

# The Season Seldom Seen: Winter Ecology of the Mono Basin



**January 13–14, 2018 • Nora Livingston**

\$125 per person / \$110 for Mono Lake Committee members  
enrollment limited to 12 participants

Winter in the Mono Basin is silent, majestic, and filled with subnivean mysteries. Despite the illusion of stillness, there is a lot going on under the snow, in the forests, and in the air. In this seminar we will investigate the connections plants and animals have with their winter environments in addition to what factors cause winter in the first place. Winter ecology reveals a new side of animal and plant life that is invisible until you seek it out. In the field we will discuss the different “personalities” of snow, why winter is longer and harsher at higher elevations, what adaptations plants and animals have evolved to survive cold snowy winters, and how humans have adapted to cope with winter. We will also look for bird and mammal tracks and burrows in the snow, and hopefully find some of the critters themselves to see their adaptations in action. This will be an active seminar in potentially freezing temperatures where participants will need to have enough stamina to snowshoe or walk up to 3 miles.

**Nora Livingston** is an always-learning student of the earth who has spent many years looking for wildlife in wild places. She has spent the last two years settled into the Mono Basin as the Mono

Lake Committee Lead Naturalist Guide, getting to know all of the basin's seasons and patterns. Winter is quickly becoming her favorite time to explore, with snowflakes floating down, padding the meadows and canyons with glittering blankets, inviting critters to hop across and lead us to their cozy lairs, showing us what perseverance truly is.

**ITINERARY** (*subject to change based on weather and road conditions*)

**Saturday, January 13 at 7:00pm:** Meet in the gallery at the Mono Lake Committee Information Center & Bookstore. After introductions, we will view a presentation of basic winter ecology concepts and detail the itinerary for the following day.

**Sunday, January 14 at 9:00am:** After meeting at the Mono Lake Committee Information Center & Bookstore in Lee Vining, we will visit multiple locations in the Mono Basin to explore the interactions between animals, plants, and humans with the cold and snowy environment. We will snowshoe up to 3 miles, or hike if it is dry. We will end the day at 5:00pm.

**WEATHER AND ROAD CONDITIONS**

Weather conditions are quite variable in January. January average temperatures in Lee Vining are 41°F (max) and 20°F (min). Average January snowfall is 17.5 inches. Relatively warm and sunny days are possible, but prepare for cold, wintry weather. Bring layered clothing in case of pleasant midday sunshine.

Highway 120 (Tioga Pass) will be closed for the winter at this time (as will be Highway 108, Sonora Pass), so plan on seeking an alternate route if you are coming from the Central Valley, western Sierra, or Bay Area. Highway 395 rarely closes except during severe winter storms. If you don't have 4WD with snow tires, you need to carry chains in case of winter weather. There is a possibility of significant travel on ice- or snow-covered roads so please be prepared.

Thirty-year January climate data for Lee Vining, along with road and weather information can be found at [monolake.org](http://monolake.org). There will be no refunds or credit of tuition for weather-related reasons.

**Altitude and Dehydration Cautions:** Remember to bring (and drink!) lots of water because your body loses more water at the higher elevations of the Mono Basin. Experts recommend that you begin drinking extra water as you drive to higher elevation in order to prevent dehydration and headaches. Also, the sun is rather fierce at high elevations, capable of burning even on cool and cloudy winter days, so be sure to protect yourself thoroughly using sunscreen, sunglasses, and hat.

**TO BRING**

- warm winter clothing: sturdy walking shoes/boots, warm hat, layers, snow pants/jacket
- day pack including sunscreen, sunglasses, etc.
- packed lunch, snacks
- plenty of drinking water
- binoculars, camera (optional, but helpful)
- notebook and pen/pencil
- field guide(s)
- snowshoes (available to rent for \$25 with advanced notice)
- tire chains for your car

## RECOMMENDED BOOKS

- Halfpenny, James and Ozanne, Roy. *Winter: An Ecological Handbook*. Johnson Books, Boulder, CO, 1989.
- Heinrich, Bernd. *Winter World: The Ingenuity of Animal Survival*. Harper Collins Publishing, New York, NY, 2009.
- Laws, John Muir. *The Laws Field Guide to the Sierra Nevada*. Heyday Books, Berkeley, 2007.
- Storer, Tracy, Robert Usinger, and David Lukas. *Sierra Nevada Natural History*. UC Press, Berkeley, 2004.



**Mono Lake Committee Field Seminars**

P.O. Box 29 • Lee Vining, CA 93541 • (760) 647-6595 • [monolake.org/seminars](http://monolake.org/seminars)