



Friends of the Kern River Preserve

Volume 12, Issue 2

 **Audubon** CALIFORNIA

Fall 2008

Audubon's mission is "to conserve and restore natural ecosystems, focusing on birds, other wildlife, and their habitats for the benefit of humanity and the earth's biological diversity."

PARKER RANCH

Staff of Audubon California's Kern River Preserve have worked alongside many partners over the past several years to help purchase a 9,576 acre conservation easement (CE) on the Parker Ranch. The ranch lies just south of Walker Basin between the Caliente Creek Roads and the "Lions Trail." The transaction was finalized in May of this year. A win-win situation for nature and the Parker Family, the development rights were purchased to provide the family with much needed capital, and now the ranching operations can continue in perpetuity.

The ranch is an integral link in the coast to the Sierra wildlife corridor. A horseshoe of mountains encircles the southern San Joaquin Valley; from west to east namely the Coast Range, Transverse Range, Tehachapi Mountain and the Sierra Nevada.



The federally endangered, Bakersfield Cactus was just one of the many beneficiaries of the Parker Ranch conservation easement.

see Parker page 2

AUDUBON CENTER UPDATE



The new Audubon Center site is just in front of the trees in the 7000-block of Fay Ranch Road.

Staff of the Kern River Preserve, Audubon California, and National Audubon continue to work on elements of the new Audubon Center. Last December the Sierra Nevada Conservancy granted a \$152,000 planning grant to help with environmental compliance and to hire an architect to design the new buildings.

Audubon is pleased to have completed some major portions of the project and has begun the final process for the CEQA compliance after meeting with officials from Kern County for the preliminary application review committee hearing in early October. Staff of the Kern River Preserve met with community and Audubon stakeholders for a strategic planning meeting on October 17th. The meeting was an important step in the Audubon Center process. Alison Sheehy continues to work on moving the project forward with the help of Dave Catlin, Audubon's Director of Field Support for Centers. §

Calendar of Events

Check our website for special events!

2008

Saturday, December 6, 2008 - Join us for the Annual Friends of the Kern River Preserve holiday potluck. RSVP. Email: krpfriends@audubon.org

Saturday, December 20, 2008. Butterbredt CBC, includes Butterbredt Spring and Kelso Creek Sanctuary. Compiler Chuck Bragg, Phone: (310) 454-9662

Sunday, December 21, 2008. 19th Annual Buena Vista CBC. This count has been compiled by Alison Sheehy since its inception. Phone: (760) 378-2029. Email: krpfriends@audubon.org

(See www.natureali.org/cbcs.htm for all of the Christmas Bird Counts in California)

2009

Saturday, January 3, 2009. 18th Annual South Fork Valley CBC, includes: most of the Kern River Preserve to Canebrake Ecological Reserve. Compiler Denise LaBerteaux. Phone: (760) 378-4278. Email: eremico@aol.com

Sunday, January 4, 2009. 31st Annual Kern River Valley CBC, includes the towns of Lake Isabella, Mtn Mesa, South Lake, Kernville, Keyesville, Wofford Heights and Alta Sierra. Compiler Alison Sheehy. Phone: (760) 378-2029. Email: krpfriends@audubon.org

KRP Work parties 3rd Saturday of each month - Start at 10 a.m. in winter and 8 a.m. in summer.

For more information or to RSVP. See our website: <http://kern.audubon.org> email: krpfriends@audubon.org

Friends of the Kern River Preserve



P.O. Box 833
 Weldon, CA 93283-0833
 il: krpfriends@audubon.org
 website: <http://kern.audubon.org>

The Kern River Preserve is managed by Audubon California for the preservation of one of California's largest contiguous cottonwood-willow riparian forests and the wildlife it supports.

The Friends of the Kern River Preserve is a membership organization that provides volunteer & financial support for outreach, education, wildlife habitat protection & stewardship.

Your support is critical to the success of the Kern River Preserve. Please consider making a donation by filling out the membership form and mailing it to the Friends.

STAFF

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SPECIAL PROJECTS

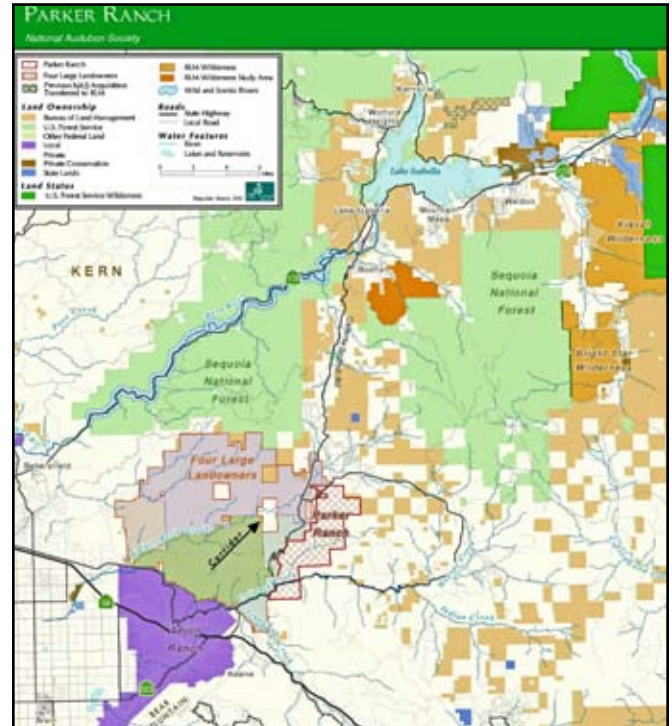
BOB BARNES, VALERIE CASSITY, BILL FOSTER, MIKE GALLAGHER, TERRY HARRIS, CHARLOTTE GOODSON, ARCHIE LOGSDON, BUZ LUNSFORD, KERNCREST AUDUBON SOCIETY, CHARLES ROBINSON, JOHN SCHMITT, PAT SEAMOUNT

