



The Cactus Wrendition

September - October 2000

This page contains several articles from the July August 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.

To navigate to other parts of the site, scroll to the bottom of the page or use [this link](#).

Newsletter Contents

- [Notes and Announcements](#)
 - [From The Editor](#)
 - [Treasurer's Report](#)
 - [Conservation – Good News Four Our Public Lands](#)
 - [Birder's Corner – In Search Of....](#)
 - [The Death Zone](#)
 - [Field Trip Report – Powers Butte Wildlife Area](#)
 - [Field Trip to San Blas, Nayarit, Mexico](#)
-

Notes and Announcements

Hummingbird banding in Southeast Arizona: Up to ten species of hummingbirds have been found along the San Pedro River, and the river's riparian corridor provides a good migration path for these and other species. As part of a continuing study, Southeast Arizona Bird Observatory (SABO) is performing hummingbird banding at the San Pedro House near Sierra Vista. Banding is conducted on Saturdays from 4 to 6 p.m. throughout early June, and again July through September. The San Pedro House visitor center is located 7 miles east of Sierra Vista on Highway 90. Sessions are open to the public without reservations and at no cost. Donations are gratefully accepted. For more information, contact SABO at sabo@ASBO.org or 520/432-1388.

Bye Bye Buzzards: Each year we do this event to say goodbye to the large migrating flock of turkey vulture that makes their home at the Arboretum each summer. We open up at 7 a.m. for a special birding tour and fill out the day with other bird-oriented activities. We'd love to see the Audubon Society involved through possibly a talk or educational workshop. This year's event will be held Saturday, September 23. For more information contact Lisle Soukup, Information Specialist, Boyce Thompson Arboretum, 37615 Hwy 60, Superior, AZ 85273-5100, phone 520-689-2723, fax 520-689-5858, e-mail lises@Ag.Arizona.Edu. Visit the Arboretum on the web at www.arboretum.ag.arizona.edu.

HawkWatch International: Spend 4 days and 3 nights at the remote Goshute Mountain project site, one of the largest known raptor flyway in the western U.S. Participate in migration monitoring as we observe, capture, measure, and band birds of prey as part of our ongoing mission to protect raptors and the ecosystems they inhabit. Call 801/484-6808 or 800/726-4295 for additional information. Dates are between September 1 and October 15. Cost is \$295 (\$100 of the cost is a tax deductible membership) and includes meals, transportation from Salt Lake City, and tent lodging.

The **Monterey Bay Bird Festival** will be held October 6-8, 2000, in Monterey, CA. Keynote speaker Debra Shearwater will discuss seabirds and marine mammals of Monterey Bay. For information, contact the Elkhorn Slough Foundation at 831/761-1719; mbbf@elkhornslough.org; www.elkhornslough.org.

Planning ahead.

The **Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival** will be held November 8-12, 2000 in Harlingen, Texas. Speakers include Kevin Karlson and David Sibley. Call 800/531-7346 or e-mail tbortness@harlingen.com for registration brochure, or visit the web at www.harlingen.com.

The fourth annual **Central Valley Birding Symposium** will be held at the Radisson Hotel in Stockton, CA, November 16-19. Field trips, a Birder's Market and art display, workshops, and speakers, including Kenn Kaufman, Kimball Garrett, Kevin Karlson, and Debi Shearwater. For more information, contact Frances Olivier, 1817 Songbird Place, Lodi, CA 95240; 209/369-2010; ffoliver@ucdavis.edu .

[\[Top of Page\]](#) | [Table of Contents](#) | [Top of this Article](#) | [Next Article](#) | [Bottom of Page](#) | [Newsletter Info Page](#)

From the Editor

Deva Burns

It has been very gratifying these past two months to hear from all of you well-wishers. I have received numerous e-mails and calls with congratulations on getting my first edition off the presses. I've also had many inquiries regarding newsletter submissions (preferably attached to an e-mail or on a disc). I have attended my first Board Meeting and met my fellow board members. I must say that the dedication, passion and desire to protect our planet and all it's inhabitants is well represented by your board.

