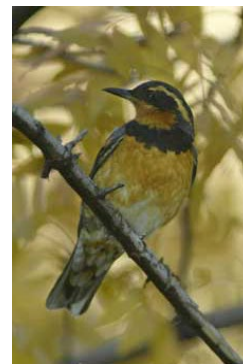




The Cactus Wren-Dition

Spring 2004 • Volume LXX, No. 1



Male **Varied Thrush** was photographed by **Jim Burns** at Boyce-Thompson Arboretum State Park on December 14, 2003, with Canon Digital 1D body, Canon 400mm f/2.8 lens, 1.4x telextender, and Canon 500 EX Flash

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PROGRAMS

September 2003 through May 2004

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. Visitors 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. Meals average about \$5.00 with a variety of choices on the menu. Join us! Except at the September meeting we will have our annual potluck starting at 6:30. Each attendee is invited to bring a platter of his or her favorite h'ors d'oeuvres, sufficiently large enough to serve at least six people. We will provide the eating utensils, the plates, and the drinks. The regular meeting will begin at 7:30.

Join us for a season of dynamic speakers and captivating topics! Visit Iceland, Alaska, Peru, Mexico and Arizona to see our favorite creatures and their associated environments. Learn to identify birds in the field by their sounds, get close-up and personal with digital photography, view habitat restoration along the Santa Cruz River, experience Arizona's sky island ecosystems and discover major conservation efforts throughout the state. Wow! And if that isn't enough to whet your interest, our banquet speaker for May 2004 is Kenn Kaufman!

To conserve space, only a short list of our speakers and topics is included in this edition of the newsletter. A summary of each speaker's topic will be available on our web site (www.maricopaaudubon.org).

PROGRAM TOPICS

September 2, 2003

David Reesor
"Birds of Iceland"

October 7, 2003

David and Jen MacKay
"Birds and Natural History of Northwestern Mexico"

November 4, 2003

Kathy Groschupf
"Identifying Bird Sounds in the Field"

December 2, 2003

Gary Rosenberg
"Digital Photography Through a Telescope: A Tour Leader's Travels from Alaska to Peru"

January 6, 2004

Ann Phillips and Kendall Kroesen
Along the Santa Cruz River: Its Birds and Reconstruction Efforts"

February 3, 2004

Peter Friederici
"Those Exotic, Thick-billed Parrots of the Sierra Madre"

March 2, 2004

Bob Witzeman
"Sky Islands of Arizona: Their Life Zones and Birds"

April 6, 2004

Pat Graham
"The Nature Conservancy in Arizona: Past Present and Future"

May 4, 2004

Kenn Kaufman
"?????? (stay tuned!)"

NOTES & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Open position on Board — Education

Chair — If interested, contact a Board Member.

Needed—Book Store Volunteers!—If you are interested, contact any Board Member.

Raptor Field Identification Course ~

February 6-8—Bisbee, AZ. Held by Bill Clark, author, teacher and field trip leader for over 30 years. The course is \$100 and does not include meals or lodging. For more information call Janine Higgins at 800-714-4365.

Backyard Bird Count ~ February 13-

16—You may submit your observations through BirdSource www.birdsource.org. Last year enthusiasts submitted almost 50,000 checklists totaling more than 4 million birds of 512 species. Developed and managed by the National Audubon Society and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology with sponsorship from Wild Birds Unlimited store owners and the Natural Resources Conservation Service, a division of the USDA.

Tucson Audubon to donate \$25 to MAS for everyone who signs up for their Copper Canyon or Belize trips:

How exciting! A fabulous bird tour and a donation to MAS! Copper Canyon is scheduled for October 7-16, 2003 and January 24-February 1, 2004. On their past trips they have seen Eared Trogons and Russet-Crowned Motmots. The Belize trip is scheduled for February 14-24, 2004. For detailed itineraries and a list of past birds seen on these trips, please see www.tucsonaudubon.org or www.naturetreks.net. Rochelle Gerratt can be reached at (520) 696-2002 or at rochelle@naturetreks.net.

North American Owls: Journey

Through A Shadowed World—MAS writer/photographer Jim Burns' owl book is being published by Willow Creek Press and should be available in bookstores early in March. It covers our 19 owl species with color photographs, a CD of their vocalizations, thumbnails their natural history, and compelling personal anecdotes.

Tres Rios Nature Festival ~ March 13-14—Estrella Mountain Regional Park in Phoenix. See the article by Tom Hildebrandt and Mike Rupp for details.

6th Annual Aleutian Goose Festival ~

March 26-28—Extreme north coast of California. The festival offers work shops and field trips. Call to receive their program booklet or for more information: 800-343-8300. Visit their website www.aleutiangoosefestival.org for complete information and online registration.

ABA Convention ~ 2004, April 26 -

May 2—McAllen, TX. Field Trips, Seminars, Workshops. For more information, visit ABA's web site at www.americanbirding.org.

The Birdseye Guide to 101 Birding Sites, Phoenix: A guide published by Rupp Aerial Photography. The maps are excellent, it is all in color and is \$23.95. For more information check www.ruppaerialphoto.com.

The Dovetail Directory (

www.dovetailbirding.com): The Directory is an online catalogue of world birding tours, and our goal is to help birders locate that special birding tour, to any of 85 countries around the world. This is a free service. There are no hidden costs or surcharges. Tours are offered at the operators price. In addition to tours, the Directory also carries a comprehensive inventory of birding-related books. For your further convenience we maintain a North American, toll-free number (877) 881-1145, and someone will always happy to take your call.

Shade-grown coffee: If you are searching for a source to purchase shade-grown coffee and haven't been successful, try ABA Sales. They carry seven kinds of Song Bird Coffee. For information call 800-634-7736.

More birding and nature festivals.

www.americanbirding.org . and www.birdinghotspot.com .

Audubon Adventures: Give the gift of discovery and share your love of the environment. The program is designated for students in grades 4-6. Introduce an entire classroom (up to 32 students) to the wonders of

From The Editor

COMMITTEES/SUPPORT

Activist Alert:

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shawnbauer@hotmail.com

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Herb Fibel
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herbertsfibel@aol.com

Audubon Phone 408-829-8209

Book Store

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jlwitzeman@aol.com

Hospitality

Web Page

Michell Fulton
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webmaster@maricopaadubon.org

Maricopa Audubon Web Site
www.maricopaadubon.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.

