



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.

**MAY/JUNE
2006**

vol. 43, no. 5

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Membership

Submissions for the July/August issue are due June 1, 2006

MONTHLY MEETINGS

Date: Fourth Tuesday of the month
Time: Social at 6:30 p.m. Program starts at 7 p.m.
Location: South Valleys Library
15650A Wedge Parkway, Reno
Exterior door, west side of building

Directions to South Valleys Library: Take Hwy 395 to the Mt. Rose Hwy. Head west on the Mt. Rose Hwy and take the first right turn onto Wedge Parkway, just past Raley's shopping center. Go about one mile on Wedge Parkway and look for the boldly designed, mustard yellow library on the right.

MAY PROGRAM

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

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

There are no LAS meetings during the summer months. The next meeting will be Tuesday, September 26.

FIELD TRIPS

Nancy Bish

775-884-1570

n.bish@att.net

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

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

For more birding opportunities, see the Spring Wings and Birdathon articles on pages 3 and 5.

Saturday, May 13

Silver Saddle Ranch

Time: 7:30 a.m.

Place: Contact trip leader

Trip Leader: Nancy Bish 884-1570, n.bish@att.net

Sponsors: LAS and Friends of Silver Saddle Ranch (FOSSR)

The spring trip to Silver Saddle Ranch is the annual FOSSR May general meeting and includes a walk along riparian habitat adjacent to the Carson River. Other habitats along the way include agricultural fields, sagebrush and willows. The diversity of habitats provides for a diversity of bird species to be observed. All levels of birders

are welcome and beginning birders are encouraged to attend. Please contact Nancy to register for the trip.

Saturday and Sunday, June 10 and 11 Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge Work Project

Sponsor: Sheldon NWR

Contact: Mike Goddard (Stillwater NWR) (775) 423-5128 or mike_goddard@fws.gov

Sunday will be a tour with Brian Day, Sheldon NWR Manager. We have three projects depending upon how many people we have. We will remove fence if a lot of people show up or restore historic willow corrals if fewer people attend. We will travel around and photograph various springs (where horses have been removed) for future reference if we are only a handful. Everyone should bring gloves, sunscreen, insect repellent, plenty of liquid refreshment, fence tools, wire cutters, buckets (for scrap wire and clips) and long bladed screwdrivers if you have them. Plan on eating lunch in the field on Saturday.

Make sure your spare tire is serviceable as we have encountered flat tires in the past on our adventures on the Sheldon. Gas up at Cedarville, Alturas, or Gerlach. I usually carry five gallons of gas with me. I heartily recommend caravanning with others and having a Nevada Gazetteer in hand. Bring your own main course and a side dish to share for the Saturday night potluck. We will camp near the sub-headquarters, at the Virgin Valley campground, next to the hot

springs. It is just off of US 140. Bring your own potable water. It has been a wet year, so the wildlife and maybe the flowers should be great. In the past we have seen sage grouse, Great Horned Owls, Sandhill cranes and Pronghorn Antelope.

There are many ways to get to the Sheldon. Contact Mike for detailed instructions or to receive a Sheldon NWR brochure. Mike will arrive Friday afternoon and would be interested if anyone wants to carpool.

Saturday, June 17

Carson River Delta

Trip Leaders: Don and Mary McIvor (775) 882-2597 or

dmcivor@audubon.org

Cost: \$4 per car

Time: 8:30 a.m.

Place: Fort Churchill State Park (Alt. 95) picnic area

Spend a day paddling the best cottonwood gallery riparian forests in Nevada. We'll drop off our boats and run our car shuttle to our takeout at the end of Ninth Street in Silver Springs. We'll stop for lunch along the river and enjoy birding the river corridor. Bring a boat, lunch, water, binoculars, and sunscreen. This stretch of the river is suitable for canoes and kayaks. Limited to 12 boats, so reservations are required. Cost covers state park entrance and use fee.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

The Pelican is the official newsletter of the Lahontan Audubon Society and is published six times annually. Subscriptions are paid for as part of the dues of LAS or the National Audubon Society. LAS welcomes gifts, donations, and bequests in general, or gifts in honor or memory of relatives and friends. Such donations will be used as specified or, if unspecified, will be used to support LAS education and conservation projects. All donations are tax deductible.

