



Songbirds Connecting Communities 2003

A report to USFS Region 5 Partners In Flight and Inyo National Forest



H. River Gates and Melissa Pitkin
October 2003

PRBO Conservation Science
4990 Shoreline Highway
Stinson Beach, CA 94970
415-868-1221

www.prbo.org

PRBO Contribution # 1157

INTRODUCTION:

In 2003, PRBO Conservation Science (PRBO) implemented the second year of an outreach and education project designed to complement their songbird monitoring and conservation activities that have been ongoing since 1998 in the Eastern Sierra. "Songbirds Connecting Communities" was an enormous success. Through a variety of education and outreach activities, a wide range of people were contacted and provided information on songbird ecology and conservation, PRBO's current monitoring efforts and results in the region, and ways citizens can get involved in local conservation endeavors. Our greatest effort focused on inviting the public and local schools to mist netting and bird banding demonstrations throughout the summer (May- August).

PROJECT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES:

- Increase public awareness about birds and bird conservation, highlighting the importance of birds and riparian habitat, and ways individuals can help protect songbirds through broad public education (presentations, workshops, articles, informational handouts, etc.).
- Make connections between PRBO research sites, the local community, Region 5 Forest Service lands and local environmental groups.
- Build community support for riparian habitat restoration and enhancement projects
- Increase awareness about birds and habitat conservation among Forest Service leasees, private landowners and homeowners, and foster strong relationships between local conservation groups and landowners/homeowners.
- Educate the public about ways scientists use birds as a tool for assessing ecosystem health.
- Promote citizen science in the community by recruiting and engaging individuals and local birding groups in data collection and outreach.

SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES:

Banding Demonstrations

Banding demonstrations were offered to the public from May 5 to August 12 at the four tributary creeks in the Mono Basin. Flyers were posted at local markets, Mammoth and Lee Vining Forest Service Visitor Centers, the Mono Lake Committee's Bookstore, and at Devils Postpile National Monument. An email list was also developed for partners including educators, local residents, agency biologists and land managers as well as bird enthusiasts. Members of this list received a schedule of all banding days for the Mono Basin and accompanying maps.

A total of 245 people visited the Mono Basin banding stations. Visitors were divided into two categories according to their attendance (Table I). Drop-in visitors consisted of local residents, tourists, and bird enthusiasts. Organized groups represented a wide range of levels and interests including a Boy Scout Troop, elementary school classes from Lee Vining and Bridgeport, Eastern Sierra Academy high school students, the Mono Lake Committee's Outdoor Experiences students, University of California at Santa Cruz Natural History Field Quarter and a Music and Ecology Camp (Figure 1). Additionally, we celebrated International Migratory Bird Day by hosting a banding demonstration at Lee Vining Creek in which 12 people attended.

Table I: Summary of visitor attendance to Mono Basin Banding Stations, May – August 2003.

Banding Station Location	Drop-in visitors	Organized groups	Total
Rush Creek	29	40	69
Lee Vining Creek	37	94	131
Mill Creek	6	24	30
Wilson Creek	0	15	15
TOTAL	72	173	245



Figure 1: PRBO biologist, Gernot Huber, demonstrates data collection techniques with a Wilson's Warbler to a Mono Lake Committee Outdoor Experiences group from Los Angeles. Photo by Randy Arnold

In-class Visits and Presentations

Five classes including 176 students participated in in-class presentations offered during the winter and spring. Kindergarten through 12th grade teachers were given the choice between two activities that were then tailored to the grade level and topics of interests. Both activities engaged students in observation, bird identification, scientific monitoring, scientific inquiry, bird morphology, habitat requirements, and simple ways people can help birds and other wildlife everyday. 135

students participated in the study skins activity including third, fifth and sixth grade classes while 41 high school students observed a presentation on PRBO's Eastern Sierra Riparian Songbird Conservation Project.

