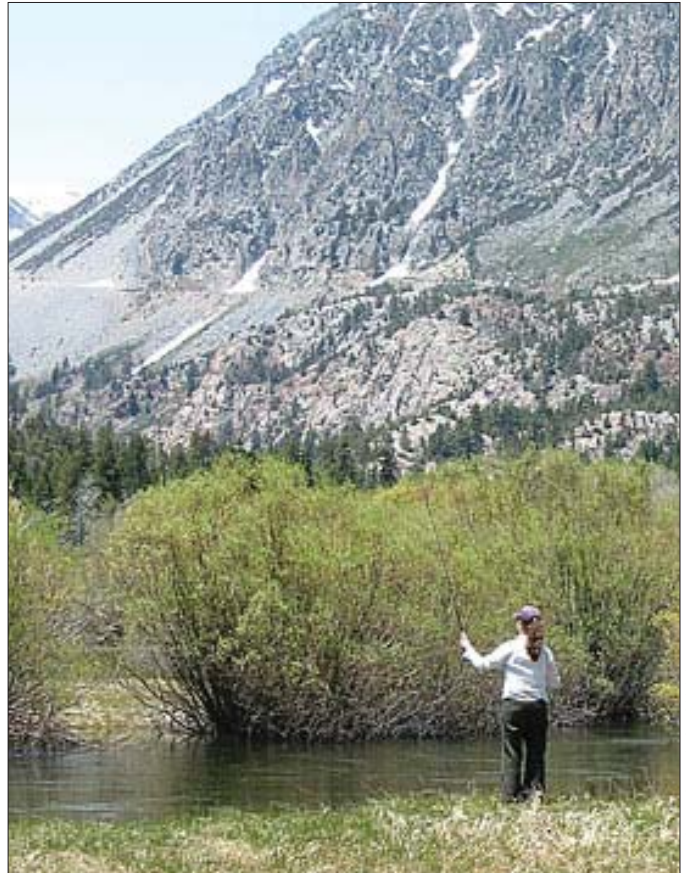


PHOTO COURTESY OF LINDSEY BRAUN

Fly fishing the meandering waters of upper Lee Vining Creek.

town of 8,000 souls in the 1860s, which now rests forever in peace amongst the sagebrush and pinyon pine. Your guide Terri Geissinger is a Bodie State Historic Park Historian, Interpreter, and Guide. She is active in the Mono Basin Historical Society, and has a special talent for making history come alive.

Fly Fishing in the Mono Basin

September 22-23

Peter Pumphrey & Roberta Lagomarsini

\$130 per person / \$115 for members

Learn the basics of fly fishing in the Mono Basin's beautiful landscape! This introductory seminar will begin by covering the basics: the equipment involved, the varieties of flies and their uses, and basic casting technique. The class will then move to one of the Basin's many streams to consider trout habitat and habits, characteristics of a healthy stream environment, reading the water, fly presentation, and catch and release. On Sunday the class will move to another streamside location to work on refining the techniques from the day before. There will be time spent at high altitude (over 9,000 feet above sea level), and most of the two days will be spent on foot. Equipment is available for those who are not already engaged in the sport. Peter Pumphrey and Roberta Lagomarsini are guides licensed by the State of

California and have been teaching basic fly fishing for over ten years. They will de-mystify fly fishing and provide a relaxed atmosphere in which to begin what can be a lifelong adventure in the outdoors.

Mono-Bodie Fall Photography

October 5-7

Richard Knepp

\$275 per person / \$255 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 fourth year, the class will spend Saturday at Bodie, inside some of the buildings—a very special treat! Join accomplished photographer Richard Knepp to explore varied shoreline locations at sunrise and sunset, fall color in nearby canyons, and the old ghost town of Bodie, where Rick will be joined by Bodie expert, photographer, and good friend Jill Lachman. 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 13th year in a row, with the Bodie twist continued for 2007!

Capturing Autumn on Canvas: Fall Painting in the Mono Basin

October 13-14

John Hewitt

\$150 per person / \$135 for members

The golden aspens, drying grasses, and bright blue skies of fall in the Mono Basin provide a myriad of opportunities for artists to capture the season on canvas. This weekend seminar will explore some of the best fall color locations around Mono Lake, and is designed for beginning through advanced painters who work with watercolors, oils, pastels, or acrylics. The class will spend Saturday painting in the field at locations like Lee Vining Canyon, Lundy Canyon, and County Park, with John offering technique tips and critiques of each individual's work. The group will share their work in the evening and regroup on Sunday morning for more fieldwork. Instructor John Hewitt is a nationally-acclaimed watercolorist and former Lee Vining resident who has taught classes and workshops for over 20 years in locations as far afield as the Italian Alps. John Hewitt is a signature member of many watercolor societies, but he welcomes any medium in his classes. This seminar is the Mono Lake Committee's newest offering, so register early to ensure your spot!

