

# 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.

## JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2006

vol. 43, no. 3

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*Submissions for the March/April issue are due February 1, 2006*

### 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.

#### January 24 -- Gary Scopptone -- Cui-ui and Pelicans

Gary Scopptone, Section Chief of the Reno Field Station of the Western Fisheries Research Center of the U.S. Geological Survey, will discuss Cui-ui, a fish endemic to Pyramid Lake and a critical food source for Anaho Island's large nesting colony of American White Pelicans. Because it was believed that they were too large for these birds to eat, cui-ui had been previously dismissed as an important pelican food item. Scopptone's office found that pelicans feed on all sizes of cui-ui, and that they took tens of thousands to the nesting colony over several years. This study suggests that preservation of a large and healthy cui-ui population is of paramount importance to Anaho Island's nesting colony of American White Pelicans.

#### February 28 -- Donna Hagerman -- Blazing Your Own Bluebird Trail

Many bluebirds in the Truckee Meadows were unable to raise young successfully this summer due to the lack of suitable nesting sites. Donna Hagerman has maintained 60 to 176 boxes on her bluebird trails around the Reno area for the past 22 years, and at least 6,000 bluebirds have fledged from those boxes. She will discuss the basics of building nest boxes, proper placement of boxes, monitoring techniques, predator guards and other tips for setting up and maintaining a successful bluebird trail. Donna will illustrate her talk with slides and will have bluebird box plans available, along with other materials to show.

# FIELD TRIPS

Nancy Bish

775-884-1570

n.bish@att.net

Field trips are free to Audubon members and non-members. Birders of all skills levels are encouraged to participate. Trips are subject to change or cancellation, so we strongly encourage all interested participants to pre-register with field trip leaders. Pre-registration provides leaders with an idea of the number of participants to expect and contact information so the leaders can reach you in the event of trip changes or cancellations. Remember to dress for the weather and bring something to eat and drink.

For information on field trips added after this publication please view the Lahontan Audubon Society web site at ([www.nevadaaudubong.org](http://www.nevadaaudubong.org)).

## **Saturday, Jan. 14 (Alternate bad weather day: Saturday, Jan. 21)**

### **Annual Dipper Day, Reno**

**Trip Leader: Jim Eidel, 841-6543**

**Time: 8 a.m.**

**Place: Rancho San Rafael parking lot at the Wilbur D. May Arboretum (closest to Sierra St. entrance)**

This trip offers a unique opportunity to hear and observe the elusive but vocal American Dipper. You will be introduced to a bird species specialized in living a semiaquatic life in swift mountain streams and rivers. From their nictitating membrane (third eyelid), large oil glands, dense plumage and unique underwater foraging techniques this bird species is truly a "water ouzel." The trip will also offer the opportunity to observe other bird species residing along the Truckee River corridor.

## **Sunday, January 22 (Alternate snow day: Sunday, January 29)**

### **Taylor Creek and Pope Beach, South Lake Tahoe**

**Trip Leaders: Sue Stevenson, sssfromslt@sbcglobal.net, (530)**

**577-5394 and Sheryl Ferguson, sheryl@etahoe.com, (530) 541-8462**

**Time: 10:30 a.m.**

**Directions: From Carson City, take U.S. 50 West over Spooner Summit to Lake Tahoe. Travel past the casinos and the Lake until you reach the "Y" (Intersection of Hwy 50) and Emerald Bay Road. (SR 89 North). Turn right onto Emerald Bay Road. and drive about 2.5 miles to Camp Richardson. The Sports Equipment Rental Office is on the left across the street from Camp Richardson's Lodge.**

Join us for an "unpredictable" winter adventure of snowshoeing or cross-country skiing. Meet at Camp Richardson at 10:30a.m. (equipment can be rented there). There may be a \$5 snow parking fee. The plan is to go to Taylor Creek in the morning and see if we can find the local winter flocks and woodpeckers, plus a few "big bonus birds" if they're around. We break for lunch at a local cafe on Emerald Bay Road (lunch and bathrooms) and then head out to Pope Beach if anyone wants to keep birding.

