



The Cactus Wren • dition

Volume LV, No. 2

Summer 2006



Whiskered Screech Owls

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 at Shalimar Country Club. Please check our web site or newsletter for directions.

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.

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

façade 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.

NOTE: The May program will be associated with our Annual Banquet. Check our web site, newsletter, or contact a board member for location information.

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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.

Whiskered Screech Owls; photographed by Jim Burns in Cochise County, AZ, March, 2006 with Canon EOS 1D body and Canon 600mm f/4 lens.

From the Editor, Deva Burns

Have you ever wondered what a Burrowing Owl burrow looked like from the inside? I must admit I really hadn't either. But now I am intimately acquainted with one. Jim and I spent a Saturday in January helping construct a burrow in Maricopa. We were joined by 15-20 cub scouts, which made for a very interesting day. My hat is off to Sam and Bob Fox who in 1990 established Wild At Heart, an all-volunteer birds of prey rescue and rehab group, and spent a decade researching and perfecting their artificial burrows. These are marvelous underground systems for living, raising young, and escaping predators, and Wild At Heart is building these burrows to protect and save our Burrowing Owls whose habitat is rapidly being destroyed. Check out their website at wildatheart.f2g.net and consider volunteering with them for a rewarding day.

By the time you are reading this, the

May banquet and elections will have taken place. With only 4 Wrenditions a year, it is impossible to be timely. Please check out the website for the names of your incoming Board.

Although the Christmas Bird Counts (CBC) seem far in the past at this juncture, I thought you would appreciate Walter's article on the Carefree count. (once again emphasizing the lack of timeliness!) And please keep in mind that all counters of every skill level are welcome on the various counts. Please consider participating this year at one of the counts.

As always Bob's conservation articles are eloquent and enlightening, the photo quiz is a puzzle, AGAIN, and the winter's influx of rarities has kept Janet extremely busy with the field observations.

When we meet again, we'll be discussing fall migration!



From the President

Mike Rupp

from the president

By the time you read this article the Maricopa chapter elections will have taken place, and the outcome will have determined the future of the chapter. I say this because for perhaps the first time in the chapter's history, there will have been run-off elections for a couple board positions, and the candidates for these positions represent two different viewpoints on where the Maricopa chapter should go in the future.

I write on this topic because at the time of writing, I do not know if I will be re-elected as President of the chapter or not. If I am not, before fading away I wish to thank everyone publicly who has supported my efforts to steer the chapter towards a greater democratic process by implementing term limits, changing the election process, and board control over the chapter's participation in lawsuits either filed by the chapter, or other groups. If I'm gone when you read this, then these proposals most likely will have gone with me, as my opponent does not support any of these measures, in my opinion. If I have been re-elected as President, these proposals will be addressed once again in an effort to encourage more candidates to run for board positions and prohibit any one individual or group from taking control of the chapter and running it for their own interests for thirty years, as has been the case.

But the election isn't about me, it's about two opposing viewpoints, one of which has been the accepted "norm" for decades, and the other being more than a single-minded conservation agenda which emphasizes a more balanced approach to achieving our conservation and education goals, allowing the entire board the real opportunity to provide oversight over all issues. The "old" viewpoint doesn't provide for a growing chapter that utilizes every possible avenue to

achieve our mission and goal, and is not self-perpetuating or tolerant of any differing opinions. The "new" viewpoint emphasizes a closer relationship with Audubon Arizona, not our enemy as has been characterized by the "old" viewpoint, but an organization dedicated to the same goals and mission as Maricopa is, only, they will have an enormous budget, many more staff, a wonderful Nature Center, and many, many programs, all of which any one chapter could not hope to emulate. Together, the chapters can work with Audubon Arizona to achieve a greater success than either group could achieve on it's own. The "new" viewpoint agrees with the proven premise that the most effective way to get kids, and adults too, interested in birds, nature, and conservation, is to provide them with a "nature experience"- a time of going out into the field with a leader who can share the excitement of discovery, teach about birds in our case, and open the door to the natural world.

I have been teaching kids for several weeks now at an AZ Game & Fish "Wetlands Workshop" program that buses elementary school kids down to our setup on the Gila River at 115th Ave, and this brief experience has validated for me the need for "nature experiences" in elementary school curriculum. As I took these 12 year olds on a birding walk around the site, I heard one kid remark to another "I thought this field trip was going to be boring, but this is really fun!" The teachers that chaperoned the group all said that everyone in their school district should have this experience, and one showed an interest in becoming a birder. This shows the importance of our chapter's field trips and birding program like the monthly Gilbert Family Birdwalks at the Riparian Preserve. My viewpoint is that these programs are critically important in reaching kids with a nature experience that hopefully sets kids on a pathway to become at the

very least conservation minded. All kids. Especially minority kids. You and I know that in very little time, our minorities will become the majority across the southwest, and the task of conserving habitats and species will begin to fall to this new majority. How many times have you seen an African-American person out birding when you were out? How many Hispanics? I find the same results in my sailing experiences with the AZ Yacht Club- these minorities are not represented at all. I'm not advocating reaching out only to these minorities, but to specifically include them in our endeavors.

So I suppose if you are like the majority of chapter members who's main interest is field trips and the monthly meetings, you may be out of luck if I and the other newer board members have been defeated, for surely the field trips will decrease to the low levels they were prior to a new Field Trips Director coming on the board, and the Gilbert Birdwalks will disappear for lack of volunteers, most of which are consistently newer folks.

But enough of sour grapes- I hope that I may already be starting another term as your President, working towards some of the goals I've stated above. If so, I encourage members to think about volunteering for current and future programs which I and others have up our sleeves, one of which is a weekend "Audubon Adventures" family campout at Coon Bluff Rec. site on the Salt River, with five educators giving talks and walks on a variety of scientific topics to perhaps thirty families, some of which would be minority families. If I am not re-elected, thanks again to the many who have supported me and my progressive goals. I have valued the time spent as Membership Chair, and President, and have established lots of contacts with the environmental community that will serve me well in the future, wherever I am.

Notes & Announcements

Congratulations to Kry's Hammers for the recent Audubon AZ grant of \$600 to purchase adult binoculars for the Gilbert Birdwalk program and other events. Kry's prepared the grant request for the state office, and contacted Eagle Optics, whom supplied the children's binocs to us at half price. The same deal was given for this new purchase, and we will soon have 15 pairs of new adult binocs, which I'm sure will be widely used.

Anyone with an old pair of binocs that's sitting on a shelf in a closet somewhere could put these to good use by donating them to the chapter- we can always use more binocs!

Birds and Breakfast – Celebrate John James Audubon's 221st birthday and the eve of International Migratory Bird Day with birding, breakfast and a talk about the future. Friday, May 12, 2006 at the site of the future Nina Mason Pulliam Rio Salado Audubon Center at the Northeast corner of Central Avenue and Salt River Bridge. Bird walks at 6 am with breakfast at 7:30. Cost is \$15.00. Contact Donna Sauer for reservations, 602-468-6470 or dsauer@audubon.org. To volunteer as a bird guide contact Janice Miano at 480-946-1327 or egret@cox.net.

