



THE GENUS ZONOTRICHIA: NOT ALL SPARROWS ARE LBJs

by Tom & Jo Heindel



Photo: Gambel's White-crowned sparrow by Tom Heindel

Think back to your early ventures into birding. For most of us, those early years were filled with way too many LBJs (little brown jobs). Many were sparrows and to newbie birders, they all looked alike. Those were the early days, before we learned to appreciate structure, proportions, behavior, vocalizations, habitat, and elevation, etc. We were rookies with a blank slate and a mind to match when faced with an LBJ. We loved seeing an all black bird with bright red shoulders, or a bird with a bright yellow breast and bold black "V" over the yellow, or a yellow bird with black and white/yellow wings, and bright red head...now those were birds we could identify since few other species looked anything like them! The LBJs.

But we all grew and gained experience and eventually reached a time when some of the LBJs looked different from the rest of the LBJs. For many of us, the first sparrows we learned were in the genus *Zonotrichia*.

There are just five species of *Zonotrichia* in the world and they are distinctive from all other sparrows but obviously look related to each other. They are usually not secretive so are easily observed and four of the five species are fairly common over much of the United States.

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Photo: Tom Heindel



Photo: Tom Heindel  
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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

"If you want to go quickly, go alone;

If you want to go far, go together"

*African Proverb*

Being president of Eastern Sierra Audubon has been a pretty amazing experience. It certainly has not turned out to be what I expected although I am not sure what that might have been. I did not think this would last this long or have all these moving parts. Still, there have been so many things that have enriched my life: meeting so many truly impressive people, getting to work on important stuff, being buoyed by encouragement from so many supportive and inspiring souls and having the privilege to be associated with an organization with the cachet, history, and vision of Audubon in general and ESAS in particular. I am grateful for such a wonderful opportunity. People are quite gracious about thanking me for what ESAS does, but the thing about this is that whatever has transpired through these years has little to do with me, but are the result of so much work, enthusiasm and persistence of the people of our chapter and beyond. My name is just on the top of a big list.

First of all, we owe a big thank you to the members of the boards of directors with whom it has been my pleasure to work. These are the folks that have made so many things possible: managing our membership and finances, planning and coordinating programs and field trips, getting the word out to our members and the community through media publicity, our website and our email communications and newsletter. Board members have shepherded the development of birds in the classroom and the expansion of this program into 6 area school systems in Inyo and Mono counties and worked to create a dynamic partnership with the Bishop Paiute Tribe and Bishop schools at the C.O.S.A. They have helped develop our logos, t-shirts and a forthcoming set of brochures and tabling materials for public events. The board members have developed a scholarship program for Inyo and Mono high school seniors, overseen the awarding of the first scholarships and worked tirelessly and creatively to fund those grants through t-shirt sales and yard sale proceeds. Throughout these years, board members have looked for and supported ways in which ESAS has partnered with other community organizations on behalf of eastern sierra birds and their habitat.

It's not just the current or most recent groups. Our work is made possible by a strong foundation which was initiated more than twenty five years ago by a dedicated group of founders and then nurtured by the energy and vision and generosity of people knew there was an

important place here for a vibrant Audubon chapter. We have been so blessed to have so many exceptional birders among our membership and leadership; I sometimes worry that we will not be able to pass those skills and joys to new generations and hope that we will continue to have their invaluable mentorship for years to come. People who were not board members at the time have and continue to make important contributions: James Wilson, the embodiment of ESAS, Mike Prather, the spirit of Owens Lake, Chris Howard and his dedicated support of the Christmas Bird Count, Rosie Howard who has worked to enrich habitat through our community garden and to solve problems encountered by area birders and Elena Espinoza who has organized a series of birding outings in north Mono County.



Please understand that this list is so extensive and I have not even begun to recognize everyone who is so deserving. This month's message is one of gratitude. Please join me in expressing appreciation to the folks who are working on behalf of our chapter by giving them a smile or a pat on the back or by jumping in and lending a hand. Our chapter needs the help of its members; their energy and passion and skills.

