



The Cactus Wren·dition



Volume LXVI, No. 1

Spring 2013



Western Grebe

Photo by Ritch Ditch

Programs March-May, 2013

March 5, 2013

Marvels of Migration with Stan Cunningham

Last winter Superior birders and photographers were surprised when a wayward Common Goldeneye spent a few days at Boyce Thompson Arboretum near the scenic copper-mining town of Superior. Would you believe that of the 850 bird species in



North America, more than 300 leave the continent and spend the winter in Central and South America and the Caribbean? In preparation, some transform themselves into "super birds," gorging until they accumulate fat reserves that almost double their body weight in order to have the energy for transcontinental flight. Others take an opposite approach - flying just a few hours each day. And how do they find their way? An internal magnetic compass, eyes that can see polarized light or even magnetic directions, memorized celestial maps along with many other methods have all been hypothesized and some convincing data have been collected. Research biologist and ASU Polytechnic Wildlife Professor Stan Cunningham will share these and more insights into avian migration accompanied by his impressive photography of birds on the wing.

For the past three decades, Cunningham has lived an adventurous life -- crawling into black bear dens during winter as a wildlife biologist for the Arizona

Game & Fish Department, spending a month each summer in Alaska as a professional photographer, shooting vivid pictures of brown bears for magazines and tourist lodges, and leading Alaskan photo safaris and ecotourism trips. A professor of wildlife biology at Arizona State University Polytechnic since 2006, Cunningham is known for his decades of research about bears, mountain lions, and the ecological effects of wildfire.

into the water, then dry by tumbling at 1,000 rpm while in flight!

Join us for a lively lecture and slideshow exploring the incredible world of dragonflies, including slow-motion videos of dragonflies bathing and spin-drying. Walker, known as "The Dragonfly Whisperer," will share tips on how to coax a dragonfly to perch on your finger. (Learn more about dragonflies at the Dragonfly Whisperer's blog, <http://thedragonflywhisperer.blogspot.com/>).

James Walker is a retired professor of theoretical physics from Washington State University, where he was the Boeing Distinguished Professor of Science and Mathematics Education. The author of several university-level textbooks on physics, Professor Walker and his wife Betsy divide their time between Western Washington and Arizona, and enjoy birding and dragonflying in both locations.

Dorrance Hall

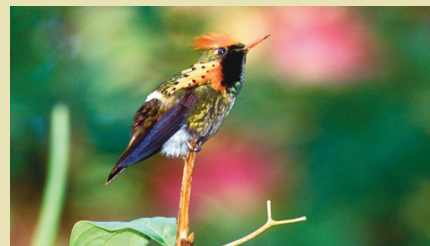
May 7, 2013

Hummingbirds: Birds with Charisma With H. Ross Hawkins, Ph.D.

Drawing upon his extensive collection of hummingbird images from photographers around the world, Ross illustrates why these amazing birds are considered by many to be the most charismatic of all birds. They set themselves apart by their outrageous iridescence, flight capabilities even a helicopter cannot duplicate, and a variety second only to flycatchers in number but second to none in appearance.

Hawkins likes to describe himself as having a checkered past. Trained as a research scientist (Ph.D., Physical Chemistry, University of California Berkeley), he worked for the du Pont company for nine years before applying his scientific analytic skills as an investment advisor for 25 years.

His wife, Beth, introduced him to the magic of hummingbirds in 1988--and he was hooked. He again



applied his scientific skills, this time to ornithology, particularly hummers. There being no organization working to protect any of the 30 endangered hummingbird species, he was moved to create The Hummingbird Society in 1996. Three years later he took early retirement to devote himself to developing the Society into a notable organization to teach about hummingbirds (few people know that any of them are endangered) and to protect the species at risk.

Hawkins and the Society headquarters moved to Sedona in 2006. Last year he organized the first annual Sedona Hummingbird Festival which included presentations by notable hummingbird authorities, banding demonstrations, hummingbird garden tours, and "Sedona Sunrise Hummingbird Breakfasts." The next Festival is August 2-4, 2013.

Hawkins will be the keynote speaker at our annual banquet, which will be held at Shalimar Country Club in Tempe. Please see the next page for more information on the banquet.

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Maricopa Audubon Website

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Maricopa Audubon Phone

480-829-8209

Hope is a thing with feathers that perches in the soul.

— Emily Dickinson

An Investment in the Future

Bequests are an important source of support for the Maricopa Audubon Society. Your chapter has dedicated itself to the protection of the natural world through public education and advocacy for the wiser use and preservation of our land, water, air and other irreplaceable natural resources.

You can invest in the future of our natural world by making a bequest in your will to the Maricopa Audubon Society. Talk to your attorney for more information on how this can be accomplished.



Game & Fish Department, spending a month each summer in Alaska as a professional photographer, shooting vivid pictures of brown bears for magazines and tourist lodges, and leading Alaskan photo safaris and ecotourism trips. A professor of wildlife biology at Arizona State University Polytechnic since 2006, Cunningham is known for his decades of research about bears, mountain lions, and the ecological effects of wildfire.

Dorrance Hall

April 2, 2013

The Wonderful World of Dragonflies with Professor James "The Dragonfly Whisperer" Walker

Dragonflies are fascinating creatures, with a rich heritage of folklore and fables that vary greatly from culture to culture. European cultures tend to see dragonflies as dangerous or even deadly. Asian and Native American cultures see them as signs of good luck, longevity, and prosperity. What's truly remarkable, however, is that the truth about dragonflies is far more interesting than any fable. For example: They have six legs, but can't walk; they have incredible vision, but can't hear; and, they were here before the dinosaurs, but are still going strong today.

