

Floods of 2010 at Audubon Kern River Preserve

On December 19th, after two days of steady rain, the South Fork gauging station next to our Allen Sanctuary went from a miniscule 52 cubic feet per second (cfs) at midnight to an astounding 5,120 cfs by 5 pm that day. In a matter of hours, roads at Fay Ranch, into the Preserve, and on Sierra Way were overtopped by the river.

The Governor declared Kern County in a state of emergency as a result of extensive flooding. Many of our local roads were damaged and some were even destroyed by flood waters. Climate change models predict these types of flood events will become more frequent. The Kern River Preserve is one of California's finest examples of a functioning healthy riparian forest – floods are a part of the natural cycle.

Audubon California has spent many years protecting working landscapes



Sean Rowe

especially ranches and native pastures that are not damaged by floods. The Preserve not only keeps the rural character of the valley but provides habitat for many species of concern. Floods help to rejuvenate this type of landscape. Audubon along with many partners has worked to protect thousands of acres in the floodplain, so people are not in harms way.

We encourage the current uses of

land in the valley and seek to provide guidance to county officials so there is no up-zoning and/or development in flood prone areas. We are working to move our visitor center to a safer and more accessible area.

Our buildings were not flooded this time but they will likely flood sooner or later. Long-time residents who lived through the great flood of 1966 remember the Preserve headquarters being on a knoll before that event. After the event they related the amount

of sediment brought down the river buried the hill and put the buildings at risk during the next 100 year flood.

Although most of our trails, fences, and roads sustained some damage, we are working hard to clean them up. We would appreciate help – donations or volunteers.

Send us an e-mail, call or check our webpage for upcoming work parties.

Planning for the Future - Specifically in the KRV!

Development spurs and promotes further development. We have three proposed solar energy projects in the Kern Valley. We just endured the fourth highest flood in South Fork Kern history with the county declared a disaster area. It stands to reason that our community will benefit from planning that takes natural events into account along with the social well-being of the citizens of the valley.

The Kern Valley Specific Plan and associated Environmental Impact Statement will be released in January

for public review and comment. Contact Paul Johnson, Supervising Planner at Kern County Planning and Community Development Department at 661.862.5022, or e-mail at JohnsonPa@co.kern.ca.us. Webpage: www.co.kern.ca.us/planning/eirs.asp.

Here are some ideas that Audubon will advance:

- Protect scenic Highway 178
- Protect dark skies
- Restrict up-zoning and development in floodplain
- Protect oak and Joshua tree woodlands
- Incentives to fund farm and ranch

conservation easements
Promote in-fill development to reduce sprawl

Bike paths and sidewalks
Implement San Joaquin Valley - Kern County Blueprint
Implement Sustainable Communities Strategies

Maintain agricultural zoning throughout the Kern Valley

The Kern Valley Specific Plan will guide development in our area for the next 20 years and this is the time for you and your organization to make your voice heard.

The Sun Shines Brightly on the South Fork, but...



Three proposed photovoltaic solar energy projects are proposed in the Kern River Valley.

On the plus side these projects would create local jobs, generate electricity, reduce dependence on fossil fuels, and decrease air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. On the negative side we will lose cultivated farmland, open space and diminish rural and scenic values. Photovoltaic solar does not use significant amounts of water so we don't anticipate significant ground water withdrawals will be needed to operate these projects. The direct negative impacts to wildlife don't appear to be excessive relative to current or potential land uses.

Although we do not directly oppose the Weldon Solar project, we did submit formal comments to Kern County in response to the Notice of Preparation. We outlined a number of our concerns regarding flood management, wildlife habitat, scenic

values and loss of agricultural lands. A copy of our comment letter can be found on our webpage.

However, there are many people in our community who strongly oppose these projects and we respect their concerns and choice to fight the projects. We also appreciate the private landowners and their endeavor to prosper financially through the use of their land within the law and in a manner that does not cause significant harm to our Preserve or the wider community.

Kern River Preserve has a good working relationship with the owners of both of the sites. We are working on their land to combat invasive weeds, for most people an unseen non-issue, but for the river a grave ecological threat. We also made several successful land conservation purchases from one of the owners in large part due to their patience and generosity. And we are currently working with both of the owners on other areas with great conservation value.