We will go farther by going together; the more people who are working on ESAS projects, the better the results. Your help is vitally needed because:

- The work of this organization is important;
- While we do a great many things, it seems that each one opens the door on another opportunity to fill a need or create an opportunity for someone to connect with our birds;
- You all have serious needed skills, if you have experience and enthusiasm for any type of activity you can help us a lot;
- You all have great and innovative ideas which need to be heard and explored.

So, hey, a little help please. The rewards are many; great people, good works and service to the community and the creatures around us. Please come along on this very special ride and help us realize your sense of what Eastern Sierra Audubon can be.

*Peter Pumphrey*

## THE GENUS ZONOTRICHIA: NOT ALL SPARROWS ARE LBJS (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

*Zonotrichia* is a Greek compound word with *zono* referring to zones or bands of light and dark on the head and *trichia* meaning a small bird or hair, depending on your "authority"; *leucophrys* is from *leukos* meaning white and *ophrys* meaning eyebrow. Four of the species breed in North America and the other species breeds in Central and South America. In the Eastern Sierra, we are fortunate to be able to see all four in one year, sometimes two or three species in the same day!

The species we all are most familiar with is the White-crowned Sparrow (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*), a small sparrow with contrasting crown stripes (zones) with a white or buff stripe over the eye. This species is found in Inyo and Mono Counties all year. But wait! They aren't all the same birds even though they have the same name! They are the same species but we have two subspecies that spend different parts of the year with us. If you know what to look at, they are very easy to tell apart. If you don't, they look somewhat similar. The subspecies that you've been looking at in your yard all winter is the Gambel's White-crowned Sparrow (*Zonotrichia leucophrys gambelii*). We have both adults and immatures in our yards right now. The adults have black and white stripes on the crown and the immatures have reddish brown and tan stripes. These immatures were born last summer and in April you will see them beginning to molt. Their reddish brown crown stripes will be replaced with black and the tan stripes will be exchanged for white. During the transition, the immatures will look like a checkerboard table of all four colors. The Gambel's White-crowned Sparrow was named after William Gambel, California's first ornithologist, who died of typhoid fever after crossing the Sierra Nevada in 1849.

Photo: Mountain White-crowned Sparrow by Tom Heindel



The other White-crowned Sparrow is the Mountain White-crowned Sparrow (*Zonotrichia leucophrys oriantha*). The subspecific name *oriantha* seems to refer to mountain living but if you have a more certain translation, let us know. This is the species we see breeding in summer in the willow-lined streams and meadows of the Sierra Nevada and White Mountains. When you look closely at the black stripes, you'll see that the lateral crown stripe widens as it reaches the bill and the lores (area between the eye and bill) is black not the gray of a Gambel's White-crowned Sparrow. This mark also holds true in immature birds with the lores dark brown or blackish in Mountain and grayish or buffy in Gambel's.

Gambel's White-crowned Sparrow is in the Eastern Sierra primarily from September to May when they depart for the breeding grounds in Western Canada and Alaska. The Mountain White-crowned Sparrow winters in Western Mexico and arrives here to breed from May to October. Beware the months of May, September, and October when both subspecies are either coming or going! These are really fun months if you are in to lore color in White-crowned Sparrows!



The second most common *Zonotrichia* in the Eastern Sierra is the Golden-crowned Sparrow (*Zonotrichia atricapilla*). The specific name *atricapilla* is another compound word with *atri* meaning black and *capilla* meaning hair on the head, in this case referring to the black feathers that border the gold crown in adults. They can be fairly common September to April along streams in the lower elevations of the foothills and alluvial fans and are less often recorded on the valley floor. They prefer more humid areas with scrubby cover.

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Photo: Golden-crowned Sparrow by Jo Heindel



THE GENUS ZONOTRICHIA: NOT ALL SPARROWS ARE LBJS (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3)



Photo: Golden-crowned Sparrow by Tom Heindel

The third *Zonotrichia* is the White-throated Sparrow (*Zonotrichia albicollis*) with *albi* Latin for white and *collis* meaning collar, in this case describing the white throat. This species breeds in the northeastern tier of the U.S. from Minnesota eastward and across Canada, all but extreme western portion. It winters over much of central and eastern U.S. and, in much smaller numbers, along the Pacific Coast. It is very uncommon in the Eastern Sierra but is of annual occurrence September through



April. This species has either a tan or white superciliary (eyebrow) that defines which morph it is. It is not an age or sexual mark. If you search through flocks of White-crowned



Sparrows feeding on the ground, you may be lucky and pull out a White-throated Sparrow. In the fall of 2014, we had three different individuals in our yard that allowed close-up images which indicated each was a different bird based on detailed feather patterns.



