



the Pelican

Lahontan Audubon Society • P.O. Box 2304 • Reno, Nevada 89505 • www.nevadaaudubon.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.

**MARCH/APRIL
2006**

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Membership

*Submissions for the May/June issue
are due April 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.

March 28 -- Marty Swartz -- Proposed Gerlach Sempra Power Plant

In September we heard the concerns of the Nevada Clean Energy Coalition about the proposed power plant; this evening we will hear Sempra's point of view. Marty Swartz is director of project development for Sempra Generation, the subsidiary of Sempra Energy that develops, acquires, operates and maintains power plants and energy infrastructure. He is responsible for development of the proposed Granite Fox Power project, a \$2 billion, 1,250 megawatt coal-fired generating station capable of producing power for as many as one million electric customers in Northern Nevada, Pacific Northwest and California. Join us for an informative presentation and an opportunity to voice any questions you have about this project.

April 25 -- Bob Goodman -- An Update on Swan Lake

Bob Goodman, Chair of the Swan Lake Committee, will give a slide show to update us on the happenings at Swan Lake Nature Study Area north of Reno. His talk will include aspects of Swan Lake's wildlife, plants, interpretative area, and ideas for the future. The area has been designated one of Nevada's Important Bird Areas, so images of some of the species that helped bring this about will be shown. The variety of landscapes, colors and textures that Bob will present will be an important aspect of the environmental education programs planned for the area.

(Meetings continued on page 3)

FIELD TRIPS

Nancy Bish

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

Field trips are free to Audubon members and non-members. Birders of all skill 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.nevadaudubong.org).

Saturday, March 11
Sage Grouse Lek or Mystery Bird Tour
Trip Leaders: Alan Gubanich (775) 857-0191 or aag@unr.nevada.edu
Jim Lytle (775) 577-9641 or lytleja@sbcglobal.net
(and maybe the guy that knows the guy....)

Contact trip leader for time and place
There are several Sage Grouse leks in the greater Reno/Carson City area, but only a few of them are accessible to the public. Jack Walters used to lead a Sage Grouse trip to a lek in a canyon above Smith Valley (southeast of Carson Valley). We are in the process of locating and trying to gain access to that Lek for this trip. As of the deadline for the Pelican's March-April edition, the coordination for this trip was still in progress. We are looking for "the guy that knows the guy who has

access." Hopefully we will have things worked in plenty of time for this trip. Give either of us a call towards the end of February to see if our PI work paid off. Worst case, we'll take you on a mystery birding tour, but bird we will! Boy, we miss Jack.....

Sunday, March 12
Truckee River Trail
Trip Leaders: Rose Strickland and Dennis Ghiglieri at (775) 329-6118
Contact trip leader for time and place
Take a long hike across the Truckee Meadows, from near Idlewild Park through downtown Reno to Cottonwood Park in Sparks to see the birds along the paved Truckee River trail. Dippers, Goldeneyes, Kingfishers, Sparrows and Towhees skulking along the riverbank often delight river walkers. A car shuttle is required, so call early to sign up for the outing.

Saturday, March 18
Schaffer Mountain/Honey Lake Lek
Dave Arsenault: (530) 258-9137, David03@aviancenter.com
Contact trip leader for time and place
This is a great chance to observe male Greater Sage-grouse perform to attract females onto their lekking grounds. This tour also includes a trip to Schaffer Mountain where a search for forest bird species will ensue. Please contact Dave directly or check the LAS web site for upcoming details on this trip.

Saturday, March 25
Sierra Valley
Dave Arsenault: (530) 258-9137, David03@aviancenter.com
Time: Call trip leader
Meet: Parking lot on the northeast corner of Oddie and Silverado, two blocks east of Hwy 395 (Old Montgomery Ward's) in Sparks
This high valley is prime wintering range for many species of raptors including Red-tailed, Rough-legged and Ferruginous Hawks. Bald Eagles also winter there. Bring a scope if you have one. Please contact Dave for a meeting location in Sierraville and trip time or check our website for additional details on this trip.

