



The Cactus Wren • Dition

Spring - 2001 • Volume XLIX, No. 1

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Brown Thrasher (juvenile)
photographed by **Jim Burns** at
Boyce Thompson Arboretum, AZ
10/01 with Canon 400 mm f/2.3
lens and Fujichrome Velvia film.

PROGRAMS

Meetings are held the first Tuesday of each month, September-April, at the Phoenix Zoo Auditorium. Meetings start at 7:30, and feature a speaker, book sales, refreshments, and a chance to socialize with fellow MAS members. Non-members welcome!

Join us for a pre-meeting dinner at Pete's 19th Tee, 1405 N Mill Avenue, Tempe (at the Rolling Hills Golf Course) starting at 6:00 p.m.

PROGRAM TOPICS

March 5: Dr. David L. Pearson, professor of biology at ASU. His topic will be Why are there more bird species some places than others?

April 2: Madhusudan Kattie from the ASU LTER project will speak on the birds and wildlife conservation of India.

May 7: Dr. Bob Ohmart, Professor of Biology at ASU will Speak on the Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge - Tantalizing and Undiscovered Jewel.

Speakers wanted: If you have ideas for speakers, or if you would like to make a presentation yourself, please contact Laurie Nessel, Program Chair, at (480) 968-5614 or laurienessel@hotmail.com

BOB OHMART TO BE GUEST SPEAKER AT OUR ANNUAL BANQUET MEETING

By Herb Fibel

We are delighted to announce that Dr. Robert Ohmart, ASU Biology Professor and longtime friend of Maricopa Audubon, will be our featured speaker at our Annual Banquet and Meeting on Tuesday, May 7th. Dr. Ohmart's tutelage has been the inspiration for many of his students to turn their birding hobbies into satisfying careers in ornithology and habitat preservation. Thy subject of Bob's presentation is "The Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge - Tantalizing and Undiscovered Jewel."

Come and hear this dynamic speaker, vote for board candidates and celebrate our successes with us as we complete our forty ninth year as an Audubon Chapter, comprised solely of volunteers, working towards making our world a better place for birds, for other wildlife, and thus for the human species, to reside in and flourish.

The buffet dinner, which will feature cuisine to suit everyone's taste, will be \$20 a person. The cash bar and hospitality hour will begin at 6:00PM., and they'll start serving the buffet at 7:00/ Dress is casual. The place is the Shalimar Country Club in Tempe again, one block north of Southern, midway between McClintock and Price. Make your reservations early by calling Herb Fibel at (480) 966-5246, or Cynthia Donald at (480) 768-0593. You can pat at the door or mail your check to Herb Fibel, Treasurer, 1128 E. Geneva Dr., Tempe, Arizona 85282. One request. We understand that plans can change but last year we had to pay for 13 no shows. So, if you have made a reservation and find that you can not make it, please call as early as you can and let us know.

Come and meet old friends and maybe make some new ones. We'll see you on May 7th

From The Editor

NOTES & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Annual Board Elections - It's that time of year again. Our annual board elections will be held at the Annual Banquet and Meeting on May 7th, and, as provided by our bylaws, a nominating committee has been named by our president. If you are interested in stepping forward and in assuming a leadership role in your chapter in the coming fiscal year which begins June 1st, please call on of the following Nominating Committee members and let him or her know of your interest

Harvey Beatty, Chairman
(480) 990-0415

Olga Harbour
(480) 503-9291

Charlotte Norrid
(480) 967-4957

Second Annual Feathered Friends Festival - March 23, 2002. The Riparian Preserve at water Ranch, located on the southeast corner of Greenfield and Guadalupe in Gilbert, Arizona. Parking is available just east of the Southeast Regional Library. Cost is \$10/family or a membership. The event will last from 9:00-2:00. For more information, to become a vendor, or to volunteer for the event, call 480-503-0734 or 602-696-1195. You can also contact MAS Education Chair, Sirena at 602-522-7438 or sbrownlw@hdrinc.com

The Aleutian Goose Festival: A Celebration of Wildness - March 22-25, 2002. A Project of the Redwood Economic Development Institute (REDI) 207 Price Mall, Crescent City, CA 95531 ~ 707-465-0888 or 1-800-343-8300 ~ fax 707-465-1388 ~ soar2@northcoast.com or visit the festival at www.redwoodlink.com/sor Contacts: Sandra Jerabek, Rick Hiser (707) 465-0888, -440, -6191. Located in the home of the Redwood National & State Parks, the Smith River Nation Recreation Area, and the Lake Earl Wildlife Area, this birding, nature and heritage festival provides 75 field excursions, workshops, and ocean, river and coastal lagoon boat trips. Field trips and workshops feature ancient redwoods; whalewatching; Spotted Owls, Marbled Murrelets, and 167 other bird species; nature photography and sketching; wolf and mountain lion ecology; native plants; wild salmon spawning; dune walks; lighthouse tours; local maritime and Tolowa Indian history; tidepools, and even seal pups. A "Wing & Whales" trade fair with gifts, are and displays; children's activities and Mother Goose puppet theater, and live birds of prey

Annual ABA Convention - In Duluth, NM, June 10-16, 2002. If you are interested in attending, please call the ABA at 800-850-2473 x 233 and request a convention booklet. The Duluth area offers an exciting mix of habitats and birding possibilities.

