



# The Cactus Wren·dition



Volume LXIX, No. 1

Spring - 2015



*Least Bittern*

*Photo by Ray Spencer*



# Programs

programs

**Programs are held at:** Papago Buttes Church of the Brethren, 2450 N 64th Street, Scottsdale, AZ (northwest corner of 64th Street and Oak Street, which is between Thomas Road and McDowell). Come and join us, and bring a friend!

**March 3, 2015**

## Cindy Marple Pelagic Birding

Oceans and seas cover more than two-thirds of our planet's surface. Many bird species make their homes in this watery world, some coming to land only to breed. This program is an introduction to the four seabird orders, illustrated with photos from around the world and close to home. See some of the adaptations these birds have to cope with life at sea. For us to see many of these birds, we need to take a boat trip on the open ocean: a pelagic trip. The program will also cover how to prepare for and what to expect on a pelagic trip and where to find one.

*Nature photographer Cindy Marple teaches Intermediate Birding for the City of Chandler Recreation Department. Seabirds have become some of her favorite birds, most notably albatrosses and penguins. She has made several trips to the southern hemisphere to photograph them and learn more about all seabird families.*

## Committees/Support

**Arizona Audubon Council Rep**  
Emerson Stiles  
[estiles2@hotmail.com](mailto:estiles2@hotmail.com)

**Bookstore**  
Mel Bramley  
480 969-9893

**Hospitality**  
David Chorlton  
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**Web Page**  
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480 968-5141  
[burge@burgenv.com](http://burge@burgenv.com)

**Maricopa Audubon Website**  
<http://www.maricopaaudubon.org>

**"Let nature be your teacher"**  
*William Wordsworth*

## 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.



*Black-footed Albatross*

**April 7, 2015**

## Amanda Moors Mexican Spotted Owls

Since the early 90s, Amanda Moors has studied the Mexican Spotted Owl, one of Arizona's most rare, charismatic, and misunderstood species. With US Fish & Wildlife Service permits, she has conducted surveys for Native American tribes, the federal government, and even local ranchers in Gila County. Amanda will explain how she surveys the owls, their biology, and how they react to some of the state's largest wildfires. She'll show videos she has filmed and edited.

*As a professional wildlife biologist, Amanda Moors has subdued black bears in Maine with sedative-tipped jab-sticks; carried an umbrella on blue-sky-sunny days to survey shorebirds (you really have to ask her why), and used radio-telemetry in Arizona's Sulphur Springs Valley in order to follow surprisingly elusive - and speedy - Ornate Box Turtles. She's flown aerial surveys counting elk, photographed mountain lions and bighorn sheep, and handled live rattlesnakes. Her video, "When Owls Dream," won a prestigious award from The Wildlife Society in 2010.*



*Amanda Moors with juvenile Mexican Spotted Owl*



**On the Cover:** Least Bittern  
Focal length: 500 mm, 1/1600 sec, f/4.8, ISO 1250  
Guajome Regional Park, Vista, CA, July 2014 by Ray Spencer

**Ray says:** I felt very lucky to photograph a family of fledgling Least Bitterns. They are secretive birds, but they persist in marshlands even close to urban areas. Notice the bird's long flexible toes that help it to climb and run through reeds. According to eBird data, in Maricopa County, Least Bitterns have been spotted at Tres Rios Overbank Wetlands, Rio Salado Project, and Veterans Oasis Park.

**May 5, 2015**

## 61st Annual MAS Banquet and Meeting Guest Speaker: David Pearson My Favorite Birding Spots in the World

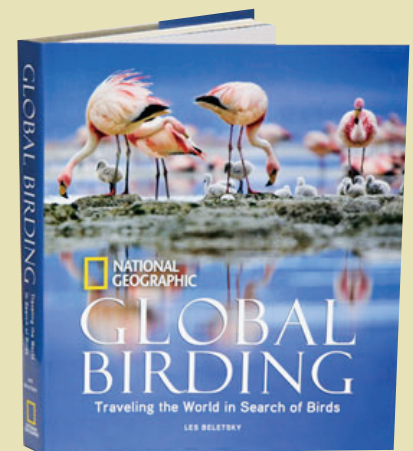
Location: **Franciscan Renewal Center**,  
5802 E Lincoln Dr., Scottsdale, AZ, 85283.

6:00 pm BYOB social hour, raffle and silent auction. Come early to meet old friends and new, and to peruse the auction and raffle tables. Raffle tickets available at the door.

7:00 pm Buffet dinner (includes vegetarian option). Cost: \$28 per person (\$25 for "Friends of Maricopa Audubon"). Reservations are required. No-shows will be billed. You may pay at the door (cash or check) or mail checks payable to Maricopa Audubon Society to: MAS Banquet, c/o Matt VanWallene, 11004 E Villa Park St., Chandler, AZ 85248.

Our agenda will include induction of our new Board and presentation of the Sixth Annual Herb Fibel Memorial Award for Distinguished Service to Maricopa Audubon Society.

*David Pearson is Research Professor in the School of Life Sciences at Arizona State University. His narratives are featured in National Geographic's Global Birding: Traveling the World in Search of Birds by Les Beletsky. Pearson's research uses the*



*interaction of ecology, conservation, ecotourism, and education to develop methods that promote sustainable biodiversity. He has worked on a breadth of organisms from crabs to insects, and Paramecia to birds. He has also studied a range of habitat types including coral atolls and desert grasslands. His current research concentrates on a small group of insects - tiger beetles - in tropical lowland rain forests around the world. He also works on international environmental education exchanges for graduate students and elementary teachers and students that promote critical thinking skills and appreciation of cultural diversity.*

For more information and/or reservations, contact: MAS President Mark Larson, 480 474-4439, [larsonwarren@gmail.com](mailto:larsonwarren@gmail.com), or MAS Treasurer Matt VanWallene, 480 204-1104, [zoutedrop@gmail.com](mailto:zoutedrop@gmail.com)

# President's Message

by Mark Larson



Mark W. Larson

2014 was a difficult year for the Maricopa Audubon Society, no doubt. But it is a new year now with new challenges for the organization. I want us to see those challenges as opportunities, chances to make a difference in more ways than ever before.

