



The Cactus Wren·dition



Volume LXVIII, No. 1

Spring - 2014



Anna's Hummingbirds

Photo by Marceline VanderWater

March 4 2013

Mary Rose Rowing the Pacific for Birds

A passion for birds and in particular their conservation can take you to places you never even dreamed you would go. June 7, 2014 Mary Rose will be embarking on the adventure of a lifetime. Starting from Monterey Bay, CA, Mary will be rowing nearly 3000 miles across the Pacific to Honolulu, HI as part of the Great Pacific Race to raise critically needed funds to support bird conservation projects. Get a behind the scenes tour of everything required in order to do this race and learn exactly why Mary is compelled to do this for birds. See the development of the awareness campaign, training, and some video which will form

Committees/Support

Arizona Audubon Council Rep
Emerson Stiles
estiles2@hotmail.com

Bookstore
Mel Bramley
480 969-9893

Hospitality
David Chorlton
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Maricopa Audubon Website
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Maricopa Audubon Phone
480 829-8209

**"If you truly love Nature, you will find
beauty everywhere."**

Vincent Van Gogh

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.

part of the documentary about Mary's race across the Pacific.

Mary is the founder of the Chirping Central Conservation Fund, a 501(c)3 organization dedicated to supporting avian conservation. An Australian "import," Mary permanently relocated to Arizona in 2004. When she arrived in the US she already had an interest in bird conservation, but with increased access to conferences and other educational resources her interest grew stronger and stronger. So much so that in 2010 she quit a very nice full-time job so she could devote extra time to conservation activities. Mary is Secretary for Maricopa Audubon Society and President of the Arizona Seed Crackers Society. In addition to operating her own accountancy practice and Chirping Central, she is active in many avian related conferences around the US. See more at ChirpingCentral.com and MaryRows.com.

**Dorrance Hall,
Desert Botanical Garden (please
check our website or call Program
Chair for possible change in venue)**

April 1 2014

Larry Arbanas Nighthawks

Video photographer Larry Arbanas captured nesting and fledging Lesser Nighthawks near his Fountain Hills home. Join us for a fascinating view of these intriguing birds.

Current MAS members will vote on the next Board of Directors at this meeting.

**Dorrance Hall,
Desert Botanical Garden**

May 6 2014

Troy Corman Recent Seasonal Distribution and Status Changes of Arizona Birds.

Have you noticed shifts in the seasonal habits of Arizona birds? Some migrate earlier; species are seen where they weren't before; nesting schedules are

off; seasonal abundance has changed. Troy Corman, Arizona Game and Fish Department Neotropical Migratory Birds Coordinator, will highlight the changes in the distribution and seasonal status of Arizona birds during the past decade or so.

Raised in rural south-central Pennsylvania, Troy Corman moved to Arizona in 1980 to pursue higher education and explore the natural wonders of the Southwest. During the mid- and late 1980s he conducted avian and herpetological inventories on the upper San Pedro River for the Bureau of Land Management. This unique area would later become the well-known San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area. He has worked for the Nongame Branch of the Arizona Game and Fish Department since 1990, primarily conducting bird surveys for species of concern, and currently coordinates many long-term, statewide bird monitoring projects with various federal, state, and private entities.

With a keen interest in the natural history and distribution of birds, Troy coordinated the *Arizona Breeding Bird Atlas* project (1993-2000) and as the primary author and editor of the *Atlas*, he coordinated its publication by the University of New Mexico Press (2005). Following the *Atlas*, Troy worked with a strong core group to establish the Arizona Field Ornithologists (AZFO), for which he was the founding President for eight years. This progressive state organization was the first to establish the concept of field expeditions, where most planned outings are to little known areas where knowledge of the seasonal status and distribution of birds is poor or lacking. AZFO also has begun using the talents of its members to conduct much needed avian surveys.

**This is our annual banquet.
Announcement of location will be
in the MAS e-newsletter. To sign up,
please see page 4.**



On the Cover: Anna's Hummingbirds
Focal Length: 400mm, 1/250 sec, f/5.6, ISO 400, June 2006.
Boyce Thompson Arboretum Visitor Center by Marceline VanderWater

Marceline says: This female Anna's Hummingbird had built her nest in a dead agave's stalk right in the breezeway at the entrance. People were getting very close to her with their little point-and-shoots, but she was just sitting tight. She was likely the most photographed hummingbird at the Arboretum that year!

President's Message

By Mark W. Larson



Mark W. Larson

Three years ago I wrote in this column about the tragic shootings in Tucson and this year I need to make special mention of another significant loss, the passing of a man who has been called the "heart and soul" of the Maricopa Audubon Society, Mr. Herbert S. Fibel. Last Saturday, January 11, 2014, at the celebration of Herb's life, the large turnout of more than 150 people bore silent testimony to what an impact Herb had made throughout his life. Not silent, of course, were the many persons who related favorite anecdotes of their time with him. Some were touching, others were humorous, but all were appreciative of Herb's huge heart, a heart large enough to hold all the birds, all the people he knew, and even people he had yet to meet.

I believe firmly in my heart that Herb would want the Maricopa Audubon Society to continue to be more than a bird club, more than a social organization, and more than a strictly conservation organization. We are, and will continue to be, all of these things and more.

And, to become more, we need you to get involved, to participate in meetings, field trips, environmental education events, and conservation activities. If there is an issue you think we

should address, or an activity that would bring value and meaning to more of our membership, please let me or another Board member know about it!

I hope to see you soon at a monthly meeting, on a field trip, or at the Annual Banquet in May! 🐦

Letter from the Editor

By Gillian Rice



Gillian Rice

Marceline VanderWater's cover photo of the Anna's Hummingbird reminds me of my first days in Arizona. A hummingbird built a home in a tree just below my third floor apartment balcony. I looked down with astonishment and excitement into the nest at the tiny bean-like eggs. A special natural history moment and always a vivid memory.

An important theme in this issue of the *Wren•dition* is memory. Laurie Nessel and Sandy Bahr help us remember the caring nature and hard work of ardent conservationist, Herb Fibel. Brian Sullivan

recalls his mentor, the renowned herpetologist, Robert Stebbins. Elaine Hultgren shows how she uses paintbrushes and pencils to capture exceptional memories. And I share with you a splendid memory from my recent trip to my homeland, Yorkshire, England, in the UK.

A second theme in this issue is communication. Learn about Barn Owl nestlings and how they communicate and negotiate with one another. Tom Gatz considers what the topknot on Gambel's Quail communicates to fellow quail. Kevin McCluney ponders the web of the spider – an oft-used metaphor for human communication. What does the spider's web tell us about ecological health?

We have contributions from poet David Chorlton, Conservation Chair Bob Witzeman, and our intrepid adventurer/Secretary Mary Rose, as well as details of programs and field trips. Thank you for being part of the MAS community. Please contact me if you would like to write an article for the *Wren•dition*. I'd love to hear from you! I hope you enjoy this issue. 🐦

The Path

By David Chorlton

"I would walk that path only so far, never to the end, because I didn't want to kill the mystery!"

Gary Fry

*Knowing extends only to the first
tracks the deer leave
along the path that goes where its own mind
leads. Give or take a shadow*

*nothing falls
across it. It gives back each step
you make, following
the threads of light that hang
from the trees. The downy woodpecker*

*has seen where it ends,
and so have the raccoons
whose noses pull them through the night.
If paths could believe*

*this one would be agnostic,
leaving anything possible
while denying there is one true way*

*anywhere. There's a rise and a dip
before the bend, then*

*the forest claims possession
of the narrowing
as it holds to the slope
with a bobcat's claw, lifts itself
on the wing of a Cooper's hawk,*

*and sees everything around it
with the never-closing
eye of a fox.*

Notes & Announcements

MARICOPA AUDUBON SOCIETY TO HOLD ELECTIONS IN APRIL

Maricopa Audubon Society's annual election of officers will take place on Tuesday, April 1, 2014. Any member of this Chapter in good standing is eligible to serve on the Board of Directors and can have his or her name placed on the slate by the Nominating Committee. Should you wish to serve, please call one of the Nominating Committee members (details below).

All Board positions, except the Editor of *The Cactus Wren•dition*, are elected by the membership. (The Board appoints the Editor). Nominations will also be taken from the floor before the election, but please advise the Nominating Committee of your interest prior to the election.

If you would like to learn more about any Board position, please feel free to call the Board member who holds that position. (Contact information for current Board members is on the back cover of this issue of the *Wren•dition*). This year's Nominating Committee members can be reached at: Roberta Chorlton 602 253-5055; Brian Ison 480 315-9031; Walter Thurber 480 483-6450.