Celebrate the history and culture of the Sulphur Springs Valley – Saturday, May 20. Festivities begin at 9:30 a.m., with Miss Arizona singing the National Anthem at the Willcox Depot. Enjoy a Vintage Car Show, Music in the Park, roaming Mariachis, Arts and Crafts Markets, Farmer's Market, Petting Zoo, children's face painting and crafts, hay rides, historic presentations, free museum admission, and more. For more information contact Louise Henderson at 520-253-0247 or louise618@gmail.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. 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.

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.

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 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: Kry's 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 Kry's 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.

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. I think Audubon should offer something like this!

The Dovetail Directory (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. Another source is Toucanet Coffee/Avian Ecologist. They are in the business of serving Smithsonian certified, bird-friendly coffee. All of their varieties are organic and shade grown. They also have fair trade varieties. Please visit www.toucanetcoffee.com for more information about their goals or to place an order. The website also includes an online community for bird and/or coffee lovers. They invite you to join.

More birding and nature festivals. www.americanbirding.org. and 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

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.



A – Good photo, easy bird

THIS ISSUE'S CLUE —

These three species are all in a colorful family of birds that is a seasonal favorite for many of us, and now is that season.

All Photos by Jim Burns



B – Good photo, difficult bird



C – Good photo, easy bird

Your Chapter's Environmental Legacy 1969-1987

Bob Witzeman

The National Audubon Society has recently sent a number of email "Alerts" and "Advisories" to its members about two laws being introduced in Congress. They would destroy the effectiveness of two of our nation's strongest environmental laws. At stake is the Endangered Species Act (ESA) passed by Congress in 1973, and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) authorized in 1969. While most are familiar with ESA, National Audubon describes NEPA as "the most important environmental law that most Americans have never heard of."

Under this law major federal projects (those on federal lands or federally funded) must be reviewed for their environmental and public health impacts. If the damage will be significant, an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) must be prepared that discloses to the public those impacts, and evaluates alternative designs to minimize damage. Most important, the public then has an opportunity to make their input on the project through their written and oral commentary to the EIS. The agency must respond to those expressed concerns.

Representative Pombo (R-CA) has introduced into Congress changes to NEPA and ESA which essentially destroy those laws. His bills have passed the Republican-controlled House and are now before the Senate.

Without NEPA, there is little question the various 1969 congressionally authorized Bureau of Reclamation dams of the Central Arizona Project (CAP) on the San Pedro, Salt, Verde and Gila Rivers would have been built.

What NEPA achieved was to give time for the public to learn and have the opportunity to comment to the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation about the harmful aspects of their project's many proposed dams. National and Arizona environmental organizations, Native American and human rights organizations, and taxpayer groups were in opposition. The Maricopa Audubon Society had a strong leadership role.

Both the upper and lower portions of the San Pedro River would have been destroyed by the CAP's Charleston Dam (located just outside Sierra Vista). It would have diverted San Pedro waters to Tucson. The public, in their NEPA commentaries, pointed out

that half the water flowing into Charleston reservoir would evaporate from its surface. It was also pointed out in the public NEPA commentary that the dam would severely reduce river flows needed to sustain that river's cottonwood/willow riparian vegetation and its priceless avifauna.

Likewise, CAP proposed a huge billion dollar dam, Orme Dam, at the confluence of the Salt and Verde on Forest Service and Ft. McDowell Yavapai Reservation land. Opponents pointed out during the NEPA public oversight and commentary periods (1976) that there were flood control and water storage alternatives which could be achieved without building that dam.

When Orme Dam was defeated in October 1981, the Bureau of Reclamation proposed another river-killing substitute, Cliff Dam, on the Verde River. Opponents again presented arguments and alternatives under the NEPA process.

That dam, like Orme, would have also resulted in a narrow Salt River floodplain through Phoenix, as well as degradation of the downstream Verde, Salt and Gila River cottonwood/willow/cattail riparian habitat all the way to Painted Rock Dam. Likewise, Cliff Dam, not unlike Orme Dam, would have narrowed the broad 180,000 cubic feet/second (cfs) metropolitan Phoenix channel to 60,000 cfs. When floodplains become

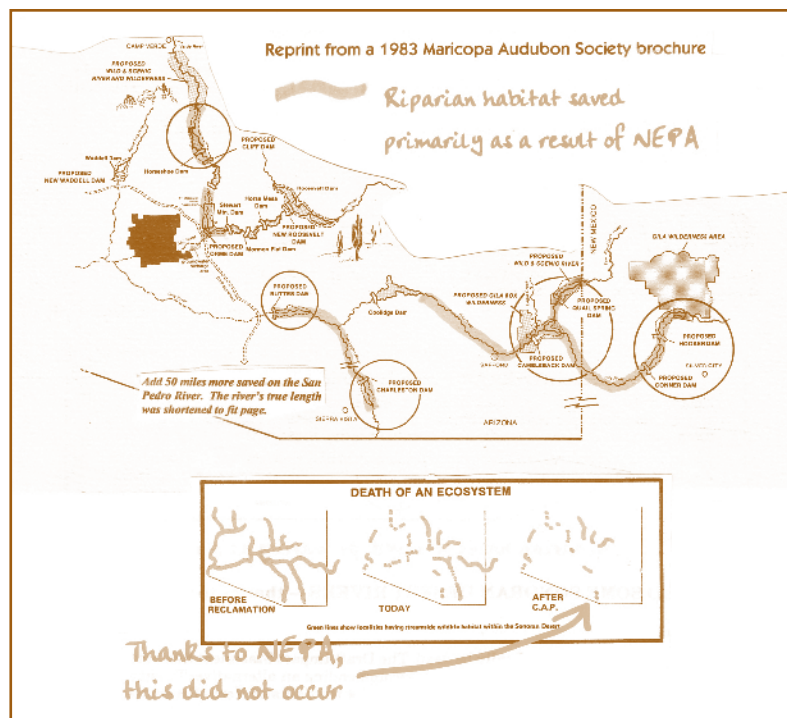
that narrow in large cities where real estate is expensive, sterile, rectangular concrete (Los Angeles-type) flood channels result. Such an environmentally hideous structure would have passed in front of the proposed Audubon Nature Center at Central Avenue had Cliff (or Orme) not been defeated.

As a result of: (1) a NEPA lawsuit by Maricopa Audubon and other local and national environmental groups, (2) increasing opposition in Congress, and (3) the statesmanship of Morris Udall, Chair of the House Interior Affairs Committee, the dam was jettisoned by Congress in June 1987. As a result, downtown Phoenix can boast a broad, earthen riverbed, often studded with cattails

and bulrushes, and frequented by Sora and Virginia Rails.

Equally important, if either of those two dams had been built they would have stifled the downstream Salt/Gila riparian floodplain which benefits from periodic large flood releases from the upstream Salt/Verde reservoirs. Such releases allow the recharge of our downstream Salt/Gila floodplain, and the germination of cottonwood/willow/mesquite seedlings in that riparian ecosystem.

