



# The Cactus Wren•dition



Volume LXIX No. 4

Winter - 2018



**Reddish Egret**  
by Andrew Cahill Hoppin



# Programs

**December 4, 2018**

## **Zachary Graham The Natural History and Fighting Behavior of Freshwater Crayfish**

Freshwater crayfish are aquatic invertebrates that play a central role in the ecology of their habitats. Over 650 individual species are currently recognized; although all crayfish have similar body plans, a wide range of behavioral, morphological, and physiological diversity exists within the group. Interestingly, the survival of many crayfish depends entirely on their ability to intimidate and fight other crayfish for resources. Zack's talk will cover general aspects of crayfish biology with an emphasis on their fighting behavior.

*Zack Graham is an animal behavior doctoral student at Arizona State University. He was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and like many Appalachian children, has memories of catching crayfish in local streams. After receiving a psychology degree from Penn State University, he somehow ended up working with a thermal biologist studying the fighting behavior of crayfish.*



*Fighting Crayfish. Photo by Zack Graham*

**January 8, 2019**

## **David and Diane Reesor Birds of Sri Lanka**

This program highlights the best of the Reesors' explorations in Sri Lanka, including sloth bears. A professional photographer, David Reesor's skills with a camera along with pithy remarks on each image will impress and edify. The Reesors include interesting excerpts from their encounters with the locals, who Diane refers to as "the most engaging people we have ever met."



*Asian Paradise Flycatcher.  
Photo by David Reesor*

**February 5, 2019**

## **Jeff Perry Least Bitterns at GWR**

In spring 2016, three adult Least Bitterns were spotted around the fishing pond at Gilbert Water Ranch. Jeff Perry has spent most of his weekends since observing and photographing the birds, from the male competing for the female's attention, and a failed nesting attempt that summer, to a successful pairing and raising



*Least Bittern. Photo by Jeff Perry*

of two broods in 2017. Join Jeff as he shares some of his anecdotes and images.

*Jeff Perry started birding and bird photography in the Seattle area in the late 1980s. He moved to Iowa City in 1992 where he focused on owl photography and followed a pair of Barred Owls for three years. He enjoys behavioral observations as much as capturing images and spends more time learning about species of interest and less on increasing his life list. Jeff moved to Phoenix in 2009. Having taken a hiatus from photography for some years, he found the beauty of the desert and species of the Southwest reignited this interest.*

**March 5, 2019**

## **Jim Burns Local Patch: Treasures Nearby**

The last time Jim Burns gave a MAS program he went exotic and took us to Costa Rica. This time he's going local and taking us just a few miles from his front door for a peek behind the curtain into the lives of common Valley birds with which we're all familiar. Come with Jim for a visit to his local patch.



*Pied-billed Grebe with sunfish.  
Photo by Jim Burns*

## **Meetings are held in Scottsdale:**

Papago Buttes Church of the Brethren (northwest of 64th Street and Oak Street, which is between Thomas Road and McDowell Road). Southbound, you may enter from 64th Street, just north of Oak Street. If coming from the south, turn left (west) at Oak Street and then right at the Elks Lodge. Continue north along the eastern edge of their parking lot and turn right into the church parking lot. Look for signs that say "Audubon." Come and join us and bring a friend! MAS holds a monthly meeting on the first Tuesday of the month from September through April.

## **Committees/Support**

**Arizona Audubon Council Rep**  
Position Open

**Bookstore**  
Sochetra Ly  
602 860-0370

**Poet Laureate**  
David Chorlton  
480 705-3227

**Website**  
Laurie Nessel  
602 391-4303  
[laurienessel@gmail.com](mailto:laurienessel@gmail.com)

**Maricopa Audubon Website**  
<http://www.maricopaaudubon.org>

**Colors are the smiles of nature.**

*Reigh Hunt (7784-1859)*

## **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.

# President's Message



Mark W. Larson

**F**all storms, often remnants of Pacific hurricanes, sometimes bring the Sonoran Desert the promise of a spring full of wildflowers. Let's hope that the storms we are having in early October do just that! Of course, this unusual fall moisture needs to be followed by regular, evenly spaced winter rains and snows in the high country throughout the winter. In the past several years we haven't gotten any of that and we have not received the full complement of summer rains, either. Extended and severe drought has been the result and the natural systems—the birds, the other wildlife, and the special vegetation they require have all suffered. Let us all hope and pray that the weather pattern favors us this winter with gentle rains that engender a healthier, more fruitful desert and less fire danger next year.

Speaking of fall storms, we are now experiencing the long overdue end of the hot weather of summer. It also means that many of our members will be returning to the Valley for the winter and attending our monthly meetings, our field trips, and our other activities. Remember, the Christmas Bird Count season is just around the corner and we need you to participate! You do not need to be an expert birder to contribute in a positive way during one of these counts. Just look on the list of counts in this issue of *The Cactus Wren•dition* for one in which you would like to help and call or email the compiler to say you would like to take part.

In addition to urging you to participate in a Christmas Bird Count, I would like to take this opportunity to ask you, the members, for any comments or suggestions that you might have about how we can make this a more effective and more enjoyable organization. I and the Board of Directors sincerely endeavor to make improvements and we welcome your input. My contact information, as well as for all of the Board, is available on the back page of the *Wren•dition*. 🐦

Mark W. Larson  
President

## Letter from the Editor

by Gillian Rice



Gillian Rice

"Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find out that going to the mountains is going home; that wilderness is a necessity..." I was struck by this quotation by John Muir that Eric Rutkow includes in his book, *American Canopy: Trees, Forests, and the Making of a Nation*. A contemporary observation but written over a hundred years ago. Research continues to support Muir's view: being out in nature is good for us. One reason might be that when we experience the natural world and watch the flora, fauna, or even the clouds floating by, we live in the moment.

Our minds don't wander. We are in the present. We are not agonizing over the past (Should I have said that? Why did I do that?) or worrying about the future (What should I say to so-and-so? What should I plan for the holidays?).

Think of a special nature moment you've had. I remember seeing Saturn for the first time through a telescope: oh, look, the rings! Somehow, it's just different when you see something "for real." I thought of nothing else but Saturn's rings in that moment. I wanted the moment to last and last but had to share and let someone else look through the telescope. When I saw a family of coyote pups, it was impossible to think of anything else I was so thrilled.

Read about special nature moments experienced by contributors to this issue of the *Wren•dition*: Andrew Hoppin spots a rare egret; Robert Ashton encounters an owl; Matt VanWallene writes of his excitement at pelagic birding; and Walt Anderson tells how safari travelers become captivated by birds of the East African grasslands. But you don't have to go far to be close to nature. Mary Martin relates her tale of helping a family of White-winged Doves in her backyard.

We can't always be out in nature, but we can bring nature close. Watching birds is meditative. Taking a few minutes now and then from our day to watch hummingbirds at the feeder and contemplate nothing else but their beauty helps us reduce stress, even that tough holiday stress.

Many thanks to this issue's contributors. To them and to all of you, I wish many special experiences in nature this winter season. 🐦

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### On the Cover: Reddish Egret

Nikon D800E, Lens: Tamron SP 150-600mm G2, 1/1250sec, f/8, ISO 1250, Salt River, October 1, 2018, by Andrew Cahill Hoppin

**Andrew says:** Tropical storm Rosa had just rolled into the valley, but I was determined

to make my routine trip to the Salt River. I made my usual trek upstream from Granite Reef to the Kerr nest site where I usually rest and say hello to my eagle friends. The weather was dismal, and I was the only person along this particular section the whole time I was there. I noticed the usual Great Blue Heron pair, Snowy and Great Egrets, and this darker buddy that immediately caught my eye. I trudged through the mud up to where it was frolicking joyfully after the fish at its feet, but it tended to avoid me. I then got back in my kayak and positioned myself perpendicularly to its location and came in slowly. The bird was extremely lenient of my position, and only flapped away once, more out of respect for my space rather than fear. I got home and sent the images to my friend Jack Holloway for the definitive identification: juvenile Reddish Egret. What a wonderful joy it was to capture this beautiful rare bird.