BIRDERS' WEEKEND SPECIALS Noftsgger Hill Inn

April 5 2014 BIRD MIGRATION

Join Kathe Anderson for an interactive hour-long class exploring the basics and some unusual aspects of **BIRD MIGRATION** on **Saturday, April 5**. Why do birds migrate? How do they find their way? What kind of preparation do birds need before migrating? What are the hazards?

Learn some migration vocabulary; take home a handout and a small prize! During our complimentary bird walk Sunday



Kathe Anderson leading bird walk.
Photo by Matt VanWallene.



Scrub Jay, a likely bird in the Pinal Mountains. Photo by Vera Markham.

morning in the Pinal Mountains, we will add some migration information (where the birds are coming from and where are they headed) to some of the species we spot.

Kathe Anderson is an avid birder, leading bird walks and teaching classes for a variety of conservation organizations, as well as counting birds for several bird surveys to help scientists with data collection. She has led hundreds of walks and taught dozens of birding-related classes. She loves sharing her passion with others!

Double occupancy rooms at Noftsgger Hill Inn range from \$90 - \$125 plus tax, including breakfast. 20 percent discount for second consecutive night booking for these special events. Additional per person fee of \$25 for the classes. Events are for registered guests only.

For complete details about the Bed, Breakfast & Birds program, call MAS member Rosalie toll-free at 877-780-2479 or 928-425-2260 or visit www.noftsggerhillinn.com

MCDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE

Sunday, March 2, 7:45 am. Bird Walk. Details at www.mcdowellsonoran.org

HASSAYAMPA RIVER PRESERVE

Saturday, March 1, 8:30 - 11:00 am. Guided bird walk with master bird bander Anne Leight.

Sunday, March 2, 8:30 - 11:00 am. Birding by ear led by Kathe Anderson.

For reservations call 928 684-2772 or email bmccollum@tnc.org

GUIDED BIRD WALK EVERY SATURDAY

8:00 - 9:00 am at the Audubon Arizona Rio Salado Habitat. Birders are

free to continue birding on their own after 9:00 am. For more information, see <http://riosalado.audubon.org>

SIGN UP FOR THE E-NEWSLETTER!

To receive updates and supplements to *The Cactus Wren•dition*, sign up for the monthly (September to May) e-newsletter. It includes meeting and field trip reminders, special events, and citizen science projects. To subscribe, contact laurienessel@gmail.com
Note: We do not use the email list for anything other than the described purpose.



Turkey Vulture
Photo by Matt VanWallene

The Descent By David Chorlton

*The vultures ride
on carrion scent
through the day's penultimate glow.
They are a vision
of souls holding on
to the light
with their primaries frayed
and they tilt gently earthward
as the Earth rises
to meet them
with blood on its breath.
Asleep on the wing
they pass from the sun
to the stars
in a silence
picked clean as a bone.*

Maricopa Audubon Society Field Trips

field trips

Car Pooling: Please make every effort to organize your own car pool, consolidate vehicles at meeting places and/or contact leaders for car pooling assistance. Be courteous to the trip leaders and help cover their gas costs. We recommend that passengers reimburse drivers 10 cents per mile each.

Reminders:

- Avoid wearing bright colors. Wear neutral-colored clothing and sturdy walking shoes.
- Bring sunscreen, sunglasses, head protection, and water.
- Always bring your binoculars. Bring a scope if recommended.
- Submit trip and leader suggestions to the field trip chair, Nathaniel Smalley.
- Unless stated otherwise, reservations are required.

Day Passes: Many locations in the National Forests require Day Use Passes. For details, see <http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/tonto/passes-permits/recreation>

Sunday March 23 and Sunday April 27

Family Nature Walks at Veterans Oasis Park

The wildlife habitats at Veterans Oasis Park in Chandler are a haven for a variety of urban wildlife. Join a guided walk that explores the plants, birds, and insects of the park's desert and wetland habitats. Bring binoculars, water, and wear good walking shoes and a hat. The walks are leisurely and the terrain is easy. Donations are accepted. Meet 8:00 am at the Red-Tailed Hawk Pavilion. Done by 9:30 am. The park is at the northeast corner of Chandler Heights Blvd. and Lindsey. The pavilion is the closest to the Nature Center, just north of the parking lot. Leader: Laurie Nessel, 480 968 5614 laurienessel@gmail.com

Saturday April 5

REACH 11, Northeast Phoenix

This site combines bosque and desert habitat, good for desert birds, raptors, any remaining migrant passerines, and other desert wildlife. Meet at preserve on the east side of Tatum just north of the CAP canal (Union Hills Blvd) at 7:00 am. Easy. Bring optics, water, sun hat, and sturdy shoes. Leader: Myron Scott, 480 968-2179 gaia_3@netzero.com

Monday April 7

Verde River north of Fountain Hills:

This should be a great area to catch migrants on their way north (flycatchers, tanagers, buntings, vireos and warblers) plus birds that are actively nesting—both locals and new neotropical arrivals. We'll start about 5:45 am in Fountain Hills, head straight out to Needle Rock, and work our way south to Rio Verde Ranch, where we can usually sit in the picnic area and add a few more species to the list. Finish up by about 10:30 am. Easy. Limit 8. Leader: Kathe Anderson, kathe.coot@cox.net

Friday April 18

South Mountain (Pima Canyon, et al.)

Desert birds, butterflies, wildflowers, herps, and petroglyphs. Meet at 7:00 am at McDonald's just east of Priest on the south side of Baseline (depart by 7:30 am for Pima Canyon). Easy-moderate: flat well maintained trails and wash beds but some hills possible. Bring optics, water, sun hat and sunscreen, and closed toed shoes for washes. Leader: Myron Scott, 480 968 2179 gaia_3@netzero.com

Saturday May 10

Lopiano Habitat (Tempe/Scottsdale)

A relatively short walk through dense, former Salt River bosque with adjacent desert (Papago Park) and easy access to Tempe Town Lake north shore sites. Raptors, desert birds, and possible late migrant passerines. Meet at 7:00 am at west end of Tempe Marsh (Salt River) overlook alongside northwest parking lot of Tempe Marketplace, McClintock and Rio Salado (west end) to depart for habitat by 7:30 am. Easy. Bring optics and water. Leader: Myron Scott, 480 968-2179 gaia_3@netzero.com

Thursday - Friday May 15-16

Fairbanks/St. David area

I got an opportunity to explore a part of this area last year, later in the summer, and it was very productive, as well as lovely. I'm hoping that migration is an equally great time to be there. The loop at Fairbanks is a couple of miles long, but relatively flat, although sandy. St. David is shorter and also generally easy going. Expect to see chats with flycatchers, grosbeaks, vireos, buntings and other migrants possible, along with

Gray Hawks, Common Ground-Doves, and a possible Mississippi Kite at St. David. We'll start early on May 15 to hit some hotspots on the way south, and depending on timing, may end up at St. David at the end of the day. We'll concentrate on Fairbanks the next day and may return to St. David. Back in Phoenix on Friday about 6:00 pm. Benson will probably be our place to stay. Moderate hiking. Limit 8. Leader: Kathe Anderson, kathe.coot@cox.net

Sunday June 8

Oak Flat and Devil's Canyon

Desert uplands birds in varied habitats; spectacular scenery in the under-birded, secluded canyon, threatened by mining. Meet at 6:30 am at Oak Flat campground pullout, Oak Flat Rd., south side of US 60, 3 miles northeast of Superior, to begin birding the campground by 7:00 am, followed by an introduction to Devil's Canyon. Easy (campground) to moderately difficult (canyon). (You can quit after Oak Flat, of course.) Bring optics, water, sun hat and sunscreen, possibly a walking stick, and sturdy, closed-toed shoes. Leader: Myron Scott, 480 968-2179 gaia_3@netzero.com

Sunday - Monday June 22-23

Mt. Lemmon

Mt. Lemmon deserves an entire day (maybe two!), and the most reasonable way to do that is to spend the night in Tucson. We'll probably start early from Phoenix on Sunday, to hit Sweetwater and a couple of Tucson hotspots before turning in fairly early. We'll be up before dawn on Monday to begin our trek up Mt. Lemmon, with the hope of getting all the way to the top for a late lunch (about 2:00 pm) in the restaurant there. Then we'll return to Phoenix, to arrive about 7:00 pm on Monday evening. Given the handful of life zones as we work our way up the mountain, we should see Upper Sonoran desert, chaparral, oak woodland (encinal), transition (Ponderosa Pine), and montane (mixed conifer) species—a nice variety, to be supplemented by whatever waterfowl may be hanging around Sweetwater and any other pond we visit. Resident species as well as neotropical nesters should be available. Easy to moderate. Limit 8. Leader: Kathe Anderson, kathe.coot@cox.net

Tales From The Field: My Best Souvenir

By Gillian Rice



Red Kite habitat near Huggate on the Yorkshire Wolds, November 2013. Photo by Gillian Rice.