Five other CAP dams were proposed on the Gila or its tributaries in Arizona and New Mexico. One of the dams in New Mexico, Hooker Dam, would have flooded the Gila Wilderness, the first U.S. wilderness area. All were defeated or postponed because opponents were able to demonstrate under the NEPA process less environmentally destructive, less costly alternatives.



Threatened with inundation was 30 miles of irreplaceable Salt and Verde River cottonwood/willow riparian habitat, Arizona's best desert-nesting Bald Eagle's habitat, and the Yavapai's tribal homeland. Also under threat of inundation was that splendid riparian habitat where MAS conducts its annual Christmas Count!

After months of NEPA public hearings, written public commentary, and agency responses, it became apparent to the public that the dam's flood control function could also be achieved by building larger bridges downstream in Phoenix, channelizing around the airport and building levees in a rural area downstream. Likewise, the dam's water storage function could be achieved for a fraction the cost of the dam by the voluntary retirement of surplus crop farmlands, groundwater recharge, water conservation, etc.

Shakespeare in the Garden

Tom Gatz

european starling

The belligerent European starling, one of the most common birds here at the Garden, is also one of the least popular wildlife species with our staff and volunteers, perhaps second only to the cottontail rabbit, consumer of all things green. This squat, short-tailed, long-billed, iridescent black bird even has an evil-sounding Latin name: *Sturnus vulgaris*. Constantly fighting with one another (sometimes to the death) and with the Gila woodpeckers that excavate the cavities they usurp, it is difficult to find something nice to say about this ubiquitous bird. Still, they are likely here to stay, and as a Sunday docent, curious Garden visitors frequently ask me about this noisy intruder of my tours. Here are some of the facts I share about this bird found in Paul Cabe's account of this species published in "The Birds of North America" series by the American Ornithologists Union in 1993.

First of all, don't blame the starlings. They didn't ask to come here. Blame Mr. Eugene Schieffelin. In the early 1890's, he released about 100 starlings in Central Park, New York City, in an effort to introduce all the birds mentioned in Shakespeare's writings to the United States. (I couldn't make this stuff up!) He failed in all of his attempts except for the starling, which now occurs across the continent, 200 million strong. It is arguably the most successful avian introduction to this continent; one of the most numerous birds in North America where fully 1/3 of the global population of this species is now estimated to live. I use this as a lead-in to inform and caution visitors that, second only to habitat destruction, competition from introduced, non-native plant and animal species is one of the major causes of many native species

declines throughout the world. Also, without our major conversions of natural habitat to agriculture and lawns, it is unlikely that the starling could have been so successful here. Although starlings love to nest in our saguaro cavities, most of them probably don't take all of their meals here at the Garden. Other studies found that desert-nesting starlings "dine out" by flying perhaps as far as 2.5 miles to areas where they can forage in short, mown lawns for soil invertebrates such as insects, worms, snails and spiders, as well as on grain at animal feeding troughs.

Starlings can mimic up to 20 different calls of other species of birds; apparently this helps them attract mates. Unfortunately for the Gila woodpecker and other cavity-nesting birds in North America, the starling's ability to also mimic human speech earned it this single, negative reference in Shakespeare's *Henry IV*: *"The king forbade my tongue to speak of Mortimer. But I will find him when he is asleep, and in his ear I'll holler 'Mortimer!' Nay I'll have a starling shall be taught to speak nothing but Mortimer, and give it to him to keep his anger still in motion."* According to the National Geographic Society, this is the only mention of the starling in all of Shakespeare's works, but a major biological invasion of the North American continent by a non-native species was the result.

Some starlings can live for over 20 years, and eradication efforts elsewhere have been largely unsuccessful. So far, and keep your fingers crossed, our native Gila

woodpeckers continue to persist at the Garden. Fortunately, studies suggest that the starling does not compete much with the gilded flicker, a less common but larger species of woodpecker at the Garden. I also found a ray of hope in talking with our excellent Garden

bird-walk
leaders,
Andrée
Tarby
and



Photo by Jim Burns

Charlie Brenner, about their observation of a Gila woodpecker turning the tables by grabbing a starling by its beak and physically tossing it out of a saguaro cavity! Perhaps natural selection is producing a tougher, street-smart woodpecker that can hold its own against this urban-saguaro bully?

(written for *The Gathering*—a newsletter for the volunteers at the Desert Botanical Garden)

Maricopa Audubon Society Field Trips

Marjorie Eckman

The following field trips are sponsored by the Maricopa Audubon Society who have an organized program of trips throughout the year. They are open to the public and are free and include all skill levels. All the trips are Difficulty Level 1 unless noted otherwise.

CAR POOLING:

Maricopa Audubon strongly encourages carpooling on field trips. Please make every effort to organize your own carpool, consolidate vehicles at meeting places; and/or contact leaders for car pooling assistance. It is recommended that passengers reimburse drivers 5 to 10 cents per mile

LEGEND:

Limit: Maximum number of participants per field trip. Please call early to make your reservations.
Difficulty Levels 1 through 5: 1 equals very low level of exertion, short walking distances, considerable birding from vehicle and possibly multiple birding stops. 5 equals very high level of difficulty with respect to exertion. Longer hiking distances are expected with possible steep trails.

REMINDERS:

- Wear neutral colored clothing and sturdy walking shoes
- Bring sunscreen, sunglasses, head protection and water
- Avoid wearing bright colors
- Bring your binoculars
- Don't forget to have FUN!!!

Maricopa Audubon Society Field Trips April - June 3

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 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 7 AM 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.

Leader: Karen Stucke at

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 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. 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 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. 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 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

Maricopa Audubon Society Field Trips

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 or (480) 946-1327, or to Donna Sauer at 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 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 McCarthey at tmccarthey@Acstempe.com or 602-451-4179 for more information and to register.

Saturday, June 3

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 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, and www.riparianinstitute.org

AZ's Special Species—Painted Redstart

Jim Burns

You would think that two birds with the unique word “redstart” in their common names would be in the same genus, but you would be wrong. The American Redstart is in the monotypic (only one species) genus, *Septophaga*. The Painted Redstart, one of Arizona's special warbler species, is in the *Myioborus* genus.

Dunn and Garrett, in Warblers, give us the answer. They explain that while American Redstart is closely related to the *Dendroica* warblers by virtue of behavior and plumage, Painted Redstart differs from these in its pattern of juvenal molt and absence of strong sexual dimorphism (sexes not alike in plumage). Similarities in behavior between the two U.S. redstarts, particularly the spectacular wing flicking and tail fanning, are apparently a matter of a convergence of feeding styles between two species in disparate genera.

Much more to the point, the full scientific name for our Painted Redstart is *Myioborus pictus*, the species name *pictus* meaning “painted.” Now that is easy to figure, and many ornithologists and laymen birders alike consider this our most beautiful warbler. The word “flashy” is often used in its description, and this species follows the general rule of the bird world—if you’ve got it, flaunt it.

As the Painted Redstart forages for insects along tree trunks, across streambeds, and over rocks and logs in its canyon home, it is constantly flashing those white outer tail feathers and flicking those white wingbars. Indeed, the British common name for the members of this genus is “whitestart.” There are two theories for the wing and tail display. One is that the bright flash stirs up insect

prey. The other is that this is a contact display which helps pairs stay in touch in the deep shadows of their canyon and ravine environment.