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By Deva Burns

The theme of this issue is volunteering, and many levels of involvement are suggested by this issue's authors.

At the highest level, the Board would love to see some new names step up and present themselves for consideration to serve Maricopa Audubon as Board members. Herb Fibel's article tells you who to contact on the nominating committee if you are interested. The vote will take place at the annual banquet in May at Shalimar Country Club in Tempe.

If you believe in the Audubon cause in Maricopa County, you may want to consider contacting Sam Campana at the Audubon Arizona office. In order for the new Rio Salado Center to become a reality, Sam needs clerical help, fund-raisers, and book donations. If you can volunteer, read Sam's article and give her a call.

If you can't commit for an entire year, but would like to do one weekend, why not plan to participate in some way in the Tres Rios Nature Festival that will take place in Estrella Mountain Regional Park in March. This first of what will be an annual celebration should be the most exciting conservation event in Arizona this year. It is a wonderful opportunity to help spread the word about Phoenix birds and Arizona conservation. See Tom Hildebrandt and Mike Rupp's article.

And last but not least, anyone with only a few minutes to spare should contact their representatives to let them know how they feel about the endangered Endangered Species Act. The ESA celebrates its 30th birthday this year. It's hard to believe it's been around that long, but all is not well as noted by Brian Nowicki from the Center for Biological Diversity. Your calls and letters can help.

Finally, since we are printing only issues that go to our "Friends of Maricopa Society", and they are supporting us by donating an additional \$20, we will return to the six issue per year schedule. However, in 2004 there will only be 5.

Be sure to check out our website at www.maricopaadubon.org

nature for just \$35 (plus shipping charges). You can select your favorite school or let Audubon do it for you. For orders: call 800/813-5037.

Maricopa Audubon T-Shirts

For information, contact Laurie Nessel at (480) 968-5614 or 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.

ANNUAL ELECTION AND NOMINATING COMMITTEE

The election of the MAS board of directors will take place at our annual meeting on May 4, 2004. Our board consists of: president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer, conservation chair, publicity chair, program chair, field trip chair, membership chair, education chair, and newsletter editor. With the exception of the newsletter editor, who is selected by the board, all chapter officer and other board positions are open for election each year. You may have noticed that a number of board members have served in their particular positions on the board for many years. This is not because he or she has a lock on that particular position, it's because no one else has stepped forward and volunteered to serve in his or her place. Our bylaws do not provide for term limits.

If you are interested in serving on the board, it is suggested that you contact the existing officer or chairperson, and ask for more information about the position. Then contact one of the following members of the nominating committee: **Doug Green**, chairman, (480) 998-5638; **Jim** or **Lynn Blaugh**, (480) 491-2509; or **Charlotte Norrid**, (480) 967-4957. If you do so, your name *will* be placed in nomination.

MAS CELEBRATES ITS 51ST YEAR OF SERVICE

Come and join us as we celebrate the completion of our 51st year of conservation activism on behalf of the environment worldwide, and of environmental education in our community.

Once again we'll be gathering in the dining room of Shalimar Country Club at 2032 E. Golf Avenue in Tempe on the first Tuesday in May, which, this year happens to be May 4th. There will be a no host cocktail hour from 6 to 7, with the buffet to start at 7. There will be food selections to satisfy all tastes and food regimens.

The cost is \$25 per person, (\$22.50 with your "Friends" discount.) You may mail in your checks to Herb Fibel, treasurer, ahead of time, or pay at the door. Reservations, though, are a must. Call Herb Fibel at (480) 966-5246, or Cynthia Donald at (480) 283-4515 to make your reservation.

Under consideration presently is the formation of a bylaws committee, with the submission of proposed updated bylaw provisions to the membership at this annual meeting. Since, in order to do so, we must announce this to the membership in a newsletter ahead of time, please consider this as your announcement, but please don't let this deter you from attending, because we have a lot of goodies in store, not the least of which is our awesome guest speaker, **Kenn Kaufman**.

For the few of you who do not know who Kenn is, Kenn is a longtime friend of Maricopa Audubon. He lives in Tucson with his wife, Lynn. At the age of sixteen Kenn dropped out of school and took to the road to look at and identify birds. His adventures are chronicled in "Kingbird Highway". Kenn is a birder's birder. I am privileged to own three of the books he has authored--"Kingbird Highway", "Peterson Field Guides--Advanced Birding" and "Kaufman Focus Guides--Birds of North America" (a field guide designed for the beginning birder. It is the textbook I use for my Basic Birding Class.) Kenn has numerous other titles to his credit, but one I look forward to regularly is his regular contribution to the bi-monthly publication, "Bird Watcher's Digest", which he calls "After the Spark".

Come, join us for the festivities!

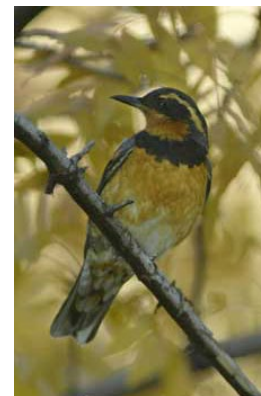
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SPRING 2004 - PHOTO QUIZ

By Jim Burns

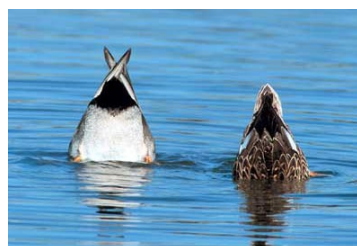
THIS ISSUE'S CLUE— Here's the bottom line. there are three species represented in this quiz, a single and two pairs, and all were photographed right here in the Valley.



A) Good Photo, Easy Bird



B) Good Photo, Difficult Bird



C) Bad Photo, Easy Bird

30TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT

By Brian Nowicki, Center for Biological Diversity



Yuma Clapper Rail
Photo credits: Jim Burns

December 28 marked the 30th anniversary of the Endangered Species Act. In the 30 years since this law was passed by Congress and signed into law by President Nixon, it has been essential to the protection of species on the verge of becoming extinct.

