

MONO



LAKE

N E W S L E T T E R

Spring 2004

There is always something needing to get done at the last minute before an issue of the *Mono Lake Newsletter* goes out. This time it was one photo. So I set out to take the necessary photo ... ok, maybe it's not quite as simple as that, because I needed to get the photo from the top of Black Point.

Black Point was the first place ever I visited in the Mono Basin and like many people I've spoken with since, I remember it in surprising detail and with strong emotion. It was with my high school natural history class and we climbed the dark sand slopes, sat at the top, and wrote in our journals. At sunset we headed down—making our way through the brush only to find that the most fun way to go about it was to jump over the shrubs. You can't help but laugh when you do this—the scent of narrowly-missed sage filling the air and soft sand filling your shoes.

This trip to Black Point was different. I was on a mission—all business. Take a couple of photos at the top, and quick, back to the office! But as focused as I was I couldn't help but launch a few jumps on the way down. Pure freedom! There, basically flying through the air, I was taken right back to my first day at Mono Lake.

The Spring *Newsletter* is filled with articles—from big policy news to reflective stories—all inspired by, dedicated to, and infused with pieces of Mono Lake. For instance, the cover photograph of a common buckeye was taken just this past week by Bartshé on a hike up Lundy Canyon. This is the best way we know how to share spring in the Mono Basin with you. We offer this issue to you in hopes that you will hear the messages and stories in the articles, but also in hopes that they remind you of your own Mono Lake memories.

So, with a sigh of relief, a photo on page 13, and sand in my shoes I present to you the Spring 2004 Newsletter. Enjoy!

—Arya Degenhardt, Communications Director



COVER PHOTO COMMON BUCKEYE BY BARTSHÉ MILLER
CLAUDE FIDDLER

Beginning in May, and throughout the summer, photographs by local photographer and mountaineer Claude Fiddler will be on display in the Mono Lake Committee gallery and slide show room. Make sure to stop in to see Claude's beautiful images of the Sierra!

Curious to see this and other Newsletter images in color? It's online in color at www.monolake.org.

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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Founded by David Gaines in 1978

MONO LAKE
NEWSLETTER

Spring 2004 ~ Volume XXV, Number 4

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David Gaines' Canoe

by Douglas Dunaway

During my first internship at the Mono Lake Committee I spent the winter in David and Sally Gaines' old pumice-block house. Steeped in karma and saturated with Mono Lake Committee history, this home has regularly housed interns working for the Committee, providing them a comfortable if not rustic place to relax and spend the season—allowing Mono Lake to quietly work its magic on them. Hanging on an outside wall on the backside of the house is an old, beat-up canoe turned upside down—exposing an underside that is scraped and battle scarred. I spent many winter nights in that house, stoking the fire in the wood burning stove, wondering about that canoe. Covered in snow, with crystal clear icicles hanging from its sides, it seemed to whisper through the walls that there were stories to be told and calm waters patiently awaiting the dip of a paddle.

Could this be the canoe that David Gaines used to ply the waters of Mono Lake? Intrigued, I called Sally Gaines and asked if she could tell me the story behind the canoe. “Presumably you are referring to an old Grumman aluminum canoe with lots of patches? The story is longer—Dave bought a Grumman canoe in Sacramento in about 1974 so he could survey Yellow-billed Cuckoos along the Sacramento River. He then brought it to Mono Lake to do field trips that included canoe rides. It was in use for several years and in the days before park rangers we locked it to a tufa tower on shore so interns would not have to carry it back and forth. Unfortunately, one lazy intern failed to lock it and it was stolen. When we asked for a donated canoe to replace it, the Russian River Canoe renters gave us one that had seen a lot of bumps and dings and hence, was patched all over. That is the canoe hanging on the house.”

Bumps and dings and patches. Occupational hazards for a 26-year campaign filled with setbacks, uncertainties and great victories—all set in motion by a quiet man who knew that the only way to truly know the lake was to be in it. Whether

swimming in its cradling buoyancy or paddling on its mysterious surface, David Gaines always found refuge on the waters of Mono Lake.

Presently at 41,600 acres, Mono Lake has a brighter future now than it did in the early years when David and Sally were desperately trying to get the word out about Mono Lake's receding shorelines. The lake's ecosystem was in danger of collapse. The dreaded Negit Island land bridge had finally connected with the shore and allowed predators to invade the California Gull rookery—an event that is still impacting gull behavior today.

David wrote poignantly about that disaster in the *Mono Lake Newsletter*: “Last month, canoeing through herds of brine shrimp and flotillas of chocolate-brown baby gulls, I thought about that island. I remembered walking its flanks in 1976, picking my way through thousands of eggs, chicks, and screaming gulls, an intense concentration of life energy. A few years later the birds were gone, the island engulfed in white alkali. Mono's beauty, power, and worth comes from more than birds, shrimp, tufa, islands or people alone. It comes from all these things together. It comes from wholeness. If we lose Negit Island, we maim this place. We make it ugly. We render it a mirror to our own greed.”

This was not a pleasant memory for David and his canoe. Neither was the day in 1980, when the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power unexpectedly released water down the parched and arid streambed of Rush Creek. The scouring action of the floodwater washed thousands of pumice rocks and dead tree limbs out onto the lake's surface, where a lone Brant was observed riding among them, looking lost and out of place.

During all those times—the worrisome years of not knowing if Mono Lake would survive, the uncertain years of lawsuits

Continued on page 18

The Importance of Restoring Mill Creek

Bringing Back the Bottomlands

by Lisa Cutting

As the Mono Lake Committee continues to seek the return of significant flows of water to Mill Creek through ongoing settlement negotiations, staff members are often asked: “Why is it important to restore Mill Creek?” “What are the benefits of restoring Mill Creek?” And “How can restoration be achieved?”

Mill Creek, quite simply, is the most significant restoration opportunity in the Mono Basin today.

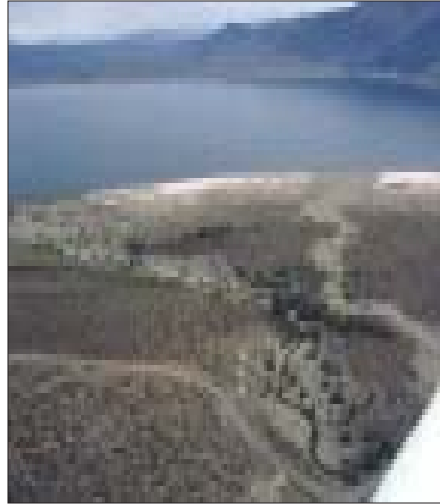
Restoration has many wildlife and ecosystem benefits, and Mill Creek is particularly notable because it holds an even greater potential for major restoration of its bottomlands and delta than Rush and Lee Vining creeks.

The multiple-channel, cottonwood-willow riparian system of the Mill Creek bottomland and delta has been degraded by a century of water diversions for hydropower and irrigation. The return of significant water to the creek will offer an opportunity to restore a vital environment that has been virtually eliminated in the Great Basin and that will provide vegetation diversity and a critical life-line for mammals, birds, amphibians, and fish in the north Mono Basin.

The restoration work that’s been done on Rush, Lee Vining, Parker, and Walker creeks by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power in the south part of the Mono Basin has shown how quickly degraded habitats respond when reasonable stream flows and multiple channels are reinstated.

Historic Mill Creek

Mill Creek is 14 miles long and is Mono Lake’s third largest tributary stream, draining a watershed that produces an annual average of 22,000 acre feet of water. Originating at the Sierra crest, Mill Creek bisects Lundy Canyon as it makes its way down to Mono Lake—flowing through Lundy Lake on the way.



Airplane overflight shows two Mill Creek channels approaching Mono lake, one dry, one nearly so.

Like Rush and Lee Vining creeks, Mill Creek has a delta at its mouth and an “inner delta” that extends upstream from Mono Lake for nearly two miles. It is in this “inner delta” area of multiple channels that stream flow was distributed across the valley floor and created a bottomland environment which under natural conditions, according to Dr. Scott Stine, created “a mosaic of dense riparian forest, wooded wetland, high water table marsh, and backwater morass, all intertwined with narrow, root-bound distributaries of sluggishly to vigorously flowing water.” (see Spring 1996 *Newsletter*)

Importance of Cottonwood-Willow Riparian Habitat in the Great Basin

Cut-off from the moist Pacific storms by the Sierra Nevada, the Great Basin is an arid area of sagebrush steppe and desert. The runoff from the Eastern Sierra was once abundant enough to support many large terminal lakes and the inflowing streams supported cottonwood-willow riparian ecosystems—oases in an otherwise dry environment. Near the lakes, the streams spread out into the rich and diverse

bottomlands and according to Stine, “the size, complexity, and continuity of natural deltaic bottomlands, coupled with their proximity to lakes, make them arguably the most biologically diverse type of environment in all of the Great Basin.” (see Spring 1996 *Newsletter*).

