



# The Cactus Wren • dition

Volume LIV, No. 1

Spring 2006



Peach-faced Lovebirds

# Maricopa Audubon Meetings & Programs Sept. 2005 – May 2006

Please join us for a terrific year of speakers with a wide range of topics – the Arizona Breeding Bird Atlas, mining of Oak Flat, Grand Canyon protection, Bald Eagles, Bird Coloration, Avian Communication and Hummingbirds.

Meetings are held on the 1st Tuesday of each month, September through May. Our May meeting is our Annual Banquet with a location to be announced. Please check our web site or newsletter for the location of the May 2006 banquet.

Meetings start at 7:30 p.m., and feature a general membership meeting, guest speaker, book sales, refreshments and a chance to socialize with MAS members. Visitors are most welcome! Our September through April meetings are held in Dorrance Hall at the Desert Botanical Garden. The Garden is located at 1201 North Galvin Parkway in Phoenix, which is approximately ½ mile north of the Phoenix Zoo. Dorrance Hall is located off the main parking lot and entry to the Garden. There will be signs directing you to the meeting. Although there is no charge to attend

our general membership meetings, the Annual Banquet does require a dinner reservation and associated cost.

A pre-meeting dinner at Pete's 19th Tee Restaurant, 1405 N. Mill Avenue in Tempe (at the Rolling Hills Golf Course), will be in effect for the September through April meetings. Come and join us at 6:00 p.m. for a delicious meal (no-host), meet our guest speaker and say "howdy" to other birders. Meals at Pete's average \$5.00 to \$7.00.

## February 7 2006

Kevin McGraw Communication in Color – The Avian Language of Love  
Birds are among the most extravagantly and variably colored animals on Earth, which raises the evolutionary question of why they develop so many different colorful features in their plumage and bare parts. Dr. McGraw runs a research program at ASU and he has focused most of his attention on understanding how these different colors are produced and used. A primary thrust of his current research involves less-common colors including red and yellow in parrots and yellow in penguins.

## March 7, 2006

Pierre Deviche Singing in the Rain-Breeding Biology of Sonoran Desert Aimophila Sparrows  
Many birds living in temperate regions breed in the spring following a regular and predictable seasonal schedule. In contrast, some Sonoran Desert passerines, in particular Aimophila sparrows (Cassin's and Rufous-winged Sparrows) generally reproduce in summer and are coincident with the annual monsoon. As the monsoon varies from year to year in terms of intensity at a given site, these birds need considerable reproductive flexibility. Dr. Deviche's work investigates the specific environmental factors that trigger and terminate their breeding cycle. Pierre has found

that factors other than day length are largely responsible for the breeding cycle of these passerines. A better understanding of how environmental factors influence reproductive cycles may help predict how populations will be affected by climate changes and persistent droughts.

## April 4, 2006

David and Diane Reesor Birding Around the Ring of Fire

David and Diane are well-known for their incredible photographs and compelling stories. Join them in a trip around the "Ring of Fire", from the northern Japanese islands (now held by Russia), to Kamchatka in Russia, through the Pribiloff Islands and on to Alaska

## May 2, 2006

Sheri Williamson Hummingbirds: More Than Just Eye Candy

Don't let the Disney-esque public image fool you! There's much more going on behind a hummingbird's glittering facade than meets the eye. From their confusing plumages and savage battles to their continent-spanning travels and penchant for mix-and-match mating, these tiny dynamos pack a lot of birding excitement into a small package – and Arizona birders have a ring-side seat! Sheri Williamson, so-founder and director/naturalist of SABO is the author of A Field Guide to Hummingbirds of North America. An avid birder since childhood, she resisted the charms of hummingbirds until 1988 when she and her husband, Tom Wood, were hired as resident managers of The Nature Conservancy's Ramsey Canyon Preserve. Though hummingbirds have been a major focus of Sheri's recent life, she also has a special interest in raptors, trogons and manakins, and enjoys watching butterflies and reptiles.

## Committees/Support

### Activist Alert

Shawn Baur  
602-828-3607  
[shawnbaur@hotmail.com](mailto:shawnbaur@hotmail.com)

### Arizona Audubon Council Rep

Krys Hammer  
480-413-9805  
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### Book Store

Krys Hammers  
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### Field Observations

Janet Witzeman  
602-840-6089  
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### Hospitality

Gretchen Burgess  
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### Web Page

Kurt Rademaker  
480.837-2446  
[kurtrad@mexicobirding.com](mailto:kurtrad@mexicobirding.com)

### Maricopa Audubon web site

<http://www.maricopaaudubon.org>

"Man's greatest joy is to teach the love of nature." Anon

## An Investment in the Future

Bequests are an important source of support for the Maricopa Audubon Society. Your chapter has dedicated itself to the protection of the natural world through public education and advocacy for the wiser use and preservation of our land, water, air and other irreplaceable natural resources.

You can invest in the future of our natural world by making a bequest in your will to the Maricopa Audubon Society. Talk to your attorney for more information on how this can be accomplished.



Peach-faced Lovebirds; photographed by Jim Burns at Gilbert Riparian Area, AZ, December 10, 2005 with Canon EOS 1D body and Canon 600mm f/4 lens.

## From the Editor, Deva Burns

Does it get any better than a warm winter night on the desert in Arizona looking for owls at full moon? It does if you're out with two novice birders who have never seen an owl in the wild and one of them is on a long weekend getaway from Chicago where he left daytime highs in the teens. The owling excursion was part of a package auctioned off on public radio stations KBAQ and KJZZ by their General Manager, Carl Matthusen, a long-time birder. Karen and Robert picked up their first two owls that day, the Burrowing Owls at Gilbert Riparian Area and a pair of Western Screech-Owls along the Salt River. The wonder and awe on their faces when the screech owls answered our tape and appeared in our light beam was better than the owls themselves. I know we're in a drought, I know our air quality is bad, but I'd still rather be here than in Chicago. Karen and Robert were too.

With no prior planning, three of our

contributors picked the theme of volunteering for this issue. Mike Rupp's article emphasizes that each of us had someone or something that inspired our birding passion. And, we owe it to the birds to give back and get someone else started in caring about the birds and our environment. Bob Witzeman waxes nostalgic on Maricopa Audubon's long, rich history which emphasizes the practice of giving back to the environment by members over the years. Laurie Nessel has profiled Kurt Rademaker and all he has done for birding and Maricopa Audubon. Additionally, the regular articles are here and should provide some very interesting reading.

So, what are you waiting for? There are myriad ways to help and promote birding in Phoenix. Pick one and give back a little something.

# From the President

Mike Rupp

from the president

I get asked fairly often what "bird watching" is all about, mostly by non-birdwatchers who don't understand the attraction. It would be easy to give a quick answer and move on, but upon reflection, the answer is really a bit more complicated, and means different things to different people.

I think back to the "continuum" that transpired in my life, and most likely in the lives of many who "birdwatch" today. Whether I was aware of it or not, the first few times I took binoculars in hand to casually check out a distant winged curiosity, a "process" was started in me which eventually transformed me from knowing little about nature, to a life aware of birds, their habitats, conservation issues, and a new overall worldview. Wow! How does that happen?

It doesn't happen to everyone who takes binoculars in hand, but it does happen to many. I know several biologists and other science types that literally had their educational lives redirected by a nature encounter, often involving birds. Many other laymen like myself have marveled at bird plumages and behaviors, or were astounded by almost unbelievable facts about migration. However it happened, we who watch birds regularly have been transformed to varying degrees. So, what does one tell a non-birder about birding?

Birds are virtually everywhere- they are the most common watchable wildlife seen just about anywhere one can travel on this globe, living in all types of habitats. Their numbers are astounding, estimates being in the billions of birds. They are the subject of poems, documentary programs, and research. Once time is taken to acquaint yourself with them, they can become a "gateway" to a better understanding of nature in a variety of ways. Whether one wants to devote substantial time to watching and learning about them or not, they are a joy to watch with their colors, patterns, behaviors, and vocalizations, and offer a wide-ranging opportunity to engage them on a variety of levels and topics.

I took off on a tangent some years ago reading about bird migration, and this facet of birdlife was truly amazing. Learning about species that travel non-stop thousands of miles twice a year, and the decades of research trying to understand genetics, navigation, timing, patterns, weather and climate factors governing migration, was easy reading, and a load of fun. The first record of inquiry into bird migration comes to us from a Greek citizen who wrote upon a small piece of parchment sometime in the second century, "O swallow, where does thou go in the summer?". After signing the note

and stating his hometown, he tied this note around a swallow's leg and let it go- where it went, no one knew. Next fall, the bird returned, still with a note around it's leg. Upon capture, the Greek read, "to Asia Minor, to the home of Cletus"!

In short, there are many many ways to appreciate birds, and they can be doorways to various possibilities, maybe even a career in conservation! The opportunities we provide to engage people of all backgrounds in "bird watching" is a large part of what Audubon is all about. Providing a "nature experience", generally with birds, but not always, has been going on for many decades at Audubon centers, camps and nature preserves, and from these experiences have sprung many a conservationist. The Maricopa chapter has been providing "birding" opportunities throughout the years to Phoenixians, and continues to do so with several programs aimed at young and old alike. Our Gilbert Water Ranch program will reach around 600 people again this year with birdwalks at the Gilbert Water Ranch. Thanks to Marjorie Eckman, our Field Trip Coordinator, our regular field trips scheduled for almost every weekend between September and April will take hundreds more out into "the field" to find our regular resident species and rarities that pass through. Our participation at nature events reaches many more with a message of conservation, we are distributing the Beginner's Guide to Birds of Phoenix booklet to hundreds of school kids to introduce them to birds, and we're developing materials for speakers to take out to events.

