



the Pelican

Lahontan Audubon Society • P.O. Box 2304 • Reno, Nevada 89505 • www.nevadaudubon.org • 775-324-BIRD

Mission statement: To preserve and improve the remaining habitat of birds and other wildlife, restore historical habitat, and educate the public, with emphasis on children, providing vision to all about our unique Nevada environments.

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2005

vol. 43, no. 1

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*Submissions for the November/
December issue are due October 1,
2005*

MONTHLY MEETINGS

Date: Fourth Tuesday of the month
Time: Social at 6:30 p.m. Program starts at 7 p.m.
Location: South Valleys Library
15650A Wedge Parkway, Reno
Exterior door, west side of building

Directions to South Valleys Library: Take Hwy 395 to the Mt. Rose Hwy. Head west on the Mt. Rose Hwy and take the first right turn onto Wedge Parkway, just past Raley's shopping center. Go about one mile on Wedge Parkway and look for the boldly designed, mustard yellow library on the right.

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER MEETINGS

September 27 -- Jon Wellinghoff -- The Proposed Sempra Coal-Fired Power Plant Near Gerlach

Jon Wellinghoff, representing the Nevada Clean Energy Coalition, will present a slide show that addresses the issues and concerns surrounding the coal-fired power plant proposed for northern Nevada by Sempra Power Company of San Diego. Jon is a specialist in energy and consumer law and was formerly the first Consumer Advocate in Nevada. Among other accomplishments, Jon drafted and lobbied for the successful passage of a law in 2001 that requires Nevada utilities to purchase 15 percent of their energy requirements from renewable energy sources. Recently, he successfully pushed for an amendment to the law in the 2005 legislative session that increases the requirement to twenty percent. Join us to learn about future clean energy initiatives and to get your questions answered about the proposed power plant near Gerlach, Nevada.

October 25 -- Bob Goodman -- After the Prospector

Bob Goodman, long-time member of LAS and a free-lance nature photographer and writer, will take us on a journey to see the various life forms and minerals found in long abandoned mine tunnels of northern Idaho and western Montana.

(continued, page 5, column 3)

FIELD TRIPS

Nancy Bish

775-884-1570
n.bish@att.net

September 10 (Saturday) 7:30 a.m.
Silver Saddle Ranch, Carson City
Trip Leader: Nancy Bish (775) 884-1570, n.bish@att.net

Sponsors: Lahontan Audubon Society and Friends of Silver Saddle Ranch

We will meet in the ranch parking lot at 7:30 a.m. The ranch is located on Carson River Road, off East 5th St. Plan to spend the morning exploring the ranch for birds and learning a little about the ranch history. Habitat at the ranch includes sagebrush, agricultural lands and a riparian corridor adjacent to the Carson River. The variety of habitat allows for a diverse number of bird species to be observed at the ranch. All levels of birders are welcome and beginning birders are encouraged to attend. Please contact Nancy Bish to register or for more information.

September 17 (Saturday) 8 a.m.
Oxbow Park, Reno
Trip Leader: Dave Jickling 848-0069, djickling@charter.net

Meet Dave at the Oxbow Park parking lot for this easy nature trail walk. To get there, drive south on Keystone (from I-80) and turn right on 2nd street after the RR tracks. Take a left onto Dickerson Road and follow it until it ends at the park. This park is a great local hotspot to find fall migrants and to learn about Reno's backyard birds. A great walk for beginner and experienced birders alike.

September 22 (Thursday) 7 a.m.
Annual Pyramid Lake Waterbird Count
Hosted by: The Great Basin Bird Observatory, 323-GBBO (4226), www.gbbo.org

Meet at the old visitor center at the Sutcliffe Marina for the annual count (by boat). Expect to see 16,000-30,000 birds. Fall is a great time to look for rare fall migrants on the lake. Bring binoculars and a scope if you have one.

