

Trip to Yukon and Alaska

Summer 2011

by Sylvia R. Gallagher

Photographs by Jim & Sylvia Gallagher

Part 1

INTRODUCTION. It's been twenty years since we last made a trip to Alaska and northwestern Canada, so we decided if we were ever going to do it again, this would be the best year. My diary from that trip is on sale from Sea and Sage Audubon in printed form; it is not online.

My husband Jim is a wildlife photographer, with a specialty in birds. I photograph all the other natural history subjects I think I'll need for my workshops--and deputize Jim to get the things that require a long telephoto lens. I also record bird sounds and use them in the aural portions of the Birding Skills Workshops that I teach for Sea and Sage Audubon.

Our enthusiastic companion, a miniature poodle named Toby, specializes in barking at everything he perceives--or thinks he perceives--outside the windows. We tow a trailer with a Suburban and stay mainly in public campgrounds--US Forest Service, state parks, etc. I try to find places where Jim can set up a feeding station and attract birds right to our site, but sometimes that's hard in the springtime when the birds don't dare leave their territories.

This time our friend Donelda Warhurst is accompanying us. She tows an Airstream with a Ford Excursion. We'll enjoy the security of having each other and having two motorized vehicles. Donelda will also enjoy the security of her year-old Rottweiler, Oakley. Donelda enjoys both photography and sound recording of birds, so our leisurely pace and the places where we choose to linger should suit her, too.

Another friend, Marilyn La Bollita, who has a motor home, is accompanying us for the first couple of weeks.

Thanks go to Jim for editing the entire diary and adding a few paragraphs in their entirety.

LIST OF CAMPING SPOTS. See end of the diary (Part VII) for where we spent each night.

8:00 a.m., Tuesday, May 24, 2011 Diaz Lake County Park, Lone Pine, CA

Since I'll be leading field trips to the northern Sierra Nevada next year in June, we decided to spend a week there this year and scout the area. It's been seven years since I've last been up there. We've made reservations starting Friday, May 27, in Clio, Plumas Co. Since we didn't know when we'd get ready to take off, we have a few days right now to spare.

Sunday morning we finished stashing things in the truck and trailer and drove to Lone Pine. Since the weather these two days was forecast to be fairly cool, we opted for Diaz Lake County Park, which has no electrical hookups, but a much nicer setting than the RV park across the road. We're surrounded by willows and cottonwoods. Right now Jim and Donelda are photographing Great-tailed Grackles and Yellow-headed Blackbirds (including juveniles) eating birdseed.

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Diaz Lake was formed in a great earthquake in 1872. Then the land in this area dropped 20 feet and soon filled in with water. At that time it was privately owned by the Diaz family, but it was acquired by the Los Angeles Dept. of Water and Power in the early 20th century when it bought up almost the entire Owens River watershed. Today it's still owned by LADWP, but the park is run by Inyo County.

Yesterday we all piled into Donelda's truck and explored Owens Lake. For as long as I can remember it's been a vast playa. Finally the city of Lone Pine prevailed in court and required LADWP to restore some water to the lakebed because the dust was causing severe health problems for the residents. A wonderful bonus is that the added water has brought the birds back, even though it's only been wet a few years. Although I had some information on where to drive to find birds along the dike roads in the lakebed, I found I really couldn't understand it. So we went first to the visitors center and the lady at the desk drew us a nice map showing a 6-8 mile route. That kept us occupied all morning. There was a good assortment of ducks, gulls, and marsh birds. A single Whimbrel, looking quite contrasty and almost black-and-white, was still hanging around. I suspect it's a late migrant. The Whimbrel was too far for anything but scope views, but we also saw a female Wilson's Phalarope in full breeding colors, which Jim and Donelda happily photographed.

We got back around 1:00. Then in the late afternoon Donelda and I drove completely around the lake, stopping at Dirty Socks Spring (don't know the origin of that name, but can probably guess). There was quite a bit of water, but no water birds--just a few Red-winged Blackbirds and Savannah Sparrows. Our only other stop was to photograph a tiny tumbled-down rock cabin beside the road just north of Keeler. The cabin was about as big as a couple of large sleeping bags, but was probably home to some early single man. We laughed at the padlock on the door, because the side wall was all broken down, allowing for easy entry. Also the plank roof was broken.

Anyway, it was fun to imagine what this area was like in the early days. Then the lake was full of water and a boat ran back and forth across it carrying ore, wood, and other supplies.

4:00 p.m., Wednesday, May 25, 2011
Mono Vista RV Park, Lee Vining, CA

Yesterday morning we stayed around the campground at Diaz Lake until around 10:30. Jim and Donelda photographed Yellow-headed Blackbirds at Jim's birdseed. Marilyn, Toby, and I walked around to the other side of the lake to get some pictures of it from a better angle.