I think a newsletter should provide both information and education. Upcoming events, past field trips, future field trips, bird sightings, conservation, photo quizzes; all this and more is in each issue. Each and every one of you have a potential article to share with the rest of us. At this time I would like to remind you that our Program Chair, Laurie Nessel, needs your attention and support—if you have an idea or a person that you would like to see at a meeting, give Laurie a call.

As you read this edition, I would like you to think about what you can do to better our planet, even if that means starting here locally in Maricopa County. Not all of us have the time or resources to travel the globe, hike The Canyon, or take on the polluters. But each and every one of us can be aware of our immediate world and do something. As Susan Kantro shows in her article, that something may be as simple as a phone call.

[\[Top of Page\]](#) | [Table of Contents](#) | [Top of this Article](#) | [Next Article](#) | [Bottom of Page](#) | [Newsletter Info Page](#)

Treasurer's Report

Herb Fibel

Maricopa Audubon's fiscal year ends on May 31st. After the end of the fiscal year we turn all of our books and records over to an independent CPA, who audits the books, and prepares the annual financial report and necessary tax returns.

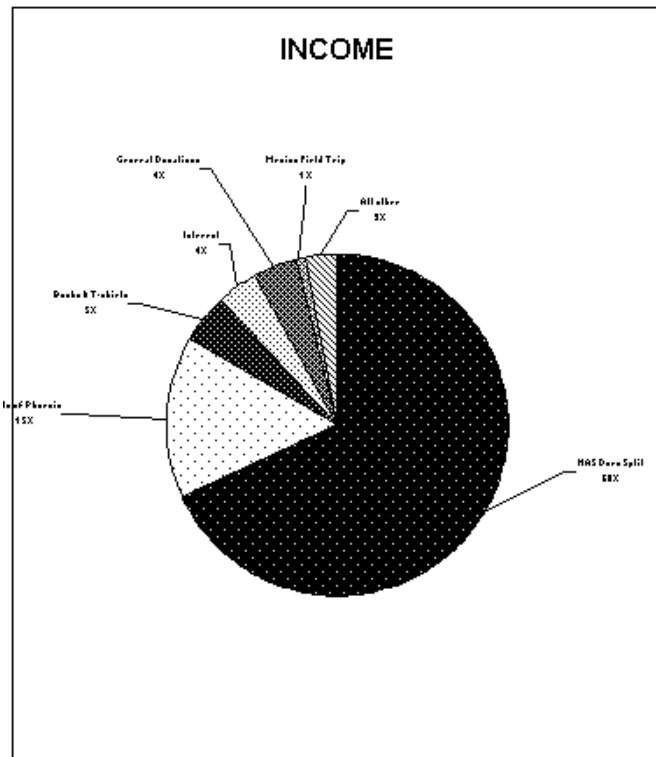
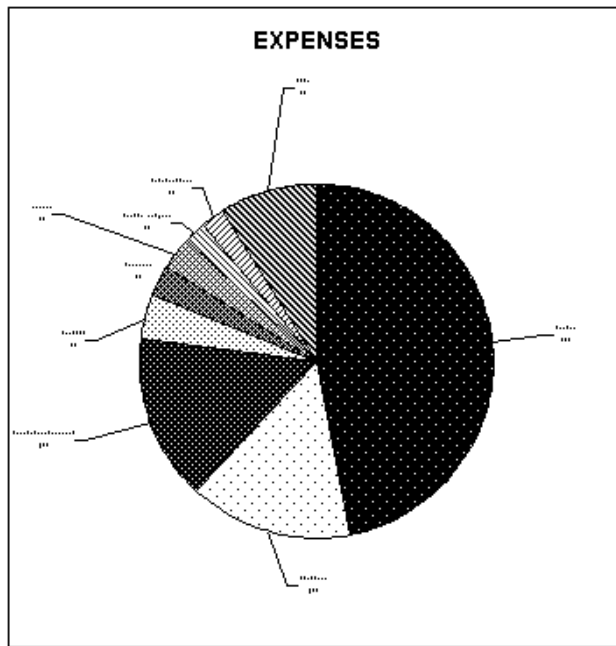
In this past fiscal year with income and expenditures exceeding \$32,500 each, we ended up the year with expenditures exceeding income by only \$120.