Parker cont. from page 1

Parker Ranch is one of several private ranches at the southern end of the Sierra Nevada that protect the biological and genetic diversity of numerous mammals. It is home to sycamore canyons, gray pine forests, juniper/oak woodlands, annual grasslands, wet meadows, and spectacular displays of annual spring wildflowers. The area supports wildlife from desert, montane, and grassland environments and is a



Oak woodland and savannah prairie are some important habitat protected by the Parker Ranch conservation easement.



vital migration corridor for animals between these ecologically distinct regions. The Ranch supports a small population of the federally endangered Bakersfield Cactus and rare species such as the Piute Mountains Navarretia, Golden Eagle, Coast Horned Lizard, and Tehachapi Slender Salamander. Ranching managed properly can benefit plants and wildlife by providing open space and habitat. Funding for the purchase came from a private grant through Audubon, the California Wildlife Conservation Board, and the owner. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) owns and monitors the CE.

The significance of the protection of Parker Ranch in preserving California's last wild spaces cannot be taken for granted in this land of little rain and burgeoning sprawl. Neighboring ranches and parcels of land are being subdivided and then sold to prospective developers effectively destroying native lands and fencing out wildlife. The Ranch is an important linkage near the 270,000 acre Tejon Ranch, which staff of Audubon California have worked intensely for the past two years negotiating a conservation outcome on 90% of that property.

Owned by the Parker family for five generations, the ranch is an example of responsible stewardship of the land and will remain so for generations to come. Bill and Tom Parker's eyes sparkle when they speak of their love for the land and the ranching lifestyle. "We consider ourselves land stewards first and ranchers second," said Bill Parker, a family member and fourth generation rancher, "Knowing that this ranch will remain just as it is now, for our children, their children, and the generations to come, is a dream come true."

This conservation outcome continues the Parker family legacy and leaves the land in open space in perpetuity for the benefit of the people of California and its wild heritage. §

NEWS BRIEFS

Audubon Christmas Bird Counts - Count Towards Conservation of Wildlife...

Join fellow birdwatchers and naturalists for crisp winter birding by participating in citizen science on the Kern River Preserve. Three CBCs cover Audubon's Kern River Preserve, Kelso Creek Sanctuary, and Allen's South Fork Sanctuary.

Each year from December 14, 2005 to January 5, 2008, volunteers from all over North America participate in the National Audubon Society's longest-running wintertime tradition, the annual Christmas Bird Count (CBC). Why would 55,000 volunteers of all skill levels want to take part in this annual census of birds, under all types of weather conditions?

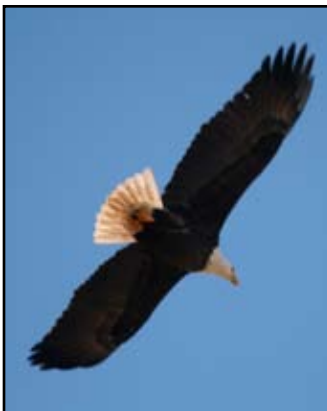
On Christmas Day in 1900, scientist and writer Frank Chapman led 27 conservationists in 25 localities in an alternative to the "side hunt," a Christmas day activity in which teams competed to see who could shoot the most birds and small mammals. Instead, Chapman proposed to identify, count, and record all the birds and mammals they saw, founding what is now considered to be the world's most significant citizen-based conservation effort – and what has become a more than century-old institution.

Last year, of the 2,013 North American counts, 119 CBCs were held in California. Kern County alone is such a huge territory that we had 10 CBCs either totally or partially held within the county. Contact compilers to join the fun.

Saturday, December 20, 2008. Butterbrecht Spring Christmas Bird Count, Kern County: Compiler: Charles Bragg, Phone: (310) 454-9662

Saturday, January 3, 2009. 18th Annual South Fork Valley CBC: Compiler Denise LaBerteaux. (760) 378-4278

Sunday, January 4, 2009. 31st Annual Kern River Valley CBC: Compiler Alison Sheehey. (760) 378-2029. §



Bald Eagles are always thrilling to spot during the Kern Valley and South Fork Christmas Bird Counts.

2008. Reed Tollefson led a nature walk around the nature trail to begin the day. Rabbitbrush was in full bloom and butterflies were enjoying the last warm days of autumn.

Chris Hancock, Sandra Wieser, and Birdie Foster were trailing behind the main group when Chris spotted a freshly hatched pond turtle struggling along the trail. Birdie hurriedly scooped this little hatchling up and it soon joined the growing population of turtles being headstarted by our turtle team.

After the nature walk, the group was given a private tour of one of the turtle ponds on the Preserve while turtle team volunteer Darrell Barnes explained the research they have been doing these past two years.

We then headed off to the Sprague House for a hearty lunch which was followed by three presentations about the Preserve's recent accomplishments. The group then got to tour the artificial ponds and enclosure built by the turtle team. The day ended with Sandra Wieser leading the group around the upland restoration site at the Sprague Ranch.

On Sunday, October 26th, the group went to Kelso Creek Sanctuary and then visited some property along Kelso Creek that Audubon is working to bring under permanent protection. We

visited an old gold mine adit and an arrastre on BLM property. It was interesting to see all of the ashy sludge in Kelso Creek brought down with the summer flash floods during the Piute Fire.

Our thanks to Birdie, Alison, Sandra, Chana, Darrell, Holly and Reed for making the weekend a memorable one. §



Birdie Foster stands next to an arrastre, which had a large stone that crushed gold ore.