The grizzly bear, Mexican spotted owl, southwestern willow flycatcher, Yuma clapper rail, piping plover, bald eagle, California condor, green sea turtle, lynx, American alligators--these are just a few examples of species whose protection and continuation has depended on the ESA. Currently, 1263 plants and animals in the U.S. and another 558 foreign species are listed under the ESA. In various cases, species have escaped extinction, and populations have stabilized or significantly rebounded due to the protections of the ESA.

Now the ESA itself is endangered.

area essential to the conservation of endangered species), removing a total of 42 million acres from designation.

At the same time, executive rule changes are being used to reduce the authority of the Fish and Wildlife Service to oversee wildlife management on federal lands. Other rule changes are attempting to allow the importation of hunting trophies of internationally endangered species and the hunting of endangered species inside the U.S.

Perhaps most effective, the administration has deliberately under-funded the ESA, asking each year for only a portion for the budget required to list new species and designate Critical Habitat, despite the fact that Congress has offered increased funding for these programs. Thus the administration has refused to implement the ESA, claiming that they do not have the

For the past three years, the Bush Administration has been working to undermine and remove the protections of the ESA. The Bush administration has listed fewer species under the ESA than any other administration--24 compared to 521 under Clinton and 234 under Bush I. The administration has specifically attacked Critical Habitat (the designation of the

funds to do so.

There is much to celebrate on this 30th anniversary of the ESA, many plants and animals that may not have survived if not for these protections. There are also many more imperiled species in need of our attention and protection, the Florida panther, Pima pineapple cactus, desert tortoise, and Mexican gray wolf, to name a few. In this 30th anniversary year, the Endangered Species Act itself deserves protection.

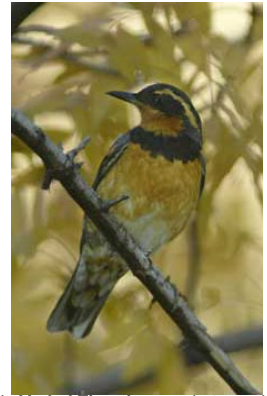


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A CHANCE TO CELEBRATE, A CHANCE TO SERVE: THE TRES RIOS NATURE FESTIVAL

By Tom Hildebrandt and Mike Rupp

The Gila River system west of Phoenix, including the lower portions of the Salt and Aqua Fria rivers, is a rich habitat for birds and other wildlife. Derived in large part from effluent from the Phoenix metro area, these waters are rich in nutrients. This translates into high levels of biotic productivity as these nutrients are taken up by algae and higher plants, and subsequently by the plant-eaters. The fish population here is among the densest anywhere in the state. This high level of fish productivity likewise results in many fish-eaters being present. Even some of the coyotes have learned specialized fishing techniques and can be observed standing in the same riffles day after day, waiting to snatch a vulnerable fish. More typically, we birders note the high numbers of herons, egrets, cormorants, osprey, kingfisher and other avian friends. Many others are less obvious, but they are there in abundance for us to enjoy. Much of this is the reason the Phoenix Tres-Rios Christmas Bird Count was re-started a few years ago. This is also the reason that we have established the Tres Rios Nature Festival in this area, to celebrate this wonderfully rich system of waters, plants and wildlife in an annual event, and to preserve them in the face of the many intense pressures which threaten their future.

Scheduled for March 13 and 14, 2004 at Estrella Mountain Regional Park, the Tres Rios Nature Festival is being developed by a strong group of partners. Maricopa Audubon has been a part of this since the first day. The event steering committee, chaired by our own Mike Rupp, is planning an event tailored primarily to serve the local community of the west valley. If we are to preserve this wildland paradise, so close to 3.5 million people and in the fastest-growing part of the valley, it will only be because the local community cares about it enough to make it happen. Our strategy is to create a high level of awareness, which we are confident will result in both enthusiastic appreciation for what is there and a strong desire to see it preserved. We're on a mission, and we expect it to be a great bit of fun!

We are also planning activities for those with a higher level of interest and knowledge. There will be lectures and field trips and demonstrations. There will also be opportunities to pass your knowledge along by helping to lead some of these activities. We hope you will come to our festival. We hope you will participate in our festival. We hope you will help us make it a screaming success!

Due to the anticipated 5,000 to 10,000 attendees, the Tres Rios Nature Festival will be **the single most important opportunity in 2004** for the Maricopa Chapter to present its goals, programs, and opportunities to the general public, and hopefully recruit new members. New, professional displays are being prepared for the Maricopa Chapter booth at the festival, in anticipation of this unique opportunity. We would like to have a "cadre" of Maricopa greeters there to interact with the public by answering questions, introducing them to the birds and habitats of the "tres rios area", and extending invitations to join the Chapter. More members = a larger budget to achieve the Chapter's goals of conservation, education, and recreation. Please give Mike Rupp, Cynthia Donald, or Bob Witzeman a call to volunteer your time.

ARIZONA'S SPECIAL SPECIES, GILDED FLICKER

By Jim Burns



Photo by Jim Burns

Birders usually have favorite families of birds often based on beauty of plumage or song. My personal favorites run to families with special habitat niches and unusual physical adaptations which have allowed them to survive in those niches. Owls head my short list, but woodpeckers are close behind. In this issue I would like to introduce you to one of the three species in this fascinating family that permanently qualify as Arizona's special species, species found only here or more easily here than in any other state.

Gilded Flicker, *Colaptes chrysoides*, neither as common (or as noisy) as Gila Woodpecker nor as uncommon (or as retiring) as Arizona Woodpecker, may be the least seen and the least sought of the three though it has the more interesting taxonomic history and the more unique ecological niche. If you are a lister you may recall Gilded Flicker disappeared from your computer screen for about two decades, only to reappear again in 1995. If you expect and delight to find woodpeckers pecking wood, you will be disappointed to find Gilded Flickers spend most of their time foraging on the ground.

Gilded Flickers are the southwest

hybridizing with Yellow-shafted Flickers in a long, rather broad zone of overlap running down the western edge of the Great Plains. As a result, taxonomists lumped the three separate flicker species and called them all Northern Flicker. Gilded was split out again in 1995 primarily because Red-shafted do not breed in our deserts and hybridization in Southern Arizona occurs only along the very narrow strands of streamside habitat there.