Our drive was only 129 miles, so we had plenty of time. We intended to get gas in Bishop, as we have many times before when driving up US-395 from home, but our low-fuel indicator came on just after we left Independence. Donelda and Marilyn went on ahead, but we turned back and found the cheapest gas on the entire drive, \$4.10 at an Indian reservation station. However, when we computed our mileage, it was only 7.3 mpg. We usually get more like 10 mpg. Jim is convinced that someone siphoned 10 gallons of gas out of our Suburban's fuel tank while it was standing in the street in front of our house overnight before we left. He hadn't thought to transfer the locking gas tank cap from our older truck to this one. That cap

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had been purchased after someone had done the same thing from the older truck a year or two ago. We'll check the mileage on the next tank and hope that's the explanation, not some serious problem with the truck. [Later: Our mileage the rest of the trip was normal.] We'll also buy a locking gas cap the first chance we get.

The rest of the trip was uneventful and we got here around 2:00. The campground is pretty empty because Tioga Pass is still closed. They get most of their customers from people driving that road. The large trees in the park are just leafing out; I think they're cottonwoods. While the others were registering I heard Cassin's Finches singing in the treetops. We've also had Red-breasted Sapsucker, Hairy Woodpecker, White-breasted Nuthatch, Clark's Nutcracker, California Gull, Pine Siskin, Brewer's Blackbird, Black-headed Grosbeak, etc.

We spent this morning at the County Park north of town, but didn't get there until after 8:00. It had been a nice calm morning, but we hadn't been there more than 15 minutes when the wind got up. And then it got up some more. . . *and some more!* By the end of the morning it was a 25-35 mph gale. One gust almost made me lose my balance and fall off the boardwalk leading to the tufa towers. Still we stuck it out and did see a few birds in the somewhat sheltered old woodland across the road from the parking area. Best were a calling Wilson's Snipe and a Hammond's Flycatcher that allowed really close approach. Finally we gave up and came back to our cozy trailers.

4:30 pm, Friday, May 27, 2011
River's Edge RV Park, Clio, CA

After I wrote up the preceding installment, the wind got stronger and stronger. Some gusts really shook the trailer--and we were end-on to the wind and had a mobile home behind us for some protection. Occasionally we heard small branches from the aspens overhead hit the roof of the trailer, but fortunately they had just started to leaf out and presented very little wind resistance. In the morning a ten-foot-long branch with a diameter of about four inches was on the ground beside the trailer. We're glad it didn't land on the roof and break a vent cover or a solar panel.

The wind had pretty well died down by morning, so I wished we had said we'd start earlier than 8:00, but by that time it was too late. We went out to the South Tufa area. I spent most of the time walking the dirt road from the highway to the tufa, hoping for some birds to record (I've heard Sage Thrashers in that area on other trips), but heard nothing close. There were only a few distant Brewer's Sparrows. I should have headed right for the lakeshore, where there were many more birds, including Brewer's Sparrow, Rock Wren, and especially the Violet-green Swallows that swooped all around. They only nest in holes in mineral substrates and the crevices in the tufa towers are perfect.

Donelda had told me about an app called AutoStitch that can make panoramas out of a series of pictures of a scene, so I took several such series with my new iPhone to try out later.

From there we drove out to the Jeffrey Pine forest area a couple of miles east of the road to South Tufa. Donelda wanted to pick up some tuff to carve into a little birdbath like Jim's. She even brought along an electric grinding tool to do it with. She and Jim hiked off into the distance and up a steep slope and eventually came back with a couple of bags of candidate rocks--including some extras in case something goes wrong with the first attempt.

Our final activity was a self-guided geology tour of the June Lake loop. I had bought a

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nice geology book at the visitors center in Lone Pine (*Geology Trips, Sierra Nevada* by Ted Konigsmark, GeoPress 2007) and had been reading the introductory chapters so I'd be ready to do some of the tours. It was really interesting to see how the glacier had carved up the rocks and created huge lateral and recessional (temporary terminal) moraines. The extremely steep mountainside on the middle of the route is the Sierra Nevada fault, along which the eastern edge of the Sierra Nevada tilted upward and the valley sank.

For lunch we found an attractive restaurant with huge picture windows facing the mountainside and its several waterfalls. My hamburger was so-so, but I think the others enjoyed their food more than I did. Jim pronounced his fish and chips excellent. The restaurant was right next to Reversed Creek, so called because it's the only creek in the Sierra Nevada that runs toward the mountain. Its terminal moraine blocked it and created June Lake. The water from the lake runs toward the mountain, where it joins Rush Creek and flows northeast to Mono Lake--except for the portion that is diverted by Los Angeles DWP.

We got back to the trailer around 2:00. After a nap, Donelda gave me a lesson on how to download the photo files from my iPhone into my computer and also how to create those panoramas I mentioned earlier using the AutoStitch panorama app.

Dinner was light and late because of our big lunch. Afterwards I figured out where there were a couple of pet stores in Carson City. Somehow we've lost Toby's harness and he chokes easily with only a leash fastened to his collar, even though he really doesn't pull very hard. We lucked out and found a Petco in a shopping center that also had a WalMart, Trader Joe's and Costco. We patronized all but the Costco and also a couple of other places along the way. (WalMart was out of locking gas caps, and we definitely had to have one of those. We found one farther up the road at an auto supply store.)

We got in here around 2:30 and have been settling in ever since. The RV park, and in fact the entire community of Blairsden/Graeagle/Clio, are bustling because of the start of the Memorial Day weekend. We have a site about where we were for a month a couple of other times--against the back fence looking out on an open forest/meadow area. Donelda is about 5 sites away in one direction and Marilyn in the opposite.