*The Birds of Phoenix and Maricopa County* reports that the Reddish Egret is a casual summer and fall post-breeding visitor along the edge of rivers, marshes, irrigation ditches, ponds, lakes, and reservoirs. Only three winter records exist; all juveniles probably from breeding areas in Mexico's Sea of Cortez region.

## Are you a Friend?

Do you enjoy reading *The Cactus Wren•dition*? Are you a "Friend of Maricopa Audubon?" Or have you renewed your membership this year? Please support Maricopa Audubon by becoming a Friend. Please see the back page of *The Cactus Wren•dition* for full details. Your contribution will help fund the publication of the *Wren•dition*. Thank you for your support!



# Maricopa Audubon Society Field Trips & Workshops

field trips

**Car Pooling:** Please make every effort to organize your own car pool, consolidate vehicles at meeting places and/or contact leaders for car pooling assistance. Be courteous to the trip leaders and help cover their gas costs. We recommend that passengers reimburse drivers 10 cents per mile each.

## Reminders:

- Avoid wearing bright colors. Wear neutral-colored clothing and sturdy walking shoes.
- Bring sunscreen, sunglasses, head protection, and water.
- Always bring your binoculars. Bring a scope if recommended.
- Submit trip and leader suggestions to the Field Trip Chair, Larry Langstaff.
- Unless stated otherwise, reservations are required.

**Day Passes:** Many locations in the National Forests require Day Use Passes. For details, see <http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/tonto/passes-permits>

## Wednesday, January 9

### Arlington

Thanks to Donna Smith of Sonoran Audubon Society, a great route around Arlington, west of Phoenix, through agricultural fields, is reliable for Burrowing Owls and diurnal raptors, sparrows, and common desert species, plus waterfowl at canals and farm ponds. Start 7:15 am in Buckeye and end there six hours later. Mostly car birding. Limit: 8  
Leader: Kathe Anderson, [kathe.coot@cox.net](mailto:kathe.coot@cox.net)

## Saturday, January 12

### Santa Cruz Flats

See wintering raptors perched on roadside poles. Search agricultural areas south of Casa Grande for location specialties: Crested Caracara, Mountain Plover, and Sprague's Pipit. Leave Tempe 6:15 am, with sunrise occurring before we arrive on the flats around 7:25 am. Return early afternoon. Bring binoculars (and a scope if you have one), water and snacks, and wear subdued-colored clothing. Limit: 11 plus leader in three cars.

Leader: Dave Pearson. To reserve, send cell # to Larry Langstaff, [larrylangstaff1@gmail.com](mailto:larrylangstaff1@gmail.com)

## Saturday, February 9

### Base & Meridian Wildlife Area

Visit an urban riparian and marshland area owned by AZ Game & Fish. Explore habitat along the Gila River looking for water and marsh birds, raptors, and a variety of songbirds. Leave Tempe 7:00 am; return by noon. Bring water, binoculars, and a hat. Difficulty: 2 (mostly an old paved road). Limit: 6.

Leader: Cindy Marple, [clmarple@cox.net](mailto:clmarple@cox.net)

## Wednesday, February 13

### Arlington Valley

Look for hawks, Sandhill Cranes, sparrows, and waterfowl in this agricultural area southwest of Phoenix. Riparian habitat and low desert brush boost our species total. Bring snacks, a drink, and a scope if

you have one. Easy. Limit: 11 plus leader in three cars. Leader: Dave Pearson. To reserve, send cell # to Larry Langstaff, [larrylangstaff1@gmail.com](mailto:larrylangstaff1@gmail.com)

## Monday, February 18

### Sweetwater and El Rio

Start 5:30 am from Phoenix, and head south to explore El Rio (formerly known as the Coachline Gravel Pits) and Sweetwater Wetlands, just outside north Tucson. Good days here top 40 species, mostly waterfowl, shorebirds and water-related songbirds like Common Yellowthroat, Yellow-headed and Red-winged Blackbirds, and Vermilion Flycatcher. Also unexpected sightings such as Bobcat. Paths mostly level dirt and easily negotiated. End 1:30 pm in Phoenix. Difficulty 1-2. Limit: 8.

Leader: Kathe Anderson, [kathe.coot@cox.net](mailto:kathe.coot@cox.net)

## Saturday February 23

### Pima Canyon (South Mountain Park)

Hike a gently rising wide path to see and learn some typical Sonoran desert birds, including Canyon Towhees, Costa's Hummingbirds, possible Bendire's and Crissal Thrashers, and raptors. Also see adjacent petroglyphs and beautiful wildflowers. 8:30-10:30 am. Difficulty: 1. Bring water, hat, walking shoes, optional scope. Limit 8.

Leader: Myron Scott. To reserve, send cell # to Larry Langstaff, [larrylangstaff1@gmail.com](mailto:larrylangstaff1@gmail.com)

## Friday, March 8

### Big Day: Birding from Oak Flat to the Water Ranch

Goal: over 70 species in at least four habitats, including the uplands of Oak Flat, the oasis of Boyce Thompson Arboretum, and the suburban wetlands of Gilbert Water Ranch. Walking areas are mostly level; plan to cover up to four miles. Start 5:45 am from Gilbert and return at 2:00 pm. Difficulty 1-2. Limit: 8.

Leader: Kathe Anderson, [kathe.coot@cox.net](mailto:kathe.coot@cox.net)

## Saturday, March 9

### Oak Flat (Ga'an Canyon)

View lingering winter and typical spring Sonoran upland and oak-juniper birds: juncos, Crissal Thrasher, Black-chinned Sparrow, Bewick's Wren, probable early Vermilion Flycatcher, three towhee species, and raptors. This area is sacred to the San Carlos Apache, but planned for mining. Look at test drilling sites and impacts. 9:00-11:30 am. Difficulty: 5 (some uphill walking). Bring snacks, water, hat, sturdy walking shoes, optional scope. Limit: 10.

Leader: Myron Scott. To reserve, send cell # to Larry Langstaff, [larrylangstaff1@gmail.com](mailto:larrylangstaff1@gmail.com)

## Wednesday, March 13

### Glendale Recharge Ponds

These large ponds attract huge numbers of waterfowl, shorebirds, and raptors during the winter. Bird for two and a half to three hours. Bring water, hat, and

binoculars. Scopes useful here! Difficulty 1. Limit: 8. Leader: Cindy Marple, [clmarple@cox.net](mailto:clmarple@cox.net)

## Saturday, March 16

### Flagstaff Area Lakes

Meet 8:00 am in Flagstaff. Bring lunch and warm clothing. Look for waterfowl on the lakes. Possible species include Bald Eagle, Red Crossbill, Cassin's Finch, Pinyon Jay, and Rough-legged Hawk. Minimum of 6 people required.

Leader: Charles Babbitt, 602 840-1772

or [cjbabbitt@cox.net](mailto:cjbabbitt@cox.net)

## Monday, March 18

### Mt Ord

Mt. Ord (7100'), in the Mazatzal mountains, is one of Maricopa County's few choices for high elevation bird habitat. An early start could grace us with one of the premier sunrises in the county. See Western Bluebird, White-breasted and Pygmy Nuthatches, Hairy and Acorn Woodpeckers, Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay, Bridled Titmouse, Hutton's Vireo, and Spotted Towhee. Potential sightings include: Painted Redstart, Olive Warbler, Cassin's Finch, and Red Crossbill. Difficulty: 2. Uneven rock surfaces and short travel down moderately steep drainage. Meet at 5:00 am. Return at about 1:00 pm. Bring snacks, water, hat, sturdy walking shoes, hiking poles if necessary for drainage, and lunch. Limit: 8.

Leader: Dara Vasquez. To reserve, send cell # to Larry Langstaff, [larrylangstaff1@gmail.com](mailto:larrylangstaff1@gmail.com)

**For additional field trips, sign up for the e-newsletter (see page 11). To join a Christmas Bird Count trip, see page 21.**

## WORKSHOPS

### Raptor Workshop and Field Trip with Kathe

**Anderson.** 10:00-11:30 am, Papago Church of the Brethren, February 19, and 6:30 am to noon, Arlington, February, 24, 2019.