WHERE TO WRITE:

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

Senator Harry Reid
400 S. Virginia St. #902
Reno, NV 89501
Reno phone: 686-5750

Senator John Ensign
400 S. Virginia St. #738
Reno, NV 89501
Reno phone: 686-5770

Representative Jim Gibbons
400 S. Virginia St. #502
Reno, NV 89501
Reno phone: 686-5760

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

Spring Wings Bird Festival

The ninth annual Spring Wings Bird Festival is in Fallon May 12-14. This year we are kicking off the festival Friday morning with a dedication ceremony for the new viewing platform and auto-tour loop out at Stillwater Point. The Stillwater refuge staff, Seabees from the Fallon Naval Air Station, Federal Highways Department, Churchill County, and the Spring Wings Friends group, with the financial support of National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Nevada Commission on Tourism, BirdLife International and Kennecott Rawhide Mine, have all come together to make the viewing platform a reality. You are all invited to join the FWS staff, local and state dignitaries, and Jonathan Stacy of Birdlife International at the dedication. Jonathan is coming all the way from London, England, for the event. He will also be giving the keynote address at the Spring Wings banquet that same night. He is based out of London but travels the world promoting and supporting bird friendly missions. This includes our own Important Bird Areas program in Nevada as well as those throughout the United States and the world! I'm sure he has a few stories to tell which will inform, entertain and educate all of us in attendance.

Not only did BirdLife International help fund the Stillwater Point observation deck project, they also helped fund the printing of our own, just released book, *Important Bird Areas of Nevada* by Don McIvor. If you haven't purchased a copy yet,

they will be available for sale at the festival. If you have, bring it along. Don will be signing books after his Saturday night talk about, you guessed it, important bird areas of Nevada.

The backbone of the festival has always been the field trips and this year is no exception. In addition to the usual trips to Carson Lake, the diversion dam, Soda Lakes, Harmon and S-line reservoirs to name a few, there will be trips to several new locations as well as re-packaging some of the traditional ones.

We have designed a couple of new tours focusing on Lahontan Reservoir and the pair of Bald Eagles that have been breeding there for almost a decade. They are thought to be one of only three documented "successful" pairs of breeding Bald Eagles in the entire state of Nevada! With the support of Nevada State Parks and the Department of Wildlife we will be able to get some good looks at their nest, and hopefully a couple of fledgling eagles still in or in close proximity to the nest. There will be a couple of different ways to get out near the island where the eagles' nest is. One is by canoe and kayak and the other, for those of us who can't paddle their way to the area, is by party barge.

The "Owl Prowl" has been modified to be an afternoon trip rather than the traditional evening event. During the afternoon the birds are easier to see, they are roosting - not out hunting somewhere, we can use spotting scopes rather than spotlights, there

is a better chance of seeing baby owls in and around the nests, and we are less of a disturbance to all the wildlife in the area, including the owls. All these factors made this a reasonable change and one that we hope you will enjoy.

The Fallon Convention Center, "Spring Wings Central," will be hosting the festival again this year. There will be a Spring Wings store where you can buy festival related items, a new Spring Wings photo and art booth where photographers and artists from around the area can exhibit or sell up to three pieces of their work without having the expense or staffing issues of a booth of their own. Other exhibits, morning coffee and homemade baked items, registration, workshops, children's programs, and field trips will all be in or start from the convention center as well. The activities at the convention center, except for the workshops and banquets, are free and open to the public.

For the first time Spring Wings is offering a photo contest. It is open to all registered festival participants. This may be the year you want to bring your camera along and brush-up on your skills by attending Bob Goodman's wildlife photography workshop.

Details about the photo contest, field trips, workshops, registration, and other festival related items can be found on the Spring Wings website (www.springwings.org) or by calling (775) 428-6452.

Jim Lytle

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S PERCH

Gone Birdin'

May is particularly active in the birding world. The columns From the President's Perch, Conservation Corner, and Important Bird Areas have taken a vacation in this issue and will return with the next issue. For an abundance of birding-related opportunities during May and June, see the various articles in this issue. Enjoy!

Please note that the scheduled presentation for the March 28 General Meeting on the Sempra Power Plant was canceled by the speaker. Several articles in the newspapers have explained that Sempra is pulling out of this project. Don McIvor Nevada Director, Important Bird Areas, came forward for an entertaining and informative program that evening in conjunction with a book signing. Many thanks to Don. It was a good evening. We were only able to advise people of the change via the LAS e-mail list. – Another good reason to sign on.

– Karen L. Kish

LAS Elections

The next LAS elections are right around the corner. They will be held during the May general meeting on Tuesday, May 23.