Painted “Whitestarts” breed through the mountains across central Arizona below the Mogollon Rim into western New Mexico, south through southeast Arizona’s Sky Islands, and down through Mexico to northern Nicaragua. They are also found in the Big Bend country of southwestern Texas.

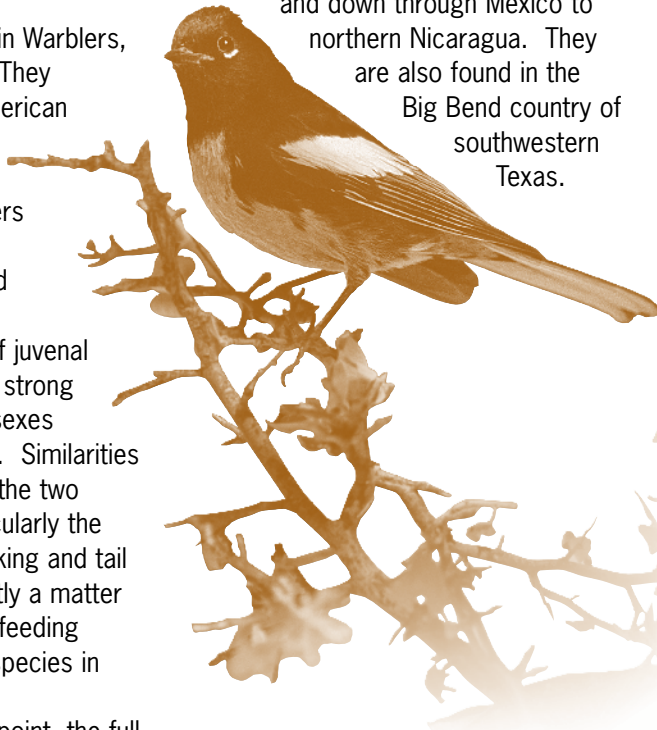


Photo by Jim Burns

Though most redstarts head south of the border after breeding season, a few linger in the southeast canyons to surprise and delight winter birders and brighten up Christmas Counts.

Redstarts begin returning to Arizona by the middle of March and, following the usual warbler pattern, males arrive a week to ten days ahead of the females. Territories are established in oak canyons and pine/oak forests at elevations from 5000 to 7000 feet, especially where there is water or running streams. Painted Redstarts are ground nesters. Nests are constructed by the females only, usually in a depression or hollow beneath a log or rock on a steep slope, often in a streambank

itself. The nest is a cup of grasses, plant fiber, and pine needles, well concealed and in shade.

The Painted Redstart song stands out in its quiet canyon environment almost as conspicuously as its plumage, a loud, cheery but slow, uprising series of rich two syllable phrases, repeated frequently, and often verbalized as “weeta, weeta, weeta, weeta, weeta.” Overwintering redstarts will often announce their presence with song as well.

A good strategy for finding Painted Redstarts in Arizona is to simply hike any of the Sky Island canyons with water during the spring or summer with your eyes and ears open. There is always a pair or three along the Carrie Nation Trail above the upper parking areas in Madera. You should find this species easily in Miller or Ramsey in the Huachucas, along Cave Creek in the Chiricahuas, and in Rose Canyon on Mt. Lemmon where the accompanying photo was taken in May, 2002. In central Arizona they nest in the higher elevations of the Superstitions, in the Pinals and the Bradshaws, and are always present in the summer on Mt. Ord near the spring above the cattle loading pen. In the winter check Madera Canyon behind the Santa Rita Lodge and Ramsey above the nature center. The hummingbird feeding stations at these locations may hold the redstarts in cold weather.

Though not as common as some of Arizona’s special warbler species, Painted Redstarts are obviously easier to find and see well because of their plumage and their behavioral characteristics which display that plumage. Furthermore, this is a relatively tame warbler which often seems to purposely cavort before observers to show off its spectacular raiment. The sudden double flash of bright white in the quiet of the shadowed canyon. Whitestart!

Photo Quiz Answers

Jim Burns

WIn one of my recent Arizona Republic columns I suggested beginners divorce themselves from color and try to build a habit of identifying birds using only shape and structure. Alluding to the silhouettes that Roger Tory Peterson included in the endpapers of his early field guides, I cited the obvious example of eagle and dove to illustrate how easy it can be to separate most bird families this way. In this issue's quiz I want to illustrate that, even within families, there are noticeable differences in shape and structure, some subtle, some not so subtle.

We've danced around this subject in the past with sparrows, but the opening clue and the bill shape of these birds tell us these are not sparrows. These are small, slender birds, with small, pointed bills. That bill shape, combined with plumage patterns, can get us into the correct family. Vireo bills are thicker than these, and have tiny hooks. Kinglets would show wingbars, and there are no wingbars in these photos. Tanagers have thicker, proportionately shorter bills than our quiz birds. Orioles would also show wingbars, and oriole bills are thicker at the base, more sharply tapered, and thinner at the tip than these. We're looking at . . . warblers.

These three warblers are all possible in Arizona. Warblers are very active feeders, and in the field we often encounter them while looking up into backlighting and/or heavy foliage. We may observe only flashes of color or we may see a "warbler-like" bird without any color pattern as in the second photo. I selected these three warblers for the quiz because they represent a spectrum of bill, body, and tail structure within a family of very similarly shaped birds that most of us never consider identifying based on anything except color and color patterns.

A)–Good photo, easy bird

Though our first quiz bird has an obvious color pattern, in this sepia rendition we can't tell what the colors are, and that pattern, though vaguely familiar, seems a bit odd for some reason. Just like it might in a dense, backlit thicket. Get over it. Forget the color and pattern, and focus on the shape and structure. And compare that shape and structure to

that of the other two warblers.

This first one appears longer and lankier than its two relatives, but that may just be an illusion created by the length of this bird's tail. This tail is so long, so much longer than that of the other two, that it nearly seems out of proportion to its host's body, and certainly longer than anything we usually associate with the warbler family.

Next, let's check out this bird's bill. Warbler bills are usually described with some combination of the words "small," "pointed," and "thin." "Small" and "pointed" would apply here, but "thin" doesn't seem to, even without direct comparison to the other two photos. By warbler family standards, this is a very thick bill.

When tail length and bill shape are combined, the beginning birder might mistake this bird for some kind of tanager. Indeed, Sibley characterizes this bird as "Arguably our most distinctive wood-warbler." Now the pattern you're seeing begins to make sense—the light spectacles set off by the dark lores and the light underparts. This Yellow-breasted Chat was photographed at a water hole along Arivaca Creek in June, 2004, and the distinctive demarcation between yellow breast and white belly has been lost in the translation from color to sepia. Yellow-breasted Chat, as you might suspect, resides by itself in the warbler genus, *Icteria*, and DNA studies to date have shown it to be an aberrant wood-warbler though shape, structure, and song suggest tanager or thrasher.