Saturday, April 1
Susanville Sage-grouse Lek and Honey Lake
Trip Leader: Dave Jickling, 329-8959
Time: 4:30 a.m.
Place: To carpool, meet at the parking lot on the northeast corner of Oddie and Silverado, two blocks east of Hwy 395 in Sparks (Old Montgomery Ward's) in Sparks
This is a second chance to make the trip to Honey Lake if you missed it earlier. Observe male greater sage-grouse perform to attract females onto their lekking grounds. Includes a visit to Honey Lake wetlands with good potential for numerous waterfowl and raptor species.
(Field Trips continued on page 3)

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

LAS Field Trips and Meetings

(Field Trips, continued from page 2)

Depending upon road conditions, only four-wheel drive or high clearance vehicles will be able to drive to the lek. Pack a lunch and bring money for breakfast at the 7 Acres Cafe.

Saturday, April 8

McCarran Ranch (Nature Conservancy), Truckee River
Trip Leader: Diane Wong (775) 287-5118 (cell), di_an@jun.com

Time: 7:30 a.m.

Directions: Meet Diane at 7:30 a.m. at McCarran Ranch, located off the Waltham Way exit on I-80 East, about 15 minutes east of Reno. Once on the exit, drive westward along the road that parallels the freeway (do not drive towards the warehouses), and cross over the railroad tracks (STOP and look for trains!). Park by the Shamrock (white house) just across the tracks.

Birding the ranch should provide a good opportunity to see early spring riparian migrants. Views of the new wetland restoration project may also be possible.

Saturday, April 15

Swan Lake

Trip Leaders: Bob Goodman, (775) 972-7848 or Pandion36@aol.com

Time: 8:30 a.m.

Place: McDonald's parking lot off the Lemmon Valley exit on Hwy 395 north of Reno

Meet Bob (look for his van) to 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 early spring migrants and winter resident birds on the marsh and wetlands. This is an easy bird walk and birders of all experience are welcome.

Saturday, May 6

Annual Swan Lake Cleanup

Trip Leaders: Bob Goodman, (775)

972-7848 or Pandion36@aol.com

Time: 8:30 a.m.

Place: McDonald's parking lot off the Lemmon Valley exit on Hwy 395 north of Reno

This is not an actual field trip but a chance to make the area better to visit. If you have waterproof boots, all the better, as some may be working in the water and soft mud. Others will be high and dry.

(Meetings, continued from page 1)

May 23 -- Ray Nelson -- "Birding Through the Eyes of an Artist"

Our former artist-in-residence, Ray Nelson, returns to Reno to talk about the eccentricities an artist brings to the birding experience. Ray's paintings, illustrations and cartoons regularly appear in *Birding* magazine, the periodical *Winging It* and Great Basin Bird Observatory publications. As an extra treat that evening, Ray will be the featured artist at the South Valleys Library. There will be a reception at 5 p.m. in his honor and at 6 p.m. Ray will give a slide presentation of his work and discuss the techniques and philosophy that informs his art. Ray's paintings will be on display in the library gallery from the end of April through the beginning of July. After Ray's slide show the Audubon Society will have its usual social half-hour, followed by Ray's talk. You are encouraged to attend both the reception and the Audubon meeting that evening. Join us to welcome back an old friend and hard-working former LAS board member.

Field Trip Report

Annual Dipper Day

January 21

Twenty of us had one of the best annual dipper trips ever. We started with Tom Stille and had good scope looks at a single American Dipper feeding on the Truckee at Mayberry Park followed by birding in Tom's yard and from his deck.

Then more than half of us drove to the Donner Party State Park and birded in the snow along the creek behind the visitor center. With the help of Steve Ting we "cornered" a dipper and watched it feed fairly close. It walked in shallow water looking beneath the surface and then dove. With considerable wing action it caught a silver minnow 3 inches long! The literature documents feeding on fish "fry" but this was a minnow, hard for it to hold. It did hold it and beat it incessantly on a rock and a piece of wood at the shore, often dropping it. Sort of external mastication. Finally the forward 1/3 of the fish broke off and was swallowed with difficulty. Steve observed it swallow the remaining portion and took a number of pictures, which he plans to post.

The literature I have seen does not refer to a dipper eating such a large fish and even refers to the remains of a dipper in the gut of a rainbow trout caught in Hunter Creek. Compare in your mind the size of the minnow and a dipper's beak. It was exciting to say the least. It was a lovely day. Thanks, Tom!

What the LAS group and Steve Ting documented at Donner Creek was tool use by another bird species...an important behavioral observation. The use of a rock to kill the minnow the American Dipper caught was the use of a tool. I have not seen this behavior described in dipper literature. We will have to make an exhaustive search, however.