## **Saturday, February 4**

### **Sixth Annual Riverview Park Winter Bird Trip, Carson City**

**Trip Leader: Nancy Bish, (775) 884-1570 or n.bish@att.net**

**Time: 9 a.m.**

**Place: Riverview Park, east end of East Fifth St., adjacent to the Carson River**

We will explore wetland, sagebrush and riparian habitats, on a one-mile easy loop trail. The total number of species observed during the past five years is 35. Some of our more memorable species included a large flock (200+) of Pinyon Jays, Belted Kingfisher, Black-crowned Night-Heron, Cedar Waxwing and a close-up view of a Bald Eagle.

Please contact Nancy if you plan to attend, so she can plan for additional trip leaders accordingly.

## **Saturday, February 18**

### **The Great Reno Caper**

**Trip Leader: Dennis Serdehely, (775) 575-0319 or**

**birders@gbis.com**

**Time: 8 a.m.**

**Place: Main Rancho San Rafael parking lot at the Wilbur D. May Arboretum (closest to the N. Sierra St. entrance)**

Back by popular demand...The Great Reno Caper! This trip is confined to the Reno City Limits and includes such birding hot spots as Rancho San Rafael Park, Oxbow Nature Study Area, Virginia Lake, Rosewood Estates and others.

**(Field trip reports are on page 4)**

## **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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Reno phone: 686-5750

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Reno, NV 89501  
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Governor Kenny Guinn  
Executive Chambers  
Capitol Complex  
Carson City, NV 89710

# IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS PROGRAM

Don McIvor

775-882-2597

dmcivor@audubon.org

## *Important Bird Areas of Nevada* Hits the Stores!

On behalf of the Lahontan Audubon Society, BirdLife International, the National Audubon Society, and all of the Nevada partners that brought us to this point, I am pleased to announce the publication of *Important Bird Areas of Nevada*. The book is the culmination of the first four years of the Nevada IBA Program and formalizes the recognition of 38 IBAs found across our state. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – Nevada Fish and Wildlife Office, and the Rio Tinto – BirdLife International Programme and the Kennecott Rawhide Mine generously underwrote the publication of the book.

The book offers an accessible package of information in a readable and companionable voice. First and foremost, the IBA Program is a conservation initiative, and so the book describes the importance of each of these landscapes to Nevada's birds. This includes a description of the salient features of the IBAs, why the sites were selected, and the conservation challenges facing each area.

With a state this vast and with many remote regions, just getting birders on the ground at some IBAs can be a challenge. The first step in getting a wider audience to appreciate the importance of IBAs is to bring potential stakeholders

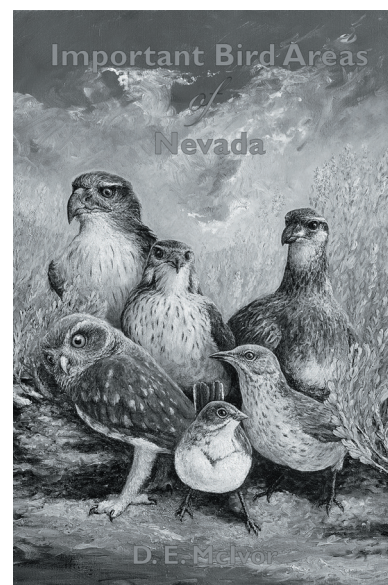
to a site to experience what is so special about that landscape. The descriptive content of *Important Bird Areas of Nevada* builds this audience and encourages involvement. The book also includes information about visiting each site simply for the act of enjoying the locale and, of course, birding.

In the years that I have been writing this column I have tried to convey the larger context of the IBA Program. It has always been a challenge to condense all that needs to be said into a few hundred words every couple of months; this task is better suited for the pages of a book. And so the book also offers chapters discussing the origins of the international and national IBA

programs, as well as the genesis of the Nevada IBA Program.

Nevada photographers Bob Goodman and Dick Barrett supplemented my own photographs, and between us we have provided more than 50 color illustrations. One of Ray Nelson's oil paintings, commissioned for the book, graces the cover. Thirty-nine maps orient the reader's journey.

*Important Bird Areas of Nevada* is a book for you, your friends, and all the birders, citizen scientists, conservationists, land managers, legislators, and policy makers you know!



