

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



**February 9, 2019 • Nora Livingston**

\$95 per person / \$85 for Mono Lake Committee members

Winter in the Mono Basin is silent, majestic, and filled with mysteries. Despite the illusion of stillness, there is a lot going on in the forest and desert, in the air, and even under the snow. 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. 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 winters, and how humans have adapted to cope with winter. We will also look for the birds and mammals that survive here in the sometimes harsh winters, as well as look for tracks and burrows if there is snow. **This will be an active seminar in potentially freezing temperatures where participants will need to have enough stamina to walk up to 3 miles.**

**Nora Livingston** is the Mono Lake Committee Lead Naturalist Guide. She has spent the last three years settled into the Mono Basin getting to know all of the basin’s seasons and patterns. Winter is quickly becoming her favorite time to explore.

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

**Saturday, February 9 at 9:00am:** Meet in the gallery at the Mono Lake Committee Information Center & Bookstore. After introductions, we will view a short presentation of basic winter ecology concepts and detail the itinerary for the day. We will visit multiple locations in the Mono Basin to

explore the interactions between animals, plants, and humans in the cold and dormant environment. We will end the day at 6:00pm, so we can enjoy the sunset together.

## **WEATHER AND ROAD CONDITIONS**

Weather conditions are quite variable in February. February average temperatures in Lee Vining are 44°F (max) and 22°F (min). Average February precipitation is 2.35 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 February 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, warm layers, gloves, waterproof 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)
- 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.



## **Mono Lake Committee Field Seminars**

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