



Ohlone Audubon Society

# **The Extremes of Inyo County**

*June 1-5, 2025*

**Leaders: Bob Toleno and Juli Chamberlin**



**Cape May Warbler – Death Valley, California**

Birding in Inyo County is all about extremes: from high mountain elevations to the lowest place on the continent; from the still-snowy peaks of the Sierra Nevada to one of the hottest places on the planet; from mountains with moist aspen and fir forests to peaks with arid bristlecone pine and sagebrush; from the driest saltbush deserts to the wetland willows of the Owens Valley, Inyo County has it all. With such extreme habitats, a wonderful variety of breeding birds nest in the area, some permanent residents, and some neotropical migrants that arrive each spring. Many of these birds can't be seen anywhere else in California, and others are limited to the Great Basin. We'll be traveling through varied habitats to see many of these birds, some common, and some that breed only in small numbers in this corner of California.

Besides nesting species, late Spring affords an excellent opportunity to see migrating birds passing through the area, as well. As the sun starts to rise each day, nocturnally migrating birds flying over the desert look down for a place to rest and refuel, and the green spaces in the desert offer the only good stopovers. The natural and artificial oases in Death Valley act as “migrant traps,” and the late migration period of late May and early June often sees more wandering birds showing up in California, especially eastern vagrant passerines. Birders from all over California come to Furnace Creek and other desert hotspots in the area to experience this phenomenon.

## Tour Itinerary

**June 1 (Day 1):** We’ll meet at 12:30pm in the town of Mammoth Lakes. Participants should eat lunch before we meet (there are lots of choices in town). We will bird for a short time in the area, looking for Sierra Nevada species, especially focusing on woodpeckers, like Black-backed and White-headed. We’ll then drive to Crowley Lake, where sagebrush habitat meets desert wetland. Sagebrush Sparrows and Sage Thrashers should be common, and a large Bank Swallow colony nests in the sandy cliffs that line the lakeshore. If we’re extremely lucky, we might spot Greater Sage-Grouse poking their heads up out of the bushes. Next, we’re off to Aspendell where Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch and montane species will be our primary targets, many coming to feeders at the houses in town. We end the day in Bishop where we’ll sleep the next two nights.



**Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch - Aspendell, California**

**June 2 (Day 2):** We'll wake up early and start in Big Pine, where we'll look for Black Swifts. After breakfast in town, we'll drive up into the White Mountains, where we'll spend the rest of the day. We'll visit Tollhouse Spring, an excellent migrant trap, Westgard Pass, and Cottonwood Canyon. Our main targets will be Plumbeous Vireo, Juniper Titmouse, Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay, Pinyon Jay, and if we're very lucky, maybe a Broad-tailed Hummingbird. In the afternoon, as the day heats up, we'll head higher up into the White Mountains, eventually reaching Schulman Grove, the bristlecone pine forest that is home to the oldest living tree in the world—4,856 years old!—named Methuselah. Targets include Vesper Sparrow, Williamson's Sapsucker, Gray Flycatcher, and Mountain Bluebird. We'll return to Bishop before dinner, then after eating, just before sunset, we'll visit Fish Slough just north of town to watch Lesser and Common Nighthawks as they begin their evening feeding. We'll sleep again at the same lodging in Bishop.

**June 3 (Day 3):** We'll check out in Bishop, pack up, have breakfast, then head south and east toward Death Valley. Our first birding stop will be the tiny town of Independence where some of the best LeConte's Thrasher habitat in California can be found. We'll visit Lone Pine to see if last summer's Mississippi Kite has decided to return. Then we're off to Death Valley, where we'll have lunch and bird at Panamint Springs, hoping for migrants. After lunch, we'll drive to Furnace Creek for more migrant birding and then check into The Ranch at Death Valley.



**Greater Roadrunner - Death Valley, California**

**June 4 (Day 4):** We'll start birding just after sunrise, walking the grounds at The Ranch. This is prime migrant time, and we'll be especially searching for eastern vagrant passerines. We'll pause for breakfast, then bird the grounds some more. After check-out, we'll bird a little longer in the Furnace Creek area, then continue south toward Shoshone, stopping at a few migrant traps along the way. We'll end the day with a hike in Amargosa Canyon, where we hope to see Gambel's Quail, Yellow-breasted Chat, Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, and Crissal Thrasher. We'll spend the last night of the tour in Shoshone.



