

MONO LAKE

N E W S L E T T E R

Summer 2005



About this time in each Newsletter cycle the words of Mono Lake Committee Co-Founder and Newsletter Editor David Gaines float gently to my mind ... “I am a Newsletter refugee” he wrote. These words beckon me to make a break for it, to leave the computer in the proverbial dust and make sure that Mono Lake and the Mono Basin are still out there.

This time, there’s no question of where to go ... it’s time for a dip. I make my way down off the ancient lakeshore terrace, the lake glimmering like a mirage—it’s a good thing I’m out here to make sure it’s for real. The salty ocean smell hits just as fields of paintbrush appear through the sagebrush—a good sign. The David Gaines Memorial Boardwalk meanders through cracked tufa mounds and tall grasses as it undulates across the uneven, marshy ground. A patch of alkali flies greets me at the shoreline—so far, so good. Thousands of brine shrimp hang in suspension, their shadows cast on the infamous muck below. Hopping through the tufa shoals I make my way out to the perfect spot and don’t even hesitate. Slippery water, the sting of the last hike’s scratches, and up go the feet. Yep, Mono Lake is still here, and seems to be doing quite well.

It feels like time stands still when you float in Mono Lake. Glassy waters, blue sky, the islands, the steep mountains and desert hills—I’m pretty sure this is exactly what Gaines had in mind. I’m not usually one for recommending things, but a good, well-timed float in Mono Lake is good for the soul.

Just before extracting myself from the brine a flock of phalaropes whispered across the water. My investigation was complete—Mono Lake is right on track. My recommendation: come check it out for yourself. And if floating in Mono Lake isn’t your thing, check out the articles in this Newsletter and see what inspires you!

—Arya Degenhardt, Communications Director



COVER PHOTO BY LEW NUNNELLEY
GREG REIS

The Rush Creek return ditch, carrying a peak flow of 350 cubic feet per second of water from Grant Reservoir to Rush Creek. This the first time Rush Creek was augmented with water from Lee Vining Creek (see article on page 16), delivering Rush Creek its first 400 cubic feet per second peak flow since the State Water Board Restoration Order in 1998.

Mono Lake Committee Mission

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



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MONO LAKE
NEW SLETTER

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2004 Best Year for Mono's Gulls in 22-Year Study

by Justin M. Hite

Editor's note: PRBO Conservation Science biologist Justin Hite has researched Mono's California Gulls since 1998 and sent us these findings derived from the formal report "Population Size and Reproductive Success of California Gulls at Mono Lake, California, in 2004." Gull research reports can be found online at www.monobasinresearch.org.

Immediately after walking the first stretch of shoreline on Twain Islet, just a few hundred meters from Negit Island, on the morning of May 25, 2004, our group of biologists and volunteers realized something amazing had happened. Before arriving on the islet I had explained to the volunteers that most nests have two eggs, some only one egg, and only a small minority have three. But what we had just observed was something totally different: nearly half of the nests had three eggs! The 2004 season marked the 22nd consecutive year that PRBO Conservation Science (PRBO) researchers had monitored Mono Lake's California Gull population. Through these two decades, the average clutch size at Mono Lake has usually hovered somewhere around 1.8 eggs per nest, but in 2004 the average jumped to 2.4 eggs per nest—a remarkably large increase.

2004 was also my last year as the field coordinator of the gull research on Mono Lake. I was finishing my six-year

tenure, which started when I was 18. So, it was marvelous to walk the islands one last time in May as, once again, the first tiny wet chicks chiseled their way out of their eggs, and to see the incredible fecundity and fertility in the form of abundant three-egg clutches.

Research Results

In general, 2004 was a banner year for Mono's gulls. The gulls laid more eggs per nest than in any other year and the total number of nests, 25,954, was one of the highest in 22 years. At the end of the season, an average of 1.5 young per nest succeeded in fledging, which was also the highest number in 22 years.

But why? We hypothesize that it was a combination of several factors working together. First, the lake had just recently recovered from a seven-year period of meromixis, a condition whereby most of the lake's nutrients are trapped in the lower part of the lake—unavailable to the lake's food chain. With the end of meromixis, the majority of the lake's nutrients were returned to the upper part of the water column, meaning that the algae, shrimp, and flies could once again thrive. Second, spring temperatures play a large role in the timing and extent of the brine shrimp hatch, which is the major food source used by the gulls in the early stages of chick feeding. The unusually warm spring temperatures in 2004 favored a large and early

Continued on page 10

Land Subdivision at Mono No Longer a Threat

Cunningham Property Sold for Protection Purposes

Land Will Be Traded To US Forest Service

by Jen Nissenbaum

In March, Mammoth Mountain Ski Area announced that it had purchased the Cunningham Property, a 120-acre parcel located on the west shore of Mono Lake within the boundary of the Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area. While plans to subdivide and develop the property with resort homes had been slowly moving forward with Mono County, Mammoth Mountain has said that it will not develop the property.

The Committee is pleased that this largescale development project no longer threatens the west shore of Mono Lake and the integrity of the Scenic Area.

Development is not in Mammoth Mountain's plans. Instead, it hopes to trade the Cunningham property to the Forest Service in exchange for property in the Mammoth Lakes area. Committee Co-Executive Director Geoff McQuilkin

adds, "I've been personally assured by senior management at Mammoth Mountain that their sole goal is to trade the property into public ownership."

Prior to Mammoth Mountain acquiring the Cunningham property, a partial application had been submitted to Mono County to subdivide and build up to 30 resort-style homes on the property. In August 2003, the Forest Service declared this proposal to be detrimental to the integrity of the Scenic Area, which protects lands surrounding the lake. While Scenic Area regulations allow property owners to make modest changes to their properties, the legislation clearly prohibits large-scale alterations such as subdivisions. "The Mono Lake Committee has been closely following this issue for several years," says McQuilkin. "Congress established the Scenic Area 20 years

ago to protect the unique character of the lands surrounding Mono Lake, and the Committee opposes development projects that violate Scenic Area protections."

Mammoth Mountain has indicated its interest in using the Mono Lake property as part of an exchange for Forest Service land beneath the Mammoth Mountain Inn and the associated parking lot. To date, no plans have been submitted to the Forest Service, which has said that any trade proposal will be subject to public review under the National Environmental Policy Act. The Mono Lake Committee supports an open and transparent process for land trades and expects that the Forest Service will lead a public process that assures a positive and responsible outcome at both ends of the land trade.

Fine Print Requires Vigilance

Although the purchase by Mammoth Mountain is complete, there apparently is a provision in the sale that bears watching. The Cunninghams retain an option to purchase the property back at a set price for two years. Mammoth Mountain can—but is not required to—stop such a buy back from happening by paying out additional funds.

At the present time, it seems unlikely that this option will be exercised. Still, it provides a path, however improbable, that could lead to the reactivation of the subdivision proposal. The Committee will monitor the situation and work locally to ensure that permanent protection, not subdivision, is the final outcome for the Cunningham property. ❖



GEOFF MCQUILKIN

Sale signs come down: The Cunningham property has been purchased for trade to the Forest Service. Public ownership will protect the lakeshore property from inappropriate development.

Federal Decision Makers Hear Plentiful Support for Mill Creek

Mono Lake Friends Speak Up

by Geoff McQuilkin

Mill Creek received landmark public support during the recently completed Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) comment period. Now the next move is FERC's, and a ruling is expected later this summer.

Mill Creek has long suffered from excessive diversion of its water, with over 70% of the creek's flow diverted on average. Although existing water rights justify some of these diversions, about 25% of the creek is diverted simply by historical happenstance. The primary reason for this is that water is initially diverted for hydropower use and it is difficult to get the water back into the creek after it flows through the powerhouse. The Committee believes that only water legally allowed under water rights should be diverted from the creek; the rest should flow in Mill Creek to Mono Lake.

FERC has the power to fix this long-standing problem by requiring repair of the "return ditch" as part of a new license for the hydropower plant. Such repair—which would allow the ditch to carry 40–52 cubic feet per second (cfs) of water in contrast to the current maximum of roughly 15 cfs—is part of a settlement agreed to by Southern California Edison (the power plant operator), land management agencies, the Department of Fish and Game, CalTrout, and the Mono Lake Committee.

The public voice was loud and clear in support of the settlement. Committee members and Mill Creek supporters made their voices heard!

In the end, 132 personal letters were filed with FERC in support of the settlement, including a dozen from local property owners. An online petition hosted by the Committee received over 1,000 signatures and was also submitted.

Key conservation groups with Mono Lake interests also weighed in on the issue. The Audubon Society endorsed the settlement, writing that "... restoration of Mill Creek's damaged habitat is dependent on water rights and other matters of California law. Nonetheless, FERC alone is responsible for assuring that the hydropower facility, including the return ditch, is constructed and operating in a manner which does not cause or continue these significant [ecological] impacts."

Ducks Unlimited (DU) also spoke in support of the settlement and Mill Creek restoration. DU Director of Conservation Planning and respected waterfowl expert Dr. Fritz Reid wrote that the second most important action possible to restore Mono Lake waterfowl habitat (after raising the lake) is "rewatering of Mill Creek to restore riparian wetland and hypopycnal environments" and that FERC has the opportunity "to assure that the licensed hydropower facilities neither impede the return of water to Mill Creek nor



ARMA DEGENHARDT

Mill Creek, Mono's third largest tributary.

hamper the waterfowl habitat restoration that will follow."

Comments were also submitted by Mono County, which owns Mill Creek water rights. The county expressed concern that a refurbished return ditch might be too large and infringe on its water rights, although the settlement clearly states that it does not alter existing water rights. The Committee believes that water rights and water law—not ditch size—determine how Mill Creek water is allocated, and is concerned that the county may seek to ratchet down the size of the return ditch in an effort to shore up or even augment diversions under its established water rights.

Currently, the Committee and other settling parties are working on reply comments to answer questions raised by the county and a local resident in a separate lengthy document. Details will follow in the next *Newsletter*.

FERC does not have to follow a fixed timetable to issue its ruling on the settlement, but hopes are for news by late summer. If FERC adopts the settlement as submitted, refurbishment of the return ditch could be underway within two years, promising healthier, water rights-based flows for Mill Creek and the streamside forest, wildlife, and birds that depend on it.

Meanwhile, Mill Creek is receiving a much needed, though temporary, boost in flow thanks to the wet winter. Lundy Reservoir spilled over for the first time since 1998, providing the highest peak flow to the creek in almost two decades, helping to create fish habitat, disperse cottonwood seeds, and build channel structure. Let's hope the next step is the return of excessively diverted flows for Mill Creek's better health. ❖

New Zealand Mud Snail Found in Rush Creek

by Elin Ljung

The Fall 2004 *Newsletter* introduced the New Zealand Mud Snail, an invasive invertebrate that has been found in several California streams, including the Upper Owens River. The tiny snail, *Potamopygrus antipodarum*, was an impending threat to the Mono Basin, and new reports now indicate that it has recently been spotted in Rush Creek.