Donelda and Marilyn drove up here separately from us. Donelda got an early start because she wanted to get a plumber to fix a water pipe (hot water to the shower), she thinks she pinched nearly shut by running over a rock. She did this at Fossil Falls south of Lone Pine on the way up. It turned out that they'd put a bunch of big rocks in the parking area to mark parking places, and the only way she could get out was by backing up between them for a long distance. (When she'd been there before, it was just an open area with no marked spots to park.) Her reason for stopping there was to try to find a bird bath rock, a task she accomplished yesterday with us. Anyway, she was able to get a repair man out in the early afternoon. He discovered that, in addition to the pinched pipe, she also had a faulty faucet in the shower. He'll come back tomorrow with the appropriate parts. Donelda has had far more trouble with her Airstream than we've had with our old Prowler.

Marilyn left after we did and stopped along the Walker River to explore a little. She got here about the same time as we did.

Guess I'll quit and take Toby for a walk, wearing his handsome new harness.

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4:00 pm, Sunday, May 29, 2011

River's Edge RV Park, Clio, CA

Yesterday I found his old harness--in my birding bag amongst all the plastic bags I use to pick up after him on walks. I'm sort of glad I lost it, though, for I've been wanting one of those pretty harnesses for a long time.

Yesterday Donelda and Marilyn both stayed behind to wait for the RV repair man. Marilyn had a leaky drain pipe in her sink and thought he might as well fix that while he was there.

It was cloudy and getting ready to rain or snow, but Jim and I braved the cold (low 40s with a brisk breeze) and went to Madora Lake in Plumas Eureka State Park about 10 miles east of Graeagle. The last time I was there, its water was very low because a golf course upstream had diverted the water that feeds it. Apparently the problem has been resolved, because water was flowing freely into the lake via the little ditch that feeds it.

The lake is set in a moist yellow pine forest with a lot of Common Douglas-Fir mixed in with Jeffrey and Ponderosa pines. There are also a few Sierra White Firs. A trail from the parking lot goes down to the lake and then encircles it. We walked it in a clockwise fashion. The first part of the forest had suffered a fire a few years back and many of the dead trees had been logged out. Others had fallen over the path, apparently since the logging occurred, for we had to take long detours around several. The other side of the lake was forested just as it always was. The lake itself has filled in with quite a bit of vegetation, which no doubt took hold when it was dry. There is still a lot of open water, though. I flushed up two ducks, which might have been Buffleheads. I recall seeing them there before. They were the only waterfowl we saw--no Ring-necked Ducks.

The birding was slow, no doubt because of the cold and wind. The birds thought winter had returned and didn't feel like singing. I did see a Townsend's Solitaire and a female Calliope Hummingbird and took photos of a tree with big holes gouged in it and fresh "sawdust" below it, no doubt produced by a Pileated Woodpecker.

Flowers were scarce. I found one ground-cover plant with stiff serrated leaves and myriads of tiny blue flowers. I picked a sample and also took photos with my iPhone. None of us (Donelda, Marilyn or I--Jim isn't interested in plants) could figure it out. I suspect it's a perennial and considered a "shrub." There are tree books and there are wildflower books, but the shrubs are often neglected. (Later: After I wrote the preceding, Donelda figured it out to be Squaw Carpet or Mahalo Mat, *Ceanothus prostratus*. It was in a Pacific Northwest plant book and a few others that I didn't think to look in because we are so far southeast of there. The plant serves as a ground cover in moist yellow pine and higher zones and is found in clearings and forest edges, especially where there is Douglas-Fir and White Fir--exactly where I found it.)

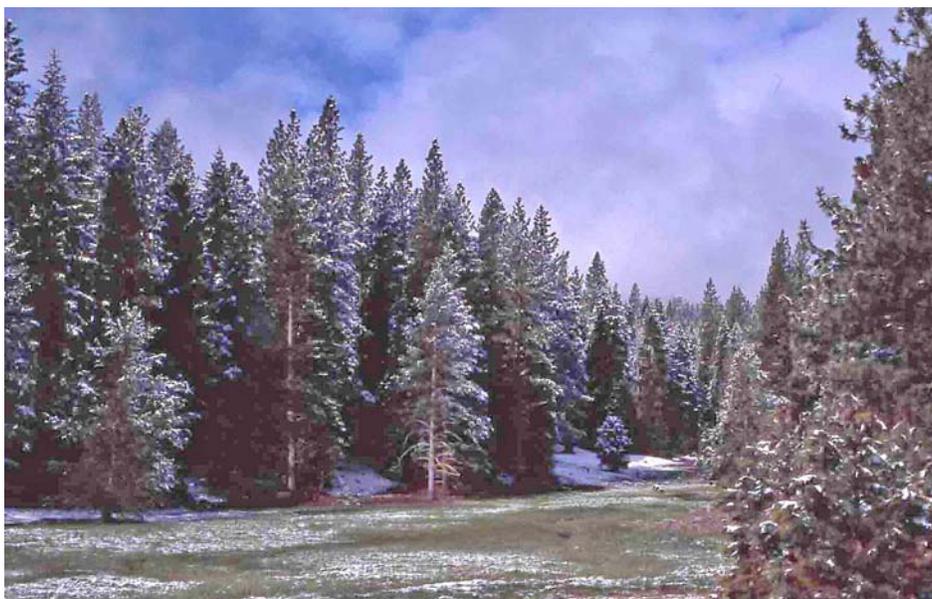
By the time I got back to the truck, I was really cold and I took a nap after lunch with my electric blanket cranked up high to finally warm me up. Late in the afternoon it snowed off and on, but the snow melted as it hit the ground. This morning there was maybe a half-inch of it on top of everything. Although more light snow was forecast, the sky was clear. So all of us except Marilyn drove over to the Sierra Valley marsh. (Marilyn had run out of propane and had to buy some. Besides, she had slept in, thinking it was going to be a bad day for birding, and