Flycatchers: ABA's Institute for Field Ornithology (IFO) - July 20-25 in Sierra Vista, AZ with Chris Benesh. Appropriate for birders of all levels and emphasizing the flycatcher species that breed in southeastern AZ. Limited to 10. For information contact IFO Coordinator Kimberly Lynn at 800-850-2473 x235 orifo@aba.org. You can also visit the IFO pages on the ABA site, www.americanbirding.org.

Sparrows of the United States and Canada: The Photographic Guide (Academic Press) - This superb identification guide by James Rising has just recently been released. MAS photographers Jim Burns and Rich Ditch were contributors to this book and Rich will be reviewing the book in a future Wren•dition.

Al Anderson from Sierra Vista - Sends some interesting pieces of information. Audubon has a new gift-membership program now. If you give a membership (and Magazine subscription) as a gift, you chapter gets all of the 15 dollars the first year. Secondly, our Arizona State Legislature has re-offered for 2001, the School Tax Credits program. With this program, you can give up to \$200 per person (\$250 per couple) to the public school (K-12) of your choice (you can give even more to private schools), and have the amount you give taken off your Arizona State income tax. The State allows an exemption, dollar for dollar, up to, but not exceeding your state tax for this year, 2001. The contribution can be extended over five taxable years if your state tax is less than the contribution. Where else can you designate your tax dollars for the public good, and not have it cost you a cent? You give the money directly to the school of your choice (K-12), where it must be used for (1) character education programs, or (2) extra curricular activities. These are very broad categories indeed, and you can designate within them what your contribution will be used for: band uniforms, field trips, etc. The school can almost always find a program/activity which is compatible with your wishes. The problem is that may not be renewed for 2002 and in order to take advantage for 2001 you

By Deva Burns

COMMITTEES/SUPPORT

Activist Alert:

Shawn Bauer
602-828-3607

shawnbaur@hotmail.com

Arizona Audubon Council Rep:

Herb Fibel
408-966-5246

herbertsfibel@aol.com

Bird Alert

Book Store

Richard & Karen Kaiser
602-276-3312

Field Observations

Janet Witzeman
602-840-6089

Hospitality

Cynthia Donald (Coffee)
Sherry Celine (Cookies)

Web Page

Michell Fulton
480-968-5141

webmaster@maricopaaudubon.org

Maricopa Audubon Web Site

www.maricopaaudubon.org

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 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.

In this column in our last issue I mentioned the profound effect 9/11 had on me and how getting out into the field and birding would help us all regain a sense of normalcy. I've been in the field a lot lately. On 11/7 I became a statistic in our economic recession, downsized after 24 years from McDonald's Corporation. 11/7 was profound and is was personal. Birding and preparing the Wren•dition have helped me work through the various stages of shock, dismay, and bitterness. Birding and humor - Rich Ditch and I are wondering what's in that Wren•dition karma - have helped me see the event as an opportunity. Is anybody out there looking for a real estate paralegal? Or maybe I'll dust off that B.S. in education that I received all those years ago from the University of Kansas.

This Wren•dition carries some common threads from issues past - conservation, the need for money to support those things we care about, and a newer plea to stand up and be counted. Jim Burns reminds us, again, that there are an awful lot of us "birders" out there. To aid those of you looking for a New Year's Resolution, I have one again included a list of governmental contacts.

How many of you thought that Phoenix was a birding "desert"? Read the Special Species article in this issue and realize that a real gem is right here. If you are interested in placing your name on the slate for a position on the MAS Board, please contact a member of the nominating committee listed in the Notes and Announcements section. Finally, come to the banquet on May 7 and vote for the coming year's board members. We will also have a wonderful dinner and a great speaker - ASU Biology Professor, Dr. Robert Ohmart.

"up close and personal: are al part of the offering.

Yuma Birding Nature Festival—April 19-21. Contact: Yuma Convention & Visitor's Bureau at 800-293-0071 or www.visityumacom

Verde Valley Birding Festival—April 27-29. Contact: Cottonwood Chamber of Commerce at 520-282-2202 or cottonwoodchamber@sedona.net

had to contact the school before December 31, 2001. But keep it in mind to encourage the legislature to renew again - just think if all Audubon members made that contribution, what an impact it could have on you youth and on the birds.

More birding and nature festivals. www.americanbirding.org

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

Maricopa Audubon T-Shirts are available for sale at member meetings or by mail.

They feature a Barn Owl primary flight feather overshadowing the common and Latin names of birds found in Maricopa County. Long-sleeved shirts are available in Charcoal, Med, Large or XL, for \$20.00. Add \$4.00 shipping and handling for the first shirt, \$1.50 for each additional shirt. Please allow 3 weeks for delivery. Make checks out to: Maricopa Audubon Society, 1128 E Geneva Dr., Tempe, AZ 85282. For info, contact Laurie Nessel at (480) 968-5614 or laurienessel@hotmail.com

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



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Brown Thrasher (Juvenile)
photographed by **Jim Burns** at
Boyce Thompson Arboretum, AZ
10/01 with Canon 400 mm f/2.3
lens and Fujichrome Velvia film.