**Phainopepla - Shoshone, California**

**June 5 (Day 5):** We'll start the morning with a walk around the tiny town of Shoshone, exploring the wetlands that are managed for the endangered Shoshone pupfish. Our target species include Summer Tanager, Greater Roadrunner, and Gambel's Quail. The town is also a great migrant trap, so we'll also be looking for vagrants here, too. After breakfast, we'll venture to the China Ranch Date Farm where we'll look for Brown-crested Flycatcher, Summer Tanager, Bell's Vireo, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, and Lucy's Warbler. We'll end the tour with lunch in Tecopa.

**Optional post-tour birding:** After lunch, Bob and Juli will be driving about 2.5 hours to California City in Kern County. If anyone wants to do some late afternoon birding in California City Central Park, another excellent migrant hotspot, they would be welcome to join us.

# Climate, Pace, & Physical Requirements

As you might imagine from a tour with “extremes” in the name, the climate will vary a lot. On the first couple days, we’ll alternate between high elevations (8,400 feet in Aspendell) and mid-elevations (4,100 feet in Bishop). Up high, it will be chilly (~55-60F), and Bishop area will be warm (mid-to-high 80s F). Bring layers so you can add or subtract clothing as needed. In Death Valley, it will be HOT. We’ll do most Death Valley birding in the mornings and evenings, and there will be opportunities for necessary breaks. Be sure to bring adequate sun protection for this part of the tour, and a cooler so you can always have cold drinks available.

The pace will be moderate. We will be out birding almost all day every day, and most mornings we’ll be getting up very early, especially in Death Valley. I’ll make sure we always get to bed at a decent hour, though, so everyone can get plenty of sleep. There won’t be much hiking—probably no more than a couple miles per day— and what walking we do will be mostly on level ground. We will be driving at least a couple of hours per day as we travel between birding spots, which will often give us welcome respite from the heat in AC as we drive between birding spots.



Common Nighthawk - Owens Valley, California

## Financial Information

**FEE:** \$825 per person for a shared room; \$950 for a private. Price includes four nights lodging and five days of meals (excluding alcohol), from dinner on June 1 thru lunch on June 5.

**PAYMENT DUE:** April 15, 2025 (pay by check to Ohlone Audubon Society)

**TRANSPORT:** Participants drive themselves, but carpooling is encouraged and will be facilitated.

# Birds

List of birds we might see. One asterisk = harder-to-find species; two asterisks = very difficult.

Underlined species are targets for the tour.