Photos: White-throated Sparrow by Tom Heindel

The fourth, and rarest *Zonotrichia* in the Eastern Sierra is the Harris's Sparrow (*Zonotrichia querula*), which breeds in north-central Canada and winters in south-central U.S., mainly Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas, with a few birds wandering widely. In Latin *querula* means plaintive, referring to the sad or complaining vocalizations the Harris's Sparrow makes. At least one bird is Sierra most years between October and bird remain at our feeders until 10 June when we left on vacation. It must have known what north-central Canada was like at that time! This sparrow was named after a friend and patron of John James Audubon and Harris accompanied Audubon on several expeditions.



Photo: Harris's Sparrow by Tom Heindel

reported in the Eastern April. In 1973, we had one



Photo: Harris's Sparrow by Matt Heindel



Photo: Rufous-collared Sparrow by Jo Heindel

The last *Zonotrichia* is the Rufous-crowned Sparrow (*Zonotrichia capensis*), which is found from southern Mexico to the tip of South America hence its specific name '*capensis*' referring to Cape Horn. When we lived in Bolivia at 11,000ft and Ecuador at 9000ft, these were common yard birds that we saw and heard every day. If you see one of these in Inyo or Mono County, call us!

## FIELD REPORTS

Antelope Valley (*Elena Espinosa*)

Here's an update for my birding trips on Sunday mornings in the Antelope Valley. I've had 7 people come out to bird and have created a couple of new birders! We're just shy of 50 species seen including

Bald Eagles, Prairie Falcons, Ferruginous Hawks and American Dippers along with Red Breasted Sapsuckers and Common Loons in winter plumage. We have a mysterious group of what look to be Snipes on the north side of the Cunningham Lane bridge in the

Walker River. We could use some help trying to identify these birds. I'll be leading the birding here through Sunday, March 22nd. We are meeting at the Walker Country Store at 9am every Sunday. I hope to see some other ESAS members out here with us.

## OWENS LAKE BIRD FESTIVAL APRIL 24-25, 2015 LONE PINE, CA

Each year in spring and fall Owens Lake, at the terminus of the Owens River near Lone Pine, CA, supports hundreds of thousands of shorebirds during their annual migrations between continents. Dried by drastic diversions to bring water to the people of Los Angeles, today dust mitigation and restoration efforts have returned water, creating habitat and attracting birds to the lake once again. Designated as an Important Bird Area by the National Audubon Society in 2001, it is the largest and richest wildlife area in Inyo County.

This April, Friends of the Inyo invites all birders and lovers of wildlife to celebrate the spring migration during the Owens Lake Bird Festival, April 24th and 25th. In its first year, the Owens Lake Bird Festival promises to honor this extraordinary place and the huge migrating flocks of birds that depend on it for rest and nourishment. It will also celebrate the communities of the Southern Owens Valley and their ties, through the watershed, to Los Angeles.

The festival begins Friday evening with a reception at the Lone Pine Film History Museum featuring the Audubon-California's short film *The Legacy of Owens Lake*. On Saturday, expert guides will lead morning and afternoon field trips to Owens Lake with explorations for beginners through experts in bird identification, avian photography, a tour of the invertebrate food web, discussions of the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power Master Project (dust control and wildlife), and the wonders of migration. Lunch will include several short talks about the lake including 'Owens Lake Master Project' by Jeff Nordin of LADWP, 'Audubon's Important Bird Areas' by Andrea Jones of Audubon-California, 'Why is that Lake Red?' by Dave Herbst, PhD of the Sierra Nevada Aquatic Research Laboratory, and 'The Magic and Wonder of Owens Lake' by influential friend of the lake, Michael Prather. The festival will close with a reception at the Interagency Visitor Center featuring the photography exhibit "The Owens Lake Project" by Robin Black.

"This will be a brand new bird festival in a spectacular, world-class location," promises organizer and speaker Michael Prather. "Birds from as far away as South America will be coming through to see us."