Mesa resident and scientist James Walker recently discovered that dragonflies bathe in flight by plunging



On the cover: Western Grebe
focal length: 600mm, 1/400 sec., f/9, ISO 400, 3/21/2010
at Gilbert Riparian Preserve by Rich Ditch



President's Message

by Mark W. Larson



Mark W. Larson

2012 was the hottest year on record in the United States and last year at this time (mid-January) I was already seeing signs of spring. Now, however, we are having our longest stretch of freezing temperatures since the mid-eighties. But, by the time you read this the days will be getting longer and warmer, the brittlebush will cover the desert hillsides with saffron yellow, and sprays of pink and red penstemons, Mexican gold poppies, and purple desert

lupines will color the trails. Glorious Spring!

The dazzling colors of spring in the desert barely suggest the hot summer to come, but they also foreshadow the departure of many of our members for their summer homes in the cooler north. We wish you well, but most of your Board of Directors will be here, working to bring you programs in the fall, fighting

conservation battles, leading field trips, and making certain that the organization is running well when you return.

Speaking of field trips, spring is an exceptional season to get outside to enjoy the natural world. This year, why not make it your mission to expose a child to nature? It might be your child, your neighbor's child, or your grandchild, but do it! It might be as simple as taking a kid to the Desert Botanical Garden for the first time, or a trip to Oak Creek Canyon or Boyce Thompson Arboretum State Park. Remember: it's not just a walk in the park—take time to notice the beauty and intricacy of nature. Turn it into a fun day of natural sights, sounds, and discovery!

This spring I will be leading groups of birders to both the Rio Grande Valley of Texas and to some of the less often visited portions of northern Costa Rica. Where will you be going? Wherever you go, be safe, and bring back memories and photographs to share with us. If you are staying here, try to lessen your environmental impact this summer by not driving as much or by raising your thermostat a degree or two—or five!

Don't forget our annual banquet in May. This year, the first Tuesday in May will be the 7th, so mark your calendar now to attend. I hope to see you there! 🐦

MAS Annual Meeting and Banquet

by Herb Fibel

Maricopa Audubon Society will hold its 59th Annual Meeting and Banquet on Tuesday, May 7, 2013 once again at Shalimar Golf Club, located at 2032 E. Golf Avenue in Tempe.

There will be a no host bar starting at 6:00 p.m. We'll have both a raffle and a silent auction, so plan on arriving early to meet old friends and to peruse the auction and raffle tables. Tickets for the raffle will be available at the door. The buffet dinner, which includes a vegetarian option, begins at 7:00. Advanced reservations are required. The cost will be \$27.75 per person (\$25.00 for "Friends of Maricopa Audubon"). You may send payment in advance or pay at the door—cash, or check made payable to Maricopa Audubon Society only, please.

Our agenda will include induction of our new board and presentation of the Third Annual Herbert Larson Memorial Award for distinguished and outstanding service to Maricopa Audubon Society.

Our guest speaker will be Dr. H. Ross Hawkins from Sedona, and his topic is "Hummingbirds With Charisma." For more information about Dr. Hawkins and his program, please refer upcoming programs section on page two.

Shalimar Country Club is one block north of Southern Avenue, midway between McClintock and Price (the 101). You can access Shalimar from Southern by turning north either on Country Club Way (That's Country Club Way in Tempe), going about one block and then turning right into the Shalimar parking lot, or by going one block north from Country Club on Fairfield Drive and then turning left into the parking lot.

Please contact Herb Fibel at 480 966 5246, hsfibel@q.com or Mark Larson at 480 474-4439, larsonwarren@gmail.com for more information and/or for reservations. 🐦

Elections In April

Nlections for MAS President and Board of Directors next year will be held at the April 2, 2013 General Membership Meeting at the Desert Botanical Garden in Phoenix. Any MAS member may run or nominate another member for a Board position. The Nominating Committee consists of Mel Bramley, DVM (480) 969-9893 (Chairman), Emerson Stiles (480) 661-0898, and Emily Morris (203) 213-5208. Please contact any member of the Nominating Committee to submit a name. Please do not submit someone's name without his/her knowledge and consent. 🐦

Notes & Announcements

E-Newsletter

The MAS e-newsletter includes meeting and field trip reminders, special events, citizen science projects and more. It is a supplement to the *Cactus Wren-dition*, sent out monthly, Sept. - May. We do not use the email addresses for anything other than their described purpose. To subscribe, email laurienessel@gmail.com

Birding Community E-Bulletin

The E-Bulletin is a monthly bulletin with rare bird sightings and other birding information. If you would like to be put on the monthly emailing list please contact either Wayne Petersen (Director of the Massachusetts Important Bird Areas Program) at 718-259-2178 or wpetersen@massaudubon.org or Paul Baicich at 410-992-9736 or paul.baicich@verizon.net. They never sell the recipient list and you will receive a lot of interesting information.

Call to Get Involved

Do you love birds, teaching about birds, and/or protecting birds and their habitats? Then it's time you stepped up to help board members and other MAS members take a stand for birds in Arizona. Contact Mark Larson if you are interested in finding out more about what the board does and how you can get involved.

Submissions

Do you have an interesting story to tell about birding? Please forward your submissions to the Editor – Emily Morris. Check the back page for address/email. Attaching an article to an email is the absolute easiest way to submit an article. Please send any pictures to complement your article directly to me as well. Remember, all articles may not be published the first month after receipt.