This spring, a California Department of Fish and Game survey team found New Zealand Mud Snails above the old highway bridge, located upstream from the current Highway 395. Dr. Dave Herbst, UC Research Scientist of the Sierra Nevada Aquatic Research Laboratory, said, "In any habitat where there is disturbance the snails do well, as if they were aquatic weeds. This is where native organisms don't do very well and the snail can flourish." It is difficult to predict whether or not Rush Creek is healthy enough to withstand the mud snail invasion.

The New Zealand Mud Snail is an exceptionally hardy species that feeds on diatoms and detritus, therefore competing with native invertebrates like mayflies and caddisflies that share the same diet. The snails can pass through the digestive tracts of fish unharmed, and can live out of water for nearly a month in damp or shady environments. Because the snails can reproduce without fertilization, it only takes one individual snail to create a colony that can heavily impact a stream.

However, Herbst emphasized that the snails still remain a relative mystery. "We don't fully understand the ecology of the

snails, their interactions with native invertebrates, their habitat requirements in terms of chemistry, their dispersal abilities, and the effect on trout foraging and food resources." With all of these unknowns, the mud snail bears close watching.

What You Can Do

Since the snails spread mainly by hitchhiking on humans, it is important to be vigilant about cleaning gear that has been in a snail-inhabited stream. Cleaning boats with hot water and bleach effectively kills snails, while boots, shoes, waders, and equipment should be frozen overnight to eliminate the chance of contaminating other waters.

The Mono Lake Committee and Mono Basin researchers are working to halt the snails' spread. The Committee installed a "New Zealand Mud Snail destruction chamber" in the Field Station, which, despite its fancy title, is simply a freezer set aside for any gear used in Rush Creek. In addition, researchers with PRBO Conservation Science have designated one pair of shoes for use solely in Rush Creek in order to avoid spreading the snails to other parts of the Basin.

When you visit Mono Lake, or any other stream in the Eastern Sierra, please do your part to stop the spread of New Zealand Mud Snails! For more information online, visit the New Zealand Mud Snail Research and Management website at www.esg.montana.edu/aim/mollusca/nzms/. ❖

Supporting Science for Mono Lake Committee Opens the Mono Basin Field Station

by Arya Degenhardt

The former Kings Inn Motel is just about as unlikely a spot for a gathering of biologists as the shores of Mono Lake were in 1976 when the original group of researchers pitched their tents for a summer of field investigations. Times and technologies have changed quite a bit, and the new generation of researchers may need phones and internet connection, but the spirit of the original crew lives on in what is now the new Mono Basin Field Station.

2005 marks the second year of the Mono Basin Field Station and the place is hopping! Located just a block behind the Mono Lake Committee in Lee Vining, the Field Station occupies two transformed buildings of the former motel. There are two main groups working out of the Field Station this summer: the US Geological Survey's Sage Grouse crew and PRBO Conservation Science's Riparian Songbird Study crew. These hearty souls brave Mono's wilds each day—and sometimes come home to brave the unknowns of the new Field Station as it gets up and running—but they all agree that having a place to sleep come sunset makes the work all the more enjoyable.

With a total of ten researchers using the Field Station at

any given time, you can find trucks with large bird-tracking antennas mounted on top, birders repairing mist-nets, folks on laptop computers connecting to the wireless network, and the obligatory piles of "tennies" covered in Mono muck.

In keeping with the Mono Lake Committee's goal of supporting research in the Mono Basin, all researchers staying at the Field Station will be sharing their findings online at the Mono Basin Clearinghouse. You can find this repository of information, ranging from oral histories to published scientific reports, at www.monobasinresearch.org.

Success in establishing the Field Station is due to a lot of dedicated staff effort and the funding support of committed donors who value science and the insights into the natural world that it produces. The Committee is still raising funds for the Field Station and encourages interested donors to contact Co-Executive Director Frances Spivy-Weber (fran@monolake.org) at (310) 316-0041 for more information and to set up a personal tour of the facility.



Scientific Research in the Mono Basin

News from the Mono Basin Field Station and Beyond

The following two project descriptions are representative of the diversity of research going on at Mono Lake. While the subjects of the research may be more or less appealing depending on your taste, the research is cutting edge, and the results exciting.

Willow Flycatchers: Fitzbews On The Loose

Chris McCreedy, PRBO Conservation Science

One outcome of the court-ordered restoration on Rush Creek has been the recent re-occupation of Rush Creek by a growing population of California State Endangered Willow Flycatchers, discovered by the Point Reyes Bird Observatory (now PRBO Conservation Science) in 2001. As a result, “fitzbew”, the Willow Flycatcher’s unique, sneeze-like song, can be heard throughout the Rush Creek bottomlands.

Willow Flycatchers were once considered fairly common in the Eastern Sierra, but Sierra Nevada populations have declined precipitously throughout the twentieth century. Rush Creek is one of the few California Willow Flycatcher breeding sites that has seen consistent population increases, and Rush now holds 1–2% of California’s breeding population.

PRBO Conservation Science has continued to monitor the Willow Flycatchers of Rush Creek, measuring nest success, population density, juvenile and adult survivorship, and habitat characteristics. As this is the only known Willow Flycatcher population in the Inyo National Forest, the United States For-

est Service is using Rush Creek’s habitat as a model for comparison studies at nearby historic Willow Flycatcher sites at McGee Creek and June Lake, where Willow Flycatchers have disappeared.

One of the most exciting aspects of PRBO’s research is the real possibility of discovering Rush Creek-born birds occupying other sites within the Mono Basin. PRBO mist-netting stations have already captured two non-breeding Rush Creek flycatchers at Lee Vining Creek. If Rush Creek can become a source population for this endangered bird’s recovery at other sites in the Mono Basin, this would be just one more indication that Rush Creek is on the road to recovery. ❖



CHRIS MCCREEDY

A fledging Willow Flycatcher nestling nicknamed “Bomb” after its color bands.

The Mono Lake Ticks

Tom G. Schwan, Rocky Mountain Laboratories, NIAID, NIH

Ticks are obligate, blood-feeding ectoparasites of land vertebrates with approximately 865 species known worldwide. In 1992 a new species was described and named at Mono Lake: *Argas monolakensis*.

At Mono Lake, the ticks are intimately associated with the California Gulls that breed on the islands during the spring and early summer (see page 3). The ticks are cold-blooded, nocturnal, and require blood to survive and reproduce. Thus, only a small seasonal window exists when the gulls are present and the night temperatures are warm enough for the ticks to be active and feed. In the laboratory, scientists determined that the tick’s life cycle consists of eggs, one larval stage (see photo), two to five nymph stages, and the adult. While the larvae remain attached to a host to feed for many days, the nymphs and adults feed for only 10 to 60 minutes. The adults are beautifully adapted to wait long periods of time between feedings if necessary. In the laboratory, some ticks have lived for five years without food!

Colonial nesting seabirds that return to the same breeding grounds each year to rear their young are ideal hosts for ticks similar to those found at the lake. However, the host–parasite association of the California Gulls and *Argas* ticks at Mono Lake is found nowhere else in the world. Also, nowhere else

in North America do such high densities of *Argas* ticks exist.

Currently, two projects with Mono Lake ticks are underway with the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, one at the Rocky Mountain Laboratories (RML) in Hamilton, Montana, and the other near the main research campus in Bethesda, Maryland. At RML, *Argas* ticks are being used along with other species of ticks to understand how pathogenic spirochetes (like the bacteria that cause Lyme disease and relapsing fever) are transmitted by some ticks but not others. In Bethesda, research focuses on identifying compounds in the saliva of ticks and other blood-feeding arthropods that affect blood flow and the transmission of disease-causing agents.

While some information exists about *Argas* ticks from Mono Lake, they represent exciting future research possibilities! ❖



ROCKY MOUNTAIN LABORATORIES

The larva of the Mono Lake tick, Argas monolakensis, as viewed with the scanning electron microscope. Larvae are the stage most often encountered by researchers handling the California Gull chicks and are less than a millimeter wide before feeding.

Restoration in the Mono Basin

It's All About Water ... and This Year There's Lots Of It!

by Lisa Cutting

Editor's note: This update assumes a basic understanding of ongoing lake and stream restoration occurring in the Mono Basin. For background information please review the Summer 2004 Newsletter article "Is Mono Lake Restored? Have the Creeks Recovered?" or review online at www.monolake.org/restoration.

After several years of below normal precipitation Mono Lake and its tributary streams will see a healthy pulse of water this runoff season (see *Streamwatch* on page 16). The spring runoff brings not only water to the creeks but also scientists to the Mono Basin to continue their restoration work and scientific inquiry. Since it has been seven years since the last above-average runoff year, you can imagine the flurry of activity which this season has brought to the stream scientists, Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (DWP), and the Mono Lake Committee. Here's a brief update on restoration activities in general and what can be expected this summer out in the field.

Rush Creek Return Ditch

This water conveyance facility transports water from Grant Reservoir to Rush Creek. It was successfully tested last summer at 380 cubic feet per second (cfs) after rehabilitation work completed in 2003. This increased capacity is critical to providing mandated stream restoration flows.

Peak Flow Variation for Rush Creek

Stream scientists and DWP have received support from the State Water Resources Control Board for an experimental peak flow schedule for Rush Creek this summer. Scientists want to extend the duration of the peak and hold it at 400 cfs for eight days instead of five. The proposal also includes slight variations to the ramping process (the amount the flow can either increase or decrease from day to day before or after a peak flow) and eliminates the requirement for a 10 day 350 cfs flow after the initial primary peak. Even though the total volume of the stream restoration flow is less than the State Water Board order, the Committee supports the experimental hydrograph because it will provide the stream scientists with important data that up until this point they have been unable to collect. Stream restora-

Find a Research Marker?

There's a lot of research going on out there in the Mono Basin. If in your wanderings you come across markers, scientific equipment, or anything else "unnatural" please do not disturb it. If in doubt as to its actual utility, please report information at the front desk of the Mono Lake Committee and we'll investigate it for you. Remember, site markers are an important part of scientific observations and all research projects are required to clean-up any trace of human impacts when the project is completed.

tion flows of this magnitude and higher—identified by experts as being the single most important element to reinstating natural processes—have been lacking in recent years.