B)–Good photo, difficult bird

Remember the point of this quiz is to show that even within families, different genera have different shape and structure. Compared to the chat, and for that matter to our third bird as well, this second quiz bird seems rather middle of the road, more vanilla, more a match for our visual stereotype of "warbler." The tail is intermediate in length between those of the other two warblers in our quiz, and looks properly proportional to the bird's body. The bill is small, thin, and sharply pointed, characteristics we normally use to define warbler bills.

As we move from shape and structure to plumage, we note there are little or no contrasting patterns on this bird other

than the light eye arcs. Perhaps just a hint of a light supercilium, perhaps just a hint of wingbar and a lighter throat, but nothing to catch the eye of the observer. If we combine the intermediate tail length, prototypical warbler bill, the lack of contrasting pattern, and the light eye arcs, we might conclude this is an Orange-crowned Warbler, the plainest, least recognizable member of its family. That's why I've labeled this photo "difficult," but that's not the point of this quiz.

This bird's shape, structure, and lack of strong patterns place it in the warbler genus, *Vermivora*, the genus which would probably best qualify for the warbler silhouette in Peterson's endpapers. The *Vermivora* shape and structure is the quintessential warbler shape and structure, the generic warbler if you will. This Orange-crowned Warbler was photographed in my backyard in January, 2005. If you were unable to identify this photo as an Orange-crowned, that doesn't surprise me. Remember the point of this quiz is to show that even within families, different genera have different shape and structure.

C)–Good photo, easy bird

Our third quiz bird represents the other end of the warbler shape and structure spectrum. The tail is short and stubby, making the bird look attenuated, but the bill, though thin like the *vermivora* bill, is quite long, longer proportionally and by actual measurement, than the chat's bill. The plumage pattern, of course, is quite distinctive, and it looks like this bird is exploring a cavity. Only two of our wood-warblers nest in cavities, and neither shape, structure, nor color pattern of this bird is anything like our desert Lucy's.

This Prothonotary Warbler, the only member of the *Prothonotaria* genus, was photographed in Fayetteville, Arkansas in May, 1998. You probably wouldn't need shape or structure to identify a chat or the "Golden Swamp Warbler," but it might help with Orange-crowned, and you need to build good identification habits by dialing in shape and structure even within families of similar sized and patterned birds. Next winter, when the sparrows return, we're going to take a look at some patternless silhouettes to see how you're doing with this concept.

Field Observations

Janet Witzeman

DECEMBER, JANUARY, &
FEBRUARY 2006

Two Clark's Grebes were observed with the 250 Western Grebes on Saguaro Lake Dec. 3 (KR). These same Western Grebes were seen performing courtship displays there on Feb. 20 (TC). One Western Grebe was present at ASU Park in Tempe the first two weeks in January (DC). More than 100 Am. White Pelicans were seen flying over Tres Rios Dec. 3 (RWz, SBU) and up to 12 were reported in that area during the remainder of the winter (TC et al.). Four Am. White Pelicans were counted at the Gilbert/Riggs Ponds Jan. 14 (TMC) and about 250 were observed at Painted Rock Dam (PRD) Jan. 28 (TC, TMC).

Numbers of cormorants continued to increase: 175 Neotropic Cormorants and more than 100 Double-crested Cormorants were counted along the Salt River e. of 91st Ave., Dec. 15 (TC). At the Ocotillo community in Chandler, 135 Neotropic Cormorants (one carrying a nesting stick) and 160 Double-crested Cormorants (several pairs nest building and a few incubating eggs) were counted on the early date of Jan. 22 (TC). About 175 Neotropic Cormorants and large numbers of Double-crested Cormorants were also counted along the Salt River, upstream from Tempe Town Lake Feb. 12 (MM, GB). Sixty-nine Neotropic Cormorants were recorded on the Gila River CBC Dec. 27 (fide TC), ten were reported in Chandler Feb. 18, plus two more at the ASU Research Park Feb. 19 (CR).

The Am. Bittern, at the Gilbert Water Ranch (GWR) since late November, remained at least until Feb. 9 (m.ob.); another individual was found in the Rio Salado area Dec. 10 and remained at least until Jan. 22 (TGs). The Least Bittern, at the GWR since mid-November, remained at least until Jan. 27 (MM, MW et al.). A few pairs of Great Blue Herons were already incubating eggs at Ocotillo on the early date of Jan. 22 (TC). A large group of 150 Great Egrets were also present at Ocotillo on Jan. 22 (TC). Good numbers of Cattle Egrets were reported in several areas around the county during the winter: a large group at the 307th Ave. Ponds Dec. 3 (TMC), 98 at the GWR Dec. 13 (MM), between 125 and

200 in the Arlington area in December and January (TC), 45 in Chandler Feb. 19, and many along Old Hwy 80, s.w. of Phoenix Feb. 20 (SG).

The **White Ibis** continued to be seen in the Arlington area at least until Dec. 27 (TC). Numbers of White-faced Ibis wintered again in the southwest area of the county: 85 at Palo Verde Jan. 4 (DSj), 140 at Arlington Jan. 22 (TC), 35 at PRD Jan. 28 (TC, TMC), and many along Old Hwy 80 Feb. 20 (SG).

The only Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks reported during the period were 16 at the pond on Gilbert Rd., s. of Ocotillo Jan. 14 (MS et al.) and nine at the Ocotillo community Feb. 25 (S&CW). The **Fulvous Whistling-Duck**, discovered at McCormick Ranch in November, was re-found at Chaparral Park Dec. 2 (HB) and continued to be seen through the period at least until March 5 at the Park or at McCormick Ranch (TC, JJ et al.). A second **Fulvous Whistling-Duck** was discovered at Red Mountain Park in Mesa Dec. 4 and remained at least until Feb. 25 (MW et al.). These represent the first January, February, and March records for Maricopa County.

Unprecedented numbers of Greater White-fronted Geese wintered in the county: one at the GWR since October, remained at least until Jan. 11 (PD, MM), one at Rio Salado since late November, remained at least until Dec. 17 (TGs), one was present at McCormick Ranch from Dec. 9 at least to Feb. 20 (TGs, TC, JJ), one was observed at Paradise Memorial Cemetery Pond in Scottsdale from Dec. 10 at least to Jan. 9 (TC, JJ, HB), three were found near the confluence of the Hassayampa and Gila Rivers Dec. 18 at least to Dec. 27, and an additional three were found elsewhere on the Gila River CBC Dec. 27 (TC et al.). Individual Greater White-fronted Geese were also observed at Chaparral Park Dec. 29 (CR), at Power and Guadalupe Roads in Mesa, and at the Pavilions Ponds in Scottsdale Feb. 12 (MM, GB).

Two Snow Geese and the continuing Ross's Goose were seen at the Lower River Rd. Ponds in Palo Verde Dec. 18 (TC); two more Snow Geese and another Ross's Goose were observed near the confluence of the Hassayampa and Gila Rivers Dec. 26 & 27 (TC et al.). Individual Snow Geese were also reported at Riverside Park in Mesa

Jan. 21 (TC) and at the Pavilions Ponds Feb. 12 (MM, GB). A Ross's Goose was observed in Chandler Jan. 14 (MS), and two were reported at McCormick Ranch Jan. 17 – 21 (PL, PD).