## BREEDING OR RESIDENT SPECIES

|  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| <i>Canada Goose</i>                      | <i>Black-necked Stilt</i>               | <i>Northern Flicker</i>                 |
| <i>Cinnamon Teal</i>                     | <i>American Avocet</i>                  | <i>American Kestrel</i>                 |
| <i>Northern Shoveler</i>                 | <i>Killdeer</i>                         | <i>Peregrine Falcon*</i>                |
| <i>Gadwall</i>                           | <i>Spotted Sandpiper</i>                | <i>Prairie Falcon*</i>                  |
| <i>American Wigeon</i>                   | <i>California Gull</i>                  | <i>Olive-sided Flycatcher</i>           |
| <i>Mallard</i>                           | <i>Caspian Tern</i>                     | <i>Western Wood-Pewee</i>               |
| <i>Northern Pintail</i>                  | <i>Forster's Tern</i>                   | <i>Willow Flycatcher*</i>               |
| <i>Green-winged Teal</i>                 | <i>Pied-billed Grebe</i>                | <u><i>Gray Flycatcher</i></u>           |
| <i>Redhead</i>                           | <i>Eared Grebe</i>                      | <u><i>Dusky Flycatcher</i></u>          |
| <i>Common Merganser</i>                  | <i>Western Grebe</i>                    | <i>Western Flycatcher</i>               |
| <i>Ruddy Duck</i>                        | <i>Clark's Grebe</i>                    | <i>Black Phoebe</i>                     |
| <i>Mountain Quail**</i>                  | <i>Double-crested Cormorant</i>         | <i>Say's Phoebe</i>                     |
| <i>California Quail</i>                  | <i>White-faced Ibis</i>                 | <u><i>Vermilion Flycatcher</i></u>      |
| <u><i>Gambel's Quail</i></u>             | <i>Least Bittern**</i>                  | <i>Ash-throated Flycatcher</i>          |
| <u><i>Greater Sage-Grouse**</i></u>      | <i>Black-crowned Night-Heron</i>        | <u><i>Brown-crested Flycatcher*</i></u> |
| <i>Sooty Grouse**</i>                    | <i>Great Egret</i>                      | <u><i>Cassin's Kingbird*</i></u>        |
| <u><i>Chukar</i></u>                     | <i>Great Blue Heron</i>                 | <i>Western Kingbird</i>                 |
| <i>Rock Pigeon</i>                       | <i>American White Pelican</i>           | <u><i>Plumbeous Vireo*</i></u>          |
| <i>Eurasian Collard-Dove</i>             | <i>Turkey Vulture</i>                   | <i>Warbling Vireo</i>                   |
| <i>Mourning Dove</i>                     | <i>Osprey</i>                           | <i>Loggerhead Shrike</i>                |
| <u><i>Greater Roadrunner</i></u>         | <i>Cooper's Hawk</i>                    | <u><i>Pinyon Jay</i></u>                |
| <u><i>Lesser Nighthawk</i></u>           | <i>Northern Harrier</i>                 | <i>Steller's Jay</i>                    |
| <u><i>Common Nighthawk</i></u>           | <i>Bald Eagle</i>                       | <u><i>Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay*</i></u>    |
| <i>Common Poorwill*</i>                  | <i>Red-shouldered Hawk</i>              | <u><i>Black-billed Magpie</i></u>       |
| <u><i>Black Swift*</i></u>               | <i>Red-tailed Hawk</i>                  | <u><i>Clark's Nutcracker</i></u>        |
| <i>White-throated Swift</i>              | <i>Great Horned Owl</i>                 | <i>American Crow</i>                    |
| <i>Black-chinned Hummingbird</i>         | <i>Belted Kingfisher</i>                | <i>Common Raven</i>                     |
| <i>Anna's Hummingbird</i>                | <i>Red-breasted Sapsucker</i>           | <i>Mountain Chickadee</i>               |
| <u><i>Costa's Hummingbird</i></u>        | <u><i>Black-backed Woodpecker*</i></u>  | <u><i>Juniper Titmouse*</i></u>         |
| <u><i>Calliope Hummingbird*</i></u>      | <i>Downy Woodpecker</i>                 | <u><i>Verdin</i></u>                    |
| <u><i>Broad-tailed Hummingbird**</i></u> | <i>Nuttall's Woodpecker</i>             | <i>Horned Lark</i>                      |
| <i>Virginia Rail*</i>                    | <u><i>Ladder-backed Woodpecker*</i></u> | <u><i>Bank Swallow</i></u>              |
| <i>Sora*</i>                             | <i>Hairy Woodpecker</i>                 | <i>Tree Swallow</i>                     |
| <i>American Coot</i>                     | <u><i>White-headed Woodpecker*</i></u>  | <i>Violet-green Swallow</i>             |