As the Income Pie Charts indicates, more than two-thirds of our annual income comes from the dues share we receive from National Audubon Society. Presently National Audubon is completely revising the way they divide the dues between themselves and the chapters, a system that has been in place for at least twenty-five years, so it remains to be seen how we'll come out in the new plan in the future.

The Expenditure Pie Chart shows that almost half of our income is devoted to publishing and distributing the Cactus Wren-dition. A major one-time expenditure we made this past year was a contribution to a research study on the status of the Yellow-billed Cuckoo in the West, a species that appears to be rapidly declining due to habitat degradation.

Income and expense on the *Birds of Phoenix and Maricopa County* were equal, because all income from the book is going out to pay the publication costs. Once this is done, and we're nearly there now, all income from the book is profit to Maricopa Audubon.

If you would like more information on the Chapter's finances, please feel free to call Herb Fibel at (480) 966-5246.



[\[Top of Page\]](#) | [Table of Contents](#) | [Top of this Article](#) | [Next Article](#) | [Bottom of Page](#) | [Newsletter Info Page](#)

Good news for our public lands

by Bob Witzeman

In the relations of man with the animals, with the flowers, with the objects of creation, there is a great ethic, scarcely perceived as yet, which will at length break forth into light. (Victor Hugo, 1802-1885)

The July U.S. Forest Service "roadless" public hearings were gloriously successful in Arizona. As you know, President Clinton has proposed shutting down all future roadbuilding in the unroaded portions of National Forests that are 5000 acres and larger. At the hearings in Tucson, Phoenix, Flagstaff, and Springerville the great majority of speakers spoke in favor of the proposal for excluding logging, grazing, mining and/or ORVs in these areas. They also asked that Alaska's forests be included, and that all U.S. roadless areas down to 1000 acres in size be included. Speakers in Flagstaff, Phoenix and Tucson averaged better than three-to-one in favor of the proposal. Surprisingly, in traditionally conservative Springerville, a clear majority of its seven speakers supported Clinton's proposal. Only in Prescott was the turnout roughly 50/50. Audubon members turned out in numbers at these hearings. Phoenix area enviros were delighted to have added conservation support from members of our state's newest chapter, the Sonoran Audubon Society.

Last year your Maricopa Audubon Board of Directors passed a resolution opposing logging on public lands (Forest Service and BLM lands) similar to the "Zero Cut" resolution of the Sierra Club. Likewise many Audubon and Sierra Club groups have passed resolutions opposing grazing on our public lands. One scientific paper listed the number of species imperiled by logging, mining, and grazing in our nation. Logging accounted for 12%, mining 11%, and grazing a whopping 22% (Wilcove et al, BioScience, Aug. 1, 1998).

The Forest Service and BLM together administer 85% of western public ranchland, about 260 million acres, or an area the size of 14 Eastern seaboard states plus Missouri. Of this 85%, BLM administers 63% (163 million acres), and USFS 37% (97 million acres). Roughly 90% of western BLM land and 70% of western USFS land is managed for grazing.

Only 2% of U.S. beef production comes from public lands. Iowa, for example, produces more beef on private land than all the federal public lands in the entire West. Surprisingly, your National Audubon Society has never passed resolutions opposing either grazing or logging on YOUR public lands. Many Audubon and Sierra Club chapters and state councils already have. If you feel it is time for Audubon to come on board, write NAS President John Flicker. Ask him to convey your letter to the National Audubon Board.

The Arizona Game and Fish Department's publication on threatened and endangered birds in Arizona ("Wildlife of Special Concern in Arizona," draft, 1996) lists 23 of the 29 listed birds as having cattle grazing as one of the causes or factors in their endangerment. By contrast, logging is only mentioned for three of the twenty-nine threatened birds. While some of these species may be common elsewhere, their survival as a species in Arizona is the reason for their inclusion. However, all of these species are exemplars of the ecological diversity of a state having varied altitudinal, climatic and geological habitats.

Grazing as an impact in Arizona avian species endangerment: (Quotations below are taken directly from this AGFD publication.)