Arizona Field Ornithologists- Citizen Science

by Laurie Nessel

The annual AZFO state meeting is a great opportunity to learn, to share, and to embrace the birding community. Presentations at last October's annual AZFO meeting in Lake Havasu City featured fascinating field study reports by Gale Monson Research Grant recipients. Topics on the local habitat –the Lower Colorado River Valley–included the effects of tamarisk beetles on Southwestern Willow Flycatchers, Yellow-billed Cuckoo surveys, the fluctuations of bird populations recorded over five decades, and more. The afternoon was dedicated to remembering and reflecting upon the contributions to our knowledge of Arizona and Mexico birds by consummate birder Gale Monson.

It was an unforgettable experience to hear the knowledgeable and articulate speakers, to rub elbows with birding legends and mavens, to browse the book sales table and go on various field trips. The meeting went flawlessly and was both inspiring and heart wrenching to learn of the continuing pressure placed on so many species. To know that so little remains of the natural Lower Colorado River Valley ecosystem, that most habitat is mitigation and restoration, that man has conquered nature at an unparalleled cost, but can also reverse the impact with vigilance and commitment.

The "Citizen Science" title of this article is to emphasize that the AZFO is an organization of dedicated birders, professional and amateur alike. Don't be intimidated by the organization name. You do not need to be an ornithologist. This distinction is so important that it is part of the mission statement:

"AZFO, a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit, was founded in 2005 by a group of field ornithologists who believe Arizona, as one of the premier ornithological destinations in the country, should have an active organization of birders and ornithologists dedicated to increasing the knowledge of the identification, status, and distribution of Arizona's birdlife."

Enthusiastic birders as well as AZFO greatly benefit from AZFO membership at all levels. Expeditions and migration counts always need extra eyes and ears in the field. AZFO seeks your help in collecting reliable information on the seasonal and geographic distribution of individual species and their nesting activity, early and late

arrival dates, irruptions, unusually high or low concentrations, and birds found in unexpected habitats or areas of the state.

AZFO provides:

Arizona Birds Online: The journal of the Arizona Field Ornithologists, includes rigorously peer-reviewed articles about status, distribution, and identification of Arizona birds.

Other Features of the AZFO Website:

- **Recent Arizona Rarity Photos**
- **Birding in Arizona, Birding Destinations, News and Notes:** Easy reading essays on topics such as little known and seldom birded areas of Arizona, and anecdotal stories about birds and birding in Arizona.
- **Field check lists** by state and by county
- **Field expeditions** and summaries: The next expedition is **Nov 10-11 San Carlos Reservation**.
- **AZFO MP3 Bird Sounds Library:** Includes sonograms while the song plays if using Raven Lite player by Cornell Labs
- **Gale Monson Research Grants:** Financial support to individuals to conduct field research that will enhance our knowledge of the status, distribution, identification, and other aspects of Arizona birdlife. Two \$2,000 grants available annually in honor of long-time ornithologist Gale Monson.

What you can do:

- **Participate** in events:
 - Annual Greater Phoenix Area Water Bird Census held in January
 - Field Expeditions
 - State meeting in Sierra Vista October 2013
- **Donate** to Gale Monson Grants Fund
- **Donate** books for the annual book sale fundraiser
 - Go to the AZFO website azfo.org to learn more about field expeditions and future meetings. Peruse images, sounds and articles online.
 - Submit sightings, images and recordings
 - Purchase AZFO merchandise, (available soon online) including the tribute book, **Counting Birds with Gale Monson**. Proceeds of this book fund the Gale Monson Research Grants.
- **Join!** Members receive an interesting and educational Newsletter about three times a year. www.azfo.org

Maricopa Audubon Society Field Trips

field trips

Monday, April 1st

Phoenix Zoo: A Behind the Scenes Look at Birds

Discover some of the exotic birds in the collection of the Phoenix Zoo. The zoo is home to over a hundred birds including one of the world's most critically endangered birds, the Bali mynah. The tour will include seeing some Asian wonders like the Green Peahen, Palawan Peacock Pheasant, Crowned Pigeon, Argus Pheasant and the wonderful Chestnut-breasted Malkoha. We will also see some Central and South American birds like the Crested Screamer, Orinoco Goose, Plush-crested Jay, Spectacled Owl and Blue-crowned Motmot. This field trip will be from 8 a.m. until 10:30 A.M. Cost: \$6 per person, free for Phoenix Zoo Members. Limit: 30 people. Please contact Mike Foley at mfoley33@gmail.com to reserve a spot.
Leader: Mike Foley

Saturday, April 6

Rio Salado, Phoenix: Restored Natural Salt River Habitat

Often good for warblers, waders, raptors, etc., and we'll do what we can with usually numerous butterflies and dragonflies. Meet at 7:30 A.M. at Pulliam Audubon Center, 3131 S. Central Avenue. This is an easy, half-day trip with a limit of 12. Recommend sun and insect protection. Email or call the leader at gaia_3@netzero.net, or (480)968-2179 for reservations, directions.
Leader: Myron Scott