East Yorkshire, England. A cold but sunny November day. (Yes, the sun does shine in England, and even in November!). My brother is taking me for a countryside walk along the Yorkshire Wolds Way National Trail.

As we drive near the tiny village of Huggate, said by some to be the highest on the Wolds, he suddenly stops on the quiet, narrow lane. "Look!" A large, russet red-colored bird courses low over the field on our left. Peering from the window, with no time to grab the binoculars, I notice patches of white on the underwing. At last. My brother smiles. He has finally found me a Red Kite.

I'd wanted to see one for so long and our last two excursions had proved fruitless. These magnificent birds have been reintroduced to England and Scotland. Long ago, they were common, and in the fifteenth century were protected by Royal Charter. To kill a kite was a capital offence. They fed on waste and kept human settlements and streets clean: nature's garbage collectors! Later, hygiene improved, and farming and game interests considered kites a threat. By 1700, bounties were paid for dead kites. The birds were persecuted so much that by the 1870s, they were extirpated from England and Scotland and only a few pairs remained in Wales.

A reintroduction program, one of conservation's greatest success stories, was done in stages starting

in 1989, using birds introduced from Scandinavia and Spain. The first Red Kite Committee had been formed in 1903, however, and the involvement of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) dates from about 1905.

Red Kites (*Milvus milvus*) sourced from the Chiltern Hills in southeast England were released in Yorkshire beginning in 1999. In 2012, the Yorkshire Red Kite Project identified 100 territorial pairs. In 2013, 88 pairs bred, raising at least 144 young.

Kites are legally protected under the UK's Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and are monitored by licensed individuals who are the only people with permission to take photos at or near a nest.

According to ornithologist Ian Carter, (author of *The Red Kite, Second Edition*, 2007, Arlequin Press), the Red Kite population is increasing rapidly. He notes it is a very adaptable, generalist species that just needs open areas for foraging and some woodland for nesting and roosting.

My Red Kite wheels up and over to the other side of the road. I watch in delight as I observe the kite's most distinguishing feature: its forked tail, which it moves constantly during its slow, lazy flight on long elastic wings. Harassed and chased by a pair of Carrion Crows, the kite flies back across the road.

Both species are scavengers and compete for roadkill and other animal carrion. Red Kites will take some live



prey, such as young pigeons and crows from nests and small mammals like mice and voles. They also forage for earthworms in damp grassland. The kite's food habits can be lethal if it feeds on illegally poisoned baits, such as a dead rabbit placed for a crow or fox. Another threat is secondary poisoning by rodenticides. At least 25 Red Kite illegal poisonings have been recorded in Yorkshire since 2000, 20 of these in North Yorkshire, which has the unenviable record of being one of the worst areas in the UK for offences involving birds of prey.

In some parts of the UK, feeding stations have been provided for Red Kites. "This is something we have deliberately avoided in Yorkshire," says Nigel Puckrin of the conservation group, Yorkshire Red Kites. "We want to establish a naturally sustainable Red Kite population."

A majestic Red Kite, with its five and a half foot wingspan, is a special sighting for any bird-watcher. Of the 18-24 thousand world breeding population, about two-thirds are found in Germany. Britain is now estimated to have 1,800 year-round resident breeding pairs. Central

European birds winter in Spain.

The Red Kite is a highly social species and roosts communally from about October to February, when they begin to disperse to their own territories. "Our current record is 59 kites roosting together at any one time," says Puckrin. He explains some reasons for communal roosts: "Aerial chases prior to roosting might give young

birds a chance to

improve their

skills. The

kites seem

to 'play,'

by carrying

sticks and twigs,

dropping them and

catching them, with

other birds joining

in. Unpaired young

birds might find a

mate. And it's possible

that 'network foraging'

occurs. This is when birds

'share information' and

follow other individuals to a food source."

On my last visit home to

Yorkshire, my

best souvenir

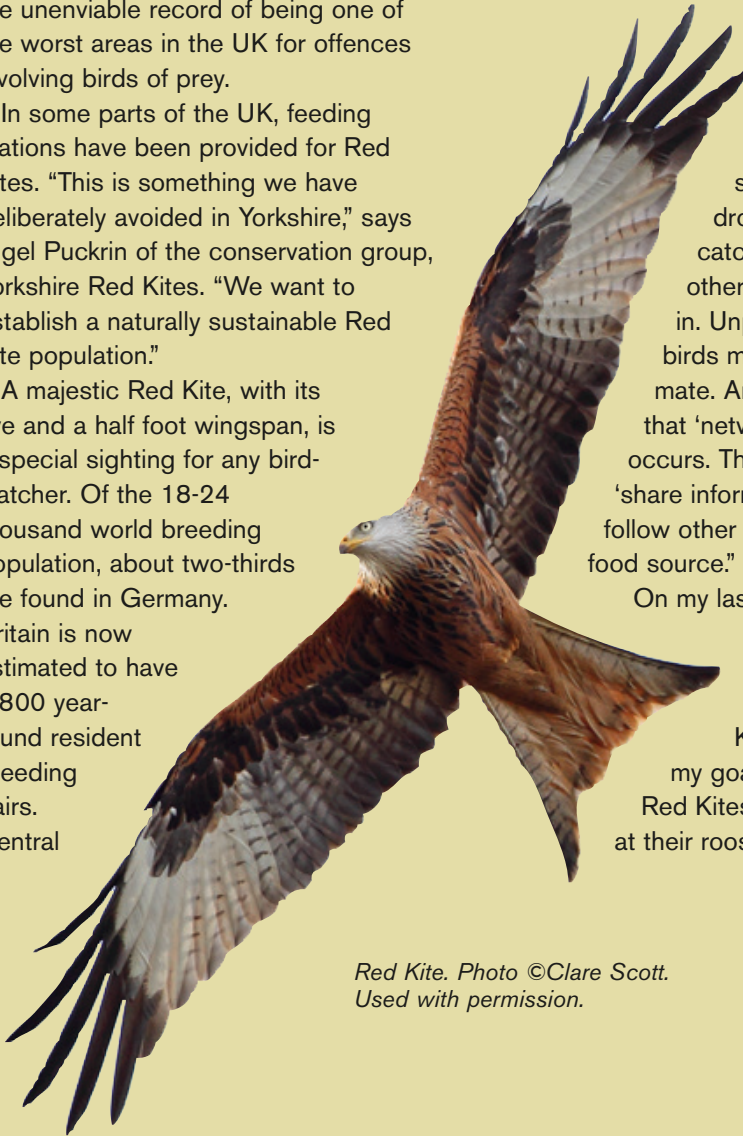
is my first Red

Kite. Next time,

my goal is to see

Red Kites gathering

at their roost. 🦅



Red Kite. Photo ©Clare Scott.
Used with permission.

*Ab, could I see a
spinney nigh,*

*A paddock riding in
the sky,*

*Above the oaks, in
easy sail,*

*On stilly wings and
forked tail.*

John Clare, c 1820

Note: "paddock" is an old English name for the Red Kite. John Clare is regarded as one of the most important poets of the natural world.

Scientists at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland and RSPB staff are learning more about Red Kite behavior using satellite technology. They track birds fitted with special transmitter "backpacks." The public can also follow the lives of these Red Kites. Using Natural Language Generation, computer science technology writes blog posts automatically (no humans involved!) about the day to day travels of the kites: where they go, to within a few yards (thus revealing the type of habitat such as woodland or bog) and in what type of weather. The researchers learn if the bird is in its usual area ("home range") or if it's gone to explore a new place.

See: <http://redkite.abdn.ac.uk>

References:

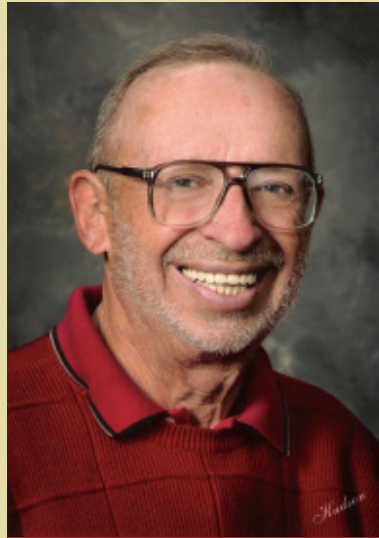
Interview with Ian Carter about the Red Kite in the UK. 2010. Accessed online December 31, 2013 at http://europeanraptors.org/interviews/interview_red_kite_uk_ian_carter.html

<http://www.yorkshireredkites.net> Website for the Yorkshire Red Kite Project, which is supported by Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, Yorkshire Water, and Harewood Estate.