Lee Vining Creek Augmentation

If you've been paying attention to the details of this article and checking the math, then you've probably been wondering how water in excess of 380 cfs gets to Rush Creek. The Grant Reservoir outlet capacity is 380 cfs and spills from Grant over the top of its dam are unreliable (the last spill was in 2000). A process called Lee Vining Creek augmentation provides supplemental water from Lee Vining Creek to Rush Creek by way of the diversion conduit. The process is a little tricky because DWP is mandated to observe the natural peak on Lee Vining Creek. So, before DWP starts the upward ramp toward Rush's peak it needs to be somewhat assured that Lee Vining has already received its peak. Lee Vining Creek augmentation will be in play this year and it's a good opportunity for DWP to test the reliability of this process.

Channel Openings on Rush

DWP has physically opened some historic stream channels on Rush Creek that were plugged when the degraded streamside habitat was unable to hold its banks during high flows which occurred irregularly while the creek lay dry. There are still several channel openings which remain obstructed on the list to be completed. This year's high flows will allow all parties to assess the mandated channel openings and proceed accordingly.

Lee Vining Creek Diversion Structure

Work to upgrade the diversion structure on Lee Vining Creek was completed this past spring. The new facility allows DWP to set the flow on the creek instead of in the conduit. This insures a set flow in the creek and significantly minimizes the potential of a flow violation. The upgrade also incorporated a gate that can be lowered at high flows to hopefully allow sediment to continue downstream as it would under natural conditions.

Trout Movement Study

In addition to the annual fall fish surveys which assess species diversity, individual size and location, and overall population size and stability, the biologists will also be tracking fish movement. Ten fish will be tagged and their movement tracked which will help scientists better understand the current habitat use patterns and preferences of the Rush Creek population. Trout are an especially important component as "restoration success" is directly tied to trout through the State Water Resources Control Board's ordered termination criteria. ❖

Lisa Cutting is the Committee's Eastern Sierra Policy Director. Now that the snow is finally melting she's busy poring over maps planning her high country adventures for this summer.

Planting Trees With Local Kids

A Celebration of Earth Day

by Jen Nissenbaum

“Thanks for letting us come with you to help plant trees and learn about nature” reads one of the colorfully decorated cards from Lee Vining 5th and 6th graders. These students, along with the 3rd and 4th graders, joined Mono Lake Committee staff on a field trip in celebration of Earth Day, planting cottonwood cuttings along Rush Creek and learning about the importance of riparian habitat.

Tree Planting Preparation

Prior to the field trip, the Committee’s Assistant Education Director Santiago Escruceria and I visited the students in their classroom—engaging the kids in a discussion about the history of water diversions at Rush Creek and providing a hands-on opportunity to learn about water quality through a science experiment. By the end of the classroom visit, the kids began to understand how a healthy riparian ecosystem is linked to water quality, started to get excited about plantint grees in their local watershed.

Prior to the cottonwoods bemerging from dormancy in spring, Committee staff collected cuttings from mature cottonwoods in Lee Vining Canyon (and stored them in a refrigerator at the Mono Market for a month: Thanks Chris!). The week before the Earth Day field trip, we dug deep holes for the trees, so that when the students arrived at the creek, they simply had to find the holes, choose a cutting to plant, and secure the tree in the hole.

Tree Planting at Rush Creek

The trees were planted on April 21st (the day before Earth Day) below the Rush Creek culvert at Test Station Road. Prior to the planting there were no cottonwoods immediately downstream of the culvert—making this part of the streambed prone to erosion, especially during high flows.

In all, the classes planted over 40 Black Cottonwoods in three adjacent sites on Rush Creek’s west bank. This was the first time the Committee has planted cottonwood cuttings by hand, and it was difficult to plant the trees as



Jen Nissenbaum gives local students a hands-on lesson on the best way to plant cottonwood cuttings along the banks of Rush Creek.

deep as when the holes were dug with the assistance of a backhoe-mounted auger. Dave Martin, a stream restoration scientist with the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power said to expect a survival rate of about 25%. Past cottonwood plantings in the Mono Basin have had survival rates ranging from 47%–84%.

In addition to tree planting, the local kids also participated in fun activities during the Earth Day field trip—like learning about local birds, putting their feet in cold water, and listening to the sounds of Rush Creek. One group even saw a small scorpion—an exciting find! The Lee Vining kids said that they are excited to check on their trees later in the year to see if they make it through peak flows in the early summer. They won’t be alone, as Committee staff plans on monitoring the survival and sprouting of these cottonwoods to

help in future tree planting efforts! ❖

Jen Nissenbaum was the Committee’s Policy Coordinator, and has recently moved on to new pursuits. In the meantime she’s been enjoying the high spring flows by river raft!



Santiago Escruceria leads fun activities with the students like this team-building exercise at Rush Creek.

The End of the Road

Mono Lake Shoulder Widening Project is Over and Mono Can Breathe a Sigh of Relief

by Jen Nissenbaum

Albeit slowly, the Mono Lake Shoulder Widening Project is moving closer its end. In the last *Newsletter*, the Mono Lake Committee wrote that the Project was “suspended” by the Mono County Local Transportation Commission (LTC), the decision making body for highway projects in Mono County. At a public meeting held in Lee Vining in March, the LTC commissioners voted to take the project off suspension and begin the process of closing the Project. In other words, the Final Environmental Impact Report (EIR) will never be released, and construction of the damaging highway project within the Mono Basin Scenic Area will not begin.

The Project was a major concern to the Mono Lake Committee, as it threatened the scenic and natural resources along Mono Lake’s west shore. Members and Mono Lake supporters made a big difference by making numerous comments on the draft EIR and at other opportunities—thank you! While a majority of the Project’s funds have already been shifted to another project in Mono County, close to \$3 million remains dedicated to highway improvements along the 3.1 mile stretch of Hwy 395 adjacent to Mono Lake. At the March LTC meeting, Caltrans discussed the potential for constructing one or two significantly scaled-back project components such as im-

proving the entrance to Old Marina, adding a new scenic vista, or replacing the existing guardrail (see Winter/Spring 2005 *Newsletter* for complete list of proposed options).

Two things became clear at the public meeting: 1) Caltrans has not developed sufficient information to make informed decisions about any of the proposed options; and, 2) Caltrans appears resistant to using the most sensitive technologies available within this unique area. Because of this reluctance, many people present at the meeting—including local community members, Committee staff, and even a few of the LTC commissioners—remarked that more details are needed prior to approving any of the proposed project components.

The public meeting ended with the LTC commissioners directing Caltrans to open a new Project Study Report (PSR), which is a document that essentially establishes the framework for new highway projects. The PSR will include more specifics about each of the proposed, scaled-back options, including costs.

The Committee will remain involved in developing and reviewing any project component proposed for Mono Lake’s west shore and remains optimistic that positive actions which respect Mono Lake are possible. ❖

Gulls from page 3

brine shrimp population (although exactly how we do not know). Mono’s gull population capitalized on this occurrence, and laid the largest clutches observed in the history of the research.

Nests fail for a variety of reasons, and if the failure happens soon enough in the season, the pair will often lay a second clutch. We have a rough idea of how many pairs do this by the number of small down-covered chicks in the plots when we do the chick banding in July. In most years, these downy chicks make up 5–10% of the chick population that we band. In 2004, however, there was not a single downy chick among the 838 chicks we banded. It seems that not only did the gulls lay more eggs, but their clutches and broods also survived the early part of the season at a much higher rate than in other years, further attesting to the unprecedented success of the 2004 season.

Coyotes Still Like Gulls

The specter of coyote predation on nesting California Gulls, which caused the abandonment of more than 15,000 pairs from Negit Island in the early 1980s when that island became connected to the shore by a landbridge, has occurred again. This time, however, it’s in a new location and on a smaller scale. In 2002 a small number of gulls began to build nests, lay eggs, and raise chicks on a small mound of rock near Old

Marina, adjacent to Highway 395. This ‘island’, which in 2002 was separated from the shoreline by no more than 100 feet of shallow water, is easily visible from the highway. In 2002 the gulls succeeded in fledging chicks, and returned in 2003 to lay again. Again they fledged chicks. In May of 2004 we counted 511 nests on Old Marina Island, though we could barely call it an island anymore since we were able to get there by hopping from rock to rock without getting our feet wet. Pulling over on Hwy 395, I could see hundreds of chicks begging for food on the island and hear their clear whistled calls through the din of raucous adult calls and the drone of passing cars.

I stopped again one day in early July, looked through my binoculars, and saw not a single adult or chick on the entire island. On a visit shortly after we found that not only were there no living chicks, there were no dead ones either. We never observed coyotes preying on the chicks, but as coyotes are commonly seen throughout the area and would have had little difficulty reaching the island, we are relatively sure this was the cause of this rookery’s demise. 511 nests, harboring more than 1,000 eggs and later hatched hundreds of chicks, had simply disappeared.

Until 2005, the water level in Mono Lake had been falling

Continued on page 19

Sierra Nevada Conservancy Updates

License Plate Could Raise \$2 Million Per Year for the Sierra

by Frances Spivy-Weber

Bipartisan cooperation for the Sierra Nevada Conservancy continued this year when Assemblyman Tim Leslie, with support from Assemblyman John Laird (authors of legislation to create the Sierra Nevada Conservancy), introduced AB 84, the Sierra Nevada License Plate bill.

The License Plate bill directs the California Department of Transportation to design and issue a license plate in honor of the Sierra, with income from the sales of the license plate to support the operation of the newly-created Sierra Nevada Conservancy. The Conservancy is the largest state conservancy of its kind in the nation, covering more than 25 million acres in 22 counties from the Oregon border to below Owens Valley. It was created to support a wide range of programs, including protecting, conserving and restoring the region's physical, cultural, historical, and living resources; reducing the risk of natural disasters, such as wildfires; and improving water and air quality.

There are currently two license plates that support Sierra programs, one for Lake Tahoe and one for Yosemite. AB 84 would create a third. Drivers who register with the Department of Motor Vehicles will have the option of selecting a Sierra Nevada license plate for a fee of \$50 and renewing the plates annually for \$40. The authors expect proceeds from the plates to generate \$2 million annually for the Conservancy.

How You Can Support the Conservancy

Pre-register online at www.sierraconservancy.org to express your interest in buying a Sierra Nevada license plate. Once the bill passes, information will then be sent to turn that interest into a reality. At least 7,500 plates must be sold within one year, and starting with a base of interested buyers will help to meet that challenging goal. Thanks to the Sierra Fund for taking the lead in marketing the license plate fund, and if you are in a business or agency that is able to purchase license plates for fleets of vehicles, please contact Shawn Garvey at shawn.garvey@sierrafund.org.