At least two **Cackling Geese** were discovered on the Fort McDowell Indian Reservation Dec. 14 – 15 (SBU, RWz, KR). Three more **Cackling Geese** were discovered with several Lesser Canada Geese and about 500 Greater Canada Geese at McCormick Ranch Jan. 17 – 21 (PL, TMC). Two **Cackling Geese** were observed with a flock of Lesser and Greater Canada Geese at the Gravel Pitt Ponds at the confluence of the Gila and Agua Fria Rivers Feb. 13 (MM). Between two and three Lesser Canada Geese continued to be seen at McCormick Ranch Jan. 21 and Feb. 12 (RH, MS, MM, GB).

A male Wood Duck was present at the Indian Steele Park in central Phoenix Jan. 15 – 21 (MP). The Eurasian Wigeon, at the Paradise Memorial Ponds since October, remained through the winter (m.ob). Two additional Eurasian Wigeons spent the winter at McCormick Ranch and at the ponds w. of Hayden Rd. in Scottsdale (m.ob.). Three "Mexican" Mallards were observed at the GWR Dec. 13 (MM) and one remained there at least until Feb. 5 (MW); another individual was found at the Gilbert Rd. and Chandler Heights Rd. Ponds Feb. 12 (MM). Individual Greater Scaup were reported on the Gila River CBC Dec. 27 (fide TC), at the ASU Research Park Jan. 1 – 21 (DC et al.), and at Red Mountain Park in Mesa Jan. 27 (MM).

A female **Black Scoter** was discovered on Saguaro Lake Feb. 18 (JR, SF) and remained through the period at least until Mar. 3 (KR, SG et al.). There was only one previous county record: three were present for a week in November 1975 at the old 35th Ave. Ponds in Phoenix. A male **Barrow's Goldeneye** was discovered with Com. Goldeneyes at the Gravel Pitt Ponds Jan. 29 (BG) and remained until Feb. 25 (PD et al.); there was only one previous county record. Numbers of Hooded Mergansers remained through the winter at ponds in Scottsdale, with a high of nine at the Pavilions Ponds Dec. 1 (RWd, BD, LH, AV). Large numbers of Com. Mergansers (450 – 600) wintered again at the Gilbert/Riggs Ponds (TC). An adult male Red-breasted

Merganser, an uncommon winter visitor, was observed at PRD Jan. 28 (TC,TMc).

More Ospreys than usual were reported during the winter. At least three were observed along the Salt River w. of 99th Ave., Dec. 4 (TC,JJ), four were counted on the Salt/Verde CBC Dec. 14 (fide KR), two were recorded on the Gila River CBC Dec. 27 (fide TC), three were observed in Palo Verde Dec. 4 (DSj), and individuals were seen at Rio Verde Dec. 17 (TGs), and at Tempe Town Lake during January and February (MW,RS). Between one and three White-tailed Kites were observed at Paloma from late January to Feb. 26 (TC,SG,K&CR) and one was seen in Buckeye Feb. 8 – 23 (TC). Two pairs of Red-shouldered Hawks were observed at the Hassayampa River Preserve (HRP) Dec. 30 & Feb. 18 (TC,TMc). A Zone-tailed Hawk (casual in winter) was reported at the GWR Dec. 6 at least to Jan. 19 (MM,PS); another individual was seen in Chandler Dec. 24 (R&JM).

A **Crested Caracara** was discovered near the confluence of the Gila and Agua Fria Rivers Dec. 29 (L&KB) and was seen there again Feb. 13 (MM). Another (or the same) individual was seen in the Arlington area Jan. 22 & 27 (TC,TH). There have been 16 previous county records.

A group of 45 Sandhill Cranes were observed in a field near Gillespie Dam Feb. 19 (CB,SS). Two Am. Avocets (rare in winter) were seen at the El Mirage Pond Dec. 3 and one remained until Dec. 15 (TC). Another individual was seen at the Gravel Pit Ponds Jan. 29 (BG). Eight Am. Avocets, observed at the GWR Feb. 3 (TC) and five there Feb. 5 (MW), may have been early migrants. Individual Lesser Yellowlegs (rare in winter) were observed at the GWR Dec. 10 – Feb. 18 (RD) and on the Salt/Verde CBC Dec. 14 (fide KR).

Large numbers of Long-billed Curlews wintered s.w. of Phoenix: 140 were counted n. of Baseline Rd. Dec. 26 (TC), up to 100 were recorded at Paloma Jan. 28 (TC,TMc), 120 were counted in the Arlington area Feb. 19 (CB,SS), and many were observed along Old Hwy 80 Feb. 20 (SG). Two Western Sandpipers (rare in winter) were found at the El Mirage Pond Dec. 15 (TC) and individuals were observed at the GWR Jan. 28 (RH) and at the ponds near Gilbert and Chandler

Heights Roads Feb. 12 (MM,GB).

A California Gull (uncommon) was found at the Lower River Rd. Ponds Dec. 18 (TC). A first year **Herring Gull** (a casual winter visitor), was discovered at Saguaro Lake Dec. 3 (KR) and remained at least until Mar. 3 (SG).

A large number of Eurasian Collared-Doves (70) were recorded on the Tres Rios CBC Dec. 16 (fide DY). Six White-winged Doves were recorded on the Salt/Verde CBC Dec. 14 (fide KR); individuals were observed on the Gila River CBC Dec. 27 (RWz), in Tempe Feb. 25 (CR), and in Mesa Feb. 26 (TP). Numbers of Ruddy Ground-Doves continued to increase: 23 were counted at the El Mirage Pond Dec. 23 (TC) and that number increased to 28 on the Tres Rios CBC Dec. 16 (fide DY); six were recorded on the Gila River CBC Dec. 27 (fide TC) and a flock of at least 27 was observed on 121st Ave., s. of Southern Jan. 15, which decreased to 15 on Feb. 3 (TC,TMc). A single male Ruddy Ground-Dove was seen in a yard in Mesa Jan. 16 – 21 (JM).

The **Groove-billed Ani**, at the GWR since early November, remained at least until Dec. 11 (m.ob.). A male **Broad-tailed Hummingbird** (not Broad-billed as erroneously reported in the previous Field Observations column) was present in a north Phoenix yard Oct. 30 until Jan. 23 (PH) and provided the first January record for the county and only the second December record for the county. Another **Broad-tailed Hummingbird**, a second year male, was discovered at the GWR Feb. 11 (JH,RH) and remained until Feb. 19 (RD).

A **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** (a casual winter visitor), was discovered along Seven Springs Wash Jan. 2 (TC). A female **Red-breasted Sapsucker** (also only a casual winter visitor), was observed in a yard in Avondale Jan. 9 – 20 (JT).