Annual Holiday Potluck Scheduled

Join your friends for our annual holiday potluck on December 6th at 5 p.m. at the Audubon House on Sprague Ranch. Contact Alison to RSVP and find out what to bring. Email: krpfriends@audubon.org or phone: (760) 378-2029. §

Pond Turtle Headstart Project Update

The turtle team has had a busy season, and with the success of the 2008 season most will remain busy throughout the winter. Trapping season began in April and ended in November with data collected on each turtle captured. Males are released and females are held to check if they have eggs.

Friends of the Kern River Preserve Appreciation Weekend

The forest was resplendent with green and gold as the sun shone on a perfect morning to begin our annual appreciation weekend. Twenty-seven members of the Friends of the Kern River Preserve enjoyed fun and camaraderie learning all about KRP activities in



One of last year's hatchlings in June. These turtles were about the size of a nickel when they hatched. Photo by Darrell Barnes

The team trapped almost 100 turtles this year, including 12 juveniles and 11 gravid females. Canyon Veterinary x-rayed the females, finding 70 eggs that they could possibly lay. The hormone oxytocin was given to the females to induce egg-laying. Of the 54 eggs that were collected by the team this year 30 hatched. In order to help our volunteers keep from being too busy care-taking and to prevent catastrophic loss, the turtles are split between volunteers Darrell Barnes, Chris and

Gordon Hancock and Jeff King. The turtle hatchling that Chris and Birdie found on the nature trail during the Friends weekend joined the Barnes brood.

Pond turtles are found throughout the preserve wherever water is found. As ponds dry up the turtles migrate to other ponds or hibernate if late enough in the season to wait for the rains to arrive. Only two ponds on the preserve typically have water through the entire year.

Thanks to the entire team for their efforts: Bill Foster, Birdie Foster, Darrell Barnes, Chris Hancock, Gordon Hancock, Jake Hefner, Dave Kurdeka, Marya Miller, Jeff King, Bob Showers, and Reed Tollefson. §

14th Annual Autumn Nature and Vulture Festival

Almost 300 people came to share two days of fun and education celebrating Fall in the Kern River Valley and watching the spectacle of migration with our annual harbingers of cool weather, the Turkey Vulture.

Sierra Vista Restaurant offered the special vulture brunch again this year while John Schmitt gave a lecture on vultures and fall migrants. At the preserve there were workshops on bird feeding, feathers, clouds and turtles along with many wonderful booths with lots of great information. Music filled the air with the talents of Lost Hills, Out of the Blue, Carrion Luggage and other artists.

We thank all who visited and of course all of the wonderful volunteers that spend their precious free time educating visitors



The Great Purple Hairstreak is one of the more dramatic butterflies to see in the fall along the nature trail at the preserve, like these two seen during one of the festival nature walks.

and all of the musicians who always add so much to the festival atmosphere. §

Spring Nature Festival

Plans have begun for the 15th annual spring festival to be held on the weekend of May 2-3, 2009, with a slew of fun field trips rounding out the week. As of this writing we have a great keynote speaker lined up... our own Bob Barnes. After years of running the festivals it seemed time for the most knowledgeable cheerleader for this area to give us a great overview of why you can always "Find it Here."

Look to our website and spring newsletter for details as they become available. §

Kern Valley Pride Day

Eight friends of the Kern River Preserve picked up 19 large bags of trash on Kern Valley Pride Day on Saturday, September 20. We are proud of the accomplishments of our loyal team. Thanks to Sandra Wieser (who organizes the event for KRP), Jeff King, Reed Tollefson, Birdie Foster, Bill Foster, Darrell Barnes, and Bob Showers for their service. §

Kelso Creek Sanctuary Survives the Piute Fire

On June 28th, someone set fire to one of Kern County's more unique forests. The Piutes are filled with wet and dry meadows, mixed conifer forests, pinyon, and Joshua tree woodlands.



Fire officials were worried that the Piute Fire would make a run into the Kelso Valley . On July 6th it looked as if they might be right.

Smoke filled the air as the plaintive cry of an American Kestrel announced the setting sun on an evening a week into the fire as it crept toward our Kelso Creek Sanctuary. Kern River Preserve staff gave Bureau of Land Management (BLM) officials permission to cut a fire break along the western

edge of the sanctuary to protect the riparian forest of this beautiful desert oasis along Kelso Valley Road.

Volunteers from the Kern River Preserve and Southern Sierra Research Station handed out flyers informing South Lake and Weldon residents of community meetings about the fire.

As the fire continued to destroy the forest, thunderstorms arrived on July 12th and continued for 6 days, effectively putting out the 37,000-acre fire. Flash floods caused mudflows that carried ash

and debris from the freshly denuded slopes down many of the streams. The sides of Kelso Creek through the sanctuary are now stained with dark black soot from the ash. This ash should provide nutrients to the riparian forest for years to come.

Soon after the fire was declared contained, a BLM crew came out and repaired the fire line. We thank the fire response teams for protecting the sanctuary and our friend Don Storm of the BLM for keeping us informed of the progress of the fire. §

Museum of Vertebrate Zoology Resurveys Grinnell Transects

This summer the bird point count team of the Grinnell Resurvey Project spent two and a half months working in the Southern Sierra, including 25 days working in and around the Kern River Valley. The team is composed of four researchers in two survey groups, each of which visited a different location each morning. In total 10 locations were resurveyed in the valley, from Walker Pass and Canebrake Ecological Refuge to Bodfish and the eastern slope of the Greenhorns. Two surveys were located on Audubon Kern River Preserve property, resurveying areas where historical observations were made in 1911 while Joseph Grinnell and others were camped at Weldon. Each survey was composed of 10 individual “point counts” where trained researchers recorded every bird seen or heard at the point during a 7 minute interval.