By the time the importance of the Great Basin bottomland environments was recognized they had already been largely eliminated by water diversions that began a century or more ago. Cottonwood-willow riparian habitats have declined by over 90% in North America, which only serves to underscore the critical need to maintain and restore these remaining areas.

Restoration Goals for Mill Creek

The Committee’s over-arching restoration goal for Mill Creek is to restore the form, function, and processes of Mill Creek with an emphasis on the cottonwood-willow riparian habitat and specifically the wooded wetlands of the Mill Creek bottomlands. This is best achieved by rewatering Mill Creek’s natural stream course with flows sufficient to achieve a multi-channeled bottomland and year-round freshwater conditions in Mill Creek’s delta near Mono Lake.

Restoration results would include:

- Re-establishment of wooded wetlands in the bottomlands;
- Groundwater recharge throughout Mill Creek’s bottomland and delta that would sustain a wide area of wetland vegetation and surface water features well away from the main channel;
- A productive fishery in Mill Creek;
- A freshwater environment in both the inner and outer deltas of Mill Creek as well as a freshwater skim off the mouth of the creek that will be particularly important for migrating waterfowl during the fall and winter months.

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State Reserve Protection of Mono Lake Challenged in Court

Mono Lake Committee Subpoenaed to Appear

Mono Lake Not Part of the Mono Lake Tufa State Reserve?

by the Policy Staff

The authority of the California Department of Parks and Recreation to protect Mono Lake came under attack in court by commercial interests this past winter. The issue, which is ongoing in the Mono County Superior Court, underscores the importance of continuing vigilance in the protection of Mono Lake.

Despite a ruling by the court supporting State Parks' permitting authority, further arguments are being presented with the goal of reducing state authority, among them the claim that the waters of Mono Lake are somehow not part of the Mono Lake Tufa State Reserve.

Additionally, Mono Lake Committee Co-Executive Director Geoff McQuilkin has been subpoenaed by the State Reserve opponents to produce permits for the Committee's canoe tour programs, apparently in hopes of finding support for an argument of "discriminatory enforcement." The Committee's permits, however, are in order dating back to the first canoe tour in 1989.

The court case began when motorboat tour operator Tom Crowe refused to sign an operating permit prepared by the State Reserve and was subsequently cited for operating without a permit. The Mono Lake Committee has supported motorized tour boat use of the lake when done under the protective rules of a State Reserve permit and has been closely involved in this case. The Committee published the principles on which it evaluates boating proposals in the Spring 2003 *Newsletter*.

Previous Use Does Not Preempt Permitting

State Parks manages Mono Lake and certain surrounding lands as the Mono Lake Tufa State Reserve. The State Reserve was created by the California legislature in 1982 "for the purpose of protecting the tufa and associated sand structures" under the overall mandate of Reserves "to preserve ... native ecological associations, unique faunal or floral characteristics, geological features, and scenic qualities in a condition of undisturbed integrity."

Provisions were made in the legislation for certain non-conforming uses, such as the brine shrimp plant, to continue operation within the Reserve. The recent court filings by Reserve opponents have sought to turn those provisions into broad restrictions on State Parks' ability to protect Mono Lake—arguing that the State has no authority to review, regulate, or issue permits for many of the uses and activities that have ever occurred in the past.

The State has pointed out that the legislation refers to a

much more limited list of uses and that, regardless, such uses must be determined to be compatible with the purposes of the Reserve. A permit process is an excellent way to determine compatibility.

On February 24, Judge Stan Eller sided with the State on this issue. He reasoned that if the legislation was as broad as the defense has argued, "it would basically cause anarchy in trying to regulate uses on the lake and uses connected with the establishment of the Reserve." The judge further explained that he interpreted the special provisions of the legislation to be referring to the commercial shrimp plant located on the west shore of Mono Lake.

Mono Lake Excluded?

Judge Eller did request further briefing and testimony on additional arguments made by the defense. Foremost is the claim by the defense that the water of Mono Lake is somehow disembodied from its physical location. "The waters of Mono Lake are not within the Tufa Reserve, and no State Parks permit to operate can be required," argues one brief. What is within the State Reserve you might ask? Only the mucky bed that lies beneath Mono Lake, according to the defense.

The District Attorney has pointed out that it is intuitively obvious that the waters of the lake are part of the Reserve "in the same way that the trees, the rocks, the wildlife and other objects within the boundaries of a Park or Reserve are included in the Park or Reserve without specific reference to them." Nonetheless, the District Attorney has provided five pages of legal citations confirming the point.

What's Next?

This phase of courtroom arguments may be completed during an April court date. If the Reserve is determined to have authority, then the matter will proceed to trial and a jury will consider whether the tour boat was indeed operated without a permit.

Should the Reserve be found to not have authority over Mono Lake, the case would be thrown out. That would open a door to all manner of commercial use of the lake, threatening the birds, brine shrimp, and other ecological resources so many have worked to protect at Mono Lake.

According to the District Attorney, in the event that the legal proceedings are not completed by May 2004 (the beginning of the boat tour season), Mr. Crowe will not be allowed to lead any tours until a decision has been rendered or the existing State Parks permit signed. ❖

No Response Yet to Highway Project Public Comments

Caltrans is Paving a Road to Litigation

By Jen Nissenbaum

After four months, the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) has still not issued any formal response to the Committee's call for a new Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) for the Mono Lake Shoulder Widening Project (Project). The Winter 2004 *Newsletter* article focused on the wide-ranging concerns raised in the many public comment letters written on the DEIR for the Project. Without committing to changes that protect Mono Lake and the sensitive habitat within the project area, Caltrans is headed down the road towards litigation.

The proposed 3.1-mile Project is located along the west shore of Mono Lake. Both build alternatives presented in the Project's DEIR result in significant impacts to wetland and riparian areas, wildlife habitat, and visual quality along the scenic highway corridor. Despite the multi-year efforts from the Committee to work with Caltrans, through attendance at Project Development Team (PDT) meetings, extensive written comments during the development of the Project, and the submission of a formal analysis of the DEIR, problems with the various highway project components have yet to be adequately addressed.

The Committee's written comments identified numerous deficiencies in the DEIR and called on Caltrans to redraft the DEIR and make the more thorough document available for public comment. To date, Caltrans has not formally responded to the Committee's request for a new environmental document. However, in a recent phone call, the Caltrans Project Manager said to expect a response to public comments within the next two months.

The Committee is also waiting for

Caltrans to fulfill its commitments to reconvene the PDT and to set up a joint public hearing between Caltrans and the Mono County Local Transportation Commission (LTC) prior to the release of the Final EIR. Without fulfilling these commitments, there is substantial risk that Caltrans will choose an alternative for the Project and publish the Final EIR without any modifications—a decision that is unacceptable given the many existing problems within both of the Project's build alternatives.

Call for a New Environmental Document

Inadequate attention to wildlife, vegetation, and visual impacts were among the reasons the Committee called on Caltrans to redraft and recirculate a new DEIR. To date, Caltrans has indicated that they have not identified enough significant issues with the DEIR that would warrant rewriting and recirculating a new environmental document.

Despite the fact that Caltrans has not determined whether or not there will be a new environmental document, the Committee maintains that the public comments submitted to Caltrans have identified a substantial number of problems that necessitate redrafting the DEIR. This is important because ignoring potential significant environmental impacts identified in public comments is a violation of the California Environmental Quality Act.

The Committee hopes that Caltrans will take advantage of the expert analysis provided in public comments and collaborate with concerned stakeholders to produce a successful project. However, it is clear that if the final project remains essentially the same as proposed in the DEIR, the

Committee must litigate in order to ensure Mono Lake's protection. In the meantime, Committee staff continue to communicate with Caltrans and Mono County staff in order to stay abreast of new developments regarding response to public comments on this project.

Upholding Commitments

Caltrans has made a commitment to hold both a PDT meeting and a public hearing prior to the release of the Final EIR—both of which are crucial if Caltrans hopes to have public support of the final project.

With over two years of experience working with Caltrans to create a balanced project, members of the PDT—comprised of public agencies, the Committee, and other stakeholders—are the most qualified in helping Caltrans identify the alternative that should be chosen for the Shoulder Widening Project. Caltrans made a commitment to reconvene the PDT prior to releasing the Final EIR; however, to date, the PDT meeting has not been scheduled.

A second commitment made by Caltrans is to hold a joint public hearing with the LTC prior to the release of the Final EIR. The LTC is responsible for allocating funds for highway projects in Mono County, which makes support for a project from the LTC important to Caltrans. The LTC requested the public hearing in order to provide an opportunity to listen to public comments once the final plan for the Project has been identified, as well as to provide direction to Caltrans before releasing the Final EIR.

While the LTC continues to request holding the public hearing, Caltrans has instead suggested holding an ordinary

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New Opportunity for Stalled Land Trade

Forest Service Action Needed

By Geoffrey McQuilkin

On March 8, the Forest Service-certified appraisal of the Cunningham property expired, opening the door for another attempt at making a land trade work. A trade would have win-win benefits for Mono Lake, the Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area, and the Mono County community.