Nominations are now being accepted for any of the officers' positions including President, Vice President, Treasurer, and Recording Secretary. These are all one-year terms. Also, three trustee seats (1,3, and 5) have come to term. Seat 1 is currently held by Jane Burnham, Seat 2 by Ali Chaney, and 5 is held by Jacque Lowery (Jacque was appointed to seat 5 after it was vacated by Ray Nelson in March of this year). Nominations for these seats are also being accepted. The term for trustees is three years.

You may nominate yourself or any LAS member in good standing, subject to their acceptance of the nomination, to any of the positions. The nomination committee encourages you to get involved and keep this a democratic process. Contact either Alan Gubanich, 857-0191, aag@scs.unr.edu; or Jim Lytle, 775 577-9641, lytleja@sbcglobal.net with any questions or nominations.

Fund Drive 2005 Donors

Our Autumn Fund Drive for 2005 had to be scaled back to a solicitation via e-mail only to approximately 100 Audubon members on that list. A very, very special thanks goes out to those generous people who responded to support our conservation, education, and birding activities.

Golden Eagle \$500 or More

Dave & Pamela Straley

American White Pelican \$100 - \$499

Robert & Gigi Chisel

Celia Evans

Karen L. Kish

John & Faith Spencer

American Avocet \$50 - \$99

Bob Brown

Bob Shields

Carole Terry

Alan R. Wallace

Mountain Bluebird \$20 - \$49

Donna Bradley

Ali Chaney

Carol Colip

Jessica Dhaemers

Mary Semski

Ruby-crowned Kinglet \$10 - \$19

Wilfred Adam

Richard Groseclose

Wesley G. Shirts.

– Dave Straley, Fundraising Chair &
Karen L. Kish, President

Birds & Books Reading Group

Lahontan Audubon Society has a new program for members who are interested in birds and books. The Birds & Books Reading Group provides an opportunity for LAS members to meet and engage in a collaborative discussion of books about birds and their place in nature. The goal is to select titles that stretch our minds as well as enhance knowledge of birds — and ourselves.

Books for the first two months have been selected so that members have an opportunity to read the books prior to the meeting. They are for May 4, *The Big Year: A Tale of Man, Nature, and Fowl Obsession* by Mark Obmascik and for June 1, *Hope is the Thing with Feathers: A Personal Chronicle of Vanished Birds* by Christopher Cokinos. Both books are in paperback and readily available at Sundance Books, Barnes & Noble, Borders, and Amazon.com, as well as at the Washoe County Library. Books for subsequent meetings will be selected by Birds & Books Reading Group members.

Prior to the Birds & Books Reading Group meeting, members should read the selected book and prepare a list of three questions for general discussion by the members. In addition, each member should select up to three passages from the book to read aloud to the group for discussion. Kenn Rohrs, an LAS member, will facilitate first two meetings. Thereafter Birds & Books Reading Group members will select a facilitator.

Meetings will be at the South Valleys Library 15650A Wedge Parkway, Reno, exterior door, west side of building from 7-8:30 p.m. Coffee and cookies will be available. For planning purposes, please contact Kenn at karohrs@charter.net or 775-849-9530.

CONSERVATION CORNER

Field Trip Reports

Saturday, March 11 Wellington Sage Grouse Lek

A combined group of NDOW volunteers and Lahontan Audubon birders visited the sage grouse leks south of Wellington. It was a cold morning but the snow that had been in the forecast held off at least until the afternoon. There were over 70 male and six female sage grouse on the leks, the most Kim Toulouse (NDOW Volunteer Coordinator) had ever seen at this site. In addition we saw: Northern Harrier, Red-tailed Hawk, Western Meadowlark, Brewer's Sparrow and American Crow.

Wilson Canyon (5 miles east of Smith on Rt. 208) species list: Rock Pigeon, American Dipper, Spotted Towhee, Audubon Warbler, Cooper's Hawk, Northern Harrier, Song Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Brewer's Sparrow and House Sparrow.

Mason Valley Wildlife Management Area (off of Hwy 95A north of Yerington) species list: Great Blue Heron, Black-crowned Night-Heron, American Coot, Ruddy Duck, Ring-necked Duck, Gadwall, Lesser Scaup, Mallard, Blue-winged Teal, Red-tailed Hawk, Northern Harrier, Belted Kingfisher, and Audubon's Warbler.

Then came the snow.....