WHERE & WHEN - MARCH THROUGH MAY 2002

By Mark Horlings

Car Pooling:

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

Legend:

Limit: Maximum number of participants per filed trip. Please call early to make your reservations.

Difficulty Levels 1 through 5: 1 equals very low level of exertion, short wading distance, considerable birding from vehicle and possible multiple birding stops. 5 equals very high level of difficulty with respect to exertion. Longer hiking distances are expected with possible steep trails.

Reminders:

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

Saturday, March 2

Lost Dutchman State Park - Join Laurie and visit this beautiful park located at the base of the Superstition Mountains near Apache Junction. The spring flowers, bird feeders and bird baths here are an attractant that few birds can ignore. Birds expected in the area include resident Canyon Towhee, Costa's Hummingbird, Phainopela, migrating warblers and vireos. There is a park entry fee. Bring a lunch, water and sturdy walking shoes. Limit: 25. Difficulty: 2. Please contact leader for information and reservations.

Leader: Laurie Nessel
480-968-5614
laurienessel@hotmail.com

Saturday, March 23

Boyce Thompson Southwest Arboretum - Always a popular destination. Varied habitat, with frequent sightings of accidental and rare species. We will meet at 7:00 a.m. at the wild bird center, (between Osco and Safeway), at the N.E. corner of Shea Boulevard and Scottsdale Road (10701 N. Scottsdale Road) for carpooling to Superior. Difficulty 1. Bring a lunch and state park admission fee. We will return about 2 p.m.

Leader: Marceline Vandewater
480-922-4910

Saturday, March 30

Gilbert Ponds - We will visit the Gilbert wildlife habitat areas and other nearby ponds. Wintering waterfowl should still be present along with some early migrants. Possible sightings of American Avocet, Black-bellied Whistling Duck, and Peregrine Falcon. Spotting scopes are helpful. Bring lunch. We will break up in the early afternoon. Limit 20. Difficulty 1. Call leader for information and reservations.

Leader: Herb Fibel
480-966-5246

Saturday, April 6

McDowell Mountain Park - We should see a variety of warblers, vireos, Barn Owl, and perhaps a Green-tailed Towhee. The park features hilly desert terrain and some scrambling through washes. We will probably stop at fountain Hills Lake to see waterfowl as well. Bring lunch and a spotting scope if available. Meet at the Barnes and Noble parking lot in Scottsdale (10500 N. 90th, at Shea) at 6:30 a.m. Limit 15. Difficulty 3. Call leader for information.

Leader: Harvey Beatty
480-991-9190

Field Trips

(continued from page 5)
By Mark Horlings

Wednesday, April 17

Badger Springs - We will walk down to the Agua Fria River after leaving I-17 at the Badger Springs exit. April should be a good month for flycatchers and migrating warblers. Last year's trip saw a Peregrine Falcon as well as Cooper's and Red-tailed Hawks. Zone-tailed and Black Hawks are possibilities, since both species migrate along the river. Be prepared to carry your lunch, since we will break up in the early afternoon. Limit 15. Difficulty 2. We will walk along the river bed, through flowing water in a couple areas. Call Leader for information and reservations.

Leader: Bix Demaree
602-992-2252

Sunday, April 21

Patagonia Area - This trip begins at the Patagonia- Sonoita Creek Preserve, a nationally known birding hotspot owned and managed by the Nature Conservancy. Gray Hawk, Thick-billed Kingbird, Northern Beardless Tyrannulet, and Green Kingfisher will be some bird species sought. Other areas visited include the Patton's hummingbird feeders, Kino Springs and time permit- ting, the Nogales sewage ponds. Bring a lunch, water and sturdy walking shoes. Limit: 20. Difficulty: 2. Please contact leader for information and reservations.

Leader: Richard Kaiser
602-276-3312

Wednesday, April 24

Birds and Butterflies - We will visit Mesquite Wash and nearby areas to check returning migrants and early butterflies. Bring guidebooks for both if you have them. Each participant

Wednesday, May 01

Agua Fria National Monument - Here is a great opportunity to become familiar with one of Arizona's newest national monuments. Agua Fria covers over 110 square miles between Black Canyon City and Cordes Junction. The rugged area of grassland, riparian and upper Sonoran desert contains more than 450 prehistoric sites and wide array of sensitive wildlife species. Some expected bird species are Zone-tailed Hawk, Vermillion Flycatcher, Warbling Vireo and Blue Grosbeak. Bring a lunch, water and sturdy walking shoes. Please contact leader for information and reservations.

Leader: Dwayne Fink
480-967-9202
edna.fink@asu.edu

Wednesday, May 8

Seven Springs & Camp Creek - Join us as we search for riparian birdlife in the Tonto National Forest near Carefree. Camp Creek and Cave Creek feature flowing water, mature vegetation, and rich concentrations of birds. Golden Eagle, Bridled and Juniper Titmouse, Rufous-crowned and Black chinned Sparrow are possibilities. There is a campground entrance fee. Bring a lunch. Difficulty: 2 (some rough walking). Contact leader for information.