Sunday, April 7

Veterans Oasis Park, Chandler

This trip is the first of a series this spring to track ecological changes at the park. On this trip we will explore the plants, insects, birds and animals of the park's desert and wetland habitats. Bring binoculars (close focus preferred), water, walking shoes, and a hat. No reservations taken. There is a suggested \$5 donation to the Chandler Environmental Education Center. Meet at 8am at Red-tailed Hawk pavilion, just north of the west end of the parking lot. We should be done by 10:00 A.M. VOP is on the northeast corner of Chandler Heights and Lindsey Roads.
Leader: Laurie Nessel

Saturday, April 13

Tempe Town Lake and Lopiano Habitat

This is an artificial lake on the Salt River (waterfowl and waders) and adjacent bosque (warblers, some raptors and desert birds) next to Papago Park. Meet at 7:30 A.M. by the pedestrian bridge across the lake at Tempe Center for the Arts, 700 West Rio Salado Pkwy, Tempe. Email or call the leader at gaia_3@netzero.net, or (480)968-2179 for reservations or directions.
Leader: Myron Scott

Sunday, April 14,

Lower Salt River

This is a favorite, close-to-the-city field trip that includes a drive along the Bush Highway,

between Granite Reef Dam and Saguaro Lake, with numerous stops for birding along the Salt River. This is within the Tonto National Forest and requires a day-use parking pass. A day's list of 50 species of birds should be easy at this time of year, and should include waterfowl like Cinnamon Teal, Ring-necked Duck, and Common Gallinule; raptors very likely are Bald Eagle, Osprey, and American Kestrel; and land birds that are frequent are Black Phoebe, Ash-throated Flycatcher, and Ladder-backed Woodpecker. We should locate returning birds for spring such as Lucy's Warbler, Bell's Vireo, and Turkey Vulture. Bring a lunch, and a scope, if available. We will meet at 7:00 A.M. in the Walgreen's parking lot on the southeast corner of McKellips and Power Roads in Mesa. Limit: 15. Difficulty: 1. Reservations required; please call or email the leader at (602)276-3312 or rkaiserinaz@aol.com.
Leader: Richard Kaiser

Saturday, April 20

Sunflower

At this higher elevation site with permanent water and a well-developed riparian system, we may see some of the remaining wintering species such as Townsend's Solitaire and Western Bluebird, and we may see some returning Neotropical migrants including Bell's Vireo and Hooded Oriole. We may even be lucky to find a Common Black Hawk or a Zone-tailed Hawk, both of which nest in this canyon. Walking is easy on the roads and trails of Sycamore Canyon. Please contact the leader at larsonwarren@gmail.com for trip details, meeting location and times.
Leader: Mark Larson

Monday, April 29

Seven Springs

We'll leave the Scottsdale area at about 5:15 A.M. and bird our way into Seven Springs. There, we'll explore a trail and one or more picnic areas to see what migrants have arrived for the summer, and what might be passing through. We can hope for a nice variety of desert species on the way there, plus resident titmice, wrens and towhees, in addition to migratory birds. We'll eat an early picnic lunch and return to Scottsdale about 1ish. Limit 8. Reservations required. Difficulty 1-2. Meeting place and carpooling logistics will be determined a few days before the trip. Please register kathe.coot@cox.net.
Leader: Kathe Anderson

Saturday, May 4

Gilbert Water Ranch Riparian Preserve

Large, impressive created wetlands with good native landscaping and a bit or a lot of everything from avocets to warblers and an ever present possibility of rarities. Meet at 7:00 A.M. at the west corner parking lot just east of the library, 2757 E Guadalupe Rd., Gilbert. This is an easy, half-day trip with a limit of 12. Email or call the leader at gaia_3@netzero.net, or (480)968-2179 for reservations, directions.
Leader: Myron Scott

Sunday, May 12

Veterans Oasis Park, Chandler

We will explore the plants, insect, birds and animals of the park's desert and wetland habitats. Bring binoculars (close focus preferred), water, walking shoes, and a hat. No reservations taken. There is a suggested \$5 donation to the Chandler Environmental Education Center. Dragonfly guidebooks will be available for sale for \$10 and dragonfly coloring books for \$6. Meet 7:30am at Red-tailed Hawk pavilion, just north of the west end of the parking lot. We should be done by 9:30 A.M. VOP is on the northeast corner of Chandler Heights and Lindsey Roads.
Leader: Laurie Nessel

Saturday, June 1

Veterans Oasis Park, Chandler

On this trip we will explore the plants, insects, birds and animals of the park's desert and wetland habitats. Bring binoculars (close focus preferred), water, walking shoes, and a hat. No reservations taken. There is a suggested \$5 donation to the Chandler Environmental Education Center. Dragonfly guidebooks will be available for sale for \$10 and dragonfly coloring books for \$6. Meet 8am at Red-tailed Hawk pavilion, just north of the west end of the parking lot. We should be done by 9:30 A.M. VOP is on the northeast corner of Chandler Heights and Lindsey Roads.
Leader: Laurie Nessel

Monday, June 3

Page Springs, Yavapai County

We'll leave the Scottsdale area quite early (5 A.M.) to arrive at Page Springs about 7 A.M. We'll explore both the fish hatchery area along Oak Creek and the woods at nearby Bubbling Ponds. This should be a colorful time of year with summer residents such as Summer Tanagers, a variety of warblers, vireos and flycatchers, and the hoped-for Common Black-Hawks. We'll take an early lunch at a nearby restaurant and return to Scottsdale about 2. Limit 8. Reservations required. Difficulty 1. Meeting place and carpooling logistics will be determined a few days before the trip. Please register kathe.coot@cox.net.
Leader: Kathe Anderson

