

# MONO LAKE

N E W S L E T T E R

Winter & Spring 2023



State Water Board Workshop

Record Snowy Winter

Following the Phalaropes

Field Seminars

I remember when April 1<sup>st</sup> was a normal, good-humored day at the office. We greeted each other with “happy April Fool’s Day” and pulled small pranks. One year Arya and I dangled a plastic toy dinosaur out the attic vent so it appeared in the Lee Vining webcam. Flying dinosaurs at Mono Lake!

Greg would always greet us with “happy new runoff year” because April Fool’s Day is also the first day of each runoff year. That’s why the State Water Board chose April 1<sup>st</sup> as the date that determines the Los Angeles Department of Water & Power’s (DWP) allowed stream diversions for the next 12 months. No joke.

Lately April 1<sup>st</sup> has become more stressful. For two years now it has been a downright nail-biter of a day because the lake has been so close to a level at which DWP’s allowed diversion amount changes. And for two years now the lake has come in juuuust under the level that allows DWP’s diversions to quadruple (see page 4).

I *always* want Mono Lake to rise. So it’s a strange feeling to be hoping, just for the last two weeks of March, that Mono Lake won’t rise. Just for a little while, just to keep it at that lower diversion threshold, just for now.

These stressful April 1<sup>st</sup>s are a microcosm of why the Mono Lake Committee has asked the State Water Board to suspend DWP’s stream diversions until Mono Lake can rise to its healthy Public Trust lake level (see page 3). The lake inches higher and diversions push it back down, year after year ... for 29 years now. It’s time to let the lake rise uninhibited.

On April 1<sup>st</sup> I’d like to joke with my coworkers instead of biting my nails. I’d like to feel the relief of knowing that DWP is not diverting water from Mono Lake’s tributary streams. And I’d like to see the lake actually, finally rise—for feet and feet and feet—until it laps at the higher, safer shoreline of 6392 feet above sea level.

I bet you would too.

—Elin Ljung, Communications Coordinator



COVER PHOTO BY ROBBIE DI PAOLO

ANDREW YOUSSEF

*It was a difficult winter for Mono Basin residents (see page 5), in part because of a record 52 days of poconip ice fog between November 10, 2022 and March 3, 2023. Although the fog kept days dark and chilly, it also created delicate, beautiful rime ice on all surfaces (see page 13).*

### 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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NEW SLETTER

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# Low lake emergency accelerates State Water Board hearing timeline

*State Water Board workshop generates overwhelming call for quick action to raise Mono Lake*

by Geoffrey McQuilkin

Last fall, Mono Lake was, once again, at a perilously low level of 6378.4 feet above sea level—a mere 25% of the way to the level the California State Water Resources Control Board mandated be achieved by 2014—and lake level projections for the year ahead were dire. The low lake level triggered two immediate emergency situations: salinity was pushed to levels that violate federal and state regulations, and the landbridge was exposed enough to allow predator access to the California Gull nesting islands.

In response to the low lake emergency, the Mono Lake Committee asked the Los Angeles Department of Water & Power (DWP) to voluntarily deliver more water to the lake by suspending stream diversions. DWP promptly refused, stating that “there is no ‘emergency’ that warrants LADWP altering its diversions at this time.”

## **Request to the State Water Board**

On December 16, the Committee submitted a request to the State Water Board asking for an emergency action to address the lake surface elevation having fallen below 6380 feet, specifically because of the threat to the nesting California Gull population and increasing lake salinity exceeding the maximum set by the State Water Board.

The request, which was supported by the Mono Lake Kutzadika’a Tribe and the California Department of Fish & Wildlife (DFW), made the case to deliver more water to the lake to address the immediate emergencies and to put the lake back on track to rise. Specifically, the lake must rise to 6392 feet—known as the Public Trust lake level—which is the level the State Water Board ordered in their 1994 decision to protect Mono Lake, Decision 1631 (D1631).

The Board expected the lake to be at this Public Trust lake level by 2014 in order to protect the lake’s resources, including California Gulls, millions of migratory birds, brine shrimp, alkali flies, tufa towers, air quality, and, more generally, the



*Last December the Mono Lake Committee submitted a request to the State Water Board for an emergency action to protect Mono Lake by addressing the developing ecological crisis due to the lake surface elevation having fallen below 6380 feet above sea level.*

cultural resources relied upon by the Kutzadika’a Tribe since time immemorial. We are now nearly a decade past that date and the lake remains far below 6392 feet.

In their letter, the Kutzadika’a Tribe stated “...it is time for the Board to halt these degradations to the Tribe’s cultural resources and allow Mono Lake to reach an acceptable surface elevation in the short term, and chart a course for the Lake to reach a higher level in the long term.”

In January, the State Water Board announced it would respond to the Committee’s request by holding a virtual public workshop specifically to discuss the current low level of Mono Lake, and to consider public comments on what actions the Board should take to address it.

## **Winter storms roll in**

In January the snow began to pile up as a series of atmospheric river storms delivered heavy precipitation, increasing the chance that Mono Lake would rise this year. Miraculously, the Committee’s call for immediate action to address the low lake level was being answered by Mother Nature.

*Continued on page 22*

# Record-setting snowy winter at Mono Lake

by Elin Ljung

**T**his was a remarkably snowy winter at Mono Lake. As measured at the Mono Lake Committee headquarters in Lee Vining, starting in November at least a foot of snow fell every month through March—sometimes two, three, even five feet—totaling 19 feet of snow with 28.6 inches of water content.

The tremendous amount of snow was a completely unexpected, dramatic change from the recent droughts, placing the Mono Basin runoff outlook into the well-above-average category (see page 14).

## **Big gains for Mono Lake**

This winter's runoff will result in a major boost for Mono Lake, its tributary streams, and the drought-parched landscape of the Sierra Nevada and Mono Basin.

From the December low point of 6378.4 feet above sea level Mono Lake rose 1.6 feet, bringing it to 6379.99 feet on April 1, 2023. On that day, Committee staff skied to the lakeshore to meet Los Angeles Department of Water & Power (DWP) staff and jointly read the lake level gauge.

The official consensus reading was

a mere eighth of an inch below the important 6380-foot diversion threshold. The lake level of 6379.99 feet means that DWP can export 4,500 acre-feet of water in the runoff year ahead. Had the lake been 0.01 feet higher, which a few warm days of snowmelt could have made happen, that allocation would have nearly quadrupled to 16,000 acre-feet.

The lake level reading is good news for Mono Lake this year—almost all of the extremely wet winter's snowmelt will flow into the lake. We expect the lake to rise three or more feet between now and September.

## **Lake level gains may not last**

The narrow margin by which Mono Lake avoided increased stream diversions this year illustrates dramatically how DWP diversions are mismatched with the lake's recovery. If a few days in March had been warmer or one more storm had added water to the lake, DWP would have been allowed to export nearly four times more water, holding back the lake's rise by a third of a foot.

The pattern has been clear now for years: Mono Lake rises after wet winters and immediately DWP's diversions

begin eroding those gains in lake level.

It has been almost 30 years since the State Water Board originally modified DWP's water exports with the express purpose of protecting Mono Lake's unique habitats and complying with clean air health standards. And yet the lake is only 30% of the way to the Board-ordered level that would achieve those goals.

That's why the Committee asked that DWP's stream diversions be temporarily suspended until the lake rises to the healthy Public Trust lake level mandated by the State Water Board (see page 3). It's even more important for the Board to take action now because it can preserve the lake level rise that will happen before our eyes over the next six months.

## **Abundant replacement water**

If the State Water Board suspends stream diversions, DWP has a number of ways to replace the 4,500 acre-feet of water that would flow to Mono Lake this year. As one example, this wet winter has already helped with DWP's stormwater capture efforts.

In a January 11 press release DWP estimated that "the cumulative amount of stormwater captured from October 1, 2022 through January 10, 2023 is nearly 32,500 acre-feet," which is more than seven times the amount the Committee is asking to be allowed to flow into Mono Lake this year. And that was before the subsequent atmospheric rivers continued drenching California with more water!

The thick blanket of snow in the Mono Basin will provide much-needed relief to Mono Lake as it melts; we need to preserve the gains in lake level as a buffer against future dry years. DWP has multiple ways to replace Mono Basin stream diversions, so we're working to ensure that Mono Lake receives as much as it can of its *only* possible supply—snowmelt flowing down the streams. ❖



BARTSHE MILLER

*Mono Lake Committee and DWP staff read the lake level gauge together every April 1, the date on which DWP's stream diversions for the next 12 months are determined.*



# Extreme winter weather causes emergencies

by Elin Ljung

**T**he record 19 feet of snow we measured in Lee Vining this winter is great for Mono Lake, but it left many of us residents reeling. Two storm cycles in particular dropped five feet of snow each—the late February storm was incredibly severe, resulting in closed roads, unusual avalanches, and a multi-day power outage, leading local and state officials to declare a state of emergency.

## **Avalanches close Highway 395**

Heavy snowfall during that storm caused a series of avalanches on the steep slopes west of Mono Lake above Highway 395. Fortunately, no one was hurt, but the avalanches slid across the highway, tearing out sections of the rockfall fence, damaging guardrails, taking out power lines and poles, and burying the highway 30–40 feet deep in snow and debris.

In 2007, Caltrans installed a Gazex avalanche control system above the highway in order to prevent these kinds of large, damaging avalanches, but this year's naturally-occurring slides took place beyond the northern extent of that system. Storm after storm in March hindered Caltrans' progress clearing the avalanche debris and repairing damage.

The highway closure disrupted daily life in the Mono Basin profoundly. It changed a seven-mile commute between Lee Vining (southwest side of Mono Lake) and its main housing community, Mono City (northwest side of Mono Lake), into a five-hour drive south to Bishop, north into Nevada, and back west from Hawthorne, Nevada. It stopped mail and packages from reaching Mono City residents. Halves of families stayed in motels or with friends in Lee Vining so kids could attend school and adults could work, while the other halves of those families stayed in Mono City to maintain homes and care for pets.

Finally, on March 24, Caltrans began allowing traffic through the closure following pilot cars. These escorted convoys have given travelers a glimpse of the ongoing work

to clear dense piles of snow, shattered trees, and twisted metal from the roadway. Though the convoys have returned a measure of function to residents' lives, fully reopening the road could take months.

## **Emergency conditions for residents**

By the first few days of March the blizzard conditions and five-day power outage affecting the communities of Mono City and Bridgeport became an emergency situation, with residents struggling to keep warm and getting low on food. Mono City in particular became the focus of emergency services when persistent wind and snow closed all roads in and out of the community for days.

On March 3, the National Guard landed a helicopter on the closed highway to deliver water, food, and generators to the community. That same day Mono County sheriff deputies organized convoys over Conway Summit so people could get to points north for supplies or take the chance to evacuate and wait out the storms elsewhere. Those who left for the day returned with supplies for multiple families each of groceries, medications, pet food, camp stove fuel, gasoline, generators, and more.

