



## The Cactus Wrendition

### January - February 2000

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This page contains several articles from the January - February 2000 Cactus Wrendition, the newsletter of the Maricopa Audubon Society. Not all articles are reproduced on this page. Fieldtrip information, recent rare-bird sightings, meeting programs/schedules, and general chapter information are presented elsewhere in this site.

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### Notes and Announcements

**Team members needed for Maricopa Audubon's 2000 Birdathon:** Be part of MAS's first Birdathon of the 3rd millenium! This fundraising event features teams of birders who try to identify as many species as possible in a 24 hour period. Each team raises money by obtaining donation pledges per species seen. Four teams have been proposed to date; if you'd like to join a team or be a team leader, or help with organizing, contact [Laurie Nessel](#) at (480) 968-5614 or Scott Burge at (480) 897-8608.

**Letters, calls needed to support PBS birding program:** A new program, "Stokes Birds at Home", is in production for public television in early 2000. This 13-part series, hosted by Don and Lillian Stokes (of the Stokes Bird Guides), features episodes on attracting birds, special birding events, and a weekly challenge in which viewers are asked to identify a "mystery" bird. KAET (channel 8) is evaluating the series for airing, depending on interest. If you'd like to encourage KAET to broadcast the series, please fax, write, or e-mail KAET indicating your support. The address is KAET Channel 8, Arizona State University, PO Box 14005, Tempe, AZ 85287-1405. Phone: (480) 965-2308. Fax: (480) 965-1000. E-mail: [kaet@asu.edu](mailto:kaet@asu.edu).

**Sparrow banding volunteers needed:** The southeast Arizona grassland sparrow-banding project continues this winter. Groups of 20-30 volunteers spend a day "flush-netting" sparrows at six different sites. Participants will have the opportunity to learn how to remove birds from nets and hold them, operate mist nets, and observe the process of bird banding. No experience is needed. Volunteers are needed for single field workdays between January 5th and March 4th, or on a more regular basis (up to 18 times, all Wednesdays and Saturdays). To sign up or for more information, contact Caleb Gordon at (520) 318-0651, or [calebg@u.arizona.edu](mailto:calebg@u.arizona.edu).

**Volunteers wanted for planting work Jan. 15-16, 2000:** Volunteers for Outdoor Arizona (VOA) is organizing another series of planting events at Nature Conservancy preserves. A willow and cottonwood planting program is scheduled for January 15-16, 2000 at Bingham Cienega on the lower San Pedro River. March will feature native plant seeding at Beuhman Canyon preserve, while sacaton restoration at the San Pedro River Preserve will be completed in April-June. For more details, contact VOA at (602) 825-2490, e-mail: [voa@dgcenter.org](mailto:voa@dgcenter.org), or visit the website: <http://www.dgcenter.org/voa>.

**Institute of Desert Ecology, April 13-16, 2000:** Tucson Audubon is sponsoring the 30th annual Institute of Desert Ecology at Catalina State Park on April 13-16. The program focusses on Sonoran Desert ecosystems, emphasizing relationships between plants, animals, and the desert's physical characteristics. Participants furnish their own tents or campers; the \$295 registration fee includes instruction, camp services, and meals. For more details or registration forms, contact Tucson Audubon, 300 E. University Blvd. #120, Tucson, AZ 85705. Phone: (520) 629-0510.

### Upcoming birding festivals:

**Wings over Willcox, Willcox, AZ, Jan. 14-16, 2000:** Celebrate the thousands of Sandhill Cranes that winter in the Sulphur Springs Valley by attending this annual event. Over 20 fieldtrips are scheduled, in both all-day and 1/2-day lengths. Trips will view cranes, hawks, sparrows, plovers, longspurs and other local specialties. A wildlife photography tour is also planned. Contact the Willcox Chamber of Commerce & Agriculture for more details. Phone: 1-800-200-2272. Web: <http://www.wingsoverwillcox.com>.

**Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival, Morro Bay, CA, Jan. 14-17, 2000:** This festival, sponsored by Morro Coast Audubon Society, highlights the thousands of resident and wintering birds of this Globally Important Bird Area. Experts will lead over 35 field trips to see such species as Sandhill Cranes, Golden and Bald Eagles and other raptors, shearwaters, jaegers, surfbirds, turnstones, Prairie Warbler, and Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow. The Festival's featured speaker, Kimball Garrett, will discuss California birds and birding in the new millenium. For more information, contact the Morro Bay Chamber of Commerce, 880 Main Street, Morro Bay, CA 93442. Phone: 1-800-231-0592. Web: <http://www.morro-bay.net/birds>.

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## Announcing Central Arizona College Birding-related Classes - Spring 2000

If you would like more information about these classes, call Vera Walters at 520-868-9002. Central Arizona College is located west of Coolidge, AZ, about 30 miles south of Phoenix/Chandler.

### Wings Around Willcox - January 15

Willcox is home to thousands of Sandhill Cranes, as well as gateway to the famous "hawk alley." This is a great opportunity to see cranes, waterfowl and raptors in abundance.

### Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument - March 29

Explore Quitobaquito Springs and Estes Canyon during the height of the wildflower bloom. Lots of birds in this unique desert setting.

### Nocturnal Animals - April 5

Spring brings a host of activity to the Sonoran Desert night. Join us for an owl prowl, searching for poorwills and nighthawks, radar detect bats, blacklight scorpions and see "what goes bump in the night."

### Verde Canyon Railroad - April 12

Follow the majestic cliffs of the Verde Canyon as our train travels through this pristine riparian area. We will see nesting Bald Eagles and many other species of birds from the train and at Dead Horse Ranch State Park.

### Birds Of Madera Canyon - April 29-30

We will explore the desert grasslands, oak woodlands and coniferous forest as the breeding birds arrive to join the permanent residents in this rich area.

### Gila Bird And Nature Festival - May 12-14

Silver City, New Mexico annually hosts this popular event. There are opportunities to bird the Mimbres and Gila Rivers, the oak woodlands and coniferous forest nearby and learn from experts of Hawks Aloft. Classes in hawk and hummingbird identification, and lots of field outings.

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## 3rd Annual Great Backyard Bird Count, Feb. 18-21, 2000

The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC), a joint project of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon, asks everyone - families, individuals, classrooms, community groups - to count the numbers and kinds of birds that visit their feeders, local parks, schools, and other areas during these four days. Participants enter their reports online at BirdSource (<http://www.birdsource.org>), a user-friendly, state-of-the-art web site.

In 1999, about 42,000 participants tallied over half a million birds. Mourning Dove was the most frequently reported species, followed by Northern Cardinal and Dark-eyed Junco; European Starling was the most abundant species. Texas reported the most species.

To participate in this year's count, simply tally the highest number of bird species seen at one time (to prevent counting the same birds more than once) and record the amount of time spent counting. Then go to the BirdSource web site and click on the appropriate state or province for a checklist of the most-frequently reported birds in that region. Results will be updated hourly in the form of animated maps and colorful graphs for all to view, so participants will be able to see right away how their observations fit into the continent-wide "snapshot".

The GBBC web site also includes other useful information to help make participation as easy and fun as possible: a vocabulary section, bird-watching and bird-feeding tips, a bibliography page, and a geography lesson. Special materials have been provided for classrooms and youth groups.

Participation is encouraged during any and all of the count days. Directions are provided at the site. Just go to <http://www.birdsource.org> and click on the "Great Backyard Bird Count" button. There's no fee and no registration. Citizen bird watchers are also encouraged to help get their communities involved. For more information, call the Cornell Lab of Ornithology toll-free at 1-800-843-2473.

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## Become an Audubon Volunteer - It's Good for You

by Janice Miano

According to a recent article in **Taking Care\***:

"Volunteering not only makes you feel good about yourself - it may help you live longer, too. According to a recent study of more than 1,200 older adults from researchers at the University of Michigan, those who volunteer for moderate amounts of time (40 hours or less a year) actually enjoy increased longevity.