September 24 (Saturday) 8 a.m.
Lahontan Wetlands, Fallon
Trip Leader: Mike Goddard (775) 423-5128, Mike_Goddard@fws.gov

Meet Mike at the Stillwater National Wildlife Refuge office at 1000 Auction Road, just off Hwy 50 in the center of Fallon (near the Speedway gas station). Birding in the wetlands is always spectacular. Come and see what species are migrating through with Stillwater's refuge manager as your guide. Bring a scope if you can. A bag lunch, water, and extra clothes for unpredictable weather are recommended.

October 8 (Saturday) 8 a.m.
Swan Lake and Lemmon Valley Marsh, North Reno
Trip Leader: Bob Goodman (775) 972-7848, Pandion36@aol.com

Meet Bob (look for his van) at 8 a.m.

at the McDonald's parking lot off the Lemmon Valley exit on Hwy 395 north of Reno. We will carpool the short distance to Lemmon Valley Marsh. Bring a spotting scope if you can and prepare to be out until mid-day. This is a good time to see late fall migrants and winter resident birds on the marsh and wetlands. This is an easy bird walk and birders of all experience are welcome.

October 15 (Saturday) 8:30 a.m.
Taylor Creek, South Lake Tahoe
Trip Leader: Susan Stevenson (530) 577-5394, sssfromslt@sbcglobal.net and Sheryl Ferguson (530) 541-8462, sheryl@etahoe.com

Bring lunch and water. We will meet at the Taylor Creek Visitor Center kiosk at 8:30 a.m. From Reno or Carson City, take Hwy 50 to So. Lake Tahoe. Follow Hwy 50 south and turn right onto 89 (Emerald Bay Rd.) at the "Y" intersection in South Lake Tahoe, shortly after Staples (store). Drive 2.9 miles between Richardson's Resort and Emerald Bay, looking for the U.S. Forest Service Lake Tahoe Visitor Center sign on the right (lake) side of the road. Turn into the road and park in the parking lot. This easy half-day bird walk will follow a nature trail (with handicap access). Since this is a fall trip, added bonuses include looks at the Kokanee Salmon spawning run and gorgeous fall colors. Sue and Sheryl will also point out places of interest for birders who wish to continue afternoon birding on their own.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

The Pelican is the official newsletter of the Lahontan Audubon Society and is published six times annually. Subscriptions are paid for as part of the dues of LAS or the National Audubon Society. LAS welcomes gifts, donations, and bequests in general, or gifts in honor or memory of relatives and friends. Such donations will be used as specified or, if unspecified, will be used to support LAS education and conservation projects. All donations are tax deductible.

WHERE TO WRITE:

Keep conservation to the forefront. Write your elected officials and tell them how you feel:

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400 S. Virginia St. #902
Reno, NV 89501
Reno phone: 686-5750

Senator John Ensign
400 S. Virginia St. #738
Reno, NV 89501
Reno phone: 686-5770

Representative Jim Gibbons
400 S. Virginia St. #502
Reno, NV 89501
Reno phone: 686-5760

Governor Kenny Guinn
Executive Chambers
Capitol Complex
Carson City, NV 89710

IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS PROGRAM

Don McIvor

775-882-2597

dmcivor@audubon.org

Nevada's Important Bird Areas The Sheldon NWR IBA

The National Audubon Society and the Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge have an interesting history together. The refuge's genesis was the result of fund raising and political persuasion spearheaded by Thomas Gilbert Pearson, a past president of the National Audubon Society (then called the National Association of Audubon Societies). For the princely sum of \$7,500, Pearson acquired possession of the 380-acre Last Chance Ranch on December 24, 1927, on behalf of Audubon, and this became the nucleus of the refuge. Pearson then approached Kermit Roosevelt, Secretary of the Boone and Crockett Club, who agreed to join forces with Pearson and Audubon and work collaboratively to acquire through purchase numerous parcels of private land. Nevada was still open to homesteading in those days, and in a motion of support for Pearson and Roosevelt's efforts, President Hoover withdrew from settlement 30,720 acres near and adjacent to the growing refuge. On January 26, 1931, an Executive Order declared the area to be the Charles Sheldon Wild Life Refuge, named after a prominent sportsman who was both a past president of Boone and Crockett and the National Audubon Society. Audubon maintained warden service on the refuge for the first four-and-a-half years of its existence.