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wasn't ready when we three naturally early risers were through breakfast and deciding what to do.)

We took the southern route to the Sierra Valley and on the way went over a 5300-foot, forested pass (Clio is at 4300 ft), stopping several places to take photos of the snow-covered trees. The snow was melting fast and falling off the branches in big glops. We had to stay out from under them to avoid getting wet.



Snowy Meadow

Between Clio and Calpine, near Sierra-Plumas county line, CA

The temperature all morning was in the mid-30s, warming up to the mid-40s, and there was a brisk breeze on top of it, so we did most of our explorations from the truck with the heater going, but the windows open so we could hear the birds. I didn't try to do any recording, but Jim and Donelda photographed a few birds. Most interesting were several Willets in breeding plumage, which were standing on fence posts here and there, and a Western Wood-Pewee that we flushed up from the grass beside the road into a shrub. It had to be a late migrant, for the trees and shrubs beside a farmhouse in the middle of the broad open Sierra Valley do not constitute the breeding habitat of that bird. It perched for a long time at no more than eight feet from us.

When we got back to the trailer, we discovered that all the birds that a man down the row from us had been feeding had discovered *our* birdseed: lots of Evening Grosbeaks and Cassin's Finches. This is the first time we've been in this park and had Evening Grosbeaks. They're usually higher in the mountains, but spring is late this year. Late this afternoon I tried to record them out the window, but only one female was left by then. I'll have to try again another day and it'll be quieter after the Memorial Day crowd goes home.

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9:00 am, Tuesday, May 31, 2011

River's Edge RV Park, Clio, CA

Yesterday we drove to Davis Lake (AKA Lake Davis) north of Portola, but it was very cold and windy, so we had to work for the few birds we saw. Even so we had 23 species. I couldn't find any Vesper Sparrows in the usual spot in the sagebrush--and almost slipped and fell several times on some slippery mud between the shrubs on the way down. I tried to return by a different route, but it was even worse--standing water on top of slippery mud.

The snow was low on the mountains all around the lake, but there were just a few old snowbanks at our level. We drove half-way around the lake's east side on a road that starts out paved, then becomes dirt. The dirt road branches and the main road continues on north; a narrower dirt road returns on the west side of the lake. We were wary about trying it, for we had encountered several muddy spots so far. Fortunately we saw a ranger on the road and stopped him and he told us it wasn't a good idea to try that part, so we missed one of our favorite birding spots, but had been able to access all the rest.

Marilyn, Donelda, and I are all interested in wildflowers, so we spent quite a bit of time looking at the early bloomers, most of which I had never seen before. In normal years, they'd probably be through blooming by now. (The weather report on TV said the temperature in Reno these past few days has been 25 degrees below average.)

This morning I got up at 5:00 hoping to get some recording done before the forecast strong winds got up, but it was blowing hard even at that time. So after breakfast, I set my tape recorder up in the bedroom with the mic pointed down out the window at Jim's bird feeding operation. After several hours of waiting, I finally got what I wanted, some "teoo" calls from the Sierra Nevada form of the Evening Grosbeak. I had the other two western forms quite well from the North Cascades and the southern Rockies, but this one is different yet and I only had a little bit. These recordings will have a lot of wind in them, but they seem to be nice and loud, so I'll certainly be able to use them in my upcoming Learning Western Mountain Bird Sounds workshop. If the wind dies down later in the week, maybe I can get some better recordings.

Between waiting for grosbeak "teoo" calls, I identified the flowers I've photographed the last few days. I'm using two cameras, my film camera for keepers, and the one on my iPhone for shots to use in identifying the flowers. It's really hard to see the view finder on the iPhone, but I got a few really nice shots anyway plus a lot of others that at least helped with the ID.

Donelda has been showing me how to download iPhone images into my computer and organize them into folders. I completed the process and labelled each image with its common and scientific names. Donelda and Marilyn had worked on the ID problem yesterday, so I had some of the names already, but others I had to figure out. Here's my list so far:

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Madora Lake

Fremont's Silk Tassel Bush, *Garrya fremontii* (had fruit, tassels still in bud)



Fremont's Silk Tassel Bush, *Garrya fremontii*
Madora Lake, Plumas Eureka State Park, Plumas Co., CA

Squaw Carpet or Mahalo Mat, *Ceanothus prostratus* (also at Davis Lake). Forms carpets on slopes at the edge of the forest and in roadcuts. Stabilizes soil. I think I may have photos of this plant in fruit from MacArthur Burney Falls State Park.)