So at this time Kern River Preserve will continue to seek collaborative conservation outcomes with these neighbors.

Reed Tollefson - Manager



Canyon Wrens can be found among the granite boulders on the hills of the Preserve.



Ron Gillentice celebrates his success at finding the geocache during our December Nature Exploration.

Audubon Kern River Preserve

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Reed Tollefson
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Birdie Foster
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Chloe Kennedy
Bob Showers
Martine Metzenheim
Maria Garcia
Gerry Tessman
Julie Rowe



Students from our neighboring South Fork Elementary School enjoy a visit to the Kern River Preserve each fall.

Working with Private Landowners

The Kern River Preserve is surrounded by private ranches and farms therefore many of our future conservation opportunities will only be achieved by working with our neighbors.

If we can maintain the rural character of the valley including farming and grazing, we benefit a wide range of wildlife that thrives on well managed agricultural lands. For example, perennial pastures provide important foraging and nesting habitat for Tricolored Blackbirds, Kern Red-winged Blackbird, Savannah Sparrows, hawks and many other species. These pastures also serve as protective buffer between roads and our preserve reducing trespass, fire and wildlife road strikes. Many of our guests enjoy the scenic views along

the South Fork Valley with the horses and cattle and people working the ranches.

However, there are many examples from around the world where intensive farming and livestock grazing has led to environmental exploitation, loss of wildlife



habitat, reduced land productivity and diminished human quality of life. In the South Fork Valley we have been concerned about the use of pesticides, soil erosion and water consumption, but largely these uses have been in balance with the natural system. Mostly we are concerned about future trends that may lead to more intensive land uses.

In any case, we always try to respect our neighbors and seek common ground and collaboration on stewardship and long-term conservation outcomes. Since 1980 when the Kern River Preserve was established we have worked collaboratively with private land owners and many conservation partners to put 13,000 acres into conservation ownership and 10,000 acres into ranching conservation

easements. All of these areas are permanently protected from up-zoning, subdivision and development. There is still a great need, many threats and much to do to protect this special place and we appreciate your support.

Behind the Scenes (Nature abhors a Vacuum)

by Sandra Wieser

The area of land around the preserve headquarters and the Sprague House amounts to approximately five acres. This acreage requires constant upkeep. Nature tries to take back what man has taken away.

Many tasks that need to be done around the compounds include: mowing, weedwacking, trimming trees and shrubs, smoothing out gopher mounds, filling in holes, raking leaves. While doing these jobs, it is fun to watch wildlife. Disturbances by workers can flush out various critters. Owls and hawks often hang around when mowing or weedwacking to snatch up any unwary animal.

There are six main buildings and some outbuildings that need to be cared for. These buildings make perfect living quarters for a variety of animals. Even though the preserve is for wildlife, we must minimize the damage done to structures by these creatures. Squirrels and other rodents chew and dig their way through the property. Bats roost in any suitable cubby hole. Birds nest under eaves and leave

their calling cards.

The safety of our guests is always a consideration. Older cottonwoods and other trees have branches that can break off during high winds. I have seen whole trees fall over after a rain, weighed down by the water. Gopher mounds create uneven ground that can cause falls or twist ankles. Mowing the grounds and trail make walking easier and also reduces the risk of picking up ticks.

Preserve work is tough on vehicles. We drive from one end of the preserve to the other over rutted, bumpy roads, through brush, water, and mud. Fences and ditches have to be maintained. We sometimes become cattle herders when strays come onto the preserve.

We are always looking for volunteers to help us out. They can help out any time, not just on our monthly work days. Not all the work is glamorous, but it is still vital to the operation of the preserve. Someone might want to adopt a small section of the preserve similar to the Adopt-a-Highway program. Any help is greatly appreciated.



Butterbredt Spring is one of California's most important spring migration routes.

Preserve Progress in 2010

The Kern River Preserve is an active place throughout the year. Many projects have been started and some are nearing completion. Our stewardship crew led by Sean Rowe and Jeff King has been busy with projects on the main preserve and our two satellite preserves.

Trash removal on the Sprague Ranch has continued with the help of KRP volunteers and a very hard working Student Conservation Association (SCA) crew.