Saturday, June 15

Canyon Creek, Gila County

This is one of the many streams that emerge from the Mogollon Rim, providing a permanent flow through lovely meadows and ponderosa pine forests burned by the huge Rodeo-Chediski fire eleven years ago. Canyon Creek quickly flows into the White Mountain Apache Reservation. The recently returned and resident breeding birds we may see include Band-tailed Pigeon, Violet-green Swallow, Hairy Woodpecker, Plumbeous Vireo, Grace's Warbler, Western Tanager, and Dark-eyed Junco. This will be an all-day adventure of nearly 200 miles 'round trip with a very early start time. Please contact the leader at larsonwarren@gmail.com for trip details, meeting location and times. Bring water and a lunch. Limit 6. **Leader:** Mark Larson

A Mission Taking Flight — Across the Pacific Ocean

by Mary Rose



So what do you do when you have an obsession with birds – in particular their conservation

– and nothing

you do seems like it is enough?

Well, naturally you decide to row across an ocean, right? Seems like a logical link – especially when you have never

rowed a boat before in your life. You just have to learn how to row, learn about boats, learn how to navigate using electronics and the stars, take sea survival classes, train...and the list goes on. Is it possible, though? Absolutely.

Sometimes a passion takes you places you never dreamed you would go and that is the case for me, Mary Rose of Chirping Central. Helping birds through funding for avian conservation projects to rowing the Pacific Ocean seems like a huge leap, but really it was not a difficult link to make given the right circumstances. And that little

perfect storm happened on February 8th, 2012 at about 9 p.m. On February 8th I was at the Mesa Arts Center

“And so it hit me. Would it be possible to row the Pacific as part of the Pacific Rowing Race and do it to raise awareness and funding for the birds?”

to see a National Geographic Live presentation called Solo Across the Oceans. Presenting at this event was Roz Savage who had rowed the Atlantic Ocean as part of the Atlantic Rowing Race. Her presentation was amazing, but I was still not even thinking that I would like to row an ocean. Inspiring - yes. Was I thinking that I wanted to spend about three months on an ocean by myself battling the elements? No, not at all. The perfect storm happened at the end

of her presentation, though, when she mentioned that she rowed the Atlantic in part to raise awareness about trash floating around in the ocean. Then she mentioned that she was part of a group called New Ocean Wave and they were organizing the first ever Pacific Rowing Race in 2014. Applications were now being accepted.

And so it hit me. Would it be possible to row the Pacific as part of the Pacific Rowing Race and do it to raise awareness and funding for the birds? The seed had been planted and I could not get it out of my head. Could I do this? How would I do this? What would I hope to achieve? Can I even row a boat? It did not take me long to decide that ‘yes’ this was all possible, and so I signed up to participate in the race. Here we go.

The Pacific Rowing Race starts June 7, 2014. I will be rowing to raise funds for avian conservation projects. The race is not just a fundraiser, however. Raising awareness about the issues faced by all manner of birds is also a very important aspect of the race. Education is key, and part of the plan is to educate while I am actually out there rowing in the race. With the opportunity to produce





video while on the boat and the ability to get small pieces of video back from the middle of the ocean, this will truly be an educational event. All I have to do out there is eat, row, and sleep so there will be plenty of time to be talking about the birds. I hope you will log in to see the updates and offer words of encouragement (and maybe be inspired to pledge a few dollars too!).

For me, the Pacific Rowing Race really is about the birds and the opportunity to raise awareness, educate, and raise essential funds to support avian conservation projects. We all know that conservation takes money and it is a tragic situation when the survival of a species is determined by funding. Zoos and many conservation organizations face this fact every day; to think that our ability to help these amazing animals is limited by financial restrictions in just something I cannot accept. So, with all this in mind, Project FlightPlan was born. Our motto – “Extinction is Optional™” and it truly is for many of these species if we can just start work now.

For information about Project FlightPlan and to follow the process through blog and video updates, please visit

www.chirpingcentral.com. It is my aim for everyone to be able to live the experience with me. I am taking on the manual labor for this project, but it is you who will make this project a success and truly do something meaningful for the birds. I cannot do this alone so, I hope that you will follow along on the journey. Maricopa Audubon has already shown amazing support for this project by becoming a sponsor of my race and I am incredibly proud that MAS will be crossing the Pacific Ocean with me. Thank you for your support so far.

June 7, 2014 marks the start of the race to show that Extinction is Optional™. Through the Pacific Rowing Race, Mary Rose will be rowing almost 3000 miles from California to Hawaii to raise funds to benefit avian conservation. A 90 day journey across the Pacific Ocean, powered only by oars. Don't let another species become another Carolina Parakeet or Passenger Pigeon. Let's do something now to help the birds. For more information visit

www.chirpingcentral.com. 🐦



Urban Ecology: How City Living Affects the Timing of Breeding Readiness in Abert's Towhees

by Gillian Rice

Are cities bad for birds? It depends! Some birds are urban avoiders and others are urban exploiters. Total breeding bird density is often higher in urban areas than in surrounding native habitats. Yet, species richness is usually lower in urban areas. On the continental level, Robert Blair, a University of Minnesota researcher, observed distinct homogenization of bird life with urbanization. His study comparing bird communities in Ohio and California showed that bird communities overlapped only 5% in the least urban developed sites whereas they overlapped about 20% in the most urbanized areas.

