



# The Chat



Kerncrest Audubon Society, Ridgecrest, California

December/January 2011/12

## DECEMBER/JANUARY CALENDAR

Wed	Dec 14	6:00 pm	Board Meeting at Ellises'
Sun	Dec 18	7:00 am	Christmas Bird Count
Wed	Jan 18	6:00 pm	Board Meeting at Burnetts'
Thu	Jan 19	7:00 pm	General Meeting
Sat	Jan 21	8:30 am	Field Trip to

## JANUARY GENERAL MEETING: BOB PARKER TORTOISES & TURTLES

The Ridgecrest Branch of the California Turtle and Tortoise Club began holding formal meetings in December of 2009 and were granted official Branch status in 2011. The group consisted of some local people who were aware of serious problems with wild desert tortoises being taken into captivity and pet turtles and tortoises being released into the wild. Species such as the red-eared slider and African sulcata tortoise are now living in the wild affecting native species. Pets often carry diseases that they can spread to the wild population. Some captive desert tortoises are from other parts of their species' range and have a different genetic make-up, so when released into our local desert can contribute genes not necessarily beneficial to the offspring.

The club was established to help alleviate the problem by being a source for those wishing to possess a tortoise through an adoption program. The club is also a place where one can place unwanted turtles and tortoises. The club receives these tortoises from the Ridgecrest animal shelter and private individuals.

Bob Parker is a Wildlife Biologist retired from the Ridgecrest Office of the Bureau of Land Management and is currently President of the Ridgecrest Branch of the California Turtle and Tortoise Club.

7:00 pm at the Maturango Museum.

## CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT REMINDER

The China Lake count is on Sunday, December 18. You may have noticed in the information provided by Alison Sheehey in last month's Chat, that the China Lake count, at 54 years, is the longest-running count in Kern County. To sign up to participate in this venerable tradition, call Peter Woodman at 760-377-3466, or email him at [kivabio@aol.com](mailto:kivabio@aol.com).

If you need a pass to accompany the group to the China Lake "Ponds", call or email Peter **right now**. He will need your social security number. Meet at Leroy Jackson park at 7:00 am. The recap dinner will be at the Suttons' at 5:00 pm.

Kerncrest Audubon Society			
Burnett	President	375-8634	
		cell	382-4935
Lee Sutton	Vice President	375-1981	
Nancy Robinson	Secretary	375-2049	
Dan Burnett	Treasurer	375-8634	
	& Education		
Robert Parker	Field Trips	446-2001	
Terri Middlemiss	Conservation	377-5192	
Noel Gravelle	Membership	375-2325	
Lloyd Brubaker	Member at Large	375-7245	
Sherry Brubaker	Member at Large	375-7245	
Shelly Ellis	Member at Large	446-5012	
Nancy Robinson	Birdathon	375-2049	
Newsletter Ed.	Brenda Burnett	375-8634	
Webmaster	Noel Gravelle	375-2325	

## JANUARY FIELD TRIP: Oceanside and the SoCal Coast

January's field trip is intended to get us out of the cold and down to the more comfortable winter climate of the southern California coastline, along with many overwintering bird species. We'll look for Cassin's Kingbirds along the River San Luis Rey, check out the peeps and shore birds along the coast at Carlsbad and Torrey Pines, and bird the marsh at Batiquitos Lagoon.

Guide and hostess will be Brenda Burnett. Limited sleeping arrangements are available at the Burnett condo for Kerncrest Audubon Society members. Others are welcome if they have other accommodations. RV camping is available at the nearby Guajome San Diego County regional park.

Call Brenda at 760-382-4935 soon to sign up. She will make campground reservations and will plan for accommodations, and will provide directions and further information regarding the trip.

We'll meet at the Burnett residence in Ridgecrest at 8:30 am to form car pools. Those with RVs will meet at the south Albertson's parking lot at the same time.

The plan is to stay 2 nights, returning to Ridgecrest on Monday. Those wishing to stay longer are welcome.

## TIME TO RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP

If you are a local chapter member or a subscriber to the Chat it is time to renew. You can tell if you need to renew by looking at the date on your mailing label. If the date is "1/1/12 (K or C)" you need to renew. To renew just send a check for \$15 for membership (including the Chat) or \$7.00 for just the Chat to, "Membership, Kerncrest Audubon Society, PO Box 984, Ridgecrest, CA 93556-0984.



## Valley Sightings November 2011

Please report unusual sightings to Susan Steele at 377-5220 (home) or 939-1722 (work), or by email at [steele7@verizon.net](mailto:steele7@verizon.net).

The **Greater White-fronted Geese** that first showed up in October remained throughout the month (JS).

The **Ross's Goose** at the Inyokern Ponds Nov 18 was the 97<sup>th</sup> species for that location and the 98<sup>th</sup> species was a **Great Blue Heron** on Nov 24 (SLS).