*Important Bird Areas of Nevada*, by D. E. McIvor. Lahontan Audubon Society, publisher. 160 pages, maps, color illustrations. Available through *The Pelican* (pg. 7), LAS web site at [www.nevadaaudubon.org](http://www.nevadaaudubon.org), Amazon.com, Sundance Bookstore (Reno), Barnes & Noble, and other fine book sellers.

# FROM THE PRESIDENT'S PERCH:

## What Winter Brings

Happy 2006 to all of our members. A lot goes on in the birding world in winter. It's an exciting time in its own right, but this year for LAS, it is especially so.

**Important Bird Areas of Nevada** by Don McIvor, our Director of Bird Conservation, was published in December. We are so very proud of this handsome and substantive work! The book is a product of the first four years' development of the Nevada Important Bird Areas Program. Few if any of us will ever know and appreciate the extent of Don's efforts to guide us into a quality program and to author, design, and illustrate – in large measure through his own photography – *Important Bird Areas of Nevada*.

To top things off, in celebration and recognition of the book's publication, we hope to have John Cecil, National Audubon's Director of Bird Conservation, and Jonathan Stacey, of U.K.-based BirdLife International, joining Don in presentations dedicated to Nevada's Important Bird Areas during the Spring Wings Birding Festival in May. Nice, very nice.

I hope a number of you will have participated in Audubon's Christmas Bird Count. In Ali Chaney's "Conservation Corner" you can learn more about what happens with the data gathered. The next fun citizen science event is **The Great Backyard Bird Count** (GBBC), organized by Cornell University Laboratory of Ornithology and National

Audubon Society, February 17 - 20. Count birds in your backyard, local park, or other natural area at least 15 minutes on one or all four count days and submit your data by internet checklist. See <http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc>. If you do not have internet access or need help, visit Wild Birds Unlimited, major sponsor of the event, at 299 East Plumb Lane (Shoppers Square) in Reno, telephone 322-9453.

Well, I could go on about the many winter bird activities, indoors and out, but I need to check on a flock of 23 Cedar Waxwings hunkered down in my backyard.

– *Karen L. Kish*

## DONORS

LAS gratefully acknowledges these donors:

**Ruby-crowned Kinglet \$10**  
Mary Semski

**Mountain Bluebird \$20**  
Betty Hartman

**Rufous Hummingbird \$45**  
John Klein and Mark Johnson

**American Avocet \$50**  
James Thompson  
Carole Terry

## Field Trip Reports

### Swan Lake, Reno

October 8, 2005

Bob Goodman led six intrepid birders first to the Sewer Ponds, then to Swan Lake, and finally to a small pond in the Sky Vista housing development which produced an amazing array of birds, including numerous ducks, the Loggerhead Shrike, Common Yellowthroat, Yellow-headed Blackbird, Sora, Song Sparrow, Ruby-crowned Kinglet and Northern Harrier.

The Sky Vista Pond was a real surprise, a small pond in the middle of a housing development with bulrushes, willows, Russian olive, and various other plants and surrounded by relatively natural upland open space with walking paths. A total of 19 species were observed here, the most exciting being when a female Northern Harrier went after one of five Wilson's Snipes foraging along the muddy shore. It was a glorious display of aerial acrobatics, in spite of the fact that she missed the snipe.

–*Mary Jo Elpers*

### Taylor Creek, South Lake Tahoe

October 15, 2005

**Trip Leaders: Susan Stevenson and Sheryl Ferguson**

We woke on Saturday morning to rain and snow, but the sun broke through, lighting the aspen brilliantly against a background of clouds rising and mountains freshly dusted with snow...a breathtaking sight.

An immature Bald Eagle perched in a bare tree at the mouth of the creek, while Great Blue Herons decorated a cottonwood and Black-crowned Night-Herons were hunkered down in the willows. An immature Northern Harrier flew low, flashing its rufous breast on each turn. Ducks patrolled the creek, while Stellar's Jays, ravens, nuthatches and a kingfisher kept up a constant chatter. The larger aspen told stories of nighttime beaver activity and bear ascents.

At Pope Beach a Cooper's Hawk flushed a noisy flock of Killdeer and kept the large flock of American Pipits on alert. The Cooper's fanned its streaked tail as it soared and scanned these nervous flocks of prey. Autumn at its best.