The original refuge established in 1931 encompassed just over 34,000 acres. More adjacent lands were set aside in 1936 as the Charles Sheldon Antelope Range, or Game Range, boasting over 540,000 acres. The two areas combined to form what is now the Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge under the administration of the US Fish and Wildlife Service. As the original name intimates, the refuge was established for the improved management of the antelope, which at that time had experienced broad population declines.

Today, the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge system translates into a specific refuge objective for Sheldon—to manage the refuge as a representative area of high-desert habitat for optimum populations of native plants and wildlife. The antelope in Sheldon are doing pretty well, and it is interesting that almost 100 years after its founding, Sheldon's greater mission lies in providing critical habitat for a suite of sagebrush obligates. Not the least of those species is the Greater Sage Grouse, a bird in Pearson's time that was probably still so abundant that reporting its presence would have ranked with pointing out that you saw sagebrush during your Great Basin travels.

Rainfall in the refuge falls on a gradient from west to east, with the first receiving about 13 inches and the latter as little as 6. The dominant land use in the area has long been grazing, and in this challenging environment range quality eventually suffered from



mismanaged grazing. Allotments have been closed and the area has recovered to the extent that it now represents one of the best examples of sagebrush-steppe habitat in the Great Basin. Ongoing studies indicate significant use of the refuge by a range of birds, though sagebrush-steppe is certainly the most extensively represented ecological system and the bird community reflects this fact.

Getting There

The Sheldon NWR is a huge landscape but there are numerous places where a visitor can get acquainted with the avifauna. There are several impoundments along US 140 that are worth exploring, and a drive through this area should include stops at Big Spring Reservoir and Catnip Reservoir. The Virgin Valley Ranch Road and ponds along this route are worth a morning's birding. Cottonwood Creek Canyon is also an excellent destination, though four wheel drive can be essential.

Further Reading

Earnst, S. L., J. Ballard, and D. Dobkin. 2002. Riparian songbird monitoring on Hart Mountain and Sheldon National Wildlife Refuges - 2000-2001 and a comparison to 1991-1993. 32 pp. USGS Forest and Rangeland Ecosystem Science Center, Boise.

Pearson, T. G. 1937. *Adventures in Bird Protection*. D. Appleton-Century Co., New York.

The high desert landscape of the Sheldon NWR IBA is dominated by sagebrush.

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S PERCH:

Looking Back, Looking Forward

We have again prepared the LAS *Annual Report*, in this case covering fiscal year July 1, 2004, through June 30, 2005. The narrative portion of the *Report* was derived from reports prepared by committee chairs and project representatives, references to our Board Minutes, and the occasional rifling through past issues of *The Pelican*. Our Treasurer Dave Straley prepared the thorough financial statement portion of the report. Once more, it seems the chapter was very active and, we believe, effective. See for yourself: The report is posted on our web site, or a hard copy is available by request to me.

We quickly moved from assessing the past year to planning for the forthcoming year at our Planning and Strategy Retreat in July. Officers, Board Trustees, the IBA Director, and Committee Chairmen were asked ahead of time to consider "In your own area(s) of responsibilities, what are your hopes, plans, objectives for the forthcoming year? What is your 'to-do' list?" Everyone was also asked, "For any area or topic, what would you like to see us do – or not do – in this area?" Thus we were armed with some preplanning so that we could maximize our seven hours together (fortified by a quality potluck midway through). Our presentations and discussions ranged from nuts and bolts to more comprehensive topics directly supporting our Mission Statement and the three functions of our chapter, *Birding • Conservation • Education*. Next June 30th, we'll see how we've done.