Partial Bird List:

Common Merganser, Common Goldeneye, Red-tailed Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, Osprey, Mourning Dove, Black-billed Magpie, Common Raven, Belted Kingfisher, Steller's Jay, Scrub Jay, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Bewick's Wren, American Robin, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Oregon Junco, White-crowned Sparrow, Golden-crowned Sparrow, Song Sparrow, House Finch, Lesser Goldfinch, Spotted Towhee, and Brewer's Blackbird.

-- Jim Eidel

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S PERCH:

Goodbye, Hello, and Did You Know?

Ray Nelson and Loa Semrau recently left our area for Bellingham, Washington. Ray served as Board Trustee beginning in 1998 and during that time he held a variety of positions including President, Treasurer, and Education Chair. He volunteered for just about every activity that came along. He was also our "artist in residence" as well as the creator of our chapter logo. Loa served as Pelican editor and Hospitality Chair. She, too, helped out in a variety of activities. At our January General Meeting we held a modest farewell for Ray and Loa, including a marvelous chocolate cake and presentation of a "Washington Survival Kit." While their move is a great loss for us, it is a very nice opportunity for them. We wish them well. There are not sufficient words to thank them for their considerable contributions to this chapter and to birding in northern Nevada.

Towards the end of 2005, a nifty thing happened. When we put out the call for a new Recording Secretary, it was answered! Dee Austin asked a number of thoughtful questions, attended our November Board meeting, and volunteered to become Recording Secretary. A Reno native, Dee recently retired after 30 years with Washoe County Library. She has three children and one adopted grandchild. Dee and husband Dave, who seem to be having altogether too much fun, describe themselves as photographers, artists, wine makers, explorers, history buffs, readers, and travelers. Last year's Spring Wings Birding Festival introduced the Austins to birding and LAS. They were later properly "baptized" into

birding by canoe, with Bob Goodman and Jim Lytle officiating. Thank you, Dee and Dave, for becoming involved with our merry band.

Ali Chaney recently brought to our attention a new book by child advocacy expert Richard Louv, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder* (Algonquin Press, 2005; paperback March 2006). According to a review by Jeanne Hamming in *Scientific American*, "Louv's idea is not new. Theodore Roosevelt saw a prophylactic dose of nature as a counter to mounting urban malaise in the early 20th century, and others since have expanded on the theme. What Louv adds is a focus on the restorative qualities of nature for children." As Ali commented, "For Lahontan Audubon members, this education [exposure to nature] is a key element to our mission [This book] provides us opportunity to reflect on what we in LAS continue to strive to do."

– Karen L. Kish

DONORS

LAS gratefully acknowledges our donors:

American White Pelican (\$100)
Celia Evans

Education Committee: The Kids Need You

This spring LAS hopes to continue an important project initiated by Pam Straley and carried forward by Ray Nelson, birding and natural history field trips at Washoe Lake Mitigation Ponds for groups of Washoe County school children and their teachers on select weekdays 10 a.m. to noon April through early June. Volunteers for any or all field trips are needed! You don't need to be a birding or natural history expert, just a willing and enthusiastic worker. You'll quickly realize what a difference you can make for many of these bright young kids. Please contact Education Chair Alan Gubanich at 857-0191 or aag@unr.nevada.edu.

Kestrel Study Project: You Can Help

Due to concerns about potential decreases in breeding American Kestrel numbers in western states, the Raptor Ecology Lab of UNR is initiating a program to monitor kestrel nest boxes in the greater Reno area. The lab is searching for volunteers for the following elements of the study: construct and place nest boxes, monitor nest content, help band adults and nestlings, and re-sight banded adults. Donations of nest box materials and/or funds for equipment are also needed. Contact LAS member Jessi Brown at lbrown@unr.edu or 775-784-7725.

More Kestrels

Dr. David Bird, an ornithologist specializing in the American Kestrel, is speaking on May 4, 4-5 p.m., at UNR's Orvis School of Nursing, Room 102. For more information about Dr. Bird's work, visit www.nrs.mcgill.ca/bird/bird.htm. For more information about the talk, contact Jessi Brown at lbrown@unr.edu or 775-784-7725.