In Memoriam 1930-2014

Herb S. Fibel

Herb was a tireless volunteer for Maricopa Audubon Society. He wrote articles for *The Cactus Wren•dition*, balanced the books, paid the bills, served contiguously on the Board since 1980 as President, Treasurer, Secretary and Membership Chair, led field trips, represented MAS at Arizona Audubon Council meetings, planned annual banquets, secured the annual nominating committee, cajoled and enlisted volunteers, participated in rallies, marched in the Ft. McDowell Orme Dam Victory Day Parade, drove to Superior to protest the Resolution Copper Mine to save a riparian treasure, Devil's Canyon, attended hearings, and wrote letters to the editor and to Federal and State agencies.



Herb S. Fibel

Perhaps his most lasting legacy is all the people with whom he shared his passion for birding. From 1989 until just a couple of years ago, Herb taught three sessions of Basic Birding classes each year at the Tempe Pyle Adult Center. He started each weekly class by asking if anyone had gone birding out of state that past week. If someone had, Herb would say "Don't tell me where! What species did you see?" and he would guess where they were by the species. He rarely got stumped. He instilled passion in his students as well as taught them the time-honored skill of pishing. Herb inspired and recruited a generation of birdwatchers and a lifeblood of chapter volunteers, including myself. He was sneaky. First he seduced you into the world of birdwatching. Then he cajoled you into volunteering, for the birds.

He was polite, a true gentleman. At board meetings, he never spoke unless called upon, sometimes nearly falling out of his seat waving his hand to be recognized. He politely waited while people spoke their mind. Then he would describe the history of the issue from the beginning, including dates, names, and talking points, and then mention an angle that no one had thought of, which usually settled the issue. He would patiently retell the stories of Maricopa Audubon for new board members. He was our oral historian.

Herb was proud of MAS' fight to keep the endangered species listing for the Arizona Desert Nesting Bald Eagles and of the Nest Watch program to protect our remaining eagle population. He was proud of the successful David and Goliath fights against the Bureau

of Reclamation and their dam builders.

I think Herb found his calling with The Big Sit! counting the birds that came to him. Herb started the first Arizona Big Sit! at Granite Reef in 1996. From the start, Herb encouraged others to form their own circles. In his irrepressibly dry sense of humor, he wrote in 1998, "We must warn you, though, that the training necessary to make you a relaxed, non-competitive birder can be quite rigorous." In 2008, he acknowledged a generous donation in honor of Kathe Anderson's mother by renaming it the Katheryn F. Anderson Granite Reef Asterisks' Big Sit! With gracious consent from Kathe, we are honoring Herb by continuing the annual Katheryn F. Anderson Herbert S. Fibel Granite

Reef Asterisks' Big Sit!

He was not afraid to take a stand. He was righteous, opinionated, a man of principle. He was a treasurer and a treasure. He was a mensch.

This morning, I enjoyed a flock of Cedar Waxwings at my backyard birdbath, and an Orange-crowned Warbler at my hummingbird feeder. I have Herb to thank for nurturing these moments of beauty and wonder and I am grateful to call him my friend.

The day after he passed, I saw a large formation of Canada Geese in the early morning light. As they passed over, I noticed one that stood out from the rest, much smaller and pure white. It was a Snow Goose. "Don't weep for me because I'm no longer here, I've a date with a hummingbird to dance in the air. I'll be singing in the sunshine, wild and free, playing tag with the wind while I'm watching over thee."

One last thing, yes, he is prodding us to *please* use recyclable grocery bags, carpool or use public transportation, turn your thermostat down now, up in summer, and for goodness sake, fill your own, reusable water bottles. 🐦

Laurie Nessel, MAS Programs Chair

MAS is accepting donations in memory of Herb. Please make your check payable to Maricopa Audubon Society and write on the memo line: Herb Fibel Education Fund. Send the check to Matt VanWallene, CPA, MAS Treasurer, 11004 E Villa Park St., Chandler, AZ 85248.

In Memoriam

Herb cared so deeply about this small blue planet and its creatures.

I met Herb when I was the lobbyist for the Arizona Audubon Council. We connected quickly due in large part to Herb's wonderful sense of humor. Herb was kind and supportive and even did his best to help me figure out how to identify a few birds – no small task, I might add. I think I did better with learning the policies than I did learning how to identify the birds, but I certainly gained an appreciation for the diversity of bird species we have in Arizona and I can identify a Phainopepla, well at least most of the time.

It is hard to think of Maricopa Audubon without Herb . . . so I won't. I will think of him as continuing to being part of what it is, its legacy, and its future.

I know it can sound cliché when people say that those who die are still with us – in our memories, in how they touched our lives, and in the work they did – but it is so true. I bet if you close your eyes and listen, you can hear Herb laughing or talking about a bird. I can see him knocking on doors for favorite candidates. You can for sure see the place where the Verde River still flows due to the advocacy of Herb and many others with Maricopa Audubon and Fort McDowell tribe. He is still with us.

I would like to leave you with a quote from John Muir as I think it is illustrative of how the essence of who we are is eternal.

"This grand show is eternal. It is always sunrise somewhere; the dew is never all dried at once; a shower is forever falling; vapor is ever rising. Eternal sunrise, eternal sunset, eternal dawn and gloaming, on sea and continents and islands, each in its turn as the round earth rolls." 🐦

Sandy Bahr, Chapter Director, Sierra Club-Grand Canyon Chapter



Herb Fibel, Carolina Butler, Ft. McDowell friends, Bob Witzeman, Janet Witzeman - Nov. 17, 2012 at tribe's Orme Dam Days annual freedom march

Charge of the Birding Brigade By Herb Fibel

*Half a mile, half a mile,
Half a mile southward,
All in the Valley of Gila
Rode the field trip dozen
"Forward the birding brigade!
Ignore the guns!" Herb said,
Into the Valley of Gila
Rode the field trip dozen.*

*"Forward the birding brigade!"
Was there a birder dismay'd?
Not tho' the participants knew
MAS had blunder'd.
Theirs not to make reply,
Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to search the sky.
Into the Valley near Arlington
Rode the field trip dozen.*

*Dove hunters to right of them,
Dove hunters to left of them,
Dove hunters in front of them
Volley'd and thunder'd;
Storm'd at with shot and shell,
Boldly they birded and well,
Into the jaws of death
Into the mouth of hell
Rode the field trip dozen.*

*Flash'd all their binocular lenses,
Flash'd as they challeng'd their senses,
Avoiding the gunners there,
Dodging the dove hunters army, while
Auduboners wonder'd,
White-tailed kites obscured by the smoke
LeConte's thrashers startingly awoke
Heron and egrets
Using the marsh as a cloak
Stayed covered but silently ponder'd.
The birders relinquished their quest,
When their leader said: "Discretion is best!"
As with shot and pellet they were pepper'd.*

*Dove hunters to the right of them,
Dove hunters to the left of them,
Dove hunters behind them now
Still volley'd and thunder'd.
Stormed at with with shot and shell
White-wing season's a birder's hell
Thankfully all lived to reflect and tell.
The whole dozen birders alive and well.
Left a sigh of relief as they wonder'd*

*When would the memories fade?
For their dedication they'd heavily paid
Back home insurers and families wonder'd
Whether ever another trip would be planned
To Arlington and Gillespie Dam land
On the weekend dove hunting start'd*

So Why Do Quail Have Those Plumes on Their Heads?

By Tom Gatz

(Reprinted from *Gatherings*, the newsletter for volunteers at the Desert Botanical Garden)

When asked this by a Desert Botanical Garden visitor, where I volunteer as a docent on Sunday mornings, I had to admit that I didn't know. But I made the mistake of offering a guess that, of course, turned out to be incorrect. I wrongly surmised that it likely had something to do with courtship between the males and females. After all, in the peafowl, the peacocks use their showy tail feathers to attract peahens, don't they? Appropriately humbled, I hit the Garden library and the Internet and tracked down the real facts regarding these feather ornaments on top of the heads of Gambel's Quail. Composed of six black, comma-shaped feathers that tightly overlap, they appear to be one feather and are commonly referred to as a "topknot."



Gambel's Quail (Male). Photo by Matt VanWallene

An erect plume signifies dominance; when folded flat it means "I give up" or "Uncle!"

I learned that, in fact, the females couldn't care less about the color or arrangement of feathers on male quail, including but not limited to, those on its head. What really impresses the female are the male's foraging display and his body size which are much better indications of the male's current health and strength than are flashy feathers which grew earlier in the season. The "buffed-out" male repeatedly performs a ritualized foraging display called "tidbitting" often resulting in the male offering the female select bits of food. Perhaps the

human version of this is to bring your date a box of nice chocolates after toning up at the gym.