Second Annual Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua

PRBO partnered with the Mono Lake Committee, Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area, Mono Lake Tufa State Reserve, and Eastern Sierra Audubon Society to organize and facilitate the Second Annual Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua

(<http://www.birdchautauqua.org/chautauquadetails.htm>). The mission of this birding festival is to enhance appreciation and understanding of the Mono Basin's diverse and abundant bird life and to educate the public about the Mono Basin's value to birds and people. **Over 250 people attended the weekend long event including land managers, children, amateur and professional birders, past and present Mono Lake scientists, eastern Sierra residents, and enthusiastic conservationists.**

PRBO contributed to this event by assisting in pre-planning of the event, and interpreting our scientific findings about birds in the Mono Basin through evening presentations, offering a Songbird Monitoring Techniques Workshop, two bird banding demonstrations, and staffed an outreach display. PRBO also provided interns for general festival support.

Twenty-five people participated in the Songbird Monitoring Techniques Workshop led by PRBO staff biologists Sacha Heath, Chris McCreedy, Grant Ballard and Viola Toniolo. Additionally, **45 people attended two days of bird banding activities on Lee Vining and Rush Creeks** (Figures 2,3 and 4). Sacha Heath delivered an evening presentation titled "*Add water and they will come? The restoration of Mono Basin's riparian songbird community*", focusing on a description of pre, during and post water diversion conditions of riparian habitat and associated songbirds on Mono Lake's restoring creeks. By describing the condition of these creeks over a 95-year period, she presented some of the PRBO's new results, research, and recommendations. PRBO biologist Justin Hite and Peter Wrege of Cornell University delivered a presentation focusing on the foraging ecology of Mono Lake's California Gulls. **Both presentations were attended by over 30 people each.** Additionally, **over 150 people dropped by and explored the PRBO outreach display** throughout the event gathering materials and talking with PRBO education staff, Sue Abbott and River Gates.



Figure 2: PRBO biologist, Gernot Huber, shows a Chautauqua participant the different flight feather tracks of a Mountain Chickadee. Photo by Arya Degenhardt



Figure 3: PRBO biologist, Gernot Huber demonstrates how a bird is carefully removed from the mistnet. Photo by Arya Degenhardt

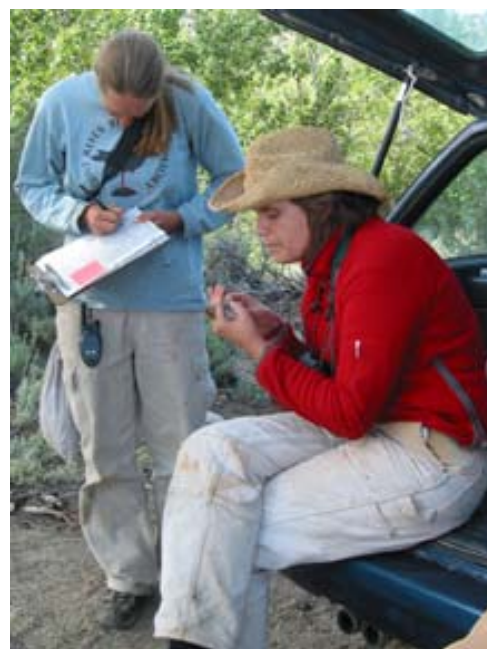


Figure 4: PRBO biologists, River Gates and Sue Abbott, collect data on a newly captured Green-tailed Towhee. Photo by Arya Degenhardt

Outreach Articles and Newsletter Pieces

Outreach articles were written to support education efforts and to disseminate information on PRBO's Eastern Sierra bird monitoring efforts. The following is a list of publications:

- "Eastern Sierra Songbird Outreach Project." p. 4 Flight Log 12: CalPIF Newsletter Winter/Spring 2002 – 2003 (<http://www.prbo.org/calpif/flightlog/Flightlog12.pdf>).
- "Mono's Tributary Streams as Songbird Habitat: What is the Appropriate Measure of Restoration's Success?" pp. 12-13. Mono Lake Committee Newsletter: Spring 2003 (<http://www.monolake.org/newsletter/03spring/index.html>).
- "Bird Migration in the Basin" pp. 13 and 17. Mono Lake Committee Newsletter: Spring 2003 (<http://www.monolake.org/newsletter/03spring/index.html>).
- "Help PRBO Survey Our Birds." p. 4. The Sierra Wave: Eastern Sierra Audubon Society Newsletter March/April 2003. (http://esaudubon.org/wv21_4.pdf)
- "Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua" section RHJV 2003(Riparian Habitat Joint Venture). Version 2.0. The Riparian Bird Conservation Plan: a strategy for reversing the decline of riparian associated birds in California. California Partners in Flight