Over half of humanity lives in urban environments. Urbanization radically changes the landscape and the ecological processes. In the Sonoran Desert region, expansion of cities continues to transform the vegetation structure, to increase access to water, and to alter predation levels for birds. Urban ecologists – biologists, anthropologists, sociologists, and geographers – are keen to understand the complex processes in the highly dynamic urban ecosystem. Ornithologists like Scott Davies, an ASU graduate researcher, study the impact of urbanization on bird behavior.

"Cities are growing all the time. I wonder how living in a city might change the way a bird responds to its environment," ponders Davies. Phoenix and its environs are especially suitable for his research because he needs to be able to study the same species in the city as in the natural desert environment. A city is generally defined as an area with a high density of humans and a high proportion of buildings and concrete surfaces (urban ecologists call concrete and roads "impervious surfaces"). A rural area (in the case of Phoenix, a desert) is defined as having very low human density and few buildings or roads.



Scott Davies with his study bird, the Albert's Towhee.

"Another reason I wanted to study in the Phoenix area was the Central Arizona – Phoenix Long-Term Ecological Research project (CAP LTER)," says Davies. "This project has lots of data gathered

regularly on birds – surveyors identify and count the birds at over 50 locations throughout the valley each year."

Davies studies when birds come into breeding condition. It has been shown in numerous studies

that urban birds often breed earlier thus giving a better prospects of survival to their offspring. "Just a few days difference can have effects on fitness," says Davies. "For example, if spring is unusually cold, birds might breed later and if it's unusually warm, they might breed earlier."

Because birds use environmental cues (e.g., day length, temperature, and food availability) in the timing of reproduction, researchers are trying to understand how birds do so within the context of climate change. "Can birds adapt as fast as the temperature is changing?" asks Davies.

His choice of study bird was determined by the need to have a species found in both the city and the desert. "This rules out starlings and sparrows, for example, as they are not found in the desert," says Davies. "Also, I feel strongly that more research on desert birds should be done."

Because Davies needed to take blood samples for his research, he also had to study a bird of a suitable size. "This narrows it down to a Curve-Billed Thrasher, an Abert's Towhee, or a Cactus Wren. All three inhabit the city as well as

the desert," he explains. "Cactus Wrens are difficult to catch and a colleague of mine was already working on thrashers, so I decided to focus on towhees." For those of you who might worry about taking blood from a bird, Davies says, "The blood sample is a mere three-tenths of a milliliter – a drop – taking

CAP LTER is a multi-disciplinary, urban ecological National Science Foundation funded investigation of the socio-ecological systems in central Arizona. According to the project's website (<http://caplter.asu.edu/>), the main question that guides the project's research is: How do the services provided by evolving urban ecosystems affect human outcomes and behavior, and how does human action (responses) alter patterns of ecosystem structure and function, and ultimately, urban sustainability, in a dynamic environment?



Scott removes a towhee from the thin and gauzy mist net.

“And this goes against the argument that cities are bad for birds – over the long term, a species like the Abert’s Towhee can be more successful.”

this amount of blood has no effect on a towhee. The towhee is a strong and robust bird.”

Davies conducted field work during two spring seasons. Having obtained the necessary permits to capture and handle wild birds, he collected data in the city at a variety of locations: backyards, Tempe city parks, and the ASU Tempe campus; and at two desert locations: Robbins Butte Wildlife Area and Powers Butte Wildlife Area (both Arizona Game and Fish properties). He used a mist net about 12 feet long to trap male Abert’s Towhees that responded to a recording of an Abert’s Towhee song. “The local towhee thinks another male has entered its territory and so responds aggressively,” says Davies.

To see if the captured male bird is in the breeding stage, Davies measures the width of the cloacal protuberance. Although most male birds have no external sex organs, the male does have two testes which become hundreds of times larger during the breeding season to produce sperm. In the males of species without a phallus (most birds except many waterfowl, the ostrich, and the turkey), sperm is stored in the cloacal protuberance prior to copulation. The cloacal protuberance grows as a bird comes into breeding condition, so it can be used as a measure of reproductive status. Davies also measures hormones, such as the level of testosterone in the blood.

Side Bar: The Arizona Breeding Bird Atlas (edited by Troy Corman and Cathy Wise) notes that over 80% of the Abert’s Towhee’s entire range is in Arizona, where they nest in dense habitats from lowland riparian thickets to irrigated suburban backyards.

because, although Davies expected city birds to breed earlier, he didn’t expect the time period to be so different. “In studies of Blackbirds in Europe and the Scrub Jay in Florida, urban birds bred two to three weeks ahead of rural birds,” he says.

It’s difficult to isolate the specific causes of differing bird behavior in urban environments. Scientists like Davies have numerous hypotheses. For example, urban American Robins

sing earlier in the day than rural robins. “Researchers think one reason might be the light pollution in a city. Also, in the city it gets noisier later in the day,” says Davies. “And it’s actually noisier in the day compared to the night, so birds sometimes sing at night instead of the day.”

City birds are more aggressive than rural birds but scientists have not yet explained the underlying mechanism for this behavior.

Why do urban birds breed earlier than desert birds? What might be some of the factors causing this behavior? “Birds start breeding in response to day length, temperature, and the amount of food,” explains Davies. “Obviously the day length is the same in the city and the desert, although the city is warmer because of the heat island effect. The amount of food the birds can find might be greater in the urban environment. An Abert’s Towhee’s favorite food is insects, especially when feeding nestlings. Insects emerge earlier when it’s warmer.

He continues: “The city is much greener than the desert because we use irrigation – it

rains every day! Plants grow more and so the insects that feed on them also grow and become more abundant.”