Biologists tell us that in nature all form has a function, so what the heck are these plumes for? To find out, researchers at the University of New Mexico gave some male quail haircuts by removing their topknots for a season, while others received "enhanced" topknots 1.5 times normal size, secured with superglue, all in the interest of science. It turns

out that the topknots are important in establishing hierarchy among competing male quail. Plume enhancement made quail more likely to win contests, whereas plume removal made males more likely to lose. Plume position also reflected male status. Winning males erected plumes, whereas losers frequently flattened them. An erect plume signifies dominance; when

folded flat it means "I give up" or "Uncle!"

You might ask, "but non-combative female quail have smaller versions of topknots; do they have a function?" I don't know; however, secondary sexual characteristics are often shared by both males and females in a species, including humans, but are often more prominent (and more functional) in one gender than in the other. 🦋

Tom Gatz has been a MAS member since 1981.

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The Web of a Spider

By Kevin McCluney

Everyone knows that spiders spin webs, but you may not realize just how far these webs can reach. These small eight-legged animals play important roles in ecosystems, as both predators and prey. As predators, spiders can reduce the abundance of pests on farms and around your house. For instance, populations of aphids (insect pests) on wheat can be cut by up to 58 percent when spiders are present at densities of about five per square foot. Similar effects can be found for a variety of crops and vegetable gardens. Spiders also kill pests inside your home—even other spiders—cellar spiders will eat black widow spiders (the only potentially dangerous species of spider in the US).

Spiders can even help maintain a diverse group of colorful insects like butterflies, dragonflies, and beetles by preventing a single prey species from becoming extremely abundant. Spiders will eat anything small enough to capture, so they can switch between prey, preventing a single species from dominating. Of course, spiders are also important food for lizards, birds, and small and medium sized mammals, supporting large and diverse food webs. Spiders can even change entire ecosystems, altering plant biomass (amount), plant diversity, decomposition rates (breaking down leaf litter), and cycling of nitrogen and carbon. So spiders can influence pest control, waste removal, soil fertility, and climate regulation.

Combine the many benefits of spiders with the fact they pose little danger to humans, and you might start thinking about spiders in a new light. But the positive effects of spiders on pest control, diversity, and ecosystem services are not static. Pesticides, water extraction, and climate change may influence spider ecology. Spiders are very sensitive to pesticides, so periodic use in agriculture could kill



An orb-weaving spider in a red-maple tree used for landscaping a parking lot in Raleigh, NC, Photo by Kevin McCluney

spiders and allow outbreaks of quickly reproducing pests. Increased temperatures can increase spider feeding rates and alter habitat use, which can change prey behavior or abundance, leading to changes in plant communities. Changes in soil moisture and water availability can also alter spider ecology. For instance, in my own research

I found that spiders controlled cricket populations along the San Pedro River, but only under dry conditions. And others have found that rainfall can change how spiders influence leaf litter breakdown, which could alter soil fertility. So changes in pesticides, temperature, precipitation, and stream flow may alter spider ecology, influencing food webs and ecosystems.

So, perhaps the next time you walk through a spider web, you'll consider just how far that web really reaches. 🕷️

Kevin McCluney, Ph.D. is Assistant Professor of Biological Sciences at Bowling Green

State University where he studies how water influences food webs. Much of his research has focused on how water availability and river drying influences the effects of spiders on crickets and vegetation. For more information, see:

<http://blogs.bgsu.edu/mccluneylab/>



A wolf spider eating a field cricket along the San Pedro River in AZ, Photo by Kevin McCluney

Barn Owl Nestlings Recognize and Communicate with Each Other

By Gillian Rice



Amélie Dreiss with research subject. Photo © Lionel Pousaz

Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*) nestlings (owlets) each have an individual vocal signature that is recognized by its nestmates. In a recently published study, Amélie Dreiss of Lausanne University, Switzerland, and her colleagues have found that the owlets use their unique calls in a “sibling negotiation system” to negotiate for food.

“Previously, only a few research studies show that parents or siblings can individually recognize young animal offspring or other siblings, says Dreiss. “Juvenile Greylag Geese can recognize each other, for example.”

To avoid the costs of physically competing for limited food resources, animals communicate their motivation and ability to compete. Barn Owl nestlings remain in their nest for about nine weeks and have ample time to communicate vocally with their siblings.

Once the owlets are old enough to swallow the rodent prey without maternal help (from around 2 weeks onwards), the mother leaves the nest to hunt for prey with the father. Dreiss and colleagues describe how the single food item brought by a parent Barn Owl to the nest is indivisible; only one owlet receives food on each parental visit. Sibling Barn Owls vocally advertise their hunger level to their nestmates during long parental absences, in order to receive priority access to food when the parents return.

The Swiss researchers observed and monitored wild Barn Owls breeding in nest

boxes. “We exchanged an equal number of nestlings, about four days after hatching, between 19 pairs of nests,” explains lead researcher Amélie Dreiss. “This is called a cross-fostering experiment, which is often performed in bird studies.” [see sidebar]

Also, three weeks prior to fledging, (at around 55 days old), the researchers brought some owlets to the lab for vocalization experiments. At least one owlet was left in a nest to prevent the parents from abandoning a nest. After three days and nights, nestlings were returned to their nests and fledged with similar success and similar body mass to nestlings not removed from the nest. (Note: the veterinary services of the local Swiss state approved all experimental procedures to ensure that the Barn Owls were not stressed or harmed during the study).

The research team studied various features of owlet calls. Characteristics like call duration, loudness (dB), and frequency variation (kHz) can distinguish owlets. “Interestingly, siblings call similarly suggesting that most of the variation in these call features are genetically inherited,” reports Dreiss. “In contrast, no call features are related to the nest of rearing indicating that sharing the same environment does not explain why nestmates adopt similar vocal behavior.”

Surprisingly, one lab experiment revealed that humans (students), who had never heard Barn Owls, could discriminate among the owlets’ calls without any training.

To an owlet, its sibling’s call reveals its

CROSS-FOSTERING EXPERIMENTS

Amélie Dreiss explains:

“Cross-fostering allows identification of which part of behavior or morphology is due to genetic factors (or to early developmental factors) or to the environmental rearing conditions. We investigate which plays the larger role: the ‘nest of origin’ or ‘nest of rearing.’

“Strangely, in many birds, the parents accept cross-fostering young, and it appears that they rear the cross-fostering young exactly the same way as their own young. It is the same phenomenon that even permits cuckoos to lay eggs in the nest of other species. Bird parents usually do not recognize their young at birth. The recognition may hence develop later. In the Barn Owl, we have not tested whether parents recognize their young. Until the first flight at least, parents do not have to recognize them, because the young do not change locality. In some bird species, parents do recognize their offspring vocally. For instance, this is important for penguins because young are lost in big colonies.”



identity, position in the age hierarchy of the brood, gender, and absolute age. Usually one owlet calls alone during long periods of time. Nestlings avoid calling simultaneously, otherwise they might have to call more (and expend even more energy) in order to transfer the same amount of information. In the absence of parents, the most vocal owlet induces its nestmates to retreat from the contest for food as soon as parents return to the nest with a food item.

Why should owlets signal their intention to compete to their siblings? The researchers suggest that if the owlets didn't communicate among themselves as much vocally, this might increase competition for the single food item (such as a vole or mouse) upon a parent's



Owlets in nest box (Western Switzerland).
Photo © Madeleine Scriba

return. Should owlets pretend to be hungrier than they really are? Probably not, as a single nestling makes up to 5000 calls per night when parents are absent. Each call contains substantial noise energy, so the sibling negotiation process is expensive in terms of energy and effort. Barn Owl nestmates are full siblings (paternity other than by the male of a bonded pair is rare), so each owlet has indirect fitness gains if its sibling obtains enough food and if food is distributed fairly according to need.

Nestlings retreat from a contest when facing highly vocal siblings. "Sibling negotiation can be thought of as a form of altruism between related individuals, because its primary function is to reduce the level of sibling competition," says Dreiss.

In some other bird species, when parents make brief visits bringing food, offspring suddenly escalate their begging behavior in an attempt to be louder than their siblings. This behavior has evolved because in those species the food brought by parents is divisible, that is, each nestling may receive some of the food. Therefore, by escalating begging a nestling can hope to receive a larger than equal share of the food. The

situation with Barn Owls is different. Siblings communicate vocally at a relatively low rate but for long periods of time.

In an earlier experiment, Dreiss and colleagues found evidence of cognitive abilities used to resolve conflicts over the share of resources. Owlets listen to competitive interactions between other owlets. They gather information on the competitive role played by two vocally interacting nestmates (which called first) and remember this for a few minutes before using it to adjust their own vocal behavior.

Two ecological factors might influence the evolution of the social and cognitive abilities to recall siblings' hunger states: parental feeding rate and the size of food items. Parent

Barn Owls feed their brood every hour, on average, with relatively large food items. Therefore, owlets' hunger levels do not vary quickly: individuals who receive food are satiated for a while; hungry owlets can wait several minutes to a few hours before being fed.