–*Susan Stevenson*

# CONSERVATION CORNER

## Christmas Bird Count Data

The birds have all been counted, the potlucks are over, and the stories have circulated. So goes the 106th Christmas Bird Count (CBC). Our fearless citizen scientists braved the elements for one long day in search of every bird they could find in an effort to contribute valuable data to the oldest and largest citizen science program in the country. So, now what?

To put the magnitude of the CBC program into perspective, here are the statistics from last year's CBC (December 2004-January 2005): 56,623 observers participated (this includes Canada, United States, the Caribbean Islands, Latin America, and the Pacific Islands), breaking a previous record by 500. 2,022 count circles were completed (also a record) and a grand total of 69,901,741 birds were counted.

In the summary report for the 105th CBC, Gregory Butcher, Daniel Niven, and John Sauer explain the value of the data: "Conservation activities require sources of information that can be used to develop population and habitat management strategies on both wintering and breeding grounds. CBC data from the early winter season provide a unique view of the winter distribution and population dynamics of many species, and complement and enhance the information from surveys such as the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) that are conducted during the early summer. Comparing results from these surveys is the first step in the development of procedures that jointly use the information from the surveys in conservation."

The utility in the CBC data is in the long-term information it provides

and the geographic area that it covers. Often, CBC data are the only data available for many bird species. Combining information from the Christmas Bird Count with other monitoring efforts like the Breeding Bird Surveys, biologists can analyze the data and determine population trends. Butcher and his colleagues analyzed CBC and BBS data for 35 water bird species frequently found on these surveys. Over a forty-year time frame, they found some species increased on both the CBC and the BBS, such as Canada Goose, Great Blue Heron, Bald Eagle, Hooded Merganser, Ring-necked Duck, Gadwall, Wood Duck, Double-crested Cormorant, Black-crowned Night-Heron, Great Egret, and Osprey. This may be a result of wet years or wetland conservation programs such as the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA). These surveys also showed that Northern Pintail, Herring Gull, and American Bittern are declining significantly along with negative trends for Killdeer, Lesser Scaup, Wilson's Snipe, American Coot, and Canvasback. Once biologists can determine increasing or decreasing trends of bird species, they can then put that information into practical land use planning efforts toward critical habitat protection and enhancement.

Audubon's web site lists almost 300 journal articles that have in some way used CBC data. This represents only those articles citing the use of CBC data and doesn't account for the many potential situations where the data are used and not reported. The CBC represents a huge contribution to research and conservation of bird species. And, it is only made

possible as a result of the efforts by concerned individuals. Well done, bird counters. Keep up the great work!

## Wetland Issues at Butler Ranch

LAS submitted comments to the Reno City Council on November 30 opposing an amendment to the Master Plan for the Butler Ranch North property south of Mira Loma Drive in southeast Reno. This property holds some of the last remaining wetlands in the Truckee Meadows, is habitat to a variety of bird species and is often frequented by a number of our members as a local birding destination. On December 1, more than 500 area residents attended the council meeting to voice their opposition to a project that would result in harmful impacts to the area, including loss of wildlife habitat, increased potential for flooding and increased traffic near an elementary school and Mira Loma Park.

The city council voted 6-1 to approve the project. LAS is not against development, but when development destroys wetland habitat, we need to question the decisions being made by our representatives. Wetlands are vastly under-represented and over-exploited in the Truckee Meadows. These are natural systems that protect us from flooding, help with water quality and provide habitat for wildlife. There are better places to build homes. Although successes may be few, LAS will continue to encourage our local and state officials to protect our natural resources.

—Ali Chaney

# BIRDS IN TOWN

by Alan Wallace

Have you ever gone through the list of birds that you've seen over the years and thought about what was going on in your life when you saw each of them? Do some birds in your yard or nearby pond or woods bring back more vivid memories than others? First arrivals in the fall seem to have that effect on people, and many of us seem to have a favorite first-arriving bird, triggered perhaps by some fond memory in which that bird played a small but important role. Here in northern Nevada, **White-crowned Sparrows** seem to be near the top of the list, based both on the number and tone of the reports. **Hooded Mergansers**, **Spotted Towhees**, **Cedar Waxwings**, **Dark-eyed Juncos**, and **Buffleheads** are up there as well. But I'm sure that there were many unreported first sightings that, for whatever reason, stirred something in the autumnal memory pots.

