



Friends of the Kern River Preserve

Volume 8, Issue 2

Audubon CALIFORNIA

Summer/Fall 2004

An Old Friend Returns

by Reed Tollefson

Spring arrived at the Kern River Preserve and as the birds return, so do many new guests and old friends. On May 6th a very special individual flew into the Kern Valley. This individual, his family and relatives have been instrumental in helping Audubon and our partners to secure over \$7.5 million dollars to support land protection, research and stewardship.

Although he arrived quietly in the night, he announced his arrival by singing early in the morning from the riparian forest near our Headquarters.

He is a willow flycatcher that was caught in 1998 and banded with a violet-light green leg band. He has returned to breed every year since and at seven years old is a venerable sire of children and grandchildren. He has had at least 8 different mates, sometimes two at the same time. Many of their nests have been

see Old Friend page 2



Southwestern Willow Flycatcher © Nature Ali

Happy Anniversary - Ten Years of Celebrating Vultures

It all began eleven years ago with the advent of the Vulture Watch, who knew that hundreds of people would come to anticipate the arrival of the janitors of the bird world with a decade of festivals. But those black and silver watchers in the sky are celebrated and anticipated with glee each year.

This year is no exception. Join us for the tenth annual Kern Valley Turkey Vulture Festival from September 24th through the

see Vultures page 5



A young boy enjoys making a Turkey Vulture puppet at the Kerncrest Audubon booth. Society © Nature Ali

KRP Friends Appreciation Weekend

Join the fun and festivities for our second annual Friends Appreciation weekend on Sat. & Sun. October 23 & 24. Planned events are nature walks, workshops, and presentations on the past year at KRP. For members of the Friends of the Kern River Preserve only. Lunch will be provided, dinner is no-host at a local restaurant. Please RSVP Reed at 760-378-2531

Calendar of Events



September 14-October 14

11th Annual KRV Turkey Vulture Watch. call Terri to volunteer. 760-378-4173. email

sanddragon@acninc.net



Sat. September 18

Kern Valley Pride Day.

contact Sandra, email: swieser@lightspeed.net



Fri.-Mon. September 24-27

10th Annual KRV Turkey Vulture Festival



Sat. & Sun. October 23 & 24

2nd Annual KRP Friends Appreciation Weekend



Sat. January 1, 2005

South Fork Christmas Bird Count.

contact Denise LaBerteaux. 760-378-3021. email: eremico@aol.com

Sun. January 2, 2005

Kern Valley Christmas Bird Count



For information contact Bob Barnes at 760-378-3044 or krpfriends@lightspeed.net

Friends of the Kern River Preserve



P.O. Box 833
Weldon, CA 93283-0833
(760) 378-3044

email: krpfriends@lightspeed.net
website: <http://audubon.org/local/sanctuary/kernriver>

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 financial support for outreach, education, wildlife habitat protection, and land stewardship.

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

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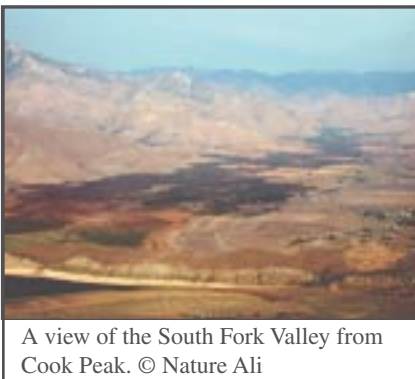
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Old Friend continued from page 1



A view of the South Fork Valley from Cook Peak. © Nature Ali

destroyed by predators, parasitized by cowbirds or destroyed by the elements. Nevertheless, he and his mates have fledged at least 10 young, not a particularly high number, but a determined effort.

Weighing less than 1/2 ounce, he migrated

thousands of miles avoiding predators, starvation, power lines, pesticides and he is back to try again. This spring, Violet-Light Green and thousands of other birds and wildlife will be striving to survive and raise the next generation on the Kern River Preserve.