Field Seminar Registration Information

New! Register online at www.monolake.org/seminars or 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/seminars.

We accept VISA, MasterCard, Discover, American Express, or personal checks payable to the Mono Lake Committee. Sorry, we cannot accept registration by mail or email. Checks must be received within two weeks of registration. Seminars are limited to fifteen people except where noted. If a seminar receives less than six participants (with some exceptions) the seminar will be cancelled two weeks in advance, and full refunds will be issued. If you cancel three weeks prior to the seminar start date, we will refund your payment (less a \$15 processing fee). No refunds after that date, but tuition can be applied to another class in 2007.

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 who have received high ratings from past seminar participants. We emphasize a spirit of learning and camaraderie in a magnificent outdoor setting for a reasonable cost.

Proceeds from 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.

Connected by more than just an aqueduct

by Geoffrey McQuilkin

Mono Lake is inextricably linked to Los Angeles by the 350-mile long LA Aqueduct, a fact the Committee has known well for decades. What happens in LA matters for Mono Lake, and so it is critical for Mono Lake to have a strong presence in downtown LA. With that, and my newly expanded Executive Director duties in mind, last November I packed my suit and a box of Mono Lake Calendars and headed down Highway 395 for the big city.

In a whirlwind ten days, I had the privilege of speaking for Mono Lake in Los Angeles, and it was both fun and productive. Board member Tom Soto and I met with possible funders of our education program. I made the rounds at the Department of Water & Power (DWP), visiting with the decision makers who influence Mono Lake policy and discussing DWP's restoration obligations in the year ahead. Frances Spivy-Weber helped me negotiate the maze of City Hall, where we dropped off Mono Lake Calendars and shared stories with old Committee friends. We also met with staff from the Mayor's office, discussing Mono Lake restoration programs, our education partnership, and where it all might go in the future for mutual benefit.

During my visit to LA I was struck by two things. First, that

many people in positions of leadership are interested in Mono Lake and the surrounding lands. Most everyone had questions, personal stories, and curiosity. I even spotted an "I ♥ Mono Lake" bumper sticker on the wall of a DWP staffer's cubicle—a far cry from the attitude of years ago.

Second, how far, far away Mono Lake is from the fast-paced daily flow of business in the nation's second largest city. LA has plenty of pressing concerns close to home, from education to employment to the homeless. Mono Lake matters too, and it's up to all of us to keep Mono Lake on the agenda.

The ability to operate in the separate worlds of Mono Lake and Los Angeles—to travel smoothly back and forth between the two—has always been a standout quality of the Mono Lake Committee as an organization. It's a secret to our successes, and it's a pleasure to be working on both sides of the equation. ❖

Geoff McQuilkin is the Committee's Executive Director. Along with his new job duties, he has been part of the suit-and-tie-to-work routine while in LA, but promises no dress code requirements for the Lee Vining office!



The Walt Disney Concert Hall at dusk, in downtown Los Angeles.

GEORGE MCQUILKIN

ELECTION FOLLOW-UP

Thank you voters for a job well done!

by Clare Cragan

On November 7th 2206 Californians voted on a number of propositions that have far-reaching implications across the state. Two measures were particularly important for Mono Lake—a yes vote on 84 and a no vote on 90. The results are all in: Proposition 84 passed and Proposition 90 failed! Read on for a summary of the results.

Clean Water, Parks, and Coastal Protection

Passage of Proposition 84 provides \$5.4 billion for water projects from river restoration to flood control in both urban and rural locations. A small portion of the funding (\$54 million) will be given to the newly formed Sierra Nevada Conservancy. The Sierra Nevada region, extending from Modoc to Kern County and covering 25 million acres, has received less than 1% of federal funding to California since 1968 and receives a scant amount of state funding. The much-needed \$54 million will allow the Conservancy to begin funding projects which enhance the region's natural

capital and economic sustainability in local communities. Preliminary project funding will be available by July 2007. For more information on how Prop 84 will benefit your area visit www.yeson84.com.

The Taxpayer Trap

Thankfully, Proposition 90 failed. An extensive and diverse coalition of organizations ranging from the California Taxpayers' Association to the Nature Conservancy opposed Prop 90 because of its overreaching intentions above and beyond eminent domain reform. Written in the fine print of this measure were provisions that would undermine local governments, put the burden on the backs of taxpayers, and jeopardize community and environmental protections that have been in place for decades. Even though Prop 90 failed on the November ballot, it is not gone forever. Proponents will likely push to place a similar measure on the ballot next election. For more information visit www.noprop90.com.