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|--|--|---|
| <i>Northern Rough-winged Swallow</i>   | <i><u>Townsend's Solitaire*</u></i>      | <i><u>Yellow-headed Blackbird</u></i>     |
| <i>Barn Swallow</i>                    | <i><u>Hermit Thrush*</u></i>             | <i><u>Western Meadowlark</u></i>          |
| <i>Cliff Swallow</i>                   | <i><u>American Robin</u></i>             | <i><u>Hooded Oriole</u></i>               |
| <i>Bushtit</i>                         | <i><u>Phainopepla</u></i>                | <i><u>Bullock's Oriole</u></i>            |
| <i>White-breasted Nuthatch</i>         | <i><u>House Sparrow</u></i>              | <i><u>Scott's Oriole**</u></i>            |
| <i>Pygmy Nuthatch</i>                  | <i><u>Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch</u></i>    | <i><u>Red-winged Blackbird</u></i>        |
| <i>Red-breasted Nuthatch</i>           | <i><u>House Finch</u></i>                | <i><u>Brown-headed Cowbird</u></i>        |
| <i>Brown Creeper</i>                   | <i><u>Cassin's Finch</u></i>             | <i><u>Brewer's Blackbird</u></i>          |
| <i>Blue-gray Gnatcatcher</i>           | <i><u>Red Crossbill*</u></i>             | <i><u>Great-tailed Grackle</u></i>        |
| <i><u>Black-tailed Gnatcatcher</u></i> | <i><u>Pine Siskin</u></i>                | <i><u>Orange-crowned Warbler</u></i>      |
| <i>Rock Wren</i>                       | <i><u>Lesser Goldfinch</u></i>           | <i><u>Lucy's Warbler</u></i>              |
| <i>Canyon Wren</i>                     | <i><u>Chipping Sparrow</u></i>           | <i><u>Nashville Warbler*</u></i>          |
| <i>Northern House Wren</i>             | <i><u>Brewer's Sparrow</u></i>           | <i><u>Virginia's Warbler**</u></i>        |
| <i>Marsh Wren</i>                      | <i><u>Black-throated Sparrow</u></i>     | <i><u>MacGillivray's Warbler</u></i>      |
| <i>Bewick's Wren</i>                   | <i><u>Lark Sparrow</u></i>               | <i><u>Common Yellowthroat</u></i>         |
| <i><u>Cactus Wren*</u></i>             | <i><u>Fox Sparrow (Thick-billed)</u></i> | <i><u>Yellow Warbler</u></i>              |
| <i><u>American Dipper</u></i>          | <i><u>Dark-eyed Junco</u></i>            | <i><u>Yellow-rumped Warbler</u></i>       |
| <i><u>European Starling</u></i>        | <i><u>Sagebrush Sparrow</u></i>          | <i><u>Black-throated Gray Warbler</u></i> |
| <i><u>LeConte's Thrasher*</u></i>      | <i><u>Vesper Sparrow</u></i>             | <i><u>Wilson's Warbler</u></i>            |
| <i><u>Crissal Thrasher*</u></i>        | <i><u>Savannah Sparrow</u></i>           | <i><u>Summer Tanager*</u></i>             |
| <i><u>Sage Thrasher</u></i>            | <i><u>Song Sparrow</u></i>               | <i><u>Western Tanager</u></i>             |
| <i>Northern Mockingbird</i>            | <i><u>Green-tailed Towhee</u></i>        | <i><u>Black-headed Grosbeak</u></i>       |
| <i>Western Bluebird</i>                | <i><u>Spotted Towhee</u></i>             | <i><u>Blue Grosbeak</u></i>               |
| <i><u>Mountain Bluebird</u></i>        | <i><u>Yellow-breasted Chat</u></i>       | <i><u>Lazuli Bunting</u></i>              |

## MIGRANTS AND VAGRANTS

It's impossible to know exactly what migrants and vagrants might be seen on this tour, but nearly anything is possible. Obviously, none of these birds are guaranteed, but to give you an idea of what could show up, here is a list of migrants and vagrants that have been found at Furnace Creek, Panamint Springs, and Stovepipe Wells in Death Valley during late May and early June over the past five years:

*White-winged Dove, Franklin's Gull, Mississippi Kite, Swainson's Hawk, Eastern Kingbird, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, Cassin's Vireo, Plumbeous Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, Purple Martin, Gray Catbird, Swainson's Thrush, Wood Thrush, Cedar Waxwing, Clay-colored Sparrow, Bobolink, Orchard Oriole, Baltimore Oriole, Ovenbird, Northern Waterthrush, Black-and-white Warbler, Tennessee Warbler, Virginia's Warbler, Mourning Warbler, Hooded Warbler, American Redstart, Cape May Warbler, Northern Parula, Magnolia Warbler, Bay-breasted Warbler, Blackpoll Warbler, Palm Warbler, Yellow-throated Warbler, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Townsend's Warbler, Summer Tanager, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting*

# Responsibilities

The trip leaders have made careful plans to provide an itinerary that is safe and enjoyable. However, there are always uncertainties in any outdoor activity, and reasonable care and caution by participants will minimize risks. Neither the Ohlone Audubon Society nor tour leaders will be held liable for any accidents or injuries. All participants in Ohlone Audubon events are expected to follow the Ohlone Audubon Society code of conduct.

Participants should be in good health before undertaking the tour. Participants should prepare for the tour by reading the detailed itinerary. Receipt of payment for the tour by Ohlone Audubon Society will constitute an agreement by the participant to abide by the responsibilities outlined here.