



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.

**JULY/AUGUST
2007**

vol. 44, no. 6

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Membership

*Submissions for the September/
October issue are due August 1, 2007*

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.

There are no LAS meetings during the summer months. The next meeting will be Tuesday, September 25.

Kids Love Birds!

The LAS Education Committee had another great season leading birding field trips for elementary school kids around Washoe Lake. This year we had 12 trips involving 7 different schools and 402 kids, ranging from grades 3 through 8. Many thanks to the 17 volunteers who made it possible: John Schulte (8 trips), Sue Stevenson (7 trips), Diane McAllister (6), Linda Badzioch (5), Edie Knight (5), Mary Ellen Conaway (4), Stephanie Sander (4), Crystal Atamian (and her 14-month old daughter, Lucene!) (4), Harry Gammie (4), Nancy Gammie (3), Kenn Rohrs (2), Laura Gibson (2), Sheryl Ferguson (1), Dave Carneggie (1), Don Lauer (1) and Ron Conkey (1). It was fun, as usual, watching the kids get so excited looking at all the birds in and around the lake. Many of them exclaimed it was the best field trip they'd ever been on! Who knows, one of them might become the next Roger Tory Peterson -- and it would be partly due to the dedication and enthusiasm of you, the volunteers, who make these trips possible. Thanks for all your time and effort.

-- Alan Gubanich
Chair, LAS Education Committee

**For more on kids and birds, see the field trip reports on pages 2 and 5 of
The Pelican.**

FIELD TRIPS

Christiane Omer
Janet Hudson

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Field trips are free to Audubon members and non-members. Birders of all skill levels are encouraged to participate. 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. Dress for the weather and bring something to eat and drink.

For information on field trips added after this publication, check the Lahontan Audubon Society web site at www.nevadaaudubon.org.

Saturday, July 21
Washoe Lake Area
Time: 7 a.m.

Trip Leader: Steve Ting, (775)-849-3725
setting@charter.net (preferred)

The several ponds and marshy areas near Washoe Lake are good spots to find many of the local duck species as well as many shore birds (Avocets, Black-necked Stilt, Snipe, Western and Least Sandpiper). Wading birds such as Great and Snowy Egret, Great Blue Heron, Black-crowned Night Heron and White-faced Ibis also frequent the area. Other possible species are American White Pelican, Forster's Tern, Western, Clark's and Eared Grebe. Come enjoy a few hours of birding with Steve who not only birds these spots regularly, but also photographs the many birds he finds. Please be prompt, it can get very hot at this time of year and there is very little shade in the area. Time permitting, we will head to Dead Man's Creek trail to observe Bullock's Oriole and more.

Meet in the parking lot for the observation tower at the south end of Washoe Lake. From

US 395 take the East Lake Blvd exit (exit #42), and head east approximately two miles, turn into Washoe Lake State Park parking area. Make sure you take the East Lake exit at the south end of the lake. Bring drinking water, sunscreen, hat, binoculars and--if you have them--spotting scopes.

Saturday, August 4
Spooner Lake State Park
Time: 7:30 a.m.

Trip Leader: Nancy Santos, (775)884-1570,
or nancylas@att.net

Join us for an easy morning walk around Spooner Lake State Park. We will search the shoreline for Spotted Sandpiper, Osprey, and area waterfowl. Forest, sagebrush and riparian habitat are also found along the perimeter of the lake and will offer us the opportunity to search for such species as the Western Tanager, White-headed Woodpecker, Green-tailed Towhee, and Warbling Vireo, just to name a few. More common species we can expect to see are Steller's Jay, Mountain Chickadee, Hairy Woodpecker, Western Wood-Pewee, and Yellow-rumped Warbler. Please contact Nancy to reserve your spot and for further information. There is a State Park entrance fee per vehicle, so car-pooling is recommended.

Dear Lahontan Audubon Society Members,
Do you have an idea for a field trip? Is there a place you know well, and love to bird? If you are interested in guiding a field trip, or co-leading a trip, would you give us a call? Trips can be from just a couple of hours to a full day. Field trip leaders are truly appreciated for their willingness to share their time and knowledge. We said good-bye to many of our former leaders during the past year as they moved to new homes in different states. We need you!