Sierra Nevada Conservancy Appointments

The Sierra Nevada Conservancy Act, signed into law in September 2004, creates the Sierra Nevada Conservancy as a state agency to bring new resources to the Sierra-Cascade region. It will be led by a board of 13 voting members and three non-voting Federal advisors, and its headquarters will be within the Sierra Nevada Region.

As of the writing of this article, the six County Supervisors,

who represent six Sub-Regions, have been named (see below). In addition, the members are Secretary of Resources, Mike Chrisman, who also chairs the Conservancy; Director of Finance, Tom Campbell; Senate Rules' choice, Byron Sher, who recently retired from the Senate; Governor appointees Bob Kirkwood, BJ Kirwan, and Carol Whiteside. The Assembly has not appointed anyone yet.

When all appointments are made, the Sierra Nevada Conservancy will meet in Sacramento to begin organizing the work of this new agency. Among the initial challenges will be hiring staff, finding a headquarters location, and deciding what kind of planning and grant award criteria need to be developed for making funding decisions. The Conservancy was created with rare bipartisan cooperation, and we look forward to this continuing as the hallmark of the new agency.

County Sub-Regions and Representatives

North Sierra: Supervisor Brian Dahle from Lassen is the voting member; David Bradshaw from Modoc is the alternate; and Glenn Hawes represents Shasta.

North Central Sierra: Supervisor Kim Yamaguchi from Butte is the voting member; Rose Comstock from Plumas is the alternate; Brooks Mitchell from Sierra County and Ron Warner from Tehama are also in the Sub-Region.

Central Sierra: Supervisor Helen Baumann from El Dorado is the voting member; Robert Weygandt from Placer is the alternate. Ted Owens from Nevada County and Hal Stocker from Yuba are also in the Sub-Region.

South Central Sierra: Supervisor Stetson from Mariposa is the voting member; the alternate will come from the following: Louis Boitano from Amador; Tom Tryon from Calaveras; and Jim Peterson from Tuolumne.

East Sierra: Supervisor Linda Arcularius from Inyo is the voting member; Byng Hunt from Mono is the alternate; and Don Jardine represents Alpine.

South Sierra: Supervisor Bob Waterson from Fresno is the voting member; Steve Worthley from Tulare is the alternate; and Jon McQuiston from Kern and Gary Gilbert from Madera are also in the Sub-Region. ❖

Frances Spivy-Weber is the Committee's Co-Executive Director of Policy. She'll be framing her Sierra Nevada license plate on her car with her "Long Live Mono Lake" license plate holder.

Is Population Growth Eroding Water Conservation Gains? Not Yet.

by Greg Reis

The title of this article touches on an often-heard question from visitors to the Mono Lake Committee. With its roots in the emotionally-charged and sometimes controversial topic of population growth, the question comes in different forms; “Why aren’t you guys doing something about population growth?” “Isn’t stopping population growth the answer to all water problems?” These are important questions to ask, and, with some research, we’ve found some exciting answers.

The Mono Lake Committee Perspective

To properly answer the question, you have to address not only the question itself, but also the emotions connected to it and the assumptions behind it.

The question itself is perhaps the easiest one to address. The Mono Lake Committee doesn’t tackle human population growth issues—focusing instead on the population issue of water consumption, its threat to the Mono Basin, and the implications for watersheds statewide.

The emotions come from the negative aspects of population growth we all know well; crowds, traffic, loss of natural habitats and recreation areas, air and water pollution, and increased resource use are all commonly experienced side-effects of population growth. There are two ways of addressing the effects on habitats and resources: limit population, and reduce consumption/pollution. The second approach is the most direct and effective in protecting water resources, has a proven track record, and is a realistic place to focus the Mono Lake Committee’s educational efforts.

The assumption behind the question is that lack of water should, or could, be used to limit population growth, and that if it isn’t, a continually increasing population will require more and more water from natural ecosystems.

Is Water a Limiting Factor for Growth?

On the contrary! In most places in California, with modern technology, water is not the limiting factor for population growth. Other amenities and ecosystem services begin to decline long before water becomes limiting. For example, imagine 200,000 people living in the Mono Basin where the current population is barely 1,000. Scary? Well, the amount of water LA will export over the long term from the Mono Basin after Mono Lake stabilizes is enough to support that many water-conscious people. If the people are brought to the water instead of the other way around, it becomes clear, in this example, that we don’t want to set limits on population based only on water.

So what about the real situation in California? What water management strategies should we use where we already have a very crowded world, an increasing population, limited water supplies, and unmet needs for water in long-degraded ecosystems?

An attempt to answer this question resulted in the Novem-

ber 2004 Investment Strategy for California Water, a project of Water for California and coordinated by the Planning and Conservation League. You can download this report from www.pcl.org. The report, which will provide the framework for the next state water bond, determined that 2–2.4 million acre-feet (AF) more water will be required by 2030 for 12 million additional people in California, and 1 million AF more water will be required for environmental restoration.

The report also identified first priority investment options that would generate 4.1–4.7 million AF more water through the following climate-change-neutral sources: urban and agricultural water conservation, water recycling, and groundwater treatment and desalination. It does not include potentially harmful strategies such as new dams, ocean desalination, increased diversions from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Bay Delta Estuary, or harmful water transfers.

The City of Los Angeles cites some of these strategies in its Urban Water Management Plan, due to be updated this year. In addition to these strategies, efforts to capture stormwater runoff in the city of Los Angeles could eventually provide for up to half the water needs of the city.

Growth and Changing Water Use

Over the last 20 years, LA’s population has grown by 800,000 people to 3.9 million, all of whom are continuing to use about 660,000 AF per year, roughly the same amount of water as 20 years ago when the population was approximately 3.2 million. This fact alone proves that a population increase doesn’t have to mean increased consumption. LA’s population is projected to increase by another 900,000 people over the next 20 years, resulting in a total estimated demand of 800,000 AF of water each year. If we invest in the right strategies now and continue to educate people about the importance of water conservation, we should have no problem meeting these real water needs without transferring environmental problems to other areas.

We live in a finite world, and, of course, there are limits to growth. LA has clearly outgrown the Los Angeles Aqueducts, and for the last two decades has depended on the Metropolitan Water District for over one third of its water supply. But the current water supply, if carefully used, isn’t limiting during the next 20 years. There is plenty of water for more people, business, and the environment. This brings us full circle to dealing with the emotional aspects of human population growth. To deal with the issue we must take a page from the chronicles of western water use and use less—less energy, less land, less fertilizers—you get the picture. ❖

Greg Reis is the Committee’s Information Specialist. He has become the local expert on floating down Mono’s tributary streams during spring runoff.

Recycling Service Reaches Lee Vining

by Elin Ljung

While many urban and suburban areas have caught on to recycling and even have institutionalized recycling programs, here in the Eastern Sierra recycling has been a few steps behind ... until now! The Sierra Conservation Project (SCP) and California Department of Conservation are working together to assist Eastern Sierra businesses in implementing recycling programs to reduce environmental impacts. The Mono Lake Committee is proud to be a participant in this exciting new program.

Here at the Committee office, the staff feels a strong sense of responsibility to the environment, and recycling in the office is a logical place to start. However, recycling in a remote area such as Lee Vining has some large obstacles, not the least of which is a lack of a consistent recycling service. The SCP's comprehensive new program offers materials for training office staff, recycling containers for the office, and provides a pickup service. For the office, the SCP offers to collect glass, plastic, aluminum, mixed paper, magazines, newspaper, and chipboard.

The SCP has offered both indoor and outdoor recycling containers for the Mono Lake Committee office, Mono Basin Field Station, and seasonal staff housing at no cost through a grant from the Department of Conservation. The new containers

and pickup service help avoid the hour-long, gas-intensive recycling runs Committee staff used to make periodically to Mammoth. In addition, the large and sturdy new containers between the intern houses and around the Field Station make it much easier to keep the seasonal residences tidy.

The flexible SCP recycling service works well for the Mono Lake Committee's varied facilities. The Committee coordinates and oversees a store, an office, and seasonal staff and researcher housing, all of which produce different volumes and types of recyclables. As a locally organized service, the SCP has tailored its program conveniently for Eastern Sierra customers—it even provides bear-proof containers for outdoor recycling.

A consistent recycling program saves the Mono Lake Committee money spent on trash removal services, but more importantly, it helps to reduce the environmental impacts of our facilities. Visit www.recyclesierra.com to see us listed as a participating "green business" and learn more about the Eastern Sierra's recycling options! ♦

Elin Ljung is the Committee's Communications Intern. She is fulfilling a lifelong dream of living in Lee Vining long enough to see all the seasons change at Mono Lake.

Focus On Photography

by Elin Ljung

Mono Lake's spectacular beauty attracts photographers from far and wide, and their work captures the Basin in rare and stunning moods. Many of these artists have become friends and supporters of the Mono Lake Committee over the years, and their fine work is regularly featured in Committee publications like the Mono Lake Calendar and the *Mono Lake Newsletter*.

As a way to acknowledge these talented people, the Committee is turning the lens around to feature the photographers themselves from time to time. Focus on Photography is a program that allows the Committee to simultaneously recognize talented artists and support ongoing programs in education, restoration, and protection at Mono Lake.

The featured print for 2005, *Mono Mystique*, comes from Yousef Khanfar, a highly-regarded landscape photographer with strong ties to the Mono Basin. After a childhood spent in war-torn Kuwait, Yousef has "chosen to carry my camera instead of a gun to tell my story and promote peace" through his landscape

photography, which has won international praise. Yousef's accolades include recognition by the International Photography Hall of Fame and Museum. He has published a book, "Voices of Light," and now generously contributes a beautiful piece of art for Focus on Photography.