See [www.maricopaaudubon.org](http://www.maricopaaudubon.org) for details and registration or call Laurie Nessel, 602 391-4303.

### Sparrows without Anxiety: Workshop and Field Trip with Tom Gaskill.

6:00-9:00 pm, Papago Church of the Brethren, March 7, 2019 and 7:00 am-3:30 pm, Rio Salado Audubon Center, March 9. Sparrows are beautiful. They can be enjoyable (and even fun). Get past the angst that sparrow identification causes by seeing sparrows differently: focus on habitat niche specialization, genus, and shape, not on plumage. We'll focus on strategies for identifying and appreciating LBJs ("little brown jobs"). The field trip will put those lessons into practice.

See [www.maricopaaudubon.org](http://www.maricopaaudubon.org) for details and registration or call Laurie Nessel, 602 391-4303.



# San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area (SPRNCA)

by Mark Horlings

**In June, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) published a new Resource Management Plan (RMP) for those portions of the San Pedro River included in the SPRNCA. The Plan compares four alternatives, but the preferred alternative would dramatically increase cattle grazing, hunting, and off-road vehicle use.**

Under the BLM's preferred alternative, cattle grazing, now limited to 7030 acres, would be permitted on 26,450 acres, 3.8 times as much and almost half the SPRNCA. The actual burden from grazing would be even greater, since animal unit months would rise from 592 at present to 3955 under BLM's preferred alternative, almost seven times as many.

The RMP has not been well received by MAS or others concerned about the San Pedro. MAS members who attended the September meeting endorsed a letter written by Kathe Anderson, since submitted to the BLM, questioning the increases proposed in roads, off-road vehicle use and grazing. Robin Silver, MAS Vice President, submitted detailed comments on behalf of the Center for Biological Diversity and MAS.

Reading the RMP, it's difficult to understand how BLM could recommend more hunting, grazing and off-road vehicles. The RMP describes conditions on the ground that undercut its preferred alternative. The RMP itemizes these harms from grazing:

"[The preferred] Alternative C would increase livestock grazing in areas that have a severe susceptibility to erosion from grazing."

"Livestock grazing can compact soil by forming dense layers near the surface....[T]oo much compaction can decrease the rate of water infiltration and gas exchange."

"Decreased gas exchange rates can cause aeration problems and soil chemistry changes, and negatively affect root metabolism. All of these are stressing agents of vegetation, which is a key component of soil stabilization."

"Livestock grazing reduces perennial vegetation cover by approximately 30%."

"[The preferred] Alternative C would also require new wells in upland areas to service livestock."

"Grazing hurts wildlife by reducing vegetation, spreading weeds, reducing water quality, altering water channels, trampling egg masses and causing erosion."

And after all this, the BLM prefers: more grazing!

Dean Bibles, Arizona Director of the BLM when the SPRNCA was established also wrote. In his words, "Frankly, there is no scientific or other common sense reason to allow privately owned livestock in the area."

Former Director Bibles' letter also addressed whether the BLM's Plan violated the law establishing the SPRNCA by treating this National Conservation Area as though it were ordinary BLM land, subject to the doctrines of multiple use. He wrote: "The preferred option is contrary to the expressed and intended purpose of the SPRNCA and misunderstands that the BLM is responsible for some for some special areas that are not to be managed as multiple use."

To quote the BLM: "The SPRNCA law calls for conserving, protecting, and enhancing the riparian area and the aquatic, wildlife, archaeological, paleontological, scientific, cultural, educational, and recreational resources, while allowing only such use that would further the primary purposes for which the conservation area was established."

The stated goal of that legislation was to "conserve, protect, and enhance." The assets to be conserved, protected, and enhanced were limited to "aquatic, wildlife, archaeological scientific, cultural educational and recreational resources."

The authorizing legislation required the BLM to allow only such uses as further the primary purposes for which the conservation area was established. The RMP appears instead to have been written to consider BLM's usual mandate, allowing multiple economic and recreational uses. MAS and several of its allies have stressed this difference in their formal comments. 🐦



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## 404 Permits Update:

**Arizona's Department of Environmental Quality plans to assume responsibility for issuing Clean Water Act permits. ADEQ would investigate plans to fill or dredge wetlands, review environmental effects, and then approve, deny, or seek changes to the project.**

When federal agencies make these decisions, courts review them under the Endangered Species or National Environmental Policy Acts. State control would remove this oversight.

In July, ADEQ organized six committees of stakeholders to advise on different aspects of the changeover. I'm a member of a committee on the Endangered Species Act and another advising on consultation with Arizona's tribes. Reports are due in December, and ADEQ hopes to publish final plans for the takeover in mid-2019. 🐦

# When the Bough Breaks.....

By Mary Martin



*Empty Nest. Photo by Mary Martin*

**Picky, picky, picky -- that was my thought as I watched a White-winged Dove select one twig with great care, only to quickly decide that another one was better... no, this one over here. Finally, it settled on one, then, looking about with caution, it flew up into our backyard tree. When I saw no dove activity, I took my binoculars and discovered the beginnings of a nest, and later, the whole nest.**

The nest looked complete after a few days, but it was many days before I saw the dove actually in the nest. Every so often I would head out under the tree with my binoculars and check. At last, there she was! Then I never seemed to catch her on the nest for several days.

I marked my calendar for the time when I saw an adult on the nest regularly. It could have been a her or a him, I realized, since I had learned from my book, *The Sibley Guide to Bird Life & Behavior*, that both parents share incubating duty, with males doing duty part of the daytime hours and the female during the night. After two weeks had passed, I checked every few days but I never was sure I saw any little ones. I never heard any cheeping or begging coming from the nest, so I wondered if the eggs had been infertile. I didn't continue to monitor the nest as often.

Then, after more than a week, a monsoon dust storm hit in the late afternoon, with mighty winds, but no rain. When calm returned, I went out to gather up various bits of trash that had blown in. As I entered the rear yard, I saw two doves, nestlings, on the ground. The nest had been blown upside down several branches below where it had been.

One dove was quite a bit larger than the other and I thought of it as a teenager. Gawky, helpless, worried, disheveled, laughable, kind of cute ... all these words came to mind but never "pretty." Its feet seemed too large, as did its beak.

I came inside and told my husband about their fate and then suddenly realized that it would be up to me to rescue them. Their parents had no way of getting them back off the ground to safety. I grabbed an old biscuit basket, headed back outside, and plopped them one at a time into it. I wedged basket and nestlings tightly in an orange-bell shrub in our rear yard. All this time, I had not heard any sound out of them. I worried that the parents might not find them. I checked online for information on how to feed a dove. It was wasted worry, as a parent was on the nest quite soon. I did learn that doves, like pigeons, feed their young "crop milk," or "pigeon milk." According to my *Sibley* reference book, crop milk is "derived from sloughed off, liquid-filled cells that line the crops of both male and female adults. Rich in fats and proteins, crop milk meets the nutritional needs of young pigeons and doves in the same way that insects and animal protein do for the young of most other bird species." The little ones stick their heads inside their parent's mouth to collect the crop milk. This is fed to them for five to 10 days, after which they get regurgitated food from what the parents are eating. This must be a lot of saguaro fruit and seeds.

I returned to check on the nestlings around nine the next morning and realized that they needed more protection from the sun than was available in the shrub. I brought out an old sheet and apologized to them as I was sure my attempts to fling the sheet up over the whole shrub would scare them. It took more than one attempt, but I finally achieved my goal and secured the sheet with about 15 clothespins, leaving a tepee-like opening facing north for the parents to enter and leave.



*Protection on Shrub. Photo by Mary Martin*





*White-winged Dove and nestling. Photo by Matt Van Wallene*

Four days later, when another windy dust storm approached, I stepped out to see if a parent was with them. They were alone. By now the wind had started to hit and I decided that a few more clothespins would be wise. When I approached to secure the sheet with another 10 pins, it seemed to frighten the larger of the doves and, much to my surprise, it popped right out of the nest and “hopped/flew” to a corner of the stucco fence of the backyard. Much to my relief, a parent flew right to the ground to be with it. The fledgling managed, awkwardly, to gain the top of the fence then, just as the wind hit with great ferocity, I saw both the parent and the young one on top of the storage shed in the yard behind us. I quickly finished securing the sheet and dashed for the door just as the dust arrived full force. I did worry that the fledgling would be blown away by the wind, but I had learned from *Sibley* that doves fledged before they were strong fliers and that they would seek shelter in bushes and shrubs and that the parents would continue to feed them for many more days, until they could fly with them. I hoped it would all work out.