Our state office, led by Sam Campana with an outstanding staff, is engaged in exactly this same kind of work- providing educational opportunities to Phoenixians through a variety of programs which will eventually be focused at their Nature Center on the Salt River and Central Avenue. The Rio Salado project is now

open to the public, and there has already been around 120 bird species recorded there. Keep your eye on this location and Audubon Arizona as it develops into a major education and bird watching center. More info on their work is at

<http://az.audubon.org/>

If you, or your children, or their children, are interested in bird watching for the first time, or are already experienced, a great opportunity awaits you at the Tres Rios Nature Festival, coming March 11-12 at Estrella Mountain Regional Park. This nature festival, the largest of it's kind in Arizona, has several groups displaying live birds, reptiles, insects, mammals, a hundred displays, featured speakers, field trips, and presentations that could have a terrific impact on young and old alike. Admission is free. More information can be found at [www.tresriosnaturefestival.com](http://www.tresriosnaturefestival.com).

The remainder of our scheduled field trips are a great way to learn about birds in greater detail, and meet other like-minded people. To see the field trip schedule see our website at [www.maricopa-audubon.org](http://www.maricopa-audubon.org). Everyone is welcome on these free trips.

These are a few of the many opportunities available to you and your family to acquaint yourself with local birdlife, and perhaps find an on-going interest in nature. In this age of cell phones, video games, and TV, birding is a wonderful way to get away from it all for a time and "reconnect" with nature. I encourage you to come to one or more of these events and see for yourself what "bird watching" is all about.

## NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE ANNOUNCEMENT

This year's nominations committee has been appointed by the board to begin receiving nominations for board positions for the term June through June, 2006-2007

The committee members, with their contact information, are :

Walter Thurber, Chair	480-483-6450	<a href="mailto:wathurber@cox.net">wathurber@cox.net</a>
Janice Miano	480-946-1327	<a href="mailto:jmiano@juno.com">jmiano@juno.com</a>
Harvey Beatty	480-991-9190	<a href="mailto:hbeatty@extremezone.com">hbeatty@extremezone.com</a>

All members are encouraged to submit nominations to this committee before the annual banquet in May, and make known any interest they may have in a board position. The nominating committee is tasked with checking to see if there are any board positions that will be open prior to elections, and find possible candidates if there are. Nominations from members are accepted for any board position.

Please make your reservations for the banquet by contacting Cynthia Donald, ([planres@earthlink.com](mailto:planres@earthlink.com)) and come enjoy a great dinner with other members, hear a great speaker, perhaps pick up a rarity at the silent auction, and cast your vote.



# Notes & Announcements

## MAS Annual Banquet is May 2nd

Make your plans now to join in the celebration of the completion of our 53rd year! The Banquet and Annual Meeting will be held on Tuesday, May 2, 2006, at the Shalimar Country Club, located at 2032 East Golf Avenue in Tempe. We will hold our annual board elections and lay the groundwork for our 54th year – WOW 54 years – that's impressive!

Our program will feature Sheri Williamson, co-founder, director and naturalist of the Southeastern Arizona Bird Observatory (SABO). Sheri's talk is titled "Hummingbirds – More Than Just Eye Candy." She has authored "A Field Guide to Hummingbirds of North America," and is an avid fan of these pint-sized dynamos. Sheri says that she resisted the charms of these jewels until 1988 when she and her husband, Tom Wood, were the resident managers of The Nature Conservancy's Ramsey Canyon Preserve.

The cost per person will be \$25.00, with a 10% discount for current Friends of Maricopa Audubon (\$22.50 is the amount for Friends). We will have a buffet dinner with selections ranging from carnivore to vegetarian foods. There will be a no-host cocktail hour from 6:00 to 7:00 p.m., with the buffet opening at 7:00 p.m. Dress is casual. Reservations are required. Please contact Joy Dingley at 480-419-9804, [joy.dingley@cox.net](mailto:joy.dingley@cox.net) or Cynthia Donald at 480-768-0593, [planres@earthlink.net](mailto:planres@earthlink.net) to make your reservation. If you leave a message, please be sure to spell your last name, indicate the number in your party and leave a call back number. If you make a reservation and find that you cannot attend, please contact Joy or Cynthia immediately so Maricopa Audubon is not charged. Checks and cash will be accepted at the door (please make checks payable to Maricopa Audubon Society). See you at the banquet!

Once again there will be a silent auction. If you have something that you would like to donate for the auction, please contact Laurie Nessel at 480-968-5614 or [laurienessel@hotmail.com](mailto:laurienessel@hotmail.com).

**Expanded Book Store Selections** – We now have a full selection of books on birding topics for adults and children alike. Maricopa Audubon logo items will include binocular harnesses, tote bags, UV-protection caps, and baseball caps. We will also have bird-themed sandstone coasters and note-cards. Newly-designed t-shirts will also be available. We will be taking orders for long-sleeved, Easy-care, button shirts with the Maricopa Audubon logo. Samples will be available for your review. Be sure to get yours' ordered. Remember that Friends of Maricopa Audubon members get a 10% discount and that your purchase helps to support our event, education and conservation efforts

## Arizona Watchable Wildlife Tourism

**Association (AWWTA)** – Check out their website for events around the state—[www.azwildlife.com](http://www.azwildlife.com).

**Museum of Northern Arizona** – They sponsor Venture trips that explore and discover the Colorado Plateau in the Four Corners area. For more information contact Lisa Lamberson at 928-774-5211 x241 or [llamberson@mna.mus.az.us](mailto:llamberson@mna.mus.az.us).

**Environmental Fund** – Green At Work—Thousands of employees can now support Maricopa Audubon Society (MAS) in their annual fall charity campaign. The Environmental Fund

for Arizona get thousands of Arizona employees involved with our group and many other conservation groups through payroll deduction workplace campaigns. Help spread the word at your office about checking off "Green" choices this fall! If your employer does not yet include environmental/conservation groups, please contact Solange Whitehead at the Environmental Fund for Arizona: [efaz@efaz.org](mailto:efaz@efaz.org) or (480) 510-5511.

**Donation Wish List** – Maricopa Audubon Society is looking for a donation of a laptop computer in order to provide educational presentations to youth groups and classes. To donate please contact any board member.

**Membership Information** – There are two ways to get on the mailing list in order to receive the *Cactus Wren-dition*. First, by joining the National Audubon Society. If you live in Maricopa County, generally east of 43rd Avenue, when National Audubon receives your check and membership application, Maricopa Audubon will receive your name and address from National, and will add you to Maricopa Audubon's *Wren-dition* mailing list, or you can make a check payable to National Audubon Society for \$20.00 and mail it with your National Audubon Society membership application to: Krys Hammer, Maricopa Audubon Society's membership chair, 1121 N Terrace Road, Chandler, AZ 85226, and she will forward it on to National Audubon. In the latter case, Maricopa Audubon will receive a rebate of your **entire** \$20.00 National Audubon membership fee the first year. Secondly, by becoming a "Friend of Maricopa Audubon". In this case you will become a member of Maricopa Audubon Society only, and will not receive the Audubon magazine, or any of the "benefits" of National Audubon membership but you will receive one year of the *Cactus Wren-dition*. "Friends" contribution categories in the form of a check made payable to Maricopa Audubon Society, and mailed to Krys Hammer, Maricopa Audubon Society's membership chair, 1121 N Terrace Road, Chandler, AZ 85226. The categories are—Anna's-\$20; Verdin-\$35-\$99; LeConte's Thrasher-\$100-\$249; Cactus Wren-\$250-\$999; Harris's Hawk\*\$1,000-\$9,999; and California Condor\*\$10,000+. \*These levels include a signed, framed photograph by Jim Burns of your designated raptor. All "Friends" members receive various discounts. If you reside outside the above-indicated geographical area, the only way to receive a subscription to the *Cactus Wren-dition* is to become a "Friend" of Maricopa Audubon Society.

**Ecuador & Galapagos Birding Contest** – If you've always dreamed of seeing fantastic tropical species like the plate-billed mountain toucan, the violet-tailed sylph, and the Galapagos endemics, a new birding contest makes it possible. Alianza Jatun Sacha – CDC Ecuador, a leading Ecuadorian conservation group, has organized BirdQuest, a friendly bird-watching event designed to support environmental protection in Ecuador. The idea is for teams of from two to six persons to bird several of Ecuador's renowned hotspots over a 10 to 15-day period. Each team will be led by an experienced local guide to help identify Ecuador's fantastic bird diversity (more than 1,600 species!), so previous familiarity with the habitats is not necessary.

The itinerary includes three reserves co-managed by Jatun Sacha. The first is **Yanacocha Bird Sanctuary** near Quito, a high-altitude forest that sits below Andean *paramo* grasslands and is filled

with a remarkable collection of hummingbirds. Next is **La Hesperia Cloud Forest Reserve**, where the 276 species recorded so far include the Andean cock-of-the-rock and the pale-mandible araçari. The Choco contest winds up at **Congal Reserve** on the Pacific seashore, home to the Ecuadorian trogon, the Choco toucan, and many shorebird species. If you chose the **Choco + Galapagos (San Cristobal Island)** event (14 days) you'll observe the amazing Galapagos fauna and vegetation, and 15 endemic birds, including the Chatham Mockingbird, endemic to San Cristobal.

The cost for the ten-day Choco tour (not including airfare) is \$2,085 and Choco + Galapagos is \$3,861 and, because the tour is personalized, the timing of your trip is flexible depending on when your team wants to visit. Details can be found on the Jatun Sacha website at [http://www.jatunsacha.org/ingles/bird\\_quest.htm](http://www.jatunsacha.org/ingles/bird_quest.htm).

**Credit Card** – The American Birding Association has negotiated an agreement with US Bank to provide ABA members a distinctive US BANK VISA Card. Using your card will not only show your connection to ABA and birding but also, at no additional cost to you, provide a contribution to ABA. If interested, contact [www.americanbirding.org](http://www.americanbirding.org). I think Audubon should offer something like this!

**The Dovetail Directory** ([www.dovetailbirding.com](http://www.dovetailbirding.com)): The Directory is an online catalogue of world birding tours, and our goal is to help birders locate that special birding tour, to any of 85 countries around the world. This is a free service. There are no hidden costs or surcharges. Tours are offered at the operators price. In addition to tours, the Directory also carries a comprehensive inventory of birding-related books. For your further convenience we maintain a North American, toll-free number (877) 881-1145, and someone will always happy to take your call.

**Shade-grown coffee** – If you are searching for a source to purchase shade-grown coffee and haven't been successful, try ABA Sales. They carry seven kinds of Song Bird Coffee. For information call 800-634-7736. Also, Trader Joe's carries shade grown coffee.