Maholo Mat (aka Squaw Carpet)
Ceanothus prostratus
Davis Lake, Plumas Co., CA



Maholo Mat (aka Squaw Carpet)
Ceanothus prostratus
Madora Lake, Plumas Eureka State Park, Plumas Co., CA

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Sierra Valley

Upland Larkspur, *Delphinium nuttallianum*



Upland Larkspur, *Delphinium nuttallianum*
Sierra Valley Marsh, Plumas Co., CA

Davis Lake

Ballhead Waterleaf, *Hydrophyllum capitatum*. (Interesting because flower clusters grow under the leaves, which seem to serve as parasols or umbrellas)



Ballhead Waterleaf, *Hydrophyllum capitatum*
Davis Lake, Plumas Co., CA

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Great Basin Violet, *Viola beckwithii* (We debated whether it was this or *Viola trinervata*. Finally decided on this one.)



Great Basin Violet, *Viola beckwithii*
Davis Lake, Plumas Co., CA

Brown's Peony, *Paeonia brownii* (I'm sure I've seen this one before.)

6:00 pm, Thursday, June 2, 2011
River's Edge RV Park, Clio, CA

Yesterday was another cold, blustery day. I spent most of the morning trying to get decent recordings of the Evening Grosbeaks feeding outside the trailer. I opened the louver window in the bedroom and aimed the mic down on where the birds were feeding. This way I diminished the wind somewhat and maybe I can remove more with Raven Lite (software for viewing sonograms and editing sounds). Around 10:30, Donelda and Marilyn decided that they wanted to go back up to Davis Lake and look at that violet again. We also found three other species and photographed them, too. Two were composites, one probably a balsamroot and the other a groundsel, but neither matched the photos in any of our books. Will have to ID them from photos and the Jepson Manual, which I didn't bring along, when I get home. [Later: I gave up.] The third was easy--Spreading Phlox, *Phlox diffusa*. The day was cloudy and windy and we had occasional sleet while we were out flower-watching, but at least the sleet just bounced off our clothes. After stopping at the little bookstore in Portola (none of us found anything to buy) and the grocery store, we got back around 1:30, glad to spend the rest of the day in our RVs.

This morning I awoke around 5:45 and was astounded to discover there was no wind! Furthermore the sky was only partly cloudy. The weather forecast had been wrong. It was supposed to be windy and snowy. This was the first time since we've been here that the wind wasn't blowing, so I bundled up--it was 38°--and went outside with my tape recorder. I recorded Evening Grosbeaks and other birds for two hours, all the time standing right behind the trailer.

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It had "warmed" up to 42° when I went in. I think I finally have good calls from the Sierra Nevada form of the Evening Grosbeak. There are four (maybe five) forms in North America, all but one in the west. They used to be considered subspecies--and probably still should be based on call differences. One is in the Pacific Northwest, the other is in the southern Rockies, and the hypothetical one, which I don't have, is in southern Arizona and New Mexico. It's questionable whether they have a song at all, surprising for a finch. I've put more information on the subject in my new *Learning (Western) Mountain Bird Sounds* workshop, which I'll be presenting next year.

After breakfast we all went to the Sierra Valley Marsh and three of us walked the entire road from east to west with Jim trailing along in the truck to pick us up at the end. It was sort of calm at first and I got what may turn out to be an interesting mix of marsh bird sounds, but little else. We were pretty cold most of the time and had occasional slight flurries of sleet, but it was nothing like the last few days. When the sun came out and the wind died down for short periods, it was even downright pleasant. The scenery was spectacular--beautiful puffy clouds and a valley surrounded by snowy mountains with snow/sleet patches visible here and there all around.



Sierra Valley Marsh and snowy mountains
Plumas Co., CA

Highlights were a Bald Eagle, American Bittern (recorded and also seen), and a heard-only Virginia Rail (one or two "kiddick" calls, not recorded). My species list for the two days (May 29, June 2) that we spent there is only 34 species. We usually get far more.

Donelda and Marilyn stopped for a few more flowers on their way back to Clio, but Jim was complaining that his lunch was late, so we drove straight back. (He couldn't have been hungry, for we'd had a late breakfast and he had a nice stash of snacks in the truck.) We got back at 1:30.