If Abert’s Towhees living in the city breed earlier, they might have a longer breeding season. “If they start a month earlier, the young might have a greater chance of survival and the parents can also have a second brood,” explains Davies. “And this goes against the argument that cities are bad for birds – over the long term, a species like the Abert’s Towhee can be more successful.”

In the desert, towhees thrive in riparian habitats. Such habitats, with palo verde and mesquite thickets, are disappearing quickly in Arizona. “They do well in the city, however,” he adds.

Additional Resource: Blair, Robert. 2004. “The Effects of Urban Sprawl on Birds at Multiple Levels of Biological Organization.” *Ecology and Society* 9 (5). Accessed online on December 15, 2012 at <http://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol9/iss5/art2/print.pdf>. 🐦



Emily Morris releases a towhee after Scott has collected all the data.

Urban towhees are in breeding readiness a whole month ahead of the desert-dwelling towhees. This is a particular interesting finding

Martinez Canyon: How Citizen Action Saved a Riparian Treasure

by Laurie Nessel

“The porous volcanic and sedimentary rock filters moisture creating lush and diverse hanging gardens.”

Tom Taylor in Martinez Canyon, courtesy of the Arizona Game & Fish Department

Choosing to save a river is more often an act of passion than a careful calculation. You make the choice because the river has touched your life in an intimate and irreversible way, because you are unwilling to accept its loss. -David M. Bolling, *How To Save A River*.

Cottonwood leaves flutter in the breeze. The trill of a ground squirrel echoes off the steep rhyolite canyon walls. Gurgling ripples reflect a chaotic canopy of sky and trees. The chirrup call of a Summer Tanager drifts down the canyon. A faint drone stirs in the distance. The drone ascends until all else is drowned out by the fits and starts of a “rock crawler,” an Off-Road Vehicle (ORV) with high suspension and low torque painstakingly negotiating the obstacle-laden stream bed.

Martinez Canyon, with its jaw-breaking topography and stunning scenery, was a magnet for thrill-seekers intent on testing

the peace, spread invasive plants, and stress or even kill wildlife. Unscrupulous adventurers trim branches and even chop down trees that block passage. The impact on habitat is multiplied in rare desert riparian areas.

Martinez Canyon is on Bureau of Land Management (federal) land in the Mineral Mountains northeast of Florence, AZ. Its ephemeral half-mile stretch of perennial pools and riffles support associated riparian species including a pair of breeding Zone-tailed Hawks. The porous volcanic and sedimentary rock filters moisture creating lush and diverse hanging gardens.

It is remote and off the birder’s radar. But one man appreciated, indeed, fell in love with this special place. Tom Taylor of Mesa and his son Tomas believed that this riparian landscape with perennial waters suffered unnecessarily from the impacts of motorized vehicles. The BLM Tucson Field Office (BLM/TFO) was charged with determining, as part of a collaborative effort, access to public lands for the Middle Gila Canyons Travel Management Plan, including Martinez Canyon. Throughout this decade-long process, Taylor was relentless in advocating for its protection -- making calls, appearing at contentious public meetings, route evaluation workshops, agency field trips and weekly trips across tortuous jeep trails to the canyon to collect flow and habitat data. He helped

release sheep and fish and trap invasive crayfish.

Although unaffiliated, Taylor obtained endorsements from a range of organizations including Arizona Wilderness Coalition, Sierra Club, The Arizona Riparian Council, and Maricopa Audubon Society. Public land and habitat managers (BLM and US Fish and Wildlife Service), can get bogged down by inertia, conflict, politics or budget constraints, neglecting their mission to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats. But Taylor never gave up on his righteous quest to fight the status quo. In his humble, unassuming way, Taylor cajoled, pestered, prodded and ultimately persuaded the BLM/TFO.

Without consensus of the divergent stake holders, despite several meetings with The Udall Foundation’s U.S.

Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution, the BLM/TFO made the decision on November 10, 2010, based on science and advocacy, to close Martinez Canyon to motorized traffic. It took another two years but last November 19 & 20, 2012, work crews from Arizona Game and Fish Department, BLM/TFO, Southwest Conservation Corps



mettle and machine against nature. But ORVs can damage sensitive plants, cause erosion, contaminate water, assault

and the Taylors erected a heavy iron gate prohibiting unauthorized vehicles. Martinez Canyon remains open to foot, mountain bike, and equine travel. Now the process of restoration begins, including possible introduction of lowland leopard frogs and removal of dilapidated ranch and mining equipment.

If you are ever lucky enough to explore the desert treasure of Martinez Canyon, imagine a platoon of ORVs passing by, then consider the efforts of Tom Taylor and be inspired. 🦔

Photographing Nature with Today's Cameras

Bob Witzeman

“Modern man is inclined to regard Nature not as the environment in which we live out our lives, but as enemy territory to be conquered and occupied...”

— Max Picard 1888-1965

For a new bird species to be added to the State of Arizona avifauna list (there are over 540 birds) it generally requires a photograph or, in rare cases, a recording of its song. Historically, birds added to a state's list of avifauna were documented with shotguns and became specimen skins at universities.



Multi-frame action sequences like this cormorant swallowing a fish head-first, are difficult with the modern bridge cameras. This photo was taken with a conventional single-lens reflex camera

Today, photo documentation of state, county and regional records is used for butterflies, dragonflies, mammals, and arthropods as well as birds. The Arizona Field Ornithologists (AZFO) website duly records and publishes those species added to our state's list.