By the end of November, the newly arrived birds had settled into the winter weather, which itself was late in arriving. A few **Snow**, **Greater White-fronted**, and **Cackling Geese** mixed with the omnipresent **Canada Geese**, and identification of the various Canada/Cackling species and subspecies remained a dilemma for even our best birders. One **Ross's Goose** appeared at Swan Lake in northern Reno in early November, roughly at the same time that tens of thousands of them arrived at the wildlife refuges in the upper Sacramento Valley, and the first **Tundra Swans** returned to their namesake lake in mid November. In the duck department, a male **Eurasian Wigeon** returned for the sixth (!) year to the second-hole pond at the Lakeridge Golf Course in Reno. Crescent patches on the cheeks of a few goldeneyes indicated the return of **Barrow's Goldeneyes**, and always-gorgeous **Wood Ducks** skulked beneath overhanging brush along the Truckee River and joined **Ring-necked Ducks** on a few small ponds. Admirably sharp-eyed birders, undaunted (or unglazed) by a sea of **California** and **Ring-billed Gulls**, found an adult male **Mew Gull** at Swan Lake.

The little land birds poked around the now-denuded shrubs and trees in towns. Juncos, **Spotted Towhees**, and **White-crowned Sparrows**, joined by a few **White-throated Sparrows**, scratched away on the ground, and **Yellow-rumped Warblers** returned to become one of the most common (certainly the most visibly active) birds in the trees. Oddly, only three **Golden-crowned Sparrows** were reported by the end of November, although they usually return in small but visible numbers by early October. Thanks to the robust acorn crop this fall, the **Western Scrub-Jays** went moderately nuts (pardon the pun), noisily collecting and stashing the harvest for the winter, yet no **Acorn Woodpecker** appeared to share the bounty. The **Cooper's** and **Sharp-shinned Hawks** also partook of the avian cornucopia, nailing **Mourning Doves**, **California Quail**, and various smaller birds at a steady pace, and even a **Peregrine Falcon** appeared at Virginia Lake in Reno. Most of the hummingbirds left by early October, although three hardy **Anna's Hummingbirds** were still coming to Kathy and Ed Oakes' west-Reno feeder (which they thaw out every morning) in late November.

Owls garnered some attention in October and November. Fred Peterson, tipped off by an agitated flock of **Yellow-rumped Warblers**, **Ruby-crowned Kinglets**, and **Bewick's Wrens**, found a **Northern Saw-whet Owl** at Rancho San Rafael in Reno. **Great Horned Owls** scoped out several neighborhoods, and dueling hoots by the male (deeper hoot) and female (higher hoot) in my back yard in late November suggested the early formation of a breeding pair. But the best owl was the **Flammulated Owl** that was seen and photographed in September in Reno. As reported by Martin Meyers, owl experts examined the photos and concluded that the amount of red in the breast streaking was consistent with Flammulated Owls in Mexico and quite distinct from the population north of Mexico. So what was it doing up here?

For those who are wondering if it's safe to feed wild birds again, it is. According to the Nevada Department of Wildlife, birds killed by the parasite have not been reported for some time, and the parasite apparently dies off as the temperature drops. Still, everyone should clean their feeders and bird baths regularly with a weak bleach solution and clean up the mess of shells and whatnot in the feeding areas.

One hundred and thirteen species were reported from northern Nevada towns in October and November. Sources of information for this column included **Nancy Bish**, **Richard Brune**, **Pat Devereux**, **Tom Dozet**, **Mary Jo Elpers**, **Clare Engeseth**, **Dennis Ghiglieri**, **Bob Goodman**, **Linda Hiller**, **Jacque Lowery**, **Sue Anne Marshall**, **Martin Meyers**, **Don Molde**, **Kathy and Ed Oakes**, **Fred Peterson**, **Harold Peterson**, **Judy Phoenix**, **Rose Strickland**, **Jane Thompson**, **Greg Scyphers**, **Dennis Serdehely**, **Diane Wong**, **John Woodyard**, and me. 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 **January 25**. Happy New Year and good birding in 2006!

# LAS 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  
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January/February 2006 issue

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<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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