Fence removal and replacement with wildlife friendly fencing is moving along with 23,335 feet (4.4 miles) of fence now permanently removed and 8,872 feet (1.7 miles) of fence replaced with wildlife friendly fencing. This year we plan to permanently remove another 1.5 miles and modify 4 miles of existing fence to reduce threats to wildlife.

Three new trails were opened for our guests to enjoy the diversity of habitats near the preserve headquarters and

our two existing trails got some much needed TLC.

We continue to implement habitat restoration projects throughout the preserve. The Tricolored Blackbird restoration "pilot" project was completed this year. Our ongoing upland restoration efforts continue with native desert scrub and Joshua trees providing us with much needed data on how we can expand these efforts to a larger scale. Riparian enhancement and understory restoration continues with the goal of creating structure diversity in older restoration sites. Gaps in the forest were created by felling some trees, girdling others and creating brush piles. These techniques will create a diversity of habitats within existing restoration sites, by stimulating understory growth and creating snags for cavity nesters.

Perennial grassland and marsh habitats will benefit from the installation of three solar and one wind powered pumps in our Palmer and Sprague fields.

We replaced old fencing at the Kelso Creek Sanctuary to eliminate trespass cattle from the neighboring properties.

A new demonstration gray pine and live oak area was planted on the Sprague Ranch.

Land Protection efforts continue with an effort to keep wind energy development out of Butterbredt Canyon. This delicate negotiation requires the seller to be willing and funding to be available. Reed Tollefson has been working to find the right balance so this amazing migratory pathway can remain protected for the hundreds of thousands of spring and fall migrants that use the canyon to access the mountains and deserts on their way to breeding and wintering grounds.

Progress on our visitor center moved leaps and bounds this year with a building grant application prepared by Audubon California's development staff and completion of our business plan.

What's Black, White and Red in Preserve Wetlands?

Healthy colonies of Tricolored Blackbirds with their striking black and white shoulder epaulets and their strange almost human sounding vocalizations can be found on the Kern River Preserve and in California's valleys. This species is found only along the west coast from Baja California to Oregon. Tricolored Blackbird flocks in the 19th Century were described as so numerous "as to darken the sky." Since then, the population has declined over 80 percent from several million to below 400,000. Tricolored Blackbird numbers in the Kern River Valley are in the hundreds not thousands. But this population does not appear to be subject to the trauma of crop harvesting before young have fledged like in many San Joaquin Valley populations.

As with many species, habitat loss is the primary challenge for this colonial nester in the Kern River Valley. One of the most colonial nesters in North America, breeding colonies



Staff and Volunteers create Tricolored Blackbird habitat on the Kern River Preserve.

in the San Joaquin Valley can have as many as 50,000 birds on as little as ten acres.

Blackbirds nest in wetland habitat but Tricolored Blackbirds appear to need very sturdy plants to build their nests in. Robert Meese of UC Davis has studied this bird since 2004 and has described the best habitat for the species as being sturdy less than three-year old herbaceous vegetation

as opposed to the less restricted nesting habitat requirements of its cousins, the Red-winged Blackbird and Yellow-headed Blackbird.

It was with this in mind that Audubon Kern River Preserve staff designed a pioneer habitat enhancement project in a fallow agricultural field on our Sprague Ranch Unit near where this species nests and feeds.

The edge of this newly created wetland was planted with mugwort, stinging nettle, wild rose, mulefat, and sandbar willow by preserve staff and volunteers in January and February. While the habitat isn't grown enough to support a blackbird colony yet, we experienced almost a 100% survival rate for the new plants. As with all experiments, only time will tell whether the Tricolored Blackbirds find the new location to their liking.

All throughout the winter and early spring we will need help weeding and monitoring the site.

To view the site, drive 1.2 miles down Fay Ranch Road from Highway 178 and carefully stop just beyond the second irrigation canal and look on the west side of the road. Contact Sean Rowe to learn how you can help with the Preserve's continuing efforts to protect this sensitive species.



2011 Calendar of Nature Events

Christmas Bird Counts

Saturday, January 1 - 20th Annual South Fork Valley: Compiler; Denise LaBerteaux. 760-378-4278.

Sunday, January 2 - 33rd Annual Kern River Valley: Compiler Alison Sheehey; 760-417-0268.