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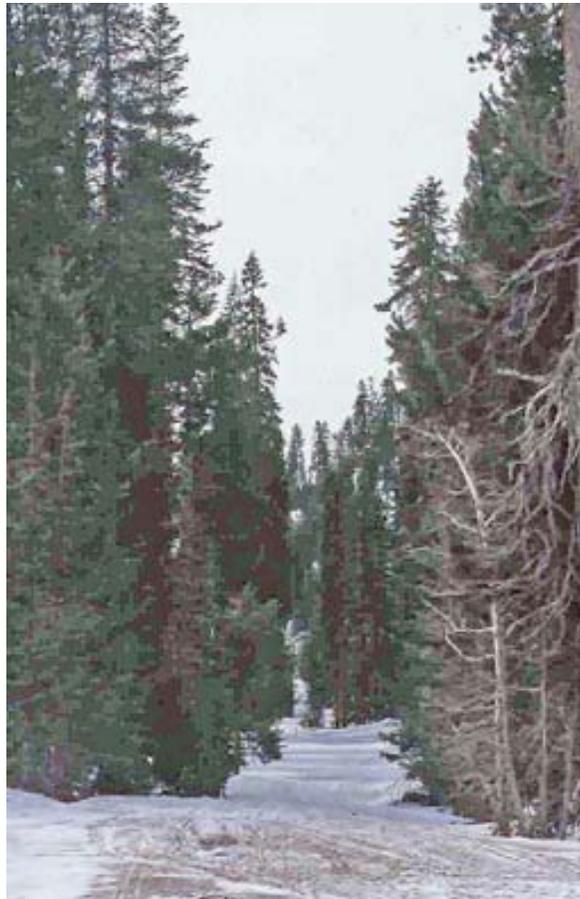
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6:45 pm, Saturday, June 4, 2011

River's Edge RV Park, Clio

Yesterday seemed like the only possible day to drive up to Yuba Pass. The Lakes Basin Highway is still closed, but we went south to SR 49, then across that way, returning by the same route. We stopped for a short walk at FR 52, which is on the east side just a little way up the grade. That has been a good spot for Fox Sparrows and sometimes a variety of warblers. We got no sparrows and only Yellow-rumped Warblers. The most interesting bird was Dusky Flycatcher, which we heard singing all along the road. We also heard Cassin's Vireo (probably not Plumbeous here) and distant Mountain Quail plus a few birds we find everywhere. Of course, we stopped to botanize all along the way. I photographed some trees which I had been embarrassed not to have when I gave my recent workshop--Douglas-Fir and Incense Cedar. They are so common that I guess I always figured I already had them.

Our next stop was Yuba Pass, 6,700 ft. As we approached it, we found more and more snow on the ground. When we arrived, we found the parking lot snow-free, because it had been plowed regularly for snow-play vehicles to park. However, both roads (north and south) from there were covered with a lot of snow, as were the meadows. None of the aspens show any sign of budding--very unusual for this late in the year.



Yuba Pass, snowy
Sierra Co., CA

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Again there were very few birds. We did see a Hairy Woodpecker and I recorded his drumming in the patch of dead & living aspens across the road from the parking lot. That's where we had a Williamson's Sapsucker nest last time we were there.

From there we drove on west to Wild Plum Creek, on the outskirts of Sierra City. The elevation there is about the same as Clio and there was no snow, even though it's on the west side of the mountains. The habitat is mixed forest with a lot of Douglas-Fir, willows, California Black Oak, Thinleaf Speckled (formerly Mountain) Alder, and a little White Alder that was just leafing out. Sierra Gooseberry occurred here and there in full bloom, and I picked a sprig to take home and put on my dinette table. I adorned my bouquet with a sprig each of Speckled Alder and one of the willows.

We walked to the bridge across Wild Plum Creek, which was flowing strongly and noisily. I took several photos of the creek with my film camera and also my iPhone. With the latter, I took four shots and later created a panorama with the app, AutoStitch. It's so simple to use!

Wild Plum Creek has always been our American Dipper spot and the bird didn't fail us. We had no sooner walked out on the bridge than we spied one on a rock below us. Jim photographed it with his little Canon camera ("Jim's camera" to all my students in the past year) and the photos came out fantastic.



American Dipper
Wild Plum Creek, Sierra Co., CA

The bird was singing and I tried to record its song. I hope it's audible above the roar of the creek--and also Jim talking and Oakley (Donelda's dog) snuffling around and rattling her collar. I went down to a better vantage point, but the bird sang only a little bit more before flying off up

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the creek. I waited around there another half-hour, but finally gave up. It was lunchtime.

We ate lunch at Bassett's Station--ordinary roadside cafe fare, but exceptionally well prepared. It was mid-afternoon by the time we got back to the trailer.

During the course of the day, it clouded up gradually. This morning it was totally cloudy and it had rained a bit during the night. Marilyn and Donelda went to Madora Lake, but since it wasn't a very nice day and I had been there earlier in the week, I stayed behind and bathed Toby and defrosted the refrigerator. They had a nice morning--not as nice as most years, but nice for this one--and the rain didn't start again until they got through with their walk. It's been raining or drizzling all afternoon and is supposed to continue until early morning.

Sunday, June 5, 2011

Goose Lake SRA, nr. Lakeview, OR

No entry.

9:00 pm, Monday, June 6, 2011

Clyde Holliday SRA, John Day, OR

Yesterday we parted company with Marilyn. We hated to leave her on such a dismal, rainy morning, but she was heading northwest to MacArthur Burney Falls State Park, and we were heading due north on US 395. It rained the first part of the drive, but had stopped by the time we got to Alturas, where we did some grocery shopping and ate lunch in a nice little cafe (name?).