The acute emergency lessened when power was restored, but Mono City and Lee Vining remained under stressful conditions as warm atmospheric river storms kept arriving, threatening to crush buildings and propane tanks under heavy snow loads and cause flooding. Structural damage and flooding were kept to a minimum by diligent work from the volunteer Fire Departments in both communities, plus many helpful neighbors.

After the storms ended and spring began to show its face we could breathe a sigh of relief and look forward to a summer of abundant water in the Mono Basin. But it's safe to say that this was a winter no one will forget. ❖



PHOTO COURTESY OF SALLY MILLER

Massive avalanches covered Highway 395 due to the record snowpack.



GEORGE MACDONALD

The Mono Lake Committee bookstore buried in snow in late February.

# California Gulls: If not Mono Lake, where?

by Bartshé Miller

**T**he California Gull (*Larus californicus*), the iconic gull species at Mono Lake and the state bird of Utah, is in trouble. These soaring and gregarious birds have nested in large numbers for millennia at Mono and Great Salt Lake, returning each year to the same patch of ground and reuniting with their mates. The gulls are an indicator of the health of these simple yet extremely productive saline lake ecosystems. Feeding on brine shrimp and alkali flies, gulls gather to nest and raise their young on predator-free islands, mixing with millions of other migratory and breeding birds along a flyway network that links states, provinces, countries, and continents.

Tragically, Great Salt Lake recently fell to its lowest level in history due to water diversions and drought. Mono Lake, while provided protection on paper three decades ago, has yet to reach its healthy Public Trust lake level due to continuing water diversions by the Los Angeles Department of Water & Power (DWP). Another large California Gull breeding site in the South San Francisco Bay, a relatively new colony established after landbridging caused gulls to abandon nesting grounds at Mono Lake, has an uncertain and complicated future—gulls at this location are unwelcome newcomers and their habitat will shrink as tidal marsh restoration progresses.

Together, these locations support half of the world's population of the species, and all three are experiencing concurrent threats or potential catastrophic disruptions. Mono Lake is unique among them—its necessary healthy level was

determined and ordered, and it's the most easily restored and protected by simply pausing water diversions until the lake reaches a more stable, drought-resistant lake level for gulls.

## **DWP transfers ecosystem problems beyond Mono Lake**

Negit Island, the distinctive black cinder cone island in Mono Lake, was once home to the largest California Gull breeding colony in California. DWP ended that in 1979.

Excessive water diversions of Mono Lake's tributary streams beginning in 1941 lowered the lake more than 40 feet and exposed thousands of acres of salt- and alkali-encrusted playa. The shallow region between Negit Island and the lakeshore was exposed, forming a landbridge that allowed hungry coyotes easy access to eggs and chicks. The coyotes decimated the gull colony and tens of thousands of gulls did not nest that year.

By 1980 the largest California Gull colony in California was in chaos. Many birds shifted to Negit's neighboring rocky islets, but gulls remember nesting disruptions. Some, recalling the trauma of predation, may have given up on Mono Lake completely and searched for new habitat. In 1980, California Gulls began to expand their breeding range to the south and west and that year 24 individuals were detected nesting in an estuary in the South San Francisco Bay. By 2014 their numbers there had exploded to 53,000.

This new gull colony found abundant nesting habitat and easily available food at landfills. Today, an estimated 45,000 breeding adults are in the South Bay and the gulls have had significant impacts on other species, preying on other nesting birds. Monitoring of nesting populations showed that in this region California Gulls regularly eat the eggs and chicks of American Avocets, Black-necked Stilts, Forster's Terns, and Western Snowy Plovers.

The South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project, the largest tidal wetland restoration effort on the West Coast, is, in part, dealing with the effects of the influx of displaced California Gulls. The gulls are hazed, their breeding habitat is flooded, and



ARVA HARP

Together, Mono Lake, Great Salt Lake, and the South San Francisco Bay support half the world's population of California Gulls. Mono Lake is the best protected of these locations.

*Continued on page 7*





SARA MATTHEWS

*At Mono Lake and Great Salt Lake, California Gulls depend on nesting grounds that are protected from predators by moats of water.*

nesting levees have been breached to restore wetland habitat. Gulls are not being harmed as restoration advances, but land managers must actively discourage them from nesting near shorebirds and terns, whose productivity and survival the gulls negatively impact.

Over time as salt marsh restoration succeeds and sea levels rise, California Gulls will lose nesting opportunities in the South Bay. This region is not a long-term refuge for the species. The South Bay colony paints an unwelcome picture of an ecosystem chain reaction, where displacement of birds from one region, due to water diversions, transfers problems to another.

### **A catastrophic forecast for Great Salt Lake**

Across the Great Basin from Mono Lake, Great Salt Lake is home to the largest concentration of nesting California Gulls in the world. An estimated 120,000–160,000 birds nest around the lake's expanse. Great Salt Lake has dropped to historic low levels, having lost 73% of its water and 60% of its surface area due to unsustainable water diversions. Recent drought has accelerated the lake's decline, and according to John Neill, an avian biologist with the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, nearly all the California Gull nesting sites around the lake today are

“landbridged,” meaning accessible to ground predators like coyotes and foxes. Neill says, “While no one has observed large-scale abandonment, these birds are not well monitored.”

An alarming new technical report indicates that within the next five years Great Salt Lake will experience steep decline, experience irreversible food web collapse, and become a public health threat unless consumptive water use within the watershed is immediately cut by 33–50%. The study, released in January 2023, was cooperatively published by 32 researchers led by Brigham Young University. While this wet winter's precipitation has recently raised the level of the lake, it is only a temporary reversal of fortune.

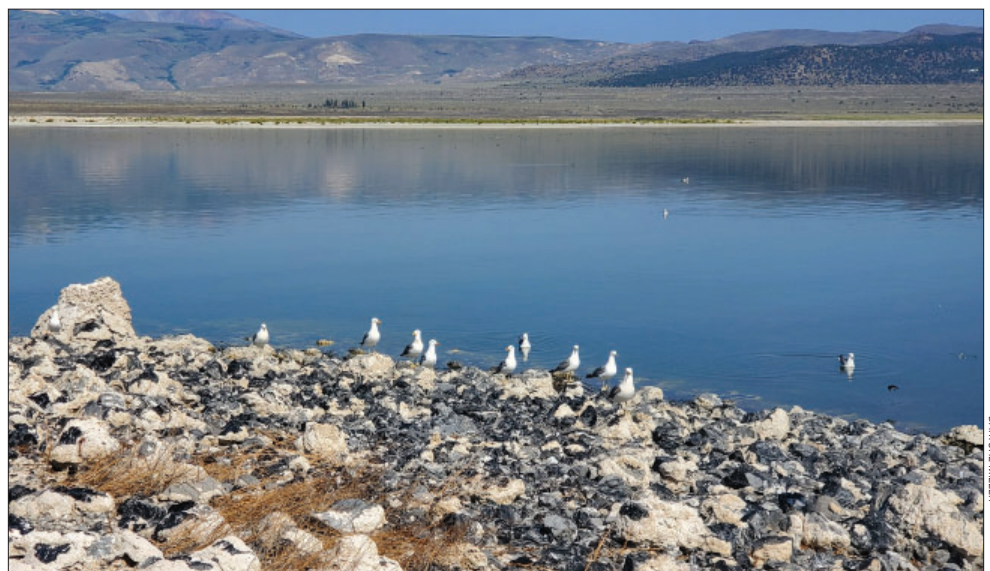
What will happen to the gulls at Great Salt Lake? No one can accurately predict but if the lake is not protected, the impacts will be catastrophic not just for gulls, but also for millions of other birds, and for the 1.2 million human residents of the greater Salt Lake City area.

### **Hanging on at Mono Lake**

Mono Lake has not yet recovered from decades of excessive water diversions and it is only 30% of the way to its mandated Public Trust lake level, set by the California State Water Resources Control Board in 1994. Seventy percent of the nesting California Gulls at Mono Lake use one small islet near the landbridge—the same landbridge that DWP diversions created decades ago.

DWP insists there is no landbridge and that there is no crisis for California Gulls, ignoring evidence that coyotes accessed nesting islands by wading and swimming in years when the landbridge was not fully connected. The landbridge brings coyotes physically closer, within tantalizing sight, scent, and sound of nesting gulls. Coyotes were documented on Negit Island and nearby Java Islet as recently as 2016, forcing the abandonment of more than 400 nests.

*Continued on page 24*



BARISHE MILLER

*Thankfully, this exceptionally wet winter caused Mono Lake to rise to 6380 feet above sea level, the minimum level needed to reduce the chance of coyotes accessing the nesting islands.*

# The future of Eared Grebes

*Mono Lake may be the North American Eared Grebe's best hope for the future*

by Robbie Di Paolo

Last fall marked the Mono Lake Committee's 15<sup>th</sup> consecutive year working with Dr. Sean Boyd from Environment and Climate Change Canada to conduct aerial surveys of Eared Grebes at Mono Lake. In 2022 the Committee chartered and staffed four flights between late August and early November to photograph and quantify the number of Eared Grebes staging at Mono Lake during their annual fall migration.

Preliminary results suggest a nearly 50% increase in the number of Eared Grebes staging at Mono Lake in 2022 compared to 2021. This is in line with a steady increase in the peak number since 2017 when Eared Grebes were estimated at 276,000 birds, one of the lowest estimates dating back to 1996.

The Committee is dedicated to the protection and restoration of Mono Lake through science, policy, and education, so Eared Grebe trends at Mono Lake are a valuable metric for understanding the productivity and health of the lake. Understanding why Eared Grebe numbers were so low in 2017 and why their numbers have been increasing in recent years is vital information.

## Interpreting the data

In a recent paper published in the journal *Waterbirds* (volume 44-1, March 2021), Dr. Boyd describes how in 2014 and 2015, our aerial photo surveys showed that large numbers of Eared Grebes arrived at Mono Lake in September, but by mid-October, when the largest number of Eared Grebes were expected to be on the lake, the numbers had declined dramatically. Dr. Boyd suggests that Eared Grebes likely left Mono Lake shortly after arriving due to limited food availability, namely brine shrimp (*Artemia monica*). After two consecutive years of low food availability at Mono Lake in 2014 and 2015, other data suggest that the grebes may have moved to Great Salt Lake in subsequent years and/or large numbers died during winter, resulting in the low numbers of Eared Grebes staging at Mono Lake in 2016 and 2017.

So why then have increasingly more Eared Grebes chosen to stage at Mono Lake each year following 2017?

## The larger context of saline lakes

Almost the entire population of Eared Grebes in North America stage at either Mono Lake or Great Salt Lake for several months each fall. The recent increases in Eared Grebe numbers at Mono Lake might be due to consistently high survival rates, or because individuals are choosing Mono



ROBBIE DI PAOLO

*In 2022 the Mono Lake Committee marked 15 years of helping conduct Eared Grebe aerial surveys at Mono Lake.*

Lake over Great Salt Lake, or some combination of both. This will be closely examined in the coming years of ongoing research using the best data available to us, which will include coordination and information sharing between researchers studying Eared Grebes at Great Salt Lake, Mono Lake, and the Salton Sea, the three most popular stops for Eared Grebes.