"When you donate your time, you may experience a renewed sense of purpose, improved mental and physical well-being, and that warm feeling that comes with knowing you have helped others.

"There are many reasons you may choose to volunteer, including: learning more about a specific organization or activity; overcoming stress, anxiety or depression; preventing boredom; making new friends; coping with a personal loss; and feeling a part of something that is larger than yourself."

Maricopa Audubon Society is a non-profit volunteer organization. Without the countless hours from its volunteers, our Audubon chapter and the over 500 other National Audubon chapters throughout the US and Central America would not exist.

There are many opportunities for volunteering with our chapter - big or small: consider becoming an officer or chair of one of the many committees; lead a field trip; write articles for the Cactus Wren edition; suggest or even give a program at our monthly meetings; host an Audubon booth at many environmental and civic occasions around the Valley; take a lead on an issue affecting birds, wildlife and habitat in our community by joining the Urban Habitat Committee; become a docent in an education project; assist in soliciting donations for Audubon projects; do a bird census or bird count; put labels on a mailing; bake cookies for our meetings; even write a letter to your congressional representatives.

Even a small amount of time volunteering for Maricopa Audubon Society could make a big difference for birds and other wildlife and your health. For more information on volunteering opportunities, please contact Janice Miano, Public Relations Chair, at (480) 946-1327 or email: [jmiano@juno.com](mailto:jmiano@juno.com).

*\*Material on volunteering and health excerpted with permission from Taking Care, ©1999 Optum*

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## A Look Back at the Last Millennium:

### Maricopa Audubon Society's Conservation Accomplishments

by Scott Burge

The Maricopa Audubon Society is over 40 years old, during which time its membership, in concert with other conservation groups, has changed the face of Arizona. Gone are the days of large federal dam-building projects and other huge projects which threaten riparian habitats vitally important to Arizona's birds. Today conservation concerns are those associated with urban growth. Urban development has altered thousands of acres of habitat and threatens such priceless areas as the San Pedro River.

Threats such as logging and grazing will be with us for years to come. Old and new threats need to be addressed, however members of the MAS can be proud to reflect on the conservation accomplishments over the last four decades. Some of those accomplishments are as follows:

Issue	Outcome
Orme Dam	Not Constructed
Cliff Dam	Not Constructed
Charleston Dam	Not Constructed

Conner Dam	Not Constructed
Hooker Dam	Not Constructed
Buttes Dam	Not Constructed
Kofa Power Lines	Not Constructed
Mount Graham	No. of telescopes limited to 3 from over 27 planned
Topock Marsh	Not Dredged
Spur Cross Exchange	Halted
Grazing Salt/Verde Rivers	Altered to Aid Bald Eagles
Gila Box	Halted Vehicle Traffic
Rio Verde Road	Not Constructed
Rio Salado Taxing District	District rejected by Maricopa County Voters

MAS has also responded to literally hundreds of government plans for grazing, logging, road building and other activities in Arizona. MAS hired the first nest guardians for controlling access to the nesting Bald Eagles, aided in the passage of the non-game check-off on the state income tax form, and the Heritage Fund. MAS also aided in the creation of one of the best set of falconry regulations in the U.S.

These are incredible accomplishments for an all-volunteer organization whose members, past and present, aided in these accomplishments. Your reward is the knowledge that the areas saved will provide homes to birds and wildlife for future generations. This reward is what makes volunteers so valuable. As long as there are organizations such as the Maricopa Audubon Society, birds will have an advocate.

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## Thank You to Audubon Volunteers

I would like to thank Laurie Nessel, Karen Stucke, Joyce and Herb Fibel, and Bob and Janet Witzeman for helping with the Maricopa Audubon Society booth at the Grand Opening of the Tempe Town Lake held on November 6, 1999. Over 50 membership applications were provided to interested persons. A list of birds sited at the lake that day included Osprey, first year Herring Gull, Double-crested Cormorant, one Neotropical Cormorant, Bufflehead, Western Grebe, one Clark's Grebe, Eared Grebe, Pied-billed Grebe, Great Egret, Black-crowned Night Heron, and Gadwall. It appears that we have a new birding destination in the Valley.