It was only 35 miles from Alturas to Goose Lake State Park, a delightful place on the lakeshore. The sites are well separated and in a park-like setting with a creek, fields, riparian woodland, etc. The lakeshore of this alkaline lake is marshy. Among the marsh & wet-meadow birds were Marsh Wren, Red-winged Blackbird, Willet, Wilson's Snipe, Sandhill Crane, White-faced Ibis. Around the campground area were Lazuli Bunting, Black-billed Magpie, and other more common species. Donelda went walking while Jim and I were napping and flushed a Great Horned Owl out of a tree in the day-use area and into another. She came back & got her camera and Jim. They succeeded in flushing it back into the campground, where Donelda succeeded in relocating it again. They both took lots of pictures, although Jim discovered his had a twig across its face.

This morning just after Jim and I awoke, we heard the owl hooting for about five minutes in pretty much the same tree where they had photographed it. Unfortunately Donelda slept through the call. She could have recorded it easily out her trailer window. I have lots of GHOW (official four-letter code for that bird) recordings and decided to just lie in bed and listen to it.

It rained off and on all night and was raining lightly when we were deciding whether to stay around the campground a while or leave. We opted for leaving, although it was a wonderful spot and one I'd love to return to someday: very quiet because it's off the highway about a mile.

We drove north, gassed up in Lakeview (cheaper than we'd been paying in California). Our drive took us along the shore of Lake Abert, another alkaline lake. Fortunately it wasn't raining just then, so we stopped at a geology sign, photographed it and also the lake. Goose

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and Abert lakes are both in grabens below very high fault scarps--among the highest in North America.

Continuing on northward, we drove through many miles of sagebrush, with occasional mountainous stretches of Western Juniper, Ponderosa Pine, and a touch of Douglas-Fir. It rained off and on most of the day and was raining lightly when we got to John Day around 1:00 pm. By late afternoon it had stopped raining, but is threatening to do more of it tonight and clear off by morning. Hurray! I hope it does clear off.

We have to stay a while or maybe all day tomorrow because Donelda has to get some work done on her truck at the local Ford dealership. (The interior lights and the running board lights won't go off when she turns off the ignition. She's disconnected the battery for tonight.) This park also has possibilities, for it's right next to the John Day River and a tall riparian woodland. I plan to explore it a bit tomorrow.

It's been much too long since I updated this account. Let's see how much of it I can remember.

Donelda called her brother, who suggested a trick to try to get those lights to go off. Apparently the switch on the lower tailgate door on the truck sometimes acts up and doesn't turn off the lights when it closes. She tried that and it worked, so we were able to get on the road again early the next morning. Before leaving I wandered around the campground and over by the river. There's a nice gravel trail all along the river, but with the river so high much of it was flooded. I could only walk about 100 yards total. Even a couple of campsites were flooded. Snowmelt run-off is the cause of the flooding. I took a lot of photos with my iPhone camera.



Flooded campsite
Clyde Holliday State Park, John Day, OR

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I also photographed a beautiful tree in the campground covered with saucer-shaped pinkish-white blossoms. I think it's a flowering crabapple.



Flowering Crabapple – probably
Clyde Holliday State Park, John Day, OR

Tuesday, June 7, 2012

Wallula/Hood Campground (US Corps of Engineers) Pasco, WA

We got on the road around 8:00 on Tuesday, June 7, and drove north on US 395 to Wallula/Hood Campground (US Corps of Engineers) in Pasco, WA. Just before we got there, we cut off on a road that runs along the Columbia River through a steep-sided gorge. Later I learned that this was the Wallula Gorge, which was a major bottleneck during the Ice Age floods. Because of its steep sides, water coursed all over the landscape in eastern Washington during the various breakings of the ice dam holding back Glacial Lake Missoula. (See June 10-12, 2008, entries from my *Trip to Western States* diary. You must read this if you're going to understand a lot of what I describe below.) I wish we had stopped to take pictures, but the wind was blowing a dusty gale and we were tired and anxious to get to our destination.

The campground consisted of widely spaced sites on an expanse of well-watered lawn with big shade trees. It was pretty, but more like a city park than the type of campground where Jim can throw out birdseed and set up his photo blind. We had a site overlooking the Snake River, which is navigable clear up to Lewiston, ID. Occasionally we'd see barges moving ever so slowly on the river. The confluence of the Snake and Columbia rivers is just a short distance downstream from where we were, but we hadn't unhooked our truck, so decided not to go take a look at it. There is a day-use state park there, though.

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Wednesday, June 8, 2012

Dry Falls State Park, WA

The next morning, Wed., June 8, I walked Toby around the campground. There is a little natural area with a trail, but I elected not to take it, partly because Donelda had told me it was somewhat overgrown with weeds, pretty much devoid of birds, and it was starting to drizzle. It seemed like an attractive area, though. I did see an Osprey flying over it carrying a fish and heard a Cooper's Hawk in the campground trees as I was walking over.

We spent the rest of the day driving farther north, first on US 395, then on SR 17, ending up at Dry Falls State Park campground about two miles south of the Dry Falls overlook that I described in that 2008 diary.



Dry Falls State Park from access road
Grand Coulee, WA

We'd have liked to spend two nights there, but all the sites were reserved starting Thurs. night, so we had to cram our sightseeing into the next morning. I really wanted to show Donelda all the fascinating Ice Age Floods geological areas. We selected adjacent campsites that were backed into a sagebrush-covered slope, with a high basalt cliff behind it.