## Science and advocacy

Even though the North American Eared Grebe population is relatively large, their reliance on two hypersaline systems, Mono Lake and Great Salt Lake, makes them susceptible to environmental shifts. With reports of increasing salinity levels already threatening brine shrimp at Great Salt Lake (*Artemia franciscana*), Eared Grebes may rely more and more on Mono Lake in the coming years. The Mono Lake Committee will continue to assist with this important research and advocate for the restoration of Mono Lake, for all of us, and for Eared Grebes.

Special thanks to LightHawk and LightHawk volunteer pilots, who have supported the Eared Grebe research at Mono Lake by providing more than 30 donated survey flights since 2008. ❖

*Robbie Di Paolo is the Committee's Restoration Field Technician. This winter he enjoyed cross-country skiing to Mono Lake, both for work and for fun.*



# Following the phalaropes

*Celebrating Argentina's Ansenzuza National Park at Laguna Mar Chiquita*

*by Arya Harp*

Last fall, a flock of phalarope enthusiasts traveled 3,000 miles from Mono Lake to the Wilson's Phalarope's southernmost migration point—Laguna Mar Chiquita. That's how six Mono Lake Committee staff, one Board member, and several long-time Mono Lake advocates from California State Parks, the Inyo National Forest, and Oikonos Ecosystem Knowledge all found ourselves together bumping down a rural road in Argentina's Córdoba province heading toward the largest saline lake in the Americas.

We were there to celebrate the new designation of Ansenzuza National Park, to share our experience working to protect Mono Lake, a vital sister lake to Laguna Mar Chiquita, and to better coordinate international scientific research efforts with a particular focus on phalaropes.

After more than 24 hours of travel we felt a new appreciation for the fortitude of phalaropes, which weigh the equivalent of two AA batteries and fly the 4,000 miles from Mono Lake to Argentina non-stop. As our bus slowed to enter the town of Miramar, on the shore of Laguna Mar Chiquita, we caught sight of a spectacular, three-story phalarope mural so new the paint was still drying.

During the three-day celebration that followed we shared our experience with habitat conservation and restoration as we learned firsthand about the challenges facing Laguna Mar Chiquita and strengthened connections with our Argentinian counterparts. Alongside workshops and presentations were field trips to see different areas of the lake by horseback, airplane, and kayak.

We got to see Wilson's Phalaropes in their southern-hemisphere home. Ryan Carle, Science Director at Oikonos Ecosystem Knowledge and lead

phalarope researcher, saw "flocks of 40,000" from a small plane. Others got to see them mingling with thousands of Chilean flamingos. One highlight was a trip to the community of the Sanaviron people of Kasik Sacat at Laguna Mar Chiquita's Dulce River delta. Alongside the creation of Ansenzuza National Park, this Indigenous group is beginning to offer ecological and cultural tours of the remote and wildlife-rich areas they have preserved for generations.

Our visit was timed to coincide with an Environmental Leaders Forum for students of Experiencia Ambiental, an extraordinary environmental education and leadership program in which high school students learn about the importance of conserving Laguna Mar Chiquita. These inspiring students helped us focus on the most critical challenges for the future with their

insightful questions while infusing the days with the joy of cross-cultural exchange. Plans for connecting Mono Basin Outdoor Education Center participants with Experiencia Ambiental students virtually are already in the works, and program leaders in both hemispheres are also planning for an in-person exchange.

The trip marked the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Mono Lake's connection with Laguna Mar Chiquita and Great Salt Lake in Utah through the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN), which works to protect and connect critical habitats for migratory shorebirds. With all three lakes currently facing unprecedented pressures from excessive tributary diversions and a warming climate, this gathering of

*Continued on page 24*



*The new mural in Miramar depicts Wilson's Phalaropes and their three saline lake habitats across the continents. It had just been painted by mural artist Franco Cervato Cozza, known as "Vato," for the celebration.*

PHOTO COURTESY OF THOMAS TORRES

# Policy notes

by Bartshé Miller

## **Revegetation now key to dump remediation**

The California Department of Resources Recycling & Recovery (CalRecycle) dump project directly adjacent to the Mono Basin Scenic Area Visitor Center is on hold beneath many feet of snow. CalRecycle is preparing an updated mitigation and monitoring plan that includes plans for revegetation, monitoring, and follow-up. Last summer the Mono Lake Committee brought in revegetation experts with local experience and repeatedly asked CalRecycle to include them in the revised plans—CalRecycle finally agreed. Additionally, CalRecycle has agreed to restore the berm that was removed during initial project work, which was integral to the Visitor Center landscape design.

This plan is central to satisfying the Committee's proposed settlement agreement to resolve violations and problems with the work CalRecycle conducted at the site and it will soon be available for interested parties to review. The Inyo National Forest, Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board, California Department of Fish & Wildlife, Mono Lake Kutzadika'a Tribe, and the Committee have been



ROBBIE DI PAOLO

*Horses have been observed at South Tufa and Navy Beach for two consecutive winters now.*

engaged in the project and are working cooperatively to make sure that a meaningful revegetation and monitoring plan is in place.

In October, with Lahontan's approval, CalRecycle completed minor stabilization work on the site. At the Inyo's request, the site was also barricaded to discourage the public from driving onto the project area. If the revegetation and monitoring plan is acceptable, work could resume on the site this summer or fall; currently there is no estimate for a project completion date.

## **Horses make another winter appearance at South Tufa and Navy Beach**

In December wild horses returned to the South Tufa and Navy Beach areas. Committee staff and local residents were monitoring horse activity until heavy snow fell and made access to the area difficult.

As many as 200 horses were counted in the area in mid-December, with the most activity observed at the spring between South Tufa and Navy Beach. Numerous stud piles (manure) and tracks were in and around the South Tufa trails and the spring was denuded of vegetation and heavily trampled.

Mountain lions have also been in the area; three were photographed together in early December on a wildlife camera set up to monitor horse activity. Three lions reportedly killed two horses just west of South Tufa about one week after being photographed; one of the lions with a radio collar was mortally injured.

The Inyo National Forest is the lead agency for addressing issues with this growing herd of horses. Stephanie Heller, Mono Lake District Ranger, reports that the agency is continuing to research its capacity and authority to gather wild horses. ❖



ANDREW YOUSSEF

*The CalRecycle dump project near the Scenic Area Visitor Center is on hold until winter snows melt and CalRecycle prepares an updated monitoring and mitigation plan for revegetation.*



# Why pausing diversions to Los Angeles honors landmark Mono Lake deal

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*Mono Lake is still not saved, still worth saving again*

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*by Martha Davis*

In 1994, I stood at a crowded dais in Sacramento where the city of Los Angeles and Los Angeles Department of Water & Power, or DWP, joined the Mono Lake Committee and many others to support the State Water Board's landmark decision to save Mono Lake.

For California, the historic announcement ended two decades of litigation over DWP's environmentally devastating diversion of water away from Mono Lake.

The 1994 decision was intended to benefit Mono Lake, an extraordinary ecosystem located east of Yosemite National Park. This million-year-old lake is one of the nation's most important shorebird habitats, internationally recognized as an essential stop on the Pacific Flyway for millions of migratory birds (see page 9).

The State Water Board directed DWP to divert less water from the basin so that Mono Lake would reach an elevation of 6392 feet above sea level. The compromise was considered strong enough to protect Mono Lake's health. The state and federal government also made over \$100 million available to fund water conservation and recycling programs to help offset the water DWP ceded.

Fast forward 29 years: Mono Lake was saved, right?

Unfortunately, no. California has experienced more erratic rainfall than anyone envisioned almost three decades ago. As DWP diverted the maximum allowed by the State Water Board, Mono Lake bore the brunt of drought shortages.

As a result, Mono Lake rose about four feet—leaving the lake 13 feet below the State Water Board's mandated level.

Even with winter's remarkable snowfall, Mono Lake will not rise enough to reduce unhealthy dust storms that billow off the exposed lakebed and violate air quality standards. Nor will it offset increasing salinity levels that threaten Mono Lake Kutzadika'a Tribe's cultural resources and food for millions of migratory birds.

Any gain Mono Lake makes surely won't last due to DWP's ongoing diversions. In fact, in December 2022, Mono Lake was so low that coyotes could once again access islets where California Gulls nest and decimate the population.

In February the State Water Board held an informational workshop on Mono Lake's dire condition (see page 3). The California Department of Fish & Wildlife and the Kutzadika'a tribe joined the Committee in requesting emergency action to suspend DWP diversions this year—a meager 4,500 acre-feet

or 1% of LA water use—to keep as much water in Mono Lake as possible. The State Water Board's decision is pending.

Los Angeles and Mono Lake share a problem—they both need an adequate and reliable water supply. But they also share a common solution, seeking available state funds for additional water conservation, especially for programs that save water and reduce utility bills for residents who can least afford rate increases.

DWP has instead argued that Mono Lake is “fine” at its current, low level. They claim the 1994 decision is “aspirational,” not binding.

The department also says that low-income ratepayers will be hurt if diversions are reduced. Yet last year, when the Committee repeatedly asked DWP to join in requesting state money to help Los Angeles residents and Mono Lake, the department refused.

What DWP doesn't mention is the 1994 funding that bolstered conservation programs also contributed to ratepayer savings of more than \$11 billion over a 15-year period, a 2018 study by the Alliance for Water Efficiency found. Also missing is this alarming fact: DWP has received tens of thousands of acre-feet more water under the 1994 decision than anyone, including the State Water Board, expected, according to the Committee's analysis.

Effectively, DWP is saying: heads, DWP wins; tails, Mono Lake loses. The department can take all the water the 1994 decision allows and accept government funding to conserve and develop local supplies when it suits them. But if the State Water Board's order didn't save Mono Lake—well, that's not DWP's problem.

Really? Is that what Los Angeles meant when the city jointly pledged with the Committee and others to raise and protect Mono Lake?

If DWP won't voluntarily cooperate in finding a way to protect Mono Lake, then the State Water Board needs to step up and save Mono Lake—again. ♦

*Martha Davis is the Committee's former Executive Director and a current Board member. This article was originally published as Guest Commentary on CalMatters.org; it is reprinted here with permission.*

# Tell the stories

by mark! Lopez

*Editor's note: Each year we ask a writer to contribute to the Mono Lake Calendar—this essay appears in the 2023 calendar.*

**M**y first memory of Mono Lake, like many of my first memories, connects to my grandparents Juana and Ricardo Gutierrez, Co-Founders of the *Madres del Este de Los Angeles Santa Isabel* (Mothers of East Los Angeles Santa Isabel, MELASI). As a kid in the early 1990s I remember seeing paw prints on the window of their van, a van used to mobilize East LA community leaders to communities all over Los Angeles, the state and surrounding states in solidarity against toxic projects threatening the health of communities, typically threatening to poison the land, water and air. I had never seen them return from a trip with paw prints before though. At first, I thought someone had drawn them on the dust on the window, but then my grandparents started telling the story of how a bear was rocking the van at night, trying to grab food containers on top of the van.