Friends of the Inyo is honored to be working with several supporters and partners to host the Owens Lake Bird Festival including The Metabolic Studio, Inyo County, Audubon-California, the Eastern Sierra Interpretive Association, Eastern Sierra Audubon, and Los Angeles Department of Water and Power among others.

"Hosting the Owens Lake Bird Festival is a natural extension of our work to inspire people to care for and preserve the outstanding beauty, recreation opportunities, and natural resources of the Eastern Sierra's public lands," says Friends of the Inyo's Executive Director Laura Beardsley. "We're excited to kick off what we hope will become an annual festival."

Registration includes evening receptions, a continental breakfast, lunch with inspiring speakers, and in-depth tours with expert guides.

For more information or to register, visit

[www.friendsoftheinyo.org/foiD7/owenslakefestival](http://www.friendsoftheinyo.org/foiD7/owenslakefestival) or call (760) 873-6500.

**MARK YOUR CALENDARS! UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS & MORE**

This year's 4th annual 'Alabama Hills Day' is scheduled for Saturday, April 11, 2015 from 9am to 3 pm in beautiful springtime Lone Pine!

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**OWENS LAKE SPRING BIG DAY WEDNESDAY, APRIL 22**

Come and help Owens Lake birds by volunteering to help 'count 'em all' April 22. Citizen scientists partner with LADWP staff to census all the birds on the lake in one day. The data collected is used in the management of bird habitat. This monitoring shows successes and also possible need for adaptation. We meet at Diaz Lake at 7AM. Come prepared – food, water, sunscreen, hat.

Contact Mike for more information - [mprather@lonepinetv.com](mailto:mprather@lonepinetv.com)

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**BUTTERMILKS BIRDING SATURDAY, MAY 16**

Leader Jerry Zatorski.

In the upper Buttermilks, May is an excellent time to catch many resident birds in full spring song and many others on their way to mountain breeding locations. This will be a 4 mile round trip hike, beginning at 7400' and slowly ascend to 7900'. In the lower portions the various sagebrush specialists can be seen and heard, and in the upper portion the Jeffery Pine forest hosts many mountain species from warblers to grosbeaks. Bring binoculars, scopes (if they can be easily carried), field guilds, camera and an ear for bird song. We should be done by afternoon. Participants should bring food & fluids, and dress for the spring weather and hiking. Meet at 7:00 AM at the Buttermilk Rd. and SR 168.

Because parking is limited, carpooling is encouraged. Vehicles with 4WD and clearance are recommended. For more information contact Jerry at 387-2920 or "[jerryzat@gmail.com](mailto:jerryzat@gmail.com)".

[http://esaudubon.org/events/field\\_trips.php#buttermilks](http://esaudubon.org/events/field_trips.php#buttermilks)

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**OPPORTUNITIES FOR MEMBERS**

Are you a financial planner? We need your help! Eastern Sierra Audubon has recently acquired estate and other funds and is seeking expertise on how to best manage these funds. Please contact Lacey the Treasurer, at [lacey.eva@gmail.com](mailto:lacey.eva@gmail.com).

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Eastern Sierra Land Trust will be holding their annual GardenFest event Friday, May 1st from 3-6pm and would love to have Eastern Sierra Audubon Society join them! If any ESAS member would be interested in participating by having a table with outreach information, educational materials on gardening for birds, or something similar please let us at the ESAS Board know.

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*Opportunities to help ESAS with getting the word out and encouraging membership abound! Upcoming events include the Banff Film Festival, Alabama Hills Day and Earth Day (and probably many more). We'd love to have your help growing the membership, attendance at field trips, and involvement with Eastern Sierra Audubon Society. Contact one of the Board members for more information.*

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NORTHERN INYO BIRD-A-THON SEPTEMBER 2015

Dear friends of Eastern Sierra Audubon Society and birders all over, ESAS is planning to do its first annual Northern Inyo County Bird-a Thon. The dates for the event will be selected pretty soon, however, the event will take place in the month of September.