These modern “resurveys” of birds will allow the Grinnell researchers to look closely at how species range distributions and abundances have changed in the last 100 years. Species are expected to have changed breeding ranges due to changes in land-use patterns, urbanization and the growth of towns, and climate and weather cycles. By comparing how birds have changed in the Kern River Valley and the Southern Sierra Nevada to similar resurvey work that has been done in Yosemite Valley and Lassen Volcanic National Park, a full picture of changes to bird communities throughout the Sierra Nevada can be attained.



Nadje Najjar and Teresa Feo searched for birds near Bodfish on May 23rd. Photo by Paul Newsam.

According to Morgan Tingley, a doctoral student at UC Berkeley and leader of the point count team, “Without the resurvey work in the Southern Sierra, the broader picture would be incomplete. We know what’s happened in the north and the middle, but what about in the south, where things are already the hottest and driest?”

What was it like to come and work in the Kern Valley for the first time? “The Valley and Plateau are really extraordinary

places for nature,” said Tingley, “There are so many different communities here – desert, riparian, wet and dry montane, oak woodland – that come crashing together to create really unique combinations of species and result in surprisingly high diversity. Witnessing all that diversity in such a small geographical area has been really exciting.”

While the bird survey season for the Grinnell team is now over for 2008, they will be back in 2009 to finish up work in the highest elevations of the Kern Plateau. §

PBS Nature Series Filmed on the Kern River Preserve

Audubon Kern River Preserve's Black-chinned Hummingbirds are to be featured in a documentary on hummingbirds in the PBS series "Nature" sometime in late 2009 or early 2010.

On June 18th & 19th, a three person film crew filmed Black-chinned Hummingbirds and the studies being done by UC Berkeley researchers, Teresa Feo and Chris Clark. The Berkeley team has been studying the "vocalizations" of hummingbird tails.

Ann Prum, Andy Wegst, and David McMurry are filming ten different hummingbird species throughout North and South America. From the East Coast to the West and from British Columbia to Chile, the crew is traveling the world to study "New Discoveries in Hummingbird Science." Although they only spent two days at the Kern River Preserve, they reported getting high quality footage of diving Black-chinned Hummingbirds with their special high-speed cameras. §



Chris Clark observes Black-chinned Hummingbirds diving while Ann Prum films them with a special high-speed camera.

Audubon Hosts Hummingbird Researchers from Across the State

The team of UC Berkeley researchers Teresa Feo and Christopher Clark returned to the Kern River Preserve in June 2008 to study the physiology of the Black-chinned Hummingbird and the role that tail feathers have in the sound made during the male's breeding dive. Clark and Feo had done extensive studies of Anna's and Costa's Hummingbirds throughout the state but couldn't find a reliable location for Black-chinned Hummingbirds.

Last year they contacted Audubon to see if the preserve would be a good location to find this species. Of course, the South Fork



Teresa Feo recorded Black-chinned hummingbirds to determine if their tail feathers also chirped.

Valley having three breeding species of hummingbirds with another breeding in the nearby mountains is a natural location for any hummingbird researcher. Clark and Feo's first paper "The Anna's hummingbird chirps with its tail: a new mechanism of sonation in birds," published in the Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences, Volume 275, Number 1637 / April 22, 2008, created quite a stir worldwide. Continuing the research with different species is proving that the tail shape of several species of hummingbirds allows them to vocalize without using their

voice boxes. We were happy to host these researchers again this year and look forward to their published results. §

Black-chinned Hummingbirds May Be Silent on the Issue

Under the direction of Dr. Anne Houtman, CSU Fullerton Masters student Uyen Tran is working to discover if Black-chinned Hummingbirds have a learned song. Previous studies by Dr. Houtman and CSUF graduate students have shown that Anna's Hummingbirds actually learn their songs from other birds near their territories but that Costa's Hummingbirds do not have learned songs.

The team from CSU Fullerton spent several days on the Kern River Preserve video-taping Black-chinned Hummingbirds on territories to determine if they have any song at all. Audubon's Kern River Preserve was pleased to serve as host in an effort to help researchers discover more about the fascinating world of hummingbirds. §



Master hummingbird bander, Chris Clark trained Anne Houtman on proper hummingbird banding techniques.

Herpetology Fans Find Friends at the Reptile Festival

Over 150 people joined the Friends of the Kern River Preserve and HerpEcology on June 14th to enjoy a day of learning about California's native amphibians and reptiles in the annual celebration of these misunderstood animals. Each year



Sophia Cassity had fun learning about the Rosy Boa at the 7th Annual Reptile Festival.

Audubon puts on four festivals celebrating various elements of the natural world. Since many scientists now believe that birds are just modified reptiles, this festival is a natural extension of Audubon's emphasis on birds. Members of the Kern River Preserve's turtle team talked about the progress of the headstart program for Southwestern Pond Turtles.

Thanks go to Buz Lunsford, Chris & Tia Lomax, Darrell Barnes and Sandra Wieser for putting together another great festival. §

CSU Monterey Bay Students Enjoy a Lesson about the Diverse World of the Kern River Valley.

The Kern River Preserve proved to be a small yet integral part of CSU Monterey Bay's class the "California Transect." On May 21st, 23 ecology students from CSU Monterey Bay along with their professors, Dr. Fred Watson, Dr. Susan Alexander, and Thor Anderson visited Audubon's Kern River Preserve as part of the 14-day field lab portion of their class.



This Summer Tanager flew in and perched above the class while the introductory talk was going on.

Individual students prepare lectures about a particular area, plant or animal for classmates at various spots along their journey. The two week expedition travels from the coast to the desert through central California.

One of the students, Francisco Santana, gave the talk about Kern River Valley and the preserve. As he was describing the area, two funny or just plain strange things occurred during his lecture. Three quarters of the way through the presentation, he began to mention the resources that attract visitors from all over the world to the Kern River Preserve, and just as he mentioned rare birds... a rare male Summer Tanager flew in and perched above the group and started singing. (Later we discovered the male and female built a nest where the group had been sitting). This is one of the rare target birds for birders visiting the area, and the timing was amazing!