As expected of a family of birds living on arboreal boring insects, all woodpeckers have evolved several structural features unique amongst birds: tail feathers that are stiff and barbed to help support vertical posture; folded facial bones and an enlarged brain case to absorb the shock of hammering into wood; zygodactyl feet (two toes forward, two backward) to help propel the bird upward along the tree bole; and extremely long, barbed, sticky tongues, remarkably extensible because they are attached to two strips of cartilage which wrap entirely around the skull and anchor into the nostril or eye sockets.

Even within this unusual family, flickers are exceptional. Flickers consume more ants than any other

AZ Special Species AZ Special Species AZ Special Species AZ Special Species AZ Special Species

AUDUBON ARIZONA & CHAPTERS WORK TOGETHER ON RIO SALADO CENTER

By Sam Campana, Executive Director, Audubon Arizona

Audubon Arizona is very excited about sharing with your Maricopa Chapter the progress we are making in having an Audubon Nature Center in Phoenix.

We are currently negotiating with the City of Phoenix for four acres at a cost of only a \$1 a year on the southeast corner of Central Avenue and the Salt River – the historic center of the Valley! There is already a wonderful gateway shade structure there – if you drive by soon you'll recognize it!

Our Audubon Center would be part of the Rio Salado Project that the City of Phoenix has been working on with the Army Corps of Engineers and Maricopa County Flood Control District – an \$85 million project! Federal dollars pay for 2/3 and the City and County are doing the balance.

Audubon Arizona needs your help to work with the community surrounding the Center and the entire Valley to be sure it fits the needs – integrating us into the schools in Phoenix and Roosevelt District. We are already working to have ASU interns be involved!

Please help us now. Come into our offices at 44th Street and Camelback and help prepare educational materials or give us a call at 602-468-6470. We are meeting regularly with the community and need clerical volunteers. Our Library is growing – can you help or donate? We will have to raise all the resources to build the facility – will you help on that campaign?

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desert specialists of the flicker genus. In Arizona they can be found wherever there is Saguaro Cactus, which they favor for nesting. They are also found along the Pacific Slope of Mexico from Sonora to northern Sinaloa and throughout Baja except for the extreme northwest. Though rare in California they are occasionally seen there in citrus and date palms along the western edges of the lower Colorado River and in the deserts of northeast San Bernardino County. There are also recent records from Tonopah and Beatty in Nevada.

Here in our state they should be easy to find in Saguaro National Monument and Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument. Closer to home, Papago Park near the Phoenix Zoo, where the accompanying photo was taken in April 2002, is a reliable spot as well as Lost Dutchman State Park or any of the city or county parks with Saguaro stands. In southern Arizona, at altitudes above the desert, Gilded Gildeds can be found in cottonwoods and willows along riparian zones such as Sonoita Creek near Patagonia or Aravaipa Canyon south of Dudleyville.

It was in these southern Arizona riparian areas that studies in the '60s revealed Gilded Flickers were hybridizing with Red-shafted Flickers which, in turn, were found to be

North American bird species and thus, though vertical creatures while excavating their homes, they alone among the woodpeckers spend most of their foraging time on the ground in horizontal posture. Because they are ant specialists, flickers have developed even longer tongues, capable of extending five inches outside the bill to probe deeply into anthills. Because desert ants are not as arboreal as those in other habitats, Gilded Gildeds are seen vertical even less than their flicker congeners and may presumably have the longest tongues in the woodpecker tribe.

Our desert Gilded Gildeds have adapted well to civilization too. I often see the Papago Park flickers with their bills inserted into discarded soda cans, presumably extracting the last dregs of the sugary liquid. This copulating pair was photographed in Papago Park in May 2003. I usually find these birds initially by listening for fast, staccato drumming on the metal covers of the park light poles. Woodpeckers drum to spread woodpecker news, the louder the surface the farther the news travels. Gilded Gildeds and Gilas both know this, but Gila news always seems more strident, more important. Gilded Flicker business is more sedate, more private. Patience and a discerning ear are required for reports from our special desert flicker.

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Field Trips

By Mark Horlings

CAR POOLING

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

LEGEND

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

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

REMINDERS

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

Saturday, January 10

Lost Dutchman State Park. This desert park lies at the base of the Superstition Mountain near Apache Junction. Bird feeders and baths make locating birds easy. Canyon Towhee, Pyrrhuloxia, and many close looks at rock wrens made last year's trip memorable. There is an entry fee at the park. This is a beautiful hike, with good views of the spires of the Superstitions. Total of three miles to walk. Bring a lunch. Call leader for information and reservations.

Limit: 15
Difficulty: 3

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

Wednesday, February 18

Saturday, March 20

Granite Reef Dam & Lower Salt River. We will visit the Salt River, below Granite Reef Dam. A traditional favorite, excellent for waterbirds and raptors, with a leader who birds this area frequently. Sixty species used to be standard for this trip; lately, we've seen fewer. It's still a beautiful area and productive for any birder. There is a lake entry fee. Bring water, lunch and a scope if available. We will meet at 7:30 a.m. at the Walgreen's parking lot at McKillip and Power (Bush Highway). Contact leader for reservations and information.

Limit: 15
Difficulty: 2

Leader: Charles Saffell

Photo Quiz Answers

By Jim Burns

Now what!? How can these photographs be labeled "good" when all three show only half birds, and only the wrong half at that? Well, I've always labeled the quiz photographs based strictly on technical quality rather than how well they manifest the field marks which might help you solve the quiz. That said however, there are very good field marks in these photos of the wrong ends of what are obviously ducks. I've wanted to do duck butts for a long time because I think they tell us a lot about how we look at birds (and people!) and how we often overlook easily identifying features.

Every caricaturist loves George Bush's ears, but do you even notice any other part of his physiognomy? On the other hand, has anyone ever even looked at Jennifer Lopez's ears? If you're going to become a better birder, sooner or later you will have to become acquainted with whole birds rather than shutting down your observation skills once you've noticed the bright colors, the relative sizes, or the structural anomalies. The easy, common species are a good place to start.