You can spend several hours, a morning, or an entire day birding looking for Fall migrants. If you are interested in participating and/or know somebody that would like to participate in the event, please contact us for more information at:

<http://esaudubon.org/about/contact.php>

Thank you,  
ESAS (Santiago)



*Photo: Common Yellowthroat by Santiago Escruceria*

GUESS THAT BIRD!

A hint is that it lives in the same bushes as the sparrow, flies like a sparrow and eats sunflower seeds and grape jelly as do the sparrows. Also feeds on the ground as well as the feeders. Submit your guesses on our Facebook page! Use #March2015 & include a photo of the bird (if possible).



BIRD OF THE MONTH: RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD

SANTIAGO ESCRUCERIA



The Red-winged Blackbird is a relatively small bird, with the male having a distinctive red shoulder. They have a long spike-like bill and dull black body. Female has a dark brown body with streaked back and under parts. The song is a short introductory sound followed by a drawn-out raspy thrill. Seen at **COSA** reserve, common and locally abundant in the Eastern Sierra (especially wet habitats).

BIRDS IN THE CLASSROOM: CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS

Hello trusty birders and volunteers!

Below is the schedule for this year's Bishop Birds in the Classroom, a program offered by the Eastern Sierra Audubon Society. Please let me know which dates you will be able to volunteer.

Volunteering means leading a small group (5 ish) of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students birding on the COSA (Bishop Paiute Tribe's Conservation Open Space Area, located directly behind the Bishop Elementary School). Students will know how to use binoculars and have some idea of how to find birds and focus on them. Your job is to lead them around, help find birds, be enthusiastic and excited about looking at birds, and help students gather information in order to identify birds. By the way, the students absolutely love this and it's very fun for the volunteers!

There will be an **optional training on May 1<sup>st</sup>** for volunteers who want to brush up on their birding skills or become familiar with the area where we will be birding on the COSA.

Thank you for giving 3<sup>rd</sup> graders a chance to experience the wonder of birds! Please forward to anyone you think would be interested.

- Thursday, May 7<sup>th</sup>: 8:15- 11:30
- Friday, May 8<sup>th</sup>: 8:15- 11:30
- Friday, May 15<sup>th</sup>: 8:15- 11:30
- Friday, May 22<sup>nd</sup>: 8:15- 10:00

*Hillary Bebr*  
 Outdoor Education Coordinator  
 Inyo County Superintendent of Schools  
 166 Grandview Drive, Bishop CA  
 Work: (760) 873-3262 ext. 431





## CALENDAR

Saturday, March 14:	COSA monthly walk 8:30 am BLM/USFS West Line Street, Bishop
Sundays, weekly:	Antelope Valley / Topaz Bird Walks (thru March 22) 9:00 am Walker Country Store
Saturday, March 21:	Wildlife of the Sierra Nevada with Cindy Kamler 10:30 - 11:30 am 137 S. Main St., Bishop
Sunday, March 22:	World Water Day Paiute Shoshone Cultural Center, Bishop
March 27-28:	Banff Mountain Film Festival Tickets: ICA, Eastside Sports, Booky Joint
Saturday, April 11:	COSA monthly walk 8:30 am BLM/USFS West Line Street, Bishop
Saturday, April 11:	Alabama Hills Day 9 am - 3 pm Lone Pine
April 10-12:	Wildflower Festival Maturango Museum, Ridgecrest
April 11-19:	California Native Plant Week <a href="http://cnps.org/cnps/conservation/nativeplantweek/">cnps.org/cnps/conservation/nativeplantweek/</a>
Wednesday, April 22:	Owens Lake Spring Big Day <a href="mailto:mprather@lonepinetv.com">mprather@lonepinetv.com</a>
Friday, April 24:	Andrea Lawrence Award Dinner Lily Pastel at (760) 647-6595.
April 24-26:	Owens Lake Bird Festival <a href="http://www.friendsoftheinyo.org/foiD7/owenslakefestival">www.friendsoftheinyo.org/foiD7/owenslakefestival</a>

## NEWS

Have you checked out [AudubonAdventures.org](http://AudubonAdventures.org), the ever-growing, ever-improving website for all things *Audubon Adventures*? The site now features “Wild about Birds.” The first of three new topics for the 2014-15 school year, “Wild about Birds” is focused on the science of birds, including their characteristics and adaptations, habitat needs, migration, and life cycles. This is the first full season of the all-digital format.