*White-winged Dove fledgling. Photo by Matt Van Wallene*

This storm came with rain; huge drops of forceful rain, (a third of an inch in our gauge.) I doubted that the sheet would hold but could not see it without stepping outside. When things calmed down enough for me to step out and look, I saw that the sheet had held and the basket was cockeyed, but still there, as was the nestling – wet, wild-eyed, and frightened – and definitely ticked off, but alive and present! As I righted the basket and made sure it was secure, I noticed how rapidly the birds grew. This one looked as big as its older nest mate had when I first rescued them, just a few days earlier. I returned to the house and hoped that the other parent would return soon to brood. It did!

Two days later at about 9:30 am, movement on our patio caught my eye over the top of the newspaper I was reading. I looked up to see the second nestling, now fledgling, walk boldly up on our patio in full view. It paused, and I took that as a thank you and wished it well. I was richer for the experience and so little doves, I thank you. 🐦

*Mary Martin is a naturalist by love.*





*Western Screech-Owl. Photo by Robert Ashton*

## An Unexpected Find

by Robert Ashton

**When in the outdoors one needs to always be ready for the unexpected. My wife was taking an early evening art class at the Desert Botanical Garden and I took the time to wander the garden looking for photo opportunities of the flower, cactus, and succulent variety. While walking on one of the less traveled trails, I noticed some Cactus Wrens that were very excited about something. I quickly found the object of their concern. Just a foot or so above eye level, and almost hanging over the path was an owl. The prospect of owl pictures pushed botany right out of my mind. I was fully prepared; my camera with long lens was already on a tripod, which was a necessity as the light was fading.**

I was sure that as soon as I pointed my camera, the owl would silently swoop off out of sight. I needn't have worried.

This owl knew in its bones that I was no threat. It looked on, sometimes with a look of disdain, for the next 15 minutes as I took pictures; first from one angle, then another, trying to move carefully and slowly so as not to disturb my subject. But my subject was most cooperative, or he, or was it she, was just bored by my presence. I was even able to motion to another garden visitor to approach quietly and she observed the owl for several minutes as well.

But who was this patient owl? I am not much of a birder. I was proud of myself for identifying the Cactus Wrens, but there are a number of owl possibilities and they never seem quite right in the bird books. Fortunately, some of my wife's artist friends are avid birders; Marceline VandeWater identified the species as a Western Screech-Owl. I hope I didn't disturb his early evening very much, or maybe he found me amusing. 🦉



# Release

for Paul Halesworth

I

*Six Northern Rough-winged  
Swallows in the dark  
container wait  
for what comes next  
after being rescued from a vent,  
raised in the suburbs  
and prepared for this  
bright moment  
above still, green water  
where the sky  
has shaken loose insects  
shining in the morning's  
buzz of light  
when the sun  
opens wide its arms.*

II

*There used to be more flowers here,  
used to be more citrus  
groves, and scents  
that drifted up to houses  
miles away,  
while now the road  
is lined with new convenience  
stores up to the wooden house  
alone on reservation land  
whose people live in a century  
of their own. The woodpeckers  
in their containers  
aren't aware  
of what they're passing, or  
the world they'll soon become  
a part of, until the lids are opened  
and they need no history  
to guide them.*

## Open Board Position: Publicity

The Maricopa Audubon Society is seeking a board member to assume responsibility for Publicity. This board member chairs the Publicity Committee, which writes press releases and communicates with the media. Familiarity with social media is desired. If you have relevant experience, please contact any Board member to express your interest in serving. You do not need to be a year-round resident of the Phoenix area to serve effectively in this role. 🦉

# What are the Most Widespread Species in the World?

by Tom Gatz

**OK, that's an easy one: we are. Humans occur on every continent and many islands of the world, but what about other animals and plants? We're not talking about the highest numbers here. That would likely be something like phytoplankton, roundworms, or Antarctic Krill. Or the Bristlemouth, a three-inch, deep-ocean luminescent fish that is so numerous it is believed to have more biomass than any vertebrate in the world. If just limited to the most abundant bird species, that might be the seed-eating Red-billed Quelea birds, which gather in enormous flocks and terrorize African farmers. What we are talking about here, however, are the most cosmopolitan (widely distributed) species of each major group. Here is what I found so far. Twelve of them occur in Maricopa County.**

## Mammals

If we don't count the wide-ranging Orca (Killer Whale) and limit ourselves to terrestrial mammals, it might be the Brown Rat, also known as the Norway Rat despite having likely originated in China. It has followed humans around the world and even to islands uninhabited by us where they often wreak havoc on indigenous species.

## Birds

This one might surprise you. It's the formerly endangered Peregrine Falcon. Again, it's not abundant, but so widespread that it occurs on every continent except Antarctica in even more remote places than do the widespread Osprey and Barn Owl (domestic chickens don't count).



*Peregrine Falcon. Photo by Matt Van Wallene*



*Brahminy Blindsnake – coming in a flowerpot to your garden soon. Photo by Jeff Servoss*

## Snakes

The Brahminy Blindsnake (or “flowerpot snake”) is considered the most widely distributed terrestrial reptile in the world. However, I had never even heard of it until a friend, Stacie Beute, found two; one of them in her Phoenix home and one in her yard. She had just brought home several potted plants

from some commercial nurseries in town. Genetic studies suggest origins in southern Asia, but a long history of human introduction of this species in the soil of potted plants, ballast of ocean-going ships, and other means have obscured its geographical roots. The reptile's success is facilitated in part by its having only one gender –female, enabling it to reproduce from a single individual. It is not venomous, but Stacie says, “it smells awful”.

## Lizards

The Mediterranean House Gecko. This is the one you might see chasing insects around your patio lights if you live in urban areas. Again, it likely spread by hitchhiking on houseplants and other objects shipped around the world.

## Turtles

If we include sea turtles, it would likely be the Leatherback that occurs throughout the world's oceans from the North Sea south to the Cape of Good Hope. If limited to freshwater species, it's the Red-eared Slider that many of us had as pets when we were kids. Native to the southeastern US, it now occurs throughout most of the Americas and around much of the world after more than 52 million were exported for the pet



trade, peaking during the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle TV cartoon craze. They compete with native species and are included on the list of the world's 100 most invasive species.

### Frogs

Probably the American Bullfrog, introduced for its edible legs on several continents around the world and considered invasive and a threat to native species.

### Fish

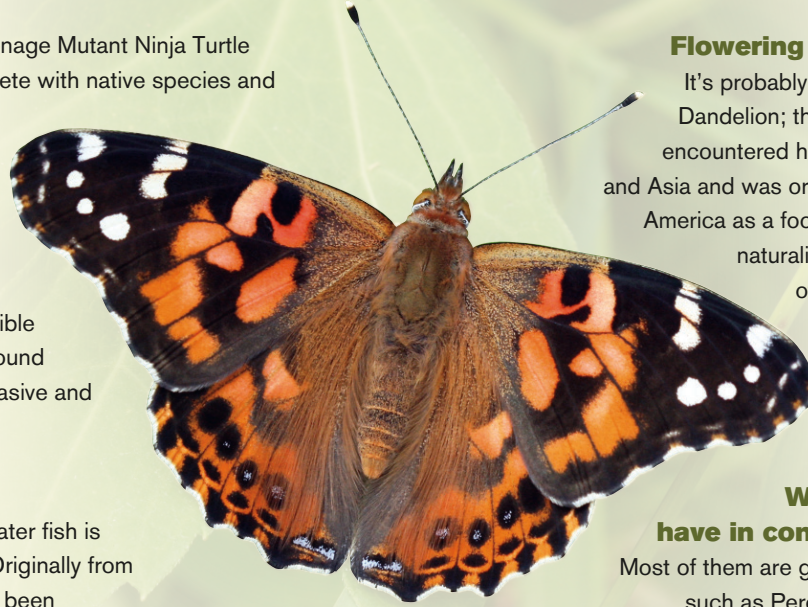
The most widespread freshwater fish is possibly the Mosquito Fish. Originally from eastern North America, it has been introduced for mosquito control around the world where it competes with, or preys upon, native species that are often more efficient at mosquito control.