Previous efforts to broker a land trade have had a lot of support but little success. The Mono Lake Committee, American Lands Conservancy, Mammoth Hospital, US Forest Service, Mono County, and the Cunninghams, who own the property, have all supported a trade.

The land trade, which would add the Cunningham property to the Forest Service's holdings in the Scenic Area while making land available in nearby Mammoth Lakes for a community hospital expansion, has been stymied by disagreement over the value of the land. Last fall, a Forest Service appraisal valued the land at about half the owner's stated price.

The Cunningham property is located next to the highway near the west shore of Mono Lake, in the Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area. The approximately 120 acres are undeveloped, with the exception of one small house, and are part of the sweeping scenic views available at Mono Lake. The property, which includes aspen groves, springs, and a small perennial stream, also provides valuable wildlife habitat.

The Forest Service has identified acquisition of parcels within the Scenic Area from willing sellers as its top land priority, and a land trade is the standard method for such acquisition.

New Opportunity

Last year's Forest Service appraisal has now expired and a new appraisal is needed. While it's not known what value a new appraisal might set for the property, it is clear that property values have been rising rapidly in Mono County.

The critical next step is for the Forest Service to bring key players together to meet and agree upon a set of fair appraisal instructions. From there, an appraisal must be done and a value certified for the property. Mammoth Hospital is ready to act quickly to purchase the property at the appraised price if the value is acceptable to the Cunninghams.

The Cunninghams, American Land Conservancy, Mono Lake Committee, and Mono County have worked together to deliver a packet of endorsement letters to elected officials, asking for their assistance in moving the process along.

The Subdivision Alternative

If the land trade is unsuccessful, a much-advertised subdivision could take place instead. Currently, however, the subdivision concept has been officially put on hold by the Cunninghams.

Should that hold be released, a subdivision would exploit a legal loophole where county zoning and Forest Service Scenic Area rules do not align and seek review and approval from Mono County planning officials while ignoring the protections put into place by Congress. The Mono Lake Committee remains extremely concerned about the subdivision possibility because it would violate the Scenic Area Management Plan and lead to lengthy public controversy. ❖

Geoff McQuilkin is the Committee's Co-Executive Director. He is looking forward to spring, and in particular, spring skiing.

Caltrans – from page 6

meeting with the LTC. A meeting is a much less formal alternative to a public hearing. In addition, Caltrans has not acknowledged whether the meeting will occur before or after the release of the Final EIR. By holding the meeting after the release of the Final EIR, Caltrans removes the opportunity for the LTC to be involved in choosing the final plan for the Project. Caltrans has stated that timing constraints are the reason why the meeting with the LTC may not occur prior to releasing the Final EIR.

Future Action

While the Committee has put forth great efforts in the past two and a half years towards developing a highway project that minimizes environmental impacts within the

scenic highway corridor, the Project as described in the DEIR remains unsatisfactory. The Committee hopes that Caltrans changes its course and commits to making the necessary improvements in order for the Project to move forward, otherwise, legal action will be necessary to protect Mono Lake. The Mono Lake Shoulder Widening Project is an opportunity for Caltrans to produce a model project—one that balances safety concerns and transportation goals while protecting scenic and environmental resources in the Mono Basin. ❖

Jen Nissenbaum is the Committee's Eastern Sierra Policy Coordinator. She and her dog Miller have been enjoying outdoor activities from skiing to climbing this spring.

Not Your Ordinary Bird Festival

by Bartshé Miller

If you've missed out on the previous two Mono Basin Bird Chautauquas, then you still have a chance to catch the 3rd annual this June. The Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua (MBBC) celebrates decades of scientific research, conservation, and the unique connection between birds and people in the Mono Basin.

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

Visit www.birdchautauqua.org
for the schedule of events
Registration begins April 15

and public events. The institution grew from the early-American thirst for self-improvement and education, and later evolved into a traveling movement or circuit that became most popular in the rural Midwest.

The MBBC even has a vaudeville streak—on Sunday participants have an opportunity to demonstrate their bird calling talent and take home exciting prizes. The weekend wraps up with a picnic and live music at County Park. This year we are pleased to present the music of Carrie Newcomer.

The 3rd Annual Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua partners are the Mono Lake Committee, US Forest Service, California State Parks, PRBO Conservation Science, and Eastern Sierra Audubon. For more detailed information, registration, and a complete listing of activities for kids and adults of all ages go to www.birdchautauqua.org. Call (760) 647-6595 with questions. ❖



ARYA DEGENHARDT

Researcher Justin Hite mimics a California Gull at the Chautauqua picnic.

Mark your calendar for summer solstice weekend, June 18–20. The Chautauqua has something for everyone—from beginning to experienced birders of all ages. The weekend offers a series of presentations, workshops, and field trips focusing on birds, art, and science. This year's Chautauqua presenters and leaders include Kenn Kaufman, Jon Dunn, Ane Carla Rovetta, Rich Stallcup, David Lukas, Dr. David Winkler, and many more.

Chautauqua is an institution that began in the late 19th century to provide higher education opportunities through the combination of lectures, concerts,

Sipping Your Way to a Good Cause

The Mono Lake Wine Flight is an opportunity to sip wine, listen to music, support a good cause, and enjoy some of the best views from any venue anywhere in California—from the Lake Room at the historic Mono Inn. Celebrate the beginning of summer with a good cause and join us for wine, hors d'oeuvres, silent auction, and cello music by Priscilla Hawkins. Wineries include Barefoot Reserves, Barefoot

Bubbies, DeLoach, Henry Wine Group, Muir Hanna, Pedroncelli, and Wildhurst.

You will have an opportunity to taste new wines, meet friends, catch up on the latest plans for the Mono Basin Field Station, and enjoy the beauty of Mono Lake. There will also be a time for friends to celebrate Martha Davis' 50th birthday. Martha was the Executive Director of the Mono Lake Committee for thirteen years, and is well known in the water world for

leading the Committee to success through truly cooperative solutions. Mono Lake holds a special place in Martha's heart, and she keeps in close touch with Mono Lake by serving on the Mono Lake Committee Board of Directors. There may be a surprise guest appearance or two from Chautauqua presenters, and a silent auction will include an Ansel Adams lithograph.

Tickets for the Wine Flight are \$50 per person and proceeds will benefit the Mono Lake Committee's new Mono Basin Field Station. Space is limited at the Mono Inn so register early. Also, if you are planning to have dinner downstairs after the event, we urge you to make reservations ASAP. To reserve your tickets to the Mono Basin Wine Flight call (760) 647-6595. For dinner reservations at the Mono Inn call (760) 647-6581.

Mono Lake Wine Flight

A WINE-TASTING BENEFIT FOR THE MONO BASIN FIELD STATION AND
CELEBRATION OF MARTHA DAVIS' 50TH BIRTHDAY

Saturday June 19, 2004 4:00 to 6:30PM

At the Mono Inn at Mono Lake

\$50 per person, to register call (760) 647-6595

California Gull Research Continues On

Research Still Extremely Relevant to Mono Lake's Recovering Health

by Justin Hite, PRBO Conservation Science

Every year turns up new and interesting results when studying Mono's California Gulls, and 2003 was no exception. Beginning in late 2002 and continuing through the spring of 2003, the entire lake ecosystem experienced a dramatic change as it got close to emerging from a seven-year period of meromixis.

Meromixis and Monomixis

Meromixis is a state in which the lake water is chemically stratified between a lighter, less salty layer overlying a deeper, saltier layer. Meromixis happens when there is a large and fast influx of fresh water into Mono's salty water, and a chemocline, or chemical stratification develops. The lake's most recent period of meromixis began in 1996. Although meromixis continues, there was substantial mixing of the lake last year.

During Mono's normal mixing regime, called monomixis, nutrients that settle down to the bottom of the lake are mixed throughout the entire water column. Monomixis is the result of the breaking down of the thermocline, or temperature stratification, each fall. It is quite similar to how meromixis works—only it's based on water temperature instead of water chemistry. During the summer months surface waters warm up and become separated from the colder, deeper waters, and nutrients and detritus settle down into the lower layer. In the fall the surface water begins to cool, eventually reaching the same temperature as the lower layer, the thermocline breaks down, and the waters mix—cycling the nutrients throughout the lake.

During periods of meromixis, this annual cycle of mixing is absent, and the nutrients on the lake bottom are unavailable to the biotic community. As a result, the species that depend on those nutrients suffer.

Meromixis Breakdown

During the 2002–2003 winter months, meromixis was rapidly breaking down after several consecutive dry winters had succeeded in driving the chemocline down deeper in the water column and returning vast stores of nutrients to the rest of the lake. Meromixis did not completely break down during the 2002–2003 winter—the chemocline remained intact,

though at a much greater depth—but the mixing that did occur led to the highest levels of primary productivity ever recorded in Mono Lake. The lake took on a thick green color as algal populations exploded. These algae are a major source of food for the lake's brine shrimp, whose population also did remarkably well in 2003. The response of the gull population, however, was more complex and difficult to interpret.