Staff migrations

by Erika Obedzinski

As Mono Lake's palette of colors moved from late summer to late fall and the visitor season slowed to just a few hardy souls, the Committee bade farewell to several more seasonal staff members.

Outdoor Experiences Coordinator **Molly Hucklebridge** took a short road trip to the southwest after finishing a successful OE season, and has now moved on to her new position as River Teachers Program Coordinator for the South Yuba River Citizens' League, where we know she'll do great work!

Outdoor Experiences Coordinator **Megan Stoddard** also helped make the OE season a success, and has headed back to her hometown of San Francisco where she's taking a Wilderness First Responder course and working at the Jewish Community Center.

We were lucky to have long-time member **Alayne Meeks** in the Bookstore this summer working as a Retail Assistant alongside Kirsten and Brett on the front counter. Alayne took a summer break from running her honey business (www.meekshoney.com) to live and work at Mono Lake for a few months, and we are all sweeter for it.

Kirsten Watson returned for her second season as a Retail Assistant in the Information Center & Bookstore where she greeted tourists and members alike with a smile. If you

renewed your membership or became a new member this summer on your way through town, it's likely that Kirsten was the one who signed you up! Kirsten has also stayed on for part of the winter to help out at the membership desk.

Intern **Becca Hammargren** stayed through October helping out at the membership desk before moving back home to Minnesota to plan her next step. We hear she's coming back to the Sierra to work for our friends at the South Yuba River Citizens League and we hope to see her often!

Former intern **Rebecca Petzel** spent six weeks at Mono Lake this fall before migrating back to her home in Jackson, Wyoming. Rebecca was a motivating force in the office, helping us accomplish many tasks during her short stay—including background research on member outreach system and helping to organize the Committee's volunteer program. We know she'll return before too long to make sure the projects she helped start are on the right track, and of course, to visit Mono Lake. ❖

Erika Obedzinski is the Committee's Office Director. When she's not keeping the staff in line she's making sure we keep "have fun" at the top of our priority list. She recently spearheaded an impromptu staff event involving caroling in the office.

MONO LAKE COMMITTEE JOB OPPORTUNITY

Seeking a Membership Coordinator

The Mono Lake Committee is currently seeking a dynamic, detail-oriented individual to coordinate our membership program. The Membership Coordinator is responsible for managing the donations and membership records of the Committee's 15,000 members and is the primary staff person responsible for addressing and responding to member requests and questions.

The ideal candidate is an enthusiastic individual with excellent oral and written communication skills. The Membership Coordinator must have an interest in the Committee's mission of protection, restoration and education, and the ability to communicate enthusiasm for the Committee's work to current and prospective members of the organization. The Membership Coordinator works out of the Committee's main office, which is located in rural Lee Vining, California.

For the full job description, applicant requirements, and information on how to apply, please visit www.monolake.org.

MONO LAKE COMMITTEE SUMMER JOBS

Summer at Mono Lake!

Summer positions including Outdoor Experiences Coordinator, Canoe Coordinator, Retail Assistant, Birding Intern, and Naturalist Intern available for the 2007 season. Applications accepted starting February 1. For more information visit www.monolake.org.

REGIONAL JOB OPPORTUNITY

CalTrout Program Manager

California Trout is seeking a motivated and talented Program Manager to lead the organization's conservation and advocacy work in the Eastern Sierra region. The Program Manager, based out of Mammoth Lakes, will be responsible for identifying, managing, and organizing conservation and restoration projects in the Eastern Sierra region and Golden Trout Wilderness. For the full job description and contact information please visit www.caltrout.org.

15,000 Ways to help

by Clare Cragan

The Mono Lake Committee, 15,000 members strong, is supported by individuals each defining their own way to contribute to Mono Lake. With each member and volunteer comes a different background, a different set of skills, and an individual love for Mono Lake that propels him or her into action. While the Committee strives to provide volunteer opportunities for a variety of interests there are some volunteers who find unique ways to balance the Committee's needs with their own interests.

One such volunteer, Randy Arnold, holds many titles in the Mono Basin: Birding Intern 2003, Mono Basin Interpretive Guide, Wine Flight Organizer, Talent Show Coordinator, Free Drawing Donor, and, oh yes, National Sales Manager for Barefoot Winery in Sonoma, California—his day job! Randy has been supporting the Mono Lake Committee since the mid 1980s

when he first began as a volunteer in the Information Center & Bookstore. He continued to find new ways to bring his talents to this organization, including spending a summer as the Committee's birding intern by taking a four-month sabbatical from the supportive Barefoot Winery after 14 years of employment.



Randy Arnold, left, sharing his passion for pouring wine at the Wine Flight fundraising event he organizes for the Committee.

