



THE OBSERVER

WHITTIER AREA AUDUBON SOCIETY

Volume 76, Issue 10

June 2019

Visit our website www.whittieraudubon.org

From Audubon California: Salton Sea's iconic pelicans and cormorants are quickly becoming a thing of the past

As bird species disappear from California's largest inland lake, Audubon report calls on state to restore crucial habitats.

Salton Sea, Calif. – As the Salton Sea's waterline continue to recede, California's largest lake is losing some of its iconic bird species, including pelicans and cormorants. The report released today, which aggregates several sources of bird monitoring data, shows how dramatic ecological change at the Salton Sea is forcing some birds out, resulting in fewer overall species of birds taking advantage of habitat. One of the fastest disappearing species appears to be the American White Pelican which, according to surveys, has declined from a high of 20,000 birds in 2008 to fewer than 100 now, according to aerial surveys conducted by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. Audubon's own surveys shows a similar drop-off on recent years. This decline is largely the result of the Sea's increased salinity, which is killing off the tilapia upon which the birds feed.

"For a community that once held annual Pelican Days Birding Festivals, the decline of these great birds is certainly disheartening," said Andrea Jones, Audubon California's director of bird conservation, and principle author of the new report. "At its peak, the Salton Sea hosted a broad diversity of birds, and any habitat restoration that takes place here should serve that diversity."

See Salton Sea, page 2

Whittier Area Audubon will observe our usual summer hiatus. See you again in September. Happy Birding!



Audubon

We are a chapter of National Audubon

KIDS SPACE

Birding in a Box

We are designing a grant application and process to award Birding In A Box grants to teaching organizations for next year. The application and instructions will be on our website soon, so if you know any educational program that would like to use instant curricula, direct them to our website.

If you are unfamiliar with Birding In A Box Cathy Fricker and Jennifer Schmahl are designing BIRDING IN A BOX to present to teachers or afterschool staff to enhance the Audubon Adventures experience. In the Box: we have designed a journal for teachers/ leaders to use as a guide, a set of kid sized binoculars, a set of owl pellets to dissect, kits to build either a birdhouse or a bird feeder and a set of Audubon Adventures. This is meant for Out Of School or Afterschool programs or to enhance Post-Testing school programs. We are setting up a Donate option on our website to sponsor a classroom Box.

GENERAL MEETING AND PROGRAM Photo Sharing and Potluck
June 20, 2019 at 6:00 pm

Thursday, June 20 2019 Community Center, 7630 Washington Ave., Whittier, CA. at the corner of Washington Ave.(not to be confused with Washington Blvd.) and Mar Vista St.

- **Salton Sea: Are We Losing Our Pelicans:**
- **Board of Directors elected**
- **Photo Sharing & Potluck**
- **Kids Space: Grant Applications for Birding in a Box Available soon**
- **Field trips: Sycamore Canyon and Mount Pinos**
- **Field Trip report: Morro Bay & Carrizón Plain**

Bring your favorite bird photos to share (USB thumb drive is easiest) and a dish to share. **Please bring your own plate and utensils.**

JUNE Field Trips

Beginning Bird Walk, Sycamore Canyon:

Every second Saturday of the month (except July and August,) **June 8, 2019 7:00am Sycamore Canyon Beginning Bird Walks** Meet at the Sycamore Canyon Trailhead. The trail is located adjacent to Rose Hills Cemetery gate 17. Rain or recent cancels the Canyon Walk, but we will choose another location. **Leader Steve Huber. We will have a summer hiatus. BBW will return in September.**

MOUNT PINOS

Steve Huber leads.

Mt. Pinos is a great place for montaine species. Green tailed Towhees, White Headed Woodpeckers, Creepers, Nuthatches, Chickadees, Stellar Jays and Mountain Quail are to be expected. California Condors are always a

possibility. We will leave the Whittier Civic Center at 7:00 a.m. on Saturday June 22, 2019 for the drive to Frasier Park. We will bird a couple of spots near Frasier Park. We will stop at a few spots outside of Frasier to look for raptors and pray for Condors. We will then turn around and head up to Mt. Pinos for more birds and lunch.

Bring a sack lunch, sufficient junk food to last the trip, your usual birdwatching stuff and a car with gas. Scopes will come in handy at a couple of stops. It is about an hour's drive from Whittier to Frasier Park. I would think we would be back in Whittier between 3:00 and 4:00.