### Butterflies

The Painted Lady. This migratory gal really gets around. Found on every continent except Antarctica, it is a generalist that uses over 300 different host plants, favoring thistle.

### Dragonflies

The Wandering Glider is the world's most cosmopolitan dragonfly, occurring on all the continents except Antarctica, plus a long list of oceanic islands.



*Painted Lady. Photo by Marceline VandeWater*

### Flowering Plants

It's probably the Common Dandelion; the species most often encountered here is native to Europe and Asia and was originally imported to America as a food crop. It has now naturalized throughout much of the world and in all 50 states and most Canadian provinces from sea level to alpine meadows.

### What do they all have in common?

Most of them are generalists. Species such as Peregrines and Brown Rats are not tied to one specific food source, narrow climate range, or habitat type. Others are more

particular about where they live and what they eat (like the ant- and termite-eating Brahminy Blindsnake) but they have hitched their wagon to humans, ensuring that their habitat (in this case, potted plants and garden beds) will be found wherever we are.

### Take home message

Only the Peregrine, butterfly, dragonfly and the marine species described above have reached the far corners of the earth on their own. Humans moved the others around, often to the detriment of native species. Please don't transport and release any non-native species, regardless of whether they are unwanted pets or a bucket of leftover baitfish.

Thanks to Jim Rorabaugh and Andrew Salywon for helping me with this article. For more information on invasive species, go to <https://www.cabi.org/isc/> 🐦

*Tom Gatz has been a MAS member since 1981.*



*The Wandering Glider was reportedly one of the first insects to reach Bikini Atoll after the nuclear bomb testing. Photo by Pierre Deviche*

### Sign up for the e-newsletter!



To receive updates and supplements to *The Cactus Wren•dition*, sign up for the monthly (September to May) e-newsletter. It includes meeting and field trip reminders, special events, and citizen science projects. To subscribe, contact [lauriensesel@gmail.com](mailto:lauriensesel@gmail.com)  
Note: We do not use the email list for anything other than the described purpose.



## Connecting with nature makes Arizona a fun and better place to live!

*Compiled by Vicki Hix*

*All photos by Vicki Hix*



*American White Pelican*



*Brown Pelican*



*American White Pelican  
showing pouch*

## The Scoop about Pelicans!

**Did you know** there are eight species of pelicans in the world, including the American White Pelican and the Brown Pelican in North America?<sup>1</sup> Pelicans live on the coasts, and on lakes and rivers. They are among the largest living birds with some species having a wingspan of 10 feet. The Brown Pelican is the smallest of them, weighing six to twelve pounds and having a wingspan of six to seven feet. The American White Pelican weighs ten to twenty pounds and has a wingspan of eight to nine feet. They are much larger than a Bald Eagle yet smaller than a California Condor.

**Did you know** only the Brown Pelican and the closely related Peruvian Pelican feed by plunging into the water, diving head first to trap fish in their pouches? Their pouch is a huge skin sac suspended from the lower half of the bill and can hold about one gallon of water and fish.<sup>2</sup> After a dive, once the Brown Pelican drains the water from its pouch sometimes a gull will perch on the pelican's head and try to steal the fish!<sup>3</sup> American White Pelicans feed differently by swimming and dipping their beaks in the water to scoop up a meal. Sometimes American White Pelicans will work together in a group to herd fish, corralling them and making them easier to catch!

**Did you know** Brown Pelicans are gray-brown with yellow heads and white underparts? Their necks turn dark red during breeding season. American White Pelicans are snow-white with black flight feathers that can only be seen when they spread their wings. Their bills and legs are yellow-orange. During breeding season the adult American White Pelican grows an unusual projection or "horn" on the upper mandible near the tip of the bill. When pelicans overheat, they face away from the hot sun and flutter their pouches which have many blood vessels. This lets their body heat escape!

**Did you know** Brown Pelicans incubate their eggs by standing on them and using the skin of their feet to keep them warm? American White Pelican embryos squawk before hatching to let their parents know they are too hot or too cold. Baby American White Pelicans crawl when they are one week old. By the time they are three weeks old they can walk with their bodies off the ground, and by ten weeks they can fly. The oldest Brown Pelican on record was 43 years old. The oldest known American White Pelican was 23 years, 6 months old and was banded in North Dakota in 1983.<sup>4</sup>

**Did you know** that the Brown Pelican is a symbol of the success of wildlife conservation efforts? Its population started declining in the 1950s and by 1970, it was on the Federal Endangered Species List. The use of pesticides was the main reason for this pelican's decline. Endrin, a chemical intended to kill insects and rodents, was also toxic to small marine fish and the pelicans that fed on them. The use of another pesticide called dichloro-diphenyl-trichloro ethane, or DDT, also entered the food chain causing the egg shells of the pelicans to be so fragile that the pelican parents squashed the eggs when they tried to incubate them. Fortunately, laws banning the agricultural use of DDT in the United States and limiting the use of Endrin helped the pelicans to flourish again.

For more information on pelicans, check out these websites:

<sup>1</sup><https://birdsna.org/Species-Account/bna/species/brnpel>

<sup>2</sup><https://nationalzoo.si.edu/animals/brown-pelican>

<sup>3</sup>[https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Brown\\_Pelican/overview](https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Brown_Pelican/overview)

<sup>4</sup>[https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/American\\_White\\_Pelican/overview](https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/American_White_Pelican/overview)





*Fishing Pelicans*

## Pelicans in the Desert?

If you keep your eyes on local ponds, you just might spot a pelican! American White Pelicans visit the Phoenix Metro area to feast in fish-stocked lakes and ponds. I spotted pelicans in the south Chandler area in 2009, and again in 2013. This past October a flock of 32 foraged on Fountain Hills Lake. Pelicans are also uncommon residents of the Tres Rios Wetlands southwest of Phoenix.

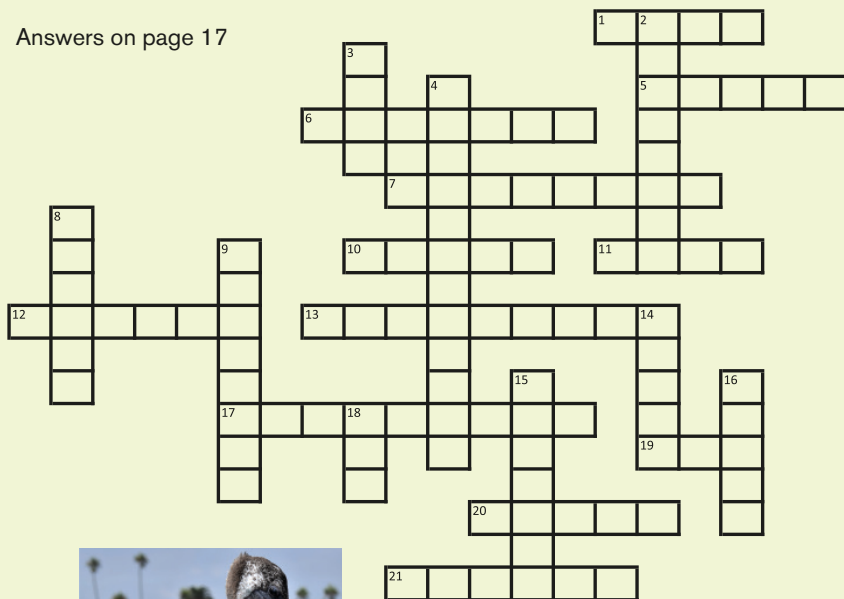
## Guess this Bird

This male has a distinctive top knot made of feathers.