Leader: Russ Widner
480-595-2977
rwidner@attglobal.net

Saturday, May 18

Ice House Campground - A favorite spot in Tonto National Forest, near Globe. Short hikes from a spring where we will spend most of our time should give us a variety of warblers, hummingbirds, and other forest

Saturday, March 16

Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge, Brown Canyon - Birds along this sycamore and live oak mountain canyon, with a 47-foot natural bridge hidden in the upper canyon includes Montezuma quail, Strickland's woodpecker, or painted red-start. A refuge naturalist will cover birding, plant identification, and natural history of some of the canyon's wild residents. One of Arizona's special places, Brown Canyon is opened by "guided tour only." There is a fee of \$5 per person. Bring walking shoes, a lunch and plenty of water. Limit: 20. Difficulty: 3. Please contact leader for information and reservations.

Leader: Bonnie Swarbrick
520-823-4251 x 108
bonnie_swarbrick@fws.gov

Saturday, April 13

Estrella Mountain Regional Park - Riparian and desert habitat mark this thirty-square mile regional park. The park is south of Goodyear, near the Gila River. Gray Flycatchers are often seen here, and we may see Osprey, Snipe, and roadrunners. Meet at 7:30 a.m. at the navy parking lot, at the east end of the picnic loop. The Park charges a \$3 entry fee per vehicle. Bring a lunch, water and spotting scope if available. Difficulty 2. Call leader for information.

Leader: Bryon Lake
623-932-3811

Are you dying to lead a trip and it is not on the list? Please contact Mark Horlings with your information.

(continued on page 6)

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will be asked to contribute \$5 since this trip occurs during the Birdathon. We will meet at 7:30 a.m. and carpool from Denny's parking lot (just west of the Beeline Highway, on the South side of Shea Boulevard). Bring a lunch. We will return in the early afternoon. Difficulty 2. Limit 15. Call leader for information and reservations.

Leader: Janet Witzeman
602-840-6089

residents. We will meet in Phoenix and carpool. Bring a lunch. Limit: 20. Difficulty: 2. Please contact leader for information and reservations.

Leader: Tara Hesselbrock
602-996-2281

Saturday, May 25

Slate Creek Divide - Possibilities include Rufous-crowned, Blackchinned Sparrow, Scott's Oriole, Virginia's, Olive, Red-faced, Black-throated, Gray, Grace's Warblers, Painted Restart, Gray Vireo, Warbling Vireo, Warbling Vireo, Hairy Woodpecker, two nuthatches, Western Tanger. Four wheel drive needed. Steep, 7 mile dirt road. Bring a lunch. Limit: 15. Difficulty: 1. Call leader for information and reservations.

Leader: Bob Witzeman
602-840-0052

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ANNUAL BOARD ELECTIONS

It's that time of year again. Our annual board elections will be held at the Annual Banquet and Meeting on May 7th, and, as provided by our bylaws, a nominating committee has been named by our president. If you are interested in stepping forward and in assuming a leadership role in your chapter in the coming fiscal year which begins June 1st, please call one of the following Nominating Committee members and let him or her know of your interest:

Harvey Beatty, Chairman
480-990-0415

Olga Harbour
480-503-9291

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By Bob Witzeman

On the left side of the two dioramas is a water seep, spring or wetland that would normally have lush grass, or cattails and bulrushes. These wetland plants are also "ice cream" plants to cattle. With the arrival of cattle in the 1870's such vegetation at these springs and wetland seeps was rapidly and systematically obliterated. Ranchers erected small dams, stock tank impoundments, or windmills at these areas. Such areas are now deathtraps for wildlife that approach these defoliated, cattle-blasted moonscapes. Without the protective cover of vegetation, wildlife fear approaching, and if they do they become easy prey from predators, or from diseases from cattle-polluted water. Birds, mammals, amphibians, and other reptiles, dependent on these vital watering spots in the desert, have suffered greatly

Many destructive species of exotic grasses introduced by the government for the cattle industry have replaced our native grasses and vegetation. Some introduced grasses burn hotter than the native grasses. The intense heat from these fires can kill our unique saguaro forests. Other introduced grasses have shallow root systems, frustrating groundwater recharge and increasing storm run-off. This results in more soil erosion and frequent washouts of the cottonwood/willow galleries during desert cloudbursts and monsoon storms.

Audubon members should make a game or puzzle out of trying to find out why and how cattle grazing harms (or helps) each of the various species listed in the graphic. The Maricopa Audubon Society will hold workshops on grazing-watch our *Cactus Wren* edition newsletter for dates. MAS will make poster enlargements of these compelling dioramas of Karen Klitz so we Audubon volunteers can explain it to Arizonans at public display events.

The Maricopa Audubon Society, besides extending its deep appreciation and thanks to Karen Klitz, also wishes to thank Dr. Martin Taylor of the Center For Biodiversity, and Dr. Robert Ohmart of Arizona State University, for their assistance and guidance in this project.