My grandparents were invited to the Mono Basin by the Mono Lake Committee. The invitation was to visit and build a connection to Mono Lake, whose tributaries provide much of the water to the faucets at my grandparents' house in Boyle Heights, along with the homes and businesses of over four million people. My grandparents took a van full of youth from our community with them. They understood and taught us that if you want to have a lasting impact on a community you have to involve the youth. Along with the close encounter with the bear, they experienced some wilderness micro-aggressions from other campers, also known as racism. Despite those experiences, or maybe because of them now that I think about the way they told the stories in ways that made us all laugh at the threats of sharp teeth and claws along with white supremacy, the following year I was part of the group that took the trip up to Mono Lake, along with my parents, brothers, cousins, aunts and uncles and family friends. These trips were

the initial connection that would serve as the inspiration for the Mono Basin Outdoor Education Center.

Since then, four generations of my family have been consistently visiting the Mono Basin. Over the last almost 30 years, along with Mono Lake, we have specifically built a relationship with Rush Creek. We supported the planting and watering of some of the first trees to return to Rush Creek. I have distinct memories of standing in the shallow waters of the creek filling buckets and handing them to my family and community members who were watering the foot-high trees in an effort to repair the riparian zone, which at that point was mainly bare soil and rocks. On one of these occasions, when I was around ten years old, we walked the length of the creek down to the shore of Mono Lake, taking in the desert like conditions of the creekbed and surrounding area. At that young age I didn't fully grasp the impact of what we were doing, the investments we were making with every bucket filled and poured at the base of the saplings. We understood that these little trees needed our support, deep pours to help them reach their roots down from the soil made arid by greed to the groundwater ever present and ready to reconnect despite it all. I don't know that any of us understood the relationships we were building with the land and the water. Or maybe our elders knew exactly what they were doing, pouring water to feed the roots of our own lives.

Every year I bring my daughters here, the fourth generation of our family to visit with Mono Lake and Rush Creek year after year. As we stand amongst the trees that are now three to four times our height, and as we canoe over areas we used to play in as kids but are now reclaimed by Mono Lake, I tell them stories of how the healing of the lake and the creek are about healing a relationship with water, the land and all of the plant and animal relatives. I tell them stories of how the healing of the lake and creek are related to the healing of our peoples,

*Continued on page 24*



PHOTO COURTESY OF DAVID J. GUBERNICK



# Naturalist<sup>\*</sup> notes

by Nora Livingston

This winter, poconip fog reigned in the Mono Basin. From the first snow in early November to the lengthening days of March, if we weren't catching monster snowflakes on our tongues from snowstorm after snowstorm, we were enveloped in a frosty low cloud day in and day out. This year's poconip fog was so persistent, so icy and thick, that it created delicate rime ice branching off of yesterday's hardened rime ice that was sprouting from last week's icicles that dangled precipitously from the roof—a nesting doll of winter's mesmerizing phenomena. In the coldest pockets of the night when the frozen fog was so thick and the frost so heavy, the crystals would drop from all the fractaling branches of every tree and shrub, creating the illusion of fresh snowfall—sometimes almost an inch of crystals would pile up on my porch overnight. In between bouts of moving snow after storms, I would rest my arm on my shovel and watch the twinkling frost flakes flutter down around me—a meditation.

Though the poconip is beautiful and unique, it holds the cold in the basin like a child holds a beloved teddy—tightly. This tenacious cold drives many birds out toward habitats under much warmer blue skies just miles away. The few birds that remain are bold at feeders, sparring with competitors for the seeds that help them survive this trying season. As spring crept closer, the longer and slightly warmer days lifted the poconip earlier and earlier in the day—sometimes we saw the sun by noon—and birds returned to their usual haunts and started twittering rumors of spring. Thankfully, the rumors were true: Spring has sprung!

While we were cozy in our homes, the wildlife was out and about in the basin. Here are some memorable observations from the season:

Boldly colored and patterned Spotted Towhees revealed themselves in yards and at feeders; they mostly skulk quietly



Northern Pygmy Owl.

in the depths of thickets throughout the summer, so seeing them contrasted against the white snow was a treat.

Several Woodhouse's Scrub Jays spent the winter in town, calling loudly while they associated with the Steller's Jays—this was unusual because Woodhouse's Scrub Jays are typically shy and secretive in their pinyon-juniper habitat. Split genetically from the coastal Scrub Jay species a few years ago, hybrids are possible in this area of the Eastern Sierra and each individual requires extra investigation; many go unconfirmed.

A tiny but ferocious Northern Pygmy Owl spent a few weeks hunting songbirds in Lee Vining apple trees.

Multiple regal Mountain Lions were spotted prowling near Navy Beach before the heavy snow; another was slinking through the snowy sagebrush on the rounded ridgeline of a glacial moraine, silhouetted against the Sierra crest.

A Gray Fox was seen prowling in the icy night, its bottlebrush tail almost doubling its body length.

After a birdless morning in Lundy Canyon, a young Golden Eagle soared above the poconip and landed on a big granite boulder to preen.

A Black-tailed Jackrabbit bounded through deep snow near the lakeshore, almost disappearing under the powder with each leap.

A California Quail balanced on Jeffrey pine branches outside my office window, its scallop-printed flank feathers contrasted with the puzzle-piece pattern of tree bark, its topknot feather quivered as it waited for the danger to pass.

A Raven played on its airfoil wings, barrel rolling in the sunshine as the fog lifted south of Lee Vining. A barrel roll is when the bird flips upside down and glides for a second on its back before flipping back over and continuing along its merry way. ❖

Nora Livingston is the Committee's Lead Naturalist Guide. This winter she followed the phalaropes to Argentina and also took a birding trip to Colombia, where her favorite of the 193 new bird species she saw was the Rainbow-bearded Thornbill.



Rime ice from poconip fog coated every surface for days this winter.

## Astonishing snowpack numbers portend record runoff

by Greg Reis

A dry 2022 ended abruptly in November with a foot of snow. Despite the continuous precipitation all winter, consistently cold weather kept winter streamflows low. But with record snowpack, 2023 will bring record snowmelt runoff.

The Mono Basin high country had its wettest December, January, and March on record. The lower elevations had record January and February snowfall, adding up to the snowiest year on

record with more than 229 inches of snowfall in Lee Vining as of April 1 and a maximum snow depth of 67 inches. Around Mono Lake, when it wasn't snowing it was foggy, and the deep snowpack absorbed the rainfall from the one warmer March storm, which kept it from melting until April.

Gem Lake snow water equivalent was the first high country snow survey record broken—on February 1. There were no March 1 snow surveys due to

the tremendous snowfall the last week in February. As this *Newsletter* goes to press in early April, snow surveyors traveling by helicopter have measured well-above record snowpack for April 1 at all measured locations.

This will be an Extreme-wet runoff year-type and there will be a record amount of snowmelt running down the streams well in excess of the minimum-required Stream Ecosystem Flows. ❖

## Lakewatch

## Mono Lake could rise 4 feet, but those gains may be temporary

by Greg Reis

Mono Lake dropped to a low of 6378.4 feet above sea level in early December—the lowest level since 2017 and a 1.5-foot drop from last year's high point on April 1, 2022. Fortunately, winter storms raised the lake by more than 1.5 feet to 6379.99' by April 1, 2023. This is 0.01' below the threshold for increased exports, therefore only 4,500 acre-feet can be diverted this year when space in the Los Angeles Aqueduct becomes available in the fall.

January's rise was the third-largest January rise in history. The combined December and January lake rise of 0.88' was the fourth-biggest December-January rise in the record and the biggest since a 1.15-foot rise in December 1996–January 1997.

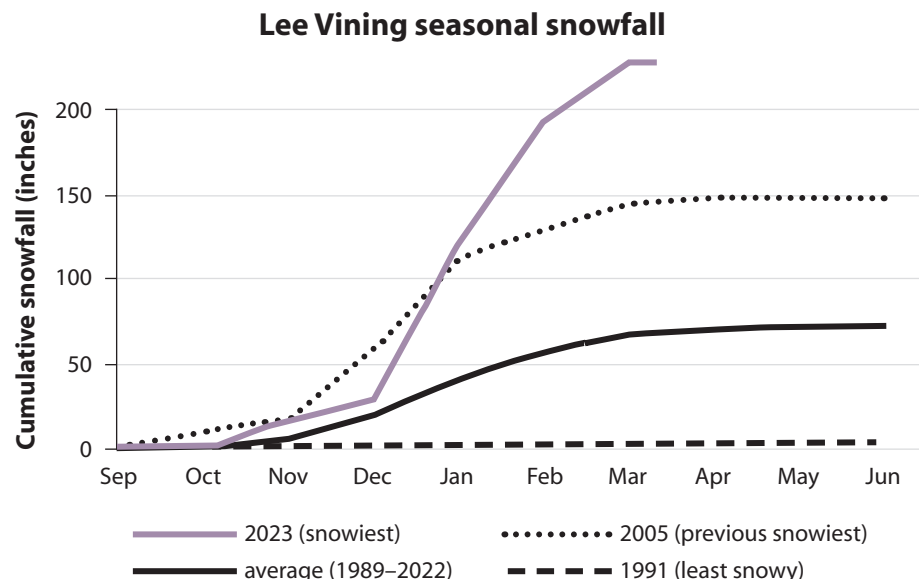
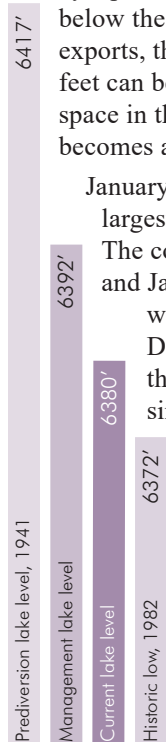
A lake level above 6380' makes the nesting California Gulls safer as they establish nests and lay eggs. Fortunately, once the incredible snowpack melts, the

lake will rise another 3 to 4 feet and keep the gulls out of danger next year.

As we saw during the extremely wet 2017, when Mono Lake rose 4.5' in a year, even large gains in lake elevation this year could be lost with continued diversions, putting the lake back in the danger zone in a few years. But if diversions are paused the lake will stay

higher, keeping the gulls safer. ❖

*Greg Reis is the Committee's Information & Restoration Specialist. April 1 felt like Christmas, between the improbable lake level reading and the record water content found in Mono Basin snow surveys.*



*In February Lee Vining seasonal snowfall surpassed the previous record of 149.5 inches that was set in 2005. By early April the 2023 total stood at 229.4 inches.*



# Mono Basin Journal

A roundup of quiet happenings at Mono Lake

by Geoffrey McQuilkin



Geoffrey McQuilkin

**A**t Mono Lake, months of unprecedented snow accumulation transformed a lakeshore visit, if you could get there at all. Skiing down the boardwalk—over what was visible only as the faint variation in the snow surface—and past buried signs and benches led to tufa towers sporting three-foot tall snow caps. A blanket of snow covered everything from shoreline to islands to craters to mountain peaks, leaving only the sparkling blue-green waters of Mono Lake for color in the otherwise monotone landscape.