Along with everything else, this organization gives us the opportunity to meet others who share our interests and efforts. In the January-February

issue of *The Pelican* Connie Douglas brought to our attention the loss of two longtime friends of Lahontan Audubon, Pete Jeffalone of Kings Beach and Pat Young of Yerington. On April 20th Jack Walters of Carson City, another longtime member of LAS, passed away. Jack birded Nevada tirelessly, taking extensive notes the whole time, and was able to complete his two-volume *Bird Stories and Sightings in Nevada*. Dennis Trousdale passed away unexpectedly on July 14th. Through *The Pelican* and the Nevada Birds List Server Dennis shared observations from his productive backyard, his pursuits of rarities and other good birds, and the glimpses he stole from locomotives rolling at 70 miles per hour along the railways in his day job. These events in the cycle of life are always a humbling reminder to live in the present moment, to appreciate the vivid experience of *now*. Some days it seems like birders have a special edge in that regard as witnesses to small, thrilling discoveries, beautiful observations striking in their detail, and simply delightful – occasionally breathtaking – moments fixed for all time in our memories, right alongside special people we have known.

Karen L. Kish

Join the LAS Email List

The LAS Email List sends out reminders of calendar events such as field trips, general meetings, and special events as well as late-developing items. The list is not shared with anyone and is sent out with the preference "do not show addressees." It is used solely for LAS activities and information. To retain the list as a small benefit of membership, current NAS and/or LAS membership status will be verified with the Membership Chair periodically. Email addresses listed on new or renewing local membership forms will be added to the list unless you tell us not to. To be added now please send your name and email address to Karen L. Kish. <klkish@pyramid.net>

DONORS

LAS gratefully acknowledges these donors:

American Avocet \$50-\$99

Diane McAllister

Mountain Bluebird \$20-\$49

Mel DeLong, John and Michele Currie.

CONSERVATION CORNER

LAS Establishes a Conservation Fund!

We know there are a lot of individuals out there, members and supporters of LAS that enjoy supporting conservation efforts, especially when those efforts go toward protecting birds and bird habitat. At our June Board meeting we established a fund that would be used for on the ground projects that benefit birds or their habitat. We will be sponsoring fundraising events (see below) and relying on donations to generate income to this fund. Hopefully, after a few fundraising events we can begin to provide financial support to a variety of on the ground projects. Examples of projects could be habitat restoration like seeding efforts, bank stabilization work, fence removal or fence construction. Other projects might be constructing bird boxes or bird perches. Projects can take place on any of our 39 Important Bird Areas across the state, or perhaps your neighborhood park. Whatever the project, albeit large or small, its primary goal will be to benefit birds and bird habitat. We'll be developing a process soon by which we'll evaluate projects, but for now we'd like to get you thinking about potential projects that you see LAS supporting in the future.

Get ready for Birdathon 2006!

Speaking of fundraisers... It's been a few years since we've held a Birdathon, therefore this coming spring we hope to have a HUGE turnout. What is a Birdathon, you ask? Similar to walkathons and such, you get pledges from friends, family and co-workers (payback for all those Girl Scout cookies you buy), and instead of miles you get pledges based on how many bird species you think you'll see in a day. You can participate on a team or as an individual, choose a day, go out all day and count as many bird species as you can. Collect your hard earned pledge money and then celebrate. The funds raised during this coming Birdathon will be dedicated to the Conservation Fund. We know what great fundraisers and contributors we have in our membership and look forward to our new members participating. Really, there is no more "fun" way to raise money than a Birdathon, and no better way to spend it than by helping out our feathered friends. Consider this a heads up. We'll be providing more information over the next couple of months.

Can't wait to get involved with Birdathon? It takes a few months of planning and we'd love to have your help. Call Ali at 813-3494 for information.

(Meetings--continued from page 1)

This slide show covers a six year study, sponsored in part by National Geographic Magazine, of what happens to these abandoned mines when they have not been disturbed for up to 80 years. Free-form growth of fungi and mineral deposits not to be found in the outside world provide a special beauty that has formed in total darkness.

In the Field Tours

Please check the website www.itftours.com for details.