## More birding and nature festivals –

[www.americanbirding.org](http://www.americanbirding.org). and [www.birdinghotspot.com](http://www.birdinghotspot.com).

**Audubon Adventures** – Give the gift of discovery and share your love of the environment. The program is designated for students in grades 4-6. Introduce an entire classroom (up to 32 students) to the wonders of nature for just \$35 (plus shipping charges). You can select your favorite school or let Audubon do it for you. For orders: call 800/813-5037.

**Maricopa Audubon T-Shirts** – For information, contact Laurie Nessel at (480) 968-5614 or mail to: [laurienessel@hotmail.com](mailto:laurienessel@hotmail.com)

Do you have an interesting story to tell about birding? Please forward your **submissions** to the Editor—Deva Burns. Check the back page for address/e-mail. Actually, attaching an article to an e-mail is the absolute easiest way to submit an article. If you have pictures or slides, you do need to send those to me directly. Remember, all articles may not be published the first month after receipt.

# Photo Quiz

Jim Burns

photo quiz



**A – Good photo, difficult bird**



**B – Good photo, difficult bird**



**C – Good photo, difficult bird**

All Photos by Jim Burns

## THIS ISSUE'S CLUE —

All in the same family, all in the same genus, all . . . Here's a little identification problem that most birders have completely forgotten about but shouldn't have because it's a great test for your observational skills.



# Early history of our Maricopa Audubon chapter: 1953-1968

Bob Witzeman

A few weeks ago a former Maricopa Audubon friend, Jack Wetmore, telephoned me from his home in Prescott. He said he had a scrapbook of documents, photographs and newspaper clippings about the early years of our chapter while he was living in Phoenix. Jack's book covered the first 15 years of our chapter from 1953 through 1968.

The scrapbook contained 133 newspaper clippings. Included was an engaging collection of archival photographs of early chapter field trips.

The scrapbook proudly boasted of the chapter having 51 dues paying members at the end of its first year. All of the names of these members were listed in the chapter newsletter. The newsletter was entitled *The Roadrunner*. It was lovingly hand typed and mimeograph by the various editors over those early years. The membership received it monthly except in July and August.

Included in that list of 51 "charter" members was our own, esteemed, Bix Demaree. She was a chapter officer and President in the 1950's and 60's. Jack's book was filled with newspaper articles showing binocular-toting members looking at birds on our field trips.

Strikingly evident from the many newspaper clippings was Bix Demaree's talent for garnering newspaper coverage in the *Arizona Republic* and *Phoenix Gazette* about birds and our field trip and chapter activities.

The chapter's annual Phoenix Christmas Counts were frequently covered in the *Republic* and *Gazette* with details about the birds seen, any

unusual birds, and any unexpected changes in numbers of various birds. The MAS count circle was in southwest metropolitan Phoenix similar in location to the current Salt/Gila count.

Today, in our large Phoenix metropolitan area, newspaper coverage about club activities and local birds is difficult to obtain. Fortunately, our community has the good fortune of Jim Burns' outstanding articles in the *Arizona Republic's* "Environment" section. Jim's engaging style of writing, as well as his remarkable and often breathtaking wildlife photographs, is an asset to our community.

Jack's scrapbook (and our early chapter newsletters which Janet has meticulously garnered for coverage of our region's past bird records) reveals that our nascent Maricopa chapter had

Included with this Cactus Wren-dition article is a fascinating photograph of MAS birders on the beach at Rocky Point with their telescopes, binoculars, field guides— and classic 1950's birding attire. The lace-up leather boots and jodhpurs on our former president and newsletter editor Bill Patey, and the long skirts of the women, reveal how much birdwatching attire and styles have changed.

The first chapter newsletter, *The Roadrunner*, Vol. 1, No. 1, June 1954, appeared 11 months after the chapter was formed. In the vigorous conservation tradition of the National Audubon Society, that first newsletter contained an article opposing the Bureau of Reclamation's Echo Park Dam in Utah. I was a medical intern in Salt Lake City that year and remember

that controversy. This article presaged the decades-long battles Maricopa Audubon and other conservation groups in Arizona and nationally had in (successfully) opposing the many proposed Bureau of Reclamation river-killing dams on Arizona's San Pedro, Salt, Verde and Gila Rivers.

From the beginning our chapter newsletter had a voracious appetite for recording every significant bird sighting. In fact, in the fourth year of publication of the newsletter, a cumulative index of all bird species published in the previous 30-plus newsletters was tabulated. It filled five full pages of that newsletter.

These early bird sighting records were subsequently invaluable to Janet Witzeman, Bix Demaree and Eleanor Radke when they published *Birds of Phoenix and Maricopa County*.

If you wish to see a copy of this fascinating scrapbook, contact any of our Board members, Bix Demaree or Jack Wetmore.



MAS field trip at Puerto Penasco (Rocky Point), Mexico, circa 1955-56. Left to right: Jim Werner, Jim Bialac, Frank Brunt, Bill Patey, unnamed winter visitor, Mrs. Culver. Note the lumber supply store aprons being used as field guide carriers.

a ravenous appetite for both distant and local field trips. Recorded in the chapter newsletters in the first four chapter years were summaries of the birds seen on three separate field trips to Rocky Point, Mexico!

As mentioned, Jack's scrapbook contained charming historic photographs of MAS birders on those early chapter field trips in the 1950's.

# Profile of a Birder or Pronounced RAD-a-mak-er

Laurie Nessel

Who was the first to document a Bar-tailed Godwit in Mexico? How do you tell the difference between a Glossy and White-faced Ibis? Is it pronounced Vohs or Vawks-iz swift, PILL-ate-ed or PIE-lee-ate-ed, SAY-bin-z or SAB-in-z, jah-KAN-ah or zhah-sah-nah?

What do these questions have in common? Kurt Radamaker. A member of the Maricopa Audubon Society, Kurt began birding when he was 8 years old. He completed the Cornell Laboratory's Seminars in Ornithology at age 15 and did his first CBC the following year. Ever since that prodigious start, he has shared his passion, knowledge and talents with the birding community. He taught ornithology for 4 years at the University of LaVerne in S. California in the early '90s where he met his future wife and birding partner, Cindy Ludden. While at LaVerne he founded *The Euphonia*, a scientific journal of ornithology. An article in *The Euphonia*, written by Steve Howell is cited by the AOU as an important work in elevating Canivet's and Cozumel Emerald to full species status. Although the *Euphonia* is no longer published, his enthusiasm for Mexico continues. He regularly birds Mexico, guiding others on occasion. Recently Kurt was an associate author of *Birds of the Baja Peninsula: Status, Distribution, and Taxonomy* (ABA Monographs in Field Ornithology, No. 3), Richard A. Erickson and Steve N.G. Howell, June 2001. Kurt contributed

several years of field notes for the book as well as many photographs. Kurt and Cindy have spent many hours birding Mexico and have documented several Mexico firsts, including Eurasian Dotterel, Olive-backed Pipit, Bar-tailed Godwit, and Downy Woodpecker. Most recently Kurt along with Guy McCaskie, documented the first record of Flesh-footed Shearwater in Mexico. Interestingly, the record is from a 1996 slide whose distant image was inconclusive. But last year Kurt had the slide scanned to a high resolution digital image which, when zoomed and cropped, verified the sighting.

Maricopa Audubon Society has benefited immensely from Kurt's talents and generosity. Since 2002, a year after moving here from Florida, he has been the Salt Verde River CBC compiler. He even built a very informative, comprehensive website dedicated to the count. He voluntarily rebuilt and maintains the MAS website for which we are eternally grateful. He is a member of the Arizona Bird Committee and an original board member and co-founder of the recently formed Arizona Field Ornithologist (AZFO), an organization dedicated to increasing the knowledge of identification, status, distribution and ecological needs of Arizona's birds. It is an inclusive group eager for participation from birders. Their informative website <http://www.azfo.org> is an invaluable resource about Arizona's

birds. Look for details on how you can contribute observations, articles, and images, or even by helping on the North American Migration Count in Arizona, May 13th and Sept. 16th. Currently, membership to AZFO is free but support to help offset costs is welcome.

So, how do you tell the difference between a Glossy and a White-faced Ibis? Well, you'll just have to get the *National Geographic Complete Birds of North America*, (Nov. 2005), and turn to page 124 to find out. With 664 pages and 4,000 illustrations covering sexes, seasonal plumages and variations, range maps, migration maps, it is a bargain at \$35. It is a comprehensive desktop companion to the National Geographic field guide. Kurt wrote the species accounts for Ibis, Herons and allies.

For the answer to pronunciations, read Kurt and Michael Patten's delightful article, *Pronounced Bûrd*. *Birding* 22:74-78, April 1990, accessible online in PDF.

Look for more publications from Kurt including collaboration with Cindy, on a *Compact Guide to the Birds of Arizona*, Lone Pine Press, due out in 2007, and another book from Lone Pine Press, *Field Guide to the Birds of Florida*, which Kurt co-authored, due October 2006.

Kurt has made notable contributions and increased our understanding and appreciation of birds. And to top it off, he is a really nice guy!

## You Can Participate in the Big Sit

Herb Fibel

Rosalinda Partel sent a note with the Partel's Big Sit! donation, expressing the hope that in the future more people could actually participate in the Big Sit! Well, folks, everyone can! Log on to [bigsit@birdwatchersdigest.com](http://bigsit@birdwatchersdigest.com) to find out how you, too, can be a part of the annual Big Sit! each October. Briefly, you can form your own Big Sit! circle most anywhere, register it, and on the designated day in October, simply keep track of the birds you see, while you're standing, or lounging, within your circle by yourself or with friends. You're welcome to fit as many people as you wish into your 17 foot diameter circle. It's nothing more than a sedentary Christmas Bird Count.