I thought of last year's drought as we shoveled and shoveled

to clear crushing feet of snow from roofs and maintain the smallest of access paths to doors. Sore muscles became the physical experience of climate whiplash, the increasingly common flip between weather extremes. It's a new experience for me, but not for my third-grade daughter who, in her eight years, has lived through the driest three-year period on record—and two of the wettest winters ever recorded. Record winter snow will soon become summer's record snowmelt and I give thanks for the boost that will give to Mono Lake. After that, I'm left wondering about what comes next. ❖

## Benchmarks

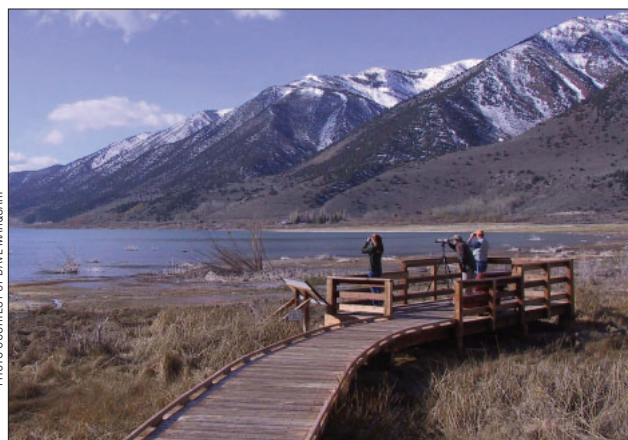


Photo courtesy of Dave Marquart

*February 2002: The State Reserve boardwalk at Mono Lake County Park is an excellent site for birding. It's unusual to see much snow accumulation here, even in midwinter.*



Robbie Di Paolo

*March 2023: After a series of atmospheric river storms, the boardwalk disappeared under snow and only the very top of the railings and interpretive signs were visible.*



## MONO LAKE COMMITTEE

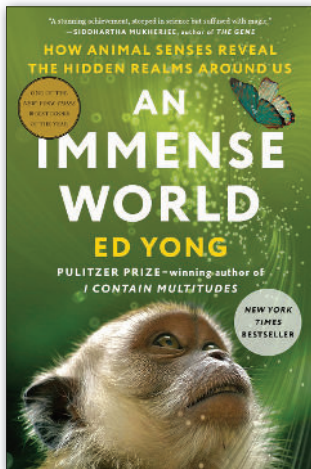
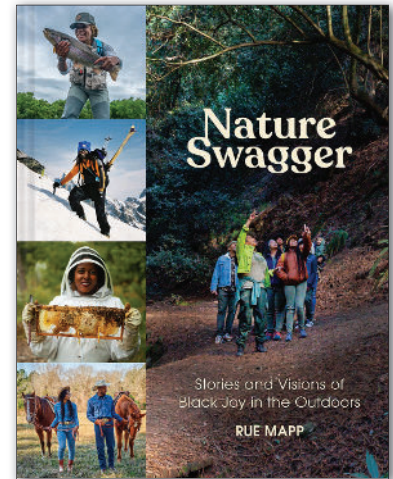
### INFORMATION CENTER & BOOKSTORE

#### NATURE SWAGGER: STORIES AND VISIONS OF BLACK JOY IN THE OUTDOORS

BY RUE MAPP

This beautifully designed book by Rue Mapp, the founder of Outdoor Afro, highlights stories of Black leaders and group participants and inspires Black communities to reclaim their place in the outdoors. This book covers the rich history of Black involvement in outdoor recreation, activism, and conservation, accompanied with beautiful photography, personal profiles, stories, and essays throughout.

*Nature Swagger, hardcover, 192 pages, Chronicle Books, 7½"x 9½": \$24.95*



#### AN IMMENSE WORLD: HOW ANIMAL SENSES REVEAL THE HIDDEN REALMS AROUND US

BY ED YONG

Delve into this *New York Times* bestseller to be astounded by the incredible animal kingdom. This fascinating book explores the vastness of Earth's sights, sounds, smells, and tastes, many of which humans cannot perceive. Expand your own senses by discovering the eyesight of bees, the olfactory ability of canines, the hidden details birds hear in their songs, and many more amazing animal abilities that reveal a truly immense world beyond our sliver of perception.

*An Immense World, hardcover, 464 pages, Random House, 6½"x 9½": \$30.00*

#### MONO LAKE PATTERNED INSULATED BOTTLE

Keep your drinks the perfect temperature at home or on the go with this Mono Lake insulated bottle from Klean Kanteen. With its colorful Mono Lake pattern and BPA-free stainless steel, this bottle is both eye-catching and safe to use. Its leak-proof lid and wide-mouth design make it easy to clean, and it can keep hot drinks hot for up to 14 hours and cold drinks cold for up to 47 hours. Take it with you wherever you go with its collapsible handle and café-style to-go lid. *Mono Lake Committee exclusive.*

*Mono Lake patterned insulated bottle,  
16 ounces: \$35.00*



#### LOCALLY HAND-BLENDED ORGANIC TEAS

These teas are all made from organic ingredients and hand-blended in Mammoth Lakes. Choose from soothing herbal blends: Snake Charmer or Bonzo's Bedtime; or, opt for The Catalyst—an invigorating green tea to keep you warm and refreshed this season. Full ingredient lists and descriptions are available online at [monolake.org/shop](http://monolake.org/shop).

*Locally hand-blended organic teas, 1.5 ounces, please specify blend of tea:  
\$13.50*

order at [monolake.org/shop](http://monolake.org/shop) or (760) 647-6595



# 2023 Field Seminars



SPENCER DUTTON

## Spring Photography at Mono Lake

May 19–21 • Joe Decker

\$310 per person / \$295 for members  
enrollment limited to 12 participants

Spring in the Mono Basin offers brand new leaves emerging along the creeks and washes of color as wildflowers bloom in the sagebrush. Bright warm sunshine, late-season snowstorms, and gentle spring rainstorms are all possible, combined with a still snow-covered Sierra Nevada as the backdrop. Along with a moonless night and opportunities to photograph the stars, the photographic possibilities are endless. We will discuss composition and methods of proper exposure under the diverse variety of lighting conditions encountered in the Eastern Sierra.

## Birding Mono Basin Hotspots

May 27–28 • Nora Livingston

\$195 per person / \$180 for members  
enrollment limited to 8 participants

Mono Basin creeks and canyons are hidden jewels for breeding and migrating songbirds in a region where high

desert habitat dominates. This two-day birding seminar will explore lush riparian areas that are hotspots for bird activity. Expect to see warblers, sapsuckers, pewees, buntings, sparrows, towhees, vireos, and if we're lucky, an American Dipper or Townsend's Solitaire.

## Breeding Birds of the Mono Basin

June 3 • Nora Livingston

\$145 per person / \$130 for members  
enrollment limited to 8 participants

Late spring and early summer are the best times to find breeding birds in the Mono Basin—they are singing from the tops of trees and shrubs to declare their territory to rivals and protect their mates. This one-day seminar will visit birding hotspots in the Mono Basin to learn about the many breeding birds that raise their families here. We will learn to identify these birds and observe their behavior as they gather food for their young or gather material to build nests. We will delve into their migration patterns and conservation status, as well as any natural history tidbits that come up.

To sign up for a Mono Lake Committee Field Seminar  
please visit [monolake.org/seminars](https://monolake.org/seminars) or call (760) 647-6595.

## Natural History of Mono Basin Woodpeckers

June 19–22 • Steve Shunk  
\$280 per person / \$265 for members  
enrollment limited to 12 participants

Join this seminar for a dynamic overview of Mono Basin woodpeckers. One of the most specialized bird families in the world, at least nine species of woodpeckers occur regularly in the Mono Basin, making the forests around Mono Lake a perfect stage for observing these amazing carpenters. We will visit prime local habitats to discuss forest ecology, woodpecker behavior, and natural history. This seminar also includes two evening lectures on specialized woodpecker topics.

## Rewild Yourself with Field Journaling

July 7–9 • Sue Jorgenson  
\$280 per person / \$265 for members  
enrollment limited to 10 participants

Rewild yourself by paying attention to, being astonished by, and telling about nature in the Mono Basin. There is a unique quality to the Mono Basin's geology, flora, and fauna—some would even call it magical—and it draws us into a deeper connection with nature. Sue will discuss and lead the group through several biodiverse regions—wildflowers will be a major focus, but other flora, fauna, ecology, and geology will be included in our perambulations. Using portable field journaling methods, we'll follow our curiosity, which will create new perspectives and deepen our own unique connections with nature.

## En Plein Air at Mono Lake: Beginning Oil Painting

July 14–16 • Penny Otwell  
\$280 per person / \$265 for members  
enrollment limited to 12 participants

Painting outdoors allows an instant connection with landscape, and the textural possibilities and complete-coverage quality of oil paint allow participants to portray their own feelings in their art. This field seminar is designed to be an introduction to the sometimes-intimidating subject of oil painting for those who want to learn oil painting outdoors. With demonstrations, individual instruction, group discussions, and plenty of humor, we will discover the tools, techniques, and some of the challenges of the outdoor oil painter. Learn to transfer the feeling of where you are into what you want to say.

## Geology of the Mono Basin: Land of Fire & Ice

July 21–23 • Greg Stock  
\$250 per person / \$235 for members  
enrollment limited to 14 participants

From volcanic craters to glacial moraines, earthquake faults to tufa towers, the Mono Basin displays some of the most unique, spectacular, and accessible geology anywhere in the world. This seminar, consisting of field visits to the premier sites from Mono Lake to Tioga Pass, will present in understandable fashion the geologic forces that formed the diverse landscapes of the Mono Basin.



*Learn about the fascinating natural history of the plants and animals of the Mono Basin on a Field Seminar.*

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[monolake.org/seminars](https://monolake.org/seminars) or (760) 647-6595 to register

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SOPHIA SCHULTZ

Field Seminars span an array of subjects ranging from birding and natural history to painting and photography.

## Communing With(in) Nature

July 28–30 • Bree Salazar

\$40–80 sliding scale

enrollment limited, by application only

This naturalist-led field seminar will visit the varying ecosystems of Kootzagoon (the Mono Basin) and Payahuunadü (Owens Valley) to learn about local natural history, regional environmental/Indigenous-led movements, and ways to feel more connected to and grounded on the land. Activities may include hiking, birding, nature journaling, forest bathing, meditation, and community building. Whether it's your first time or your hundredth in the area, by the end of this seminar we will feel more confident and empowered to step beyond just recreation and into responsibility, while honoring each other's identities. *This seminar is specifically designed for participants who self-identify as BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color).*

## Natural History at the Edge of the Sierra

August 5 • Nora Livingston

\$145 per person / \$130 for members

enrollment limited to 8 participants

Natural history pays attention to all aspects of nature and widens our view when out in the forest or high desert. In this seminar, we will make our way up the east slope from Mono Lake to Tioga Pass, stopping at several locations to observe all that we find, which may include wildly colorful butterflies like the lustrous copper, hidden Sierra rein orchids in pristine meadows, and plenty of birds, from warblers to rosy-finches. This is the quintessential day in the field with a naturalist,

where we will ponder the grandeur and the minutiae that envelop us in this amazing place.