After a slight pause to be awed by the "flying neon tomato" color of the tanager, Santana continued his narrative, as he was listing



This Western Tiger Swallowtail flew in as if on cue when Santana mentioned butterfly diversity in the Kern Valley.

the other attractions that bring nature tourists, plants, reptiles, amphibians, butterflies... what should flit in as if on cue, but a Western Tiger Swallowtail. The butterfly chose that moment to fly in and land on one of the student's notebook. After which it flew up to his shirt and chose to just perch on him for several minutes. It was a magical talk and the animals cooperated as if they were trained to do so.

Visiting the preserve is always a delight, but the enthusiasm of the students along with the arrival of two special guests made the

morning more memorable. You can visit the class website to experience some of this great learning experience. http://sep.csusb.edu/class/ESSP303/2008/transect_2008.htm §

Kern County Wins Birdiest Inland County for the Fifth Year in a Row

The word continues to get out that if you want to see hundreds of species in one place, come to Kern County. Our county won the Birdiest Inland County competition for the fifth year in a row, with birders recording 241 species during the weekend of May 2-4, 2008. The Kern River Preserve and the South Fork Valley remain one of the critical bird havens that make this county one of the finest places in the country to view many species of birds.

The neighboring county to the south Los Angeles with their diverse habitats and pelagic opportunities was the winner of the Coastal County competition with 256 species.

Thanks and congratulations go to all of the birders who participated. A huge thank you goes to Bob Barnes for organizing and compiling this fun event every year. §



Great Egrets can be found year round in Kern County.

10th Annual Hummingbird Celebration

Ten years ago Bob Barnes thought he would invite a few people over to see the amazing phenomenon of hummingbird migration at the Kern River Preserve and around the valley. This year 291 people attended our annual celebration, which continues to grow in popularity.

The 2008 event was a great day for hummingbirds and humans;



Thousands of hummingbirds can fly through on a single day during the Hummingbird Celebration.

the weather was perfect, the hummingbirds arrived on schedule, and the staff and volunteers of the Kern River Preserve pulled off another great festival. This one day event celebrates the six species of hummingbirds that live in and migrate through the Kern River Valley.

Thanks go to Birdie Foster, Christy and Gordon Hancock, Marya Miller and Darrell Barnes, Sandra Wieser, Jeff King, and Reed Tollefson for all their great help! Thanks also to Steve Kenton of the USPS, Bill Moffat of the Tule Elk Reserve, Bob Robinson of the Mountain Desert Resource Conservation Service, and Mimi, Doug, and Adam of the Student Conservation Service for some great displays full of interesting information. We also thank all of you for coming to learn about how to care for these flying jewels. §

Spring Nature Festival recap

One more festival for the books, over 500 people enjoyed field trips, music, keynote speeches, workshops and just being out among the beauty of the Kern River Valley and Southern Sierra

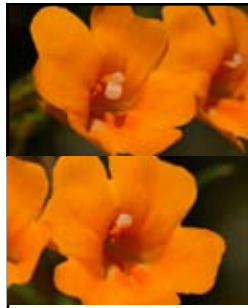


John Muir Laws offered great field sketching workshops on birds and wildflowers.

Nevada. Our two keynote speakers were particularly enjoyable. Bob Steele is one of the gems of Kern County and presented a beautiful and informative program on Warblers on Friday night.

On Saturday night we were treated to John Muir Laws, author and illustrator of the "Laws Field Guide to the Sierra Nevada." Laws was very interactive with the audience, asking them

if they knew some of the special things about plants or animals he had illustrated; take the bush monkeyflower for example; he told the crowd that as a way to prevent self-pollination the flower would close its stigma when touched. I just wonder how many of us harassed monkeyflowers after that fun talk!



Make sure you offer pollen to each monkeyflower tickled!

We thank all of our volunteers, trip leaders, and participants for making this one of the best festivals ever. §

Tricolored Blackbirds (*Agelaius tricolor*) Breed Successfully



This female Tricolored Blackbird was feeding several chicks.

Lands protected in the South Fork Valley by Audubon and the California Department of Fish & Game (CDFG) are home to several flocks of nesting Tricolored Blackbirds. These colonial nesters have declined dramatically throughout their range in the last few years and are listed by CDFG as a Species of Special Concern. Recent research has shown that the birds will only nest in sturdy vegetation. As cattails and nettle age they tend to sag, so removing vegetation in the

non-nesting season to let it regrow is proving to be a way to encourage the success of many nesting species, especially the Tricolored Blackbird. §

Cyrus Canyon protects extremely rare Kelso Creek Monkeyflower

In 2006, after years of being good land stewards, the Sprague Family offered Audubon another significant piece of their land holdings in Cyrus Canyon. Audubon purchased then transferred the land to the Bureau of Land Management to protect this unique 1,662-acre parcel of juniper woodland and upper Sonoran grassland in perpetuity. It was speculated that this could be a beneficial parcel in protecting the Kern Valley's only endemic species, Kelso Creek Monkeyflower. In March a botanist with the Bureau of Land Management discovered over 10,000 individual plants on three acres within the property. Not only did the purchase protect an important piece of creek side habitat, it may prove to be the most important land to save this amazing tiny plant §

The Circle Of Life

A scale insect, a tiny butterfly, an even tinier ant and a desert shrub make up an intriguing drama in the circle of life on the Kern River Preserve.



This soft scale is the smallest part of the life cycle of the San Emigdio Blue Butterfly. Photo by E. Paddock, courtesy U.S. National Collection of Scale Insects Photographs Archive, USDA Agricultural Research Service, www.Bugwood.org



This is a male San Emigdio Blue.



This ant can't compete with the invasive Argentinian ant. Photo courtesy Hartmut Wisch.