Jim Lytle

Sunday, March 12 Truckee River

On a very cold and snowy Sunday morning, a hardy band of six birders (including a 1 year old and a 5 year old) walked (or strollered) the Truckee River Trail in Reno. While our family made it all the way to Wingfield Park through intermittent snow showers and sun, we completed the hike to Rock Park in Sparks.

We saw 33 bird species, some in good numbers, including Common Mergansers and American Robins, Western Scrub- and Stellar's jays. Other birds included about a dozen Hooded Mergansers and

half dozen Common Goldeneyes. Of special note were three pairs of Killdeer, a Red-breasted Sapsucker, and a Sharp-shinned Hawk in full chase, target unidentified.

Rose Strickland

Saturday, March 21 Schaffer Mtn. Sage Grouse Lek, Honey Lake State Wildlife Area, and Brockman Canyon Oak Grove

We (Steve Ting, Susie Marshall, and David Arsenault) arrived at the Schaffer Mountain sage grouse lek at 7 a.m. thanks to Steve's bravery in tackling the precariously muddy road in. We counted 13 male and 8 female Greater Sage-Grouse on the lek and watched the displaying males until 7:30, when all but two males had departed for the day. Steve took some great pics you can see at <http://rohirrim.smugmug.com/gallery/945059>.

We continued on to the Honey Lake Wildlife Area and found a good number of ducks as well as numerous Tundra Swans and a large flock (~500) of Snow Geese. A real treat was a Cooper's Hawk that was perched in a lone tree next to a small pond and was very interested in the ducks below. It then flew between telephone poles by dropping nearly straight down into the sagebrush, flying low, and then climbing sharply to perch atop the next pole.

Our last stop was an oak grove on the west shore on Honey Lake where we found Lewis's Woodpecker, Acorn Woodpecker, and a Great Horned Owl that were active between the bouts of diamond-shaped hail. Despite the weather, we still had a great day. Species count was 56.

David Arsenault

*Sierra Nevada Avian Center
www.aviancenter.com*

Birds of the Truckee Meadows Basic Birding Course 2006

**Dates: Wednesdays May 17, 24, 31,
June 17, 14**

Time: 7-9 p.m.

**Location: Nevada Division of Wildlife,
1100 North Valley Road, Reno**

**Cost: \$40 for 5 classes or \$10 per class
(payable at the door - arrive early to pay)**

Topics and Instructors:

May 17: Introduction to Birds and Birding, David Jickling

May 24: Backyard Birds, Alan Gubanich (class at UNR lab)

May 31: Mountain Birds, Jim Eidel

June 7: Birds of Lakes and Marshes, Larry Neel

June 14: Birds of Prey, Bob Goodman

This course qualifies for one teacher in-service credit. Selected books on birding will also be available for purchase at each class. Proceeds benefit Lahontan Audubon Society projects. For further information or to register call Bob Goodman at 972-7848.

Birdathon 2006

It's May, which means Birdathon 2006 is here! We currently have teams in Reno, Carson City and Fallon. Have a great time, and the best of luck to all our participants! For those of you still not signed up, there might still be time to join a team so contact me now at Ali_Chaney@hotmail.com (reference birdathon in the subject heading) or 775-813-3494.

There is still time to participate as an individual and collect pledges, and we welcome your participation as a sponsor of a team or one of our team members. Remember, money raised during this event goes toward conservation projects to help birds and bird habitat in Nevada. This is our spring fundraising event and with your help it will be a success! Contact me for more information.

Ali Chaney

BIRDS IN TOWN

by Alan Wallace

From the urban center of Reno to somewhat less cosmopolitan Tuscarora and Austin, northern Nevada feederwatchers responded in force to the three-day Great Backyard Bird Count in mid-February, resulting in 138 species in all (minus a few obvious impossibilities). Some species were fairly widespread, but location did matter for others. **Pine Siskins** generally were more widespread in eastern Nevada (abundant in Baker, as usual), along with **Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches**. **Cassin's Finches** were in Battle Mountain, Austin, Baker, and Virginia City, **Juniper Titmice** graced Virginia City, Spring Creek, and Baker; Spring Creek had a few **Black-capped Chickadees** (they do occur in northeasternmost Nevada), and the **Bohemian Waxwings** showed up in force in Lovelock. Plus, a few lucky communities didn't report any **House Sparrows**, or maybe they were in denial. If you're interested in seeing all the results from Nevada, point your web browser to <http://gbbc.birdsource.org/gbbcApps/results>.