MAY TRIP REPORT

Morrow Bay and Carrizo Plain

In spite of May's atmospheric river pummeling Northern and Central California, we managed to bird around rain storms and get some pretty good birds on our field trip. As usual, trip leader Jay Oberholtzer had scouted out lots of places so we got good looks at shorebirds, wading birds, floaters and flyers. First stop was Morro Rock to look for the nesting Peregrine Falcons.



Along with the young family, the Rock was home for nesting Brandts and Pelagic Cormorants, and Western Gulls. Next, we circled around the bay and estuary and saw Canada Geese, several Brant, Caspian Terns, Double-crested Cormorants, Brown Pelicans, Black Phoebe, Tree, Barn and Cliff Swallows, a Wrentit and the resident race of White-crowned Sparrow (nuttalli).

Various stops around Morro Bay gave us Black Oystercatcher, Pigeon Guillemot, Surf Scoter, California and Spotted Towhees, California Scrub Jays. There were lots of nesting action at the Audubon Sweet Springs property. We saw a Red Tail Hawk nest with young in it, Chestnut-backed Chickadees taking turns feed young in a cavity, as well as a pair of Downy Woodpeckers in and out of another cavity nearby. A Song Sparrow was observed with worms and

then taking out a fecal sack. At another location we observed two juvenile American Crows being fed.

Next morning, we headed East on Hwy 58 towards the Carrizo Plain. Along the way we found Yellow-billed Magpies in a neighborhood along Hwy 58. Then further along saw Cliff Swallows nest building under a road bridge.

Driving along Soda Lake Rd to the Visitor Center, there was a pair of Loggerhead Shrikes feeding a juvenile, as well as a trio of Red-tailed Hawks, one of whom was a juvenile still with his family.

We stopped for lunch at the KCL Campground and saw Bullock's Orioles feeding young, Western Kingbirds, Says Phoebes and Brewers Blackbirds building nests and four Common Raven nestlings with very striking gapes.



From Page 1

SALTON SEA: The Salton Sea is one of the most important places for birds in North America, and the larger region is home to about a million people. As part of the Colorado River Delta, the sea filled and dried for thousands of years prior to its current, 35-mile-long incarnation. The 350-square-mile sea has partially replaced wetland habitat lost to agricultural and urban conversion in the Colorado River Delta, California's coast, and the San Joaquin Valley. For more than a century, the sea has served as a major nesting, wintering, and stopover site for millions of birds of nearly 400 species. Recent months have brought hope for the Salton Sea. California for the first time has committed substantial funding, about \$280 million, for habitat restoration and dust mitigation. While several restoration projects are identified in the state's 10-year restoration plan, those projects are far behind schedule.

Beyond the pelicans, the new report notes that the numerous Eared Grebe

and Double-crested Cormorant are also declining rapidly. Declines have occurred as recently as within the past couple of years. For example, Audubon's Christmas Bird Count data show an average decline of 63% per year for the past few years for Eared Grebes (once occurring at the Sea in the millions and now at most in the thousands). Double-crested Cormorants, which once had a breeding colony of more than 5,000 nesting pairs on an island within the Sea, have all but disappeared. But the report also notes significant increases, in the past two years, for shorebirds, such as the Western Sandpiper, and waterfowl, such as the Ruddy Duck. The report notes that these species are taking advantage of large numbers of insects being produced as the receding waterline exposes wet shoreline.

While some species are taking advantage of the current food resources, Audubon has documented an overall decline in diversity, with a 10% decline in species diversity in just the past two years. However, as the shoreline stabilizes in coming years, the Sea's wet edges dry up, and the Salton Sea becomes more saline, fewer hospitable habitat conditions will persist. The Sea saw a potential preview of that this past January when more than 7,000 Ruddy Ducks died from avian cholera, a contagious disease that affects waterfowl in crowded and stressed conditions. "Some birds will diminish and other birds will prosper – but the overall number of birds at the Sea is shrinking," added Jones. "It is my hope that ten years from now, people can visit the Salton Sea and watch large formations of these magnificent birds flying along the shoreline and dropping down onto the water to feed on the fish below its surface."

Mailing Address:
Whittier Area Audubon Society
P.O. Box 548
Whittier, CA 90608-0548