--Christiane Omer

Field Trip Report

Saturday, May 5

McCarran Ranch

Leaders: Christiane Omer and Janet Hudson

It was a clear and promising sunny morning when our group met near I-80 and Vista in Sparks. In the fifteen minutes it took driving east to reach McCarran Ranch, the winds kicked up and the skies darkened. Birders are a driven and hardy lot, and any day birding is a good day, so the twelve of us bundled up and trekked along the river's edge led by the ever-plentiful Western Kingbirds. We had the pleasure of Paul's company, our young elementary school participant, who is an excellent spotter, and has great enthusiasm for birding. He, unlike us older folks, never seemed to mind the cold. After a couple of hours, it began to feel like snow, and a few people left, or retired to the relative warmth of their cars. During the morning, we saw Spotted Sandpiper, Common Merganser, Belted Kingfisher, Lark Sparrow, Red-tailed Hawk, five swallow species, three wren species, American Kestrel (including one going into its tree nest cavity), Common Raven, Bullock's Oriole, and more. While wandering near the rugged volcanic outcroppings searching for wrens, we spotted a Wood Duck down river. There were excellent views, thanks to birders who willingly lugged around their spotting scopes, of that exquisitely designed creature. In all we found 43 species of birds, numerous rabbits and one coyote. We also found an enormous nest perched high on a rocky ledge with whitewash all around it; it was fun speculating about the possible homeowner. The beauty of McCarran Ranch is impressive, as is the amount of work that went into restoring its riparian corridor. Thanks to Diane Wong, Wildlife Biologist from Otis Bay, and The Nature Conservancy for arranging access for us.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

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WHERE TO WRITE:

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

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Reno, NV 89501
Toll-free: 1-866-736-7343

Senator John Ensign
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Reno, NV 89501
Reno phone: 775-686-5770

Representative Dean Heller
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Reno, NV 89501
Reno phone: 775-686-5760

Governor Jim Gibbons
101 N. Carson St.
Carson City, NV 89710
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IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS PROGRAM

Robin Powell

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'TIS THE SEASON

With many of us enjoying the emergent flowering plants throughout the landscape during this time of year, the menacing, ominous invasive plants are also emerging. Invasive plants are typically non-native plant species that “invade” an area and outcompete native vegetation, limit the amount of food or shelter for wildlife, overuse water, negatively impact the economic enterprises within the area, disrupt public health, and can be just plain unsightly. Invasive plants or “weeds” include the **noxious weeds**, which is a term for an invasive plant species that has been identified and listed within the state as the most harmful.

Throughout the world, bird habitat is negatively impacted due to invasive plants. The Nevada IBAs are no exception. In fact, a majority of the IBAs have the presence of at least one noxious weed within the area. Some of the IBAs are significantly at-risk for habitat loss and destruction due to noxious weeds such as salt cedar (*Tamarix spp.*) and cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*). Other noxious weeds that are impacting avian habitat include purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*) and perennial pepperweed, a.k.a. tall whitetop, (*Lepidium latifolium*) which has significantly reduced the ability

for waterfowl and other aquatic birds to utilize the habitat for nesting and has decreased the forage potential of the area.

Many of the noxious weeds or other invading plants were introduced through landscaping/habitat projects or through unknown transport such as vehicles, livestock, and people. For example, salt cedar was sold by nurseries as an ornamental or used for erosion control along riparian areas throughout the West. This species has since escaped, naturalized along waterways, impacted water quantity, and outcompeted the native vegetation to become the dominant plant species.

Even with all of the tall whitetop and salt cedar surrounding us, the war against weeds is not lost. Everyone from homeowners to recreationalists to wildlife enthusiasts (including birders) can help prevent, monitor, and control the plant invaders. Here are some key tips to help you contribute in the fight against the invaders and protect bird habitat:

- Learn how to properly identify noxious weeds or contact your local county cooperative extension office for identification. It is a service that they provide free of charge.
- Do not transport plant materials from another state UNLESS you know that the plant is not a weed

in Nevada.

- When you travel in an area with weeds, check your vehicle, clothes, equipment, and animals for any plant material BEFORE you leave the area.
- If you suspect an infestation of an invasive plant, contact the Nevada Department of Agriculture Noxious Weed Program with location information and a description of the plant.
- When feeding your livestock, use certified weed-free hay which prevents the spread of weed seed. For more information regarding invasive plants, visit http://agri.nv.gov/PLANT_NoxWeeds_index.htm.

--Robin Powell
Nevada Director of Bird
Conservation



Cheatgrass

USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database / Hitchcock, A.S. (rev. A. Chase). 1950. Manual of the grasses of the United States. USDA Misc. Publ. No. 200.