September 20

Lecture: Discover NV: Central Region (Tonopah)

September 23-25

Field Trip: Discover NV: Central Region (Tonopah)

September 29

Lecture: Birds of Bodega Bay and Pt. Reyes in the Fall

October 7-9

Field Trip: Birds of Bodega Bay and Pt. Reyes in the Fall

October 20

Lecture: Natural History of Death Valley

October 27-30

Field Trip: Natural History of Death Valley

December 19-29 Christmas in Peru!!!
Contact ITF Tours for information.

BIRDS IN TOWN

by Alan Wallace

As spring storms drifted into the searing summer heat, dead, not living, birds were the focal point of in-town birders. Frank Whitman in Austin noticed several dead finches and siskins with what looked like Mormon cricket hind legs sticking out of their mouths. Austinites speculated that the birds were choking on the crickets. More dire, however, was the spring outbreak in northern Nevada of *Trichomoniasis gallinae*, a parasite that produces lesions in the mouth, esophagus, and crop of an infected bird; the bird can't consume food and thus starves. It is not infectious to humans, unlike the very different West Nile virus. The infection is passed to other birds through oral secretions in bird baths, the common watering hole for most yard birds, and in food that drops from the mouth of the infected bird and then is consumed by other birds. The parasite primarily affects birds that feed on the ground, especially **Mourning Doves** and pigeons. However, it can be passed by oral secretions to birds that use hanging feeders by birds, such as **House Finches**, that feed in both places. Raptors that eat infected birds also can acquire the parasite, as can nestlings that are fed by infected parents. Hummingbird feeders apparently are not a problem, given their use only by hummingbirds and other nectar feeders. The Nevada Department of Wildlife strongly recommended that feeders be removed until fall, and that the feeders and ground-feeding areas be cleaned with a 10 percent bleach solution. This, of course, prompted considerable questions and discussions among birders. Some felt that suddenly cutting off the feed-dependent birds was irresponsible since we created the dependency on the feed, whereas others felt that a few months of natural foraging was beneficial to newly hatched offspring. Good cases also were made for landscaping with plants that provide natural food for the birds. The official LAS stance is that people who choose to feed birds should take responsible measures to maintain a healthy environment for the birds. Cleaning feeders and bird baths regularly with a bleach solution is a must, as is putting fresh water in your bird bath every day. Discard old seed and hulls from feeders and on the ground beneath the feeders, and don't put feed on the ground until the fall at least. Natural food is available to most birds into the fall. The bottom line is that this parasite is extremely infectious, and the resulting complications can produce mortality in your yard birds, which, of course, could obviate the whole point of feeding the birds.

Despite all of that, the 110 species of birds that were reported reflected a still-robust bird population. Certainly, the parasite hasn't affected the **Pinyon Jays** on the western outskirts of Reno. Richard Brune provided frequent updates on the breeding cycle of these birds in June and July, which culminated in sightings of a flock of well more than 75 birds. Larry Williams reported a good breeding season in his yard north of Reno, including four fledged **Say's Phoebes** that chose to explore the great indoors via his open-door policy and **Rock Wrens** that selected a barn instead of rocky outcrops as a nest site. Fred Peterson's and Bob Goodman's reports from Swan Lake in Lemmon Valley indicated that the various waterfowl that inhabit that area were very productive this spring as well. Bob also noted **Virginia Rails** leaping to feed on moths that were attracted to tall whitetop blossoms near the lake margins. As usual, the **Burrowing Owl** colony on the outskirts of Carlin produced young by the middle of June, and nesting **Pine Siskins** provided a nice change from the usual **House Sparrows** outside my Elko motel window. Unionville hosted a nice assortment of breeding birds in late June, including at least three **Virginia's Warblers**, and a **Tundra Swan** and several **Sandhill Cranes** were seen on the east and west sides of Carlin. And Linda Hiller found a new way to coax birds into her yard, namely a dead skunk that attracted **Turkey Vultures**.