LAS Fundraiser at Wildbirds Unlimited

You can support LAS and have a chance at a large wooden feeder with patio base, pole and two pole-mounted seed trays from Wildbirds Unlimited in the Shoppers Square Addition at Plumb and South Virginia. Tickets are \$1 each or six for \$5 suggested donation. The drawing will be on May 14. Tickets available at Wild Birds Unlimited, 322-9453.

CONSERVATION CORNER

Birdathon 2006

It's March, which means it's a perfect time to highlight this year's Birdathon fundraiser in the Conservation Corner. Proceeds from Birdathon 2006 will go toward Lahontan Audubon Society's Conservation Fund. This fund, newly established, will be used as a funding source for on-the-ground projects designed to protect, enhance or rehabilitate bird habitat in Nevada. It has been five years since our last Birdathon, so we are anticipating a strong and enthusiastic turn out of participants. Our goal is to raise \$5,000 to get this fund started and begin working on projects such as native plant seeding efforts and riparian habitat improvements. As in years past, we will be celebrating our accomplishments this summer with a potluck recognition party. This is a fun event, and I hope many of you will join us. Can you think of a more fun way to raise money for bird habitat than by bird watching?

What is a Birdathon?

A Birdathon is similar to a Walkathon. Instead of gathering pledges for how many miles you plan on walking, you gather pledges based on how many bird species you hope to see in a day. Gather pledges from friends, family, co-workers and local businesses, go bird watching, collect money, send money in, and celebrate!

When is Birdathon?

May is the month to celebrate bird migration! Often, Birdathon happens on a set day with many teams heading out at dawn (or before, to check off some owl species), in a race to see the most bird species in a 24-hour period and raise the most money. To provide more opportunity, your team can choose any day in May that works best.

How do I sign up for Birdathon?

There are many ways to participate in Birdathon. You can be a team leader and form a team with fellow birdwatchers, join as a team member, or sit in the comfort of your own home and bird watch in your backyard. And, of course, you can always sponsor a team member or make a donation directly to LAS. Please contact me if you would like to participate on a team, if you'd like to be a team leader or if you'd like to participate as an individual.

How do I find out more about Birdathon?

The LAS website, www.nevadaudubon.org, will have all the information you need to participate in this year's Birdathon. Pledge sheets and sample donation solicitation letters and emails will be available to make it easy for you to get pledges.

Spread the word. This is a great family event. Please contact me, Ali Chaney, at 775-813-3494 or Ali_Chaney@hotmail.com if you have any questions. On e-mails, please put "Birdathon 2006" in the subject line

—Ali Chaney

Spring Wings Festival May 12-14

Fallon Convention Center
(775) 428-6452 or
www.springwings.org

Volunteers contact: Carol Colip at (775) 423-2083 or colipso@charter.net

The annual Spring Wings Festival in Fallon is a great opportunity to learn, socialize and shop. Several great field trips are planned and one of the featured speakers is Jonathan Stacy of Birdlife International in London. His organization supports bird friendly missions, including the publication of Don McIvor's *Important Bird Areas of Nevada*.

Volunteers are needed to help with tours, workshops, registration and kids' activities.

BIRDS IN TOWN

by Alan Wallace

Noah and his ark came to mind in late December as the water gushed from the skies. But what a birding indulgence for Noah: all he had to do was wander the decks for 40 days and 40 nights and get the perfect world life list (and there were two of each species!). Northern Nevada birders didn't do quite as well, but they did don the Gore-Tex and find 119 species in December and January. This total came from throughout northern Nevada towns and spanned reports for both months, but, remarkably, almost all of these birds (111) also were spotted during the Truckee Meadows Christmas bird count on December 18. Highlights (at least in my mind) were **Greater White-fronted, Snow, and Cackling Geese, Barrow's Goldeneye, Mew Gull, Black and Say's Phoebes**, all three nuthatches (**Red-breasted, White-breasted, and Pygmy**), **Orange-crowned Warbler, Canyon Wren, and Great-tailed Grackle**. The Carson City count a day and a foot or two of snow later added **Snow Geese, Northern Pygmy Owl, and Chestnut-collared Longspur**, and the Elko count had **Bohemian Waxwings, Fox Sparrow, and Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches**. Both Truckee Meadows and Carson City had **Least Sandpipers** and extremely hardy **Anna's Hummingbirds**, and Carson City, Elko, and Pyramid Lake (Sutcliffe) had **Eurasian Collared-Doves**.