The Granite Reef Big Sit! Circle has its antecedents in 1995, when I read about the activity in "Birding" magazine. Being one who enjoys sitting and waiting for the birds to come to me, I made inquiry to the New Haven Bird Club about the event, and then I spent considerable time scoping out a place where a maximum number of bird species could be seen in October. In October 1996, I invited birding friends Pete Moulton, Terry Brodner,

and Ken and Ardelle Howe, to join Joyce and me in the Big Sit! Circle that I had selected in the Granite Reef Recreation Area, where we had a view of Red Mountain, the Granite Reef Reservoir, and the mesquite bosque, which formed the back three-quarters of our circle. Over the years the participants have changed. Ken and Joyce have passed away, Ardelle has retired to an assisted living facility, and Terry has moved on to her own Big Sit! Circle down at Tres Rios.

Pete is my ace spotter, and I would be lost without his identification skills. In recent years Pete and I have been joined in the annual October event by Cynthia Donald, Cynthia Grant, and by Adam and Phyllis Martin. Adam is almost as diligent as Pete, while the rest of us have bouts of attentiveness, interspersed with eating, shmoozing, playing cribbage, and interacting with the kids and other visitors at the picnic grounds that we share. We start at the crack of dawn in order to catch the "Morning Chorus." Traditions have developed over the years, and include a little circle-forming ceremony, and the sharing of a bacalava treat.

We usually pack it in around 3:00 p.m., after nine hours of something less than intensive birding.

It was only two or three years ago that I decided to make this a fund raising activity for Maricopa Audubon. For the 2005 Big Sit! the money raised will be used for the Save the San Pedro River Campaign. We tallied a record 61 species this year, with five new birds, bringing our total for ten years up to an amazing 118 species.

The participants listed above have my eternal gratitude, as do all of you who so generously donated money for the cause. For the few of you who are reading this and who have not yet sent in your pledge, please make your check payable to Maricopa Audubon Society, but send it to me at 1128 E. Geneva Drive, Tempe, AZ, 85282. I will tally it and send your check on to Treasurer Joy. I promised to acknowledge our commercial sponsors, but there's only one, unless you count the Bramley's Eastside Animal Hospital, and that's B & B Lawn Maintenance in Tempe, (my gardener).



# Maricopa Audubon Society Field Trips

Marjorie Eckman

## Saturday, February 4

**Le Conte's Thrasher Site.** This is our nearly annual trip to this traditional site on the far west side of Phoenix at the intersection of Baseline Road & the Salome Highway. Resident Bendire's, Crissal and Curve-billed Thrashers may also be seen as well as Le Conte's and overwintering Sage Sparrows. Prairie Falcons have been observed on this trip in the past, and all of the typical low desert breeding birds should be present. The meeting place for those who wish to carpool will be Mike Rupp's office parking lot at 740 E. Highland Ave at 7 AM. Le Conte's are shy birds so we will limit the number of participants to 10 as we have done in the past. Call or email early to reserve a spot.

Leader: Harvey Beatty at 480-991-9190 or [hbeatty@extremezone.com](mailto:hbeatty@extremezone.com). Please call for reservations and additional information.

## Saturday, February 11

**Hayfield & Cobble Ponds and the Phoenix International Raceway Trails.** Both the well-known Hayfields site and the Cobble Ponds across 91st Avenue are open ponds, with riparian habitat and trails that run along cottonwoods, mesquites and willows. These ponds have been a mecca for birders for years and can be depended on for an interesting list of birds including waterbirds, shorebirds, hawks, warblers and sparrows plus often a surprise or a rarity. This year we are adding the PIR site, another excellent riparian area, to the day so be prepared by bringing lunch, water and scope. Meet for prompt departure at the REI parking lot at the SW corner of Southern & Priest at 6 AM for carpooling or at parking lot at Mike Rupp's Office at 740 E. Highland Ave. at 6:30 AM.

Leader: Jeff Fustich at 623-327-0540 or [fustich@yahoo.com](mailto:fustich@yahoo.com)

## Saturday, February 18

**Gilbert Water Ranch.** The ponds and surrounding marshes attract migrating waterfowl, wintering raptors, and passerines. Borrowing owl colonies are well established and easily viewed. Close looks at all the common waders usually possible. These ponds are fast becoming the east side mecca for birders and also have had their share of rarities. Bring a scope if available, lunch, and water. Start at site promptly at 7:30 AM. Limit 15.

Leader: Cindy West at 480-830-5332 or [cwestbirdr@juno.com](mailto:cwestbirdr@juno.com)

**Friday through Monday, February 24-27 Rocky Point (Puerto Penasco) & Cholla Bay, Mexico.** We will bird sandy beaches and rocky shoreline habitats for gulls, terns, shorebirds, and pelagics with the possibility of land species that do not occur in Arizona. This area offers a great opportunity to brush up on your gull identification. Previous Christmas Bird Counts have yielded 100 to 140 species over a winter weekend. Spotting scope helpful. Early departure Friday, meeting site TBA. Return time flexible. All participants will share carpool gas and Mexican insurance costs. Double accommodations only. Limit 8. Level 2 - expect some long walking distances. Leader: Claudia Kirscher at 623-934-5460 or [antclaudia@aol.com](mailto:antclaudia@aol.com)

## Saturday, March 4

**Granite Reef Dam & Lower Salt River.** We

will bird the Salt River below Granite Reef Dam, using cars to cover hot spots along ten miles of road. A traditional favorite, excellent for waterfowl and raptors. This beautiful area usually produces a variety of species. There is a lake entry fee. Bring water, lunch, and a scope if available. We will meet at 7 AM at the Walgreen's parking lot at McKellips and Power (Bush Highway).

Leader: Charles Saffell at 480-668-9393 or [marisaff@cox.net](mailto:marisaff@cox.net) for reservations or additional information.

## Saturday and Sunday, March 11,12

**Tres Rios Nature Festival.** This year's nature festival will be free, and offers a large variety of vendors, displays, all sorts of "nature" activities, and a host of lectures by professional biologists, geologists, rehabbers, and naturalists. Activities include hiking, a fishing clinic for kids, field trips to local river sites, early-morning bird watching, canoeing on the Gila River, and much more. Due to this event, there will be no field trips this weekend, as several leaders are manning the Maricopa tent for the weekend. This is a great opportunity to learn about west valley birding locations, see lots of organizations, and educate kids. The Festival is at Estrella Mountain Park, 5 miles south of I-10 freeway off Estrella Parkway. It opens at 9AM, but will have early bird entry for birdwalks, etc. Follow signs from the freeway, and plan on spending most of a day here to enjoy the activities, the food, lectures, displays, entertainment, and vendors.

## Wednesday, March 15

### Native Flowers & Plants of the East Valley.

Join us for a walk in the desert to look for wildflowers and other native plants. We will touch on identification techniques and ecology. A small loupe would be helpful. Bring binoculars, as we will be watching for typical desert birds. Limit 15. Leader: Mel Bramley at 480-969-9893 in the evening for reservations or additional information.

## Saturday, March 18

**Flagstaff Lakes.** On this field trip we will visit the lakes around Flagstaff looking for waterfowl and Bald Eagles. We also hope to find Red Crossbills, Cassin's Finches and Pinyon Jays. We will meet at Denny's Restaurant at the intersection of I-40 and I-17 at 8 AM. Bring a lunch, water, snacks and a scope will be very helpful if you have one.

Leader: Charles Babbitt at 602-840-1772 or [cjbabbitt@cox.net](mailto:cjbabbitt@cox.net)

## Saturday, March 25

### Needle Rock, Box Bar, and Rio Verde Ranch.

We will visit an area north of Scottsdale's McDowell Mountain Park and work our way down to the Rio Verde Ranch. This is interesting country with varied habitats and normally provides a good variety of species. Bring spotting scope if available, lunch, water and carpool money. Meet at parking lot by the north pond at Scottsdale Pavilions on Indian Bend at 6:30 AM

Leader: Matthew Toomey at [matthew.toomey@asu.edu](mailto:matthew.toomey@asu.edu) or contact Marjorie Eckman at 480-368-1901 or [desertjewelB77@aol.com](mailto:desertjewelB77@aol.com)

## Saturday, April 1-3

**San Diego.** This weekend trip will afford us the opportunity to see various shorebirds, gulls, and other species at a host of sites in and around

San Diego. We will stay at a motel across from a nature preserve in Chula Vista, and visit a close-by estuary and local harbor. Later we will bird at Point Loma, Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery, the lighthouse at Cabrillo National Monument, and the surrounding hills. For those who haven't spent time on the coast, this trip will be of interest, as we will certainly see many new species that don't occur in Maricopa County. We will leave Phoenix Friday at 1 PM and depart San Diego about 2 PM. Those who wish to stay an extra day may carpool separately. Limit 8. Please bring a spotting scope if available.

Contact: Mike Rupp is temporarily using wife Nancy's email address at [nrupp88@yahoo.com](mailto:nrupp88@yahoo.com) or 602-388-4072 for information on costs, trip details, and specific departure info.

## Saturday, April 8

**Rio Salado Habitat Restoration Area.** A 580-acre river habitat consisting of streams, ponds and wetlands, mesquite groves, stands of cottonwood and willow trees, desert grasslands and shrubs were formally opened on November 5 revitalizing the Salt River corridor. Now is the time for our Maricopa Audubon members to get to know this area. Karen Stucke has kindly agreed to lead this trip and may make it an annual trip every year in the Spring to help us get acquainted with what promises to be an interesting birding area. Perhaps next year, we can add a Wednesday trip in the fall months. Please bring lunch, water, carpool money and let's meet at Mike Rupp's parking lot at 740 E. Highland in Phoenix at 6:30 AM or meet us at 7AM at the Rio Salado visitor's center at 2439 S. Central Ave. in Phoenix (NE Corner of Central & Salt River Bridge).

For more information and a map, visit the Rio Salado Restoration web site at

[www.phoenix.gov/riosalado](http://www.phoenix.gov/riosalado).

Leader: Karen Stucke at [kstucke@earthlink.net](mailto:kstucke@earthlink.net) or 480-600-1574 for reservations.