Those three days, while an interesting snapshot, didn't capture the hints that a new breeding season was approaching. Just as lakes turn over seasonally, so do the bird demographics. Early March brought spring arrivals, starting with a single **Violet-green Swallow** on March 1, followed later in the month by **Tree, Cliff, Barn,** and **Northern Rough-winged Swallows**. The first **Turkey Vultures** soared into Reno on March 2 and March 8 in Elko, devoid of the fanfare that they receive at the Buzzard Festival in Hinckley, Ohio. **American Avocets, Black-necked Stilts, White-faced Ibises,** and **Long-billed Curlews** began to frequent wetlands; **American White Pelicans** were spotted soaring over wetlands, likely heading for Pyramid Lake, and **Sandhill Cranes** passed overhead, some aiming farther north or some perhaps arriving to nest in local pastures. **Red-tailed** and **Cooper's Hawks**, as well as **Great Horned Owls**, began the breeding season early, rebuilding nests and laying eggs in March, and **Burrowing Owls** returned to past nest sites north of Reno in late March. **Western Scrub-Jays** collected nest materials in March (they tend to nest early), and hormones led one pair of **Mourning Doves** to start what turned out to be a false nest as the early March snow was flying. By the end of March, birds were becoming much more vocal, most notably in marshes where the **Marsh Wren** and **Yellow-headed Blackbird** calls made for a jarring two-part harmony.

A few winter birds hung around into late March, including the **Chestnut-collared Longspurs** and **Barrow's Goldeneyes** at Swan Lake north of Reno and **Golden-crowned Sparrows** in various locales. A wintering **Mew Gull** shifted from Virginia Lake in Reno to the Swan Lake area before migrating, and the **Tundra Swans** gradually departed for more northerly lands. Fewer **Bald Eagles** than usual (half dozen versus three dozen) were seen in the Carson Valley during the calf-drop season, and hawk numbers were much lower as well. Linda Hiller wondered if one reason might be the recent eastward range expansions of the **American Crows** and **Common Ravens**, which also are scavengers, creating increased competition for the eagles and pushing them eastward in advance of the corvids. A few pink **Ring-billed Gulls** were seen here and in many parts of the West. Fred Peterson cited a research paper that said that the pink color is caused by astaxanthin, a carotenoid pigment. Sightings of pink gulls have increased in the past 6 to 8 years, paralleling the introduction of synthetic astaxanthin to the diets of hatchery-raised salmon. The food chain in action?

And now for a little avian etymology. With the **Bohemian Waxwing** invasion, Jane Thompson found that the "Bohemian" moniker refers to their nomadic winter movements, similar to past residents of Bohemia, seeking out and devouring the food available, then moving on to find and eat more. (Incidentally, they will devour over-ripened, alcohol-rich fruit, creating some interesting behaviors.) In the summer, Bohemian Waxwings do not have breeding territories to defend and thus have no true song. So, that said, where do Wandering Tattlers get their names? The truth might be less colorful than what we can dream up.

Birders reported 154 species during February and March. Sources of information included **John Anderson, Brian Adams, Richard Brune, Melody & Steve Craig, Claudia Funari, Bob Goodman, Sue Herrera, Linda Hiller, Nancy Hoffman, Jacque Lowery, Sue Anne Marshall, Matthew Matthiessen, Martin Meyers, Fred Peterson, Harold Peterson, Debbie & Randy Pontius, Lois & Mark Ports, Melissa Renfro, Greg Scyphers, Rose Strickland, Carol Thomas, Jane Thompson, Frank Whitman, John Woodyard, Dave Worley**, all the anonymous backyard feederwatchers, 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 **May 25**. Good birding!

LAS MEMBERSHIP/DONATION FORM

Lahontan Audubon Society Membership: All funds remain in the community. Members receive *The Pelican* newsletter and may elect to receive e-mail activities notices. Please complete and mail this form with payment.

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

LAS Donations: Please select level:

- Ruby-crowned Kinglet - \$10 Mountain Bluebird - \$20 American Avocet - \$50
 American White Pelican - \$100 Golden Eagle - \$500 or more

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May/June 2006 issue

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<i>A Birding Guide to Reno and Beyond</i> Published by Lahontan Audubon Society, 2000	\$10	\$1.50	_____
<i>Nevada Birding Map</i> (price includes postage) Published by Lahontan Audubon Society, 2004	\$ 4	\$1	_____

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IBA

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