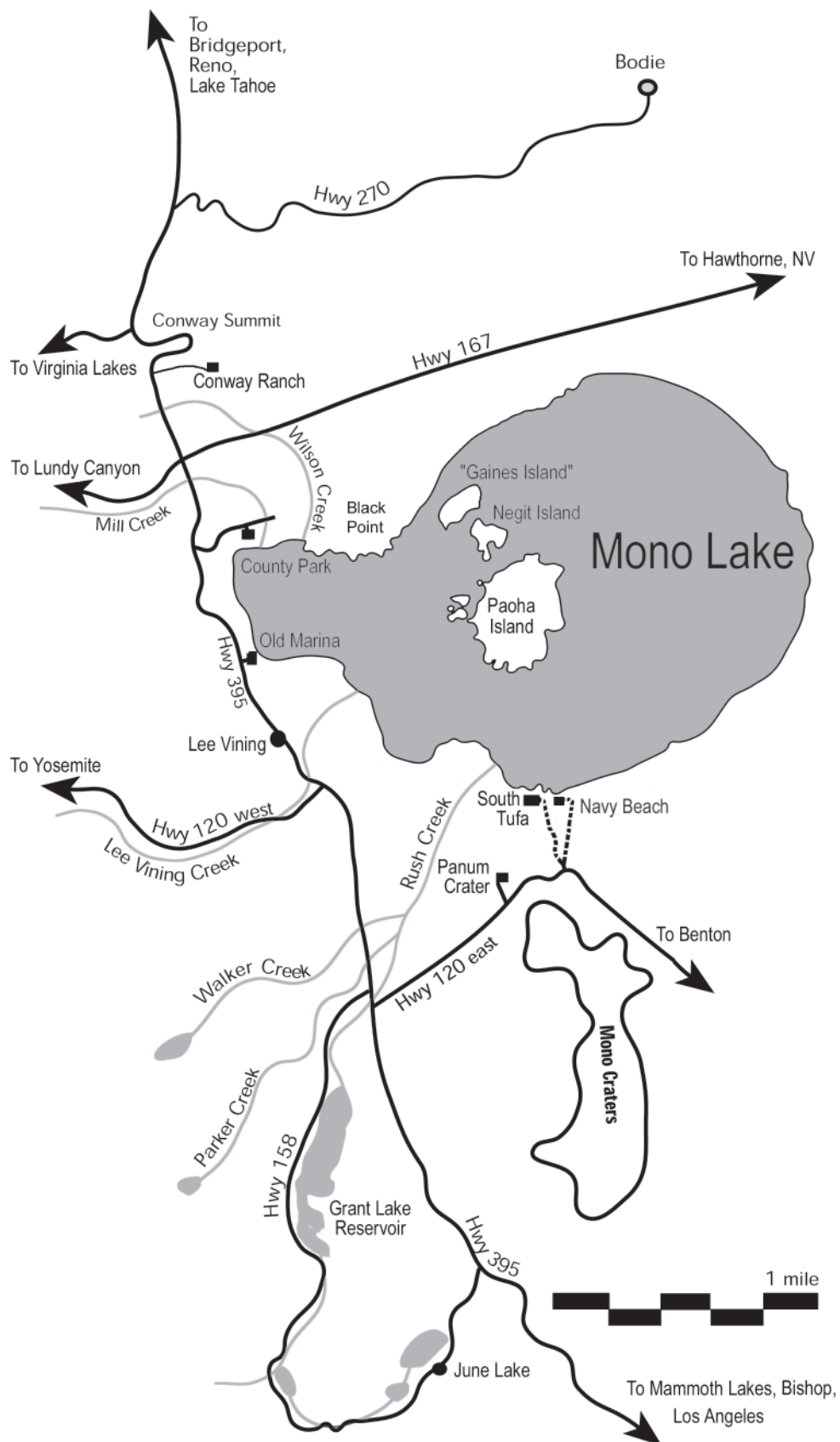
Mono Mystique by Yousef Khanfar

Yousef supports the Committee's work on behalf of the lake, and for each print ordered in 2005, he will donate all but the cost of materials back to the Committee. This generosity means that each order will generate over \$500 for restoration, protection, and education.

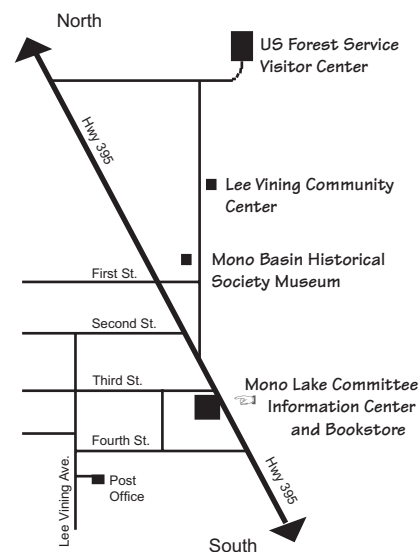
Focus on Photography is a way to extend Mono Lake's beauty into homes or offices, all the while providing the Committee with valuable support and recognizing Yousef Khanfar's fine work and

commitment to the Mono Basin. Please visit www.monolake.org or contact Membership Coordinator Douglas Dunaway (douglas@monolake.org) at (760) 647-6595 if you would like to take part in this program!

Mono Lake and Vicinity Map



Lee Vining Town Map For Walking Around Town



How far is it?

Distance From Lee Vining To:

South Tufa	11mi	18km
Yosemite Park entrance	13	21
Tuolumne Meadows	21	34
Mammoth Lakes	27	44
Bodie	32	52
Bishop.....	66	106
Yosemite Valley.....	77	124
Lake Tahoe.....	110	177
Reno	140	225
Death Valley.....	177	285
San Francisco (via 120)	250	402
Los Angeles	303	488
Las Vegas	326	525

Things to do in the Mono Basin

Activities

Not sure where to start? Just stop by the Mono Lake Committee and our knowledgeable staff can help!

- **South Tufa tours** take place three times a day during the summer and are an excellent introduction to Mono Lake. Join a naturalist on a walking tour at the South Tufa area to learn about the ecology, geology, and natural and human history of the Mono Basin. The walk is approximately one mile long on easy terrain and lasts about an hour. Meet at the South Tufa parking lot at 10:00AM, 1:00PM, and 6:00PM daily during the summer months. There is no charge for the walk, but a \$3 per person fee is required to enter the South Tufa Area. No reservations are necessary.

- **Canoe tours** depart every Saturday and Sunday morning during the summer months at 8:00, 9:30, and 11:00AM, and last for about one hour. \$19 for adults, \$9 for children. Reservations are required; call (760) 647-6595.

- **Bird walks** take place Fridays and Sundays at 8:00AM throughout the summer. Meet at the Mono Lake County Park with binoculars (not required), a bird book, hat, and sunscreen. Tours last 1½–2 hours

and are open to all levels of birders. Committee staff can also suggest good birding areas around the Basin.

- **Lee Vining Creek hikes** take place Mondays at 8:30AM from June 26–Sept 4. Meet in front of the Mono Lake Committee Information Center & Bookstore prepared with water, hat, sunscreen, and binoculars if you like for a two-hour walk along the moderate Lee Vining Creek trail. Learn about restoration, natural history, and human history as you go!

- **Historical Lee Vining Town tours** take place Fridays at 3:00pm. Meet in front of the Mono Lake Committee Information Center & Bookstore for an hour-long walk and talk on the colorful cultural history of this remote town while visiting some of the earliest buildings in Lee Vining.

Visitor Centers

- **The Mono Lake Committee Information Center & Bookstore**, located in the heart of Lee Vining, offers a free video, educational exhibits, a photography exhibit, and activity schedules. The bookstore offers an excellent selection of regional books, maps, T-shirts, posters, local crafts,

and specialty gifts. The Committee also houses the Lee Vining Chamber of Commerce with information on lodging, dining, and recreation opportunities as well as weather and road conditions. Come on by to make the most of your visit! The Mono Lake Committee is open from 8AM–9PM daily during the summer, or call (760) 647-6595 for more information.

- **The Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area Visitor Center**, located just north of town, features an excellent view of Mono Lake, interpretive displays, and natural history trails. A dramatic Mono Lake film shows regularly in the theater, and during the summer rangers give patio presentations daily. Open from 9–4:30 daily, contact the Visitor Center at (760) 647-3044 for more information.

- **The Mono Basin Historical Society Museum**, located in Lee Vining at Gus Hess Park, houses a fascinating collection of materials from the Mono Basin's past. See Native American artifacts, gold mining implements, and even the legendary upside-down house! Open Thursdays–Mondays from 10–5 and Sundays 12–5. There is a \$1 charge but children under the age of 13 are free. Contact the museum at (760) 647-6461 for more information.

Travel Resources

- Mono Lake Committee Information Center
(760) 647-6595 www.monolake.org
- Lee Vining Chamber of Commerce
(760) 647-6629 www.leevining.com
- U.S. Forest Service Scenic Area Visitor Center
(760) 647-3044 www.fs.fed.us/r5/inyo/about
- Mono Lake Tufa State Reserve
(760) 647-6331 www.cal-parks.ca.gov
- Bodie State Historic Park (760) 647-6445
- Mammoth Lakes Visitor Center (760) 924-5500
- June Lake Chamber of Commerce (760) 648-7584
- Bridgeport Chamber of Commerce (760) 932-7500
- Inyo National Forest 24-hour Wilderness Permits/ Info
(760) 873-2408 www.fs.fed.us/r5/inyo

- Yosemite National Park www.nps.gov/yose
Information by phone (209) 372-0200
Campground Reservations (800) 436-7275
Hotel and Motel Reservations (559) 252-4848
Wilderness Permit Reservations (209) 372-0740
- Devil's Postpile (760) 934-2289 www.nps.gov/depo
- White Mountain Ranger District–Bishop (760) 873-2500
- Lone Pine Interagency Visitor Center (760) 876-6222
- Manzanar National Historic Site (760) 878-2932
www.nps.gov/manz
- Death Valley Reservations (760) 786-2345
- Bridgeport Ranger Station–Toiyabe National Forest
(760) 932-7070
- California Road Conditions (800) 427-7623

High Summer Runoff—132% of Average

by Greg Reis

Between severe drought in the Pacific Northwest and extreme wetness in the Southwest, the Mono Basin ends up on the wet side of things this year. Even within the basin there is a north-south gradient, with forecasters expecting 124% of average runoff in Lee Vining Creek to the north and 139% of average runoff in the Rush Creek watershed to the south. The runoff from both streams is expected to be 132% of average, officially designated as a “wet-normal” year.

In wet-normal years, the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (DWP) is required to pass the peak flow down Lee Vining, Parker, and Walker creeks. On Rush Creek below Grant Lake Reservoir, which DWP expects might spill in August, DWP is required to release a peak flow of 400 cubic feet per second (cfs). This is 20 cfs more than Grant Lake’s outlet can release, and is achieved by augmenting Rush Creek with water diverted from Lee Vining Creek.

This is an exciting year for Mono Basin creeks. Although lower Rush Creek’s peak flow won’t come anywhere close to that of 1998 due to the low level of Grant Lake, the creek flows will be higher than anything the creeks have experienced since then.