A **Hammond's Flycatcher** and a **Dusky Flycatcher** (rare winter visitors) were observed along Sycamore Creek, near Sunflower Jan. 16 (TC). A **Hammond's Flycatcher** was recorded on the Salt/Verde CBC Dec. 14 (fide KR). Two **Dusky Flycatchers** were recorded on the Gila River CBC Dec. 27 (fide TC). A Gray Flycatcher spent the winter in an urban area – in a Mesa yard (CS). A "Western" type Flycatcher (probably Pacific-slope) was observed

at the HRP Feb. 18 (TC,TMc). Individual Eastern Phoebes were recorded on the Salt/Verde CBC Dec. 14 (fide KR) and on the Gila River CBC Dec. 27 (fide TC). A **Cassin's Kingbird** was discovered along the road to PRD Feb. 26 (K&CR,SG); there were no previous winter records for the county and it was also unusual at this low elevation.

The Bell's Vireo, at the GWR since November, remained through the winter there and was joined by a second one Mar. 2 (RH,TC,MM); there were no previous January or February records for the county. Individual Plumbeous Vireos were observed along the Salt River w. of 99th Ave. Dec. 4 (TC,JJ) and at the Tres Rios Hayfield site Jan. 15 (TC,TMc). Three Plumbeous Vireos and a Cassin's Vireo were found at the HRP Feb. 18 (TC).

Normally Tree and Violet-green Swallows are rare in winter, so unusual were the ones that were seen in several locations. A few Tree Swallows were observed along the Salt River, e. of Phoenix Feb. 15 (RWd,LH,AV), at the GWR Feb. 18 (RH), at the Gila Bend Sewage Ponds Feb. 19 (CB,SS), and at the Gravel Pit Ponds Feb. 19 (RH); one was reported at the HRP Feb. 18 (TC,TMc). Several Violet-green Swallow were observed at Saguaro Lake Jan. 28 & Feb. 20 (DY,TC), at the GWR Feb. 18 (TGs,RH), and at the Gravel Pitt Ponds Feb. 19 (RH); individuals were seen along the Salt River e. of Phoenix Feb. 16 (RWd,LH,AV) and at the HRP Feb. 18 (TC,TMc).

A high number of 214 N. Rough-winged Swallows were recorded on the Salt/Verde CBC Dec.14 (fide KR), several were also reported at Rio Salado Jan. 21 (TGs), at the HRP Feb. 18 (TC,TMc), at the Gila Bend Sewage Ponds Feb. 19 (CB,SS), and at the Gravel Pitt Ponds Feb. 19 (RH). Between one and two N. Rough-winged Swallows were seen at the GWR Dec. 13 and Jan. 2 (MM,PD). Many Cliff Swallows were seen at the GWR on the early date of Feb.18 (RH). An early Barn Swallow was reported at the Gravel Pitt Ponds Feb. 18 and two early ones were there Feb. 19 (RH). Three early Barn Swallows were observed at Saguaro Lake Feb. 20 (TC). This uncommon spring migrant is not usually seen before mid-March.

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Field Observations

A **Winter Wren** (a rare winter visitor) was recorded on the Tres Rios CBC Dec. 16 (fide DY). Two Golden-crowned Kinglets were found along the Salt River w. of 99th Ave., Dec. 15 at least until Jan. 15 (TC) and two more were reported at Morgan City Wash below Lake Pleasant during the winter (TC). A **Sprague's Pipit** (a rare winter visitor) was discovered on the Gila River CBC Dec. 27 (TC).

More than the usual number of **N. Parulas** were recorded: one was found along the Salt River w. of 99th Ave. Dec. 15 and two were found there Dec. 16 (TC,BG), two more were found near the confluence of the Gila and Agua Fria Rivers Dec. 17 (BG), one was observed along the Hassayampa River near the confluence with the Gila River Dec. 27 (GR), and one was found along the Verde River in the Box Bar area Jan. 29 (MT).

More Yellow Warblers than usual were reported: individuals were found at Fountain Hills Dec. 3 (KR), at the Tres Rios Cobble Ponds Dec. 4 – 16 (TC,JJ), at a pond in Scottsdale Dec. 10 (TC,JJ), and three were reported at the GWR Dec. 6 (MM); one discovered in downtown Phoenix near the U.S. Courthouse Feb. 24 (JM), provided the first February record for the county. Individual Chestnut-sided Warblers were observed along the Arizona canal e. of 64th St. from late November to Dec. 15 (JN) and along the Salt River w. of 99th Ave., Dec. 4 at least until Dec. 16 (TC,JJ). Individual "Myrtle" type Yellow-rumped Warblers were reported at the GWR Dec. 11 (PD), on the Tres Rios CBC Dec. 16 (fide DY), on the Gila River CBC Dec. 27 (fide TC), and on the Carefree/Cave Creek CBC Jan. 1 (fide WT).

Up to two Black-throated Gray Warblers were observed along the Salt River w. of 99th Ave, Dec. 3 at least to Dec. 16 (TC). A Black-throated Gray Warbler, a Townsend's Warbler, and a Black-and-white Warbler were recorded on the Salt/Verde CBC Dec. 14 (fide KR). A Hermit x Townsend's Warbler was observed along the Salt River w. of 99th Ave. Dec. 15 (TC). Additional individual Black-and-white Warblers were seen at El Dorado Park in Scottsdale Dec. 5 (HB), at the Tres Rios Hayfield site Dec. 18 – Jan. 15 (MV,TC,TMc), and s.w. of Buckeye Dec. 26 (fide TC).

The **Prairie Warbler**, at the GWR since mid-November, remained through the winter into March (m.ob.). A second **Prairie Warbler** was discovered in Chandler Jan. 7 – 14 (TC,DY) and provided the third county record. The **Ovenbird**, at the Desert Botanical Garden (DBG) since late November, remained until Feb. 27 (TCh). A Painted Redstart was seen again along Lower Camp Creek Jan. 1 – 2 after having been absent for four years (TC) and another individual was seen along Fish Creek on the Apache Trail Jan. 15 (BE).

A male Summer Tanager (rare in winter) was reported in a Tempe yard from late November into March for the fifth consecutive year (BE).

Three **Grasshopper Sparrows** were discovered at Paloma Jan. 28 (TC,TMc) and were re-found there Feb. 26 (K&CR,SG); there were no previous January or February records for the county. The "Slate-colored" Fox Sparrow, at the DBG since late November, was still present there Dec. 6 (SBa); another individual was found along the Hassayampa River near the confluence with the Gila River Dec. 27 (WR). Between one and two Swamp Sparrows were observed at the Tres Rios Cobble Ponds Dec. 15 – Jan. 18 (TC,RWd,BD,AV); additional individuals were seen at El Mirage Pond Dec. 15 (TC) and at the GWR (RH).

Individual White-throated Sparrows were reported on the Salt/Verde CBC Dec. 14 (fide KR), s.w. of Buckeye Dec. 26 (TC), and one was found dead near 3rd Ave. & Thomas in Phoenix Dec. 27 (EL). Individual Harris's Sparrows were found near the confluence of the Gila and Agua Fria Rivers Dec. 24 (BG) and in Wickenburg Dec. 30 (LL). Individual Golden-crowned Sparrows were reported on the Gila River CBC Dec. 27 (fide TC) and at the Cobble Ponds Jan. 15 – 18 (TC,TMc,RWd,BD,AV).

