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FALL/WINTER 2000 NEWSLETTER

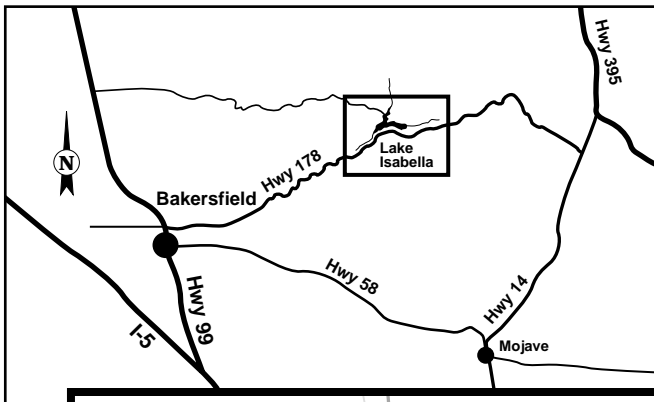
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COMING EVENTS

Nov 11, Dec 9—Kern River Preserve Service Workdays

Dec 30—Kern River Valley Christmas Bird Count

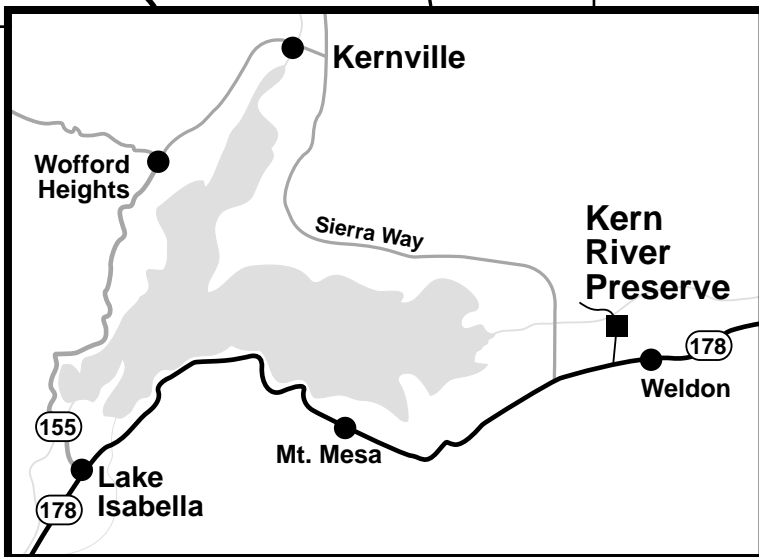
Dec 31—South Fork (Kern) Valley Christmas Bird Count



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 hours
- San Diego 5 hours
- San Francisco 6 hours
- Reno 7 hours



For further information about the

Friends of the Kern River Preserve,

call: (760) 378-3044

e-mail: krpfriends@lightspeed.net

visit our web site:

<http://frontpage.lightspeed.net/KRP/>



Friends of the Kern River Preserve

Vol. Four No. Two

NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY CALIFORNIA

Fall/Winter 2000

Interest Soars at 6th Annual Kern River Turkey Vulture Festival

by Rick Englehorn

The preserve became a focus for turkey vulture enthusiasts from around the world, as hundreds gathered to watch, count and experience the fall migration through the Kern River Valley. The magnitude of the turkey vulture migration over this Southern Sierra Nevada location is one of the largest known in North America. Centered at the preserve headquarters with the “drop-in” sites close by, many wildlife conservation groups shared information on topics ranging from the California condor to the Sequoia Manter Fire with those attending the festival. Arts and crafts booths stimulated young minds and captured wildlife art collectors’ interests. A commemorative postage stamp offered by the U.S. Postal service and autographed festival posters and t-shirts were also available.

However, the main event was definitely the birds themselves. Starting with a wonderful show on Friday, field biologist and count coordinator Terri Gallion led behind-the-scenes tours. That morning, hundreds of vultures rose from their overnight roosting trees and circled or kettled their way, using heat thermals, up the Kelso Valley and onward along the southern migration route. As the birds head out of the valley, Terri and a volunteer crew count them. More than 27,237 vultures have been seen so far this season. Also noted by “the watch” were a beautiful flock of white pelicans and many species of raptors, including broadwinged hawks—normally an eastern species.