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S PERCH

Why

I should be writing about something serious. There are certainly enough such topics around. Perhaps a promising mirage of summer indolence has overtaken me. Or perhaps I've drifted off into some little philosophical stream where one ponders, Well, what is serious? What is important?

Recently I was asked yet again, "Why do you bird?" Many of you, I suspect, have also had to try to answer that. The question came up in an interview about our new *A Birding Guide to Reno and Beyond—Second Edition*. The thought kept turning in my head like the barrel roll of a playful crow, like the wild and breathtaking dance of a pair of Red-tailed Hawks.

A few years ago at Spring Wings Bird Festival, keynote speaker David Allen Sibley began by mentioning this question. He gave three good reasons, but the only one I remember is, "Because they fly." The birding guide interview question brought me back to the epigraph we used in the first edition. Award-winning Nevada poet Bill Cowee gave us, "The blue heron steps lightly across the wetland, stalks the heart within my chest" The quotation is from *What Would Be Joined Together*, in his 1997 book *Bones Set Against the Drift*. Alas, with procrastination leaving no time to seek permission, I will not quote it in its entirety.

Trying to write this column and becoming slightly less indolent, I fumbled through a variety of volumes of poetry to help me answer why. Robinson Jeffers' granite-tough poetry of the California coast, *Hurt Hawks, Rock and Hawk, Vulture*. The Romanticism of Wordsworth's *Green Linnet, The Sparrow's Nest*,

To the Cuckoo and Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*, who started a lot of trouble by shooting the albatross. Contemporary Mary Oliver's delicate spiritual metaphors of *Goldfinches* and *Wild Geese*. And world-class poet-birder Chilean Pablo Neruda, who says in his *The Poet says good-bye to the birds* (in *Art of Birds*), "... I've wandered the world in search of life: / bird by bird I've come to know the earth: ..." and "... I received those wings in my soul / and immobility never held me down."

I hope you wander and drift a bit in these summer months or just stretch out supine like a child musing at passing clouds and perhaps the winged creatures that tell us why.

— Karen L. Kish

New Membership Chair

LAS welcomes Kathy Oakes as our new Membership Chair. A wildlife biologist, Kathy just recently retired from her position as EAS and EIS project manager for an environmental consulting firm. Kathy is originally from St. Louis. She worked for the Oak Ridge National Laboratory in Tennessee, where she learned to bird with an excellent birder friend. She and her husband Ed also lived in Wyoming and then Las Vegas before arriving in Reno in 1982. They enjoy hiking and camping throughout Nevada. Thanks to Kathy for stepping up. Also, many thanks to outgoing Membership Chair Judy Kretzer for her diligent work. Judy continues as a Board Trustee.

LAS Elections

At the general meeting on May 22 the LAS membership cast their votes for next year's officers and board members. The following candidates were elected to these posts:

President

Karen Kish

Vice-President

Alan Gubanich

Treasurer

Dave Straley

Recording Secretary

Bonnie Wagner

Trustee Seat Number 7

Kenn Rohrs

No one was nominated or elected to Trustee Seat # 6 or # 4, so LAS is still looking for enthusiastic volunteers willing to serve in this capacity. Contact Karen Kish or Alan Gubanich if you are interested.

-- Alan Gubanich

Co-chair, Nominating Committee

Late-breaking News -- Two New Board Members

The LAS Board has approved the following two appointments to the Board of Trustees: Kathy Oakes to Seat #4 to 2008 and Linda Badzioch to Seat #6 to 2010. Congratulations and many thanks for coming forward. The Board looks forward to Kathy and Linda's involvement.

CONSERVATION CORNER

Legislature – AB622, the bill designed to provide matching state dollars for federal State Wildlife Grant money was sent to the Ways and Means committee the last week in May. As was the case for all bills during the session, the process happened extremely fast. An e-mail was sent to all committee members prior to the hearing expressing Audubon’s support of this bill. Karen Kish attended the hearing on LAS’ behalf and again expressed our organization’s support. Unfortunately, no action was taken on the bill and it never left the committee.

Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Nevada – On May 18, the Great Basin Bird Observatory threw a party at the Nevada Museum of Art in celebration of the much anticipated publication of the Atlas and marking 10 years of the Observatory. Many LAS members and volunteers were on hand to help celebrate, as many of them had contributed time and energy in surveying remote parts of the state for evidence of breeding birds. All the authors of the Atlas and most of the founders and current board members of GBBO were on hand to recognize the hard work that went into the Atlas and

shared fond memories of the early days of GBBO. It was a great party and the Atlas is truly an amazing compilation of information on Nevada’s rich bird diversity. If you haven’t yet purchased your copy, check out their website at gbbo.org. Congratulations GBBO!

Porter Springs – LAS has submitted a letter of support to the Bureau of Land Management for the Porter Springs Management Plan Preliminary Environmental Assessment. LAS has valued this area for years and many of our members have helped “put it on the map” in terms of getting the area recognized for the resources Porter Springs provides birds and other wildlife. The management plan’s proposed action calls for many improvements to the area that will not only help protect current bird habitat, but improve the habitat conditions as well. The barbed wire fencing will be replaced with a steel constructed fence that will be easier for birders to maneuver around, yet keep wild burros and cattle out. The enclosure will be expanded to include the upper part of the spring. The irrigation system will be updated to provide more efficient use of the water that runs through the property. Vegetation management is

proposed to protect the established habitat, increase appropriate types of vegetation that provide food and shelter for birds, and control noxious weeds. Motor vehicles will be prohibited within the enclosure to keep impacts to the area low. A vault toilet will be installed outside the enclosure along with a better vehicle parking area. The plan also proposes having a host help manage the area and provide visitors with information on the biological importance of the site.

Porter Springs provides a great opportunity for partnership. In September 2004, volunteers from LAS and Sierra Club along with BLM and other agencies such as Pershing County helped clean up the site in recognition of National Public Lands Day. We appreciate BLM being responsive to our concerns and desires to protect this important migratory stopover site. The final management plan should be out soon and we’ll keep you posted on how LAS plans to stay involved with Porter Springs and on future volunteer opportunities.

--Ali Chaney

Silver Saddle Bird Walk Report

Leader: Nancy Santos

Report Preparer: Adam Young (age 13), Virginia City

Along the picturesque walk were many bird boxes. Nancy had me open them up and check them for any sign of bird life, eggs, nesting material, chicks, etc. We were looking for Western Bluebirds and American Kestrels. The first box that I checked was located on a tall cottonwood just adjacent to the ranch house. So I climbed up and opened the box and inside were two pink little chicks inside that turned out to be starlings, not what we wanted.

Then we began the walk. We spotted many birds and the group stopped here and there to examine and identify them. It was quite exciting, but probably the most exciting part for me was opening the second box. It was along a ditch off the main trail. Several Tree Swallows were on the fence nearby, but there was not a stick in the box. The exciting part was when the swallows took flight. They went into defensive mode and were flying right up in our faces, as my mother said, “They were dive bombing us.” It was a great experience.

The group then arrived at the river. There we stood on a nice deck over the river and watched various swallows (Bank, Northern Rough-winged, Cliff and Barn) and searched the cliff bird homes for Barn Owls. Then we continued our journey along the Carson River. We saw lots of birds, including flickers (Northern), more swallows, robins (American), hawks (Red-tailed), warblers (Wilson), orioles (Bullock’s) and many more. We checked a few more boxes but found nothing more than a few twigs.

Overall this was a great trip with lots of excitement and many learning experiences. I sure am glad that I didn’t sleep in and miss seeing all the new birds. It was a great experience and the Silver Saddle Ranch is a beautiful place.

BIRDS IN TOWN

by Alan Wallace

In contrast to the deluges and expansive water bodies of last spring, this April and May were notably dry, focusing a lot of the aquatic birds into smaller and fewer lakes and ponds. As cold fronts moved through, so did the birds, with a major arrival on Earth Day of **Least and Western Sandpipers, Long- and Short-billed Dowitchers, Dunlins, Black-bellied and Semipalmated Plovers, Marbled Godwits, Willets**, and various other species. They were soon joined by ample **Wilson's Phalaropes**, a smattering of **Semipalmated Sandpipers** and **White-faced Ibises**, and a few **Red-necked Phalaropes**. **Black and Forster's Terns** darted above the water along with all of the common swallows that pass through or nest in northern Nevada. **Vaux's Swifts** made a brief appearance in May on their ways to more northerly breeding areas, and several **Ospreys** prowled the rivers in search of piscine meals.