American Bittern - "riparian overgrazing" p.24

Least Bittern - "riparian overgrazing" p. 24

Bald Eagle "loss of...riparian...habitats" p. 25

Swainson's Hawk - "grazing practices" p. 26

Ferruginous H. - "prairie dog control programs" by ranchers p. 26

Northern Aplomado Falcon - "reduce cattle grazing" p. 26

Masked Bobwhite - "overgrazing" p. 27

Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo "overgrazing" p. 28

Cactus Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl "manage grazing" p 28

Elegant Trogon – "riparian and adjacent slope grazing" p. 29

Green Kingfisher – "upland grazing" p. 29

SW Willow Flycatcher – "overgrazing in riparian habitats" p. 30

Buff-breasted Flycatcher - "fire suppression" [overgrazing a factor in fire suppression] p. 30

Thick-billed Kingbird – "overgrazing" p. 30

Rose-throated Becard – "overgrazing" p. 31

Azure Bluebird – "overgrazing" p. 31

Veery – "riparian overgrazing" p. 31

Swainson's Thrush – "riparian grazing" p. 31

Gray Catbird – "overgrazing by livestock" p. 32

Sprague's Pipit – "overgrazing" p. 32

Baird's Sparrow – "overgrazing" p. 32

Arizona Grasshopper Sparrow – "reduce cattle grazing" p. 33

Five-striped Sparrow – "overgrazing of slopes & canyons" 33

Logging as an impact in Arizona avian species endangerment

Goshawk - "removal of large...trees...timber management." p. 25

Mexican Spotted Owl – "timber harvest" p. 29

Thick-billed Parrot – "logging" p. 28

Some conservationists contend public lands grazing is only harmful in areas with less than 17 inches of rainfall. In fact, grazing on Forest Service lands is highly destructive since the "doghair" thickets resulting from USFS cattle grazing become the laddering fuels setting the stage for catastrophic crown fire. Historically low intensity, non-crown fires cleared the forest floor debris every 5 to 15 years without taking out the old-growth. Tragically, the Forest Service continues to allow cattle grazing and crown fire hazard in their logged (higher rainfall) areas. AGFD's "Arizona Partners in Flight Conservation Plan, June 1999, provides additional reasons why the double punch of grazing and logging on the higher rainfall Forest Service lands is so harmful. They have "watchlisted" Three-toed Woodpecker, Red-naped Sapsucker, Purple Martin, Olive-sided FC, Cordilleran FC, and Pinyon Jay.

Twenty-three of the 29 birds in Arizona listed as imperiled by the Arizona Game and Fish Department have grazing listed as a factor in their endangerment.

Livestock grazing removes forage needed by native mammals, birds, herps, and arthropods while introducing harmful exotic plants, soil erosion and desertification.

[\[Top of Page\]](#) | [Table of Contents](#) | [Top of this Article](#) | [Next Article](#) | [Bottom of Page](#) | [Newsletter Info Page](#)

In Search of...

Barb Winterfield

We were on our drive back, jostling up and down in the car as we drove along the hot dusty road. Though at times rough, the drive was scenic, with rugged mountains and rolling hills. We were excitedly talking about the species we had seen; the Montezuma Quail, the Mexican Jay, the Varied Bunting, and the ones, THE one, that had gotten away.

As birders, many times we go in search of target birds, traveling hundreds of miles, or hiking for hours to find a particular species. And often that species alludes us. Sometimes it is the species that can be reliably found in a certain area, other times it is one that was reported on a rare-bird alert. But every time, it is a disappointment if the target bird isn't found.

After the first several treks I had made that resulted in failures, I would brood, or even be angry on the way home. I was ready to ignore all the rare-bird alerts unless they were practically in my own back yard. It was just too frustrating. But now, I am willing to hop in the car for a 3 hour drive to see a Least Grebe or a Plain-capped Starthroat. Part of this change came about because I have learned my success rate has gone up when I have done some preparation. But the key to my change of attitude is the simple realization that being in the field is far more exciting than sitting at home watching TV or doing practically anything else around the house.

Looking back, several of my failures were due to me arriving at a site and only knowing what the bird would look like. I didn't know which trees to search, whether I should be looking on the ground, low in the tree, or at the top of the tree, or whether to look in dense foliage or open area. So the travel time to the location became a time for me to study the species. What are its behaviors, its distinguishing marks, where does it like to perch, what kinds of trees does it prefer? To learn all this, I reference my rather large home library (I'm sure many other birders have these, just by talking with several of my likewise birding addicted friends). I have listed a few good references, but know there are many more that may be just as or even more useful.