The four-wing saltbush has four sections on its seed case.

The San Emigdio Blue (*Plebejus emigdionis*) is an extremely rare butterfly found only in desert valleys in southern California from Inyo County southwest through the Mojave Desert and Southern Sierra Nevada to Los Angeles County. Its caterpillar feeds on the spinach relative, four-winged saltbush (shadscale) (*Atriplex canescens*). Another insect feeds off this saltbush, irregular wax scale (*Ceroplastes irregularis*) which is cared for by a tiny ant (*Formica francoeuri*) that milks the scale for honeydew. Enter the butterfly looking for its host the four-winged saltbush... the butterfly could lay its eggs on any individual in this species, but its larvae would not survive. The butterfly larvae emits a pheromone that makes the ant into, well, an aunt. The ant protects the butterfly larvae even taking it down into its ground nest to foster parent it over the winter. While the saltbush survives fine without its guests, (the butterfly could not survive without all four species in this magical tale of the circle of life.)

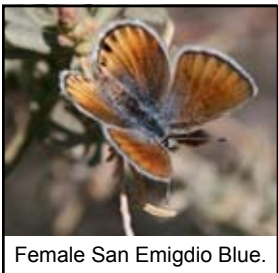
What is even more amazing is the foresight of The Nature Conservancy in planting four-winged saltbush during restoration efforts along KRP's nature trail 15 years ago. During the 2008 South Fork Butterfly count in late April, 42 San Emigdio Blue butterflies were found on the restored site. "I think it is really rewarding that this animal has been found on a site staff and volunteers replanted with native four-winged saltbush in 1993,"

said Reed Tollefson, Manager of the Kern River Preserve.

Recently several parcels of habitat in the Kern River Valley where this rare species had been documented were plowed under by landowners. Audubon is working diligently to provide alternative habitat to prevent this species from being listed as endangered or worse. We are working to create more habitat on the upland restoration project on our Sprague Ranch addition. Our Office & Field Assistant, Sandra Wieser is in charge of this project. As rare habitats disappear around the Kern River Valley is it so important to learn about common to rare species because they can disappear in the wink of an eye; more often just because you don't know they are there.

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The San Emigdio Blue is only 7/8 - 1 1/8 inches long. The male has a pale blue with orangish-brown border on the upper wing and a faded orange band on the outer margin of the hindwing. The female's upper wing is brownish with a blue wash toward the center of the body with orange bands near outer margins. Both sexes are white with small black spots on the underwing.



Female San Emigdio Blue.

A single egg laid is on the leaves of four-wing saltbush. The caterpillars eat leaves and are tended to by the formica ants. Pupa overwinter in the soil. Three flights hatch from April-September. Its habitat is in shadscale scrub in desert canyons and washes. It is very rare throughout its range in southern California from Inyo County south through the Mojave Desert, San Joaquin Valley, Bouquet and Mint Canyons, and Los Angeles County. §

Two Rare Butterfly Species Found on Kelso Creek Sanctuary

This past April, a team of professional and amateur lepidopterists conducted a new butterfly census in a 15-mile circle centered around the Kelso Valley. During the count the rare San Emigdio Blue and Yucca Giant Skipper were discovered on our Kelso Creek Sanctuary.

This makes two wildlife preserves that Audubon owns and manages that prove to be important islands of habitat for the very local San Emigdio Blue butterfly.

Our Outreach Coordinator and butterfly count participant, Alison Sheehey has been adding to the previous censuses of plants and animals on this preserve for the past few years. These butterflies are an exciting new addition to the sanctuary's growing lists of wildlife and plants. Audubon is currently engaged in projects to protect up to 600 acres upstream and adjacent to the Kelso Creek Sanctuary through fee title acquisitions. We hope to convey any new lands to BLM to manage for inclusion in the Brightstar Wilderness Area. §

Crested Caracara on the Preserve



This really rare Crested Caracara was discovered by the turtle team.

On March 25th, Bill Foster, Darrell Barnes, Chris & Gordon Hancock observed a Crested Caracara on the Kern River Preserve. It was refound on March 27th by Walter Mecham who notified Alison Sheehey, KRP's Outreach Coordinator. It flew over Alison, Walter, and Guy Straker as raptor expert John

Schmitt arrived on scene. This was the first county record for this species. It disappeared after only four days. §

Kelso Creek Land Protection

As you read this the transfer agreement between Audubon and the Bureau of Land Management on some critical property in the Kelso Valley Watershed should be finalized. Riparian habitats continue to be threatened by development upstream and upslope of the valley floor, and willing sellers have sold 601-acres to Audubon to protect in perpetuity by transferring to the BLM - Ridgecrest for inclusion in the Bright Star Wilderness. §

Research Around the South Fork and Beyond

The Southern Sierra Research Station ended its field season with another head scratcher. The number of Southwestern Willow Flycatchers continues to drop with only seven pairs recorded this year, which may have something to do with two years of very low rainfall. The good news is 15 young fledged and all nesting females from last year returned with one nine-year-old returning. Of nine nests attempted only one failed, and one particularly smart bird buried a cowbird egg and started with a fresh egg. During banding the researchers banded three new adult birds, which is interesting because all fledglings are banded each season. Were these birds brand new to the area or did they occupy other regions of the valley that the research crew don't survey? Even after 20 years of research, there are still questions in search of an answer.

Tracy Borneman a former owl researcher and this year's field supervisor was excited about her experience, "This was an excellent season, I learned so many new things about songbirds."

