

Breeding Birds of the Mono Basin



Say's Phoebe

Nora Livingston

May 22–24, 2026 • Nora Livingston

\$310 per person / \$295 for Mono Lake Committee members
enrollment limited to 12 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 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 breeders and observe their behaviors 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. This seminar will involve easy hiking at elevations ranging from 6,400 to 9,600 feet above sea level. We will hike 1–2 miles over the course of each day, mostly on level terrain.

Nora Livingston spent eight years as the Mono Lake Committee's Lead Naturalist Guide. She is now an independent biologist and naturalist, still based in the Lee Vining area. She has spent more than 15 years birding the basin and is an expert on Mono Basin birding locations. Before moving to Lee Vining permanently, she bounced around California for eight years as a field biologist, studying birds on the Channel Islands, the Farallon Islands, and in the Eastern Sierra.

ITINERARY

Friday, May 22, 6:00pm: Meet in the gallery at the Mono Lake Committee Information Center & Bookstore. After introductions, we will view a slideshow presentation that will review basic bird behavior concepts and provide some background on the Mono Basin birds that we will observe in the following days.

Saturday, May 23 at 7:30am: Meet in front of the Mono Lake Committee Information Center & Bookstore. We will carpool to several Mono Basin locations that could include Lee Vining Canyon, County Park, DeChambeau Ponds and Ranch, South Tufa, and a few lesser-known patches. The day's itinerary may vary with bird activity, weather, or the instructor's whims. The field portion of the class will end around 3:30pm. After a late afternoon rest, we will regroup at the Committee gallery at 7:00pm for a one-hour presentation about bird behavior.

Sunday, May 24, 7:30am: We will meet at the Mono Lake Committee and carpool to new birding locations, finishing the day by about 1:30pm to allow folks time to travel home.

ACTIVITY LEVEL: EASY

This seminar's activity level: *easy*. We will be walking one to two miles total each day, over several stops, at "birding pace," which is slow. We will stick to established roads and trails. Birding includes time standing still in the field, some of which may be in the sun without much shade.

WEATHER & ALTITUDE

Temperatures in late spring will likely be warm during the day and drop to chilly at night, with possible windy conditions. The possibility of cold storms exists. Average temperatures in May in Lee Vining are 67°F (max) and 39°F (min).

This seminar will take place at elevations ranging from about 6,000 to 10,000 feet above sea level. It is a good idea to acclimate at the elevation of Lee Vining for at least 24 hours prior to the start of the seminar. Those with a history of heart, ear, or respiratory problems should consult their doctors before attending. Anyone restricted to lower elevations should not enroll.

Remember to bring (and drink!) lots of water because your body loses more water at the higher altitudes of the Mono Basin. Begin drinking extra water as you drive to higher elevation in order to prevent dehydration and headaches. Also, the sun is intense at high elevations, capable of burning even on cool and cloudy days, so be sure to protect yourself thoroughly using sunscreen, sunglasses, and hat.

TO BRING

- binoculars and/or spotting scope
- field guide(s) of your choice (optional)
- notebook and pen/pencil
- sturdy footwear
- appropriate field clothing: hat, sunglasses, warm layers, rain gear
- day pack including **plenty of water**, sunscreen, insect repellent, etc.
- packed lunch and snacks

RECOMMENDED BOOKS

- *Birds of the Sierra Nevada; Their natural history, status, and distribution* by Beedy, Edward C. and Edward R. Pandolfino (2013)
- *The birder's handbook, a field guide to the natural history of North American birds: the essential companion to your identification guide* by Paul R. Ehrlich, David S. Dobkin, and Darryl Wheye (1988)
- *The Sibley guide to bird life & behavior* by David Allen Sibley (2001)
- *Peterson Field Guide to North American Bird Nests* by Casey McFarland (2021)
- *Peterson Field Guide to Bird Sounds of Western North America* by Nathan Pieplow (2019)



Mono Lake Committee Field Seminars

P.O. Box 29 • Lee Vining, CA 93541 • (760) 647-6595 • monolake.org/seminars