

# Mono Basin Journal

A roundup of less political events at Mono Lake

by Geoffrey McQuilkin

Windblown cotton from creekside cottonwoods is in the streets of Lee Vining, announcing the real arrival of warm weather in the Mono Basin. With the end of another snowfall season at hand, the official snow surveys and runoff forecasts are rolling in, and the word is clear: another normal runoff year, not much different that last year.

What that means for the creeks is quite quantifiable in terms of cubic feet per second rolling down toward the lake. Likewise, estimates are made of how the lake will rise and fall as a result—this month, this year, if this happens, if that happens. But what does it mean down at the lakeshore, along the tufa outcrops, out where the alkali flies thrive and rabbitbrush has been going underwater?

Through the late nineties, rising lakewater gave us new images of grass leading right into Mono Lake and of wave-cut cliff lines changing the shape of the shore. Oddly enough, the past two years of average snow in the mountains makes the lake look



Photo by Geoffrey McQuilkin

more like the sandy-shored place most of us are used to. With the lake taking a break in its long climb toward its future level, the undulating berms of sand—built by longshore currents and continuous wave action—are back. Ponded lagoons of brackish water have formed behind these shoreline berms, and recent days revealed American Avocets, Black-necked Stilts, and others wading thorough this familiar but transient habitat.

The lesson is, no single day at the lake reveals what the future lake will be like, nor does a single month or year. We have forecasts of what the future holds in terms of ecology, air quality, and a dozen other factors, but the actual shape of next year's landscape is still something of a mystery. In an ever-changing landscape, the lake is an ever-variable element of change itself,

and we cannot avoid being captivated as we watch a sometimes-familiar but ultimately all-new Mono Lake being created. 🐦

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