## The Scoop about Pelicans! Crossword

Answers on page 17



*Brown Pelican*

### Across

- 1 Brown Pelicans plunge and \_\_\_\_\_ head first into the water to catch fish
- 5 Baby American White Pelicans can do this when they are one week old
- 6 Pelican eggs became \_\_\_\_\_ and cracked before they hatched as a result of DDT entering their parents' food chain
- 7 The distance from the tip of one wing to the tip of the opposite wing
- 10 A huge skin pocket suspended from the lower half of a pelican's bill
- 11 American White Pelicans work together as a team to \_\_\_\_\_ or round up fish to make them easier to catch
- 12 A pelican's pouch can hold one \_\_\_\_\_ of water and fish
- 13 A chemical or biological agent used to control pests and insects
- 17 American White Pelicans are much larger than this bird of prey
- 19 There are \_\_\_\_\_ species of pelicans in North America
- 20 Brown Pelicans \_\_\_\_\_ on their eggs to keep them warm
- 21 A pesticide used to kill insects and rodents that was also toxic to small marine fish and the pelicans that ate them

### Down

- 2 To keep eggs warm
- 3 The American White Pelican grows one of these on its upper mandible near the tip of its bill
- 4 Another word for farmed or cultivated
- 8 Baby pelicans do this before they hatch to let their parents know if they are too hot or too cold
- 9 Another word for the upper or lower parts of a pelican's bill
- 14 There are \_\_\_\_\_ species of pelicans in the world
- 15 Pelicans turn away from the sun and \_\_\_\_\_ their pouches when they get too hot
- 16 American White Pelicans use their pouches to \_\_\_\_\_ fish from the water
- 18 An abbreviation for the chemical dichloro-diphenyl-trichloro ethane



# Ladies on the High Seas

by Matt Van Wallene



*The California Flying Fish doesn't really fly but can leap out of the water and use its specially adapted fins to glide over the ocean's surface.*



*The Black-footed Albatross has a 7-foot wingspan.*



*The Common Murre's range is circumpolar and it will dive up to 200 feet to feed.*

**I needed to give my life bird list a kick start. Having never experienced pelagic birding I signed up for the next available boat out of San Diego. I so enjoyed the experience that I went on four more trips. Three of my five trips were with Buena Vista Audubon ([sandiegopelagics.com](http://sandiegopelagics.com)). Those trips are 12 hours long with things happening the entire day. I did not prepare well on my first trip and ended up sick.**

It was in the sick section (fulcrum) of the boat that I met Janet Shields, an MIT physicist. It doesn't take long for two birders to size each other up by simply asking what they are doing there. Janet has an American Birding Association (ABA-area) life bird count of 616.





Janet Shields is a third-generation birder with a life list count of 616.

She was on the boat driven by the desire to see two more species, which would get her to her mother's life bird count. Janet is a third generation birder who was guided by her grandmother before grade school, and later by her parents and sister. She surpassed her father's count of 606 on her trip to southern Florida and the Dry Tortugas. She said that her mother had achieved her life list while disabled, without guides or tours, and without eBird or apps. She would love to match her mother's number to honor her.



The Laysan Albatross is the second most common seabird in the Hawaiian Islands with a population of 2.5 million birds.

Now sick even after taking Dramamine, she was determined. Janet didn't get any lifers and despite her being seasick, she signed up for another trip. Sadly, the follow up trip had to be cancelled. Had she been on board, her count would have gone up by four. She notes that many of the last few birds on her parents' life lists were pelagics, because – of course – she inherited the seasickness tendency from dear old Dad, who therefore avoided pelagics until the birds called too loudly to ignore.

I photographed nine life birds on that first trip and there were more that I missed. I had not achieved that daily count level since 2011. Three weeks later, using medication for seasickness, I was back on board for another trip where I added four more birds to my list. To add to the pelagic birds there were whales, dolphins, and seals. A number of passerines that had lost their way on migration landed on the ship. We were 30 miles off shore and gulls were going after the song birds that were clearly distressed. My first two trips were so exhilarating that I decided to seek out further opportunities up the coast.

I booked two trips with Debi Love Shearwater, (<http://www.shearwaterjourneys.com>), one out of San Francisco to go to the Farallon Islands and the other a tour of Monterey Bay. Both outings were equally amazing and I added six more birds to my life list. Debi was very enthusiastic on both trips. You would never guess that she is just a year away from retirement. Debi, as some of you may know, was the inspiration for Annie Auklet in the movie *The Big Year*.

On her website, she writes: "In September 1976, I was mystified by my first encounter with a whale - the great Blue Whale! Since that time, I have seen many ocean wonders: 800,000 feeding Sooty Shearwaters, the annual rafting of the thousands of storm-petrels, the delicate calling of a pair of Ancient Murrelets, breaching Baird's Beaked Whales, mating



The Red-footed Booby is the smallest of the boobies with a 3-foot wingspan. It takes five months for a hatchling to make its first long flight.



# Ladies on the High Seas cont.

dolphins, singing Humpbacks, newborn Gray Whales, and oh yes, I have been eye-to-eye with the Sperm Whale! I have personally identified at least four bull Orcas that have visited the Monterey Bay area over a period that spans seven years. And, I have enjoyed the company of many, many fascinating people over the years. The magic of the ocean is still there, stronger than ever for me. I hope that you will join me and the crew for a journey."

On September 29th she was awarded the ABA's Ludlow Griscom Award for Outstanding Contributions in Regional Ornithology. This award is given to an individual who has dramatically advanced the state of ornithological knowledge for a particular region, either by long-time data contributions in monitoring avian status and distribution and/or through the force of their personality, teaching and inspiration. Her pelagic trips are the only ones that have a permit to chum or bait in Monterey Bay.



*Debi Love Shearwater, the inspiration for Annie Auklet in the movie The Big Year.*



*This Tufted Puffin landed next to the boat and checked us out for about five minutes. Debi Shearwater commented that she had never seen this in the 40-plus years of her pelagic experiences. It was astounding.*

I made another San Diego pelagic trip where I scored six more lifers. That fifth trip was every bit as fun as the first. Imagine a pelagic list that consists of albatrosses, boobies, shearwaters, storm-petrels, fulmars, auklets, jaegers, murrelets, puffins, guillemots, and murrees. Well, don't imagine it, do it!

Thank you to Janet Shields and Debi Love Shearwater for assisting me with this article. 🐦

*Matt Van Wallene has been birding for ten years and found his pelagic trips so exciting he is headed for Attu Island. His website is <http://hollandwest.com>.*



*Largest of the boobies, the Masked Booby's wingspan extends to 62 inches.*



*Humpback Whales regularly slap the water with their flippers and flukes (the lobes of their tails). Scientists believe this behavior might be a form of communication because it creates a great deal of noise, which can be heard far away under water.*



# Annual Report for Fiscal Year Ending May 31, 2018

by Vicki Hire, Treasurer

## Income

Donations .....	11,209
<i>Birds of Phoenix &amp; Maricopa County</i> .....	10,397
Audubon Membership .....	6,318
Investments .....	1,683
Banquet .....	1,658
MAS Friends Membership .....	1,220
Books .....	972
Auction .....	580
Interest .....	294
Fry's Community Rewards .....	251
Big Sit! Fundraiser .....	230
Raffle .....	123
<b>Total Income .....</b>	<b>34,935</b>

## Expenses

<i>Birds of Phoenix &amp; Maricopa County</i> .....	39,400
<i>The Cactus Wren•dition</i> .....	16,223
Banquet .....	5,136
AZ Beetle Book (grant) .....	4,000
Education .....	2,700
National Audubon Society Convention .....	1,722
Insurance .....	1,555
Speakers' Honoraria .....	1,438
Rent .....	1,300
Administration .....	1,246
Conservation .....	526
Books .....	295
Property Tax .....	70
<b>Total Expenses .....</b>	<b>75,611</b>

## Help MAS with an Employer Matching Gift

**M**any Maricopa Audubon members aren't aware that their employers may include a matching gift program in their benefits package. Programs vary from business to business, but they generally offer a dollar-for-dollar match when an employee makes a personal gift to a nonprofit organization like Maricopa Audubon Society.