- Kenn Kaufman's "Lives of North American Birds" is good for learning the behavior of the species, and has photographs, and nice range maps.
- The Audubon Society Master Guide to Birding (set of 3) is very good for learning distinguishing marks for the species.
- Roger Tory Peterson's "Peterson Field Guides, Western Birds", has nice illustrations of similar species on the same page and points out important differences, and has nice range maps.
- John K. Terres's, "The Audubon Society Encyclopedia of North American Birds" is a very good general reference.

If you are in search of Warblers, Gulls, or Sparrows that have varying plumage throughout the year, or their lives, there are several good specific references that cover just those species.

After studying the birds behavior and marks, I study its call. If like me, you am not very good at learning calls, listening to the Bird Call CD may be frustrating. I find myself hearing 4 or 5 similar calls all in a row, and not being able to remember which one was which. I can listen to them over and over, and still not recognize it in the field. So I have a few tricks to help me. First, I try to figure out if there is another species with a similar call that I do recognize. This helps me remember what type of call I should be listening for. Second, I tape just the call of the target bird onto a handheld tape recorder, and listen to just it, rather than to all the other species on the same track of the CD. I am not recommending you use the tape in the field, just use it to listen to before going into the field.

Now its time to hit the field. The nice thing about birding is there is rarely just one species of bird where you are searching. So if I've been searching for the target bird without much success, I occasionally stop and listen to all the calls around me. Are there any I don't recognize? If so I try to search out that calling bird and see if I can log that call in my memory. When I hear a call I recognize, can I correctly identify the species that made it? Is it coming from up high or down low? Was that the tree or location from which I would expect the call? Are the common species behaving as I would expect? While learning from books is interesting, learning in the field is much more fun and rewarding.

And if I find my target species, I'm thrilled. If I don't, I'm still disappointed, but I appreciate my trips into the field, whether it be to search out a lifer, a state-bird, or just to see the common species I have seen thousands of times before.

[\[Top of Page\]](#) | [Table of Contents](#) | [Top of this Article](#) | [Next Article](#) | [Bottom of Page](#) | [Newsletter Info Page](#)

THE DEATH ZONE

Susan Kantro

"Come on over and see this baby owl in my backyard." It was an early morning last April and my neighbor Kathleen was calling me from the fence in my backyard. I envisioned a small creature, but once I got in her yard I saw a very large baby Great Horned owl standing stoically under a tree. I walked slowly toward the owl and when I got within a foot, it began clacking its beak and opened its large yellow eyes. These were both good signs that confirmed the bird was not sick, a fact we learned from Wild at Heart. Wild at Heart is a non-profit, all volunteer wildlife rescue and rehabilitation organization in Cave Creek specializing in the conservation and preservation of Arizona's birds of prey (hawks, owls, falcons, eagles), collectively referred to as raptors. This noble-looking creature had apparently fallen from its nest and made its way into Kathleen's backyard.

Melissa Movitz, a college-bound veterinary student and volunteer from Wild at Heart, soon arrived and immediately administered a physical examination of the juvenile, approximating his age as seven weeks old. Determining all was well, it was decided that Felix (Kathleen's spontaneous name for our new friend) be returned to the wash behind our two houses. He was placed in a tree near a Saguaro where I had often seen large owls in the evening.

Almost every evening at dusk I would stand in my backyard with my binoculars to check on Felix and make sure an adult owl was nearby. I was fortunate to routinely spot him as if he'd been waiting for me to check on him for the night. Unexpectedly one evening, I was astounded to see that Felix was accompanied by a much larger sibling. It seemed he was showing his sibling the human who had helped him get through a bad day. From then on they were always observed to be inseparable. It became part of my normal routine to watch them in the very early morning and at twilight, accompanied at times by one or both adults.