Cold and stormy spring weather is preserving a copious snowpack longer into the warm season, meaning that a sudden warm-up is likely and will lead to even higher peak flows on uncontrolled drainages. ❖

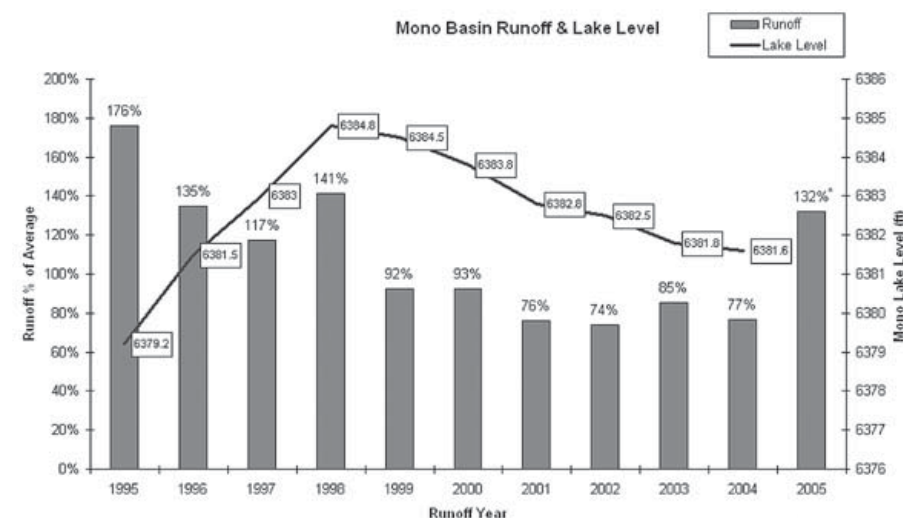
Lakewatch

Mono Lake is Rising!

by Greg Reis

As the Mono Basin thaws out from the snowiest winter in years, the receding snowdrifts are replaced by an abundance of green grass and flowers along the lakeshore. Lee Vining received over 19.5 inches of precipitation (160% of average) since October—the third wettest winter (after 1995 and 1997) since recordkeeping began in 1989. There were over two inches of precipitation in each month between October and March. This consistent wetness has not happened since recordkeeping began.

The winter was also consistently cold, causing almost all of this precipitation to fall as 150 inches of snow in record-setting storms: one third of it in 9 days and over half of it in the 16 days around the start of the New Year. When it wasn’t stormy in January and February, the poconip (freezing fog) set in and kept the deep snow around Mono Lake from melting.



2005 runoff is forecasted to be 132% of average—similar to the 134% forecasted in 1998 (1998 runoff turned out to be 141% of average). Mono Lake rose 1.3 feet between April and August 1998, however Grant Lake was full that April. This year Grant Lake is only one third full and will catch a large portion of Rush Creek’s runoff before it reaches Mono Lake.

This combination of cold, dark, and wet weather limited evaporation from Mono Lake’s surface. It also added water directly into the lake from precipitation. This caused Mono Lake to rise one foot from November to April (the biggest rise during this period since a 1.2 foot rise in 1998). The April level of Mono Lake was 6381.6 feet above sea level (a 0.2 foot drop from April 1, 2004). Based on similar years in the past, Mono Lake is likely to rise a foot by August and then drop about a half a foot by November.

Research scientist Bob Jellison estimates that there is a 30% chance of meromixis (the lake water failing to mix in the fall) occurring this year—if a pulse of runoff comes rapidly into the lake during calm weather.

The November 2004 lake level was the lowest Mono Lake has been since January 1997. It has been falling since it reached a high point of 6385.1 in July 1999. ❖

6417'

Prediversion lake level, 1941

6392'

Target lake level

6382'

Current lake level

6372'

Historic low, 1982

Mono Basin Journal

A Roundup of Quiet Happenings at Mono Lake

by Geoffrey McQuilkin



GEORGE MCQUILKIN

*T*he ability to jump back and forth between seasons is just a part of living at Mono Lake. The lake's high altitude, the still higher Sierra Nevada, and the dry Great Basin stretching to the east all factor into a seasonal pattern that varies with where you are standing as much as the day of the year.

Take today as a study, it's Memorial Day weekend. It's eighty degrees outside, the apple tree at my house is covered with white blossoms, and the breeze is thick with the scent of blooming lilacs. Clearly it is springtime. And just as clearly, it is not. Looming over the purple of the lilac bush is the imposing bulk of Mt. Warren. Still covered deep in snow, the mountain has yet to shake off winter; nighttime temperatures fall below freezing while plants lie dormant, wondering if summer will appear at all.

Down here by the lake, back in springtime, warm temperatures are delivering abundant snowmelt, and the wildflowers are responding in kind. The improbably fragile pink blossoms of the spiny shrub called desert peach spread more widely across the basin and cluster more thickly on branches than

usual. As they fade, tens of thousands of small yellow blossoms cover bitterbrush for an even bigger show. Stop for a closer look out among these sandy expanses and you'll find red paintbrush and deep purple lupine tucked away amongst the bushes. And you'll find, at least for a few weeks, carpets of one-inch high pink, purple, yellow, and white flowers offering tribute to the year's richness of water.

Personally, I've given up on matching seasons to dates in the Mono Basin. I go by clouds instead. Banks of grey altostratus clouds pushing over the mountaintops from west to east are the sign of winter and indicators of storm fronts moving through. Summer produces more artistic cloudwork: tall pillars of puffy cumulonimbus clouds. I saw the first impressive ones of the year just yesterday, so now it must be summer—despite the snow. Billowing white, tinged with silver and grey, they ascended through tens of thousands of feet of air, they ranged freely across the deep blue sky, and, as they wished, they pelted the ground with fat drops of thunderstorm rain. ❖



GREG REIS

Rush Creek during peak flow, spring 2005. The channel to the left, known as the "Million Dollar Bend" because of the expense of armoring it against erosion during the early 1990s, is now dry at low flows, but received water this year!

The Eastern Sierra Watershed Program Flows to Mono County

by Bartshé Miller

Got dissolved oxygen? In the Mono Basin, just above the County Road culvert on Mill Creek, students determined they did—to the tune of nine parts per million, an amount that can sustain populations of trout and macroinvertebrates.

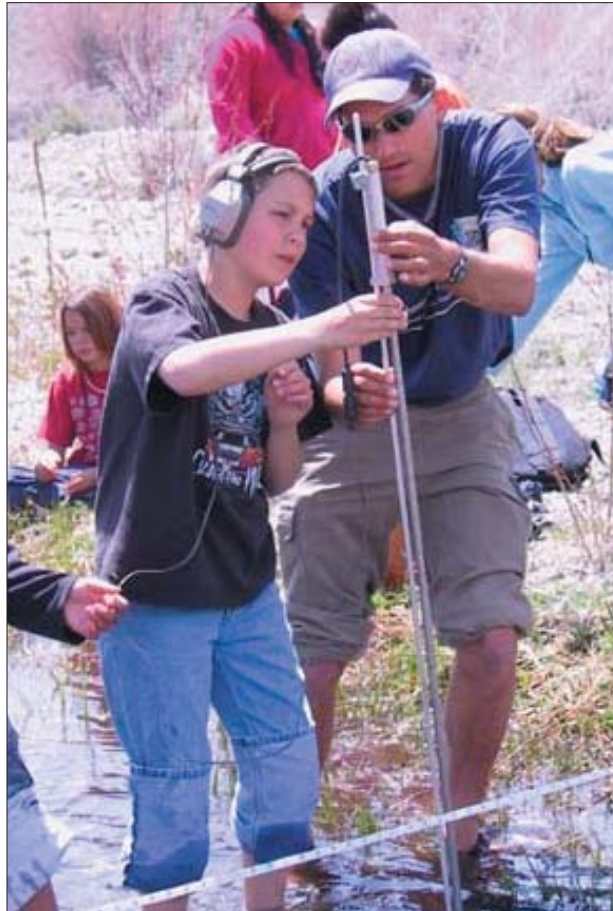
These students were part of the Eastern Sierra Watershed Program's formal launch in Mono County, which took place May 3 with the help of volunteer docents and Mono Lake Committee staff.

The goal of the Eastern Sierra Watershed Program is to familiarize students with their local streams by using hands-on science to determine the relative health of the ecosystem. In fast-paced and fun testing stations, students learn in-depth lessons about water acidity, temperature, dissolved oxygen, total dissolved solids, hardness, turbidity, and nitrates. They also learn about the role of macroinvertebrates, fish, streamflow, and riparian vegetation in stream ecosystems, creating an introduction to the concept of assessing stream health in their own backyard.

Launching the 2005 Watershed Program Season in the Mono Basin

With new equipment and recently trained staff and docents, the first day of the spring 2005 program began on Mill Creek—an easily accessible tributary of Mono Lake. Students from Lee Vining and Mammoth began exploring the creeks through six water quality testing stations.

After lunch in the field, staff from the California Department of Fish & Game



Mono Lake Committee Information Specialist Greg Reis teaches students about stream flow on Mill Creek during the Eastern Sierra Watershed Program in the Mono Basin.

arrived to demonstrate fish sampling via electrofishing. Students weighed, measured, and identified brown trout before returning them to the creek.

At three afternoon stations the students focused on streamflow measurements, macroinvertebrate identification, and a survey technique for quantifying riparian vegetation.

What Is A Healthy Creek and How Do We Know?

Water quality is key in determining the health of a creek and a watershed. Understanding the relationships between water quality, fish, macroinvertebrates,

riparian vegetation, and the physical make-up of a watershed helps the students determine the state of a creek's health.

The Eastern Sierra Watershed Program also extends beyond the Mono Basin, and on May 18, Mammoth Elementary 6th graders walked to Mammoth Creek and investigated their local creek.

In its first year the Eastern Sierra Watershed Program completed two field days in Mono County before spending more time developing pre- and post-classroom activities which make California State Science Education Standards relevant to our local creeks. This is a dynamic, hands-on program with room to expand its relevant curriculums and activities to 7th and 8th graders as well.

The Eastern Sierra Watershed Program is a partnership effort made possible through a grant from the California Native Plant Society, Bristlecone Chapter. Additional funding and volunteer effort has come from the Sierra Club Toiyabe Chapter, Range of Light Group, and Mono Lake Committee staff

and members. Thanks to the US Forest Service for loaning the flow meter. Special thanks go to California Fish & Game, Patricia Schlichting with the Mono County Office of Education, and Leigh Parmenter with the successful parent ESWP program in Inyo County. ❖

Bartshé Miller is the Committee's Education Director. He spent a good portion of the spring runoff period making sure the peak flows didn't take off with his driveway.