## Saturday, April 15

### Page Springs Fish Hatchery & Sedona State Park.

Tice Supplee will lead us on this trip to the Fish Hatchery near Camp Verde, as well as other nearby locations, and Red Rock State Park. Possible sightings of Common Black Hawk, Western & Cassin's Kingbird, Bell's Vireo, Lucy's Warbler, Summer Tanager, and spring warblers. Spotting scopes are helpful. Wear sturdy boots. Bring lunch, water, snacks and carpool money. Limit 15. We will meet at 6 AM at Denny's parking lot at 3205 W Bell Road (west of I-10, south side of Bell Road). Expect to return late afternoon.

Leader: Tice Supplee, Director of Bird Conservation for Audubon Arizona and formerly of Arizona Game & Fish.

Contact: Claudia Kirscher at [antclaudia@aol.com](mailto:antclaudia@aol.com) or 623-934-5460

## Saturday, April 22

**Arlington & Gila River Area.** Possibly we will see Sandhill Cranes as we travel around the Arlington area beyond Buckeye searching for ducks, raptors, sparrows and other farm field species. We should see a good variety of birds as we look at sites along the Gila River, agricultural fields, ponds and desert areas. We expect to return about 3 PM. Bring lunch, water, snacks, carpool money and a scope if available. Meet at Mike Rupp's parking lot at 740 E.



# Maricopa Audubon Society Field Trips

Highland at 6:30 AM for carpooling. We will meet the leader at Safeway/Starbucks parking lot on the northeast corner off the Litchfield Park Road Exit on I-10 at 7 AM..

Contact: Cathy Wise-Gervais at [bird\\_breath@yahoo.com](mailto:bird_breath@yahoo.com) or 602-765-4599 for reservations

## Wednesday, May 3

**Pinal Mountain.** Pinal Peak is the highpoint of the Pinal Mountains. It is located about nine miles south of Globe. A good road goes very near the radio-tower adorned summit. We will hope to find on-territory and northward bound migratory birds. Read Rick Hoyer's "Birding the Pinal Mountains" at [www.azfo.org/articles](http://www.azfo.org/articles). I will decide on our departure time (early) and place (some place on #60 east) later. No limit. Call or email a week or so in advance.

Leader: Russ Widner at [rwidner@earthlink.net](mailto:rwidner@earthlink.net) or 480-595-2977 for reservations, time and place

## Wednesday, May 10

**Peralta Trail in the Superstitions.** Maricopa Audubon Society and the Desert Botanical Garden have teamed up for this birding and nature hike along Peralta Trail in the Superstition Mountains. We've combined an expert birder, Justin Jones from MAS with our own Garden staff and volunteers to provide fun interpretation of the plants, animals, ethnobotany, and geology that make this area so spectacular. We'll see a variety of wildlife species while on our walk; some common and others not so common. We will be stopping frequently for interpretation, including hands-on demonstrations - even tasting some things made from our native plants. The trail is moderately difficult, with very uneven footing over rocks and considerable elevation gain on the way up the trail. The hike is worth the effort, with spectacular landscape views and photogenic scenery. Please bring a lunch; bottled water and trail mix are provided. No transportation provided. You will receive more specific information prior to the trip. Space is limited.

Call 480-941-1225 to register.

## Friday, May 12

### Birds & Breakfast at the Rio Salado

**Audubon Center site.** This event is part of the celebration of International Migratory Bird Day along with the trip to BTA on the following day, Saturday, the 13th (see below). Participants will gather at the Nina Mason Pulliam Rio Salado Audubon Center site on the southeast corner of Central Avenue and the Salt River Bridge at 6am by the Ramada. Birders will be divided up in groups with leaders to view the wonderful wildlife found in the park. Please bring your binoculars. At 7:30, there will be a continental breakfast and a presentation by Phil Weddle, architect of the future Audubon Center. There is a donation of \$15 for breakfast.

Please RSVP to either Janice Miano at [egret@cox.net](mailto:egret@cox.net) or (480) 946-1327, or to Donna Sauer at [dsauer@audubon.org](mailto:dsauer@audubon.org) or (602) 468-6470.

## Saturday, May 13

**International Migratory Bird Day.** This is an annual event shared across the US and internationally that focuses attention on one of the most important and spectacular events in the life of a migratory bird - its journey between

summer and winter homes. IMBD was created to stimulate birders to take action to help conserve birds and their habitats. This provides an impetus for various organizations to present programs on birds. This year Boyce Thompson Arboretum in Superior will be having a guided bird walk and a class in avian photography with photographer EJ Peiker. This accomplished photographer will explain equipment, natural lighting, and appropriate ethics of nature photography, and will show slides of his remarkable close-up photography. Throughout the morning visitors may see a few species of birds up-close-and-personal right near our visitor center, where the Adobe Mountain Wildlife Rehabilitation Center will have a display. World Migratory Bird Day events at the Arboretum will run from 7 AM to 11 AM. Summertime business hours at the Arboretum are 6 AM to 3 AM daily; participation in events on May 13 is included with adult admission of \$7.50. BTA is appointing the leader and therefore there will be no carpool area - please join your friends and visit this lovely garden.

## Saturday, May 20

**Madera Canyon.** We will be birding the Madera Canyon area, feeders at Santa Rita Lodge, and the surrounding Santa Rita Experimental Range. The terrain will consist of grassland, cactus desert, and live oak and higher altitude conifer forests. The trails can be moderately steep and quite rocky. Possible birds to be encountered/expected include several species of resident and migratory warblers and flycatchers, raptors including Northern Goshawk and Zone-tailed Hawk, Northern Pygmy-owl, Elegant Trogon, Rufous-winged Sparrows, Yellow-eyed Juncos, Western Hepatic, and Summer Tanagers, and a variety of other local resident species. Expect this to be a long day trip. We will leave promptly at 4 a.m. at the Phoenix carpool site (to be decided) for the 2-1/2 hour trip there. Those who wish to stay overnight closer to the destination should arrange their own accommodations. We will decide on a meeting time and place in Green Valley. Spotting scopes are helpful. Wear sturdy boots. Please bring carpool money, lunch, lots of water, and snacks. Level of difficulty 3. Limit 12 participants. Leader: Pierre Deviche, PhD professor, School of Life Sciences at ASU. Contact: Claudia Kirscher, 623-934-5460 or [antclaudia@aol.com](mailto:antclaudia@aol.com) for reservations and additional information.

## Saturday, May 27

### The lower San Pedro River, Dudleyville area.

This trip will focus on the nesting and migrating bird species along the lower San Pedro River near Dudleyville. We will bird the Dudleyville and Aravaipa crossing areas and will hopefully get permission to bird The Nature Conservancy's San Pedro River Preserve. We will hope for the early return of species such as the Mississippi Kite, Tropical and Thick-billed Kingbirds, Gray Hawks, and Willow Flycatchers. This will be an all-day trip, leaving early and returning by 5 pm. Bring lunch, water, and carpool money. Meet at the REI in Tempe (on the SW corner of Priest / Southern for a prompt 5 AM departure. Limit 15.

Leader: Tracy McCarthy at [tmccarthey@Acstempe.com](mailto:tmccarthey@Acstempe.com) or 602-451-4179 for more information and to register.

## Saturday, June 3

**Mt. Ord.** Mt. Ord is a cool, beautiful area of juniper and ponderosa pine and a great place to be when temperatures in the city are starting to climb. Mt. Ord is the highest elevation bird habitat we have and one which gives us many possibilities for summering warblers, vireos, and flycatchers. En route we will stop in Sunflower and bird along Sycamore Creek watching for common black hawk and zone-tailed hawk. At Mt. Ord, our target birds will be gray vireo, black-chinned sparrow, painted redstart, red-faced warbler (rare here), olive warbler, and oak titmouse. Please bring a scope if available, carpool money, lunch, snacks, and lots of water. The dirt road up the mountain may be rutted and have a few stones, but high clearance, while not necessary, is nice to have. We will meet at 6:00 AM at the gas station on the southwest corner of Route 87 (road to Payson) and the Verde River, just before the bridge over the Verde. We will be returning in the late afternoon. Level of difficulty: 2. Limit 12 participants. Leader: Pierre Deviche, PhD professor, School of Life Sciences at ASU.

Contact: Claudia Kirscher at [antclaudia@aol.com](mailto:antclaudia@aol.com) or 623-934-5460 for reservations and additional information

## Gilbert Water Ranch Beginning Birdwalks

Maricopa Audubon Society, the oldest and largest Audubon chapter in the valley, has teamed with The Riparian Institute of Gilbert, to bring regular monthly "birdwalks" to individuals and families in the southeast valley.

Located at the southeast corner of Greenfield and Guadalupe Roads, the beautiful 110 acre Gilbert Water Ranch will play host to guided birdwalks on the third Saturday of the month, from October 2005 through March 2006, with April 8 being the Feathered Friends Festival. Running from 8AM to 12:00, the birdwalks will be guided by experienced leaders, with "loaner" binoculars and field guide books available free of charge. Each walk will travel around several of the ponds and a variety of habitats that will provide participants with good views of some of the 125 species that have been recorded at the water recharge facility.

The walks are open to all ages, individuals, and families, and are especially suited to let children experience, perhaps for the first time, the little known bird species that live right in our own neighborhoods- from beautiful Red-Tailed Hawks, and ground-dwelling Burrowing Owls that stand guard at their burrow entrances, to a good variety of ducks, sparrows, and sandpipers. Children are invited to play "Bird Bingo."

These birdwalks are a perfect way to introduce children and adults alike to local birdlife, and provide an educational family activity that will be long-remembered. Maricopa Audubon invites you and your little "naturalists" out for a fun morning of discovery and exploration.

Details about birdwalk dates, times, and changing exhibits can be seen at: [www.maricopaaudubon.org](http://www.maricopaaudubon.org), and [www.riparianinstitute.org](http://www.riparianinstitute.org)

# AZ's Special Species—Peach-faced Lovebird

Jim Burns

**W**hat? You've never heard of Peach-faced Lovebird? Or you instantly recognized that it must be an introduced exotic and you wouldn't walk across the street to see one? What if there were no traffic on the street? What if it were a tiny, bright, multi-hued social parrot with soft pastel colors and a fascinating life history? Do you have European Starling or House Sparrow on any of your lists?

No matter how you answered these questions, no matter that Peach-faced Lovebird is an SKP (escapee) not ABA countable—yet, I think if you love birds you will want to seek out and enjoy *Agapornis roseicollis*.