Volunteer Work Parties

Habitat restoration, trail enhancement, seed collection, trash removal, fence removal, bench building, painting, leaf raking.

Third Saturday of each month. - 8 a.m. – noon.
Contact Sean Rowe: srowe@audubon.org

Monthly Nature Explorations

First Saturday of most months - 9 a.m. – 11 a.m.

Contact Alison Sheehey: krpfriends@audubon.org

February - Beginning Bird Identification Workshop

March & April - Spring Wildflower Hikes

May - Migrating Birds

June - BioBlitz

July - Butterflies

August through December TBA

Festivals - all at Kern River Preserve HQ.

Saturday, April 23 - **Kern River Valley Spring Nature & Earth Day Festival.**

Saturday, June 11 - 9 a.m. - 4 p.m. **California Amphibian & Reptile Celebration.**

Saturday, August 6 - 8 a.m. - 2 p.m. **Kern Valley Hummingbird Celebration.**

Saturday, September 24 - 9 a.m. - 3 p.m. **Kern Valley Autumn Nature & Vulture Festival.**



The hills around the preserve are filled with wildflowers in spring.

Other Events

February 11-14 - Great Backyard Bird Count.

Saturday, April 30 - South Fork Butterfly Count.

Sunday, May 1 - Kelso Valley Butterfly Count.

Sunday, June 5 - Sequoia South Butterfly Count.

Saturday, July 2 - North Fork Kern Butterfly Count.

Sunday, July 3 - Giant Sequoia NM Butterfly Count.

Saturday, September 17 - 7 a.m. - 11 a.m. Kern Valley Pride Day. Join the Friends of the Kern River Preserve team.

Saturday, October 29 – KRP Friends Appreciation Day.

Saturday, December 3 – 5 p.m. KRP Friends Holiday Potluck.

The Battle Against Invasive Plants

Many plants found in local stores are beautiful and hardy species in local gardens. But a number of these popular plants are a major menace to some of the Kern Valley's native plant and animal life; like pampas grass, and scotch broom. Often non-native plants are not well adapted to local environments and require constant care.

The problem of invasives is visible in a variety of places, such as the North Fork of the Kern River and Scovern Hot Springs. You may or may not have noticed that the South Fork of the Kern River is relatively free of many invasive species. But, this relatively pristine environment still has some severe invaders that we battle every year. Through over 20 years of diligent action some invasive species have been almost entirely eradicated.

The Kern Valley is home to some of the world's rarest habitats. But invasive plants – including purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*) – are threatening those habitats. Many of the invasive species are poor for our native wildlife, while others can be downright dangerous to humans.



For instance, Giant Cane (*Arundo donax*) is extremely flammable and acts as a ladder fuel that introduces fire into the eaves of houses with a fury. Other species such as Salt Cedar (*Tamarix* sp.) and Tree of Heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*) provide little in the way of food for most species. Both of these trees can provide some cover but at a loss to native species. It is much better to never introduce invasive plants but to plant any of the 2,000 native species known to our region.

Bakersfield has many riparian habitats completely taken over by common water hyacinth (*Eichhornia crassipes*) and many other non-natives. Many people admire the beautiful purple flowers of loosestrife or hyacinth and plant them or convince nurseries to sell them. Be a part of the solution by encouraging your local nursery to stock local native species and informing yourself and others about the plants that are problems in your area. If those who understand the devastation caused by invasive plants take steps to inform others about the value and beauty of native vegetation, then our native wildlands might have a chance against the onslaught of exotic species.

New & Returning Friends

As of January 10, 2011, 290 people and organizations have generously sent in much needed donations since our last newsletter. Your privacy matters, please check the appropriate boxes on your application.