Barn Owls occur on every continent but Antarctica. Most research on vocal analyses has been done on European Barn Owls, but *Birds of North America Online* indicates that with a few exceptions, vocal patterns are

similar between the North American and European races of this species. 🦉

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BARN OWLS IN ARIZONA

"Ah, one of my favorite birds!" exclaims MAS member Walter Thurber, a regional coordinator for the Arizona Field Ornithologists and compiler of the Carefree Christmas Bird Count. He continues: "Barn Owls are uncommon permanent residents locally. The only place I know where they are regular is in the mineshafts at the Spur Cross Ranch Conservation Area. The site is off limits to the public for safety reasons, but sometimes the owls will roost in the nearby Jewel of the Creek Preserve. There are mineshafts in the Cave Creek Regional Park too and Barn Owls have been there in the past, but I don't have current information."

Thurber reports: "We just concluded a two-year bird study in the McDowell Sonoran Preserve. We tallied 128 species, but no Barn Owl. I found a hole in an earthen embankment along Lost Dog Wash that looked like a possible Barn Owl nest or roost site, but we never found an owl there."

According to the *Arizona Breeding Bird Atlas*, relatively more Barn Owls are found in habitats such as Sonoran Desert uplands and the adjacent wooded dry washes, and in agricultural settings. They can be found in urban areas and will nest behind the mass of dead fronds of untrimmed palms. MAS member Matt VanWallene reports that a Barn Owl nested in a tree in his Chandler backyard. "Unfortunately the nest failed resulting in several broken eggs and two dead chicks," says VanWallene. "I dissected many owl pellets, however, containing skulls of small creatures."

The Arizona Field Ornithologists North American Migration Count (held the second Saturday in May annually) reported no Barn Owls in 2012, but three in 2011. Reports on eBird.org include several observations during 2013 at, for example: Rio Salado Project, Tres Rios, Glendale Recharge Ponds, Avondale Bridge on the Gila River, and two Chandler locations.

Fun with a Solar-powered Birdbath

By Bob Witzeman



A Mourning Dove foursome enjoying a solar birdbath



House Finch at solar-powered birdbath



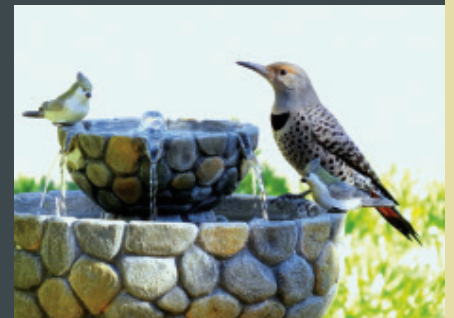
Mourning Dove and House Finches



The Mourning Dove gives size comparison to the two solar panels, one facing east and one south.



Orange-crowned Warbler checks out solar-powered birdbath



Northern (Red-shafted) Flicker

All photos by Bob Witzeman

“Any glimpse into the life of an animal quickens our own and makes it so much the larger and better in every way.”

John Muir (1838 ~ 1914)

Solar-powered birdbaths are inexpensive and fun. Mine pumps water from a half-hour after sunrise until 15 minutes before sunset. The reason it starts later in the morning is that I have higher trees on the east side of my house. The solar panels even gather electricity when the sun is hazy-bright.

Most solar panel birdbaths come with only one panel. Yet, to run one for more daylight hours, from nearly sunrise to sunset, two panels are needed. One panel must be east-facing and one must face west or southwest. [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) has an assortment of solar birdbaths.

However, single-panel birdbaths are mostly what are for sale. They are simpler and easy to install but they operate fewer hours each day. Solar panels are inexpensive to purchase. They may require an electrician if you do not understand the difference between AC and DC current. Solar panels are direct current (DC) devices, not the

alternating current (AC) we have in our homes. One must be careful to connect the wires from each of the two separate collector panels in “parallel,” not in “series.” If you do not understand that difference, any electrician can easily wire them for you.

I have only had my solar birdbath for a few weeks. So far, the birds coming to it have been my common winter yard birds such as Northern Mockingbird, House Finch, Mourning Dove, Orange-crowned Warbler, Red-shafted Flicker, and Costa’s Hummingbird. It is a delight to watch them. Some just drink cautiously; others, even hummingbirds, delight in full-body immersion and/or prolonged splashing free-for-alls.

The difficult part of any birdbath is the need to add water to make up for bird splashing and evaporation. However, it will not hurt the solar pump if the birdbath runs dry. I soon tired of filling the bath by hand every few days. You can easily install a tiny water hose (plastic or copper) running from your house. If you are not sure about obtaining garden hose flow-control valves at your local hardware store (to attach to your home’s outdoor hose bibs), it is a simple job for a plumber or handyman. This allows you to adjust the flow to keep up with bird splashing and evaporation. 🐦

Project Flightplan Update

By Mary Rose

Four and a half months to go until the big row! Things have gotten a little bizarre at the Rose household. You may have noticed I've missed monthly meetings lately, but there is a very good reason: all the craziness in the lead up to the race. I'm on the home stretch, but there is still a lot of work to do – including securing all the necessary certificates needed just to start the race. What does this mean? Weekly trips to California for US Coast Guard Auxiliary training, and even a trip to Seattle for sea survival training.

As with any major project, there is always background work to be done and Project FlightPlan is no exception. While trying to row an ocean from the middle of the desert is possible, it does require that I have to travel at times to train and do the required classes. Every single class and training has to be done in California, and so for the next 3 months I am back and forth between Phoenix and San Diego each week. I am getting to know I-8 very well right now.

So what exactly are the required certifications? They involve a very steep learning curve. Here are the requirements:

1. National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA) approved Foundation Course Boating Safety Certificate

For all boating and maritime laws and boating safety procedures

2. Marine Radio Operator Permit

Permit to legally operate VHF/DSC radio. This involves a class to study all procedures, laws, and protocols, and then an exam to gain the certificate. Licensing is then done through the Federal Communications Commission. Typically these licenses are required to operate radiotelephone stations aboard vessels of more than 300 gross tons and vessels, which carry more than six passengers for hire in the open sea or any tidewater area of the US. They are also required to operate certain aviation radiotelephone stations and certain coast radiotelephone stations. Although I will be rowing, this is the required license for the Great Pacific Race.

3. International Sailing Federation approved Offshore Personal Survival Course

This course has both a theory and practical element. The theory class covers things like identifying hyperthermia, medical issues, use of flares, and emergency procedures. I will be doing the practical part in February on Bainbridge Island, WA. It involves a simulation of what might happen in the event of inversion of the boat. In full sea survival gear I will be required to deploy a life raft, activate flares, and do everything else which may need to be done in the event of an emergency. I must do all this while being sprayed with a fire hose and being pulled under the water by divers. Oh, what fun!

4. US Coast Guard approved First Aid and CPR course

Given the five-page medical kit list which goes with this race, this is an important class. Remember, everything has to be on board the boat when I leave Monterrey Bay so if there is a medical issue then I must know how to fix it with supplies on board. Of course, there is an assigned medic on board the support yachts for the race, but if they are two days away it will be up to me.

5. US Coast Guard Auxiliary Weekend Navigator class

While most of the navigation during the Great Pacific Race will be taken care of by a GPS, I have to be prepared and be able to navigate using manual methods in the event the GPS fails. This involves learning navigation using charts, compass, a sextant, and the stars. Yes, I get to learn celestial navigation!

6. US Coast Guard Auxiliary Boating Skills and Seamanship class

For all things boating, from rules of the ocean (traffic separation rules, distress signals etc.), to how to handle a boat in differing conditions. This class is all encompassing.

So in the lead up to the race, there is a lot to do in addition to regular training on the water, in the gym, and with a sports psychologist for neurofeedback training. It is all worth it though as this race can do a lot for birds – particularly in the area of awareness.

Please keep an eye on the race website for more updates in the lead up to the race and during the race itself. We now have the equipment required to be able to send back video from the middle of the Pacific during the race so everyone will be able to follow along with progress. To follow progress visit www.MaryRows.com

June 7, 2014 marks the start of the race to show that Extinction is Optional®. Through the Great Pacific 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 or www.MaryRows.com



Inspired by Stebbins: Memories of Dr. Robert C. Stebbins, 1915-2013

By Gillian Rice

Back in 1966, a fifth grader took a reptile class in the San Francisco Bay area. Encouraged by the instructor to buy a field guide, young Brian Sullivan got his first “Stebbins,” which is how herpers (herpetologists) refer to the influential *Field Guide to Western Reptiles and Amphibians* in the Peterson Field Guide series written and beautifully illustrated by the late Robert C. Stebbins.

According to David Wake, Professor of the Graduate School in Integrative Biology, and Curator, Museum of Vertebrate Zoology (MVZ) at UC Berkeley, Professor Robert C. Stebbins was the preeminent scholar studying amphibians and reptiles in North America.