SSRS conducted field studies of Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo after an absence of several years as Murrelet Halterman finishes her doctoral studies at the University of Nevada at Reno. This year the cuckoo team found three nests during the short

breeding season of the cuckoo. An estimated 7-12 pair of cuckoos occupied the South Fork Kern River forest this summer. §

Let Your Legacy Live on at KRP

What better place to leave a legacy for our planet than on the Kern River Preserve? A simple note in your will allow long-term support for Outreach and Education, Land Protection, Research and Land Stewardship. It is easy. To help the Kern River Preserve protect this land in perpetuity, just have the following language added to your will:

"I bequeath \$_____ (or _____% of my residuary estate) to the National Audubon Society, Inc., a not-for-profit environmental conservation organization, located at 700 Broadway, New York, NY 10003. This bequest shall be applied to Audubon's programs at the Kern River Preserve in the State of California."

Please consult an estate planner for legal advice. Planned giving is one of the most powerful ways for an individual or family to help create a lasting benefit for the wildlife, the land and the people who love this Preserve. §

Upland Restoration on Sprague Ranch

Long time friend of the Kern River Preserve, Dan Portway, spent part of his summer helping to expand the upland restoration project on the Sprague Ranch. Beginning in June, Dan started collecting seed that was propagated in the preserve's greenhouse by Dan, Sandra Wieser, Birdie Foster, and Marya Miller. Ten plants will make up the bulk of the restored area, and include four-wing saltbush, silver lupine, cotton thorn, narrowleaf goldenbush, California buckwheat, beavertail cactus, silver cholla, Acton's encelia, Joshua tree and chaparral yucca. In a few years we hope to see active recruitment by desert species such as white-tailed antelope squirrel, Cactus Wren and Ladderback Woodpecker in a thriving Joshua tree desert shrubland. §



Dan Portway prepares to plant native plant seedlings nurtured in the KRP Greenhouse. Photo by Sandra Wieser.

North American Butterfly Association Biennial Meeting

From June 25th to July 3rd, 188 people from 27 states and Mexico and Great Britain enjoyed the natural wonders of the Kern River Valley including the Kern River Preserve as part of the North American Butterfly Association's Biennial Meeting. Audubon hosts several rare butterflies that delighted the

participants. Rare butterflies such as the Alkali Skipper, which is found in the preserve's grassland and the San Emigdio Blue were satisfying finds for the listers in the group.

The Kern Valley economy certainly got a boost with 788 visitor days. Over the week 112 species of butterflies were seen in Kern County with another four found for a group that wandered down to San Diego County.

Outreach Director, Alison Sheehy, was one of the Keynote Speakers for the event and presented her "Big Picture in a Small Frame: The Natural History of Kern County and the Southern Sierra Nevada" to an enthusiastic group. More appreciative groups will be able to enjoy the natural wonders of the Kern River Valley once the new Audubon Center is built. §

How the Kern River Preserve helps mitigate global climate change

by Reed Tollefson

"Planting and stewarding trees is one of the best ways to capture and store carbon for climate protection, while at the same time enhancing quality of life where we live, work, and play. Over the course of its life, a tree can store 10,000 lb of carbon dioxide (CO₂), or 4.5 metric tons (t)" (McPherson and Simpson 1999). Trees also release oxygen, filter pollutants from the air and hold down wind erosion thus reducing particulate pollution. Considering Kern County has some of the worst air in the nation these are "environmental services" that are much needed in our community.

Before the Kern River Preserve was established in 1980 this land was part of the A. Brown Ranch, which was managed to maximum financial profit through year round livestock grazing, wood cutting for firewood and active forest clearing to make room for pasture and cultivation. Since that time, financial profit has taken a back seat to our mission is to maximize wildlife habitat which has also lead to benefits for our wider "human" community.

"Active riparian restoration" is when we plant, irrigate and care for young native trees and shrubs for the first year until they can sustain themselves. This is applicable on higher and dryer sites that seldom flood and were therefore cleared for cultivation of hay and alfalfa. Until the river meanders through or floods over these sites new forest will not regenerate and this could take decades. In 20 years, Kern River Preserve volunteers and staff have planted over 342 acres on former farm fields with an average of 120 trees per acre for a total of 41,040 trees. That's a lot of carbon!

We have had a far greater impact through "passive riparian restoration" when we change land management to promote natural regeneration and growth of riparian vegetation. This is applicable on lower wetter sites that flood regularly and therefore were used as pasture but not cultivated. To encouraging the recovery of the river forest, we reduced grazing to only in the winter on about 50% and to no grazing on about 50% of the preserve. We

now use livestock grazing as a conservation management tool and have working partnerships with several local ranch families. Through grazing we help manage fuel loads, utilize old grasses to keep meadows “fresh and productive” and our ranch cooperators



Each tree takes in CO2 and exhales O2, sequestering the carbon for the life of the tree.

help us with heavy equipment needs, labor and expertise in management. About 500 acres on the Kern River Preserve have gone from pastures or “open forest” with a few scattered old trees to dense forest with tens of thousands of young and middle aged trees. That’s a lot more carbon!

In 20 years, I’ve been told more than once “What good is this place if it doesn’t produce anything?” It’s true we don’t “produce” anything that we can sell to generate income. But the trees at Kern River Preserve provide a home to many rare and wonderful creatures while at the same time they work every day to make the air we breathe a little cleaner.

What can you do to help us continue with our mission? Be informed by visiting our webpage and the preserve, volunteer to help with stewardship and outreach, make a donation or planned gift to Kern River Preserve. To carry on we need your help. §

California Department of Fish & Game and Kern River Preserve staff rid the South Fork Valley of Invasive weeds

One of the most challenging tasks in managing the forest along the South Fork Kern is how to keep it relatively free of invasive weeds. While many plants are now easily managed with a few days of weed pulling, a few are have the potential of completely overtaking the forest. Perennial pepperweed is a huge problem along many rivers in the west, and preserve staff monitor continuously throughout the Kern River Valley for this overwhelming invader. The good news is the South Fork appears to have few plants growing within the valley, the bad news is several inaccessible private parcels in Kernville are inundated with the plant. The biggest problem along the South Fork is purple loosestrife which threatens to clog every waterway and marsh crowding out the native plants.

