

High Country Marvels: Wildlife with an Altitude



A pika peeks out of its hiding spot. Photo by Beth Pratt.

July 31-August 2, 2026 • Beth Pratt

\$360 per person/ \$345 for Mono Lake Committee members
enrollment limited to 10 participants

“Nowhere in California is there more beauty crowded into each square foot,” said pioneering naturalist Elna Bakker about the Sierra Nevada high country, and its sublime grandeur is indeed hard to parallel. Yet the story behind the magnificent scenery is the remarkable wildlife who call these high elevation landscapes home. In this course, conservation leader Beth Pratt will introduce you to some truly inspiring wild animals who survive in one of the world’s most challenging environments. During hikes to elevations of up to 12,000 feet, you will learn about (and hopefully meet!) resilient creatures such as pikas, Yosemite toads, alpine butterflies, fairy shrimp, yellow-bellied marmots, Clark’s nutcrackers and more. In this survey of alpine life, Beth will also share the unique geologic and climatic influences that define the distinctive types of plants and animals who live in the Sierra high country and how climate change is impacting life at high altitudes.

A lifelong advocate for wildlife, Beth Pratt has worked in environmental leadership roles for over thirty years, and in two of the country's largest national parks: Yosemite and Yellowstone. She has spent almost four decades wandering in Yosemite and the Sierra Nevada. Beth leads the #SaveLACougars campaign to build the Wallis Annenberg Wildlife Crossing and her innovative conservation work has been featured by *The New Yorker*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, BBC World Service, CNN, CBS This Morning, the *Los Angeles Times*, *Men's Journal*, *The Guardian*, NPR, AP News, and more. She spent over 30 years researching and writing her newest book, *Yosemite Wildlife: The Wonder of Animal Life in California's Sierra Nevada*, which was published in 2025. Beth makes her home outside of Yosemite, "my north star," with her seven dogs, two cats, and the mountain lions, bears, foxes, frogs, and other wildlife that frequent her backyard.

ITINERARY

Friday, July 31 at 7:00pm: Meet in the gallery at the Mono Lake Committee Information Center & Bookstore in Lee Vining (51365 Highway 395). After introductions, Beth will acquaint participants with the wildlife of the Sierra Nevada high country, and the places they will be visiting on this seminar.

Saturday, August 1 at 8:00am: Meet at the Mono Lake Committee Information Center & Bookstore. We will spend the day traveling to Bennettville in the Inyo National Forest and around the surrounding alpine lakes. The day will end around 5:00pm.

Sunday, August 2 at 8:00am: Meet at the Mono Lake Committee Information Center & Bookstore. We will spend the day traveling to Tioga Lake and hiking part of the Glacier Canyon trail. The day will end around 5:00pm.

ACTIVITY LEVEL: VERY DIFFICULT

This seminar's activity level: *very difficult*. We will be hiking 6-8 miles a day at elevations up to 11,000 feet, most of which will be over uneven terrain, off trail, and will include stepping up and over obstacles. This type of walking requires good balance, some agility, and stamina. Be prepared for short, steep sections of trail with little shade.

WEATHER & ALTITUDE

Temperatures in summer will be hot during the day and chilly at night, with possible windy conditions and afternoon thunderstorms. Temperatures at higher elevations will be cooler. Average temperatures in August in Lee Vining are 83°F (max) and 52°F (min).

This seminar will take place at elevations ranging from about 8,000 to 11,000 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.

MEALS

Please bring a lunch already packed in the morning plus water and snacks to eat during both days.

TO BRING

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| <input type="checkbox"/> warm clothing/layers | <input type="checkbox"/> daypack |
| <input type="checkbox"/> long pants (due to brush) | <input type="checkbox"/> plenty of water |
| <input type="checkbox"/> raincoat, just in case | <input type="checkbox"/> boots or supportive shoes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> hat, sunscreen, and sunglasses | <input type="checkbox"/> packed lunch and snacks |

RECOMMENDED READINGS

- *Yosemite Wildlife: The Wonder of Animal Life in California's Sierra Nevada*, by Beth Pratt
- *Birds of the Sierra Nevada: Their Natural History, Status, and Distribution*, by Edward C. Beedy, and Edward R. Pandolfino
- *Animal Life in the Yosemite: An Account of the Mammals, Birds, Reptiles, and Amphibians in a Cross-Section of the Sierra Nevada*, by Joseph Grinnell and Tracy Irwin Storer. Available online at <https://archive.org/details/animallifeinyose00grin/page/n5/mode/2up>
- *The High Sierra of California*, by Tom Killion and Gary Snyder
- *The High Sierra: A Love Story*, by Kim Stanley Robinson