Gull Research Results

Nest counts indicate that only 39,830 adult California Gulls were nesting at Mono Lake in late May 2003—the second lowest count in the 21 years of this study. In recent years, the number of nesting gulls has been declining each year at a constant rate since a recent high of 49,300 gulls in 2000.

Although this may seem alarming at first, the decline could have a relatively simple explanation, and the trend will likely soon be reversed. During the early years of meromixis, from 1996 to 1999, gull reproductive success (measured as an estimate of the average number of chicks fledged per nest) was extremely low—ranging between 0.26 and 0.4 chicks fledged per nest. Starting around 2000, as meromixis began to weaken, reproductive success rose to more than 1.1 chicks fledged per nest from 2000 through 2003 (it was 1.18 in 2003).

California Gulls take four years to reach reproductive age, and therefore it seems likely that the declining number of nests in recent years can be explained, at least in part, by the exceptionally low reproductive success of the late 1990s. In addition, the much higher reproductive success starting in 2000 should translate to higher nesting numbers in the years ahead.

The Mysterious Long-legged Fly

From 2000–2002 long-legged flies made up 10–20% of gull chicks' diets. Interestingly, almost no long-legged flies were fed to chicks in 2003. Additionally, full-sized larvae (the gulls only feed on the larvae) were difficult to find in high densities along shorelines where they had been hugely abundant from 1999–2002.

In sandy places where they were most abundant from 1999–2002, upwards of 200 full-sized larvae (~1cm in length) per sample were collected. Throughout the 2003



ARYA DEGENHARDT

Banding chicks helps researchers measure gull reproductive success

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The Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area Turns 20

Critical Role in Saving Mono Lake

Future Holds Opportunities, Attacks

by Geoffrey McQuilkin

In 1984, Ronald Regan signed legislation that turned over 118,000 acres of land surrounding Mono Lake to the US Forest Service in order to “protect its geologic, ecologic, and cultural resources.” Thus 20 years ago was born the Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area, a landmark federal recognition of the tremendous public value of Mono Lake and the Mono Basin.

“It was hard to overcome the opposition of the Department of Water and Power” remembers Richard Lehman, Mono Lake’s freshman congressman and the author of the legislation. “They had a lot more congressmen and legislators than Mono County does.”

“We took land from the Bureau of Land Management and gave it to the Forest Service—that was controversial,” Lehman continues. “But it sure worked out right. When the Forest Service people came and took over they fell in love with the lake too. To be in a position to do something to protect that area is one of the best things that ever happened in my life.”

Critical Land Protection

The Scenic Area brought critical national attention to Mono Lake’s plight; it also brought important management oversight and resources to the lands surrounding the lake. The Scenic Area Management Plan, developed over four years with local residents, set limits on acceptable change from 1984 levels of development and land use. It also identified zones ranging from those in which existing commercial activity is allowed and encouraged, such as along Highway 395, to those in which solitude is the primary value and land development is not allowed, such as Mono’s remote east shore.

The plan also established an important recreation management policy for the Scenic Area. Public visitation is focused at specific sites, like South Tufa, allowing impact management while leaving much of the Scenic Area open to individual exploration and discovery.

Part of Saving Mono Lake

The Scenic Area legislation was clear that the water rights of the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (DWP) were unaffected by Congress’ action. And yet, the Forest Service had a mandate to protect the ecology and resources of the area, both being rapidly degraded by the excessive diversion of water. It became clear that the Scenic Area Management Plan couldn’t impose any changes on diversions, but it couldn’t be silent on the matter either.

In the end, the Forest Service identified a lake level management range of 6377–6390 feet as necessary for the

Scenic Area. A round of lobbying in Washington DC by DWP was countered by a round of lobbying by the Mono Lake Committee, and in the end Mono Lake gained important federal recognition of the need to stabilize Mono Lake.

Interestingly, the Scenic Area designation also played unexpected and important roles in the lake’s protection. For example, toxic dust storms that blew (and still blow) off the exposed lakebed were a critical issue before the State Water Board. One of DWP’s solutions was to tear down a large portion of Black Point, a volcanic hill on the lake’s north shore, and spread the dark cinders across the exposed lakebed, sealing in the dusty ground. The Scenic Area’s mandate to preserve the shoreline in undisturbed condition, happily, precluded such engineering adventures.

Challenges Ahead

As California’s population increases, so increases visitation to the Mono Basin and associated impacts on Mono Lake and surrounding lands. The Forest Service will continue to play a critical management role in the years ahead as it seeks to both protect the ecologic, geologic, and scenic resources of the area and to make this remarkable area available to the public.

While striving to meet those management challenges, the Scenic Area will also have to confront direct assaults to its existence.

Internally, federal funding has been cut year after year for both the Forest Service and the Scenic Area. Staffing is now roughly just one third of what it was ten years ago, making it difficult for remaining staff to work successfully.

Externally, there are challenges to the Forest Service’s authority to protect the Scenic Area. Caltrans, as part of its highway project adjacent to Mono Lake, continues to deny that the USFS has federal authority to require “all possible planning to minimize harm” to Mono Lake as laid out by law. And a proposed large home subdivision development that violates Scenic Area standards threatens to embroil the Forest Service in a messy enforcement issue.

Even so, the big picture is overwhelmingly positive. “Now Mono Lake is an international resource,” observes Lehman, “Over twenty years Mono Lake has gained in importance as a place for scientific study and understanding of the environment and as a place for simple rest and rejuvenation.”

Indeed, it takes nothing more than a visit to Mono Lake’s quiet shoreline and a look across the bird-covered lake to confirm that the Scenic Area has achieved 20 years of success in protecting one of the most remarkable places in California. ❖

22 Years at Mono Lake

Mono's First State Park Rangers David and Janet Carle

On a blustery April day in 1982, Rangers David and Janet Carle pulled into the Conway Summit viewpoint to gaze down on Mono Lake. It was cold and windy and snow had just started to fall. They apprehensively looked at each other, wondering if this was typical weather for this time of year—after all, spring was supposed to be just around the corner. “We liked snow, but we had just left the flowers and greenery of Sacramento. The contrast was a shock.” That memorable day in 1982 set the stage for the next 22 years, supporting David and Janet’s convictions that there is nothing typical about Mono Lake.

In November of 1981, the California State Legislature had established the Mono Lake Tufa State Reserve. David and Janet were to become the first full time State Park Rangers for the newly established Reserve, jointly sharing one permanent ranger position: “We were the first couple in State Parks to share a ranger position, as well as the first married couple to do so.” The Carles held this job until they both retired—David in 2000 and then Janet early in 2004. Job-sharing gave them the opportunity to pursue their careers and raise a family while promoting and protecting the natural wonders at Mono Lake.



COURTESY OF THE CARLES

Janet and Dave Carle at the top of Conway Summit on the day they arrived in the Mono Basin.

Dave and Janet have two children, Nick and Ryan, who were born and raised in the Mono Basin. “We thought we’d job-share for 5 or 6 years, until our kids were older” Dave recalls, but the Mono Basin has a way of making people want to stick around. “We got involved with the community and before we knew it, 20 years had gone by. This place was the perfect fit for our interests and needs.” Janet noted that “Mono Lake is one of the last true ‘one ranger’ parks. The ranger really does do

everything.” All that responsibility could be overwhelming at times, but as David and Janet found out “there was always the lake to keep you centered, to remind you about what was important.”

During their 22 years at Mono Lake, the Carles built a solid foundation for the success of the State Reserve. They spearheaded tours and education programs as well as trained interpreters with Yosemite National Park, Bodie

Continued on page 25

Mono Lake to Have New State Ranger

In March, the Mono Lake Tufa State Reserve began advertising for a replacement for retired Rangers David and Janet Carle. The search will take several months, meaning a new State Reserve ranger should be roaming the tufa this summer. The new ranger will need to be excited about the diverse duties at Mono Lake: everything from educational walks with school groups to patrolling the remote east side of

Mono Lake, from picking up trash to overseeing the increasing recreational use demands on the lake.

Spending your workday outside at Mono Lake may sound great—and, well, it is—but don’t rush out and look for an application form just yet. The position is only open to State Park rangers who want to transfer from other locations. You have to pay your dues before you can win an assignment at

Mono Lake! Plus, you also need to be a Peace Officer and have had extensive additional training.

The State Park system is no stranger to budget cuts, but with only one full-time position at Mono Lake, there’s no room for staff reduction. The Tufa Reserve, in fact, has extremely low budget and staffing demands, all while providing tremendous benefit to Mono Lake and the visiting public.

Statewide Water Policy

Protecting Water Quality and Using Water Wisely

by Frances Spivy-Weber

Sierra Conservancy Bills

Californians are familiar with the work of the Coastal Conservancy and Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, to name just two of the state's government conservancies.