The two juvenile owls were extremely comical to watch. Their heads bobbed, and their clumsy attempts at footing seemed as if they were learning to dance for the first time, all the while flapping and stretching their wings like they were being fitted for a new suit. When they weren't playing they were almost always nestled close together, apparently taking comfort in the contact of each other's bodies, or preening each other. It was extremely gratifying to see these birds grow and flourish, and to be privileged to observe these regal friends. I often felt they were putting on a show for me to thank me for reuniting them. It was a true joy to watch them flying freely and interacting together.

I didn't know then that soon Felix and his sibling would be dead.

The lives of these wonderful birds ended senselessly and their fates were not isolated incidents. Raptors are drawn to utility poles because they offer a high place to perch, roost, nest and hunt. However, the large wing span of raptors makes them vulnerable to being hurt by the electricity carried on the power lines. Public power lines looming over the wildlife habitat in our neighborhoods present a life threatening hazard to raptors traversing the matrix of washes in the area. The threat was dramatically realized in March when Kathleen and I both discovered, in one week, two hawk corpses at the base of utility poles on our properties. Horrified, I called the Arizona Game and Fish department to come and investigate. They later confirmed by phone death was by electrocution. I remembered reading an article on the prevention of raptor electrocutions by the simple installation of perches on utility poles under the auspices of APS' Raptor Protection Program. At my request, APS installed raptor perches on all utility poles on our properties. The perches were of a bi-level design.

I didn't learn until it was too late that the design of these perches are faulty and can actually facilitate injury or death. APS was informed by the Adobe Mountain Wildlife Center of Arizona Game and Fish Department that tests on the bi-level PVC perches have demonstrated that raptors will

not use them, especially owls. However, since the fall of 1999, APS continues deploying bi-level perches from their inventory, despite knowledgeable advice from others outside of APS to install longer and wider "T" perches made of wood. Raptors instinctively seek-out perches that provide maximum height and length, criteria absent in the bi-level perches. The bi-level perches are not long enough for the wing span (at least three feet) of these birds and the diameter is too narrow for their feet.

On July 3rd, the APS crew was called out to investigate why accidental deaths were still occurring on my utility pole. They determined that the owls, unable to negotiate the perches, landed on the transformer below making deadly contact with exposed wires. The top of the transformer where the owls had landed showed the scorch marks caused by 7200 volts of electricity coursing through the owls' feet. The plastic hood insulator on the transformer (the switch cover or "bird guard") intended to shield live wires on my utility pole had become dislodged by the wind (according to the APS crew) and slipped upward. APS had failed to secure the "bird guard" when they raptor proofed my utility pole in March. Too late, during this July visit, they taped and secured the "bird guard".

The two dead owls were examined by Sam Fox, the Co-Director and Co-Founder of Wild at Heart along with her husband Bob Fox, (for more information about Wild at Heart, see the July/August issue of "A Peek At the Peak" magazine by the Greater Pinnacle Peak Homeowners Association). After the examination, she confirmed that they were approximately five months old, the larger owl was a female, and both had died by electrocution.

Sam pointed out that these incidents occurred in what Wild at Heart refers to as "The Death Zone". The Death Zone is roughly the area defined as south of Carefree Highway on Cave Creek Road to Jomax Road, east to Scottsdale Road, and north to Carefree Highway. "The Death Zone is such a hard area for birds of prey", Sam explained. She continued, "A high percentage of dead or injured birds of prey come in from that area, especially by electrocution. It just seems to be a bad luck area."

If you see a dead bird of prey by a utility pole or have a strong suspicion that it might have been an electrocuted bird, or if you have found raptors in the past that you think may have been electrocuted, it is extremely important that you immediately contact the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Division of Law Enforcement.

It is imperative that all dead birds are collected by the USFWS, as they become evidence in any criminal prosecutions against any individuals or corporations, including utility companies. Any criminal activity, including electrocutions by the utility companies, fall within the USFWS' jurisdiction. It is extremely important that the USFWS has knowledge of each individual kill. The USFWS urgently needs location information, even if the incident had occurred in the past and you had not reported it to the USFWS at that time.

If the raptors are still alive and injured, contact Mia Ditson, a volunteer for both Southwest Wildlife Rehabilitation Center and Wild at Heart, or Wild at Heart. They will immediately contact the USFWS to report the suspected electrocution and come to rescue the bird from you.