## Falling for the Migration: Bridgeport, Crowley, Mono

August 11–13 • Dave Shuford

\$250 per person / \$235 for members

enrollment limited to 10 participants

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, August is the time of year to see late summer migrants and early arriving wintering birds in the Mono Basin, Bridgeport Valley, and Long Valley. Beginners as well as experts will enjoy this introduction to the area's birdlife found in a wide variety of habitats, from the shimmering shores of Mono Lake to lofty Sierra peaks. We will identify about 100 species by plumage and calls and probe the secrets of their natural history.

## Mono Basin & Bodie Photography

August 18–20 • David Gubernick

\$325 per person / \$310 for members

enrollment limited to 12 participants

In this seminar, we will enhance our photography skills in the uniquely beautiful Mono Basin and at the world-renowned Bodie State Historic Park. Field trips and classroom sessions will combine to cover a multitude of photographic topics, and we will visit Bodie for private, after-hours evening access. This seminar is designed to enhance our picture-taking abilities in a supportive learning environment. In addition to mastering the technical aspects of creating images, we will explore the artistry of photography with an emphasis on composition.



EMMA ROSEN

Field Seminars have a range of activity levels, from slow, easy walking to strenuous off-trail hiking. Learn more at [monolake.org/seminars](https://monolake.org/seminars).

[monolake.org/seminars](https://monolake.org/seminars) or (760) 647-6595 to register



ELIN LJUNG

*Refine your skills and discover a fresh approach to capturing the Mono Basin through your camera lens on a photography seminar.*

## Late Summer Birding

August 26–27 • Nora Livingston  
\$195 per person / \$180 for members  
enrollment limited to 8 participants

As birds fly south for winter, people often wonder: “Where exactly are they going? Where are they coming from? How long does it take them to get there? How do they know where to go?” This seminar strives to answer those questions during a fun time in the field observing these lightweight travelers as they fuel up along the way. We will focus on shorebirds, but there will be plenty of songbird migrants to see as well.

## Mono Basin Tree Identification

September 2 • Nora Livingston  
\$145 per person / \$130 for members  
enrollment limited to 8 participants

From cottonwoods and willows along creeks to gnarled windswept pines high in the mountains, the Mono Basin and adjacent mountains provide a wonderful gradient on which to look at trees and tree-like shrubs in their plant communities. There are plenty of trees to learn about and celebrate here in the Eastern Sierra. This one-day seminar will delve into the diversity of trees in the Mono Basin and their identifying traits. We will take time to examine and observe the trees to help ingrain the knowledge into our senses.

## Los Angeles Aqueduct Tour

September 3 • Robbie Di Paolo & Maureen McGlinchy  
\$145 per person / \$130 for members  
enrollment limited to 15 participants

The Mono Basin extension of the Los Angeles Aqueduct began exporting water 350 miles south to the City of LA in 1941. Today, the aqueduct must balance competing needs for this water instead of exclusively serving one. During this

seminar, we’ll visit all the major aqueduct facilities in the Mono Basin and learn about their modern relationship with Los Angeles, Mono Lake, and the lake’s tributary streams. We will discuss past and present diversions, and see how 20<sup>th</sup> century infrastructure is serving 21<sup>st</sup> century water needs. This seminar will provide a great overview of the Los Angeles Aqueduct, and a few of the historical, engineering, and ecological anecdotes that make up this fascinating water infrastructure.

## Eastern Sierra Volcanism

September 8–10 • Claire Landowski  
\$250 per person / \$235 for members  
enrollment limited to 10 participants

The Eastern Sierra is a fascinating and exciting place to learn about volcanoes and to experience the volcanic history of the region. Over two days this seminar will explore some of the world-class volcanic features in Mono Lakes backyard. At Hot Creek we’ll imagine the catastrophic eruption of Long Valley Caldera and observe its remnants; at the Mono-Inyo Craters we will hike through spectacular obsidian and pumice deposits; and in the north Mono Basin we will envision underwater eruptions. Whether you are a casual observer of landscape or an avid rock nerd, this seminar will deepen your understanding and appreciation of Eastern Sierra geology and natural history.

## Mono Basin Landscape & Night Photography

September 15–17 • Jeff Sullivan  
\$310 per person / \$295 for members  
enrollment limited to 10 participants

Summer is a special time in the Mono Basin, with wildflowers blooming, Sierra Nevada peaks catching morning alpenglow, and afternoon cloud formations for potential sunset color, often yielding to clear skies for night photography. This



NORA LIVINGSTON

*With its rich and varied geologic features, the Mono Basin is an ideal location to explore the forces and processes that shape our planet.*



seminar will cover best practices for composing and capturing stunning landscape and night sky photographs. We'll also spend time learning how to anticipate and plan for great sunrise and sunset shots and how to use composition and light for greater impact in every photograph. When we're not out photographing in the field, we will have discussions and demonstrations on post-processing indoors to refine our skills.

## Geology of the Mono Basin: Land of Fire & Ice

September 22–24 • Greg Stock  
\$250 per person / \$235 for members  
enrollment limited to 14 participants

From volcanic craters to glacial moraines, earthquake faults to tufa towers, the Mono Basin displays some of the most unique, spectacular, and accessible geology anywhere in the world. This seminar, consisting of field visits to the premier sites from Mono Lake to Tioga Pass, will present in understandable fashion the geologic forces that formed the diverse landscapes of the Mono Basin.

## Arborglyphs & Aspen Natural History

October 7–8 • Richard Potashin & Nancy Hadlock  
\$195 per person / \$180 for members  
enrollment limited to 12 participants

A century of sheep grazing brought Basque sheepherders into the Mono Basins aspen-bordered meadows, and they left numerous carvings—arborglyphs—on the aspens. Join this seminar for an enchanting journey into the aspen groves at peak color to explore this historical art form and to learn about the wildlife, insects, and birds that are drawn to this

habitat. By visiting several different groves we will compare the designs and artistic and cultural content of aspen carvings. Participants will have an opportunity to document carvings using photography, pencil drawing, and video.

## Mono Basin Fall Photography

October 13–15 • Robb Hirsch  
\$310 per person / \$295 for members  
enrollment limited to 12 participants

In autumn spectacular foliage and skies combine with exceptional light, presenting ample subject matter to photograph. Seminar participants will learn how to refine their own vision and best interpret it through the camera. Explore shoreline locations at sunrise and sunset, fall color in nearby canyons, and grand overviews of the Mono Basin.



*The changing fall leaves are the perfect backdrop for a Field Seminar.*

## Field Seminar Information

Please visit [monolake.org/seminars](https://monolake.org/seminars) to register for a Field Seminar, see complete itineraries, and cancellation and refund policies.

*No pets are allowed on any Field Seminars.* Please consider this in advance and find boarding accommodations for your pets or leave them at home; do not leave pets in your car during seminars. Service animals assisting people with disabilities are allowed on seminars and must be leashed.

Field Seminars are open to all, but Mono Lake Committee members may register early and receive discounts. All instructors are experts who have received high ratings from past seminar participants. We emphasize a spirit of learning and camaraderie in this magnificent outdoor setting for a reasonable cost. Proceeds from Field Seminars benefit research and education in the Mono Basin.

All Field Seminars and custom trips operate under Inyo National Forest and California State Parks permits.

**Questions? Email [fieldseminars@monolake.org](mailto:fieldseminars@monolake.org) or call us at (760) 647-6595.**

But would a wet winter resolve the low lake level for the long term? Recent history had the answer: no. After the wet 2017 winter Mono Lake rose an incredible 4.5 feet, but that increase in lake level didn't last. Instead, continuing DWP water diversions lowered the lake in subsequent years, eroding the gains and returning the lake to a dangerously low level.

Relying on one wet winter's precipitation is not a plan—neither for Mono Lake nor Los Angeles. And yet, under the current stream diversion rules, the record shows that gains from wet years are not preserved. Without a change in diversion rules, Mono Lake's rise in 2023 will only be temporary and therefore the need for State Water Board action remains urgent.

### State Water Board workshop

In February, the State Water Board held a public workshop about Mono Lake, just two months after the Committee's request. The five-hour workshop was attended by 365 people—an impressive turnout acknowledged by the Board staff. Of the 53 public commenters, 49 spoke in support of raising Mono Lake to the Public Trust lake level established in 1994.

State Water Board staff introduced the Mono Lake issue, and the Committee, DWP, DFW, and the Kutzadika'a Tribe all made presentations.

The Committee's presentation reviewed how the Board's

requirements in D1631 issued to protect the Public Trust have not been met, underscoring that the lake has only risen 25% of the way to the required lake level and is nine years overdue in getting there, while DWP has diverted all the water the Board expected it to and more. We emphasized that due to this lack of progress it is time for the State Water Board to hold its planned hearing this year in order to ensure implementation of the required lake level.

The Committee brought in Ryan Burnett, Point Blue Conservation Science biologist, to present the research showing the dangers of coyotes using the landbridge to predate gull nests and chicks at lake levels below 6380 feet. In 2016, when the lake was at about the same level, coyote presence and predation was documented on Negit Island and several small adjacent islets showing they are willing to wade and swim small stretches of water at the north edge of the landbridge.

We also highlighted our efforts to secure local water supply solutions in Los Angeles, as we have successfully done before. For example, over the past year the Committee has been pursuing \$60 million in State funding to invest in water efficiency devices that would reduce water bills in low-income communities while saving water for Mono Lake.

We are confident that Los Angeles can offset any additional water the Board requires to flow to Mono Lake with sustainable local sources. In the past, tens of millions of dollars of state and federal funding have gone to DWP for this purpose. Unfortunately, DWP has so far refused to work with us on this effort.

The Tribe's remarks were a highlight—after calling for full consultation with the Tribe about Mono Lake decisions and more water for the lake, Vice Chair Dean Tonnena eloquently summed up the stakes when he said, “decisions regarding Mono Lake have impacts that span generations into the future.”

DFW—the state agency responsible for Mono Lake's gull population and ecosystem—laid out the predator peril facing California Gulls and the hydrologic analysis showing the benefit of immediate stream diversion suspension. DFW asserted that State Water Board action is needed this year.

DWP's presentation outlined an alternative view. DWP maintained that Mono Lake and the California Gulls are doing fine, there is no landbridge, and replacing the water taken from Mono Lake would be challenging, expensive, and environmentally harmful. None of these claims are true, and they all contradict the analysis and conclusions of the State Water Board itself in D1631.

DWP's claim that its total diversion of 3.6 million acre-feet of water since 1941 has somehow had no impact on the health of Mono Lake is the same claim it made to the Board in 1994, when it unilaterally proclaimed the lake to be “healthy” and “vibrant” at 6374 feet. The evidence

*Continued on page 23*



BARTISHE MILLER

Committee staff hand-delivered more than 1,000 paper letters from members to the State Water Board headquarters in Sacramento. In total the Board received 3,000 comment letters about Mono Lake.



shows otherwise, and the Board identified 6392 feet as the necessary lake management level precisely because the lake is not fine at current low levels.