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Brown Thrasher (Juvenile)
photographed by **Jim Burns** at
Boyce Thompson Arboretum, AZ
10/01 with Canon 400 mm f/2.3
lens and Fujichrome Velvia film.

Photo Quiz Answers

By Jim Burns

Just before Game Four of the World Series I happened to walk past a television tuned into the opening ceremonies. It was in a large public viewing area with perhaps fifty people present, most of them strangers to one another. As the last strains of the "Star Spangled Banner" faded away, there wasn't a dry eye in the house. Then Challenger swept out of the night sky and landed on his trainer's wrist. The hush in the room was suffocating, the electricity palpable. All fifty of us were ready to don our camouflage and ship out together on the next flight to Kabul.

Birders and non-birders alike immediately recognize and emotionally react to our country's symbol in its adult plumage. But if that huge dark bird doesn't display a white head and tail, misidentification often occurs. I remember assuming, as a beginning birder, any eagle sized bird without a white head and tail was a Golden. This issue's quiz will illustrate field marks which should lay to rest some of those faulty assumptions.

A) Good Photo, Easy Bird

Although, this may be the least familiar and least likely to be seen of the three plumages in our quiz, I'm sticking the "easy" label on this photo because it shows the most distinctive field mark of any of our subadult huge birds. There is a lot of white on this bird, but for our identification purposes the obvious white axillaries (armpits) are the key, eliminating all but two possibilities: immature Bald Eagle and California Condor. All Golden Eagles have dark armpits. Neither juvenile nor adult condors will show this white spotting on the belly and flight feathers. And condors won't look like huge dark birds. Half again larger than Bald Eagles, condors look like small airplanes.

In their first three plumages, subadult Bald Eagles have white axillaries. Typically it takes four years for Bald Eagles to acquire the full adult plumage that triggers our adrenaline. The four subadult age classes are labeled Juvenile, Basic I, Basic II, and Basic III. Basic III birds with their whitish heads and mostly white tails would be recognizable to non-birders. In flight they will not show white axillaries.

B) Good Photo, Difficult Bird

Because underwing shape and color are often so diagnostic, many raptors are more easily identified in flight than perched, especially at a distance. With

this close-up through, we have a good look at head features and body plumage. The head is feathered but it's not white. The eliminates the vultures, adult Bald Eagle, and Osprey. The real difficulty for us is deciding whether or not our second bird is a Golden Eagle.

Golden Eagle cannot be dismissed just because of the head and nape for which this species is named is more often than not obscured by the bird's posture or the angle of light, making the bird appear uniformly dark as it does in this photo. We need to focus here on a couple other features - bill size and body plumage.

Our photo birds has a massive bill with a lethal looking hook. Which is harder to rip open, the tough scales on a fish or the soft skin of a rodent? Though Balds and Golden Eagles are essentially the same size, with just a little thicker, heavier bill of Bald Eagles is easily recognizable, and it adds to the species' imperious head profile. Additionally, the bill on Golden in all plumages will have three distinct colors: horn lores (base of the bill in front of the eye); yellow cere (bare skin around the nostrils); and black tip/ the huge bill in our photo is uniformly dark, cere and tip the same color. Corroborating evidence against Golden Eagle is the white mottling on the wing and tail coverts and on the flanks and outer breast. Only rarely will Golden show white feathering on the body.

This young Bald Eagle was photographed on the Samish Flats in Washington state in January 2001. Because it has no white mottling on the belly and no hint of yellow around the nares (nostrils), we can be fairly certain it is in Juvenile Plumage are the dark crown and dark gray beak, both of which begin to lighten by the time Basic I plumage is attained. On our bird we can be fairly certain it is in Juvenile plumage. Other characteristics of this plumage are the dark crown and dark gray beak, both of which begin to lighten by the time Basic I plumage is attained. On our bird we can

ARIZONA'S SPECIAL SPECIES - LE CONTE'S THRASHER

By Jim Burns

Le Conte's Thrasher is a bird of ironies. Though Maricopa County Arizona may be the most reliable place to see this species, most serious out-of-state listers by-pass the Phoenix area in their rush to the more avian rich hotspots south and east of Tucson. Thus, though Le Conte's is an Arizona special species, species found only here or more easily here than in any other state, many birders see their first Le Conte's in California, primarily in the San Joaquin Valley.

Furthering the irony, not only is Le Conte's most common there near the small town of Maricopa, but the San Joaquin Valley population is disjunct from the rest of this species' habitat across the low deserts of southeastern California and southwestern Arizona where *Toxostoma lecontei* is at home in the driest and sparsest creosote and saltbush wastelands, south into northwest Sonora and northeast Baja, with another disjunct population along the west coast of central Baja. The final irony is that although Le Conte's is not uncommon in its preferred habitat, it is hard to find and even harder to see well because of the inhospitable nature of that habitat and the shy and unapproachable nature of the species.