One of the most interesting questions about the Peach-faced Lovebird in Phoenix is why here? The answer apparently lies in the origins of this particular lovebird species. What Phoenix shares with other exotic strongholds like south Texas and south Florida, which don't have Peach-faceds, is mild year-round temperatures and a plethora of non-native vegetation. What it has that they lack is a dry climate.

Peach-faced Lovebirds are native to the deserts of southwest Africa where the preferred habitat is savanna, a term used to describe ecological transition zones of poor soil and scattered trees which lie between forest and grassland. Though they have evolved for life in the desert, as Troy Corman points out in the *Arizona Breeding Bird Atlas*, "these lovebirds are highly dependent on water sources." Because of its canal systems, Phoenix is an "ecomoron," a desert with an abundance of water.

Peach-faceds were first reported in the Phoenix area in 1987, yet

none were reported on the Arizona Breeding Bird Atlas survey blocks which were completed between 1993 and 1996. The calls of this diminutive parrot, which Troy so aptly characterizes as "shrill, metallic shrieks," are now being heard from such far-flung locations in the east Valley as Cave Creek in the north to Chandler in the south, suggesting that a "mini-explosion" may be taking place in the population.



Photo by Jim Burns

In their native land these lovebirds often nest colonially, commonly using niches in cliff faces or abandoned Social Weaver nests. In captivity females have been observed transporting nesting materials such as leaves, twigs, and grasses by securing them beneath their rump feathers. In Arizona, in addition to saguaro excavations, nests have been found in fan palms and under roof tiles, and palm fronds are a favored nesting material.

Nesting in Phoenix is observed in April and May, though there have been fledgling sightings in mid-winter which suggests that this species, like other introduced exotics elsewhere, may be taking advantage of the easy living conditions and reproducing throughout the calendar year.

Lovebirds have been found mostly in older Phoenix neighborhoods, presumably because of the presence there of taller shade trees and

mature palms. They have been observed feeding on cactus and palm fruit, and I have personally observed them at the Gilbert Riparian Area (GRA) stripping the seed heads from tall grasses and, like the one in the accompanying photo taken at GRA, chewing on mesquite pods to extract the beans.

No treatise of any introduced exotic can be complete without introducing the term "invader" into the discussion. We are all aware of the problems European Starlings have brought with them to our desert, outcompeting our native woodpeckers for saguaro cavities, then damaging the health of the saguaros themselves with their droppings. It is too early in this lovebird "invasion" for any environmental issues to have surfaced, but it is certainly possible that some will. In Africa where loosely associated colonies numbering in the hundreds sometimes gather at rich food sources, damage to grain crops has been well documented. In raw ecological terms, Peach-faced Lovebird in Phoenix is an invader species currently pioneering virgin territory—attractive and captivating, but scary nonetheless.

Because of its SKP status, Peach-faced Lovebird doesn't get much play on the bird alerts. In addition to the GRA southeast of Guadalupe and Greenfield Roads in Gilbert, lovebirds are also being reliably seen in the neighborhood of Doubletree and Tatum in Paradise Valley, around 104th and Fenimore in Apache Junction, and along the banks of the canal running westward from where it crosses 40th St. just north of Camelback Rd. in Phoenix.

You really should try to see this beautiful little invader before the drama plays out and it becomes either last century's Crested Mynah and disappears, or this century's Eurasian Collared-Dove, living as a pejorative epithet on the lips of ecologists throughout the southwest.



# Photo Quiz Answers

Jim Burns

**W**e might guess these three birds are *all* in the same *family* and *all* in the same *genus* because of several structural similarities. What follows the next “all” in the clue? The goal in this issue’s quiz should be to successfully complete the first sentence of the clue. Judging by the rocks and grasses, these are small birds with the same compact, rather plump body shape and the same short, conical, uniformly colored bill.

That bill shape tells us these are all seed eaters, but there are obvious differences in their plumage. The first appears tri-colored, black head and bib contrasting with lighter back, wings, and flanks over a white belly. The second is very pale overall except for the black lores (the area between the eye and the base of the bill), and the photo gives a hint of white on the belly and the vent (the area underneath and to the north of the tail base). The third is very dark overall, nearly but not quite black, and appears to have a white belly and vent like the second.

There are two common plumage features that link our three quiz birds together. None shows a wingbar and all show white outer tail feathers. The latter characteristic is the one which should key your recognition when any of these birds flush up from trail to tree as you walk the foothills around Phoenix this winter. The white tail flash says “junco,” and the plumage differences don’t matter any more. They all have a dark eye, so they’re all Dark-eyed Juncos—*all the same species*. But, even here in sepia, these three birds might pass for different species.

Although I’ve heard no rumors that the Dark-eyed Juncos may be split out again as they once were, knowing the species “includes at least six recognizable populations,” as David Sibley says, provides a nice identification stew to warm up your observational skills in a season when breeders and migrants are absent. Remember, all six “forms” of Dark-eyed Junco might show up in or near Phoenix in winter. These three forms were all photographed the same day, January 21, 2001 in the Evergreen Cemetery in Tucson while I was there

looking for a fourth, the White-winged, which differs from our third quiz bird only by its slightly paler plumage and, yes, its white wingbars.

Let’s begin our Dark-eyed Junco discussion by naming the six forms and eliminating three of them from quiz consideration. The six are Oregon, Pink-sided, White-winged, Slate-colored, Gray-headed, and Red-backed. The latter two, Gray-headed and Red-backed, would look just like our second bird except both have a sharply delineated triangle of rufous on the mantle (the area of the upper back below the nape), dark enough to show up even in a non-color photograph. Additionally the Red-backed form has a bi-colored bill featuring a dark upper mandible and sometimes, but not always, shows rufous in the wings.

And we know we can eliminate White-winged because there are no white wingbars in these photographs. Keep in mind, however, that some Slate-coloreds will have white wingbars. So, now you’re beginning to see how these various junco forms overlap, why they are not considered separate species, and why they present an identification challenge. For this quiz we’re left with the Oregon, Pink-sided, and Slate-colored forms.

## A)—Good photo, difficult bird

For most left coasters (Washington, Oregon, and California) our first junco will be the most recognizable of the forms, their breeding season junco—black or dark sooty hood, chestnut back, pink sides, and extensive white belly. First described from a specimen taken in 1837 near Fort Vancouver, Washington, this is an “Oregon” Junco, the form with the least amount of white in its tail.

**Noteworthy features:** uniformly light bill, pink in real life color; *convex* lower border on its black hood.

**Identification issues:** females are generally duller/paler and may be indistinguishable from darkest plumaged “Pink-sided” Juncos; Oregons hybridize with Slate-coloreds in the Canadian Rockies and with Gray-headed in southern Nevada and southeastern California, and intergrades may not be identifiable to subspecies.

## B)—Good photo, difficult bird

In living color there would be no problem distinguishing this bird from the one in the third photo, but even without color we can see it is a much paler shade of gray and its dark lores stand out on its gray face in comparison with those of the third bird. Though in this photo we can barely discern the contrast between this bird’s mantle and its flanks, we probably have enough visual information to guess this is a “Pink-sided” Junco. Pink-sideds are the palest of the six forms. They breed in the northern Rockies.

**Noteworthy features:** uniformly pink bill; *convex* lower border on pale gray hood (so pale in some birds such as this one that contrast between throat and belly is hard to see).

**Identification issues:** darkest individuals difficult to separate from palest female Oregons; Pink-sideds hybridize with Gray-headed in southern Idaho, southern Wyoming, and northern Utah., and intergrades may not be identifiable to subspecies.

## C)—Good photo, difficult bird

Were it not for the black cowl on the “Oregon” Junco in our first photo, the plumage on our third bird appears so dark that it might pass for black. Indeed, this form of the Dark-eyed Junco has the darkest upperparts of the six, shows little or no contrast between the head and body, and does look black if seen in deep shadow. This is the most recognizable of our juncos for easterners, the “Slate-colored” Junco.

**Noteworthy features:** uniformly pink bill; *concave* lower border on dark gray hood; black lores do not stand out in contrast to the hood which is darkest on the head.

**Identification issues:** females are paler and some with brown suffusion on hood and flanks are not separable from female Oregons; Slate-coloreds hybridize with Oregons in Canadian Rockies as noted above; some individual Slate-coloreds have white wingbars as prominent as White-winged form.

Get some practice, and next winter we’ll work on the other three Dark-eyed Juncos.



# Field Observations

Janet Witzeman

## AUGUST through NOVEMBER 2005

Individual Common Loons (uncommon visitors) were reported at Fountain Hills Lake Oct. 31 and at Lake Pleasant Nov. 27 (K&CR). Four adults and a juvenile Western Grebe were observed at Painted Rock Dam (PRD) Aug. 18 (PD); the species has bred there only on an irregular basis. Between 25 and 250 Am. White Pelicans were counted at PRD during August and September (BG,PD); numbers tapered off there in October. Thirty-five Am. White Pelicans were seen flying east over central Phoenix Nov. 5 (TGs). Numbers of Brown Pelicans increased at PRD from one to 15 during August (PD). One was reported on Tempe Town Lake from late October at least until Nov. 24 (TH,MP,TGs,KR). A Neotropic Cormorant (first seen in July) reappeared at Fountain Hills Lake Oct. 31 (KR). Several Neotropic Cormorants were observed on Tempe Town Lake Nov. 24 (TGs) and 50 were counted at the Hayfield site at Tres Rios Nov. 27 (TC,JJ).

Individual **Am. Bitterns**, rare winter visitors, were reported in the marshes at the east end of Tempe Town Lake Nov. 24 (TGs), and again, as last year, at the Gilbert Water Ranch (GWR) Nov. 28 (MM,BP,JT). A Least Bittern, seen at the Granite Reef Picnic Area Sept. 18, was the first in 15 years of birding there (PM). A Least Bittern, found at the GWR Nov. 13, at least through December (MW, m.ob.), may have been new to that area as well. Another individual was seen along the Verde River Nov. 8 (KR). The species has been wintering in the Phoenix area since about 1998.