APS IS LEGALLY RESPONSIBLE FOR PROTECTING BIRDS OF PREY and can be subjected to heavy fines and violation notices for failure to do so. In other states, there have been formal charges filed against the power companies for electrocuting raptors and they have been forced to pay penalties. Recently a power company in Colorado pleaded guilty to six federal wildlife violations involving the electrocution of protected eagles and hawks on the company's power lines and poles. The power company was convicted. This case forms the basis for criminal prosecution of a utility company whose equipment electrocutes federally protected birds. Cases will be prosecuted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife service when it becomes necessary.

On July 19th I contacted Edward Fox (no relation to Bob and Sam), Vice-President of Environmental Health and Safety Concerns for Pinnacle West Capital Corporation, APS' parent company. He is responsible for overseeing the Raptor Protection Program at APS and told me, "In the last several years we are supposed to have had a major effort in the Cave Creek area to deal with raptor electrocutions." When I explained to him that this effort was sorely lacking as evidenced by the high percentage of electrocutions occurring in The Death Zone, he stated, "These incidents are not acceptable. . . " He promised "We will deal with the issues and fix the problems."

We all need to do our part to help the wildlife living in our natural areas to at least have a chance at survival. We live in a very special area and open land is becoming more and more scarce as development encroaches. Please give these wonderful creatures a chance to live.

Call Edward Fox and let him know that APS's Raptor Protection Program is not working in Cave Creek and that it needs to be revamped. These senseless electrocutions must end. It is time that we make sure that APS lives up to enforcing their responsibilities to protect these magnificent birds of prey. Susan can be reached at kanthro@hotmail.com

WHAT TO DO IF YOU FIND AN ELECTROCUTED RAPTOR:

FIRST:

CALL USFWS (if raptor is dead) 480-835-8289 or

Mia Ditson (if bird is alive & injured) 480-488-3482 or

Wild at Heart 480-595-5047

Even if you are not sure how the bird died, but suspect it may be electrocution, it is imperative you contact USFWS before contacting APS.

SECOND:

Call Edward Fox @ Pinnacle West 602-250-2906

(to report an electrocuted bird, or suspicious death).

Tell him you want his promise that APS will do the following:

1. T-perches be installed and made of wood, at least 3 feet long
2. Perches are vertically high enough so that they are not directly over the transformer
3. No gaps or breaks, and all insulation is current on the pole
4. Switch covers are taped down on the transformer
5. No steel utility poles on your property
6. No PVC perches
7. Contract between APS & a licensed Wildlife Rehabilitation Center to rehabilitate injured raptors which have been electrocuted on APS utility poles in the Cave Creek area
8. Educational instruction of APS linemen by a licensed Wildlife Rehabilitation Center, similar to what Liberty Wildlife performs for SRP
9. Public community events with APS to educate the public about APS' Raptor Protection Program

[\[Top of Page\]](#) | [Table of Contents](#) | [Top of this Article](#) | [Next Article](#) | [Bottom of Page](#) | [Newsletter Info Page](#)

Powers Butte Wildlife Area

Tom Hildebrandt

Ten persons traveled with leader Tom Hildebrandt to the Powers Butte Wildlife Area (PBWA) on Saturday, May 6, to see the managed habitats of the wildlife area and the surrounding wildlands and, of course, the birds they attracted. Meeting at 5 a.m. at the Home Depot parking lot at 75th Ave and McDowell, most of the group was able to travel in an Arizona Game & Fish Department suburban van in carpool arrangement, with one couple traveling in their won vehicle. A flock of White-faced Ibis and a single Lesser Nighthawk were seen along the drive. We arrived at PBWA about 6 a.m. and checked out the Barn Owl boxes under the canopy first thing. A huge pile of pellets and droppings was under one box, and with a little prompting, an owl flew out of the other. Most of the group got a good view and appreciated the concept of providing artificial habitat for these avian guests.