Bird photographers may prefer to carry 'single-lens reflex' (SLR) cameras. But this means long, ponderous lenses weighing five pounds or more. Today's digital so-called 'bridge' cameras, on the other hand, weigh only about one pound. Currently, \$300-500 will purchase a Nikon or Canon camera with 40 or 50-power zoom magnification. Compare this with your binoculars which are 7 - 8 power or your telescope at 20 - 50 power. Bridge cameras are image-stabilized and allow one to make telephoto shots at great distance, in dim light, with short exposure times, and without a tripod.

Bridge cameras are hybrids between 'point-and-shoot' digital cameras and conventional SLR, interchangeable lens cameras.

These highly sensitive bridge cameras can allow you to freeze the motion of a bird in flight ASA originally referred to the emulsion speed of camera film; it now indicates how fast the camera can freeze the motion of a moving object.

However, bridge cameras may only focus and shoot a given frame every one to three seconds whereas an SLR can shoot many frames per second. Hence, SLR cameras are helpful with nature photography for action sequences. For example, catching cormorants rotating their fish tail-first to head-first to swallow, or a sequence of cormorants fighting over a fish about to be swallowed, is too slow for a bridge camera (see enclosed photos). However, SLR cameras are bulky, weigh five or more pounds compared to a one pound bridge camera, and cost much more.

Cell phone cameras are becoming so technically advanced, it should not be surprising to learn of a first Arizona state bird record documented this way.

While experienced photographers may prefer to make their digital camera purchases on the web, there is a fairly steep

learning curve and purchasing locally can be desirable. There are many point-and-shoot bridge cameras: Nikon, Sony, Canon, Leica, Olympus, Panasonic, etc. Currently, I like the Nikon Coolpix P510 and Canon PowerShot SX50 HS. They are in the 42-50 power magnification range.

Perhaps only two camera stores remain in metro Phoenix: Tempe Camera, 606 W. University Dr., Tempe, and Foto Forum, 4834 N. 7th St., Phoenix. The new digital cameras regrettably come with compact discs for instructions rather than printed manuals, so salesperson assistance may be important. Purchasing on the web might save sales tax but there is no help provided for answering your questions or solving your problems. 🐦



Today's image-stabilized, digital, bridge cameras are able to take photos at great distances. This Belted Kingfisher was photographed using a hand-held Canon PowerShot SX 50HS camera



The new bridge cameras of today are lightweight with fast shutter speeds and can capture hand-held photos of small birds (Yellow-rumped Warbler here) at great distance in flight with ease

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Monthly Meeting

First Tuesday of the month, unless otherwise announced, September through April, 7:30 p.m. Our meeting place is Dorrance Hall or Webster Auditorium, at the Desert Botanical Garden (DBG), except for our annual banquet in May, the location to be announced. The DBG is located at 1201 N. Galvin Parkway, Phoenix, Arizona. This is approximately 1/4 mile north of the Phoenix Zoo. For a map, please see the DBG website at www.dbg.org/.

Dorrance Hall is located just off the main parking lot and entry to the DBG. Webster is in the far southeast side of the gardens. Please contact a board member if you have any questions, or check out our web site at www.maricopa-audubon.org. Pre-meeting dinners (September through April) are held at Rolling Hills 19th Tee Restaurant, 1405 N. Mill Avenue, starting at 6:00 p.m.

Membership Information

There are two ways to become a Maricopa Audubon member and to receive the *Cactus Wren* edition by mail:

1. By joining the National Audubon Society. If you live in the Phoenix metro area generally east of 43rd Avenue, or in the East Valley other than in Gilbert, Chandler or most of Mesa, when National Audubon Society receives your check made payable to National Audubon Society and your membership application, you will be assigned to Maricopa Audubon Society, or you can send your check payable to National Audubon Society and your National Audubon Society membership application to Scott Burge, membership chair, and he will send it on in to National Audubon for you, or
2. By becoming a "Friend of Maricopa Audubon". In this case you will become a member of Maricopa Audubon Society only, and you will not receive the Audubon magazine or any of the other "benefits" of National Audubon membership, but you will receive a one-year subscription to the *Cactus Wren* edition. "Friends" contribution categories are: Anna's Hummingbird-\$20; Verdin-\$35-\$99; LeConte's Thrasher-\$100-\$249; Cactus Wren-\$250-\$999; Harris's Hawk-\$1,000-\$9,999 and California Condor-\$10,000+. Mail your Friends membership application and your check made payable to Maricopa Audubon to Scott Burge, membership chair. All "Friends" members receive certain designated discounts. (If you reside outside the above-indicated geographical area, the only way to receive a subscription to the *Cactus Wren* edition is to become a "Friend".) For National Audubon membership address changes or other questions call (800) 274-4201 or email CHADD@audubon.org. For all other membership questions call or email Scott Burge.

Submissions

Copy for *The Cactus Wren* edition must be received by the editor by e-mail, by January 15, April 1, July 1, and October 1. Articles not received by the deadlines may not appear in the upcoming issue. Email to: The Cactus Wren edition Editor, Emily Morris: monarchmorris@gmail.com

Opinions

The opinions expressed by authors in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect the policy of the National Audubon Society or the Maricopa Audubon Society.

Reprinting of material

Unless stated explicitly in the article, material in *The Cactus Wren* edition may be reprinted on other newsletters as long as the material is credited to the original author and to *The Cactus Wren* edition.

This publication is printed on recycled paper.



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