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Helldivers at Mono Lake

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For Immediate Release

Mono Lake, located in the Mono Basin on the east side of the Sierra Nevada, is a traditional stop over for approximately 1.5 to 2 million Eared Grebes on their annual migration from Canada to the Salton Sea and the Gulf of California. Every year, Eared Grebes, or “helldivers” as old-time Lee Vining locals used to call them because of their red eyes, sharp beaks and their ability to tolerate the salty, alkaline waters of inland seas, stop over at Mono Lake to tank up on brine shrimp before they continue on with their southerly migration. From September through November Eared Grebes can be seen in astounding numbers on Mono Lake. At their peak populations, it seems Eared Grebes occupy every square foot of Mono Lake’s surface. If you were to line up all 800,000 of these 12 inch paddlers end to end, they would form a string of birds 150 miles long! Arriving under the cover of darkness at speeds of 60 miles per hour, Eared Grebes appear without warning and just as strangely disappear during the night. During their brief stay

at Mono Lake, they will molt their feathers and eat enough brine shrimp to almost double their weight, making it difficult for some birds to get airborne. Eared Grebes are diving water birds, so they both swim and fly but do not walk on land.

If you are interested in visiting Mono Lake to observe this annual event, there are two access points where you can easily drive and park, followed by a short walk to the shoreline: Old Marina, located 1 mile north of Lee Vining on Highway 395 allows easy access to Mono Lake with fantastic views of its two large islands, and County Park, 2 miles further north, where you will find the beautiful Tufa State Reserve boardwalk that extends out onto the wetlands, providing visitors with up close observation of Mono Lake's many migrating shorebirds and water birds. Research scientist Justin Hite says of the yearly event: "In September and October, if you are lucky enough to venture out onto Mono Lake by canoe or kayak, you will understand immediately what people mean when they say "Mono Lake, it's for the birds."

The grebes leave Mono Lake when the fall nights get long enough to allow them to fly south in darkness to the next suitable lake. Habitat lost on the Pacific Flyway at places such as Owens Lake and impending losses at the Salton Sea make this a more difficult trip, and may mean some long nights ahead for Eared Grebes leaving Mono Lake.

If you are planning a trip, current weather information and accommodations are available on the Mono Lake Committee's website, www.monolake.org, or you can call the Mono Lake Committee Information and Bookstore at (760) 647-6595 or stop by between 9:00 am and 5:00 pm daily for updates on activities and events happening in the Mono Basin.

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www.monolake.org/press

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