Rufous Hummingbirds invade Nevada in July after breeding in the northwest. Carol Amos in Fallon provided the first sighting on July 6, but further reports from towns were notably sparse – three appeared Jack's Valley by mid July, a few people in Carson City and Reno had scattered sightings, and none had appeared in Lovelock – but sightings began to pick up at the very end of July. Still, the locally breeding **Black-chinned Hummingbirds** must have been thrilled about the delayed arrivals. In contrast, Melissa Renfro had the usual numbers of **Black-chinned, Broad-tailed, and Rufous Hummingbirds** in Baker as in years past.

Sources of information for this column included **Brian Adams, Elisabeth Ammon, Carol Amos, John Anderson, Nancy Bish, Jessi Brown, Richard Brune, Dick Carlson, Ali Chaney, Tom Dozet, Jim Eidel, Bill Frey, Bob Goodman, Mike Greenhan, Ellis Hammett, Linda Hiller, Nancy Hoffman, Martin Meyers, Fred Peterson, Harold Peterson, Debbie Pontius, Lynn Purcell, Melissa Renfro, Jennifer Rycenga, Melissa Scott, Dennis Trousdale** (sadly, for the last time), **Frank Whitman, Larry Williams**, and me. The current in-town species list now totals 270 species since October 2001. Contributions are welcome, so send a postcard/note to 1050 Sumac St., Reno, NV 89509 or an email to wallacealan@sbcglobal.net, or continue to post items on the Nevada bird list-serve. The deadline for the next column is **September 25**. Good birding!

MEMBERSHIP/DONATION FORM

Lahontan Audubon Society Membership: All funds remain in the community. Members receive *The Pelican* newsletter and may elect to receive e-mail activities notices. Please complete and mail this form with payment.

1. Individual/Family - \$20/year Full Time Student/Senior (over 62) - \$15/year
2. Renewal New Membership

Donations: Please select level:

- Ruby-crowned Kinglet - \$10 Mountain Bluebird - \$20 American Avocet - \$50
 American White Pelican - \$100 Golden Eagle - \$500 or more

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September/October 2005 issue

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LAS SALES FORM

	Price	Postage	TOTAL
<i>A Birding Guide to Reno and Beyond</i> Published by Lahontan Audubon Society, 2000	\$10	\$1.50	_____
<i>Nevada Birding Map</i> (price includes postage) Published by Lahontan Audubon Society, 2004	\$ 4		_____
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Jane Burnham, LAS Sales, 8071 Big River Drive, Reno, NV 89506

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Vice President	Alan Gubanich	aag@scs.unr.edu	857-0191
Treasurer	Dave Straley	dstraley@nvcbell.net	832-9222
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Seat #4 to 2008	Jim Lytle	lytleja@sbcglobal.net	577-9641
Seat #5 to 2006	Ray Nelson	raynloa@powernet.net	849-0312
Seat #6 to 2007	Nancy Bish	n.bish@att.net	884-1570
Seat #7 to 2007	Bonnie Wagner	bwagner@hyattclassic.com	829-6311

IBA

Director	Don McIvor	dmcivor@audubon.org	882-2597
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COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Activity/Program	Alan Gubanich	aag@scs.unr.edu	857-0191
Birding Classes	Bob Goodman	pandion36@aol.com	972-7848
Communications	Karen Kish	klkish@pyramid.net	841-1180
Conservation	Ali Chaney	achaney@heritage.nv.gov	813-3494
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Membership	Judy Kretzer	judykretzer@yahoo.com	826-6891
Volunteers	Bonnie Wagner	bwagner@hyattclassic.com	829-6311

PUBLICATION AND INFORMATION

<i>The Pelican</i> Editor	Mike Greenan	mike@basicallywild.com	322-0707
<i>The Pelican</i> Distribution	Connie Douglas	cdouglas@775.net	425-1305
"Birds in Town"	Alan Wallace	wallacealan@sbcglobal.net	786-5755
LAS Info Line	Jim Lytle		324-BIRD
Web Master	Jim Lytle	lytleja@sbcglobal.net	577-9641