The group proceeded to the pond and adjacent cottonwood plantings for the major part of the morning. The pond produced Black-crowned Night herons, Cinnamon Teal and Ruddy Duck (probably breeding), American Coot, and a diversity of smaller birds coming in to drink. The migrant flight seemed to be pretty limited, with Wilson's Warblers being the primary species observed, along with Lazuli Buntings, Blue Grosbeak and Orange-crowned Warblers. A brief glimpse of what appeared to be an eye-striped *Dendroica* warbler was considered to be a probable Townsend's Warbler, but none of the group got a good enough look to know for sure. Common Yellowthroats sang from the pond, and later were heard near the river. A displaying male Vermillion Flycatcher attracted the groups' attention to the edge of the nearby cottonwood grove, the trees about 10 years old now and showing canopy closure and sufficient height to attract a number of gallery forest species. Species seen here include Bullock's Oriole, Western Kingbird, House finch, Mourning and White-winged Dove, Western Wood Pewee, Empidonax spp. and others.

After the cottonwood, the group proceeded to the north end of the wildlife area and some of us climbed Powers Butte itself. Here we saw again a Prairie Falcon, a species seen earlier, picked up a Cactus Wren and a nest full of Redtail Hawks in a saguaro, and heard the only Green Heron of the trip. The view from the butte was terrific, with a coyote fording the river upstream, turtles sunning themselves, and the cattails, willows, and flowing water of the whole system laid out before us. The petroglyphs left by the resident Hohokam and Pima peoples of the area were very interesting, but somewhat spoiled by the graffiti of the modern visitors.

While some of us were up the hill, others were seeking out the singing Cardinals, Verdins and other resident species at the base of the butte. The downhill group startled a Kingfisher from near the river, and its rattle attracted the attention of the uphill group as well. As the uphill group rejoined the others, we found them debating the identification of a bird proving to be a Brown-crested Flycatcher, who showed off its field marks in excellent light and distance to the group. Tom suggested a hike down to the river's edge to play a tape for Yuma Clapper Rail at a likely-looking spot. Although no rails were heard, the group got to experience the rare mosquito iritatus in significant abundance! On the return to the vehicles, the whole group got to view two Black Vultures soaring very excellent viewing conditions with Turkey Vultures. We surmise these were vagrants from the group of Black Vultures thought to reside in the Sierra Estrella Mountains out on a westward jaunt. Great looks at their fresh plumage blush, their flight behavior, and comparison with Turkey Vultures in the same air space!

We followed the back route home, picking up a Western Tanager in a palo verde in the middle of the desert, but failing to pick out a Gilded Flicker anywhere. On a power pole near Old U.S. 80 we spied an Osprey, and a Purple Martin near Gillespie Dam. A total of 64 species were seen/heard.

[\[Top of Page\]](#) | [Table of Contents](#) | [Top of this Article](#) | [Next Article](#) | [Bottom of Page](#) | [Newsletter Info Page](#)

A Special Field Trip

To

San Blas, Nayarit, Mexico

A trip to San Blas, Mexico will be conducted on January 5 to 12, 2001. The trip will include visits to the town, seasonal lagoons. La Tovar, Singaita and the coffee plantations above the town of La Bajada. Side trips will included the La Mirador (Military Macaws are common) and the areas around the town of Jalcocotan. A day will be used to bird the areas south of Puerto Vallarta which should produce some birds which are difficult to locate in the San Blas area such as Orange-bellied Buntings and Red-breasted Chats. The trip should produce over 200 species of birds including Tiger Herons, Trogons, Parrots (5 species), Guans and several unique types of Warblers and Vireos. The trip will start and end in the City of Puerto Vallarta. Please see the accompanying article. The suggested donation for the organizing the trip and guide services is \$80.00/person. The funds will be used for conservation and education activities of MAS. Leaders: Lee and Scott Burge (480-968-5141) for more information.

[\[Top of Page\]](#) | [Table of Contents](#) | [Top of this Article](#) | [Bottom of Page](#) | [Newsletter Info Page](#)

[\[MAS home page\]](#) | [Join MAS](#) | [Chapter Info](#) | [Meetings](#) | [Activist Info](#) | [Other Sites](#) | [Newsletter](#) | [Field Trips](#) | [Calendar](#) | [AZ Birding](#) | [Christmas Count](#)]

Last updated: March 21, 2001

©2001, Maricopa Audubon Society. All rights reserved.

Mail comments to: webmaster@maricopaaudubon.org