But what about the Sierra Nevada Conservancy? Remarkably, there isn't one! But 2004 is the year to change that.

Assemblyman John Laird introduced AB 2600 and Assemblyman Tim Leslie introduced AB 1788 in this 2004 State legislative session. The Mono Lake Committee is endorsing AB 2600, and is also pleased that Assemblyman Leslie wants to establish a Conservancy for the Sierra.

Governor Schwarzenegger proposed a Sierra Conservancy during his campaign and as part of his administration's environmental agenda. There is strong support for a Conservancy from a broad group of interests throughout the state, making the Committee optimistic that the Governor will have a bill to sign this year.

AB 2600 will give the Sierra a "seat at the table" when it comes to allocating funding resources. It will provide guidance for investments in the Sierra's water quality and supply, watershed restoration, working ranches and farms, recreation, and of particular interest to the Mono Lake Committee, education. All of these investments will benefit not only the Sierra and its residents and businesses, but also the millions in the state that use water from the Sierra, visit in all seasons, and who want the region to be forever the jewel it is today.

The Mono Lake Committee has joined with the Sierra Fund, Planning and Conservation League, and the Sierra Nevada Alliance to provide leadership for the bill. For more information on AB 2600, up-to-the minute details on who is endorsing the bill and what is happening with hearings, visit the advocacy website at www.sierraconservancy.org.

New Guidance Possible on Water Recycling and Water Quality

Since its founding in 1978, the Mono Lake Committee has been a leading advocate for conservation and water recycling as the best ways to stretch supplies so there will be water for both people and the environment. More recently, the Committee has worked with environmental organizations and water agencies to build greater public confidence in the safety and quality of recycled water.

Toward this end, the Committee is endorsing Assemblyman Alan Lowenthal's AB 2528, the "Drinking Water Quality: Emerging Contaminants" bill. It will provide clearer guidance to water agencies, cities, and counties about the actions they should take when there are unregulated contaminants in both surface and groundwater.

California Leads the Nation in Setting Water-Saving Washing Machine Standards

In early February the California Energy Commission adopted water efficiency standards for clothes washing machines. The new standards are tiered—based on the "water factor" of the clothes washer, which is the number of gallons per cubic foot of wash load.

In 2007, the minimum allowable water factor will be 8.5 per clothes washer. By 2010 the standard will be further reduced to 6.0. Washing machines are second only to toilets in terms of high use of water inside the home, so the new water factor will save a significant amount of water.

The bonus benefit is that these new washing machines are energy efficient and kinder to clothes, thus saving consumers even more money. If you are in the market for a new washer, contact your water and energy providers about incentives on the new, efficient machines.

Water Conservation Does Make a Difference

In March, the US Geological Survey released figures on water use in the United States for the year 2000. The figures showed that nationwide per capita water use has declined by 4% since 1995. The amount of water used per person in the US is lower now than it has been since the mid-1950s, and despite population growth, total water use has been stable since the mid-1980s.

How did this happen? Mono Lake Committee members know that it happened through conservation—in homes, industry, and agriculture. This is good news for Mono Lake and for other "Mono Lakes" around the state that need to share water with people and the economy. But even better news is that we haven't conserved the maximum amount possible—there are significant conservation additions we can still make to these successes.

In the legislature this year there are several bills that will encourage water conservation: Assemblyman George Plescia's AB 2298 would require separate meters or submeters for large landscapes; Assemblywoman Chris Kehoe's AB 2572 would require all remaining unmetered cities to meter and another Kehoe bill, AB 2572, requires realtors to advise sellers, as appropriate, about local water agency toilet rebate programs. ❖

Fran is the Committee's Co-Executive Director. She has been enjoying her house in Lee Vining as a place to retreat from the hustle and bustle of LA.

Mono Basin Journal

A Roundup of Quiet Happenings at Mono Lake

by Geoffrey McQuilkin



GEOFF MCQUILKIN

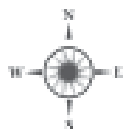
We all know that Mono Lake is unique, and we all know that the lake is of great public interest. But it's easy to forget just how far that interest extends. Not long after a big February snowstorm, a crew from TV Asahi, a national television station in Japan, showed up for a lake visit. The reason? They were working on an episode of the "Spaceship Earth" weekly documentary which, their printed material says, "considers the social, loving and natural environment that surrounds us." I'm not quite sure what the "loving environment" means, but it all sounds applicable to Mono Lake.

So we headed out to South Tufa and other points of interest, tromped through the snow, and tried to avoid getting their minivan stuck. Their particular interest was to match video footage of the lake that they shot back in 1989, and again in

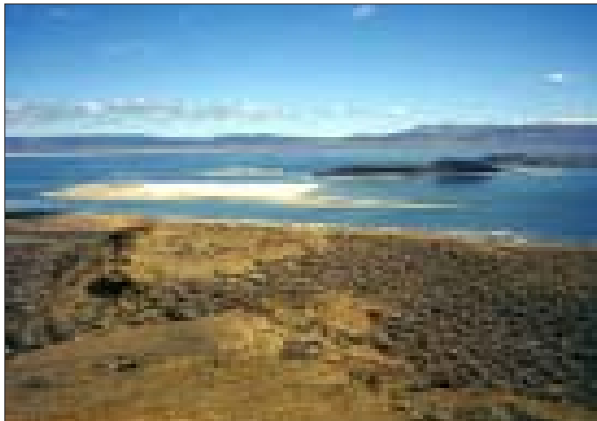
1997, to show how much the lake has risen and changed.

It's hard to explain how remarkable it is to be standing on a lonely snow-covered road overlooking Mono Lake with people from 5,000 miles away who are shooting high definition video and trying to communicate via an interpreter. That's got to qualify Mono Lake for star-power credentials!

And so we spent the morning out under the bright sun. I explained the importance of stream restoration for the camera. They debated tufa tower changes in Japanese. I looked for gulls with my binoculars, as directed. They set up the tripod for sweeping shots of the Sierra. And underfoot, a web of animal tracks crisscrossed the new snow and headed toward the lake, a quiet reminder of the real reasons for all this electronic, multilingual activity. ❖



Benchmarks



CHRIS LIZZA

Looking east towards Gaines Island, the white remnant of the land bridge between the mainland and Negit Island, in the fall of 2000. Lake level 6384.



ARMA DEGENHARDT

Spring 2004, the slightly lower lake level of 6382 makes a difference in the size of Gaines Island. A coyote was spotted out there in the summer of 2003—see the article on page 9 for details.

A Spring Selection

from the Mono Lake Committee Bookstore



WOMEN’S LONG LIVE MONO LAKE EMBROIDERED T-SHIRT

Vireo is modeling our newest women’s shirt! This light green, 100% organic cotton shirt has a simple embroidered design with violet lettering and a silver flying gull. Available in women’s sizes S–XL.

Adult Women’s embroidered T-shirt in light green, S–XL: \$18.00

KID’S LONG LIVE MONO LAKE EMBROIDERED T-SHIRT

Caelen is blowing a kiss to a brine shrimp in our first kid’s t-shirt available on organic cotton! The rust colored shirt comes with cream and navy embroidery to let everyone know how much you love Mono Lake. Youth sizes only.

Kid’s embroidered T-shirt in rust, XXS–XL: \$16.00



KID’S GLOW-IN-THE-DARK FOOTPRINTS T-SHIRT

Sabine is looking pretty cool in this fun shirt with common woodland animal footprints silk screened in glow-in-the-dark ink on both the front and back of the shirt. Available in a bright sapphire blue in youth sizes only.

Kid’s footprints T-shirt, XS–L: \$15.00



MONO LAKE COMMITTEE LOGO DINER MUG

Our 25th Anniversary version of this mug was so popular last year that we’ve brought it back this year in a new Long Live Mono Lake design. Same classic 10-ounce ceramic diner style mug feels great in your hand and keeps your drink hot.

Diner mug, ivory with blue lettering: \$6.95

CAMP-STYLE MUGS

These popular mugs have a speckled paint pattern reminiscent of the enamel covered metal camp mugs of old. However, these mugs are thick ceramic that will keep your coffee steaming down to the last sip. Featuring the Sierra skyline from Bloody Canyon north to Warren Peak, and now available in four colors!

Camp Mug, in cobalt blue, dark green, maroon, or black: \$8.50 each



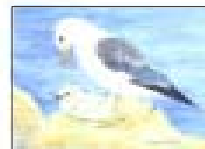
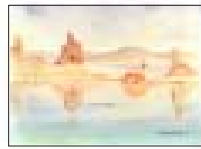
❁ Spring Selection ❁



HANDSCREENED WILDFLOWER NOTECARD SETS

Each card is an original design and silk-screen printed by hand by local artist Helen Coxhead McFarland. The set includes six wildflowers found in the Mono Basin: Columbine, Blue Flax, Wild Iris, Lupine, California Poppy, and Paintbrush. Printed on heavy stock paper with matching envelopes.