Are these ducks embarrassed or is this an avian version of flipping off the paparazzi? Once we set aside our anthropomorphism, we know every species is adapted by evolution to feed in a specialized niche and, thus, in a specialized manner. These three species are "dabbling" ducks which feed by "dabbling" on the surface of the water or by tipping up to feed on aquatic animals and vegetation along the bottom of shallow ponds. Dabblers comprise the genus *Anas*, and twelve are possible in Arizona.

A)---Good photo, easy bird

Even birders who get past the easily identifying colors on most male ducks probably stop after they have learned that head and bill shape can be the keys to the more difficult

B)---Good photo, difficult pair

If this is a pair, that has to be the male on the left with the white belly and the female is the bird on the right with the mottled plumage and darker belly. Running through the roster of dabblers, the obviously contrasting underparts of the two sexes eliminates Mottled Duck, American Black Duck, and Cinnamon and Blue-winged Teal. Those nice chevrons we can see on the female flanks eliminate the wiggeons but would sure look good on a Northern Pintail had we not already dealt with that species.

Flank chevrons are also apparent on Mallard, Gadwall, Northern Shoveler, and Green-winged Teal females, so we need to look a little further and a little closer at the photo. The term "speculum" refers to a small area of iridescence in the inner secondaries of most of the dabblers. It is thought that the males use the speculum in wing preening as a courtship display to attract females. In some of the females the speculum can be an identifying field mark. Our photo shows a dark speculum bordered fore and aft with white bars. Gadwalls show a large white patch in the secondaries, a "white" speculum if you will, so this is definitely not a pair of Gadwalls, but this female rear end, especially without the benefit of color, could pass for any of the remaining three species. We need help from the male.

Is there a birder out there breathing who has ever mistaken the metallic green head of a Mallard drake for anything else? Or the huge, trowel-shaped bill of the Northern Shoveler, for which the species is named, for anything else? Or the fancy green-on-brown contrasting face of the Green-winged Teal male for anything else? But I'm betting fully half of us have never even noticed or realized that Mr. Mallard is our only duck with central tail feathers that curl up. And

Rio Verde -We will visit an area north of Scottsdale's McDowell Mountain Park, with particular sites depending on scouting results the previous weekend. This is interesting country with varied habitats and normally provides a good variety of species. Contact leader for reservations and information.

Limit: 15
Difficulty: 2

Leader: Herb Fibel (480)966-5246.

Tuesday, February 24

Gilbert Library Ponds. The ponds and surrounding marshes attract migrating waterfowl, wintering raptors, and passerines. Last year's trip was exceptional for the numbers of waterfowl seen. Burrowing owl colonies are well established and easily viewed. Bring a spotting scope, if available, as well as lunch and water.

Limit: 15
Difficulty: 1. They don't get any easier.

Leader: Cindy West
(480) 830-5332
cwestbirdr@juno.com

Wednesday, March 11

Southwest Phoenix. Visit several locations in search of Vesper Sparrow, Savannah Sparrow, and various wintering waterbirds, including Neotropical Cormorant. Bring a lunch. Call leader for information and reservations.

Limit: 20
Difficulty: 1

Leader: Bob Witzeman
(602) 840-0052
No e-mails please.

(480) 668-9393; marisaff@cox.net

Saturday, April 10

Spur Cross We will visit Spur Cross, concentrating on a portion of the park recently reopened to visitors. The area has been closed for conservation purposes. The walk will focus on birds, flora and herps. Six warbler species were seen on an April trip last year. We will also visit an area known as "Jewel of the Creek" which features a perennial stand of cottonwoods, willow and ash. Riparian species should be abundant. Total of three miles to walk. A fee of \$3 to the park and a donation of \$7 to Maricopa Audubon will be requested. Bring a lunch. Call leader for information and reservations.

Limit: 20
Difficulty: 3

Co-Leaders: Laurie Nessel and John Gunn, wildlife biologist and park ranger
(480) 968-5614;
laurienessel@hotmail.com

Saturday, May 1

Boyce Thompson Arboretum. Join Herb Fibel's Basic Birding Class for their final field trip. We will assemble in the valley and carpool 60 miles to the Arboretum. A \$7 donation will be requested. The Arboretum always produces a good variety of species. We hope for a day list of about 60. An excellent opportunity to meet beginning birders and correct any misinformation Herb has dispensed to the young and impressionable. Bring lunch. Call leader for reservations and information.

Limit: 10
Difficulty: 1

Leader: Herb Fibel
(480) 966-5246

ones. Moreover, it is so unusual for any of our birds to actually be named for their most defining field mark that we often forget or overlook how and why they were named, particularly if they are common species with readily recognizable plumage. In fact, there are some members of the *Anas* genus whose common and scientific names do reflect what one should notice first about the species, distinctive male plumage notwithstanding.

Our first quiz bird should be the easiest to identify because, if you proceed all the way to its far end where this photograph takes us, you'll find the identifying characteristic for which the species is named. This feeding dabbler has hoisted for us its long, eye-catching, pointed tail. Now you remember. Northern Pintail really does have a "pintail," but who ever looks beyond the crisp white neck stirrup under the contrasting dark brown head of the strikingly marked male?

Northern Pintail is *Anas acuta*, and Latin scholars will also remember that this species name, *acuta*, is the derivative for acute or pointed. You may not need that insight for the readily recognizable plumage of the drake, but the cryptic, mottled brown female also has the species' namesake appendage, not as obvious as the male's, but longer and more pointed than any of the other dabbling females for which she might be mistaken. This feeding male Northern Pintail was photographed last winter along the Scottsdale Greenbelt in the first pond north of Roosevelt.

they're black, contrasting with the rest of the white tail. This pair of foraging Mallards was photographed last winter in Eldorado Park on the Scottsdale Greenbelt.

C)---Bad photo, easy pair

This should be an easy pair because we've already done a lot of homework. On the other hand, we can't see the flanks or belly on this female and nearly all of our dabbling males show varying degrees of black like this on their undertail coverts. Because of our straight-on viewing angle, the female is going to have to provide us with the diagnostics.