After meeting Randy this past spring at his Wine Flight event during the 5th annual Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua, I took home not only an appreciation for a certain grape grown in the northern Rhône region of France, but an appreciation of the limitless abilities and dedication of Committee volunteers. Volunteers will always be integral to the Mono Lake Committee's effectiveness, allowing us to grow our interpretive programs and on-the-ground field projects. Please contact Erika (erika@monolake.org) at (760) 647-6595 for more information on volunteer opportunities with the Committee. ❖

Tioga Pass Run benefits Mono Lake

The 2006 annual Tioga Pass Run was another success. The Committee received a generous donation from the proceeds of the run from organizers Kathie & Kyla Kortering of Benton and Skip Harvey of Base Camp Café in Mammoth Lakes. Thank you! We also send our thanks to Coach Margie Beaver (and Wayne and Brad too!) and the Lee Vining Lady Tigers Volleyball team who came out in full force to help staff aid stations and cheer on the runners—thank you!

Mark your calendar for this year's run, which will be on Sunday September 9, 2007; visit www.basecampcafe.com for more details.



The Lee Vining Lady Tigers Volleyball team volunteered and cheered on runners at aid stations along the 12.4-mile course.



Event organizers Kyla Kortering, Erika Obedzinski, Skip Harvey, and Kathie Kortering passing on the donation from the Tioga Pass Run to the Mono Lake Committee.



From the mailbag

News from members and friends

In memory

Sally Barngrove of Pasadena made a contribution in memory of **Mink Barngrove**. Marla Burns of Laguna Beach sent a gift in memory of **George & Barbara Burns**. John Callen of Rancho Santa Margarita made a donation in memory of **Thomas N. Callen**. Monique A. & Jack C. Archibald of Simi Valley gave a gift in memory of **David T. Campbell**. Elizabeth A. Buchanan of Camarillo sent a gift in memory of her friend **David Campbell**. Peggy McKie & Kirk Dixon of Sparks, NV sent a donation and wish to honor the memory and spirit of **Mary Coffeen**, naturalist and author of *Central Coast Wildflowers*. Gifts in memory of **Catherine M. Frank** were given by **Jody Orlick, Janie Nolan, & Tim Komoto**.

Diane Diggins of San Jose made contributions in memory of **Thomas**

Gaffney. **Vicki Lynn A. Ingram** sent a donation in memory of **William Ingram**, who loved Mono Lake. **Holly A. Pauls** of Walnut Grove gave a gift in memory of **Robert A. Pauls**. **Sue Rhu** of Sparks, NV made a contribution in memory of **Betty White**.

In Honor

Howard & Laurie Webb of Sutter Creek made a contribution in honor of their friend **Hal Bopp's 60th birthday**. **Christopher Mohr** of Big Sky, MT gave a gift in honor of **Stew Mohr**. **Karen & Mark Roberts** of Tustin gave a gift in honor of **Robin Roberts' birthday**.

Special thanks

Special thanks goes to the **2006 Night Photography Conference** sponsored by www.thenocturnes.com and www.thenightskye.com, who

recently presented a generous donation to the Mono Lake Committee from the sale of two night photographs. This annual event brings night photographers from across the country to Mono Lake.

Thank you to **Helen Green** of Berkeley and **Lisa Laidlaw** of Sebastopol for donating much-needed items from the Outdoor Experiences program wish list. If you are interested in donating materials to the OE program, here's what they need:

- Warm clothes: jackets, hats, gloves
- Cookware: cast iron pots, pans
- Gear: binoculars
- Library materials: nature books

To donate new or in-good-condition used items please contact Assistant Education Director Santiago Escruceria (santiago@monolake.org) at (760) 647-6595. ❖

Support from the top down

A big thank you to the many members who gave above and beyond your year end gift to help us pay for putting a new roof on our offices and the bookstore. We've been enjoying seeing all of your creative time capsule contributions as we mount them in the roof for safe-keeping. We couldn't have made a new roof happen without you!



Arya and Geoff are enjoying the new flat floor in their office.



The new roof on the Mono Lake Committee headquarters.

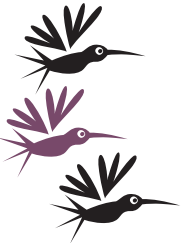
Thank you to the many Guardians of the Lake who made an extra contribution to the floor fund. Geoff and Arya now have a flat and functional (and insulated!) floor in their office and you made it happen! Special thanks to the anonymous donors who inspired the project with a challenge grant. And many thanks to our dedicated volunteers George and Nancy Appel, who helped put the finishing touches on the project with a beautiful snow grate.



Sixth Annual

Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua

June 15–17, 2007



make plans to drop in!

registration begins April 15, 2007 at www.birdchautauqua.org

Check out the Mono Lake Committee's new

.....
:
Online Store!
:
.....

Browse for gifts, books, clothing, bath & body products, and your Committee gear online at www.monolake.org.



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