



Birders Flock to 2019 Owens Lake Bird Festival

By Sylvia Beltran

Nearly 170 bird watchers and nature enthusiasts descended on the town of Lone Pine, California, April 26-28 to participate in the 5th Annual Owens Lake Bird Festival. The three-day event, sponsored by Friends of Inyo, LADWP and others, brought outdoor enthusiasts together for this popular event. Birders, as they fondly refer to themselves, participated in numerous outings onto Owens Lake and excursions to other areas around Lone Pine to view birds, wildflowers, geologic and historical features.

As the early morning sun rose over the Inyo Mountains to the east of Owens Lake, several groups of birders traveled onto the lake stopping to eagerly set up their spotting scopes to view birds from a distance. Birds could be found playfully scurrying on the shorelines, foraging for food or flying in for a restful stop as they migrated to their summer home. Mild temperatures in the mornings made bird watching more comfortable. As the weather warmed in the afternoon, it didn't stop birders from heading back to the lake to try and spot other birds and maybe catch a peek of the cryptic Snowy Plover.

The Snowy Plover, which nests during this time of year on the playa of Owens Lake, is classified as a species of special concern, which limits the proximity of humans and equipment to their nests. Other birds found on the lake during the festival included the Western and Least Sandpiper, American Avocet, Northern Shoveler, American Wigeon, Gadwall, Mallard and other water birds.

Juanita Smith-Nokao was a first-time birder. Born in Bishop, Calif., Juanita moved away for college and upon graduation, she moved to Japan to teach mathematics. She later moved to Monterey, Calif., where she continued teaching until her recent retirement. Once retired, Juanita moved to Lone Pine. She was never a birder, but wanted to understand how others could be attracted to the activity. Her initial interest was sparked while teaching in Monterey where she observed that ravens were astute enough to learn the school bell schedule. They would swoop down onto the grounds where crumbs had fallen after snack and lunch period. Now that she lives in Lone Pine and the bird festival is in her back yard, she wanted to participate in the event. She made new friends - both human and winged - and stated she would attend next year's festival.



Juanita Smith-Nokao using her binoculars to view the birds from a distance on Owens Lake.

Jay Carroll, a retired marine biologist from Morro Bay, Calif., finds birding appealing. Jay described the appeal as a free peek into nature and how birds behave, an opportunity to study birds' feather colors and markings while enjoying the outdoors and nature. At this year's bird festival, Jay focused on the migrating birds like the Western Sandpiper, American Avocet, Northern Pintail and others.

The Owens Lake Bird Festival has grown in popularity and participation since it began in 2014. Participants come from various parts of California, including San Diego, Mammoth Lakes, the Bay Area and from Nevada. LADWP employees provide support for the annual event and lead groups onto Owens Lake for their bird watching enjoyment.

LADWP began the largest dust mitigation efforts in the United States at Owens Lake in 2000. Since the efforts began, the exposed lakebed has been transformed into a haven for migratory birds and other wildlife. The lakebed has a myriad of mitigation measures including shallow flooding, native vegetation, gravel and tillage to abate harmful dust from blowing off the dry lakebed.

Learn more about [LADWP's environmental work at Owens Lake.](#)