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## A Banner Month for the Environment

by Bob Witzeman

*The one process ongoing that will take millions of years to correct is the loss of genetic and species diversity by the destruction of natural habitats. This is the folly our descendants are least likely to forgive us. -E.O.Wilson*

**MAS** members had a busy November holding up banners and signs. On Nov. 18th conservationists gathered outside the corporate offices of Arizona Public Service in downtown Phoenix in a placard-carrying demonstration thanking that utility for signing an agreement to decommission two hydropower dams and their flumes on Fossil Creek. As a result 14 miles of lush Upper Sonoran Desert riparian habitat will be revived after a 90-year demise. The current flow of 0.2 cubic feet per second (cfs) will increase to some 43 cfs.

The rewarding part for conservationists is that there will be a momentous recovery of the fish and wildlife habitat there. Many species of threatened birds and native fish will benefit from having this willow, cottonwood, alder, ash, and sycamore-studded stream spring back to life. This stream could now provide habitat for embattled avian species such as the Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Southwestern Willow Flycatcher and

Bald Eagle. It is also a potential introduction or rehabilitation area for the endangered Razorback Sucker, Colorado Squawfish, Gila Topminnow, and for the threatened Loach Minnow and Spikedace. Even today one can see upstream of the APS dam several species of native fish, namely the Roundtail Chub, Longfin and Speckled Dace and Sonora and Desert Sucker. Like birds, fish species taxonomy undergoes lumpings and splits. The chub species in Fossil Springs will soon be officially split from the Roundtail Chub species and renamed the Headwater Chub.

Fossil Creek restoration will create stunning travertine mineral deposits of waterfalls and rice paddy-like pools such as are found along Havasu Creek next to the Grand Canyon. Besides making this remote area a hiker's destination, this should also benefit wildlife. These photogenic travertine pools will attract both fish and fish-eating birds and mammals.

These two hydropower plants at Fossil Creek generate some 5.6 megawatts of electric power. This is a drop in the bucket compared to the 8000 megawatts APS currently produces. APS is also planning to build two new power plants in Arizona, which will produce 2600 megawatts. Fossil Creek provided APS only half a million dollars per year or about one-fiftieth of one percent of their 1998 net income. The disappointing part of the recent APS agreement is that APS wants to delay decommissioning the dams until 2004.

Nonetheless, conservationists should be pleased. All of us can thank Robin Silver and the Center For Biodiversity for working so diligently to make this happen. Other signers in the agreement with APS included the Northern Arizona Audubon Society (their tireless Frank Brandt), the Sierra Club and American Rivers. We wish to thank MAS'ers Bob Rhodes, Matt Becker, Laurie Nessel, Shawn Baur and the many others for helping to make the demo placards. It must have been an unexpected sight for APS officials to look out their corporate office windows and see placard-carrying environmentalists thanking APS.

On November 20th the Yavapai at Ft. McDowell held their 18th annual Orme Dam Days parade in celebration of their land not being inundated by the proposed Central Arizona Project Dam. It would have destroyed nearly 30 miles of riparian habitat on the Salt and Verde Rivers. It was a boondoggle to make downstream river bottom floodplain developers rich. As the Yavapai so often said during the Orme Dam fight, why do White developers want to move people into flood prone areas thereby placing peoples' homes and lives at risk? Indians and non-Indians, including MAS members, made many trips back to Washington during the years of struggle. The Yavapai have shown their gratitude to us and every November extend a standing invitation to all Audubon members to march alongside the Yavapai Orme Dam fighters in their annual parade. Those who marched with the Yavapai this year included the dedicated supporter of the Yavapai, Carolina Butler. Sign and banner-carrying MAS members included Lee Burge, Liz Hatcher, Janet Witzeman, and Eleanor Zoellner.

Named honorary Grand Marshall was Yavapai Dixie Davis who died this past June. T-shirts were printed with her picture and text: "In Loving Memory, Dixie Lee Davis 1941-1999, Orme Dam Fighter." Dixie was an outstanding activist and a great friend. She will forever be remembered.