Le Conte's is one of the least studied of North American birds. Last year in Yuma County, Arizona breeding bird atlasers obtained what are thought to be the first photographs ever taken of this species at the nest. Nest are typically large masses of thorny sticks lined with grasses and plant down and built within a few feet of the ground in low desert scrub. Le Conte's are suspected of mating for life, thought to raise two broods a year, and are most easily observed during the spring breeding season (January to March in Arizona's low deserts) when males sing early and late in the day from atop a bush to defend their territory.

That song, like those of most other members of the *Mimidae* family which includes catbirds and mockingbirds, is a rich, melodious series of whistled phrases with some repetition.

and oft visited Salome Highway site, the latter's song is softer, higher, and contains fewer harsh, guttural notes. Like other thrashers, Le Conte's has a "whisper" song which is audible only a few yards from the singer and is presumed to maintain contact between mated birds.

Le Conte's feed primarily on insects which they find by scratching, towhee-like, beneath desert vegetation, or dig from the ground with their long, decurved bills. Ants, spiders, and beetles form the bulk of the diet, and undoubtedly lizards and scorpions are also taken. The most typical way non-vocalizing Le Conte's are encountered is to see a pair foraging together, racing from bush to bush across the desert floor like nothing so much as miniature roadrunners, dark tails cocked up exposing the wonderful soft peach undertail coverts.

Here's how difficult Le Conte's can be to find. I know a Phoenix birder who has yet to see one though he has gone half a dozen times to the Salome Highway site during breeding season. Here's how common Le Conte's are. A friend from Florida unsuccessfully searched this site, drove a couple miles south and west, realized he was driving through identical habitat, walked into the desert, and found a Le Conte's within five minutes.

We birders, shame on us, are like so many sheep, following one another around to known hotspots. I stand amongst the guilty. It is probably well past due time to give the thrashers at the west Baseline "T" some respite from our annual breeding season intrusions. The next time you want to see a Le Conte's for your year list, drive out to the Salome Highway site, note well the vegetation, then keep driving. There are literally thousands of miles of accessible Le Conte's habitat all over the southwest quadrant of Arizona. Looking and learning and doing the legwork should be half the fun. Just make sure you're not on an Indian Reservation or a military firing range.

The accompanying photograph was taken in November, 2002 at an alternate site within Maricopa

After we've noted the white armpits, the second most obvious field mark on our quiz bird is the one which eliminates two of the remaining three age classes for us. Not that the trailing edge of the visible wing appears very ragged. When Bald Eagles undergo their first molt, some but not all flight feathers are replaced. Retained secondaries (inner flight feathers) are longer and more pointed, new ones shorter with blunter tips creating the uneven effect. Bald Eagles have 14 secondaries numbered from the outside in. Our photo shows S1, S5, S12-14 to be new, S2-4 and S6-11 to be longer juvenile feathers. Several of this bird's primaries (outer flight feathers) also appear very tattered.

Juvenile Bald Eagles, having not undergone a molt, will display a straight, smooth trailing wing line in flight. By Basic II, secondary molt will be complete and the trailing edge will again be uniform. Occasionally a juvenile secondary or the outermost primaries will be retained in Basic II plumage. This Basic I Bald Eagle was photographed in Brackendale, British Columbia in December, 1999.

see just a hint of buff growing into the crown. In Basic I both crown and cheeks will be buffy and by Basic II these areas will be turning to white with a distinct eyeline between them.

C) Bad Photo, Easy Bird

Though this bird appears the same size in the frame as our first bird, this photo is not nearly as sharp or well exposed. It perfectly illustrates on of the flight shooter's biggest problems - birds on the wing are often between the sun and the lens. In order to illuminate the diagnostic but deeply shadowed underwing pattern, this shot was overexposed, sacrificing detail and blowing out the head and nape area. Additionally, the grain and softer focus here tell us this bird was actually much farther away than the first.

Before we look at that underwing pattern, let's discuss this bird's jizz (overall shape and proportion). Even though the angle is slightly different, compared to the Bald Eagle in our first photo we can see that this bird head is smaller and also shorter relative its tail extension. The rule of thumb for eagles in flight is that a Bald's head will extend more than half the length of its tail, whereas a Golden's will extend less than half. Jizz gives

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Compared to Crissal Thrasher, with which Le Conte's shares the well known County. No sheep allowed.



Ave. and the Gila River Nov. 12 (TCO). A Greater Scaup was found in the Bill Williams arm of Lake Havasu Oct. 27 (CB, SS). A Hooded Merganser was seen at Coon Bluff Nov. 22 (MR) and the pair of Red-breasted Mergansers at El Mirage Pond were still present Nov. 12 (TCO).

Two White-tailed Kites were seen near Arlington Nov. 3 (MR). An adult and young Com. Black Hawk were still at Boyce Thompson Arboretum (BTA) on the late date of Oct. 3 (BD, SG *et al.*). The pair of Red-shouldered Hawks at the Hassayampa River Preserve (HRP) continued to be seen there - on Oct. 7 (PM, TCO, NS) and Nov. 25 (JBo). A **Crested Caracara** was discovered at 115th Ave. and the Gila River Nov. 12 (TCO, CW); there have been about 14 previous county records. Individual Merlins were reported at Fountain Hills Lake Nov. 8 (JSm) and at the park e. of Hayden, n. of Indian School Road Nov. 22 (PM, CD).