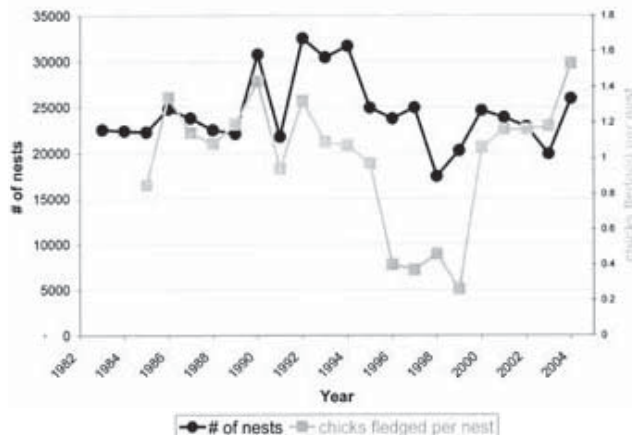
steadily since 1999 due to both drought conditions and water diversions to Los Angeles. If this had continued, Negit may have once again been connected to the mainland. Worse than that, Twain Islet, home to nearly 50% of Mono's gulls each season, could be reconnected to the mainland as it was in 1982. Coyotes, wonderful and amazing creatures in their own right, and whose nighttime howls I could sometimes hear from the islands, would not hesitate to take advantage of such easy prey.

Predators of a Different Kind

Mono Lake's islets are not just home to California Gulls, where perhaps 25% of the world population breeds. They are also home to a specialized bird tick found only on Mono's isles and that feeds exclusively on the gulls (and, unfortunately, sometimes on researchers as well). They're remarkably well adapted creatures; and to me, "Long Live *Argas monolakensis*" has an oddly appealing ring to it. We monitor the prevalence of ticks on the gull chicks that we band, and have noted an interesting pattern in the last several years. On Little Norway, an islet named for the dramatic cliff-walled 'fjord' that bisects it, the tick population appears to have risen dramatically in recent years. The gulls are slowly abandoning this islet (the number of nests has dropped from almost 900 in 2000 to 200 in 2005), and for those that haven't, their chicks suffer much higher mortality than other islets. As Little Norway's gull population drops, the ticks will probably also suffer in the next few years because their food supply will have left. And then, with a drop in the tick population, the gulls will likely recolonize the islet. (See more on tick research on page 13.)

And the Research Continues On

The wonders discovered during the annual gull research continue on. This year, PRBO biologist Kristie Nelson takes the lead on the project and continues the legacy of this research.



Number of nests and chicks fledged per nest at Mono Lake, 1983 to 2004.

The graph above shows there is tremendous variation in both overall nest numbers and chick fledging success over time. By continuing to collect these data, and by comparing them to weather, water diversions, and consequent changes in the lake's chemistry, we can learn in great detail how the successes and failures of Mono Lake's gulls are tied to the environment in which they live. Long-term data sets are a rarity, and we have a gem in the work that dozens of biologists and hundreds of volunteers have helped collect over the years at Mono Lake. May it continue for a long time. And may further work begin, probing deeper into the myriad life forms that survive and thrive in the shimmering waters of Mono Lake. ❖

Justin Hite is a research biologist at large. Mono Lake is a magical place for him, and he will never forget the days and years he spent perched on its lonely isles admiring its gulls.

The California Gulls Need Your Help ... Again

PRBO Conservation Science, in collaboration with Cornell University and the Mono Lake Committee, has been tracking the health of the California Gull population at Mono Lake since 1982. Increasingly, this essential research has become more difficult to fund. Grantors are often not inclined to fund long term monitoring because it does not seem as exciting as new projects. However, this important research is intimately connected to measuring the health of Mono Lake.

The Committee and the gulls need your help. Two dedicated Mono Lake supporters already make a generous annual gift in support of the gull work and we are actively seeking a few more individuals to help financially support this ongoing research for the long term. The researchers operate on a shoestring budget and need \$12,000 each summer to get the job done and summarize the results.

Back in 1979, the California Gull became a focal point for saving Mono Lake as the declining lake level exposed a land

bridge which predators easily crossed. The gull population was severely threatened by the dropping lake level until 1994 when the State Water Resources Control Board issued its decision to curtail water diversions to Los Angeles and raise the surface level of Mono Lake.

Through the years scientists have seen the gulls respond to changes in lake level, water chemistry, and food resources. Every year researchers collect data by conducting nest counts, banding chicks, and conducting mortality counts on the Negit Islets. The California Gull research project at Mono Lake is one of the oldest, continuous bird research projects in California, and its value as a long term monitoring project increases with each year of data collection. Help sustain this important project for years to come!

If you are able to help, please contact Eastern Sierra Policy Director Lisa Cutting (lisa@monolake.org) at (760) 647-6595.

A Summer Selection

from the Mono Lake Committee Bookstore



PADDLE MONO LAKE T-SHIRTS

Canoe Coordinator Mike Mace and Communications Intern Elin Ljung are a natural choice to model our new Paddle Mono Lake T-shirt in this *Newsletter*. This colorful shirt features a ring of yellow, orange, and magenta sea kayaks on a blue, 100% cotton, pre-shrunk T-shirt with "Paddle Mono Lake" over the left chest.

*Paddle Mono Lake T-Shirt, Sizes Small–X-Large: \$18.00
XX-L: \$21.00*



MONO LAKE COMMITTEE LOGO DINER MUG

This mug has been surprisingly popular, so don't miss out! The classic 10-ounce ceramic diner style mug feels great in your hand and keeps your drink hot.

Logo Diner Mug, ivory with blue lettering: \$6.95



REAL SOAP: LONG LIVE MONO LAKE BARS

Handcrafted from rainwater, vegetable oils, and essential and/or fragrance oils in the traditional cold process soapmaking method. These soaps are cured at least 8 weeks and then hand cut and embossed with the words "Long Live Mono Lake".

Bath bars available in Lavender Swirl, Clean Citrus (Lemongrass), Rainbow (Citrus/Lavender/Eucalyptus), Jasmine, Sandalwood, Green Tea, and Fruit & Flowers. Gardener's bar with exfoliating oatmeal available in unscented.

*Real Soap, please specify Lavender, Clean Citrus, Rainbow, Jasmine, Sandalwood, Green Tea, Fruit & Flowers, White Sage, or Sweetgrass: \$4.50 each
Real Soap Gardener's bar, Unscented with Oatmeal: \$4.50 each*



SACRED SAGE

The sacred sage line is a blend of traditional purifying herbs made with handpicked, wild and organically produced white sage grown in California, along with other herbal essences. The harvesting and gathering practices support renewable resources and sustainable agriculture.

Sacred Sage Massage Oil, 8 oz: \$14.95

Sacred Sage Hand and Body Lotion, 8 oz: \$14.95

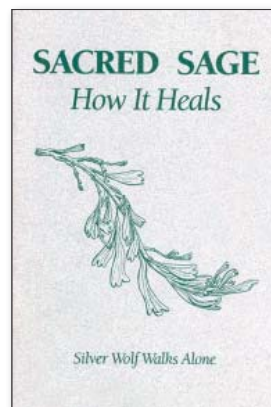
Sacred Sage Smokeless Mist Air Freshener, 4 oz: \$15.95

SACRED SAGE: HOW IT HEALS

BY WENDY WHITEMAN

This short book provides an overview of the ceremonial gathering and medicinal uses of the different species of sage, as well as a description of the smudging ceremony. It's a great introduction to this wonderful plant.

Sacred Sage: How It Heals, soft cover, 29 pages, 5 1/2 X 8 1/2": \$5.00





2005 Field Seminars



FIELD SEMINAR INSTRUCTOR, RICK KNEPP

Introduction to High Country Plants and Habitats

July 29–31

Ann Howald

\$125 per person/ \$110 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 the group out. This weekend seminar will begin Friday evening with an introduction to the basics of plant identification and a slideshow preview of some of the habitats and plants to be seen during the fieldtrips. 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.

Miwok–Paiute Burden Basketry

August 5–7

Lucy Parker and Julia Parker

**\$185 per person/ \$170 for members, \$60 materials fee
primitive group campsite included**

During this three-day seminar participants will prepare materials and create a small burden basket. Students will work with willow shoots for the wrap foundation and willow strings for the weaving. A form of twining will be used to make the baskets. Finally you will use a cooked soaproot paste to coat your burden baskets. Traditionally, burden baskets (a favorite Miwok–Paiute style) were large, conical baskets used for gathering acorns and pinenuts.

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

Call (760) 647-6595 to Register

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.

The Secret Knowledge of Mono Basin Water

August 6-7

Greg Reis

\$125 per person/ \$110 for members

Water is the essence of life and controversy in the Mono Basin. Water in the Mono Basin takes an intriguing journey full of detours, strange passages, and dramatic releases. Join the Mono Lake Committee's Information Specialist Greg Reis for an investigation of the Mono Basin's link in the water cycle, an intriguing maze of human and natural influences. We'll discuss climate, snowfall, snowmelt, DWP and SCE reservoir operations, the creeks, and the lake, as well as where water goes below ground. On the first day we'll visit the watersheds south of the lake, the conveyances, and the recovering creeks. On the second day we'll take a tour of the north Mono Basin, and learn how the recently signed settlement agreement will help restore Mill Creek. This seminar will focus as much on the management of the water as the natural habitats dependent upon it. Greg has a decade of experience in Mono Basin hydrology and restoration and keeps close track of the secret life of Mono Basin water.



BARTSHE MILLER

Fall Bird Migration

August 20-21

Dave Shuford

\$125 per person/ \$110 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!

Identifying High Country Wildflowers

August 12-14

Mark Bagley

\$125 per person/ \$110 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 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.

Winging into Autumn

August 27-28

David Lukas and Simone Whitecloud

\$125 per person/ \$110 for members

This field seminar will focus on the identification and ecology of both resident and fall migratory birds. This course is appropriate for beginning and more advanced birdwatchers. The birds will ultimately dictate where the class will go, but the plan is to investigate 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 birds' 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 the Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua.

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

September 10-11

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 threatened 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.



JOHN WEHAUSEN

The Story Behind the Land: Geology of the Mono Basin

September 17-18

Tim Tierney

\$125 per person/ \$110 for members

The Mono Basin is a geological showcase, featuring young volcanoes, glaciated landscapes, stark mountains, and strange mineral towers, all set about ancient and saline Mono Lake. Explore this land with geologist Tim Tierney (UC Santa Barbara instructor and author of the Committee's field guide *Geology of the Mono Basin*) and learn how to recognize the geology, know the reasons behind why things have happened, and what the future may hold. The first day of the seminar will be spent gaining an overview of the area via car and short walks. The second day will focus on thoroughly exploring a few select areas with extended hikes. Cooler fall weather and the first tinge of fall color will highlight the geologic wonders of this popular field seminar. Tim is an excellent teacher and interpreter of the "hard" languages, and has been a popular seminar leader among geology sleuths and laypeople alike.