Hawks, for some reason, get noticed and reported more in the winter, and this was no exception. In addition to both **Bald and Golden Eagles**, the full size gamut was seen, from the diminutive **American Kestrel**, up to **Merlin**, then **Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks**, to the larger **Red-shouldered and Red-tailed Hawks**, and finally **Northern Goshawk**. **Barn Owls** appeared on birders' radar screens, including four roosting birds in one small area in Sparks near the Truckee River (found thanks to a robust supply of pellets beneath the trees). Numerous **Great-tailed Grackles**, and possibly some **Common Grackles**, foraged at their favorite spot in Winnemucca, namely the Raley's parking lot. A **Harris's Sparrow** joined **White-crowned Sparrows** in northern Reno in December, and **Golden-crowned Sparrows** frequented the river corridors as well as John Anderson's yard in Mogul. On the waterfront, **Tundra Swans** plied the deepening waters of Swan and Silver Lakes north of Reno, **Virginia Rails** boldly exposed themselves in the nearby reeds, and a few **Greater Yellowlegs** poked along area mudflats. In Lemmon Valley, both **Loggerhead and Northern Shrikes** provided a rare, nearly side-by-side comparison, while a dozen **Chestnut-collared Longspurs** skulked through the low grasses. **American Dippers** seemed to have survived the flooded rivers, although many of their favorite feeding areas, food sources, and rocky perches were drastically rearranged (envision your kitchen moving overnight to the neighbor's back yard). Conversely, **American Robins** seemed thrilled by all the wet weather and the worms that it drove to the surface. Oddly, as many as four or five **Ring-necked Pheasants** burst on the scene in western Reno in December. At least two wore "blindens" that indicated that the birds originated in a breeding farm, and they seemed to be doing well on their own, but their origin remains a mystery. And if you're in search of **Pinyon Jays**, you can go west to the 100-plus flocks just west of Reno, or east to the 150-strong flock near Baker.

Cornell recently reported that the top five Feederwatch birds in the southwest region (which includes Nevada) last winter were **House Finch, Dark-eyed Junco, House Sparrow** (alas), **Northern Flicker**, and **Mourning Dove**. More **Lesser Goldfinches** and fewer **Western Scrub-Jays** frequented feeders, and the number of yards reporting **Mountain Chickadees** was the highest ever. **Pine Siskins** came to 52 percent of the yards, twice the previous season's record lows, so hopefully they're rebounding. Siskins aren't abundant in western Nevada towns, but John Woodyard always gets a lot at his feeder near Baker, including 40 just this January, as does John Anderson in Mogul.

Sources of information for this column included **John Anderson, Nancy Bish, Richard Brune, Ali Chaney, Jim Eidel, Claudia Furari, Bob Goodman, Mike Greenan, Joel Grier, Sonya Hem, Jacque Lowery, Kathy Malcomson, Sue Anne Marshall, Don McIvor, Fred Peterson, Harold Peterson, John Schulte, Greg Scyphers, Dennis Serdehely, Tom Stille, Rose Strickland & Dennis Ghiglieri, Jane Thompson, 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 **March 25**. Good birding!

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
2. LAS Renewal New Membership Send me a National Audubon application

LAS 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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March/April 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	\$1	_____

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President	Karen Kish	klkish@pyramid.net	841-1180
Vice President	Alan Gubanich	aag@scs.unr.edu	857-0191
Treasurer	Dave Straley	dstraley@nvbell.net	832-9222
Recording Secretary	Dee Austin	austdd@nevbells.net	673-6842

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Seat #1 to 2008	Jane Burnham	jburnh@juno.com	677-4178
Seat #2 to 2005	Judy Kretzer	judykretzer@yahoo.com	826-6891
Seat #3 to 2006	Ali Chaney	achaney@heritage.nv.gov	813-3494
Seat #4 to 2008	Jim Lytle	lytleja@sbcglobal.net	577-9641
Seat #5 to 2006	Vacant		
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	Jim Lytle	lytleja@sbcglobal.net	577-9641
Education	Alan Gubanich	aag@scs.unr.edu	857-0191
Field Trips	Nancy Bish	n.bish@att.net	884-1570
Fundraising	Dave Straley	dstraley@nvbell.net	832-9222
Hospitality	Jane Burnham	jburnh@juno.com	677-4178
LAS Sales	Jane Burnham	jburnh@juno.com	677-4178
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