FREMONT COTTONWOOD (\$1000-\$2499)

Lucy Clark
JoAnn Conard
Ken & Rhonda Gilliland
Margery Nicolson
Dan Portway
Pomona Valley Audubon Society
Bob & Susan Steele

GRAY FOX (\$500-\$999)

Sarah & David Bottjer	Frank Delfino
Ernest & Nancy Flores	CleoBell Heiple-Tice & Sid Tice
David L. Kurdeka	Bruce Garlinger & Denise LaBerteaux
Scott Rosenlieb	Lake Isabella True Value Hardware
Elaine & Doug White	Kerncrest Audubon Society

WILLOW FLYCATCHER (\$250-\$499)

Janet Cunningham & Ron Beck	
Aletha Benson	Chana Cortez
Emergency Management & Safety Solutions	
David A. Fong	Martine & Richard Metzenheim
Erin Portway	Maggie Seely
Vern & Beaujourn Shull	Brenda Larison & Tom Smith
Geraldine Tessman	Francina & Cornelis van der Hoek
Alan & Joan Woodman	Bruce Terzes & Suzanne Eiseman
Doug, Janine & Lindsay Wilson and Jamie Uyehara	



Rufous-crowned Sparrows can be found on the rock strewn hillsides of the Preserve.

Web Information

- Visit www.kern.audubon.org to keep current on Preserve news
- Follow us on Twitter - <http://twitter.com/KernRiverPrsrv>

Are you on Facebook?

So is the Kern River Preserve

Share news, photos and announcements about upcoming events. It's easy to find us – we are at <http://www.facebook.com/Audubon.KRP>

BE A PHILANTHROPIST FOR CONSERVATION...THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO SUPPORT AUDUBON KERN RIVER PRESERVE!

Please invest in the future of our conservation work by naming Audubon Kern River Preserve in your will or as a beneficiary of your retirement plan assets.



WE SUGGEST THE FOLLOWING WORDING: I bequeath \$ ____ (or ____% of my residuary estate) to Audubon Kern River Preserve, a field program of National Audubon Society, Inc., a not-for-profit environmental conservation organization, headquartered in New York, NY. This bequest shall be applied solely to the environmental conservation, policy, and education programs conducted by Audubon Kern River Preserve.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT: Alison Sheehy, Outreach Director, Audubon Kern River Preserve, PO Box 1662, Weldon, CA 93283, or call (760) 378-2029.





Audubon Kern River Preserve
Membership / Renewal Application



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

Application for: New Member Renewal Gift In Memory

_____ \$ 5,000 Summer Tanager	_____ \$100 Great Blue Heron
_____ \$ 2,500 Black Bear	_____ \$50 Bobcat
_____ \$ 1,000 Fremont Cottonwood	_____ \$40 California Quail
_____ \$ 500 Gray Fox	_____ \$25 Raccoon
_____ \$ 250 Willow Flycatcher	Total \$ _____

Anonymous Donation
 Do not sell my name
 Web Newsletter Only

Please Send Information on:

Planned Giving / Bequests
 Volunteer Opportunities

Please make checks payable to : **Audubon Kern River Preserve**
 or donate online: <https://loon.audubon.org/payment/donate/CAKERN.html>

Mail to: AUDUBON KERN RIVER PRESERVE • Gift Processing • 4225 Hollis St. • Emeryville, CA • 94608-3507 V1511

Festivals Scheduled for 2011

Preparations are underway for the next exciting slate of nature festivals held on the Kern River Preserve.

Each year we celebrate the rich diversity of the Kern River Valley and Southern Sierra.

On April 23rd, our Spring Nature Festival will spring forward to coincide with Earth Day. Since this is also Easter Weekend join us for an Easter egg hunt with a twist, we will search for replicas of native bird eggs!

Field trips will follow a few weeks later so we can coordinate world class nature trips for our visitors. We are working on putting together a series

of fund-raising trips to be held on International Migratory Bird Day weekend. This way our nature festival can be the world class event our guests have come to know and appreciate. Holding the festival on Earth Day will allow us to celebrate our connection with nature and help us shine a light on our role as conservationists.

On June 11th, we will again celebrate our local and California's diverse herpetological fauna. The number of amphibians and reptiles in Kern County is impressive and seeing these mysterious animals up close is always fascinating and educational.

On August 6th, we look to celebrate the amazing migration of hummingbirds. Six species of hummingbirds can be found on the preserve during the celebration.

The season of festivals ends on September 24th when migrating Turkey Vultures grace our valley. Not only are vultures visiting but this is the time of year when the last push of fall migrants pass through. At the same time colorful rabbitbrush begins to fill the valley with a blush of gold, while many species of butterflies feast on its nectar.