Wildflower card set, six notecards with envelopes, 4¼"x5¼": \$15.00 each



WATERCOLOR NOTECARD SETS

This wonderful set of six notecards is reproduced from original watercolors by local artist Nancy Overholtz. This special Mono Lake collection includes three different scenes of Mono Lake, as well as cards of the Eared Grebe, California Gull, and Wilson's Phalarope. Printed on heavy stock paper with deckled edge and matching envelopes.

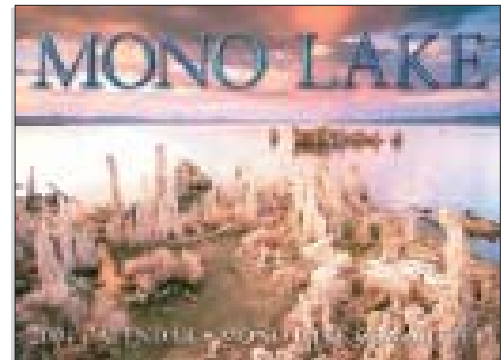
Watercolor card set, six notecards with envelopes, 5"x7": \$15.00

2004 MONO LAKE CALENDAR

Still don't have your 2004 Mono Lake Calendar? Get one today at a reduced price!

The Mono Lake Calendar is full of beautiful color images of Mono Lake and the Mono Basin. Printed in the USA on recycled paper.

2004 Mono Lake Calendar, 13"x9": \$1.95



Order by phone: (760) 647-6595, fax: (760) 647-6377, or email: bookstore@monolake.org

MONO LAKE COMMITTEE MAIL ORDER FORM

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EDUCATION IN FOCUS

FIELD SEMINARS

by Bartshé Miller

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

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

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

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

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

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

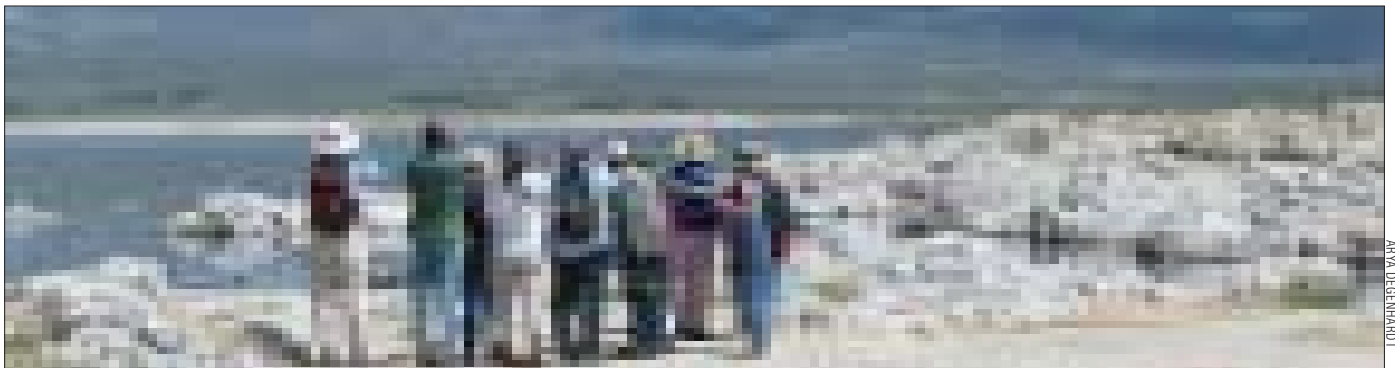
Who participates in field seminars?

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

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

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

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



ARVA DEGENHARDT

Only in Lee Vining

... where the parents take pride in their kids, and the kids take pride in their town



The Little School That Does

Kids who play sports in Lee Vining have to play for the spirit of the games. Often playing with short sided-teams, and driving hundreds of miles for tournaments they may never place in, these kids hardly ever even get acknowledged in the local newspaper. But things are turning around for the Lee Vining sports teams. In February Lee Vining High School's very own girls and boys basketball teams got some press, the likes of which this town hasn't seen in a while, or maybe ever.

The reporters were spotted at a couple of games, and spent some time with the players and coaches, but no one could have guessed that the Lee Vining Tigers Basketball Teams would end up on the front page of the LA Times Sports Section. On Tuesday February 10th the Sports Section featured a multi-page, six-photo story on the plight of our teams. The story itself was very well done, and accurately spoke of the overriding spirit of sports in this 398-person town.

The day the article hit people were scrambling for copies of the newspaper—as it isn't even available in town in the winter. There were reports of people getting misty-eyed over the article, and

teachers and parents smiled proudly at the thought that people outside of this town would take such interest in our kids, and our school.

Since the article hit, the little high school that could is getting a little help from its friends. Due to the article the school has received calls from other schools, sports programs, and generous individuals who have given much-needed monetary and sports-equipment donations to the school's sports program. Lee Vining High is now the little sister school to Long Beach Polytechnic High School, a 4,700 student school, and there are rumors of a special on TV featuring the Lee Vining sports teams. And with all of the hype the kids just keep on playing their best, the coaches carve time in their busy lives for practice and travel to games, and folks in town keep a close eye on the marquis in front of the school and mark their calendars to turn out for the games.



Hero's Welcome

One afternoon last March white buses from the Pickle Meadows Marine Base drove through town carrying troops shipping off to Iraq. As the buses drove past, the teachers and students of Lee Vining Elementary, joined by community members and passers-by, waved flags and cheered them on. It was a moment right out of an old movie, only this time it was real.

Just months later, one of Lee Vining's own, Michael Wiles was sent notice that he would be heading to Iraq with the 82nd Airborne Division. He was just 18 at

the time. Family and friends around town had Michael in their thoughts and prayers daily—taking pause when the 82nd Airborne was mentioned on TV or radio. The Lee Vining Boy Scout Troop 313 organized events sending 80 boxes full of books, baked goods, supplies, and most-importantly, letters to Michael and his compatriots.

For a couple of weeks we were lucky enough to have Michael back—welcomed by yellow ribbons all over town, a Lee Vining style bar-b-que and potluck at the Community Center, and lots of thankful friends and family. Sure, there are diverse feelings and opinions on the war, but one of the beauties of Lee Vining is that at times like this people can join together to celebrate the safe return of a community member.

In this time of war there are also other honorable Lee Vining locals serving our country in the military. Justina Dore is on the USS Peleliu which just returned from the Persian Gulf, Henry Baer is currently serving in the Army, and the Kellogg's grandson Lauren is also in the service. We thank you for your dedication, and wish you safe return. ❖

—Arya Degenhardt



Michael Wiles surrounded by friends and family looking at a scrapbook made for him by one of his Lee Vining friends.

ARYA DEGENHARDT

and litigation, up until the present day, where visitors can see a lake that is on the mend—there has been a consistent and overriding feeling of hope. A feeling that is best experienced sitting in a canoe, quietly paddling over clouds of brine shrimp and the upwelling of spring water from submerged tufa towers.

Educating the public about the wonders of Mono Lake has always been at the forefront of the Mono Lake Committee's mission. From the beginning, David and Sally Gaines took visitors out onto Mono Lake, so the lake could speak for itself.

In 1978, the Mono Lake Committee started half-day field tours that included an off-shore paddle among the tufa towers at what is now called South Tufa. David's canoe played host to California Assemblymen, State Legislators, writers, photographers, and many of the key players in the legal battles to restore Mono Lake and its streams. In 1989, weekend interpretive canoe tours were started, and continue today. The Committee's Education Programs have taken over two thousand Southern California students out onto the lake, giving them the opportunity to learn about Mono Lake's vibrant ecosystem and the importance of water conservation. All in all, hundreds of people have had the opportunity to sit in David's canoe and see first hand why Mono Lake was worth saving.

Back when David Gaines was canoeing at Mono Lake, the pressures on the lake were obvious—either Los Angeles curtailed their diversions of water from the Mono Basin, or the lake was going to die. But David had a sense that the more people who heard about Mono Lake, the more people's impacts would be felt. Aldo Leopold once said, "Of what avail

are forty freedoms without a blank spot on the map?" In a 1979 newsletter article, David wrote: "Mono Lake is as blank a spot as you can find anymore. Though the hand of man hangs heavy over its future, Mono still retains the magic and power of primeval America. I wonder whether this elusive and precious quality can survive with large numbers of people, however well-intentioned?"

Ice Age Mono Lake only had one island—Cedar Hill. Separated from Mono Lake thousands of years ago, this remnant of ancient times is facing the pressures of development. The west shore of Mono Lake is in danger of being impacted by road improvements and subdivision. Just when the old lake is starting to relax, new and inevitable events are on its horizon. What would David Gaines think? Reunited with his canoe, paddling the mirrored image of today's Mono Lake, would he sigh with resignation, or would he dig his paddle in deeper, and continue the fight he started 26 years ago?