### **State Water Board hears strong call for action**

The Committee, DFW, Kutzadika’a Tribe, and others asked the Board to take swift action to implement the Mono Lake protection requirements of D1631—specifically, to temporarily suspend diversions by DWP to allow the lake to reach and fluctuate around an average of 6392 feet, the Public Trust lake level.

In addition, the Committee asked the Board to hold the hearing required by D1631 to modify the diversion rules this year. Given the narrow scope of such a hearing, we believe the Board has access to the data and established hydrologic models it needs to proceed, and that participants could be ready to present proposed changes and evidence within six months.

### **Public comment overwhelmingly in support of Mono Lake**

After the presentations the Board heard three hours of public comment—extending the meeting by two hours to accommodate those who had signed up to speak.

LA community members made eloquent calls for DWP to meet its commitments, comply with existing requirements, and do the right thing for Mono Lake and Los Angeles.

Elsa Lopez, whose group Mothers of East Los Angeles—Santa Isabel conducted some of the first direct-install conservation work in LA in the 1980s, commented: “I brought generations of youth from the LA area to do restoration work at Mono Lake, which resulted in instilling core values that last a lifetime and made stewards for the environment. We need to be responsible in LA for our own water and DWP should do everything it can to help Mono Lake rise.”

Ashley Hernandez from Communities for a Better Environment said, “As LA residents we will all be impacted by this destructive pattern if our public utility keeps hoarding water while many low-income residents deal with inequitable rates or programs. It is up to LADWP to protect not only our water in LA but to do their due diligence to help our city learn how we can all protect and not take from Mono Lake.”

Representatives from statewide and national groups, including the Audubon Society, California Hispanic Chambers of Commerce, California Coastkeeper Alliance, and American Muslims for Sustainability voiced their support of Mono Lake as well.

Scientists and organizers also called in to speak from Mar Chiquita in Argentina and Great Salt Lake in Utah, two saline lakes that, along with Mono Lake, provide crucial habitat for birds that migrate along the Pacific Flyway. Saving Mono Lake and other saline lakes is of hemispheric importance.

### **3,000 letters in support of Mono Lake**

A written comment period followed the workshop and the volume of comments in support of Mono Lake was among the highest seen by the State Water Board for any issue.

As the comment deadline approached, thoughtful and impactful comments arrived by the hundreds. Committee staff hand-delivered more than one thousand paper letters from Mono Lake Committee members to the State Water Board headquarters in Sacramento. In total, three thousand comment letters called for the Board to act quickly for Mono Lake.

Mono County, Great Basin Unified Air Pollution Control District, California Audubon, CalTrout, Heal the Bay, numerous Mono Lake scientific experts, Los Angeles residents, and many others all explained how the future health of Mono Lake depends on State Water Board implementation of the long-promised lake level. DFW reiterated its call for a hearing this year and interim rules to suspend diversions. The Committee rebutted DWP’s claims in a detailed letter and we demonstrated how the record supports a focused hearing that quickly leads to more water being delivered to the lake.

Marc Del Piero, a former State Water Board member who led the 1994 hearings and voted for the Mono Lake Decision, summed it up, writing: “LADWP is not protecting or advancing the Public Trust targets mandated in D-1631. It is the responsibility of the SWRCB to protect and preserve Mono Lake, and those actions need to be taken now.”

### **Looking ahead**

As record Mono Basin snowfall turns to record runoff, the pressure for a State Water Board hearing is also at record levels. The extremely wet winter of 2023 is a gift that will raise the lake multiple feet toward the Public Trust lake level in a single season. That gives us a rare opportunity to seize the moment to preserve this year’s lake level gains.

As thousands of commenters have pointed out, a State Water Board hearing and subsequent action can put Mono Lake back on track to rise to the healthy level mandated 30 years ago. We expect to hear the Board’s plan for next steps soon and are preparing for a momentous year for Mono Lake. ❖

## **For more on the State Water Board workshop**

**H**ighlights of the State Water Board workshop, the Mono Lake Committee’s presentation, and a recording of the full workshop is available at [monolake.org/swbworkshop2023](https://monolake.org/swbworkshop2023).

This winter the Committee had planned to install a temporary solar-charged electric fence to help protect the gulls from coyotes. The fence worked six years ago and disaster was averted in 2017. This exceptionally wet winter caused the lake to rise to 6380 feet above sea level by the time gulls began nesting, the minimum level needed to reduce the chance of coyotes accessing the nesting islands. The unexpectedly and miraculously wet winter provided the remedy that DWP was unwilling to provide—more water for the lake. Instead of the fence, the Committee will install a monitoring system using a network of wildlife cameras and Point Blue Conservation Science will implement additional field monitoring for coyote activity during this year's gull research.

Mono Lake will continue to rise through this summer.

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*Phalaropes from page 9*

people involved in all aspects of ecosystem protection was particularly well-timed.

In fact, many of our Argentinian partners participated in the Mono Lake State Water Board workshop (see page 3). In addition, the 2023 Mono Basin Chautauqua will highlight international phalarope research and efforts to bring phalarope murals to Mono Lake and Great Salt Lake are underway.

This trip was both a dream come true and an inspiring reminder that Mono Lake and Laguna Mar Chiquita are linked not only by migratory Wilson's Phalaropes and shared environmental challenges, but also by partnerships of passionate and determined scientists, educators, land managers,

However, until either DWP or the State Water Board takes action to change diversion criteria to ensure a buffer for Mono Lake, the cycle will likely continue—a warming climate will likely bring more severe drought years, the lake will drop too low, and coyotes will once again threaten nesting gulls.

There are no other nesting opportunities at Mono Lake safe from coyotes. Great Salt Lake is on the verge of collapse and the South Bay is not sustainable. If not Mono Lake, then where? As Ryan Burnett, biologist with Point Blue, stated at the Mono Lake State Water Board workshop, "Mono Lake likely represents the single best place for California Gulls to nest. Ensuring predator-free nesting habitat and a productive lake ecosystem is critical to their long-term viability." ❖

and students working for the phalaropes, and so much more.

This trip would not have been possible without US Forest Service International Program support, and the hard work of our counterparts, and esteemed colleagues, at Laguna Mar Chiquita—WHSRN, Manomet, and Fundación Líderes de Ansenuza. Special thanks also go to Oikonomos Ecosystem Knowledge, California State Park Rangers Association, and California State Parks. Un agradecimiento especial también a Aves Argentina, Natura Argentina, Asociación Ambiente Sur, Secretaría de Ambiente y Cambio Climático, Gobierno de la Provincia de Córdoba, Administración de Parques Nacionales Argentina, y Parque Nacional Ansenuza. ❖

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*Tell the stories from page 12*

after generations of colonization, migration, and re-orientation.

The Mono Basin Outdoor Education Center has grown since the 90s. After enjoying the program as a youth participant for most of my life, I have transitioned to supporting organizing youth groups for over a decade. For us, unlike with other urban to outdoor type programs, visiting with Mono Lake isn't about disconnecting from our communities. It is about understanding our own impact on Mono Lake, examining our responsibilities to Mono Lake and committing to fight for our communities, which includes fighting for Mono Lake. It is about a type of connecting and reconnecting that regenerates the type of community building our elders have taught us.

Connection after disconnection. Commitment to humanity after being dehumanized. Relationships. Once you know and love a place, you have a responsibility to that place. Mono Lake shows us that we have the capacity to know and love a people, and therefore be responsible and accountable to a people. I applaud the efforts by the Mono Lake Committee staff to invest in building relationships with, and fight alongside, the Kootzaduka'a, whose homelands make up

the Mono Lake-Yosemite region. If you feel a love for and responsibility to Mono Lake, this must extend to its original peoples and their fight for federal recognition as the Mono Lake Kootzaduka'a Tribe (visit [MonoLakeTribe.us](http://MonoLakeTribe.us) online).

Towards the end of this year we will mark the second anniversary of the passing of my grandfather, Ricardo Gutierrez. We celebrate his life, much the way he lived it, telling stories. The many stories of our family in our homelands, on the borderlands, in East LA, and at Mono Lake. Stories of people, lands, and waters. I invite you to share Mono Lake stories, your own and the wonderful stories of the long fight to save Mono Lake. ❖

*mark! Lopez is the Eastside Community Organizer & Special Projects Coordinator for East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice. He is the 2017 North American Recipient of the Goldman Environmental Prize. mark! blames the Mono Lake Committee's Outdoor Education Center Manager, Santiago Escruceria, for the many generations of Los Angeles youth who have their own funny Mono Lake stories to tell.*



# Remembering Phil Pister

Renowned conservationist Edwin Philip Pister, known for his work in protecting golden trout and desert fish, passed away in Bishop on January 17, 2023, at the age of 94.

Phil dedicated his career to protecting the biodiversity of fish populations in the Eastern Sierra and beyond in his work with the California Department of Fish & Wildlife as a fishery biologist. He is perhaps best known for saving the Owens pupfish from near extinction by personally scooping the last-surviving, inch-long fish from their shrinking pond and carrying them to safety in two buckets.

Reflecting on this experience, Phil wrote in *Natural History* magazine, “I literally held within my hands the existence of an entire vertebrate species. If I had tripped over a piece of barbed wire or stepped into a rodent burrow, the Owens pupfish would now be extinct! But good fortune smiled upon us, and the recovery continues today.”

In addition to his professional work,

Phil was also an active volunteer, including serving as a Mono Lake Committee Board member in the early 1990s during a critical time in Committee history leading up to the historic State Water Board hearing that protected Mono Lake.

In 2018 the Committee presented Phil with the Andrea Lawrence Award for his true embodiment of its spirit: passionate engagement in community and the land. Phil’s work in the Eastern Sierra fostered an ethic of conservation and he worked tirelessly toward the goal of protecting and enhancing the area’s fisheries for both recreational and ecological purposes, often citing the words of Aldo Leopold: “A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.”

Phil was a lifelong steward of the environment, a passionate advocate for Mono Lake despite its fishlessness, and a stalwart reader of this *Newsletter*. His

legacy will continue to inspire and guide conservationists and conservation efforts for generations to come. ❖



PHOTO COURTESY OF PHIL PISTER

Phil Pister in the 1930s with an impressive stringer of fish.

## 2022 Free Drawing prize winners

by Kristin Weiss

Drawing winning tickets for the annual Free Drawing fundraiser always brings excitement to the Mono Lake Committee headquarters, and this year was an extra source of light after weeks of the sun being blocked by thick poconip ice fog in the Mono Basin. Thank you to the generous donors and everyone who entered the 2022 Free Drawing! Your donations help protect and restore Mono Lake for years to come.