Since Violet-Light Green left last fall we have worked hard at all of our programs: outreach and education, research, stewardship and land protection. Our Outreach and Education efforts included the Turkey Vulture and Bioregions Festivals, webpage and newsletter which help to connect people with the Preserve and build membership for the "Friends of the Kern River Preserve". Research by the Southern Sierra Research Station included studying willow flycatcher habitat needs,

genetic viability and nest success as well work on Yellow-billed cuckoos and goldfinches. In stewardship, our crews have planted and cared for thousands of native trees, shrubs and understory plants on our riparian restoration sites while at the same time battling invasive weeds like salt cedar, Russian-olive and purple loosestrife on over 10,000 acres throughout the South Fork Valley. In land protection we continue to work with private landowners and public agencies to help the Army Corps of Engineers achieve their 1,100 acre willow flycatcher mitigation requirement for the operations of Isabella Reservoir, which is the source of the \$7.5 million dollars. For more information, see our webpage and online newsletters at <http://audubon.org/local/sanctuary/kernriver>.

OPTICS FOR BIRDING

by Bob Barnes

There is nothing like a good pair of binoculars or a spotting scope to bring out the color, texture, and beauty of a bird's plumage. Optics for birding make seeing the details that aide in identification of a bird much easier, too. Clearly (pun intended!), this article provides KRP Friends readers with a brief discussion of what to think about when buying a new pair of binoculars or a spotting scope.

The intention of optics in nature is to see birds (wildlife) as easily and clearly as possible. To be successful, optics should have appropriate magnification (8X or 10X), a wide field of view, close focus, a comfortable weight for the wearer, ease of use, and

lenses that reveal images that are clear not only in the center of each lens but at the edges, too. Eight power (8X) lenses make an object appear eight times closer, ten power (10X), tens time closer, and so

forth. The higher the magnification the harder it is to hold the image steady or find it in an accompanying smaller field of view. A wide field of view is important because it helps keep an object such as a flying bird in your binoculars more easily.

Close focus allows the user to look at flowers, small birds, butterflies and other insects at distances as close as three feet. The number of times I have had to step BACK to get a bird or butterfly in focus has convinced me that close focus distance is critical to my decision as to which binoculars to purchase and use.

Make sure the binoculars you purchase are as easy and quick to focus as possible from the very closest focus to



A Cuckoo Wasp on yarrow with and without close focus magnification. © Nature Ali

Optics continued from page 2

infinity. And, make sure the image is clear all around the lens...from the center to all edges around the lenses. You do not want to own a pair of binoculars where the bird goes blurry as it reaches the edge of your lenses due to poor quality manufacturing. When you check out binoculars, focus on a letter on a distant sign and move the letter all around the field of the lens to see if it stays in focus. Do the same with a nearby object.

Weight of some binoculars can be a major issue with some people. Ask. Keep in mind that some binocular straps are designed specifically to distribute weight away from your neck so you can wear binoculars for several hours without developing localized pain. Again, ask.

My recommendation? Assuming good quality, I recommend binoculars in the 7X35 to 8X42 range. Some people can handle and prefer 10X. And, I think close focus is very important. There are numerous manufacturers of high quality binoculars at wide-ranging prices. Try out several until you find the ones you like.

To help you out... Go to <http://optics4birding.com> for additional information. §

BENEFIT FOR FRIENDS OF THE PRESERVE



Migrant Corner by Barbara Andolsek

Sequoia Studios is hosting an "Arts for the Preserve" Raffle. Raffle tickets are just \$5 for a chance to win an original oil painting by local artist Barbara Andolsek. The painting can be viewed at Sequoia Studios and there are prints available for viewing at Kern River Preserve.