A **Little Blue Heron**, a casual spring and summer visitor, was discovered at PRD Sept. 3 (BG) providing the first September record for the county. Black-crowned Night- Herons were still feeding young at PRD Aug. 23 (DPe). An immature **Yellow-crowned Night-Heron** was discovered below PRD Aug. 13 and remained at least until Sept. 5 (BG et al.); this represented the first record for Maricopa County and only the fifth for the state. The **White Ibis** was observed again Nov. 12 at

the ponds in Palo Verde for the third fall and remained through the period (BG,TC). The White-faced Ibis adults, that nested at PRD during the summer, were still feeding young there Aug. 23 (DPe). A large number of 150 White-faced Ibis were counted at the Hayfield site at Tres Rios Nov. 27 (TC,JJ).

A juvenile **Fulvous Whistling-Duck**, a casual visitor, was discovered at McCormick Ranch Pond Nov. 11 (ME,GW,DF). A pair of Greater White-fronted Geese were observed at the GWR Oct. 16 (PM) and one was still present there Nov. 21 (GB). Another individual was reported at Rio Salado, w. of Seventh Ave. in Phoenix Nov. 27 (TGs). A Ross's Goose was seen at the Lower River Rd. pond in Palo Verde Nov. 27 (TC,JJ). A Eurasian Wigeon returned Oct. 26 for the third consecutive winter to Paradise Memorial Gardens in Scottsdale (JP). A pair of "Mexican" type Mallards were observed at the GWR Nov. 30 (MM); there have been only about four previous county records.

A male Blue-winged Teal was observed at the GWR Nov. 24 (PM,RD) and 25 were counted at Tres Rios Hayfield site Nov. 27 (TC,JJ); the species is usually rare in late fall and winter. A male Hooded Merganser returned to Papago Park Oct. 20, about ten days earlier than in previous years (JBu). An early female was seen at Boyce Thompson Arboretum (BTA) Oct. 23 (PM). In November Hooded Mergansers were also recorded on Fountain Hills Lake (up to three, KR), at the Pavilions (a pair, PD), and at Ahwatukee (two, PB). Two Red-breasted Mergansers were seen at PRD Nov. 16 (PL) and a male was observed on Fountain Hills Lake Nov. 17 (KR).

During the first week in October, a Cooper's Hawk returned to a yard in n.e. Phoenix for the 26<sup>th</sup> year (BD). Individual Zone-tailed Hawks were seen on the late dates of Nov. 8 and Nov. 21 at the GWR (MM,RH) and two were seen flying over Papago Park on the late date of Nov. 12 (TGs). Seventy-five Sandhill Cranes, irregular winter visitors to the county, were counted in a field e. of the confluence of the Hassayampa and Gila Rivers Nov. 12 (BG); one was

observed at PRD Nov. 16 (PL).

Fifty-six Greater Yellowlegs, counted in a flooded field east of Buckeye Nov. 27, was a large number for that late date (TC,JJ). A late-staying Lesser Yellowlegs was observed at the GWR Nov. 19 (TC,KR). A large group of 50 Long-billed Curlews were counted at the Palo Verde Lower River Rd. ponds Nov. 13 (TC). Two Marbled Godwits were seen on Lake Pleasant on the late date of Nov. 26 (K&CR); there were no previous county records after mid-November.

A Red Knot was discovered at the Dateland Shrimp Ponds Sept. 14 (HD) and remained until at least Sept. 24 (PD). A late-staying Western Sandpiper was observed at the GWR Nov. 19 (TC). A Short-billed Dowitcher was observed below PRD Aug. 31 & Sept. 3 (DS,CBe,BG).

A juvenile jaeger, thought to be a Parasitic Jaeger, was observed at Roosevelt Lake Aug. 20 (KR). Two immature California Gulls, uncommon transients, were seen below PRD Aug. 13, Sept. 3, and Nov. 16 (RP,BG,PL); one seen on Fountain Hills Lake Oct. 1 – 16 was the first for that locale (KR). Between one and three Sabine's Gulls were found at the Dateland Shrimp Ponds Sept. 17 – 24 (PD,RWd,BD,AV). An immature Black Skimmer was discovered at Gillespie Dam Sept. 16 and remained at least until Sept. 20 (DePa et al.); the bird was banded and information from the band indicated that it came from the south end of the Salton Sea and was banded Aug. 19. There have been only two previous county records.

An adult female Ruddy Ground-Dove was observed at Morgan City Wash Oct. 1 (TC,JJ). Unprecedented numbers of Ruddy Ground-Doves were counted at El Mirage Pond during the period: at least 13 on Oct. 10 (TC), at least 10 on Oct. 17 (MW), at least 21 on Nov. 27 – the largest concentration ever in Arizona and probably the U.S. ((BG), and 15 on Nov. 29 (BP,JT). In addition, one was seen on a line in the breeding area off of Southern Ave. between 99<sup>th</sup> and 107<sup>th</sup> Ave. on Oct. 10 (TC). A **Groove-billed Ani**, a casual visitor to the county, was discovered at the

GWR Nov. 7 and remained at least until Dec. 11 (OH et al.). A male **Broad-billed Hummingbird**, a rare visitor to the county, was found at the GWR Nov. 12 (MA). Another male **Broad-billed Hummingbird** was noted in a north Phoenix yard in early November and was still present there at the end of the period (TJ,Phe). A male Rufous Hummingbird was still present at the end of the period in a yard in n.w. Phoenix, where one also remained for the entire winter a year ago (KiRo).

A Gray Flycatcher, unusual in urban areas, was observed in a Tempe yard Sept. 1 (HF). A Dusky Flycatcher was heard calling at BTA Nov. 19 (TC,KR). A Tropical Kingbird was found at the Dateland Shrimp Ponds Sept. 22 (RWd,BD,AV). A Thick-billed Kingbird returned to Yuma Nov. 26 for the fourth winter (HD). A Bell's Vireo was observed at the GWR on the late date of Nov. 21 and remained at least through the end of the period (RH). A Cassin's Vireo was found at Morgan City Wash, s. of Lake Pleasant Nov. 10 (TC); the species is uncommon after mid-October. A Warbling Vireo, also not usually found after mid-October, was observed at BTA on the late date of Nov. 19 (TC,KR).

A birder, visiting from Kansas, sent a description of a Blue Jay he had seen in a yard in Glendale, n. of 63rd Ave. and Happy Valley Rd., Oct. 30 (ML, fide TC); there have been only six state records and none in Maricopa County. Individual Winter Wrens were observed in the Pinal Mts. Oct. 3 (JBU), at BTA Nov. 13 (MV), and at Lower Camp Creek Nov. 25 (TC); at least four were found Nov. 13 in Oak Creek Canyon (TC), where they are not as uncommon as in the Phoenix area. A Golden-crowned Kinglet was seen in Morgan City Wash Nov. 10 (TC).

A Rufous-backed Robin, in an odd juvenile plumage, was discovered in Morgan City Wash Oct. 1 (TC,JJ); another individual was observed in a Scottsdale yard Oct. 4 – 9 (JBa). These represent the first October records for Maricopa County. A Brown Thrasher was seen back at BTA for the sixth consecutive fall/winter and remained through the period (MW et al.).

At least eight Lucy's Warblers were

counted near Morgan City Wash and the confluence with the Agua Fria River Aug. 28 – a large number for so late in the season (TC). One was still there Sept. 4 and two were there on the late date of Oct. 1 (TC,JJ). There have been only three previous October records for the county. A N. Parula was discovered at BTA Oct. 23 (PM). A female Yellow Warbler was found at Tres Rios on the late date of Nov. 29 (BP,JT). Individual Chestnut-sided Warblers were observed in the Pinal Mts Sept. 4 (DPe), and at Morgan City Wash Oct. 1 – 8 (TC,JJ,KR); a second individual was seen there Oct. 2 (K&CR,TMc,TC).

A Prairie Warbler was discovered at the GWR Nov. 17 (MM et al.) and remained through the period, providing only the second record for Maricopa County and about the tenth for the state. Individual Black-and-white Warblers were observed at the Hayfield site at Tres Rios Oct. 10 and 23 (CBa,MW) and along the Verde River, n. of Rio Verde Ranch Oct. 10 (MV). Individual Am. Redstarts were found at Page Springs Aug. 6 (KA,HF et al.) and at Butcher Jones Park on Saguaro Lake Nov. 27 (KR). Individual Prothonotary Warblers were discovered at Page Springs Aug. 6 (HF,KA et al.) and at BTA Aug. 7 – 14 (JH).

An injured Worm-eating Warbler was found in a Chandler yard Sept. 16 (P&GH), providing the seventh record for Maricopa County and the first in September. An Ovenbird was found at the Desert Botanical Garden (DBG) Nov. 27 and remained through the period (TGz et al.). A Hooded Warbler was observed at Morgan City Wash Oct. 1 & 2 (TC,JJ,KR). A Canada Warbler, discovered at the DBG Sept. 23 – 26 (CBa,DH et al.), represented only the fourth record for Maricopa County and the tenth for the state. A Painted Redstart, rare in late fall and winter in the county, was observed at Lower Camp Creek Nov. 11 & 25 (RWd,TC).

Individual "Slate-colored" type Fox Sparrows were observed at BTA Nov. 19 (TC,KR), at Oak Flat Campground Nov. 27 (RWz), and at the DBG Nov. 29 (PD). A Swamp Sparrow was found at the GWR Nov. 21 (RH). Between one and three White-throated Sparrows

were reported at BTA Nov. 19 – 27 (TC,KR,ES,RWz). A Golden-crowned Sparrow was photographed in a yard in Hidden Valley, s.w. of Maricopa Nov. 1 (NL). A "Slate-colored" form of Dark-eyed Junco was observed at Oak Flat Campground Nov. 27 (RWz). Two Pyrrhuloxias were found in an unusual area, along the road to Horseshoe Dam Nov. 2 (RWd,LH,BD); another individual was seen Nov. 15 at the GWR, where it is also uncommon (PD). Individual Rose-breasted Grosbeaks were reported in a yard in Hidden Valley Oct. 10 (NL) and at Paloma Oct. 29 (CBa,SS).