Photo: Michael Prather

## BOARD MEMBERS & COMMITTEE CHAIRS

### Chapter Officers:

President: Peter Pumphrey (872-7846)

Vice-President: Jenny Richardson (920-8541)

Secretary: Ann Hoffmann (933-2318)

Treasurer: Lacey Greene(920-3606)

### Other Board Members:

Bart Godett(938-2959)

Jenny Richardson(920-8541)

Maggie Riley (258-9694)

Roberta Lagomarsini (872-7846)

Santiago Escruceria

Hillary Behr (603-953-3690)

Paul McFarland

Vickie Taton

You can find a list of our current ESAS Board Members and Committee Chairs [here](#).



Join us on [Facebook!](#)

## MEMBERSHIP

If you would like to join or renew and help support Eastern Sierra Audubon, there are two ways you can do it:

Join as a National Audubon Society Member, designating ESAS as your chapter affiliation (your zip code will associate you with the chapter nearest you). Includes Audubon Magazine subscription. This is \$20 for the first year, and goes up to \$35 annually thereafter.

Join as an ESAS Chapter-only Member for \$20 per year. 100% of your donation stays here in the Eastern Sierra this way. Your chapter membership is a way to give back, and show your appreciation for all that ESAS does, and to help support our mission locally. Your membership helps pay for scholarships, programs, special events, education programs, research, and more. Click [here](#) for a membership form to join or renew, or pick up a membership form at any Audubon event! Please contact me at [hoffmann@qnet.com](mailto:hoffmann@qnet.com) or 760-933-2318, if you have concerns or questions.

*Ann Hoffmann, Membership Chair.*

## MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

This newsletter is for you, the members, and I appreciate all the wonderful contributions you've made. We publish bi-monthly and our next newsletter deadline will be **April 15th** for the May-June issue. You are always welcome to send submissions for future newsletters and also the monthly email at any time before the deadline.

All of our content is supplied by our awesome members... if you have anything to share for newsletter publication, whether an article, a news item, update, correction, poem, essay, artwork, photo, field trip report, neat birding experience, letter, etc, please send it, along with any comments or suggestions, to the [newsletter editor](#). We'd love to hear from you! Thanks for reading, and happy birding!

*Vickie Taton, Editor*



# WORLD WATER DAY

March 22, 2015

6:45 AM — 12 PM

Paiute Shoshone Cultural Center  
2300 West Line Street, Bishop

*“Water is Life”*

Join us in celebrating water! We'll be starting off the event with a **sunrise water blessing**. This is a **FREE** event

packed with presentations, demonstrations, water-related games and activities, nature walks through the Conservation Open Space Area (COSA), and raffle prizes! There will be information about the Tribe's Water Quality Control Program and other programs in the Inyo and Mono counties. Come learn how you can better manage your water resources!



For more information, please contact Tiffany Mikamo at:  
760-873-3584 ext 223 or  
[tiffany.mikamo@bishoppaiute.org](mailto:tiffany.mikamo@bishoppaiute.org)







# Owens Lake

## BIRD FESTIVAL

*A Celebration of Shorebirds Migrating Between Hemispheres*

LONE PINE, CA  
**April 24 & 25, 2015**

Join us for a day of birding and discovery  
 at Owens Lake Important Bird Area.

**Tours, Speakers, Inspiration**

**Tickets: \$35; \$20 for students;  
 Children under 12 – free with an adult**

Registration includes evening receptions, continental  
 breakfast, lunch with inspiring speakers, and in-depth  
 morning and afternoon tours with expert guides.

Details and registration at [friendsoftheinyo.org/foiD7/owenslakefestival](http://friendsoftheinyo.org/foiD7/owenslakefestival)  
 For more information call 760-873-6500 or email [owenslakefestival@friendsoftheinyo.org](mailto:owenslakefestival@friendsoftheinyo.org)



*"...Large flocks of shorebirds in flight over the water in the distance, wheeling about show en masse,  
 now silvery now dark, against the gray-blue of the water.  
 There must literally be thousands of birds within sight of this spot..."*  
 Joseph Grinnell, Sept. 24, 1917