All of the proceeds go to Friends of the Kern River Preserve. The drawing will be held October 9th, 2004. Contact: Debbie Kiggins at: Sequoia Studios - 21129 Highway 178 - Weldon, CA 93283. (760) 378-3765. See the website <http://sequoiastudios.com/html/ArtPreserve.htm> to purchase tickets online. §

LOOK UP IN THE SKY IT'S A BIRD AND ANOTHER BIRD AND ANOTHER BIRD!

The 11th Annual Kern Valley Vulture Watch is 14 September through 14 October, 2004. The whoosh of hundreds of wings flapping just over your head or the discovery of thousands of vultures sneaking by at altitudes almost too high to see is a thrill. Being up close and personal with such an array of bird species, there is no pleasure like it.

Join Terri Gallion and her crew for another exciting season of vulture counting. This year there will be a new protocol as several teams will try to capture the entire Kern River Valley migration numbers and the path of exit for each route during peak migration. Counting and chase teams will be placed strategically throughout the area.



Vultures soar over the vulture watch site. © Nature Ali

Why a Turkey Vulture Count? For years Kern River Valley residents noticed thousands of Turkey Vultures migrating southward in September and October. In 1994, under the auspices of the Kern River Research Center, staff member Sean Rowe and volunteer Terri Gallion started the first Kern Valley Vulture Watch. They wanted to document the magnitude of the vulture migration. The first Vulture Watch recorded 27,415 vultures - establishing one of the largest known migrations of Turkey Vultures over a single point north of Mexico. The September 1 - October 20, 2003 Vulture Watch tallied 30,458 vultures.

Volunteers are needed 14 Sept-14 Oct. 2004. Once again, we will assess the exciting migration of Turkey Vultures through the southern Sierra Nevada Mountains. This count relies on volunteer birders who come out, for a few days or regularly each week, to see some great desert birds, raptors and up to thousands of migrating Turkey Vultures. You will always be paired with an experienced vulture and hawk watcher, so it is an opportunity to learn as well.

Nearly 30,000 Turkey Vultures are counted each fall along with approximately 300 raptors of 13 species. Duties include counting 9AM-3PM each day (half days are OK), collecting temperature, wind and cloud cover data every hour and recording vulture and hawk data on site and after each daily count. Each volunteer must have an interest in vulture and raptor observation, be able to accurately record information on data sheets, and maintain patient observation even in an apparently empty sky. The count site is located in a desert setting with spectacular views of the surrounding southern Sierra Nevada mountains of the Sequoia National Forest.

Please join us for the fun and contribution to migration studies! No prior experience required. If you can make at least a two week commitment, housing can be provided. §

MAPS: ITS FOR THE BIRDS

by Ashley Sutton

For the past ten years volunteers have been running a MAPS station at the Kern River Preserve. Folks who have visited during the Bioregions Festival, Reptile and Amphibian Celebration,

or Hummingbird Celebration may have witnessed the crew banding birds out on the nature trail. MAPS (Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship) was created by



Southern Sierra Research Station director Mary Whitfield demonstrates the release technique used after banding a Common Yellowthroat to an enthusiastic visitor. © Nature Ali

The Institute for Bird Populations in 1989 to assess and monitor the vital rates and population dynamics of many species of North American breeding birds. The data collected is used to provide critical conservation and management information on their populations. MAPS stations utilize constant-effort mist netting and banding in order to collect data. Since its first season, MAPS has grown from 16 to over 500 stations and has received the support and endorsement of many federal agencies and conservation groups, including the USDA Forest Service, the National Park Service, The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Biological Division of the USGS, the Department of Defense Legacy Resource Management Program, the National Audubon Society, and the international cooperative Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Initiative, "Partners in Flight."(IBP)

Here at the Kern River Preserve nets are run 9 times throughout the breeding season, about once every ten days from early May through early August. Species netted include the common breeders; the Song Sparrow, Bewick's and House Wren, Yellow Warbler, Spotted Towhee and woodpeckers. Occasionally a Willow Flycatcher or Summer Tanager will find its way into the nets. Data collected here is used to monitor trends of breeding species and their use of the forest habitat as it grows and changes over the years. Visitors are always welcome to come out and observe. The season for 2004 is over, however there will be banding demos during September's Turkey Vulture Festival, and there's always next summer. §

KERN COUNTY, AMERICA'S BIRDIEST INLAND COUNTY!