Numbers of Sandhill Cranes were seen in Arlington during the period: 17 on Oct. 6 (BG), 86 from Oct. 27 at least to Nov. 3 (MR) and at least three Nov. 12 (TCO). Up to 45 Mountain Plovers were reported at the Western Sod Farm near Arizona City in late November (TGO *et al.*). A Lesser Yellowlegs and an injured Pectoral Sandpiper were observed at the El Mirage Pond on the late date of Nov. 14 (SG). The Pectoral Sandpiper remained at least until Nov. 17 (PM, CD).

Oct. 8 (BG).

Unusual was a group of Bushtits at a lower than usual location at the Desert Botanical Garden Aug. 20; one was still present there Oct. 29 (SB, AT). Two Golden-crowned Kinglets were seen at the HRP on the early date of Oct. 7 (PM, TCO, NS). A Brown Thrasher was found at BTA Nov. 17-18 (JBa). An Am. Pipit was seen at the Water Ranch Ponds on the early date of Oct. 20 (JoB).

A N. Parula was observed in Prescott Sept. 21 (CT). A Yellow Warbler was seen at Tres Rios on the late date of Nov. 4 (RWz). A Chestnut-sided Warbler was found at BTA Oct. 11 (JBa). There were at least four Black-throated Blue Warblers reported in the state during the fall: in addition to the male found along Queen Creek Sept. 13 (CT), one was found in Prescott Sept. 21 (CT), a female was found at BTA Oct. 7 at least to Oct. 11 (RJ, RWd), and one was reported in s.e. Arizona at Kino Springs Oct. 21-22 (fide JH). A Hermit Warbler was seen at the Water Ranch Ponds Sept. 22 (PM). A Pine Warbler was discovered at Tres Rios Oct. 8 (CB, SS), providing only the third record for Maricopa County and the twelfth record for the state. A N. Waterthrush was observed along the Gila River w. of 115th Ave. Oct. 6 (TCO).

A Summer Tanager was found at 115th Ave. and the Gila River on the very late date

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the bad news and thought it should just be about the birds. Hello!



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of Nov. 23 (TCO). A male Scarlet Tanager, discovered at the Phoenix Zoo Oct. 4-6 (RJ *et al.*), represented the seventh record for Maricopa County; there have been two dozen previous records for the state

Nov. 23 (PM, TB). Three **Black Rosy-Finches** were found w. of Pipe Springs Nat'l. Monument Nov. 22 (JBo) Corrigenda: The report of the Black Rail below Lake Pleasant March 29, 2000 has been retracted.

.A Clay-colored Sparrow was found in Tempe Oct. 3 (KG). Individual White-throated Sparrows were reported in a Scottsdale yard Oct. 31-Nov. 9 (JBa) and at BTA Nov. 24 (TGO). Two McCown's Longspurs were discovered at the sod farm near Alma School Road and McDonald Drive Nov. 24 (RJ), providing only the third record for Maricopa County.

Individual Pyrrhuloxias were found away from their usual habitat at the Water Ranch Ponds Oct. 20 (JoB, RWz) and at the Desert Botanical Garden Nov. 12 (SB, AT). A Rose-breasted Grosbeak was found on the n.w. side of South Mountain Nov. 3-4 (LS). A Black-headed Grosbeak was reported at Fountain Hills on the late date of Nov. 5 (JSm). A Lazuli Bunting was observed along the effluent channel w. of 91st Ave. on the late date of

Abbreviations: Boyce Thompson Arboretum (BTA), Granite Reef Picnic Area (GRPA), Hassayampa River Preserve (HRP).

Observers: Charles Babbitt, Sally Barnes, Jerry Bock, Terry Brodner, Jim Burns, Josh Burns, Tillie Chew, Troy Corman, Bix Demaree, Rich Ditch, Cynthia Donald, Jeff Estis, Herb Fibel, Steve Ganley, Tom Gatz, Tony Godfrey, Kathy Groschupf, Bill Grossi, Jay Hand, Roy Jones, Glen Knowles, Laurie Nessel, Mike Rupp, John Saba, Leanna Shaberly, Norm Shrout, James Smith, Sig Stangeland, Karen Stucke, Andre Tarby, Carl Tomoff, Barb & Lou Winterfield, Russ Widner, Cathy Wise, Robert Witzeman.

Please send reports of unusual bird sightings to me by e-mail: jlwitzeman@aol.com or by phone: 602-840-6089.



The Cactus Wren-Dition

Spring - 2001 • Volume XLX, No. 1



Brown Thrasher (Juvenile)
photographed by **Jim Burns** at
Boyce Thompson Arboretum, AZ
10/01 with Canon 400 mm f/2.3
lens and Fujichrome Velvia film.

