

# Mono Basin Journal

A Roundup of Quiet Happenings at Mono Lake

by Geoffrey McQuilkin



GEORGE MCQUILKIN

All winter the trees make noise as the cold wind threads through their bare branches, but now the leafy green treetops are alive with new sounds. In my neighborhood, it's the raucous cacophony of roaming flocks of Yellow-headed Blackbirds. They often hide, leaving the impression that an innocuous tree has just let loose with a tremendous noise.

The birds are a sign of spring and the coming summer, seasons you can't fail to notice if you've been down walking along Mono Lake's tributary streams. Winter is draining away; the streams flow fast, cold, and full of their own rushing sounds. The lake is rising quickly as a result, the water's edge creeping outward into the lakeshore grasses. Over at the County Park boardwalk, the lapping waves are drawing closer to the observation platform frequented by visitors and locals alike. Built in anticipation of a day—perhaps later this year—when salty waters would reclaim this stretch of lakebed and reconfigure the shoreline, the planks can be unbolted, the supports lifted and moved.

Back in 1990, this boardwalk followed a different—longer—route to the shore of the then-smaller, still-imperiled lake. Would protection from excessive water diversions be achieved? The question was open and the Water Board decision four years away. Now we know the answer and tufa that were trailside curiosities back then have become islands in the lake.

The same could be said out by Negit Island. The landbridge linking shore to island, once so readily hiked by people and predators, is now an island. The flanks of what we locally call Gaines Island slope into the lake producing a miles-long spectrum of color, ranging from the bright white of the island to shallow-water shades of blue, to the deeper greens of deeper water, all as the island shrinks beneath the rising lake.

*Geoff McQuilkin is the Committee's Co-Executive Director. He is enjoying his 18-month-old daughter's surprise at the existence of warm weather.*

## Benchmarks



PHOTO COURTESY OF MALCOLM MOSHER, JR.

Looking out across Mono Lake to Black Point and Negit Island, 1979, lake level 6373 feet above sea level.



ARNA DEGENHARDT

The same view, May 2006, with 10 more vertical feet of water, at lake level 6383 feet.