This is a top view of this female's bottom end, and what appears to be a dark uppertail is really the bird's primaries. Moving forward (down in the photograph) we come to the obvious white secondary patch which identifies this as a female Gadwall, the only dabbling species, as we have already noted, with a white speculum. The black undertail coverts of the male Gadwall are really no more extensive than those of the wigeon which also have white bellies, but the uppertail coverts of the former are also extensively black and the birds are known to hunters as "black butts." This pair of Gadwalls was photographed last winter along the Scottsdale Greenbelt in the first pond south of McDowell.

We all need this reminder to learn whole birds. There are always useful field marks to be seen once, and if, we can get past the splashy colors, George's ears, J.Lo's . . .

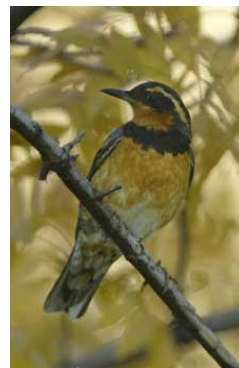


The Cactus Wren-Dition

Spring 2004 • Volume LXX, No. 1

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Male **Varied Thrush** was photographed by **Jim Burns** at Boyce-Thompson Arboretum State Park on December 14, 2003, with Canon Digital 1D body, Canon 400mm f/2.8 lens, 1.4x teleconverter, and Canon 500 EX Flash

Field Observations

SEPTEMBER, OCTOBER, NOVEMBER 2003

By Janet Witzeman

Three species were added to the Maricopa County List during the fall, providing a new total of 448 species. A **Thick-billed Kingbird** was heard calling at Palm Lake, Hassayampa River Preserve (hereafter HRP) Sept. 21 (TC) and was seen there again Sept. 27 (PM). A **Carolina Wren** was discovered in a Tolleson yard Sept. 28 and remained until Oct. 11 (BG); this was the first record of this species west of the Continental Divide. A first winter **Glaucous-winged Gull** was found at one of the Lower River Road ponds, n. of Palo Verde Nov. 23 (TC *et al.*) and was still present there in early December. There have been only five previous state records and this was the first in twenty years.

A Common Loon was reported at Gila Farms Pond (hereafter GFP) Nov. 2 (PD). A Clark's Grebe (an uncommon fall and winter visitor) was observed at Granite Reef Dam Oct. 4 (HF). Am. White Pelicans appeared to be more widespread and in larger numbers than usual. About a dozen were reported at the "jaeger pond" at Paloma Ranch Sept. 20 at least to Oct. 11 (PD,DP,BG); up to 30 were observed at Gillespie Dam Nov. 1-5 (CB,SS,L&KB), increasing to more than 60 Nov. 27 (TC,DY); between 18 and 28 were counted at Tres Rios Nov. 18-30 (DS,TC); and five were seen at Granite Reef Picnic Area Nov. 24 (SG). Individual late-staying Brown Pelicans were seen along the Gila River w. of Hwy. 85 Nov. 2 (BG) and at Tempe Town Lake Nov. 29 (TG). Numbers of Neotropic Cormorants continued to increase: more than 40 were counted at Tres Rios Nov. 30 (TC); individuals were also seen at 115th Ave. and the Gila River Nov. 23 (TC) and at Tempe Town Lake Nov. 29 (TG).

A **Reddish Egret** was discovered at the Gila Bend Power Plant Pond Sept. 14-18 (RJ,SG); there have been six previous county records. A large group of 60 Cattle Egrets were counted at Tres Rios Nov. 30 (TC). White-faced Ibis are not as uncommon in late fall and winter as they once were; one was seen at the sludge pond e. of El Mirage Nov. 23, and 25 were counted at Tres Rios Nov. 30 (TC).

Eighteen Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks were observed at the Gilbert Wildlife Area (Neely) Ponds Oct. 13-20 (P&DK,RG) and one was seen at the sludge pond e. of El Mirage Nov. 23 (TC). Individual Snow Geese were observed at El Mirage Pond Nov. 6 (BD,LH,AV,RWD) and at the ponds n. of Palo Verde Nov. 23 (TC). Individual Ross's Geese were reported at Eldorado Park in Scottsdale Sept. 13 at least until Nov. 22 (TG,L&KB), at the ponds n. of Palo Verde Nov. 23 (TC), and at the Ken McDonald golf course in Tempe Nov. 24 (MM). Thirteen Swans (presumed to be Tundra) were seen flying west from Palo Verde Nov. 28 (PD) and 30 Tundra Swans were counted at Becker Lake in the White Mountains Nov. 28 (*fide*MS).

A male Wood Duck was seen at the Gilbert Rd., s. of Ocotillo Rd. Pond Sept. 21 (PD), two males and a female were seen at the Gilbert Wildlife Area (Neely) Ponds Oct. 19 (PD), and a male and female were reported at Encanto Park Nov. 21 (L&KB). Eight Blue-winged Teal were observed at Tres Rios Nov. 30 (TC); the species is usually uncommon in late fall and early winter. A **Surf Scoter** (a rare transient) was discovered on Saguaro Lake Nov. 24 (SG); another individual, an adult female, was reported on Upper Lake Mary in n. Arizona Nov. 7-15 (JP *et al.*). Two **White-winged Scoters** were discovered on Ashurst Lake, Flagstaff Nov. 9 at least until Nov. 20 (JP *et al.*). Two Com. Goldeneyes were observed at GFP Nov. 22 (PD) and two were found on the ponds n. of Palo Verde Nov. 23-25

Field Observations

SEPTEMBER, OCTOBER, NOVEMBER 2003

(Continued from Page 9)

visitor) was seen in a yard in Tolleson Oct. 9-12 (BG). A Broad-tailed Hummingbird was reported at Boyce Thompson Arboretum (hereafter BTA) on the late date of Nov. 8 (HF). A Lewis's Woodpecker (an irregular winter visitor) was observed at Paloma Ranch Nov. 1 at least until Nov. 4 (CB,SS,HD). A female Acorn Woodpecker (uncommon in the lowlands) was found in a Scottsdale yard Nov. 16 (JB).