Stebbins, born in 1915, spent his childhood on his family’s ranch near Chico, California. His father was a biologist who worked in agriculture. At about age five,

his colleagues. Much to his relief, write Mulcahy and Mahoney, the director of the MVZ told him, “Draw!” Without this support, he might not have written and illustrated the field guides that have made such a monumental contribution to the study of herpetology.

Stebbins had a profound influence on Brian Sullivan, ASU professor and herpetologist. “Perhaps the most important pages of my ever-increasingly well-worn copy of 1966 Stebbins was ‘Making Captures,’” he explains. “At the time, unlike amateur birders who would never dream of capturing the subjects of their keen interest, herpers accepted that each encounter required a capture so that the specimen could be examined closely (often proper identification requires close inspection), positioned for photographs, and eventually released (or retained for further study, especially on feeding habitats and mating behavior, communication and social interactions).”

In the spring of 1971, the young Sullivan was the proud owner of two impressive spiny lizards of the desert Southwest: a male and female pair of Granite Spiny Lizards, *Sceloporus orcutti*. The male is perhaps the most gaudy of all North American lizards, with a suffusion of purple, blue, and turquoise across not only its ventral but all dorsal surfaces as well. The drab female, brown and tan, pales by comparison, but it was her egg-laying one night as summer began that was to provide Sullivan’s first opportunity for direct interaction with Stebbins.

“From his larger book on amphibians and reptiles of the western U.S., published in 1954, I knew that there had only been two clutches described for *S. orcutti*,” says Sullivan. “So I knew that any information I gathered would be ‘important,’ and I dutifully recorded the details of each egg produced by this female, placing the length and width of each in two columns in my ‘field note book’ (which I constructed following the guidelines in my Stebbins, 1966). The next day I enlisted the help of my mom; she assisted in the typing of my draft, and then we shipped it off to Professor Stebbins, having no idea what, if any, response there might be.”

Sullivan was over-joyed when a reply from Stebbins arrived. “Most compelling of all was the content,” he recalls. “Professor Stebbins expressed his desire to use my data in his revision of the 1954 book on which I had staked my claim to significance! He wrote to me as if I was a colleague.”

During high school, Sullivan continued to correspond with Stebbins, who always replied quickly and provided encouragement on various projects. Sullivan’s first meeting with Stebbins was a brief chance encounter in Corral Hollow while “road riding” for snakes [see sidebar]. Stebbins was doing likewise with a class of students in a convoy of cars. “When I went to Cal in 1977, I was lucky enough to be in two of Stebbins’ classes immediately prior to his retirement,” relates Sullivan.

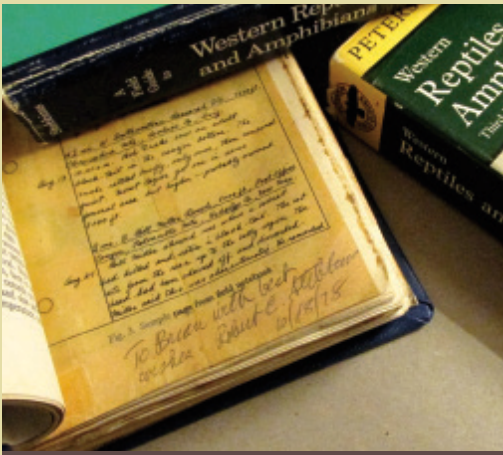


Robert Cyril Stebbins, 2004. Photo copyright Charles Brown. Reprinted with permission of the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, UC Berkeley and Matthew Bettelheim of bioaccumulation.wordpress.com

Stebbins learned the parts of a flower from him. Mulcahy and Mahoney (2006) report how Stebbins “once climbed a tree to get close to a sleeping Great Horned Owl and was reprimanded with a swat on the rear by his father for not watching over his younger sister.”

Stebbins attributed his artistic abilities to his mother, who painted. From the age of 16, he painted landscapes and portraits as well as wildlife. He planned graduate study in ornithology at UCLA, but switched to herpetology because of his excitement about the subject and the comparative lack of researchers in this area.

Stebbins became the first herpetology curator at the MVZ in 1945. He worried that the many hours spent illustrating the figures for his 1951 publication, *Amphibians of Western North America*, would detract from his research progress as compared to



A sample of Brian Sullivan's Stebbins field guides, showing the autographed 1966 edition.

leave an untended area. He focuses on how to encourage children to love nature and provides many hands-on activities and games, such as "playing hide and seek with owl calls." He urges "collecting" specimens with a camera and developing a record of plant and animal subjects and their habitats. In 2012, a year before his death, he published a revised edition of *Amphibians and Reptiles of California* (University of California Press).

Raymond B. Huey, University of Washington Biology Professor, was a Berkeley Zoology undergraduate taking a natural history of the vertebrates class in 1965. He remembers: "One day in late spring, my group was lucky enough to have Dr. Stebbins as our leader, and our goal was to look for herps in Tilden. It was a beautiful sunny morning -- a perfect day for herping. Suddenly Dr. Stebbins told us to stop and listen. In the distance a Ruby-crowned Kinglet (if memory serves) was singing. Dr. Stebbins said that this was his favorite bird and that we should all lie down on the grass and listen for a while. I remember initially being surprised that a herpetologist would stop looking for herps to listen to a bird, but soon realized why: Dr. Stebbins was a 'complete' naturalist who loved all nature."

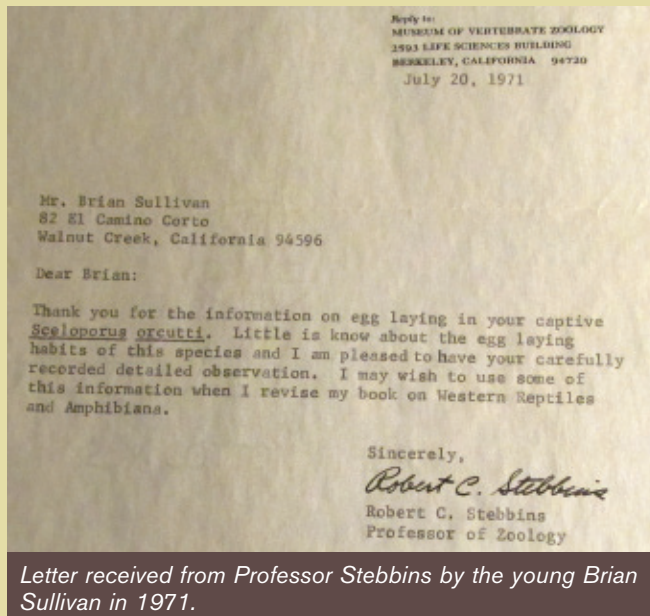
"Although Stebbins was not dynamic or energetic in the classroom, students hung on his every word," recalls Sullivan. "He was soft-spoken and sincere in an understated way." When Stebbins was in his mid-eighties, Sullivan met him at an art show. "I've been taking art classes," he told Sullivan, "because I'm really just an illustrator." 🐍

Reference:

Mulcahy, D.G. and M.J. Mahoney. 2006. Robert Cyril Stebbins. *Copeia*. 3: 563-572.

Stebbins was rather unorthodox as an academic because he didn't seek or obtain large National Science Foundation grants. What set him apart was his dedication to public outreach. He retired to do conservation full-time and dedicated himself to protecting the Mohave Desert from off-road vehicles. "He had a supreme commitment to the next generation," says Sullivan.

Stebbins continued publishing. In 2009, he produced *Connecting with Nature* (Llumina Press), in which, through an interdisciplinary approach, he encourages us to become explorers of common things, in our own backyards, perhaps where we intentionally



Letter received from Professor Stebbins by the young Brian Sullivan in 1971.

ROAD RIDING

"Given how rarely snakes are encountered while hiking, even when searching for them, road riding is a frequently used method of snake collecting, and one that Stebbins understood well. In arid and semi-arid regions, certain snakes seem to use paved road surfaces, which retain heat, for thermoregulation in the early evenings of spring and summer. Snakes also cross roads to move among habitat patches. Road riding involves cruising a quiet road at 15 mph or so from dusk to midnight. When a reptile is spotted, the driver stops and a colleague jumps out to capture it for examination or collection. My best night, 30 snakes of seven different species, stands as an all-time personal best in spite of my efforts on multiple continents under a variety of conditions."