Ruth Casler of Auburn won the early bird prize, an iPad Mini. National Park grand adventure: Warren Watkins of Healdsburg. June Mountain Ski Area season pass: Debbie Lurie of Lee Vining. Tamarack Cross-Country Ski

Center season pass: Donna Weinert of Mammoth Lakes. Mammoth Mountain Bike Park season pass: Michael Tyers of Cloverdale. June Lake retreat: Thomas Shepherd of Sacramento. Yosemite vacation: Lia Kollen of Sacramento. Lee Vining getaway: Joe Gallagher of Watsonville. Mono Lake trip: Christy Guerra of Los Angeles. Benton Hot Springs escape: Janet Clover of Petaluma. Mono Basin fun in the field: Doug Jumelet of Rocklin. A day on the Bay: Kristine Murphey of Santa Rosa. Experience the Channel Islands: Jeffrey Kilmer of San Francisco and Mary Lamo of Long Beach.

Alice & Richard Cocke of Rocklin and Robin Drury of Santa Cruz won canoe adventures on Mono Lake. Mono Lake

Committee gift packs: Alice & Kenneth Atwood of Ridgecrest and William Krausman of Fullerton. Eastern Sierra experience: Jeff Spalsbury of Murrieta. Camp comfort gift pack: Julie Lutz of Green River, WY. Patagonia apparel: Robert Magarian of Berkeley and Laurie Stowe of Groveland. Patagonia Black Hole backpack: Sheri Freemuth of Boise, ID. Patagonia Black Hole duffel: Vivian Nelson of Culver City. Pentax Papilio binoculars: Andrew Naegeli of Walnut Creek. Photographer’s favorites book bag: Vicki Call of Santee. Bodie exploration: Keith & Meredith Standiford of Carmel.

# Staff migrations

by Elin Ljung

**B**etween blizzards, atmospheric rivers, and avalanches, this winter's daily staff migrations to and from the office were ones for the record books. Amidst full days of shoveling snow, multiple highway closures, and more than 50 days of dense poconip fog, we rejoiced in the arrival of several folks to the Mono Lake Committee staff team and said goodbye to a few as well.

Congratulations to **Rose Nelson**, Education Director, and **Willy Klein**, who were married on November 14, 2022. Rose and Willy met here at Mono Lake when he made a stop during a north-to-south cycling trip through the Americas ... and stayed longer than he planned! Rose said goodbye to us this spring and joined Willy for the rest of the cycling trip—they are mirroring the phalaropes' migration on wheels instead of wings, south to Argentina. Luckily for us, Rose and Willy plan to return to the Mono Basin in spring 2024.

To keep the Committee's busy education department running, **Ryan Garrett** has moved from Project Specialist to Education Program Manager. Ryan was introduced to Mono Lake as a high schooler through the Mono Basin Outdoor Education Center (OEC), returned as a Mono Lake Intern in 2021, and has been key to the last couple years of our interpretive and monitoring programs. We are glad to have his teaching experience, birding prowess, and love for Mono Lake in this position.

**Claire Landowski** made a short migration this winter, bidding farewell to the Committee to pursue new business ventures nearby in June Lake. Claire started as Office Director just two weeks into the pandemic lockdown and helped keep our operations running smoothly as we quickly shifted to remote work and then through many more configurations on the journey back to "normal." We are grateful for her resourceful, cheerful handling of so many challenges, and we're thrilled that she'll be back to lead the popular Eastern Sierra Volcanism field seminar again this year (see page 20).

Legislative Coordinator **Dennis O'Connor** joined us this winter to help keep track of work going on in Sacramento that has the potential to affect Mono Lake. Dennis recently retired as a consultant to the California Senate Committee on Natural Resources & Water and 30 years of his career focused on research, legislation, and collaboration around water and natural resources. His eyes, ears, and expertise at the State Capitol will benefit Mono Lake.

After five years as Facilities Superintendent, **Bill Lundeen** finally hung his snow shovel up for good. We are thankful he brought us his extensive experience with aging Eastern Sierra buildings—he kept the offices, staff housing, and Mono Basin



Newlyweds Rose Nelson & Willy Klein—congratulations!

Field Station running with practical and creative solutions. We're glad he now has far less snow to deal with and much more time with his partner Charlotte.

**Bree Salazar**, former Mono Lake Intern, returned to work at the OEC last summer as an Outdoor Education Instructor. She migrated back to Los Angeles in the fall and has helped with outreach in the city to former and potential OEC groups. We're delighted that Bree also will be leading a Field Seminar this summer (see page 19).

**Mara Krista Plato**, Project Specialist, joined us this winter, adding more birding and ecology expertise to the staff. Mara's near decade-long experience with bird conservation work—protecting the places where birds breed, rear their young, migrate, and overwinter—mean she's adept at collaborating with multiple agencies, something that is key to the Committee's work.

**Katie Smith** brought her ornithology experience to the OEC last summer as an Outdoor Education Instructor and stayed on through the fall and winter as a Project Specialist, monitoring birds and wildlife at key locations around Mono Lake. She has migrated to one of our partner organizations, Point Blue Conservation Science, for a bird banding apprenticeship.

We were also glad to welcome **Kristin Weiss**, Project Specialist, to the Committee this winter. Kristin's experience working at REI, Bodie State Historic Park, and the Mono Basin Scenic Area Visitor Center, as well as a passion for the complicated story of the Los Angeles Aqueduct, make her a great asset. ❖

*Elin Ljung is the Committee's Communications Coordinator. Her favorite season has always been winter, though this one really tested her commitment and she is dreaming of summer.*





# From the mailbag

*News from members and friends*

by Leslie Redman

**T**hank you to all of you who sent gifts in honor or in memory of friends and loved ones. Your support makes our work possible.

## In honor

Neil Andersson of Lompoc donated in honor of **Bob Braitman**. Jessica Bayne of Spokane, WA gave a gift in honor of **Linda Adams & Barry Macdonald**. Catherine Brown of Little Falls, NJ contributed in honor of **Mel & Anna Brown**. Alma Gade of Bolinas donated in honor of **Michael Light & John Lum**. Cecilia Helmick and Jean & Matt Moelter of Los Osos gave a gift in honor of **Marcia Givvin**. Janice Heppe of Sacramento contributed in honor of **Amy & Joe Villacci**.

We received \$221 in donations from **Heide Jenkins's** fourth grade class at **Overland Avenue Elementary School** in Los Angeles, who studied Mono Lake this year. **Nancy Lindsay** of Millbrook, NY gave a gift in honor of **Morgan Lindsay** and **Nora Livingston**. **Jo Lisman** of Syracuse, NY contributed in honor of **Evan Lisman**. **Anthony Loro** donated in honor of **Mark Dubois**. **Ann & Keith Mangold** of El Granada gave a gift in honor of **Rosemarie Willimann**.

**Lorraine Becker**, **Celia Norian**, and **Pauline Trimarco** of Palm Springs contributed in honor of **Norman King & Terry Dean**. **Kathleen Mugele** of Sonoma donated in honor of **Sue Weingarten**. **June Peterson** of Henderson, NV gave a gift in honor of **Dr. Raymond Rice & Mrs. Mary Rice**. **Warren G. Roberts** of Davis contributed in honor of **Sally Judy**, which is how he remembers **Sally Judy Gaines** at UC Davis in the early 1970s. **Barry Rosenbloom** of Los Angeles donated in honor of **Scott & Michelle Quirsfeld**. **Ron Rutowski** of Tempe, AZ gave a gift in honor of the **Rutowski** and **Mitchell families**. **Katie Stoyka** of San Francisco contributed in honor of **Cathie Haynes**.

**Emily Taylor** of Ross donated in honor of **Joanne Chace**. **John & Jeri Taylor** of Prosper, TX gave a gift in honor of **Tony & Sherryl Taylor**. **Edwina F. White** of Sacramento contributed in honor of **June Gill**.

## In memory

**Deborah & Robert Alberti** of Atascadero donated in memory of **Dorothy P. Millerd**. **Charles Blumle** of Emporium, PA gave a gift in memory of **Judy Blumle**. **Glen Chappell** of Redlands contributed in memory of **Karlene Campo**. **Jayne DeLawter** of Santa Rosa gave a gift in memory of **Ken Koppelman**. **Channing & Kathy Der** of Chapel Hill, NC donated in memory of **Ruth Deich**. **Sharen Gasior** of Irvine gave a gift in memory of **Mandie Whyte**. **Raymond Glienna** of La Canada, **Lillian Pfaff** of Shippensburg, PA, **Donna Roff** of Ventura, and **Eugene Moy & Susan Sing** of Alhambra sent contributions in memory of longtime Mono Lake Volunteer **Dave Hurst**.

**Carmen Haigos** of Seattle, WA donated in memory of **Nico Luiggi**. **Gene Heiman** of Pleasanton gave a gift in memory of **Trudy Heiman**. **Kent Hoff** of Denver, CO contributed in memory of **Marji Hoff**. **H. Randolph Holder** of Incline Village, NV, and **Tom Parrington, John Turner**, and the **Central Sierra Audubon Society** of Sonoma donated in memory of **John Petter**. **Bruce Horn** of Mammoth Lakes gave a gift in memory of **Dr. Richard Horn, MD**. **Joanne Horton** of Eugene, OR contributed in memory of **Lynn Carpenter** and **Bill Walcott**. **Laura Johnson** of Moraga donated in memory of **Pete Johnson**. **Lisa Kadyk**

of San Francisco gave a gift in memory of **Ann Kadyk**.

**Craig Latker** of San Francisco contributed in memory of **Marilyn Goode**. **Alan M. Lawson** of Brea donated in memory of **Jorge Zavaleta**. **Carol Mathews** of Walnut Creek contributed in memory of **Robert, Alice, and Harold Mathews**. **Larry Miller** of El Granada donated in memory of **Dr. Michael Rosen**. **Kathleen Oakes** of Reno, NV gave a gift in memory of **Edward Oakes**. **Jim Oeland** of Medford, OR contributed in memory of **Caroline Erickson**. **Steven Pace** of Steilacoom, WA donated in memory of **Tom Fleming**.

**Pamela Foreman** of Eau Claire, WI, **Donna Pozzi** of Sacramento, **John Rowntree & Mary Schleppegrell Rowntree** of Ann Arbor, MI, **Nancy Skoulphoung** of Lakewood, and **Eva Skuratowicz** of Ashland, OR gave gifts in memory of **Travis Silcox**. **Charlene Rau** of Cerritos contributed in memory of **Frank Neil Rau**. **Ralph Rea** of Laguna Woods donated in memory of **Patti Rea**. **Claudia & Dan Rico** of Pacific Grove contributed in memory of their son **Joe Stapp**. **Georgia Stigall** of Woodside donated in memory of **Consuelo Stigall Evans**. **Nancy Upham** and **Danny & Shawn Louth** of Bishop gave a gift in memory of **John Louth**. **Dr. Charles E. Wheatley III** of Del Mar contributed in memory of **Judith Ann Wheatley**. **Dan Zimmermann** of Wallingford, PA donated in memory of **John & Alice Zimmermann**. ❖

*Leslie Redman is the Committee's Membership Coordinator. She's looking forward to warmer weather, muddy trails, and wildflowers!*



# MONO LAKE COMMITTEE

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ARNA HARP

## Mono Basin Field Seminars

Learn more on pages 17-21.  
Register at [monolake.org/seminars](http://monolake.org/seminars).



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NORA LAMSTON