Teams from the California Department of Fish & Game along with Jeff King, Matt Reiter, and Reed Tollefson spread out across the valley over several weeks this summer trying to eradicate this noxious interloper.

The final and most insidious problem was discovered this year. Criminal marijuana



Marijuana gardens do a lot of ecological damage.

gardens were planted and tended by Mexican Nationals along Fay Creek. The amount of ecological damage this operation caused cannot be overstated. A team of Wardens from CDFG and Kern County Sheriff Department swept in and arrested six men. Unfortunately the ecological damage they caused may take years to undo.

Audubon and the Department of Fish & Game will remain ever vigilant to defend this land from all invaders for the benefit of wildlife and humanity. §

Staff News

It was a risk we were willing to take but alas finishing one's degree takes precedence... sadly we report that our bright and promising Land Steward, Matt Reiter, was offered a generous stipend to finish his doctoral dissertation. We hate to see Matt go, in the short time he was at the preserve he brought us into the 21st Century with GIS mapping capability. Matt brought a fresh perspective to the operations at the preserve, and he will genuinely be missed.

On November 17th, we welcome an old friend back to the Kern River Valley to fill Matt's shoes. Sean Rowe has lived and worked in Florida for the past few years and even took a temporary position with the Department of Fish & Game last year while he looked for opportunities in California. It is a pleasure to have Sean back in the Kern River Valley and we welcome him to the Audubon family. §



Sean Rowe. Photo by Walter Mecham

Volunteer Opportunities

Do you live in or visit the Kern River Valley? Would you like to help feed the birds, help plant and maintain the hummingbird garden, do special construction projects, or help with the trail projects? Contact us to volunteer - krpfriends@audubon.org §

KRP WISH LIST

CAN YOU HELP US? Have you noticed our trails becoming a little unkempt... our tractor keeps breaking down.

We NEED a new tractor so we can mow our trail without threat of more breakdowns and parts that can not be found. What we need is a Medium Farm Tractor, Category III with a 3-point hitch. We also need a flatbed Trailer suitable for hauling a tractor or automobile.

Our Buildings

Both the current Visitor's Center and the Audubon House at Sprague Ranch need new roofing and wiring.

For the planet

We are constantly traveling and need an economy car for travel to events and meetings. §

THANK YOU DONORS & NEW MEMBERS

Since our last newsletter 232 people and organizations have generously sent in much needed donations. If your name is missing or misspelled please let us know. Your privacy matters, please let us know if you prefer to remain anonymous.

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Name: _____ Phone: _____
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Application for: New Member Renewal Gift In Memory

_____ \$ 5,000 Summer Tanager	_____ \$100 Great Blue Heron
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_____ \$ 500 Gray Fox	_____ \$25 Raccoon
_____ \$ 250 Willow Flycatcher	Total \$ _____

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 Web Newsletter Only

Please Send Information on:

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 Volunteer Opportunities

All members in the Raccoon and above categories receive our newsletter. New members in the \$100 Great Blue Heron and above level are eligible to receive a KRP Friends T-shirt. Donations in the Gray Fox and above categories receive lifetime membership. Please be sure to indicate size if you WISH to receive a t-shirt. Extra T-shirts available for \$15 (\$12.50 members) plus \$5.00 shipping.
 small ♦ medium ♦ large ♦ XL ♦ XXL (\$18 each)

Please make checks payable to : **NAS / KRP Friends**
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- Yum! Brands for employee Suzanne Eiseman §

KEYSTONE SPECIES



Raccoon

RACCOON

Procyon lotor

One of the smartest local mammals, the raccoon with its opposable thumbs can really get into trouble. The raccoon and the ringtail are related although none of the latter have ever been seen on the preserve. While the ringtail is exceptionally shy, the raccoon is far from it and will boldly venture anywhere the opportunity of food exists.

This masked adventurer can weigh over 18 lbs and can be over 3 feet long. The raccoon is mostly nocturnal and spends the bulk of its days lounging in rotted out logs or in tree cavities near water.

Audubon's Kern River Preserve protects the habitat of 49 species of mammals that call the preserve home. The Kern River Preserve loves to have smart and mischievous friends in the raccoon category, share your love of the preserve with your other masked friends. §



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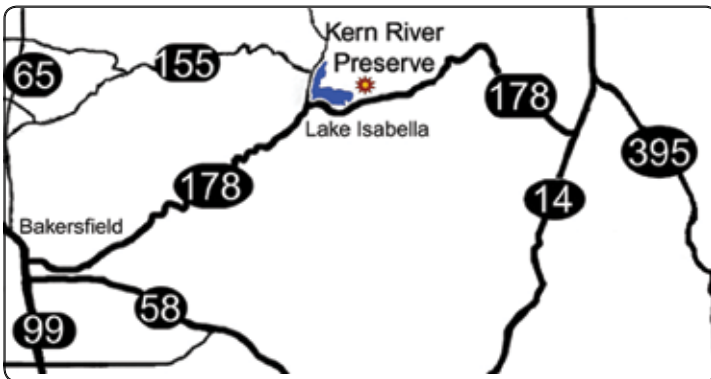
January 3, 2009

South Fork Christmas Bird Count

January 4, 2009

Kern River Valley Christmas Bird
Count

Please note the date of expiration on your mailing label. If it says "exp" then this will be your last issue (if this is in error please contact us right away). We appreciate your support in the past and hope you consider renewing your membership soon. Thank you.



The Kern River Preserve is located 1.1 miles east of the intersection of State Highway 178 and Sierra Way in Weldon, Kern County, California.

Driving time from:

- Los Angeles 3.5 hours
- San Diego 5.5 hours
- San Francisco 6.5 hours
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For further information about the



*Friends of
the Kern
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