

# From the field

notes from the Riparian Songbird Conservation Project by Sacha Heath

**O**n June 18 and June 25, 2001, a biologist with the Point Reyes Bird Observatory (PRBO)'s Eastern Sierra Riparian Songbird Conservation project located two Willow Flycatcher nests on lower Rush Creek.

These observations are exciting because there have been very few detections of possibly breeding Willow Flycatchers in the Rush Creek vicinity of the Mono Basin over the last 30 years, although in the early part of the 20th century they were considered common. Joseph Grinnell and Tracy Storer reported a Willow Flycatcher occurrence in the vicinity of Mono Lake in the 1920s. Grinnell and Joseph Dixon's 1916–1934 avian assessments included the detection and collection of males in mid-May and mid-June between Rush Creek's Silver and Grant Lakes and along Mono Lake's western and northern shores. In 1985, David Gaines and Ilene Mandelbaum



Photo by Will Richardson

A Willow Flycatcher captured by PRBO in 2000.

reported (personal communications in Jones and Stokes 1991) that "Willow Flycatchers may have been extirpated as a breeding species on Lower Rush Creek." Jones and Stokes' 1991 efforts for the Mono Basin Environmental Impact Report uncovered one singing male on upper Parker Creek, but it was not present in subsequent surveys on that creek, nor were Willow Flycatchers detected on any of the Rush Creek surveys. PRBO began point counting on lower and upper Rush

Creek in 1998 and 1999, though no Willow Flycatchers were detected in these years. In 2000 our efforts on Rush Creek were more intensive—a singing male was detected on point counts and nest searchers observed lone singing territorial males, but no females or nests were found.

The recent breeding confirmation of this State Endangered Species—in addition to the abundance of breeding Yellow Warblers, Song Sparrows, and a handful of Black-headed Grosbeaks and cavity nesters—may be an exciting testament to the recovery of lower Rush Creek as breeding songbird habitat! PRBO will be following these nests closely (in addition to those of other riparian songbird species breeding on Rush, Lee Vining, Mill and Wilson Creeks) to determine their success at producing young within these recovering riparian systems. 🐦

## Volunteers help rid Rush Creek of tamarisk

**O**n May 19, a crew of three Mono Lake Committee staff and ten local volunteers scoured the Rush Creek delta in a hunt for tamarisk seedlings. The good news is that the crew had to search hard to find seedlings—thanks to prior efforts to eliminate this invasive, non-native plant from Rush Creek. But there's still more tamarisk in the area. The Committee will host a second tamarisk-removal day on Sunday, Sept. 2, during Restoration Days.

The Mono Lake Committee thanks the volunteers for their help as well as the LA Department of Water and Power for donating a weed wrench for use in tamarisk-removal efforts in the Mono Basin. This handy tool was needed to uproot the largest of the tamarisk trees found on Rush Creek that day (see photo at right).



Photo by Heidi Hopkins