**Wood Ducks** were at the ponds Nov 2, 5, and 23-28 (SLS, AS).

The **Surf Scoter** stayed at the ponds through Nov 8 for an eleven day stay (BB).

Two **Common Goldeneye** were at the ponds Nov 27 (DVB).

A **Hooded Merganser** was at the ponds Nov 17-19 (BB).

Seven **Red-breasted Mergansers** were at the ponds Nov 17 (BB). This is nicely in the middle of their expected fall migration window Oct 2-Dec 10.

The **Pacific Loon** at the ponds Nov 23 was the 3<sup>rd</sup> valley record and the first seen since Oct 2, 1999 (SLS).

A **Red-shouldered Hawk** was at the ponds Nov 20 (BB).

**Merlins** were at the ponds Nov 2 and 13 (SLS) and N of Inyokern Nov 13 (BB).

A **Peregrine Falcon** was at the ponds Nov 30, which is later than expected (SLS).

The **Red-necked Phalarope** at the ponds Nov 13 was much later than expected (SLS).

The Inyokern Jr Audubon club had two **Bonaparte's Gulls** at the ponds Nov 8 (BBu).

The **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** continued at the college through Nov 7 (SLS).

A **Red-naped Sapsucker** was N of Inyokern Nov 13 (BB).

**Hairy and Nuttall's Woodpeckers** were in Sand Canyon Nov 17 (BB).

Three species of **swallow** were seen at the ponds this month. **Barn** on Nov 4-5, **Violent-green** on Nov 5 (SLS), and **Tree** on Nov 23 (AS).

A **Red-breasted Nuthatch** was seen intermittently at the college throughout the month (SLS).

A **Brown Creeper** was at the college Nov 5-7 (SLS).

A **House Wren** lingered at the college through Nov 29 (BB, SLS).

The **Western Bluebirds** at the college Nov 15-19 were unexpected (BB).

**Mountain Bluebirds** were first noted on the valley floor this fall on Nov 21 (SLS).

**Townsend's Solitaires** were at the college Nov 19-29 (SLS, DVB).

A **Hermit Thrush** was seen at the college on the Kerncrest Audubon field trip Nov 19 (LS).

An **Orange-crowned Warbler** lingered at the college through Nov 13 (SLS).

**Chipping Sparrows** remained at the college through Nov 22 (SLS).

What is most likely the **Clay-colored Sparrow** discovered at the college on Oct was seen intermittently through Nov 11 (BB).

A **White-throated Sparrow** was at the college Nov 19 (SLS).

A "Slate-colored" **Dark-eyed Junco** was SW of Inyokern Nov 19 (LK).

**Rusty Blackbirds** were reported from Ridgecrest Nov 1 (DB) and at the college Nov 5-14 (TW), for the 182<sup>nd</sup> species at that location.

A **Cassin's Finch** was at the college Nov 14 (SLS).

A **Pine Siskin** was at the cemetery Nov 14 (SLS).

Thanks to the following observers: *Bob Barnes, Brenda Burnett, David Blue, Louise Knecht, Joyce Seibold, Alison Sheehy, Lee Sutton, Tom Wuster*

## November Field Trip Report IWV Birding Hot Spots

The November 19, 2011, Kerncrest field trip to Indian Wells Valley bird hot spots, notably, Cerro Coso Community College, the cemetery, and the Ridgecrest Ponds, started out on a cold and blustery note. Fortunately, the weather improved throughout the morning to the point it was darned nice by the time we finished around noon. Eleven hardy Kerncrest birders were able to identify 31 species. Thanks Noel for leading a good trip.

Birds species identified (roughly in the order seen) were:  
Verdin

Dark-eyed Junco (most, if not all of the Oregon subspecies)

Yellow-rumped Warbler

Long-eared Owl

Northern Mockingbird

Mourning Dove

Eurasian Collared Dove

Horned Lark – probably 2 to 300 in about 3 or 4 locations.

Black Phoebe

House Finch

House Sparrow

White-crowned Sparrow

Ruby-crowned Kinglet

Hermit Thrush

Northern Flicker

Say's Phoebe

Loggerhead Shrike

Snow Geese – ca 400 with 4 to 5 blue phase, all on the pond.

Ruddy Duck

American Coot

European Starling

Rock Pigeon

American Wigeon

Northern Shoveler

Bufflehead – one female

Sage Sparrow

Sharp-shinned Hawk

Red-tailed Hawk

Common Raven

Western Grebe

California Quail

(Burrowing Owl and Prairie Falcon seen by some after we broke up)