Please visit your human resources department or charitable giving department to see if this opportunity is available to you. You usually have to fill out and submit a form, which is sometimes done online. If you have already made a donation to MAS in the past year, you may be able to get a matching gift after the fact from your employer for up to 12 months later. 🐦



## Green Scene Puzzle Answers

### Answer to Guess this Bird

The Gambel's Quail was named after 19th century naturalist and explorer William Gambel. This game bird lives in the Sonoran Desert and eats mostly seeds, leaves, and berries. They do not migrate, and they rarely fly.

### Answers to The Scoop about Pelicans Crossword Puzzle

#### Across

- 1 dive
- 5 crawl
- 6 fragile
- 7 wingspan
- 10 pouch
- 11 herd
- 12 gallon
- 13 pesticide
- 17 bald eagle
- 19 two
- 20 stand
- 21 endrin

#### Down

- 2 incubate
- 3 horn
- 4 agricultural
- 8 squawk
- 9 mandible
- 14 eight
- 15 flutter
- 16 scoop
- 18 DDT

## Green Scene School Projects

If you would like to apply to the MAS Education committee for funding for a school natural history project or field trip, please contact Mark Larson at [larsonwarren@gmail.com](mailto:larsonwarren@gmail.com)

# Day Raptors of the Serengeti

by Walt Anderson

**Arguably the most famous wildlife preserve in the world, Serengeti National Park in northern Tanzania boasts the Great Migration of millions of wildebeest, zebras, and gazelles, as well as predatory lions, hyenas, cheetahs, and leopards. Visitors coming for the Big Five (lion, leopard, elephant, rhino, and buffalo) can meet that simple task, but there is so much more to see in the Serengeti. A host of other mammal species can provide visual rewards to the discerning safari-goer.**

But what surprises newcomers the most are the birds—hundreds of species, much easier to observe in the open habitats than in tropical forests. Many people for whom birds were little more than a melodic twitter-feed in the past get hooked on birds once they experience them in the Serengeti.

Such diversity boggles the imagination. I am going to sample but one group of birds—the diurnal birds of prey, or raptors. Arizona is known as a birding hot spot; an eBird checklist shows an impressive 29 species of day raptors. Serengeti National Park is but five percent of the area of Arizona, but it lists an incredible 60 species of day raptors!



*Lappet-faced and White-backed Vultures*

Traditionally we have included as diurnal raptors the falcons, hawks and eagles, and Osprey. Evidence now tells us that falcons are more closely related to songbirds and parrots than to the other raptors. Similarity results from evolutionary convergence (when natural selection has operated similarly on unrelated groups). Thus “raptors” as we call them are not one big happy family!

Convergence is particularly striking when you compare Old World and New World vultures. The latter (e.g., Turkey Vulture, California Condor) are just modified storks. In the Serengeti, the seven species of “vulture” are actually modified eagles, called “vultures” by dietary habits (sometimes an offal choice to have to make). Indeed, the larger Serengeti vultures (Lappet-faced and White-headed) also hunt prey as typical eagles do.



*Tawny Eagle, dark*



*Martial Eagle*



All photos by Walt Anderson



Secretary Bird

Then you may find the Tawny Eagle right in there at the carcass with the vultures and the rather cadaverous-looking Marabou Stork (which is an Old World cousin of the Turkey Vulture!).

The Tawny Eagle (and its wintering step-sister, the Steppe Eagle) are the most commonly seen eagles in the Serengeti. “Tawny” is a bit of a misnomer too; it can vary from pale blonde to dark brown). *Aquila rapax* gets its species epithet from its “rapacious” behavior; its relative abundance reflects its willingness to eat anything from termites or locusts to dead elephants. Mice, hares, mongooses, small antelopes, doves, francolins, guineafowl, bustards, small colonial birds, snakes, lizards—all find room on this species’ menu. Tawny Eagles even successfully attack flying flamingos, sometimes inhibiting a flock from moving from one lake to another. They are also aerial pirates—kleptoparasites—that attack other eagles, vultures, falcons, and storks to steal their prey. They push their way around at carcasses, undeterred by the presence of larger vultures (i.e., big scavenging eagles). You could spend many pleasurable hours watching these handsome rugged eagles in the field.

The Martial Eagle stands out, an apex predator tending to choose profitable prey, not sweating the small stuff. No other eagle kills as many kinds of mammals (over 90 prey species reported), including small antelopes, jackals, hyraxes, servals, and mongooses. It also takes larger birds, including storks, herons, egrets, ibises, bustards, waterfowl, guineafowl, spurfowl, sandgrouse, hornbills, and even other birds of prey. Large individuals can weigh up to 14 pounds (as can the largest Lappet-faced Vultures). Contrast that with the tiny Pygmy Falcon; this diminutive raptor weighs in at a mere 2.2 ounces, one percent of the weight of the Martial! Yes, their diets do *not* overlap.

The tallest bird of prey in the Serengeti is the majestic Secretary Bird, over four feet tall. It strides across the grasslands, searching for snakes, lizards, rodents, grasshoppers, and other small prey. Despite its name, it will not take dictation; “secretary” is a corruption of an Arabic word that means hunter-bird.



# Day Raptors of the Serengeti cont.

Hawk diversity includes six species of *Accipiter* (versus three in Arizona) and three species of *Buteos*, the genus that in Arizona includes the Red-tailed, Swainson's, and up to seven others. The most common Serengeti *buteo* is the Augur Buzzard. Buzzard, you say? In the Old World, members of *Buteo* are called buzzards. The Rough-legged Buzzard of Eurasia is the same as our Rough-legged Hawk (ironically, JJ Audubon called it the Rough-legged Falcon). If our early European immigrants had been just a bit more knowledgeable about birds, they wouldn't have attributed "buzzard" to the New World Vultures, which are closer to storks anyway.

Serengeti hosts one resident and three migratory harriers, low-flying gliders that come in under the radar of their prey. Two species of chanting-goshawks look superficially like long-legged, upright harriers as they sit up on low acacias, but they are ecologically very different. Their courtship chanting is, well, enchanting to hear.

We rarely see snakes in East Africa, but three species of snake-eagles and the unique Bateleur occupy the ophiophaga (snake-eating) niche. The Bateleur is large-headed and short-tailed, quite colorful for a raptor. It can fly hundreds of miles daily in search of food, gliding and tipping like an aerial tightrope-walker. Snakes are but a fraction of its highly varied diet—not dissimilar to that of the Tawny Eagle.

A dozen species of falcons reside in or visit the Serengeti during migration. The large Lanner Falcon is a powerful missile, capable of seizing swifts in flight and even slamming birds head-on. Flocks of dozens of graceful wintering Lesser Falcons are a sight to see.

And there are more: the crepuscular Bat Falcon, the spectacular African Fish Eagle ("the voice of Africa"), the contortionistic African Harrier-Hawk, the acrobatic Yellow-billed Kite. Once visitors begin to experience the amazing diversity and remarkable behaviors of the African birds of prey, they realize that safari is so much more than the Big Five. So, let's give a High Five to the raptors, the flying assassins of the savannah!

Walt Anderson, Professor Emeritus of Environmental Studies at Prescott College, is an accomplished artist, photographer, and naturalist. Walt has led ecotourism trips all over the world. Upcoming trips include Tanzania ([http://www.geolobo.com/?page\\_id=522](http://www.geolobo.com/?page_id=522)) and Madagascar ([http://www.geolobo.com/?page\\_id=658](http://www.geolobo.com/?page_id=658)). See Walt's art in the summer 2018 issue of the *Wren•dition*. 🦅



*Lanner Falcon, immature*



*Lesser Kestrel regurgitating pellet*



# Christmas Bird Counts

by Walter Thurber, Arizona Field Ornithologists

The National Audubon Society has conducted Christmas Bird Counts since the year 1900. Volunteers from throughout the Western Hemisphere go afield during one calendar day between December 14 and January 5 to record every bird species and individual bird encountered within a designated 15-mile diameter circle. These records now comprise an extensive ornithological database that enables monitoring of winter bird populations and the overall health of the environment. Participants are typically assigned to teams based on their bird identification skills and endurance. Many counts hold a compilation dinner at the end of the day where results are tabulated and stories shared. Help is needed on most of these counts.