An Eastern Phoebe was found along the channel n. of the Cobble Ponds Sept. 20 (CB). A Brown-crested Flycatcher was observed along the Agua Fria River s. of Lake Pleasant Sept. 21 (TC), almost a month later than usual. A **Tropical Kingbird** was discovered at GFP Oct. 1 (RJ), two weeks later than usual. Another **Tropical/Couch's Kingbird** type was found at the Gilbert Water Ranch in early November and was still present in early December (MW,DP,SG *et al.*). There have been seven previous county records; four of these have been in the last five years.

Individual **Red-eyed Vireos** were observed at BTA Sept. 1-7 (CT,KR) and along the Fisherman's Trail at Granite Reef Picnic Area Sept. 9-14 (SG). Two Steller's Jays were seen along the Agua Fria River Nov. 1 (RJ) and one was seen there again Nov. 13 (JB). Small numbers of W. Scrub Jays began appearing in the lowlands in late August and were reported through November along the Agua Fria River, at HRP, at Whitlow Dam, at Granite Reef Picnic Area, in Gila Bend, below Painted Rock Dam, and at BTA (JB,L&KB,TC,HF,SG,BG).

A small flock of Mt. Chickadees (irregular winter visitors to the lowlands) were seen at BTA Nov. 8 (HF) and five were counted there Nov. 18 (BD,LH,AV). Early White-breasted Nuthatches were reported at Eldorado Park - two on Sept. 2 (JB), at BTA- one on Sept. 3 (RD), at Rio Verde - two on Sept. 4 (BD,AV), and along the Agua Fria River - one on Sept. 11 (JB). Two more were seen at HRP Oct. 2 (JB) and one was still present along the Agua Fria River Oct. 12 (BG). A Brown Creeper was found along the Agua Fria River Oct. 29 (JB). Individual Golden-crowned Kinglets were observed along the Agua Fria River Oct. 23 (JB) and again Nov. 1 (RJ), and at BTA Oct. 26 (L&KB).

Individual Varied Thrushes were found in the inner basin of the San Francisco Peaks in n. Arizona Oct. 23 (CT) and at BTA Nov. 27 (JB) and Nov. 30 (*fide* RD). The Brown Thrasher was seen back at BTA Nov. 30 (*fide* RD). A **Sprague's Pipit** (a rare winter visitor) was discovered at the Rousseau Sod Farm at the n. end of Alma School Rd. Oct. 18 (PD) and remained at least until Oct. 26 (RJ,SB,TC,PM,CD). Numbers of Cedar Waxwings were reported at Paloma Ranch Nov. 20 (DS), on the ASU Campus Nov. 20 (MM), and three flocks of more than 50 each in the Encanto Park neighborhood Nov. 27 (TG).

A Tennessee Warbler was found at BTA Sept. 17 (SG). A N. Parula was reported at the Gilbert Water Ranch Oct. 26-27 (JMCM). A Yellow Warbler was seen at Tres Rios on the late date of Nov. 30 (TC). A Chestnut-sided Warbler was reported in a Scottsdale yard Nov. 1 (JB). An unusual number of **Magnolia Warblers** were discovered: one at Little Ash Creek area of the Agua Fria National Monument, n. of Phoenix Oct. 1 (WA *et al.*), a female along the Agua Fria River below Lake Pleasant Oct. 9 (JB) and again Oct. 11 (RJ,SG), and one at the Desert Botanical Garden Oct. 13 (AT) at least until Oct. 16 (TCH). There were only six previous county

(TC,MR). Individual Hooded Mergansers were reported at Papago Park Oct. 18 at least until Nov. 22 (L&KB,TG), at GFP Nov. 15 (PD), and at the Gilbert Water Ranch Nov. 22 (PM,CD); three were seen at the Gilbert Rd., s. of Ocotillo Rd. Pond Nov. 29 (PD). Eight Red-breasted Mergansers (uncommon winter visitors) were observed at GFP Nov. 15 and one was seen at the s. of Ocotillo Rd. Pond Nov. 29 (PD).

Two White-tailed Kites were reported at Tres Rios Nov. 2 (L&KB). An adult Com. Black Hawk was seen at an out-of-the-ordinary place, at the Agua Fria River riparian area below Lake Pleasant Sept. 21 (TC) and it, or another, was seen in that area Oct. 23 (BD,AV,RWd). One of the Red-shouldered Hawks at the HRP was observed there Sept. 27 (PM). A Merlin was seen at Papago Park on the early date of Sept. 21 (TG). Clapper Rails, that are seldom heard later than September, were heard at the "jaeger pond" at Paloma Ranch Oct. 5 (BG). Ten Sandhill Cranes were seen in Arlington Nov. 1 (CB,SS); by Nov. 26 that number had increased to 52 in the same area (HF). Nine more Sandhill Cranes were found along the Gila River, e. of Gillespie Dam Nov. 27 (TC,DY).

A Black-bellied Plover was found at the El Mirage Pond Nov. 6 (BD,LH,AV,RWd). An **Am. Golden Plover** (a rare fall transient) was discovered at Paloma Ranch Sept. 20-25 (BG *et al.*). A large number of 23 Am. Avocets (usually rare in late fall and winter) were observed at the El Mirage Pond Nov. 23 (TC) and another three were seen at the Gilbert Rd., s. of Ocotillo Rd. Pond Nov. 29 (PD). A late Whimbrel was discovered at Paloma Ranch Sept. 24 (BG); there were no previous September records for the county. Individual Marbled Godwits were reported at Paloma Sept. 28 (PD) and at the Gila Bend Power Plant Pond Nov. 1 (CB,SS). A Sanderling was found at the Gila Bend Power Plant Pond Sept. 7 and remained at least until Sept. 21 (BG). A **Sharp-tailed Sandpiper**, discovered at the "jaeger pond" at Paloma Ranch Nov. 2-3 (BG *et al.*), provided only the third record for the county and the state. A Stilt Sandpiper was reported at the Gilbert/Riggs Ponds Oct. 25 (PD,DP). Three late Red-necked Phalaropes were observed at GFP Nov. 2 (PD); they are usually gone by the fourth week in October and there was only one previous November record for the county.