The female **Orchard Oriole**, in a yard in Ahwatukee since November, was joined by a male Orchard Oriole Feb. 15 and both remained through the winter into March (SBa). The Hooded Oriole, in the same yard since November, also remained through the winter into March (SBa). The **Streak-backed Oriole**, at the GWR since early November, remained through the winter into March (m.ob.). An Am. Goldfinch (an uncommon winter visitor) was

recorded on the Carefree/Cave Creek CBC Jan. 1 (fide WT).

In Gila County, a Horned Grebe (a rare winter visitor) was observed on Roosevelt Lake Dec. 26 (K&CR). A **Palm Warbler** was discovered at Punkin Center Feb. 11 – 19 (K&CR). A Harris's Sparrow was found near the Roosevelt Lake Marina Dec. 26 (K&CR) and continued to be seen there at least until Feb. 25 (K&CR,MW,S&CW).

Following are records of unusual species observed at Boyce Thompson Arboretum in Pinal County during the winter: a Broad-billed Hummingbird and two Broad-tailed Hummingbirds Feb. 25 (RD), a Dusky Flycatcher Jan. 15 (RH), and a Cassin's Vireo Feb. 26 (TMc). The Rufous-backed Robin, the Brown Thrasher and up to two White-throated Sparrows remained through the winter into March (RH,TC,TMc et al.). A Western Tanager, present there since November, was seen again Feb.19 (TC).

Abbreviations: Christmas Bird Count (CBC), Desert Botanical Garden (DBG), Gilbert Water Ranch (GWR), Hassayampa River Preserve (HRP), many observers (m.ob.), Painted Rock Dam (PRD).

Observers: Charles Babbitt, Sally Barnes (SBa), Linda & Ken Bielek, Harold Bond, Scott Burge (Sbu), Greg Butcher, Tillie Chew (TCh), Dale Clark Troy Corman (TC), Bix Demaree, Pierre Deviche, Rich Ditch, Brian Enos, Sam Fried, Steve Ganley, Tom Gaskill, Bill Grossi, Liz Hatcher, Paul Hershberger, Tom Hildebrandt, Jack Holloway, Rich Hoyer, Justin Jones, Eric Latturmer, Paul Lehman, Linda Long, Tracy McCarthey, James McKay, Robert & Jimmin McMorran, Michael Moore, Jim Newell, Michael Plagens, Tim Price, Cindy Radamaker, Kurt Radamaker, Gary Rosenberg, Carlos Ross, Jeff Rusinow, Will Russell, Charles Saffell, Patrick Santinello, Sig Stangeland, David Stejskal, Mark Stevenson, Robin Silver, Walter Thurber, Matt Toomey, Jolan Truan, Anita Van Auker, Marceline Vandewater, Russ Widner (RWd), Robert Witzeman (RWz), Sarah & Chauncey Wood, Daniela Yellan.

One recent Saturday morning, the family was settling in for a typical lazy day. The television was on, the dogs were lying at our feet and positions had been claimed on the couch. Personally, I was thinking about catching a few winks sleep. My eyes had just barely begun to close when my reverie was shattered by noise and motion—a large thud was heard against our sliding glass door and the whole back wall shivered. My husband, Scott, was the first on his feet moving quickly towards the door. My heart was sinking as I realized that a bird had most likely flown into the glass door and I was disappointed that my hanging door ornament had not adequately warned a feathered friend. I was contemplating to go and view the damage when my husband exclaimed (in all reality-yelped), “a hawk flew into the door!!!” I was on my feet in a flash and running to the door while thoughts of “where are the gloves in the garage” and “I hope it doesn’t make it over the back fence only to land in the busy street beyond”. A little side note here, I wouldn’t randomly promote that lay people attempt to handle a bird of prey, however, I am a veterinarian who has some history with raptor rehabilitation. Meanwhile my feet weren’t keeping up with my thoughts and Scott’s second statement was something to the effect of, “no, it was a pigeon” followed by “and I think the hawk killed it on the door!” I finally arrived at the door (which is only footsteps away from the couch) followed by my father. The green grass just to the side of the concrete patio was littered with small pigeon feathers and just beyond the pool fence and the pool itself was a small hawk or falcon with a pigeon tightly grasped in it’s feet. I couldn’t see clearly to make an identification so I whirled around and dashed up the stairs two at a time to grab my digital camera. On my way I banged

my fist on my mother’s door and scared the daylight out of her. We both looked out the second story window (blinds down) only to see the bird starting to gain flight. The poor victim struggled to gain freedom and the raptor cleared the pool fence and slammed into the ground just short of our concrete fence dividing our yard from the neighbor. I slowly raised the blinds and despite the bird’s nervousness, managed to obtain a couple of snapshots. The pigeon struggled once more and the raptor jumped straight up in the air and slammed the bird into the gravel flexing it’s talons at the same time. After several minutes of admiration, the raptor took it’s prize and left us in awe and I got a good look at the

white banding on the underside of the long narrow tail. I was also left with the lateral imprint of a pigeon on my sliding glass door. I feed the hummingbirds and songbirds in the neighborhood and apparently now also feed higher in the food chain, the raptors! My identification is of a Sharp shinned hawk when we viewed the photos although we also thought it could have been a Merlin falcon. Not two weeks later, after I had cleaned the sliding glass door, my husband came home to another imprint in the sliding glass door. Needless to say, I feel slightly guilty when I am putting the bird seed outdoors but am eagerly waiting another appearance of our hunter.

CarefreeChristmasBirdCountSummary

JANUARY 2, 2006

Walter Thurber
(compiler)

The 14th annual Carefree Christmas Bird Count was held on Monday, January 2, 2006. Some 78 field observers and 8 feeder watchers teamed up to find 102 species and a record high 18,329 individual birds. We were surprised to find so many birds after the Cave Creek Complex Fire ravaged nearly one-fourth of our count area in June.

New species for the count were a Peregrine Falcon in the Tonto Hills area and Brewer’s Blackbirds at the north end of Spur Cross Road. This brings our cumulative total to 155 species. A Yellow-bellied Sapsucker was spotted along Seven Springs Wash and a Painted Redstart appeared at Lower Camp Creek. Two Sora were noted during the count week at the Dove Valley Ranch Golf Club. Peach-faced Lovebirds, however, were a no-show for the fifth consecutive year.

Record high counts were established for 34 species. Our sparrow numbers were up dramatically as they apparently benefited from re-growth of grasses in the burn areas. Gambel’s Quail was our most abundant bird; last year Carefree had the national high count for this species. We gathered at the Satisfied Frog Restaurant for our compilation dinner.

This year our area leaders were Harvey Beatty, Diane Berney, Greg Clark, Troy Corman, Joy Dingley, Cynthia Donald, Herbert Fibel, Andrea Ouse and Tice Supplee. Our volunteer corps included many Maricopa Audubon members and I am grateful to each of you for your support.

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/.

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. Pre-meeting dinners (October through April) are held at Pete's 19th 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, Kry's 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

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.

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