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Events & Programs • Bob Ohmar to be Guest Speaker at Our Annual Banquet Meeting • From the Editor • Notes & Announcements • Conservation - An Educational Tool About Cattle Grazing • Photo Quiz • Field Trips • Photo Quiz Answers • AZ Special Species - Le Conte's Thrasher • Sightings • Birder's Corner - As American As Baseball, Hunting, Dogs, and... • Special Note - FYI

GOVERNMENT CONTACTS

How often have you thought about contacting your "congress(wo)man"? Did you put it off because finding the address was a hassle? The following is an updated list of local and national representatives that was published last summer. Let them know what you think on issues that are important to you. After all----they are elected officials.

For statewide conservation information and conversation join the AZ.ACTIVIST listserv on the web. Send an e-mail message to LISTSERV@LIST.AUDUBON.ORG with **no** subject heading. The text of your message should read: SUBSCRIBE AZ-ACTIVIST

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Maricopa County

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District 3
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Supervisor Janice K Brewer, R

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Supervisor Mary Rose Wilcox, D

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State of Arizona

ARIZONA LEGISLATURE

Arizona Senate: 602/542-3559
Arizona State Senate

District 16

Rep Linda Gray, R 602/542-3376
Rep Jim Weiers, R 602/542-4639
Sen Darden Hamilton, R 602/542-5261

District 17

Rep Phil Hanson, R 602/542-3255
Rep John Nelson, R 602/542-5872
Sen Brenda Burns, R 602/542-3160

District 18

Rep Deb Gullett, R 602/542-5766
Rep James Kraft, R 602/542-5836
Sen Susan Gerard, R 602/542-4480

District 19

Rep Ted Carpenter, R 602/542-1859
Rep Roberta Voss, R 602/542-5168
Sen Scott Bundgaard, R 602/542-4136

District 20

Rep Bill Brotherton, D 602/542-4002
Rep Kathi Foster, D 602/542-5160
Sen Mary Hartley, D 602/542-4485

District 21

Rep Dean Cooley, R 602/542-5874
Rep Gary Pierce, R 602/542-3163
Sen Marilyn Jarrett, R 602/542-5268

District 22

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Rep Richard Miranda, D 602/542-3392
Sen Joe Eddie Lopez, D 602/542-4171

District 23

Rep Carlos Avelar, D 602/542-3278
Rep Leah Landrum-Taylor, D
602/542-5864
Sen Linda Aguirre, D 602/542-7830

District 24

Rep Barbara Leff, R 602/542-5963
Rep Steve Tully, R 602/542-5977
Sen Dean Martin, R 602/542-5284

District 25

Rep Ken Chevront, D 602/542-5895
Rep Christine Weason, D 602/542-3297
Sen Chris Cumiskey, D 602/542-4916

District 26

Rep Jeff Hatch-Miller, R 602/542-5051

GOVERNMENT CONTACTS

(continued from page 13)

District 28

Rep Carolyn Allen, R 602/542-4225
Rep Wes Marsh, R 602/542-5503
Sen Randall Grant, R 602/542-4138

District 29

Rep Mark Anderson, R 602/542-4371
Rep Russell Pearce, R 602/542-5760
Sen David Petersen, R 602/542-4481

District 30

Rep Eddie Farnsworth, R 602/542-5735
Rep Karen Johnson, R 602/542-4467
Sen Jay Blanchard, D 602/542-5325

Federal

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THOMAS SYSTEM OF THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS:
thomas.loc.gov (searchable full text of bills, Congressional Record, extensive links)

Federal Web Locator:

www.law.vill.edu
US Senate home page:
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Photo Quiz Answers

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us our first good clue that this might be a and curvature of the wing. Relative to

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Rep Robert Robson, R 602/542-5549
Sen Lori Daniels, R 602/542-4178

District 7
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Rep Mark Clark, D 602/542-5829
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Rep Lowell "Mike" Gleason, R
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Sen Tom Smith, R 602/542-5955

District 27
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Rep Laura Knaperek, R 602/542-5169
Sen Harry Mitchell, D 602/542-4124

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Golden Eagle

The Dark underside of this bird is marked by three large patches of white. Two are at the bases of the primaries, one at the base of the tail extending all the way to its outer margins. The tail's dark terminal band is very wide. The axillaries are dark. This pattern is quite distinctive and quite diagnostic. This is a classic look at an immature Golden Eagle, photographed in the Ruby Mountains of Nevada in August, 1994. Note the ragged trailing edges of the wing which indicate a subadult bird, and the apparent golden nape which Goldens of all ages will show.

Golden Eagles are more closely related to the butoes than to Bald Eagles, and a hint of this relationship is apparent in the shape

Balds, Goldens' wings will appear longer but narrower, more indented near the body with more bulging secondaries. In flight Goldens typically glide on flat wings, whereas Balds often glide with wings bowed downward resembling an Osprey.

There are arguments that Golden Eagle, hunter rather than scavenger and more widespread over the country, would be a more appropriate national symbol, but the visceral response evoked by that distinctive white head has certainly bonded us in these uncertain times. To best see and study our country's emblem in its subadult plumages spend a weekend this winter driving roads around Lake Mary and Mormon Lake southeast of Flagstaff when and where the eagles hold their annual retreat.

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