A female Orchard Oriole returned to a yard in Ahwatukee Nov. 15 for the sixth winter, and remained until Nov. 22 (S&GB). A Hooded Oriole was seen in the same yard on the late date of Nov. 10 (S&GB). A Streak-backed Oriole was discovered at the GWR Nov. 11 and remained through the period at least into December (TC et al.); there was only one previous record for Maricopa County.

Abbreviations: Boyce Thompson Arboretum (BTA), Desert Botanical Garden (DBG), Gilbert Water Ranch (GWR), Painted Rock Dam (PRD).

Observers: Moez Ali, Kathe Anderson, Charles Babbitt, Sally & Gordon Barnes, Jack Bartley, Pat Beall, Chris Benesh, Gavin Bieber, Charlie Brenner, Jim Burns, Troy Corman, Bix Demaree, Henry Detwiler, Pierre Deviche, Rich Ditch, Marjorie Eckman, Herb Fibel, Dick Fogle, Tom Gaskill, Tom Gatz, Bill Grossi, Paul & Gloria Halesworth, Olga Harbour, Liz Hatcher, Diana Herron, Paul Hershberger, Tom Hildebrandt, Jack Holloway, Rich Hoyer, Justin Jones, Tom Jones, Mark Land, Nancy Lange, Paul Lehman, Tracy McCarthey, Michael Moore, Pete Moulton, Richard Palmer, Dennis Paulson, Jerry Pavlov, Dave Pearson, Brandon Percival, Michael Plagens, Cindy Radamaker, Kurt Radamaker, Killian Roeveer, Sig Stangeland, Dave Stejskal, Ed Strong, Jolan Truan, Anita Van Auken, Marceline Vandewater, George Wall, Magill Weber, Russ Widner, Robert Witzeman.

# New Hotspot Reaches Boiling Point

When the Gilbert Riparian Area (GRA) opened in 1999, water birds and waterfowl were immediately attracted to its 110 acres and 8 ponds, and many Phoenix birders figured it was just a matter of time until the vegetation matured and a variety of land birds would find the area too, making it the best (some might say “only”) place to go birding in the Phoenix metro area. The Tropical Kingbird which showed up in the fall of ‘03 was the harbinger of times to come. Those times have come this past fall.

If you’re interested in birds and you’ve not been living under a rock, you know GRA hosted three Maricopa County and Arizona state rarities beginning at least in early October, giving new meaning and local life to the old birding phenomenon called the “Patagonia picnic table effect.” Someone finds an unexpected bird which attracts many other birders to see it, and this influx of observers then finds a second vagrant or rarity which, in turn, brings out even more interested people who then turn up yet another excellent bird.

When Olga Harbour saw and reported a Groove-billed Ani at GRA on November 7, little did she know the chain of events that would soon follow. Anis are strange looking birds, black, slightly smaller than our grackles, and related to roadrunners and cuckoos. They are often described as having been made out of spare parts, readily identifiable by their long, floppy tails, droopy wings, shaggy head and chest, and bulbous gray bill.

The Groove-billed Ani is a common bird from Mexico south to northern Argentina and Chile. Although it breeds in south Texas, it can be hard to find there in winter. Anis are found almost annually somewhere in our

state, usually in southern Arizona, typically in the fall. Because there are less than a dozen records of this species here in Maricopa County, Olga’s discovery scrambled many county and state listers to GRA where it was observed almost daily through mid-December, most often within an hour after sunup, usually on or near an overgrown island at the west end of Pond #2.

The influx of birders looking for Olga’s ani included, on November 11, Troy Cormon, co-editor of the Arizona Breeding Bird Atlas and arguably the best field birder in the state, who immediately contributed to the new “GRA ponds effect” by finding and identifying a female/first year male Streak-backed Oriole. Troy’s serendipitous relationship with this species goes all the way back to the summer of 1993 when he discovered the first nest of this Mexican vagrant ever recorded in the U.S.

Though Streak-backed now nest periodically along the San Pedro River in southern Arizona, they are still quite difficult to find north of the border, and there had been only one prior record for Maricopa County. So, this was a much “better” (read rarer) bird than the Groove-billed Ani, and it proved more elusive and

less consistent to any daily routine than the ani, and it was quite “un-oriole” like in its feeding patterns and movements.

On several occasions the oriole was heard making its typical oriole-like chatter before it was actually observed. This was primarily because it often fed low in the bushes or on the ground itself rather than mid to upper story in the trees where most birders are used to seeing spring and summer orioles gleaning insects from the foliage. I personally observed this bird breaking open the stems of dried tumbleweed and extracting worms

from dried mesquite bean pods. Dale Clark and I once watched for half an hour as it fed on the ground under saltbush like nothing so much as a towhee or a sparrow, totally obscured from all sight unless we were in one precise spot which allowed us a viewing angle through dense underbrush.

No doubt countless searchers walked right by this bird countless times while it fed in this manner along the paths of GRA.

And then, on November 17, Mike Moore, looking for the ani and the oriole, jumped a Prairie Warbler near one of the islands in Pond #2. Though not a Mexican vagrant like the ani and the oriole, the Prairie



Prairie Warbler  
Photo by Jim Burns



# New Hotspot Reaches Boiling Point

Warbler was rarer still, the first Maricopa County record for this eastern warbler and only the tenth documented state record. Again, serendipitously, this warbler had been the subject of Mike's undergraduate thesis, so there was no question about the validity of his sighting but just another scrambling of birders to GRA to look for this latest out-of-context bird. This bright, easily recognizable warbler was seen off and on through the first week of December and again, briefly, in January, usually first thing in the morning at the south end of the west island in Pond #2.

Birders flocking to GRA in November and December ran the spectrum from raw beginners to seasoned listers, the former gaining from the latter their first taste of the fun, excitement, and camaraderie shared when multiple birders seek unusual birds or birds in unusual places. In my several attempts to see and photograph the three rarities, I personally interacted with birders from as nearby as across Greenfield Road and as far away as British Columbia, San Diego, Colorado, and South Carolina. The former had never seen an eagle nor a dove, but they had heard the buzz about GRA, saw the ani, and were now hooked. The latter were amazed at the size and healthy habitat of GRA. The "GRA ponds effect" was enhanced by the discovery of an

escaped European finch called a Cordon Bleu, a Zone-tailed Hawk and several Black Vultures seen soaring with the Turkey Vultures from time

to time, adult and immature Harris's Hawks, and the small flock of Peach-faced Lovebirds now an exquisite staple of the GRA birding menu. Additionally, a Least Bittern near the main parking lot and an American Bittern which took up residence on the "ani island" south of the central restrooms provided consolation prize life looks for

many birders who missed the three featured birds.

"Mexican" Mallards; a hummingbird thought to be a Costa's x Anna's hybrid; American Coots eating fish; Black-necked Stilts and Great-tailed Grackles pulling the intestines from dead beached fish; a Greater Yellowlegs swimming across a pond; six Great Blue Herons together on one Osprey platform; and, of course, tame Burrowing Owls—all these out of the ordinary scenarios awaited fall visitors to GRA where the birding truism, "every day is different," is literally true because of the fluctuating water levels in the ponds.

The recent influx of rare birds at GRA echoes the thoughts in Deva's "From The Editor" column in the spring, 2005 Cactus Wrendition—



**Groove-billed Ani**  
Photo by Jim Burns

"Imagine . . . how important Tres Rios and the Gilbert Riparian Area here in our own metro area may become as unprotected habitat south of the border becomes unviable for birds." Was this influx attributable to loss of habitat in Mexico, to global warming, or to just some happy coincidence? The answer, and the influx of rare birds, is not as important as the influx of new birders and the fact that GRA has grown up to become Phoenix's featured venue in efforts to attract and lead new birders down the path from environmental awareness to general conservation and habitat preservation.

The Gilbert Riparian Area is located behind the library at the southeast corner of Guadalupe and Greenfield Roads in Gilbert. It is # 87 in Mike Rupp's book, Guide To 101 Birding Sites: Phoenix, and information and a map to the area can be downloaded at the Gilbert Riparian Institute's website, [www.riparianinstitute.org](http://www.riparianinstitute.org).

Thanks Olga. And thanks Gilbert Riparian Institute.



**Streak-backed Oriole**  
Photo by Jim Burns

### Monthly Meetings

First Tuesday of the month, September through April, 7:30 p.m. Our meeting place is Dorrance Hall, at the Desert Botanical Garden (DBG), except for our annual banquet in May at Shalimar Country Club in Tempe. The DBG is located at 1201 North Galvin Parkway, Phoenix, Arizona. This is approximately 1/4 mile north of the Phoenix Zoo. For a map, please see the DBG website at [www.dbg.org/](http://www.dbg.org/).

Dorrance Hall is located just off the main parking lot and entry to the DBG, and there will be signs directing you to the meeting place. Please contact a board member if you have any questions, or check out our web site at [www.maricopaaudubon.org](http://www.maricopaaudubon.org). Pre-meeting dinners (October through April) are held at Pete's 19<sup>th</sup> Tee, 1405 N. Mill Avenue, Tempe (at the Rolling Hills Golf Course), starting at 6:00 p.m.

### Membership Information--see notes and announcements for more detail

Your National membership entitles you to membership in the National Audubon Society and the Maricopa Audubon Society. National members receive bi-monthly issues of *Audubon Magazine* and quarterly issues of the *Cactus Wren\*dition*. For all new National Audubon memberships send check or money order payable to National Audubon Society to: Membership Chair, Krys Hammer.

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### Submissions

Copy for *The Cactus Wren\*dition* must be received by the editor by e-mail, (may be on computer diskette, or typed and double-spaced; however, this is not preferred) by January 15, April 1, July 1, and October 1. Articles not received by the deadlines may not appear in the upcoming issue. E-mail to: *Cactus Wren\*dition* Editor, Deva Burns. [devaburns@aol.com](mailto:devaburns@aol.com)

### Opinions

The opinions expressed by authors in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect the policy of the National Audubon Society or the Maricopa Audubon Society.

### Reprinting of material

Unless stated explicitly in the article, material in *The Cactus Wren\*dition* may be reprinted on other newsletters as long as the material is credited to the original author and to *The Cactus Wren\*dition*.

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