With 232 species seen in a 24 hour period on April 30- May 1, Kern County is now officially America's birdiest inland

county. Nearby Inyo County is the second birdiest with 212 species. WE always knew this was a fantastic place for birding and now it is a proven fact. With 196 nesting species, the Kern River Valley and watershed is a place to be visited by at least once by any serious birder. §

OUR WISH CAME TRUE: FINALLY A NEW TRUCK!

by Reed Tollefson

In 1990, Melvin Wiebe and family donated a 1969 Chevrolet 1-ton truck to the Kern River Preserve. We used that old truck for 14 years to haul plants, irrigation lines, fence materials, garbage, recycling, tools and equipment to support our stewardship and outreach programs. Many "Friends of the Kern River Preserve" will remember load-

ing trees or riding across our flooded driveway to a festival or. But old trucks have to retire some time, so volunteer Dave Kurdeka applied for a grant from the Kern County Air Pollution Control District for funding to replace old polluting vehicles. We got \$20,240 from this grant toward the purchase of our new Ford F-150, 4x4 pickup and with generous contributions from "Friends" we are making progress toward paying off the \$6,000 balance.



The Kern River Preserve's new work truck. Photo courtesy Reed Tollefson.

Our new truck is safer to operate and produces about 95% less pollution than our old truck. The old "white monster" had to be permanently retired to meet the grant requirements, but you will see the utility bed and rack reincarnated as a work trailer. Although I have lost track of Mel and his family, I want to thank them for a fine truck which served the preserve well and that helped us to qualify for the grant. The Kern County Air Pollution Control District and their staff have been very helpful and only with this great program could we ever have imagined buying a new vehicle. Thanks also to our "Friends" who are helping us to finish paying for the new truck to the future volunteers who will help us to work the new truck to benefit the Kern River Preserve. §

PULLING ROOTS - WEED ERADICATION

Since the immigration of Europeans to this continent, maintaining native habitats takes work. Jeff King and Adolphe Tetskoua spend hours upon hours toiling in the fields doing the unenviable task of pulling several noxious and invasive species of weeds from our forest. This has helped the South Fork of the Kern remain one of the most natural riparian forests in the west.

Weeds which are under control due to the efforts of these whacking warriors are Russian olive (*Elaeagnus angustifolia*),

see Weeds page 5

Weeds cont. from page 4

salt cedar (*Tamarisk ramosissima*), and giant cane (*Arundo donax*). Purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*) is a large problem with the limited number of weed warriors fighting the battle along the South Fork, each year thousands of these plants are pulled.

Several new species of invasives have recently been found in the Kern River Valley, this unfortunately assures that our weed team will never be able to rest. We laud their efforts and dedication as our wildlife certainly benefits. §

FROGS, LIZARDS & SNAKES... OH MY!

As visitor's gathered around the rattlesnake cages in awe, Buz Lunsford explained some of the myths and dangers of these mysterious creatures.

The third annual California Amphibian & Reptile Celebration was held on June 12-13 and attended by over 200 visitors.

Many live animals were on display along with photographs of many of the reptile and amphibian species native to California.