The more terrestrial-based migration and summer arrivals were equally busy. As the pre-migration songs of the wintering **White-crowned Sparrows** reached their crescendo, **Black-headed Grosbeaks, Bullock's Orioles** (a little early), **Western Wood-Pewees** (a little late), and **Western Kingbirds** (hugely abundant in the Fallon area), **Warbling Vireos**, and **Wilson's and Yellow Warblers** arrived to vocally stake out their breeding territories. **Hummingbirds** took advantage of feeders, starting with a very early **Black-chinned** on April 1, a **Calliope** on April 5, and then **Rufous** and **Anna's** later in the month. In the eastern part of the state near Baker, breeding **Broad-tailed Hummingbirds** arrived on April 20, filling the air with their metallic flight noise, and Alan de Queiroz's Ely yard hosted **Green-tailed Towhees, Mountain Bluebirds**, and **Lark and Chipping Sparrows**. By mid May, young **Canada Geese, Great Horned Owls, Red-tailed Hawks, Western Scrub-Jays**, and **House Finches** marked the start of new avian generations. Just like new human homes are built, used, and then sold, **Downy Woodpeckers** were excavating nest holes in April, and Fred Peterson found a pair of **Mountain Chickadees** using an old hole for their nest site in late May. **Common Nighthawks** typically are some of the latest arrivals, and the first ones began hawking bugs above western Nevada towns at the very end of May.

Errant and migrating birds passed through towns, producing some exciting sightings. Our smaller towns produced some great migrants, such as an **Ovenbird** and a **Northern Parula** in the Tonopah cemetery and a **Northern Waterthrush** in greater metropolitan Preston near Ely. A **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** visited a feeder on the southwestern fringes of Reno, one of a number of these eastern birds seen throughout the West. A couple of more southern species – **Hooded Oriole** and **Costa's Hummingbird** – visited the Reno area for a few days before perhaps realizing that they had overshot their breeding grounds and headed back to the homelands. Although a few are seen just about every year, eastern- and central-based **White-throated** and **Harris's Sparrows** followed a more westerly trajectory through our towns en route to their breeding grounds. A few **Evening Grosbeaks**, which normally nest high in the Sierras, took a pre-breeding spin through the desert, showing up in both Fallon and Lovelock. And **Great-tailed Grackles** and **Eurasian Collared-Doves** continued their range expansion into northern Nevada; the latter are now fairly regular at a yard near Baker.

Spring produces some interesting bird behavior. Doug Booth observed a **Song Sparrow** that tore down a small, inhabited wasp nest and hauled it away. Some birds purposely nest near wasp nests because the wasps feed on ants and parasites that are detrimental to the bird nests and young, but the reason for this sparrow's behavior remains a mystery: it seems like a pretty extreme way to get nest materials. Doug also watched a hen **Mallard** chase large carp away from her brood; whether carp are predators is uncertain, but mom apparently wasn't going to take any chances. Adding to the list of mercantile-based birds is the **Say's Phoebe** seen by Rose Strickland in a Home Depot, and **House Finches** were building a nest on one of the retractable boarding ramps at the Reno airport, which should provide some interesting moving experiences for the nestlings.

Both the birds and the birders were out in force this April and May, leading to reports of 163 species from northern Nevada towns. Sources of information for this column included **Brian Adams, John Anderson, Kristi Antunovich, Don Bentley, Doug Booth, Richard Brune, Ali Chaney, Melody Craig, Alan de Queiroz, Mary Jo Elpers, John Free, Glen Gentry, Bob Goodman, Linda Hiller, Nancy Hoffman, Shonna Ingram, Ed Kurtz, Jacques Lowery, Sue Anne Marshall, Martin Meyers, Don Molde, Kathy Oakes, Fred Peterson, Harold Peterson, Debbie & Randy Pontius, Melissa Renfro, Melissa Scott, Greg Scyphers, Dennis Serdehely, Jean Sherman, Lisa Stillings, Rose Strickland, Steve Ting, Myra Ulvang, Renee White**, 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 **July 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.

- LAS Renewal New Membership Send me a National Audubon application
- Individual/Family - \$20/year Full Time Student/Senior (over 62) - \$15/year

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July/August 2007 issue

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Kathy Oakes, L AS Membership, 4120 Plateau Road, Reno, NV 89519

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<i>A Birding Guide to Reno and Beyond--Second Edition</i> Published by Lahontan Audubon Society, 2007	\$10	\$1.50	_____
<i>Nevada Birding Map--Second Edition</i> Published by Lahontan Audubon Society, 2007	\$ 4	\$1	_____
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