Reading the Aspen Groves: Arborglyphs and Aspen Natural History

October 1-2

Richard Potashin and Nancy Hadlock

\$125 per person/ \$110 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 sheepherders into these meadows. With their leisure time they left numerous carvings—or arborglyphs—on the aspens. Join the instructors for an enchanting journey into the aspen groves to explore this historic, organic art form and the natural history of the trees themselves. Learn about the numerous wildlife, insects, and birds that are drawn to the groves. During leisurely walks the instructors will 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 is currently a Park Ranger at Manzanar National Historic Site. Nancy Hadlock has her BS from the University of Nevada at Reno, her MS from California State University, Sacramento and has worked as an Interpretive Ranger since 1982. She has participated in UNR's Basque Studies Program and has been a passionate student of Basque culture, history, and stories for over 20 years.

Mono-Bodie Fall Photography

October 7-9

Richard Knepp

\$275 per person/ \$250 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 second year, the class will spend Saturday at Bodie, inside



RICK KNEPP

some of the buildings! Join accomplished photographer Richard Knepp to explore varied shoreline locations at sunrise and sunset, fall color in nearby canyons, and the old ghost town of Bodie. 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 11th year in a row with the new Bodie twist continued for 2005!

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 2005.

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

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

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

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



Staff Migrations

by Geoff McQuilkin

With the exciting renewal of spring also comes a burst of staff changes and a fresh batch of seasonal staff for the summer. Without further ado, here's the news!

We bid farewell to Policy Coordinator **Jen Nissenbaum**. Jen joined the policy team at just the right moment to put her skills to work on a host of recent challenges that have faced Mono Lake: the Caltrans highway widening project, the attempt to remove State Park authority over Mono Lake, the Cunningham subdivision, and much more. Jen's scientific skills, analytical thinking, dedication to finding solutions, and overall good cheer played a key role in the Committee's successes on these issues. The lure of the Eastern Sierra has proven strong enough to make her seek more time for climbing, biking, and skiing, not to mention her family. We're sure we'll be seeing Jen out on the slopes of the east side often.

We bid farewell to Office Manager **Craig Pyle**. Mono Lake has been Craig's introduction to living out west, and he has spent the last year and a half helping make the Committee's operations run effectively. He's moving on to new challenges and we wish him all the best!

Happily, Membership Coordinator **Erika Obedzinski** has stepped up to the plate as the new Office Manager. After three years of dedication to Committee members as Membership Coordinator, Erika will be focusing her people skills and meticulous organization abilities on the daily effort of keeping the office scheduled, coordinated, and in good spirits.

Luckily, Staff Assistant **Douglas Dunaway** has accepted the Membership Coordinator position! Douglas has become versed in the ways of the membership desk, and is excited to

be helping with all things membership. Make sure to say hello to Douglas the next time you call the Committee!

The Mono Lake Committee couldn't function in the summer without the Naturalist Interns who lead tours, make visitors welcome in the Bookstore and Information Center, and provide support for the Committee's core programs. So, a warm welcome to **Allison Jones** who is currently studying Recreation, Sport, and Tourism as well as Park and Natural Resource Management at the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana. **Clare Cragan** graduated from University of Wisconsin, Madison where she studied Economics, Environmental Studies, and Business. **Jonna McKone** goes to Bowdoin College in Maine where she is majoring in Environmental Studies and Anthropology. **Rebecca Petzel** just graduated from the University of Wisconsin, Madison where she studied Economics, History, and Environmental Studies.

Birding Intern **Nick Neely** has migrated out from Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island. Communications Intern **Elin Ljung** is back for her second summer season after graduating as an English major with a concentration in Environmental Studies from St. Olaf College in Minnesota. Canoe Coordinator **Mike Mace** came all the way from Western Illinois University in Macomb to paddle the waters of Mono. Outdoor Experiences Coordinator **Maggie Witt**, recent graduate of Claremont-McKenna College, is back for a second season in the area to work with inner city youth in the wilds of the Mono Basin. **Stratton Lawrence** also joins the Outdoor Experiences team as a Coordinator after working as an environmental educator in Mendocino County.

Retail Assistant **Anna Scofield** is back home after her second year at Cal Poly in San Luis Obispo to help out up at the front counter for her seventh season of cheerfully assisting visitors with their travels while keeping the store in good form. Recent transplant from Lake Arrowhead, Retail Assistant **Kirsten Watson** is also helping keep things in the Bookstore running smoothly. Retail Assistant **Beth Harley** rounds out the group at the front counter, coming to Mono Lake from Chapin, South Carolina.

We would also like to extend special thanks to the 2005 **Mono Lake Volunteers** for their time and dedication to Mono Lake. Visitors will be able to spot them in their volunteer vests in both visitor centers and around the Basin all summer!

And last, smallest, but certainly not least, we welcome two new additions to the Mono Lake family. Congratulations to Co-Executive Director Geoff McQuilkin, his wife Sarah Taylor, and daughter Caelen McQuilkin who, last fall, welcomed new baby sister **Ellery Alice Barngrove McQuilkin** to their clan. And congratulations to Retail Manager Brett Pyle, his wife Shannon Nelson, and their daughter Sabine Pyle who recently welcomed **Casey Forrest Nelson Pyle** to their family! Shrimp for Mono! ❖



2005 Staff from left to right, top to bottom: Greg Reis, Bartshé Miller, Ellery McQuilkin, Geoff McQuilkin, Mike Mace, Nick Neely, Santiago Escruceria, Douglas Dunaway, Donnette Huselton, Brett Pyle, Allison Jones, Jonna McKone, Anna Scofield, Lisa Cutting, Maggie Witt, Arya Degenhardt, Caelen McQuilkin, Elin Ljung, Clare Cragan, and Rebecca Petzel. Not pictured: Frances Spivy-Weber, Laura Walker, Kirsten Watson, Gary Nelson, Stratton Lawrence, and Beth Harley.



From the Mailbag

News from Members and Friends

by Erika Obedzinski

In Memory

We are sad to hear of the recent death of **Mortimer Gaines**, age 92. Mort was the father of the Mono Lake Committee's founder, David Gaines, who preceded his dad in death in 1988. His grandchildren, Vireo and Sage, have nothing but fond memories of their frequent visits with Mort. He introduced them to fishing, one of his pastimes when in the mountains, as well as ping-pong in his backyard in Los Angeles. His widow, Edith, plans a trip up to Mono Lake this summer to revisit an area important to the entire family. The Committee will acknowledge gifts made in Mort's memory in the *Newsletter* and we are happy to pass on to Edith any cards or notes we receive.

Robin Roberts & Erica Chapin of Santa Cruz made a donation in memory of **Ludwig Huber**. A gift in honor of the memory of **Robert B. Johnson** was

given by his family. Gifts in memory of **Jane Standifer Owens** were received from **Barbara Arnold** of Hillsborough, **Gabby Fuller** also of Hillsborough and **Violet S. Taafe** of San Francisco. **David Wimpfheimer** gave a gift in honor of his mother, who had a special appreciation for unique, wild, beautiful places like Mono Lake.

In Honor

Camden Richards and Josh Dickinson of Alexandria, VA gave a gift in honor of their grandparents **Martha & Bob Conley** and **Paul & Kathy Richards**. **Hardy Drane** of Wilmington, DE made a contribution through the **United Way of Delaware** in honor of **Kent Fickett**. **Mr. & Mrs. Gary Kawamura** of San Jose made a donation in honor of **Sue Imada's** birthday. **Stacy Brown** of Los Angeles made a contribution in honor of the dedication and good work

of the Mono Lake Committee staff and Board of Directors. **Carleen and Mike Bedwell** of Escondido gave a gift in honor of **Carol Rakich**.

Thank You

Thank you to **Planet Inc.** for their annual donation of environmentally friendly cleaning supplies for use in our Lee Vining office! Thank you to **Kelly Ogle** of Tuolumne County who is collecting pledges on behalf of the Mono Lake Committee while he hikes the Appalachian Trail this spring and summer. We'll have an update on Mr. Ogle's trek in an upcoming *Newsletter*. If you would like to make a pledge towards his efforts, contact Erika at the Membership Desk (760) 647-6595. ❖

Erika Obedzinski is the Committee's Membership Coordinator. She has been scouting wildflowers from Death Valley to Mono Lake to Marin this season.

In Search of Flatscreen Monitors

The Committee is supported in a variety of ways: donations through the mail, donations over the phone, donations in the bookstore, folks who stop by each warm season and drop off a boxful of fruit, letters of support in response to action alerts and letters to just let us know you love the lake and think we're on the right track. Several years ago we started receiving support with a new twist: donations made by IBM employees which could be matched for a greater value if the Committee put their donation towards the purchase of IBM equipment.

In the years since we started participating in the IBM matching grants program, we've been able to purchase a printer, a new hard drive and several flat screen monitors. In our Lee Vining office space which is always jam-packed with people

and bustling with projects, this equipment goes a long way.

This is true especially in the summer months when our usual team of 13 year round staff swells with 12 additional seasonal staff members who help out in the bookstore, run the canoe and South Tufa tours, lead bird and creek trail walks, and work on a variety of other projects in the office. Not to mention the visitors and researchers coming into the bookstore looking for internet access or a place to download their digital photos. Out of necessity we've become creative with our space, and we've quickly learned how useful flat screen monitors can be.

So far the use of flat screen monitors has helped staff members make a tiny desk area a little more spacious, create a more ergonomic set up, and

save precious counter space in the bookstore. Plus they are more energy efficient and require fewer resources in production. So, this is a call to anyone who would like to make a special one-time donation to buy an additional flat screen monitor for use in our Lee Vining offices. To replace the rest of our old-style CRT monitors, we could use flat screen monitors in 14 more places in the office. A 17" flat screen monitor runs about \$300 including tax and shipping. If you'd like to make a donation for this purpose, send us a check with a note saying "For purchase of flat screen monitor" or contact Erika (erika@monolake.org) at (760) 647-6595 if you'd like to make a credit card donation or have further questions.

Don't miss the 25th Anniversary of the
Tioga Pass Run

**3,165 feet of elevation gain
in 12.6 miles**

Sunday September 11th

Start at the Mono Lake Committee, finish at Tioga Pass
Information online at www.monolake.org/images/tiogapassrun.pdf

Proceeds benefit the work of the Mono Lake Committee

Mono Lake Committee Field Seminars

Come Take A Closer Look At The Mono Basin....

Introduction to High Country Plants and Habitats, July 29-31

Miwok-Paiute Burden Basketry, August 5-7

The Secret Knowledge of Mono Basin Water, August 6-7

Fall Bird Migration, August 20-21

Identifying High Country Wildflowers, August 12-14

Winging into Autumn, August 27-28

Thin Air and Steep Slopes: Sierra Bighorn Sheep in the Mono Basin, September 10-11

The Story Behind the Land: Geology of the Mono Basin, September 17-18

Reading the Aspen Groves: Arborglyphs and Aspen Natural History, October 1-2

Mono-Bodie Fall Photography, October 7-9

See page 22 for more details and registration information.



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