Like an old soldier after a long campaign, David's canoe has been retired. It has taken a long journey and deserves a rest, but like all things at Mono Lake, the future is uncertain. The old canoe may yet be pressed back into service, and I think both David and his canoe would be grateful. ❖

Douglas Dunaway is the Committee's Staff Assistant. He is looking forward to the time when the Committee's canoes are no longer encased in snow and are ready for paddling season.

The Committee's Restoration Principles

The Mono Lake Committee believes that the best and most cost-effective method of restoration is re-establishing natural processes. This is the same guiding approach being used in the restoration of Rush, Lee Vining, Walker, and Parker creeks.

While some water diversions will continue from all of Mono Lake's creeks, the goal of re-establishing natural processes provides important guidance towards how and when water is diverted. This means re-establishing peak flows and maintaining base flows on the creeks. These give the creeks enough energy to recreate their former habitats without significant intervention or continued maintenance.

When past degradation is such that it is difficult to reinstate natural processes, the Committee supports a limited helping hand, such as reopening side channels to raise water tables and provide complex habitat, or planting native vegetation to jump-start streambank recovery. These principles have been applied successfully on Mono Lake's other tributaries, leading to the recovery of a more natural condition, and the Committee is anxious to begin restoration work on Mill Creek once a settlement is reached.

Current Status of the Settlement Process

Talks continue as all parties remain committed to the process of resolving an almost 20 year-old Federal Energy Regulatory Commission relicensing procedure while simultaneously developing a comprehensive water management plan for the north part of the Mono Basin (see Spring 2003 *Newsletter*).

The parties—United States Forest Service, Southern California Edison, Bureau of Land Management, Mono County, California Department of Fish and Game, American Rivers/California Trout, People for Mono Basin Preservation, and the Mono Lake Committee—all have diverse interests and goals. The primary challenge has been (and will no doubt continue to be) that of effectively balancing water between competing uses and determining how best to distribute that water to benefit both the existing natural systems and the goals of the water rights holders. ❖

Lisa Cutting is the Committee's Eastern Sierra Policy Director. The warm spring days are a gentle reminder that fly fishing and hiking are "right around the corner" as Bartshé—the office weather soothsayer—would say.

2004 Field Seminars

PHOTO COURTESY OF CLAUDE FIDLER

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, count on fishing 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

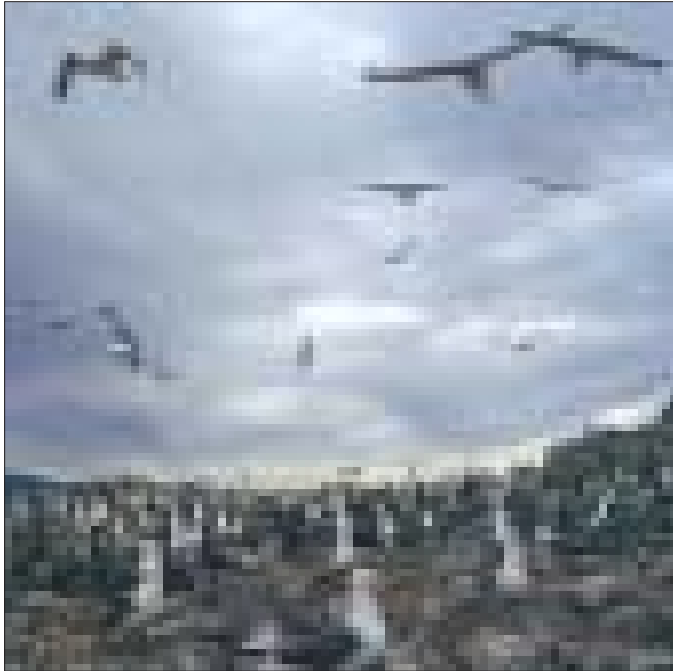
June 16–18

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. The class 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. The group 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.

Call (760) 647-6595 to Register



ARVA DEGENHARDT

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.

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.

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.



Call (760) 647-6595 to Register

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.

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!

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.



PHOTO COURTESY OF JOHN WEHAUSEN

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.**

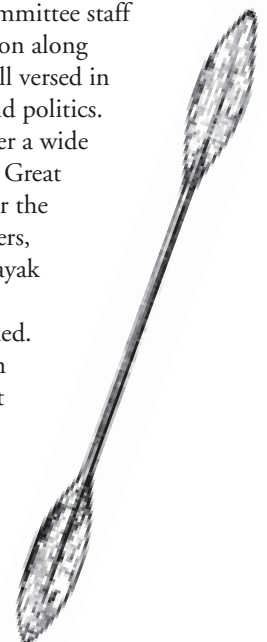
South Shore Kayak

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



ARYA DEGENHARDT

Julia Parker preparing materials for basket weaving.

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^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.

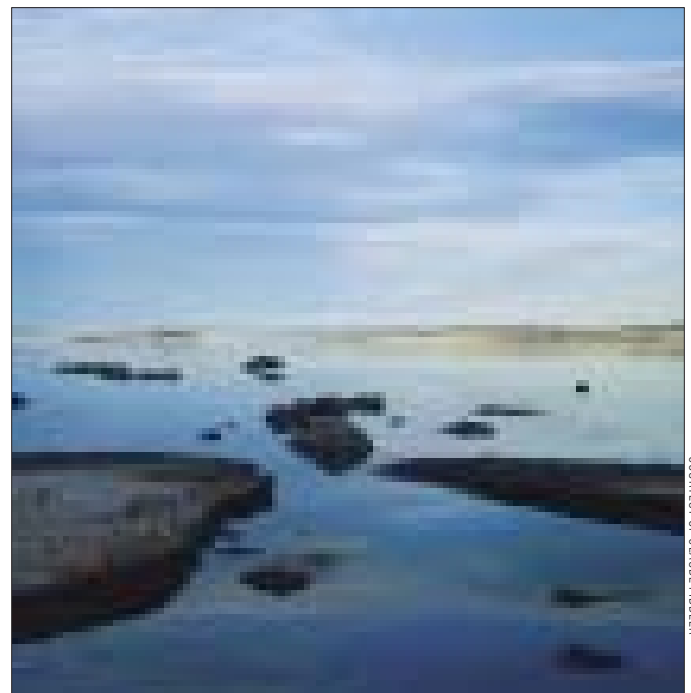
Reading the Aspen Groves: Arborglyphs and Aspen Natural History

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.



COURTESY OF CLAUDE FIDLER

Call (760) 647-6595 to Register

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 open to seminar participants for an additional fee of \$115.00. Register 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; some operate under additional permits from the California Department of Parks and Recreation.

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.

summer, however, never more than 30 full-sized larvae were collected in a sample, but these samples did host thousands of tiny larvae (1–2mm in length). These tiny larvae persisted in the sands all summer, never growing en masse to full size.

Prior to 1999, research scientist Dave Herbst had not observed long-legged flies in the lake since the previous meromictic event (1983–1989), indicating that they are less salt tolerant than alkali flies. This leads one to wonder: has the slowly-dropping lake level just caused the salinity to reach a threshold the long-legged flies can no longer tolerate, or could all the salts returned to the mixolimnion (the upper layer) last winter have pushed them beyond their threshold?

While brine shrimp and alkali flies are the main prey items fed to gull chicks under most circumstances, long-legged fly larvae dominate the diets fed to chicks on windy days. Wind churns up larvae from the sandy beaches where they gather to pupate, and often thousands of gulls can be seen standing side by side along sandy shorelines on windy afternoons taking advantage of wind and waves to easily capture these larvae.

The disappearance of these flies may not affect the gulls too drastically (after all, the gulls seemed to do well during the last decades when the waters were not meromictic and the long-legged flies were not abundant), but foraging adults will have to focus their attention on other prey when Mono's winds are howling. It will be interesting to see the findings in the 2004 long-legged fly season.

State Park Rangers – from page 11

State Historic Park, the Forest Service Scenic Area, and the Mono Lake Committee. They watched the evolution of the Mono Basin Scenic Area. They participated in the court cases and the 1994 State Water Resources Control Board's hearings that ultimately limited the amount of water being diverted from the Mono Basin by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power. "After the 1994 SWRCB decision, we were able to incorporate Mono Lake's success story into our interpretive tours." More and more school groups were



Janet and Dave with sons Ryan and Nick (holding faithful friend Doggy) Christmas 1986.

A Tenuous Safe Haven for Gulls

There were many wild and wonderful wildlife sightings in the 2003 season, not the least of which was a single coyote spotted on Gaines Island on August 23rd. Gaines Island is a remnant of the land bridge that once connected Negit Island—which at the time was home to two thirds of Mono's gulls—to the mainland. Rising lake levels have since isolated Gaines Island from both Negit and the mainland, and eventually the island will be completely covered with water when the lake reaches the target of 6392 feet above sea level.

As longtime Mono Lake Committee members are well aware, when the land bridge first emerged in the early 1980s, coyotes proved perfectly willing to sate themselves on gull eggs and they will likely do the same if given another opportunity. As the lake level has slowly declined these past few seasons the strait between the mainland and Gaines Island has narrowed, and this lone coyote managed to swim its way out there.