See **FESTIVAL** on page 2

Female Southwestern Willow Flycatchers Scarce this Year

by Betsy Steele

One of the preserve’s most precious visitors had a bad summer this year. The southwestern willow flycatcher’s numbers were down to dismally low levels. Although the same number of males (about 25) as last year showed up to sing and court, fewer females sought their attention. Only a dozen or so females were noted on the preserve and none in the South Fork Wildlife Area by Mary Whitfield and her crew of five researchers.

And those that did breed laid an abnormally low number of viable eggs, Whitfield said, further imperiling an already low population. Yet other factors seemed in the birds’ favor this year, with no brood parasitism from brown-headed cowbirds occurring and nest predation about average.

Whitfield, a wildlife biologist who’s been tracking southwestern willow flycatchers at the preserve since

1989, is hesitant to speculate on why hatchability has gone down—a troubling trend that became especially noticeable in 1997. From 1989 to 1996, clutches were, for the most part, fertile, with a more than 90 percent hatching rate. The next year, though, clutch fertility dropped to only about 74 percent.

“It’s probably not due to inbreeding,” Whitfield said. But pesticides might be a factor. Whitfield would like to see more research on just where certain populations over winter; whether males and females from the same breeding locale spend the “off season” in the same general area too; and what contaminants are in blood samples from the birds. One method for determining where the South Fork’s neotropical migrants come from is through isotope analysis of the feathers which have molted and regrown on their wintering grounds. But funding for such projects—that could provide keys to flycatcher problems—is in short supply.

Funding has come through, however, from the Army

See **FLYCATCHER** on page 2

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The Kern River Preserve is managed by Audubon-California for the preservation of California's largest contiguous cottonwood-willow riparian forest and the wildlife it supports. The Friends of the Kern River preserve is a membership organization that provides financial support for the Preserve. 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.

Preserve Manager Reed Tollefson
Director of Kern Valley Outreach Bob Barnes
Newsletter Editor Betsy Steele
Newsletter Production Wendy Higa
Webmaster Alison Sheehey
Masthead Art Work Keith Hansen

FESTIVAL: *Continued from page 1*

Even though turkey vultures were the guests of honor, many other wildlife field trips were scheduled during the weekend event. Trees of the Southern Sierra, beginning owling and kayaking the South Fork area of Lake Isabella head the list of other activities enjoyed.

The late September festival date corresponds with observing the fall land migration in California as well. Field trips took advantage of the presence of many western migrants, such as sandhill cranes. Additionally there were other excellent observations, including a prothonatory warbler, an eastern rarity found by birders at Galileo Park in the Western Mojave.

Some festival-goers may have believed sky watching of a different sort highlighted the weekend, as the China Lake Astronomical Society presented a stargazing program. With a new moon's dark sky enabling the telescopes to pick up numerous sights, the presentation lasted well into the night.

Bob Barnes, Bill Kohlmoos and the Condor Recovery Team gave a fascinating and highly informative evening on Friday, featuring not only the turkey vulture but also a California condor update.

All things considered, the 6th annual Kern River Valley Turkey Vulture Festival was a great indicator of why the Audubon Society and many local activists feel the Kern River Valley is a special locale worthy of protection. The

opportunity to "share" the region's natural wonders with others and the phenomenon of the migration make this festival the event for birders of any level and nature lovers in general. See you next year. ❖

FLYCATCHER: *Continued from page 1*

Corps of Engineers, for land acquisition and restoration for the southwestern willow flycatcher—and other rare, riparian species that will benefit. The preserve has been instrumental in negotiations to help protect 1,100 acres in the South Fork Valley as part of the management plan for this federally endangered species. As soon as the land and its management is "secured," officials from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service said, the injunction on Isabella reservoir's water level—now limited to 334,000 acre-feet—will be lifted.

Since the court-ordered limits, "the lake has had no impact on the birds and the birds have had no impact on the lake," Whitfield said of the politically sensitive issue. Spring runoff flowed into the reservoir unrestricted and never reached capacity for the past two seasons.

