

# Mono Basin Natural History: Aquatic & Terrestrial Habitats



**August 2–4, 2019 • David Wimpfheimer**

\$207 per person / \$192 for Mono Lake Committee members  
enrollment limited to 12 participants

The Mono Basin is one of the most diverse terrestrial ecosystems on the continent. This field seminar will be an overview of the varied habitats that are found here; from Mono Lake to young volcanic domes, to glacial canyons and subalpine meadows at tree line.

One of the best ways to get an appreciation for Mono Lake's drama and productivity is to explore it by boat; a guided canoe exploration of Mono's south shore is included in this class. As we slide by oddly wonderful tufa towers we may encounter hundreds of phalaropes. A simple, but important food chain ties them to the trillions of brine shrimp in the lake. The tufa formations are just one geologic aspect of a wondrous basin that includes both the oldest lake on the continent and its youngest mountain range.

Although we will enjoy the rich diversity of mammals, butterflies, wildflowers, trees, and other plants as we explore the Mono Basin, a major focus of this seminar will be the identification and

ecology of birds that breed here. In sagebrush meadows, riparian and conifer forests, the class will explore a number of sites intensively, mixing short leisurely walks with periods of observation and natural history discussion. These are breeding sites for many birds including green-tailed towhee, sage thrasher and Townsend's solitaire, but a major focus will be Mono Lake and other special wetlands.

David Wimpfheimer has been educating and interpreting birds and the natural history of California for over 25 years. His connection with and love for Mono Lake started with educational work for the Mono Lake Committee in 1983 and continued as he rode in eleven Mono Lake Bike-A-Thons. He has worked with groups such as the Smithsonian Institution, Point Reyes Field institute, Oceanic Society, Wild Wings, and Roads Scholar. His seasoned focus and knowledge will make for an enjoyable and educational outing!

## **ITINERARY**

**Friday, August 2 at 2:00pm:** Meet on the back patio of the Mono Basin National Forest Visitor Center (1 Visitor Center Drive) just north of Lee Vining. From there we will visit Lee Vining Canyon and other sites to explore the mixed forest ecosystem. Woodpeckers, swallows, and a variety of flycatchers are just some of the birds we'll discover in this zone. The diversity of conifers is quite rich here and a variety of shrubs and wildflowers will be our focus as well. After dinner join David back at the Mono Lake Committee for a presentation on the habitats, wildlife, and birds of the Mono Basin.

**Saturday, August 3 at 7:00am:** Meet at the Mono Lake Committee in Lee Vining to carpool to South Tufa. From South Tufa we will make our way east to Navy Beach by 7:30am to join a Mono Lake Committee canoe tour for an hour on the water. Please bring plenty of drinking water and snacks. We will be back to shore by 9:15am.

After canoeing we will drive a short distance to Rush Creek, where we can rinse our salty feet in the shade of willows. In the afternoon the group will explore several sites south of the lake. Mono Mills is an area rich in human history as well as a diverse mixture of sagebrush, bitterbrush, Jeffrey and pinyon pine. The nearby burn area here is a noteworthy study in ecological succession.

Sometimes overlooked, Panum Crater is a jewel in the basin. A short, but steep sandy hike takes us to the top of this pumice and obsidian plug (bring good hiking shoes and trekking poles if you wish). From Panum we will travel upstream along Rush Creek, stopping to look for birds and other wildlife and to discuss the ecological changes brought about by complete dewatering in the 1940s and the subsequent rewatering in the 1980s. We will end the day at approximately 4:00pm along the June Lake Loop.

**Sunday, August 4 at 8:30am:** We will meet at the Mono Lake Committee and then carpool to different sites. We begin the day at the County Park, a rich riparian area along Mono Lake's shore. Avocets and phalaropes are some of the birds that often feed along the shore here. We will then begin a transect in elevation that will take us next to Lundy Canyon. The groves of aspen, pine, and fir here attract a variety of cavity nesting birds. Even the variety of chipmunks in these different habitats is noteworthy. In the afternoon we will drive up to the alpine habitat near Virginia Lake. Wildflowers can be especially dramatic here and we may find the elusive Gray-crowned Rosy Finch

feeding on the edges of snowbanks. Each location displays a distinct variety of nesting birds, other wildlife and plant life.

***Altitude and Dehydration Cautions:*** Remember to bring (and drink!) lots of water because your body loses more water at the higher altitudes of the Mono Basin. Experts recommend that you begin drinking extra water as you drive to higher elevation in order to prevent dehydration and headaches. Also, the sun is rather fierce at high elevations, capable of burning even on cool and cloudy days, so be sure to protect yourself thoroughly using sunscreen, sunglasses, and hat.

## TO BRING

- binoculars
- spotting scope (optional, but recommended, especially for lake stops)
- notebook and pen/pencil
- field guide(s)
- appropriate field clothing: sturdy walking shoes, hat, sunglasses, warm layers, raingear, trekking poles (optional for Panum Crater)
- canoeing clothing/equipment: shoes that can get wet, sun protection, dry bag for cameras/binoculars
- day pack including sunscreen, insect repellent, etc.
- packed lunch for each day, plenty of snacks
- plenty of drinking water

## RECOMMENDED BOOKS

- Evens, Jules. *California Birdlife*. UC Press, Berkeley, 2005.
- Laws, John Muir. *The Laws Field Guide to the Sierra Nevada*. Heyday Books, Berkeley, 2007.
- National Geographic Society. *Field Guide to the Birds of North America*. Fifth Edition, 2006.
- Storer, Tracy, Robert Usinger, and David Lukas. *Sierra Nevada Natural History*. UC Press, Berkeley, 2004.
- Whitney, Stephen. *A Sierra Club Naturalist's Guide to the Sierra Nevada*. Sierra Club Books, San Francisco, 1979.



## Mono Lake Committee Field Seminars

P.O. Box 29 • Lee Vining, CA 93541 • (760) 647-6595 • [monolake.org/seminars](http://monolake.org/seminars)