A first winter Franklin's Gull was observed at Fountain Hills Lake Sept. 25 (KR). Individual first winter Herring Gulls (casual transients) were found at the Gilbert Rd., s. of Ocotillo Rd. Pond Nov. 2 (PD) and at the Lower River Rd./Johnson Rd. Pond n. of Palo Verde Nov. 25 into early December (MS,MR *et al.*). Individual Sabine's Gulls were reported at Fountain Hills Lake Sept. 26 until Oct. 1 (KR *et al.*) and at Gilbert Rd., s. of Ocotillo Rd. Pond Sept. 27 (PD); two more were seen on Roosevelt Lake Sept. 29 (JE); the species is usually considered to be a rare fall transient. Individual Caspian Terns were seen at the Gila Bend Power Plant Pond Sept. 18 (RJ) and at the "jaeger pond" at Paloma Ranch Sept. 24 (BG). Twelve Common Terns were reported on Becker Lake in the White Mountains Sept. 14 (CB,BJ). Ten Eurasian Collared-Doves were counted at Paloma Sept. 28 (PD) and five were observed at the Arlington School Nov. 27 (TC,DY).

An Elf Owl, found near 77th Ave. and Bethany Home Rd. in Glendale on the late date of Oct. 14 (JR), represented only the third October record for the county. A Long-eared Owl (a rare visitor) was discovered at the Desert Botanical Garden Oct. 17 (JB). Three Lesser Nighthawks were seen flying over the Sentinel Rest Area, w. of Phoenix on the slightly late date of Nov. 4 (HD). A nightjar, thought to be a Poorwill, was seen in a downtown Phoenix parking garage from Oct. 31 until Nov. 6 (JM).

A Broad-billed Hummingbird (a rare

[\(Continued on Page 10\)](#)

records.

A male **Black-throated Blue Warbler** was discovered along the Agua Fria River Oct. 23-29 (JB *et al.*); there were ten previous county records. A female **Blackburnian Warbler** was found along the Agua Fria River Oct. 9 (JB) and was seen again Oct. 11 (RJ,TC) and Oct. 12 (BG); there were only two previous county records. A Grace's Warbler, observed at BTA Oct. 26, was late and out-of-place (L&KB); the species is rarely seen in the lowlands and usually not seen after early September. Individual Black-and-white Warblers were reported at the HRP Oct. 2 (JB), along the Agua Fria River Oct. 29 (JB), Nov. 1 (RJ), and Nov. 13 (JB), and at the Cobble Ponds Nov. 6 (BD,LH,AV,RWd). Individual Am. Redstarts were seen at McCormick Ranch Sept. 18 (KM), and at BTA Oct. 5 (TC). A male **Prothonotary Warbler** was found along the Agua Fria River Sept. 11 (JB); there have been only five previous county records.

A male Summer Tanager was observed in a yard in McCormick Ranch, Scottsdale on the late date of Nov. 29 (WT). A **Clay-colored Sparrow** was reported n. of Luke Air Force Base Oct. 3 (HD); there have been six previous county records. A "slate-colored" Fox Sparrow was seen at the marsh at the e. end of Tempe Town Lake Nov. 29 (TG). A Swamp Sparrow was reported along the Agua Fria River Oct. 26 (PM,CD), three were seen there Oct. 27 (RJ), and one was seen at the Cobble Ponds Nov. 2 (L&KB). Individual White-throated Sparrows were observed at BTA Nov. 9 (RD) and above Lower Camp Creek Nov. 13 (BD,LH,AV,RWd). A Golden-crowned Sparrow was seen in a north Phoenix yard Nov. 15 (BD).

Five **McCown's Longspurs** were discovered at the Rousseau Sod Farm Oct. 25 (PD,DP,RJ), two were seen there Oct. 26 (PM,CD,TC), and one was still present Nov. 11 (RJ). This is the third fall the species has been recorded at this location. A **Lapland Longspur** was found at the Rousseau Sod Farm Nov. 7-11 (RJ), providing the second record at the Sod Farm and only the third record for the county. Numbers of Chestnut-collared Longspurs at the Sod Farm went from three on Oct. 17 (RJ), to 15 on Oct. 18 (PD), to 30 on Oct. 25 (PD,DP,RJ), to 50 on Oct. 26 (PM,CD,TC), and to zero in early November (RJ).

A female Rose-breasted Grosbeak was reported in a Mesa yard Nov. 4-8 (JM). Two Indigo Buntings (rare transients) were observed at HRP Sept. 21 (TC). Two Dickcissels were found at Becker Lake in the White Mountains Sept. 14 (CB,BJ) and one was seen at the Gilbert Rd., s. of Ocotillo Rd. Pond Sept. 28 (L&KB). A **Bobolink** was discovered at the Rousseau Sod Farm Oct. 19 (RJ); there have been only five previous county records.

A few highlights from s.e. Arizona during the fall were: individual Green Kingfishers were reported along the San Pedro River Oct. 5 and in Sycamore Canyon Nov. 1: a Rufous-backed Robin was found at Patagonia Lake State Park Nov. 21 and was still present there in early December; and a **Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow**, discovered at the Avra Valley sewage ponds in Tucson Oct. 7-8, provided the first record for Arizona. (Records from s.e. Arizona courtesy of the Tucson Audubon Society weekly Bird Report compiled by Bill Scott).

Abbreviations: Boyce Thompson Arboretum (BTA), Gila Farms Pond (GFP), Hassayampa River Preserve (HRP).

Observers: Walt Anderson, Charles Babbitt, Jack Bartley, Linda & Ken Bielek, Scott Burge, Tillie Chew (TCh), Troy Corman (TC), Bix Demaree, Henry Detwiler, Pierre Deviche, Rich Ditch, Cynthia Donald, Jeff Estis, Herb Fibel, Steve Ganley, Tom Gaskill, Ron Gilbert, Bill Grossi, Liz Hatcher, Bud Johnson, Roy Jones, Peg & Dick Krel, Keith Mellon, James McKay (JM), Jimmy McMorran (JMcM), Mike Moore, Pete Moulton, Dave Pearson, John Prather, Kurt Rademaker, Jim Rorabaugh, Mike Rupp, Sig Stangeland, Mark Stevenson, Diane Stuart, Andre Tarby, Walter Thurber, Carl Tomoff, Anita Van Auken, Matthew Wehman, Russ Widner, Daniela Yellan.