During the Orme struggle, the U.S. government offered the tribal members some \$50,000 per man, woman, and child if they would give up their land. The tribe held a referendum vote and decisively opposed the dam. But this still did not halt the unrelenting efforts of almost the entire power structure in Arizona - the political, business, and governmental agencies trying to build the dam.

As Audubon members are keenly aware, it also would have flooded prime nesting and foraging habitat of the highly endangered southwestern Bald Eagle population. Now the Yavapai are able to have their casino on their own land strategically located close to a metropolitan area. And for Audubon members we still have an intact Verde and Salt riparian habitat for our Christmas Bird Count. We have undertaken this count site since 1985. We had to relocate the Christmas Count circle away from the rapidly urbanizing Southwest Phoenix area.

James Watt visited the Yavapai reservation in September and formally declared the proposed dam dead on Nov. 12, 1981. Watt, as Interior Secretary, supervised the Bureau of Reclamation, the agency that would have built the dam. While it was the end of the struggle for the Yavapai, it was just another beginning of a long struggle by conservationists to prevent construction of additional CAP dams elsewhere on Arizona's and New Mexico's rivers.

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## Urban Habitat Happenings

by Dwayne Fink

A couple months back the Tempe Kiwanis asked me for a short presentation on Maricopa Audubon activities. How could I refuse a free lunch? I explained to the Program Chairman that I'm mostly out of touch with Chapter happenings these days, but would be happy to talk about the Urban Habitat Committee (UHC) - of which I'm still a member. "Sure", he said, "just keep it to 15 minutes - including questions".

So I set about to prepare a one page handout, which I calculated would take 5 minutes to read, 10 minutes to explain, with 5 minutes left over for questions. Immediately there arose a problem. No one had sat down and tallied up what activities UHC has been involved with in the several years of its existence. There was too much stuff to fit on a single page - except to just bare bones it into one liners. I was surprised myself.

I'm going to try tell you what I told them - and keep it to 10 minutes. It's appropriate too: many of you are new to MAS, and 99+ percent of you aren't members of the committee.

I explained that UHC restricts itself pretty much to environmental issues within Maricopa County, and showed them our Mission Statement which was developed with that restriction. I made them read the Statement. So must you:

"The Mission of the Urban Habitat Committee of the MAS is to (1) identify, evaluate, maintain, improve and protect existing and potential wildlife habitat in the Metro-Phoenix area for the benefit of the wildlife which frequent or reside at these habitat islands, and for the benefit of the public

which visit these special sites for passive recreation and/or educational purposes. This year we added a second mission: (2) to influence developers, government and non-government agencies, and all stakeholders in the decision making processes involving wildlife and its habitat."

Now think about it - that should be the mission or goal of anyone who is a member of Maricopa Audubon, or belongs to any local environmental group, or just enjoys wildlife. As long as you can talk to a friend, or a child, or an official of any stripe about how much you enjoy birding, you are fulfilling our mission statement.

Then I showed the Kiwanis members our list of past and present activities. I broke the list up into short and long term projects. Mostly, short term means activities that take a year or less to complete, and long term means the rest. Our philosophy is that there needs to be a mix: most people need some progress markers along the way to maintain enthusiasm. Just like the old time steamers needed regularly spaced watering stations to keep up a head of steam.

So here's the list, broken down into short and long term activities, with a further breakdown into stakeholder and in-house activities. "Stakeholder" means we are one of many participants in a large community project, while "in-house" means things we pretty much did ourselves.

#### **Short Term - In House:**

- Bird lists for South Mountain Park, Gilbert Wildlife Preserves, and Tres Rios. In preparation are lists for Papago Salado and Greenlines in Tempe.
- A "Birding Metro-Phoenix" brochure is in preparation.
- Xeriscape Class: promoted landscaping which favors native wildlife, saves water, looks beautiful and is easy to maintain. Class was open to the public.