Partnership Support and Informational Materials Dissemination

Most of PRBO's partners received an education and outreach packet with informational materials regarding bird feeding, songbird and owl nest box maintenance and creating backyard bird-friendly habitat (Table 2). Partners were encouraged to distribute materials to visitors, staff and other partners.

Table 2: List of organizations or agencies receiving outreach packet.

Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, Bridgeport Ranger District
Inyo National Forest, White Mountain Ranger District
Bureau of Land Management, Bishop Field Office
Mono Lake Tufa State Reserve
Interagency Visitor's Center, Lone Pine
Eastern Sierra Audubon Society
Mono Lake Committee
Devils Postpile National Monument

Volunteers

Volunteers have become increasingly essential for the success of long-term monitoring programs. The recruiting and training of volunteers is mutually beneficial, and provides the volunteers an opportunity to learn new skills. Local volunteers participated in a variety of bird monitoring techniques including mistnetting and bird banding, vegetation assessments, education and outreach and data entry. **Four volunteers donated a total of 81.5 hours of service** to the PRBO's eastern Sierra bird monitoring projects. We successfully trained two volunteers to band and collect demographic data on songbirds.

Evaluation

Teachers were asked to evaluate the effectiveness of the Songbirds Connecting Communities project by rating it on a scale of 1 to 10 as well as answering a few questions regarding context and content. Teachers were overwhelming in their support for the project and gave constructive feedback on how to improve the project to meet their needs. In summary, teachers gave high ratings averaging 8.5 on a 10 point scale.

Additionally, drop-in visitors to the banding station sent letters of appreciation for the education project. Below are a few excerpts from these letters that highlight the various way visitors were impacted and educated by the banding demonstrations.

"My husband and I spent most of the morning at Lee Vining Creek with River and Gernot, watching their birding activities. I learned more in those few hours than the many years of beginning birding. They both expressed enthusiasm for and love of their 'task'. As they worked they shared a wealth of information and were so patient of and articulate in answering the many questions and statements from the several people who came to watch" – Mono Lake Committee member

"We also enjoyed so much being with you and Gernot during the banding mornings. Observing the banding and learning so much more about the birds, seeing them up close definitely gives us such an appreciation not only for the birds, but the interconnectedness of all of nature. We realize, too, how important our role of stewardship is." —PRBO member

"Your field people, River and Gernot" were very considerate of the camper's questions and very professional in that they made it clear that their first responsibility was to any birds they may have netted. As a college biology teacher I appreciated the way they explained what data they were collecting and why that data was important." —Youth educator

Acknowledgments

Financial and logistical support in 2003 was primarily provided by United States Forest Service, Region 5 Partners in Flight funds. PRBO biologist, Sacha Heath provided invaluable assistance and guidance throughout the project. Contributors to PRBO's eastern Sierra riparian songbird monitoring efforts also supported these education efforts. These include the Mono Lake Tufa State Reserve, Eastern Sierra Audubon Society, Mono Lake Committee, Bureau of Land Management, California Department of Fish and Game, and Devils Postpile National Monument. Special thanks to PRBO Biologist, Gernot Huber who's interpretive expertise was essential to the success of this project. Other PRBO biologists who provided their biological expertise and interpretation of their work include Sue Abbott, Grant Ballard, Leah Culp, Kiera Freeman, Jennifer Kendrick, Quresh Latif, Chris McCreedy, Viola Toniolo, Chris Tonra, and Simone Whitecloud. Margina Rhyne, Justin Hite, Miguel Berrios and Jean Dillingham offered their valuable time and energy as volunteers. This is PRBO contribution # 1157.