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Campsite
Dry Falls State Park, Grand Coulee, WA

Rock Wrens were singing on the slope and White-throated Swifts were flying around high in the sky, but nothing came to Jim's birdseed except Brewer's Blackbirds.

Thursday, June 9, 2012 **City Park Campground, Omak, WA**

On Thursday, June 9, we got up early and walked the short trail to a nearby lake, one of the many plunge pools from various flooding events. The trail had lots of shrubs, wildflowers, and marsh plants alongside it--and also a lot of birds. Some of the more interesting birds were Bullock's Oriole, Yellow-breasted Chat, Cedar Waxwing, and Eastern Kingbird. I found a small vole right in the path, which was narrow and overgrown in spots. Using my iPhone camera, the only one I had with me because I was mostly trying to record birds, I got closer and closer to the little thing. I thought it would scurry away, but it moved only a short distance, then went round-and-round like a dog trying to get comfortable before lying down. Finally it curled up into a little ball, obviously trying to be inconspicuous. I ultimately had my camera only a foot from it. I shot maybe 50 images and some of the photos were good enough that later I was able to identify it as Townsend's Vole.

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Townsend's Vole
Dry Falls State Park, Grand Coulee, WA

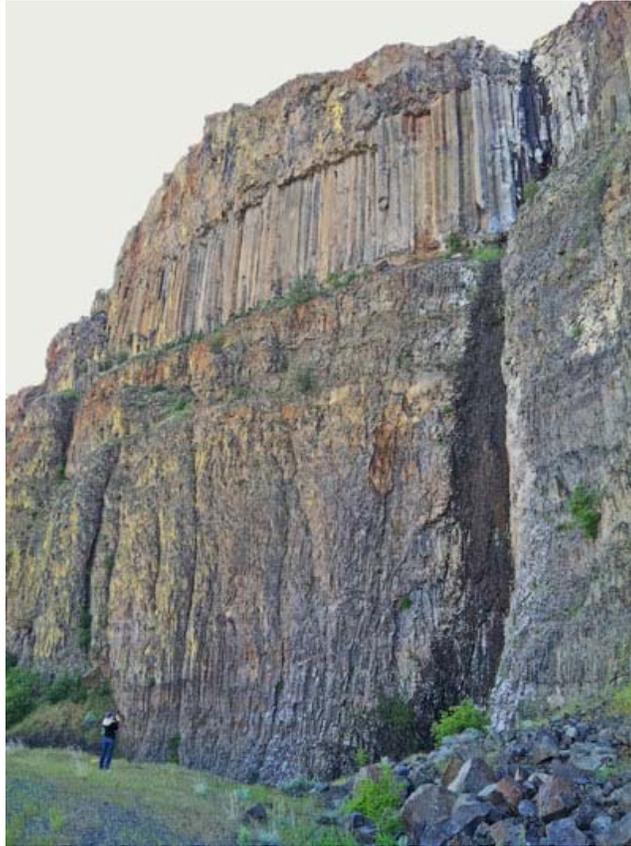
Since the Dry Falls Visitors Center didn't open until 9:00, I decided we'd take the drive north along the Grand Coulee and look at all the geological features on our own. I'd immersed myself in the geology of this area so thoroughly in preparation for my just-finished workshop that I felt I could do a pretty good job as a tour guide on my own. We drove north along the Grand Coulee to Grand Coulee Dam. Most people probably think the Columbia River runs through the Grand Coulee, because of the name of the dam. Actually the river runs west, then south in its own course and only ran through the Grand Coulee when blocked by tongues of the Cordilleran Ice Field during the Pleistocene--and of course during the flooding events. It took that route to skirt the high plateau of lava, created by millions of years of lava flows. These lava flows were only under water during the floods. Thus the Grand Coulee is really mainly a record of the floods and is just the largest of many channels in the "channelled scablands."

Thursday, June 9, 2012 – (continued) City Park Campground, Omak, WA

From our campground at Dry Falls SP we drove north about four miles, east across a man-made dam on the Grand Coulee, then north again along the highly scenic drive on the east side. With high basalt cliffs on one side and water on the other, it's pretty spectacular. I was especially interested in photographing the two kinds of basalt. Columnar basalt is created by extremely slow cooling, while pillow basalt is on top and stronger. The flood waters swept away many columns, leaving overhangs of pillow basalt.

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Cliff face with columnar and pillow basalt
Grand Coulee, WA

We ended up at Grand Coulee Dam, which Donelda had never seen, but didn't linger there. On our way back we stopped several places for photos of the features outlined above--and also a number of wildflowers.

After we got back to the trailers, we hooked up and got out before check-out time, then drove north to the Dry Falls Visitors Center, where we parked, ate lunch, then looked at the area and the exhibits in the center. I got some really nice photos with my iPhone camera--an amazing little device. I think the day was much prettier than when we were there in 2008.

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Dry Falls
Grand Coulee, WA

The rest of the day was spent driving to Omak, WA, where we spent Thursday night, June 9, in the city park campground. It was nothing special, but adequate. It also gave me my last chance to email people before we turned off our 3G when we entered Canada.