Booths from the Tortoise Rescue Group, Kern River Preserve, and Forest Service provided visitors with much information about the watershed. §



Desert Tortoises were abundant at the Reptile Festival. © Nature Ali

THOUSANDS OF WHISTLING WINGS WOW VISITORS

by Reed Tollefson

This year's Hummingbird Festival was a fun and exciting success, with over a thousand visitors each day. However, some of these guests were a bit pugnacious and were observed chasing other guests about the preserve headquarters. This may have been influenced by their consumption of massive quantities of a mixture of di-hydrogen monoxide and sucrose (4:1 ratio, no red dye please). Many of these guests were apparently old friends of the Kern River Preserve, with one recaptured female Anna's hummingbird that was banded here 5 years ago. Visiting Rufous hummingbirds may nest as far north as southwestern Alaska and winter in Mexico, so it's a marvel when you imagine that these tiny beings have to make a magnificent migration each year, just to attend our festival! We are honored and amazed by their presence and sincerely hope their visit has been enjoyable.

Don Mitchell and Stacy Jon Peterson also made long voyages to be part of our Festival again this year to share their considerable knowledge, insights and passion for hummingbirds with our many human guests. We had over 450 "visitor days" during the weekend, with people attending from the Kern River Valley, throughout California and even some lovely people from France and Belgium. There are no hummingbirds

in Europe, so we all must offer our condolences and hope that these special guests got a good look at a hummingbird or two and perhaps got to release one after banding. Over 100 hummingbirds were banded and released during the festival and we hope to see these individuals as well as our larger guests again at future festivals.

Emily Diggles and our "Preserve Greeters" were busy capturing our human guests to encourage them to become members of our "Friends Group". Some individuals apparently escaped without joining but we hope we may recapture these and other potential supporters at future preserve events (note: all guests are release unharmed after appropriate life history data are collected). Tom Kaminski brought and displayed his marvelous video of hummingbirds, which in many ways bring out elements of behavior, flight, and beauty that are difficult to experience in any other way. Ron Bolyard led a great geology field trip and Alison Sheehy pulled together many very important details that really enhanced the entire festival. So many "Friends of the Kern River Preserve" helped the festival to succeed, by greeting people, helping to build membership, leading trips, organizing and by just attending the event. Thank you all so much.

Most of all we need to thank our most honored guests, without whom we would not have much of a festival, the many hummingbirds that visit our Preserve. We do our best to make this a special and important place for these little beings to raise their families or to stop and rest on their long and arduous migration. And they would have much less reason to visit if it weren't for the work that we all support through "The Friend's of the Kern River Preserve". After all it is *our* mission to protect one of California's finest riparian forests for the benefit of the wildlife and people that are a part of this wonderful place. Thank you all for another fine festival.



Waiting for hummingbird take-off was a fun moment for the crowd. © Nature Ali

p.s. Remember the Turkey Vulture Festival, September 25-26, where our honored guests will be somewhat less pugnacious, but perhaps a bit more revolting. So mark your calendar, it should a malodorous event. §

Vultures continued from page 1

27th. Held at the Kern River Preserve, dozens of field trips and activities should delight visitors from far and near. The Facility for Animal Care & Treatment will be there with a few rescued animals. Information on vultures will be available through Kerncrest Audubon and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. Many other organizations will be there to share information on nature and conservation. It will be fun for children of all ages, please visit our website in late August for a listing of all of the activities. <http://valleywild.org/tvfest.htm>. §

THANK YOU DONORS & NEW MEMBERS

Since our last newsletter 258 people and organizations have generously sent in much needed donations. As of this year the entire Kern River Preserve budget comes from your donations. If your name is missing or misspelled please let us know. We enjoy providing recognition to our wonderful friends. A special thank you to all of our anonymous donors. Your privacy matters, if you prefer to remain anonymous please state that on your donation form.

FREMONT COTTONWOOD (\$1000-\$4999)

Buena Vista Audubon Society Roger & Barbara Coley

Bob & Susan Steele

GRAY FOX (\$500-\$999)

Ernie & Nancy Flores Sea & Sage Audubon Society

GREAT BLUE HERON (\$100-\$499)

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6 Frank Gibson Dorothy Gould



Friends of the Kern River Preserve

Membership / Renewal Application



Name: _____ Phone: _____
 Address: _____ Fax: _____
 City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____
 Email: _____ Check for change of address / information

Application for: New Member Renewal Gift

_____ \$10,000 Golden Eagle	_____ \$100 Great Blue Heron
_____ \$ 5,000 Black Bear	_____ \$50 Bobcat (Supporter)
_____ \$ 1,000 Fremont Cottonwood	_____ \$40 California Quail (Family)
_____ \$ 500 Gray Fox	_____ \$25 Raccoon (Friend)
\$ _____ other	Total \$ _____

Anonymous Donation
 Please send me information on planned giving / bequests.
 Please send me information on volunteer opportunities.