#### **Short Term - Stakeholder:**

- Desert Breeze Hummingbird Park of Chandler: We advised in the planning and helped in the community-involved planting.
- Gilbert Wildlife Preserves (two of them): We advised in the planning of the first site and helped in the community-involved planting. We actively supported the creation of the second site, which has only recently gone on line. We've helped them with bird hikes and open houses.
- Rio Salado (restoring wildlife habitat in the Salt River in Tempe and Phoenix): We were active in community support of the project, and had a member on the City of Phoenix's "Above the Banks" committee, who's function was to prepare a plan on how South Phoenix might benefit from the restoration of the riparian habitat in the now-dry Salt River bottom. Money has been approved for Rio Salado, and construction should begin this year.

#### **Long Term - In House:**

- Shade-Grown Coffee: This was a bit outside our Mission, but one of our members asked us to support her in promoting the sale and use of shade-grown coffee locally.
- Population Issues: This also stretched our mission to include one of the primary causes of loss and degradation of habitat. This is definitely a long-term project. It includes ongoing support by one of our sister environmental organizations to control growth in the Metro-Phoenix area.

#### **Long Term - Stakeholder:**

- Reach 11: We participated in the planning process by the City of Phoenix. The long-term plan has progressed through the Parks and Library Committee, and faces the final hurdle of the City Council. So far, the "golf-course" developer element has been beaten back, but we know there will be pressure to sacrifice most of the existing natural riparian habitat for manicured greens.
- Tres Rios: We have participated in the planning of habitat restoration/enhancement in the Salt/Gila/Aqua Fria Rivers below the Phoenix Waste Water Treatment plant at 91st Avenue. That project is nearing the funding application phase. Planning has been initiated to expand Tres Rios both up and down stream along the Salt and Gila Rivers. Of course we will be there too.
- Greenlines: The Arizona Historical Museum acted to preserve an endangered riparian strip in Tempe. They asked the community to help plan a future for the area, which would enhance habitat quality, and serve as an outdoor educational classroom for their needs.
- Upper Agua Fria River County Park: We have worked with the County and Federal Agencies to try restore this pristine area to a viable riparian area. Efforts to-date have been fraught with frustration, and the future is uncertain.

Several other projects that we are contemplating getting more involved in: WESTCAPS (project to partition CAP water in the West Valley); grazing issues as they affect habitat in Maricopa County; the newly proposed wildlife corridor along the Agua Fria and New Rivers below Lake Pleasant. More.

The Urban Habitat Committee members contribute to the Chapter and community in ways outside the Committee. Five members have served on the Maricopa Audubon Board. Several members regularly lead bird hikes. Several have contributed articles to the Wrendition. The Wrendition Editor is a member of UHC. The MAS web page was written, and is maintained, by a Committee member. One member is the President of the Arizona Audubon Council (state-wide organization of individual chapters). Several members are active members of other non-profit environmental organization in the Valley. Others have or are serving on advisory boards relating to air-quality preservation, preservation of desert spaces, and education of youth to appreciate wildlife. Several members earn their livelihood in the environmental field. We've joined in community-wide projects to pick up garbage. The list goes on.

The Kiwanis lunch was great, and I kept the presentation to 15 minutes.

## Field Trip Review - Salt River Raft Trip, Oct. 23, 1999

by Evelyn Lewis

If you missed the October 23rd Salt River raft trip, you missed a great experience - wonderful weather, lots of birds, and good company. Twenty-six MAS members and friends saw an Osprey catching fish, two Harris' Hawks catching rays, Kingfishers and approximately 50 Great Blue Herons pretending we weren't watching them...they do a really good imitation of invisible birds! Lots of smaller birds were seen along the very scenic river. The fish were jumping, too.

The group met at 6:00 a.m. at the corner of McKellips and Power Road in Mesa. Carpools were quickly arranged and we were off to the Saguaro Lake Ranch. Big rubber rafts were waiting and we piled in. Oars were handed out...what's this!! I thought this was a float trip. Well, yes, it was, but occasionally the guide would call out for us to assist in getting the raft into the necessary direction (no one strained any muscles).

The entire trip was amazingly quiet. We often heard the birds before they came into view.

"A great time was had by all" is an understatement.

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