The strait on the other side of Gaines Island separating it from Negit and its islets—where the gulls currently breed—is wider, and this will hopefully grant the gulls sufficient safety. Keeping the channels between the islands and the mainland wide is essential to keeping the gull colony safe from predators, and the population recovery on track. ❖

Justin Hite is a senior at Cornell University studying Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, and is looking forward to returning to Mono Lake for another wonderful field season.

visiting the State Reserve, so the Carles developed educational programs to meet the needs of teachers and children who wanted to know where their water was coming from. "Working with school groups created some of our most satisfying memories."

The years at Mono Lake inspired David to become a writer, now with five published books on the environment to his credit. Janet has impressed Mono Lake visitors with her innovative interpretation skills. She invented a highly entertaining demonstration of a volcanic eruption, using the damp pumice sands along the shores of Mono Lake, and her intriguing song, "Bats Eat Bugs, They Don't Eat People" has delighted thousands of children as well as adults. They created the Moonlight Halloween Walk—an event complete with talking tufa towers, alkali flies and brine shrimp—a favorite of local Mono Basin residents and visitors.

David and Janet witnessed the re-flooding of the Negit Island land bridge in 1983. They constructed the first boardwalk across the marsh below the Mono Lake County Park. They were among the 320 people at South Tufa for David Gaines' Memorial Service in 1988. They watched Mono Lake rise while Lee Vining and Rush Creek were reborn. Today, you can often find Dave and Janet walking the shores of Mono Lake or hiking along the creeks, keeping a finger on the pulse of the thriving and vibrant State Reserve that they helped to create. ❖

New Audubon Center at Debs Park in East Los Angeles Up and Running

The Mono Lake Committee has a new, strong education partner in Los Angeles—the Audubon Center at Debs Park. This partnership is made even better because Elsa Lopez, who helped the Committee launch its Outdoor Experiences Program ten years ago, is the Executive Director of the Center. Elsa and the Mothers of East Los Angeles-Santa Isabel also started the low-flow toilet distribution program for Los Angeles Department of Water and Power in the early 1990s.

Debs Park is a natural gem in East Los Angeles—a steep hill of grasslands, trees, and brush where the Audubon Center makes it easy and fun to become a naturalist. The Center provides backpacks filled with guides and equipment that families and individuals can use to look for butterflies and birds on their own; and educators take school groups and others on general and specialized tours; and there is even an equipped laboratory classroom.

The Audubon Center is also a state-of-the-art off-the-grid facility. Heating and cooling come from solar-powered electricity; the septic system has the latest in ecological treatment technology; almost all building material is recycled—even the artwork on the gates to the children’s outdoor activity area.

When Mono Lake Committee staff visited Debs Park in February, we felt right at home. The Committee is looking forward to education groups making visits to both Debs Park and Mono Lake to illustrate the water connection that is an integral part of both places.

Debs Park is open 9AM–5PM daily. Call (323) 221-2255 ext.16 for general information and (323) 221-2255 ext. 13 for school groups. Directions and more information online at www.audubon-ca.org/debs_park.htm. ❖



Elsa Lopez giving Mono Lake Committee Board Members and Staff a tour of the Audubon Center at Debs Park facility.



The Debs Park Audubon Center is completely off the grid, with solar power for energy, and recycled materials used to build the facility.

ANVA DEGENHARDT



COURTESY OF THE HAWKINS

Music and Ecology Camp at Mono Lake

Explore Mono Lake through this independent camp run by Cole and Priscilla Hawkins for instrumentalists ages 11–18. The camp will take place during the week of June 13–20, 2004 in the Mono Basin.

Mornings will focus on studying the ecology and natural history of the Mono Basin and Sierra Nevada. Morning activities include horseback riding, hiking in the Sierra, climbing into a volcano, a boat tour on Mono Lake, and optional swimming at a spa or hot spring.

Afternoons will focus on music—playing instruments in coached chamber groups, private lessons, and classes on improvisation, performance, and music listening.

Nights will be occupied with star gazing, jam sessions, slide shows, and learning about local Native Americans.

The week will conclude with a concert held at the historic Mono Inn. For more information, contact camp organizers Cole and Priscilla Hawkins at (530) 753-1927.



From the Mailbag

News from Members and Friends

by Erika Obedzinski

*“An invitation—to explore, befriend and learn from Mono Lake...
to walk its beaches, float on its waters and climb its volcanoes...
to ponder what our children should inherit...”*

—David Gaines

If it's not happening already, warmer weather is just around the corner—so as you make your summer plans, don't forget to include a visit to Mono Lake! If you are able to make a trip to Lee Vining, please stop by the Mono Lake Committee Information Center and Bookstore to say hello while you're here. Many of activities will be going on this spring and summer—here are a few things to keep in mind.

The Committee's **guided canoe tours** are a great way to see the lake from late June to early September. Tours depart weekend mornings at 8:00, 9:30, and 11:00AM. Reservations are required.

Guided **walking tours at South Tufa** are offered daily during the summer at 10AM, 1PM, and 6PM. This one-hour, one-mile walking tour is a fun introduction to Mono Lake. The tour is free, and is enjoyable for both kids and adults—meet at the South Tufa parking lot.

Bird walks take place during the summer on Friday and Sunday mornings at 8AM at County Park north of Lee Vining. Come and learn some of the many birds who visit Mono Lake in the warmer months. All levels of bird enthusiasts are welcome.

We will be offering **Lee Vining Creek tours** once again this summer! Meandering the 1.6 mile community-built Lee Vining Creek Trail with a naturalist is a wonderful way to see Lee Vining Creek as it is being restored to health.

An **exhibit of fine art landscape photography** by world-class mountaineer and adventurer **Claude Fiddler** will be

showing in the Committee gallery May–October. While you're here, check out the **Mono Lake Story video** too!

Spend a weekend learning more about the Mono Basin on a **Mono Lake Committee Field Seminar**. Seminars are listed on page 19—spaces are limited and reservations are required.

The **3rd Annual Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua** will take place from June 18–20 in the Mono Basin. Don't miss out on this fun weekend of birds, field trips, music, art, and more! Details on page 8.

New this summer from the Lee Vining Chamber of Commerce: **Campfire Programs**. Talks, music, and fun Thursday–Sunday evenings from 8:00–9:30 at Gus Hess Park.

And if you're in town you won't want to miss the **Mono Basin Historical Society's lecture series**. Come learn about human history in the Mono Basin! Lecture series takes place the last Monday of each month at 7pm at the Lee Vining Community Center.

For more information on any of these activities please call the Information Center at (760) 647-6595, or check the calendar of events on the website www.monolake.org. We hope to see you soon! ❖

Erika Obedzinski is the Committee's Membership Coordinator. She is looking forward to taking a canoe trip in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness this spring!

In Memory

Stacy Brown of Los Angeles made a donation in memory of **Greg Esgate, Paul Green, Mary Hanson**, and all other special Mono Lake lovers we have lost. **Mary & Walt Callesen** of Livermore gave a gift in memory of **George Klein**. **Alice T. Chan** of San Francisco made a contribution in memory of **Eunice Elton**, and **Dorothy H. Fowler** of San Francisco also made a contribution in memory of **Ms. Elton**. **Kenneth & Barbara Coates** of Claremont made a donation in memory of **Bob & Louise Hill** of Mariposa. **Patricia Holland** of Lee Vining gave a gift in memory of her father, who loved the Eastern Sierra. **John & Inna MacDougall** of St. Helena made a contribution in memory of **Francis Fisher** of

Norfolk, MA. **Genny Smith** made a donation in honor and memory of **Rick de Laet**. **Mary E. Vestal** of Boise, ID gave a gift in memory of her husband **Elden Vestal** whose significant role in saving Mono Lake meant much to him.

In Honor

John & Katharyn Crabbe of Santa Rosa made a contribution in honor of **Robert & Glenda Crabbe** of Sacramento. **Caren & Dan Deardorf** of Lexington, MA made a donation in honor of **Mimi & Neil Burton** of Kentfield. **Jeanne Walter** of Bishop gave a gift in honor of **Denise Waterbury's 50th birthday**—Happy Birthday Denise!



CARL DENNIS BUELL

The 3rd Annual

Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua June 18-20, 2004

Birds ♦ Field Trips ♦ Music ♦ Art ♦ And More

Visit www.birdchautauqua.org for the schedule of events. Registration begins April 15th.

Mono Lake Wine Flight

A WINE-TASTING BENEFIT FOR THE MONO BASIN FIELD STATION AND
CELEBRATION OF MARTHA DAVIS' 50TH BIRTHDAY

Saturday June 19, 2004 4:00 to 6:30PM

at the Mono Inn at Mono Lake

\$50 per person, call (760) 647-6595 to register

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

Visit 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



MONO LAKE
COMMITTEE
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