Meanwhile, elsewhere in the "SWFL's" range, the populations have held steady, with no overall decline, Whitfield said. The preserve hopes to report similar good news—and even better—in years to come about these little birds that add their special element of charm to the riverside woodlands. ❖

Volunteer Opportunities

Service Workdays—Help KRP staff and volunteers with work projects at the preserve!—for dates and time, see Calendar of Events. Bring a sack lunch and wear sturdy outdoor clothes. Contact Reed Tollefson for details.

We Need—A team of people to serve as hosts, instructors, chaperones, materials preparers and general assistants for KRP visitors and special events. • A team of gardeners to take on the responsibility of lawn and garden care at KRP Headquarters. • People with painting, carpentry and/or electrical skills to do construction, repairs and maintenance on Headquarters' buildings and equipment.

KRPreserve Wish List: 1. Office equipment of all types from paper clips, pens, and paper to modern copiers, computers and laser printers. 2. "Farm" equipment from nails, small tools, and painting supplies to a modern tractor, flatbed trailer, and a new pick-up truck. **Contact Reed at the Preserve (760)378-2531.**

FRIENDS OF THE KERN RIVER PRESERVE
 NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY— CALIFORNIA
 MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL

4.2

Name: _____ Phone: (_____) _____
 Address: _____ Fax: (_____) _____
 City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____
 E-mail: _____ NOTE: This is a change of address

Please Make Checks Payable to: NAS/KRPFriends

Application for: <input type="checkbox"/> New Member <input type="checkbox"/> Renewal _____ \$1000 Raptor Circle _____ \$20 Friend _____ \$100 Pacific Flyway Patrol _____ Additional Contribution _____ \$50 Supporter \$ _____
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_____ Please send me information on planned giving

_____ Please send me information on volunteer opportunities

All members (Friends and above) receive our newsletter
 New members at the Supporter level and above can receive a KRPFriends T-Shirt
 (please indicate size if you wish to receive a shirt)
 Small Medium Large XL XXL

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

..... (please cut here and return with remittance)

Calendar of Events for 2000-2001

Nov. 15—2000 Kern Valley Turkey Vulture Festival wrap-up/2001 BioFest kick-off meeting —3:30 pm at the Southern Sierra Research Station (AKA Kern River Research Center) 7872 Fay Ranch Rd., Weldon.

Nov. 29—Friends of the KRP Monthly Luncheon (Wednesdays) Kern River Preserve Headquarters. Contact Bob Barnes.

Nov. 11 & Dec. 9—Service Workdays at Kern River Preserve —9:00 am, Kern River Preserve Headquarters. Contact Reed Tollefson.

Dec. 30 & Dec. 31—Christmas Bird Count Kern River Valley on Sat., Dec 30 (Bob Barnes 760-378-3044), South Fork Valley on Sun., Dec 31 (Denise LaBerteaux 760-378-4278).

April 27 - May 3, 2001—7th Annual Kern River Valley Bioregions & Spring Migration Birding Festival—Kernville, CA. Average of 190+ bird species per BioFest! Small group field trips, children’s program, 5K/10K walk/run, hot springs, kayaking, wildflowers, trout festival. See website for more information.

July 7 - 8, 2001—Summer Bird Count Weekend

July 21- Aug 26, 2001—3rd Annual KRV Hummingbird Celebration—Kern River Preserve, Weldon. Feeders will be up from March - Sept. Scheduled activities and programs on weekends (see website for dates). *Special guest:* Donald Mitchell, author of the Birds of North America account on Allen’s Hummingbird.

Sept. 1 - Oct. 20, 2001—8th Annual Kern River Valley Turkey Vulture Watch

Sept. 28 - Oct 1, 2001—7th Annual KRV Turkey Vulture, Raptor & Fall Migration Festival

For more information on these and other events, please visit our website at <http://frontpage.light-speed.net/KRP/>

Or Contact:

Reed Tollefson—phone/fax: (760) 378.2531 or e-mail: rtollefson@lightspeed.net

Bob Barnes—phone: (760) 378-3044 or e-mail: bbarnes@lightspeed.net