Brian Sullivan,
Herpetologist

Nature Through the Artist's Eye: Elaine Hultgren

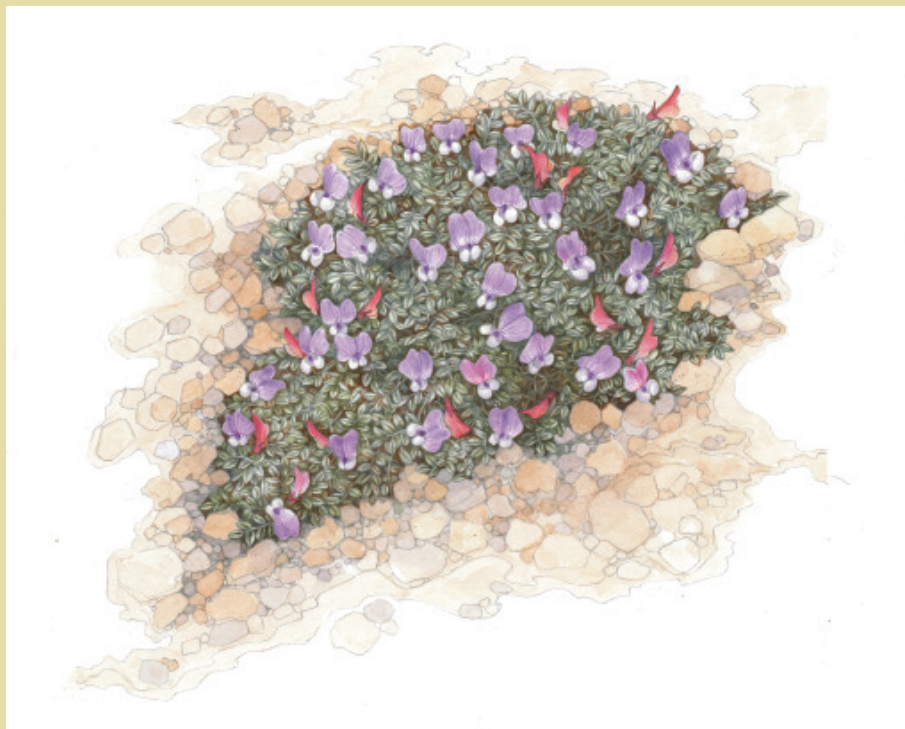
Elaine Hultgren graduated from the Cleveland Institute of Art with a major in painting and a minor in printmaking. Her paintings and drawings have been exhibited in several juried shows, are included in private collections, and have received several awards. Her graphic design work and illustrations have been published in books, magazines, and newsprint. An Emmy award-winning animation artist, Hultgren has worked in the animation industry for over 25 years.

A life-long love of all things botanical led her to obtain her certification in Botanical Art and Illustration from the Desert Botanical Garden in 2010.



She is both an artist and an educator who teaches classes in botanical watercolor and botanical drawing as well as a variety of workshops on snakes, lizards, birds, butterflies, and beetles.

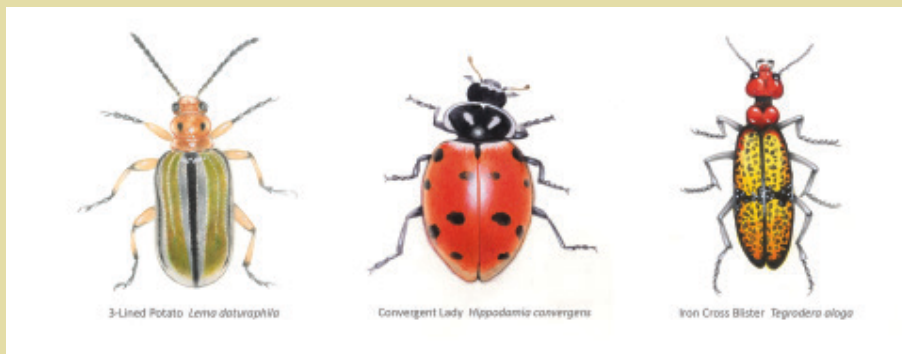
Hultgren's signature workshop is "Nature Sketching & Journaling," for beginners to advanced artists. "I warn participants that keeping a nature sketchbook or journal may lead to uncontrollable urges to spend more time outdoors exploring new and beautiful surroundings," says Hultgren with a smile. She has taken this workshop first taught at the Desert Botanical Garden "on the road" to botanical gardens in Ohio and Utah. In 2014, the nature sketching workshop will be offered at the Sedona Arts Center and the Grand Canyon.



Astragalus cremnophylax var. cremnophylax, Sentry Milk-vetch
Watercolor and graphite, 8" x 8"

Grand Canyon National Park is very large and diverse and contains over 1,750 species of plants. Yet within this huge area containing ecosystems ranging from forest to desert, there is only one federally-listed endangered plant: the Sentry Milk-vetch, which is both endangered and endemic. Endemic means that Grand Canyon National Park is the only place in the world that the plant lives. It is a perennial mat-forming herb and is a member of the pea family. Tiny (1" tall and 1-10" in diameter), it grows in crevices with little soil, on rim rock located on the edge of the canyon in the Kaibab limestone formation. It is also aptly named the "Watchman of the Gorge" from its species name cremnophylax: cremno means gorge and phylax means watchman.

It was an honor and a privilege to be asked to illustrate this plant. The experience is one I will treasure forever.



Three Sonoran Beetles

Convergent Lady Beetle, *Hippodamia convergens*, 2" x 3"

Three-lined Potato Beetle, *Lema daturaphila*, 2" x 3"

Iron Cross Blister Beetle, *Tegrodera aloga*, 2" x 3"

Watercolor and colored pencil

When I draw beetles I am always reminded of what the British biologist, J.B.S. Haldane (1892-1964), is reputed to have said when asked by theologians what one could conclude as to the nature of the Creator from a study of creation. Haldane supposedly replied, "an inordinate fondness for beetles." I own a book called *An Inordinate Fondness for Beetles* by Arthur V. Evans and Charles L. Bellamy. We live in the age of beetles – Coleoptera – approximately 350,000 species have been discovered since the 1750s.



ELAINE HULTGREN ©

White-lined Sphinx Moth, Hyles lineata
Watercolor and colored pencil, 6"x 5"

One day I discovered a stranger in my yard. Down at the base of an aloe plant was a sphinx moth, sheltering perhaps as it waited until evening when it would seek out nectar from plants like Sacred Datura. Struck by its beauty, I had to paint it. The discovery of something that you paint is always meaningful.



Empress Leilia w/ Desert Hackberry Elaine Hultgren ©

Empress Leilia & Desert Hackberry, Asterocampa leilia & Celtis pallida
Watercolor, 5" x 7"

I like teaching because it helps me to learn more about the creatures we draw in class. This painting reflects the close relationship between the Empress Leilia butterfly and its larval food plant, Desert Hackberry. I was fascinated by the way I often find this butterfly on the ground. I learned that males spend most of their time perching in the vicinity of Desert Hackberry as they watch for passing females. Early in the morning, they perch on the ground with wings open. Later, they close their wings, and even later, they perch on vegetation. By altering their perching in this way, they maintain their body temperatures and more easily detect females.



Sir Lancelot aka "Lance,"
Sceloporus magister
Silverpoint and pastel, 8" x 8"

Lance is a beautiful male Desert Spiny Lizard who calls the Desert Botanical Garden home. He resides near the pond on the People and Plants of the Sonoran Desert Trail. To me, he seems a bit pugnacious; when encountered, he stands his ground, bobs up and down, and rises up and opens his mouth with a tiny "go away" hiss. I met Lance in 2010. He is most active in spring. If you go to the Desert Botanical Garden, take a stroll on this trail, and enjoy the beauty of the place Lance calls home.



(Un)Common Raven – Corvus corax
Watercolor and colored pencil, 18" x 17"

May, 1985, Delicate Arch, Arches National Park, noon-ish. I hiked alone to Delicate Arch and stopped a distance away to sketch it. I shared my snack of nuts and raisins with a raven as two hikers, a man and a woman, passed us by. We watched as they stopped to unload their backpacks. The woman held up her golden glittering crescent moon necklace, which broke as she removed her pack. She laid it on a rock nearby as she and her companion headed for the arch, cameras in hand. I watched spellbound as the raven flew to the necklace, scooped it up, and flew into a nearby canyon. The couple returned and I told them of the bandit raven stealing the moon. Together we scanned the canyon walls and soon the raven flew out from a crevice in the rocks. We delighted in imagining a nest filled with untold treasure. This memorable event was the inspiration for this illustration and I became a docent at Tracy Aviary in Salt Lake City shortly thereafter. Within a year, I was handling the education birds at the aviary, which included Red, the Red-tailed Hawk, Caesar, a Great Horned Owl, an Elf Owl named Pee Wee and a very stubborn magpie named Lucille. I took them to schools and scout meetings in my Volkswagen van. Thus began a love of birds with a special fondness for ravens.

Maricopa Audubon Society

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miscellaneous

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.maricopaaudubon.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•dition* 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•dition*. "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•dition* 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•dition* 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•dition* Editor, Gillian Rice: editor.Wren•dition@yahoo.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

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