Date	Day	Count Name	Primary Compiler	Phone	Email
12/14	Fr	Salt-Verde Rivers	Kurt Radamaker	480-585-1606	kurtrad@mexicobirding.com
12/15	Sa	Avra Valley	Claudia Johnson	509-264-9076	claudialj@mac.com
12/15	Sa	Cabeza Prieta NWR	Christopher Riesberg	520-387-6483	christopher_riesberg@fws.gov
12/15	Sa	Hassayampa River	Chrissy Kondrat-Smith	623-451-1250	hassayampacbc@yahoo.com
12/15	Sa	Martinez Lake-Yuma	Lin Piest	928-341-4049	lpiest@azgfd.gov
12/15	Sa	Mormon Lake	[Open]		terence.blows@nau.edu
12/15	Sa	Nogales	Alan Schmierer	805-801-3701	aaschmierer@yahoo.com
12/15	Sa	Santa Catalina Mountains	Kendall Kroesen	520-971-2385	kkroesen@cox.net
12/16	Su	Grand Canyon	Brian Gatlin	928-638-7723	brian_gatlin@nps.gov
12/16	Su	Jerome	Tina Greenawalt	503-927-1367	tina_greenawalt@nps.gov
12/16	Su	Ramsey Canyon	Ken Blankenship	770-317-8486	kenblankenshipbirding@gmail.com
12/17	Mo	Chino Valley	Russell Duerksen	928-925-5567	duerksen@msn.com
12/18	Tu	Tucson Valley	Luke Safford	520-629-0510	saffordluke@gmail.com
12/19	We	Phoenix-Tres Rios	Marceline VandeWater	602-689-4356	marceline@ermaroni.net
12/19	We	Prescott	Carl Tomoff	928-778-2626	tomoff@northlink.com
12/20	Th	Patagonia	Patsy Vandenberg	520-604-6601	pvnndnr5@gmail.com
12/21	Fr	Atascosa Highlands	John Yerger	814-308-4078	john@adventurebirding.com
12/21	Fr	Saint David	Heather Swanson	520-307-4405	SPRNCABird@hotmail.com
12/21	Fr	Sedona	Richard Armstrong	928-282-3675	richarmstrong@q.com
12/26	We	Superior	Joy Bell	480-760-1393	joyabell_az@yahoo.com
12/27	Th	Gila River	Troy Corman	602-717-2928	aplomado02@gmail.com
12/28	Fr	Green Valley-Madera Canyon	Malcolm Chesworth	203-947-2440	malcolmsc@yahoo.com
12/28	Fr	Havas NWR	DeeDee DeLorenzo	928-758-2707	deedeedelorenzo@gmail.com
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12/29	Sa	Flagstaff-Mount Elden	Terence Blows		terence.blows@nau.edu
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Luke Safford assisted in the preparation of this list.

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# Nature through the Artist's Eye: Saraiya Kanning



**Saraiya Kanning's silk paintings stem from a passionate connection to the environment and an interest in the emotions evoked by color. Her journey in the arts began as a child, when she kept notebooks with observations on wildlife. Though mostly self-taught, the few art classes she has taken enabled her to enhance her power of observation. More recently, her art utilizes bright color play to push the boundary of representation.**

A graduate of the University of Arizona's MFA creative writing program, Saraiya enjoys exploring multiple avenues of expression. Her go-to mediums are silk painting, watercolor, and ink. Silk painting involves drawing lines with resist, a substance that stops the flow of dye across fabric, and then painting between these lines with dye. Her silk paintings call most especially upon variegated violet, blue, teal, and burnt sienna hues.

Growing up in Colorado Springs, Saraiya interacted with Aiken Audubon Society, where she met Colorado birders who taught her the basics of bird behavior and identification. For several years she apprenticed under a master bird bander and found immense value in holding birds, learning about their anatomy through direct touch. She is grateful for this early mentorship of other birders and hopes to pass it on to others who are eager to investigate the world through nature, ecology, and art. She hopes her art will bring viewers into a closer relationship with the environment, inspiring a sense of responsibility and stewardship towards Earth's ecosystems and resources.

Saraiya teaches creative writing in Tucson public school classrooms through Writing the Community, a program of the University of Arizona Poetry Center. She also teaches art classes in nature drawing, graphite, and ink mediums at The Drawing Studio, a community arts organization that makes art accessible to all experiences and age levels. She seeks to make her art and business, Raebird Creations LLC, a haven for the creative mind. Located in central Tucson, she offers workshops in her light-filled studio, including classes in silk painting, watercolor, and drawing. Find a list of upcoming classes, sign up for her monthly art newsletter, or browse more artwork at [raebirdcreations.com](http://raebirdcreations.com). Contact her at [raebirdcreationsart@gmail.com](mailto:raebirdcreationsart@gmail.com). 🐦



## Border Cat

Silk painting stretched over canvas, 18x24 inches

A Jaguar walks across a desert wash, past an Alligator Juniper where doves perch and watch. Jaguars are boldly and wonderfully borderless, roaming from Mexico into the US with a range extending from the southern tip of Arizona into the rainforests of South America. They are threatened by poaching, habitat loss, and the border wall.



## Violet Dusk (Sandhill Cranes)

Silk painting adhered to canvas, 22x28 inches

Sandhill Cranes winter in Arizona's Sulphur Valley, where they gather in flocks of thousands, occupying fields and playas. Cranes are ancient creatures, with fossil evidence dating as far back as 2.5 million years. In migration, their rattling calls reverberate through the air.





### **Majesty (Golden Eagle)**

Silk painting adhered to canvas, 18x24 inches

Eagles are culturally important and sacred creatures all around the world. They symbolize truth, courage, power, wisdom, and freedom. They nest on bluffs and rocky precipices and their territories may be 25 square miles or larger.



### **Jackrabbit After A Monsoon Rain**

Silk painting adhered to canvas, 18x24 inches

Jackrabbits are actually hares, easily distinguished from cottontail rabbits by their large size and satellite-like ears. This painting is inspired by many walks through Saguaro National Park, where Black-tailed Jackrabbits are common. The size of a small dog, they are an iconic character of arid deserts and prairies, with a range stretching as far north as Washington state.



### **Curious Coati**

Silk painting adhered to canvas, 18x24 inches

White-nosed Coatis are members of the raccoon family found from southern Arizona into Colombia, South America. Females travel in bands. They can be spotted in oak woodlands and sycamore-lined riparian canyons.



### **The Enchanted Juniper**

Silk painting adhered to canvas, 15x30 inches

Alligator Junipers grow in desert grasslands alongside yucca, agave, and oak. Their mosaic-like bark resembles the scaled skin of alligators, hence the name. This silk painting celebrates the desert grassland biome: a dry, sun-parched, but nonetheless biologically diverse ecosystem. Home to coatiundi, sparrows, spiny lizards, and more.



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### Monthly Meeting

First Tuesday of the month, unless otherwise announced, September through April, 7:30 p.m. Our meeting place is Papago Buttes Church of the Brethren, 2450 N 64th Street, Scottsdale, AZ (northwest of 64th Street and Oak Street, which is between Thomas Road and McDowell).

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 (September through April) are held at Rolling Hills 19th Tee Restaurant, 1405 N. Mill Avenue, starting at 6:00 p.m.

### Membership Information and How to Receive *The Cactus Wren*•dition

Two distinct memberships exist: membership of the National Audubon Society (NAS) and membership of the Friends of Maricopa Audubon Society (MAS).

To become a member of the NAS please go to:  
[www.audubon.org/audubon-near-you](http://www.audubon.org/audubon-near-you)

We send *The Cactus Wren*•dition to all current members of NAS if you are assigned to or choose MAS as your local chapter. NAS provides MAS \$3.00 per year for each member assigned to us.

To become a Friend of MAS, please pick up a form at the book sales table at our monthly meeting or download the form from our website,  
<http://maricopaaudubon.org>

For specific questions please contact our Membership Chair.

### Submissions

Copy for *The Cactus Wren*•dition must be received by the editor by e-mail, by January 15, April 1, July 1, and October 1. Articles not received by the deadlines may not appear in the upcoming issue. Email to: *The Cactus Wren*•dition Editor, Gillian Rice: [editor.wrendition@yahoo.com](mailto:editor.wrendition@yahoo.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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