Submitted by Lee Sutton

## DEATH TRAPS

Open-top vertical pipes are death traps to birds, lizards, and small mammals. Cavity nesting birds and animals escaping from predators or seeking shade are

frequently trapped. Birds enter pipes but can't get out. These animals suffer miserable deaths from dehydration, starvation, and exposure. As described in Audubon's Kern River Preserve web site: a 20 foot tall, 6 inch diameter irrigation vent tube on an abandoned irrigation system fell over. When Audubon staff "picked up the pipe, they were shocked to find a 7-foot long, black mass of decomposed carcasses of hundreds of dead birds and animals, including kestrels, flickers, bluebirds and fence lizards. The date etched into the concrete at the base of this vent pipe showed that it had been in place for over 50 years. All that time animals had been silently suffering and dying in this trap as unsuspecting people went about their business nearby." (<http://kern.audubon.org/> Nests to Die For)

A recent article in a Las Vegas paper, "Mining claim markers blamed for thousands of bird deaths" mentions an Audubon member who found a PVC pipe used as mining claim corner marker. "As John Hiatt lifts the 5-foot length of tube in the air, the dried husk of a dead bird slides from the bottom. It's a Say's Phoebe, he says, a species native to Nevada but unable to avoid a ghastly and un-foreseen hazard created by one of the state's iconic industries." Nevada is plagued with thousands of these markers -- as many as a million, and California has the same problem. A new Nevada State law allows anyone to remove a plastic tube or un-capped pipe from a mining claim and lay it on the ground. "To mark the occasion, the Red Rock Audubon Society held a volunteer "pull-out event" Saturday in the desert north of Pahrump and is encouraging its members to "pull, baby, pull" ". (<http://www.lvrj.com/news/>) If you can't pull the pipe up, you can stuff rocks in the pipes to close off the openings.

California Public Resources Code, Section 3915 states that the only monuments allowed to mark claim corners are wooden posts, rock mounds, and capped metal posts or solid metal rods.

In Omaha, an Audubon member discovered dead bluebirds that had gone down his stovepipe because there was no wire "spark arrestor" around the chimney cap. It is common for bluebirds, swallows, and other cavity nesters to enter stove pipes in search of a place to nest. The poor man said, "he cried like a baby while cleaning out the dead birds from the stove". He filled up a five gallon bucket with dead bluebirds and returned to remove even more...all killed during just one nesting season. (<http://audubon-omaha.org/bestofbbml/stovepipe.htm>)

Birds are also trapped in large water storage tanks with small openings around the top. BLM recently found one of these tanks with dozens of dead birds inside. Cans and bottles also trap lizards and small mammals. People need to remove, cap, or screen open-topped pipes. Please look around and take notice of these death traps. If you find an open-topped claim marker out in the desert, cap or plug the opening.

Submitted by Shelley Ellis



231 SKULLS FROM SKELETONS FOUND IN ONE 6" IRRIGATION SYSTEM VENT PIPE NEAR WELDON

Sean Rowe, Land Steward, Audubon California Kern River Preserve provides the following:

"I think pipes of all sizes are a problem. We have found dead birds in pipes from 1 1/2" to 10" in diameter. A very high percentage of pipes I've looked into contain at least one dead bird. And pipes don't have to be in place very long. Twice I have leaned a 3" steel pipe against a building, expecting to use it within a few days, only to find dead birds inside. 2 House Finches in one and a Rock Wren in another.

"In our area 8-10" steel pipe (often old well casing) is used to make gate posts. This is common on ranches. I believe I've also seen this on some BLM and/or USFS gates. We've documented dead flickers & fence lizards.

"3" steel pipe – used for fence corner posts – house finches & rock wren

"1 1/2 - 2" plastic pipe – tree swallow

"2-3" outhouse vent pipe – common yellowthroat

"I believe so far 45 species have been documented – mostly from claim markers – but folks aren't looking elsewhere. *Nearly EVERY residential and commercial building has at least one pipe protruding from the roof.*

"Some solutions:

Remove pipes that can be removed

Plug pipes with sand/gravel or a heavy well fitted rock.

Even a few sticks if absolutely nothing else around.

Pipes that can't be capped – eg. Plumbing vent pipes (on your rooftop) – cover with 1/4" mesh hardware cloth held in place by a stainless steel hose clamp

Large gate posts – fill with sand, concrete or gravel.

Weld on steel caps – some ranches do this, or we have capped with a concrete plug.

Small steel pipes – used for signs or chain link fence posts – cap with metal cap or crimp top together."

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(Includes subscription to *The Chat*)

\_\_\_\_\_ yr Subscription to *The Chat* only @ \$7/year

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Please enclose a check payable to Kerncrest Audubon Society.

Clip out and mail to: Kerncrest Audubon Society  
P.O. Box 984  
Ridgecrest CA 93556

National Audubon Society membership includes membership in the local chapter, a subscription to the Audubon magazine and the Kerncrest newsletter, *The Chat*. It also provides the right to vote in society elections, and inclusion on national society mailing lists for informational materials and solicitations for contributions. Membership in the Kerncrest Audubon Society includes a subscription to *The Chat*, (not to *Audubon* magazine) and provides the right to vote in local society elections. Inclusion on national mailing lists is optional. A subscription to *The Chat* only does not provide the right to vote in elections.

***The Chat***

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