All members in the Friend and above categories receive our newsletter. New members in the \$50 Supporter 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 are available for \$15 (\$10 for members) plus \$2.50 shipping.

small medium large XL XXL

Please make checks payable to : **NAS / KRP Friends**

Mail to: *Friends of the Kern River Preserve* • P. O. Box 833 • Weldon, CA 93283-0833

v8 12

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- Chuck Williams
- James & Jewellie Wolfe
- Roger Zachary



KEystone SPECIES

Our new membership categories characterize keystone species that rely on intact ecosystems to survive. Our goal is to provide long-term sanctuary for these species through outright acquisition of habitat or conservation easements along the entire South Fork Kern River watershed. Although most of the property will not be owned by Audubon, staff of the Kern River Preserve are integral to the success of protection efforts by government agencies and other private organizations.

Supporting the Friends of the Kern River Preserve by becoming a keystone donor allows these important efforts to continue. Without you, none of this critical work can continue... Please unlock the potential of the Kern River Preserve protection and education efforts by becoming a member at the highest monetary level you can comfortably afford.

GOLDEN EAGLE

The Golden Eagle - *Aquila chrysaetos* - with a wingspan of 6.5' - is one of the greatest grassland species native to the Kern River Valley. The Golden Eagle hunts for jackrabbits, squirrels, and other rodents in the grasslands and uplands of the Kern River Preserve where hunting and pesticides are prohibited.

If the Friends of the Kern River Preserve had one member for each of the six local Golden Eagles - then the position of Outreach Director could be fully-funded.





Friends of the Kern River Preserve

P.O. Box 833
Weldon, CA 93283-0833

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**Upcoming Events...
Don't Miss!**

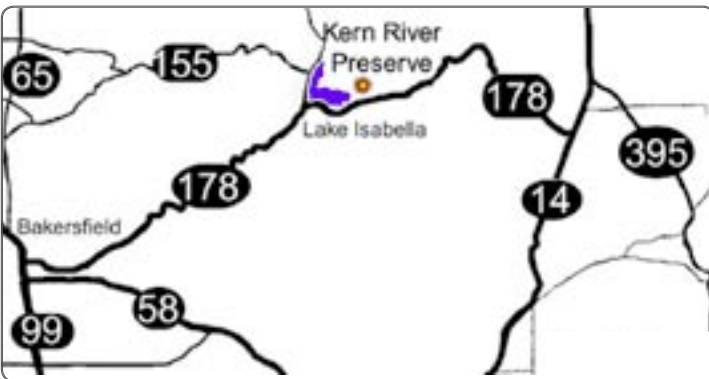
Sept. 14 - Oct. 14

11th Annual Kern River Valley
Turkey Vulture Watch, Vulture
Count site, Kelso Valley

Sept. 24 - 27

10th Annual Kern River Valley
Turkey Vulture Festival, Kern
River Preserve, Weldon

Please note the date of expiration on your mailing label. If it says "exp" then this will be your last issue. 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
- Reno.....7.5 hours

Cal Trans current road conditions: **1 (800) 427-7623**

For further information about the



*Friends of
the Kern
River Preserve*

call: (760) 378-3044
email: krpfriends@lightspeed.net
or visit our websites:
KRP: <http://audubon.org/local/sanctuary/kernriver/>
Festivals: <http://valleywild.org>
Wildlife: <http://natureali.org>