For example, your Board of Directors is working on some projects you should know about and, as always, I am interested in your input. The first is a project to install interpretive signs around Tempe Town Lake to help the public identify the birds and other wildlife they see. We are working jointly with the City of Tempe and are just getting started, so there is plenty of time for you to get involved.

Another project we are involved in is training for field trip leaders. We are working with the other Audubon Chapters in the Valley to hold a three-part training course beginning in February. We would like to have more and better opportunities for you and your children to participate in a range of field trips to learn about our natural world: field trips for birds, of course, but also field trips to see and learn about a variety of other subjects such as desert tortoises, dragonflies and damselflies, bats, reptiles and amphibians, and other key components of natural systems.

The Maricopa Audubon Society has been doing such field trips on a limited basis for years. In the coming years we would like to increase both the number and the quality of field trips for our members. To do that we will need more trained leaders.

Contrary to what most people think, you do not need to be an expert to lead a good field trip. In fact, I have been on field trips with some so-called experts that were miserable experiences because the leader had poor people skills or did not communicate well with inexperienced people. What you do need is a strong desire to introduce and share the natural world with others.

If you are interested in helping to design the Tempe Town Lake signs or in becoming a field trip leader, please let any Board member know! 🐦

## Letter from the Editor

by Gillian Rice



Gillian Rice

Recently I went home to England for several weeks to help care for my mother. Even in chilly dark December mornings, the Dunnock, a small bird of hedgerows and gardens, sang its hearty melodious song. While fixing breakfast, I was captivated by Rooks. From the kitchen, I watched about 200 of these large purplish-black corvids become active just before sunrise. They would circle, caw loudly, stretch their wings, and jostle for position on large leafless trees near the town center. As the sun rose: an abrupt disappearance. The Rooks flew to forage in the fields.

My parents and I were delighted to discover a female Blackcap, with her distinctive brown cap, at the bird feeder. Instead of migrating south to Spain,

these warblers are increasing their winter numbers in the UK. Scientists speculate this is because of supplemental feeding. Our Blackcap lived up to its reputation as a bird feeder bully when it tussled with a Robin.

Our favorite bird was the Grey Wagtail by the garden pond. For us, it seemed to radiate happiness as it bobbed its long tail, showing color splashes of bright lemon yellow on its breast and underparts. For protection from harsh weather, this bird of upland rivers and streams moves to lowland farms and towns during winter.

Home. Like our winter visitors to the Valley, feathered and human, I, as a British American, feel as if I have two homes. Does a Brown-headed Cowbird have a home? Tom Gatz investigates. How can we best conserve our home – our environment? Mark Horlings updates us on the Oak Flat situation. Join Gail Cochrane to ponder the beauty of wildflowers that grace our home state at this time of year. Artwork by members of the Southwest Society of Botanical Artists illustrates her story. Vicki Hire reports on her Christmas Bird Count experience; she visited the year-round homes and winter residences of birds in various state locations. Larry Langstaff moved his home to Kansas temporarily and was enthralled by some surprising farmland residents and other expected migrating creatures. Sarah Shiota informs us of an Audubon Arizona project to provide new homes for Burrowing Owls. Matt VanWallene is keen to offer birds the best homes he can with nest boxes for woodpeckers and raptors. Read his heart-warming story about helping Barn Owls. Also, don't miss the art of David Manje celebrating our desert home and the poetry of David Chorlton and Jasper Robinson, which focuses on local birds.

As always, a huge thank you to our contributors. I hope you enjoy the spring issue! 🐦

### The Local Sky By David Chorlton

*East of the front step this morning  
the view between palm fronds and bare  
winter branches was red  
as the gorget on the hummingbird  
who came early to our porch for its first  
early food of the day  
while the clouds  
thickened grey over grey  
and house sparrows flocked at the back  
of the house with many appetites  
and identical plumage.  
On days like today  
light is rationed, allowing barely enough  
to see the thrasher when it moves  
between one bush and another, or to identify  
a verdin as its simple call is swallowed  
by a paloverde straining to be green.  
The day  
progresses, hawk by hawk, Red-tail  
circling slowly, Cooper's gliding two feet  
above the roof and across  
the startled yard, and high up where,  
on other days, the sun would be,  
a Zone-tailed is the sky's  
final secret revealed.*



# 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, Larry Langstaff.
- 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>

## Wednesday, February 25

### First Water Creek, Superstition Mountain Wilderness

Visit this beautiful area located east of Lost Dutchman State Park at the base of the Superstition Mountains near Apache Junction. Birds to look for include resident Canyon Towhee, Costa's Hummingbird, and Phainopepla. Meet at 8:00 am. Done by 1:00 pm. Tonto Day Pass required. Bring lunch, water, and sturdy walking shoes. Difficulty: Easy to moderate. Limit 10.

Leader: Laurie Nessel 602 391-4303, [laurienessel@gmail.com](mailto:laurienessel@gmail.com)

## Saturday, March 14

### Oak Flat

Politically threatened site reliably productive for mid-elevation oak habitat birds including Spotted Towhee, Canyon Towhee, Vermilion Flycatcher and, with luck, Black-chinned Sparrow. Meet at 8:00 am. Done by 1:00 pm with optional extension to other nearby sites. Bring water, sturdy walking shoes. Difficulty: Easy to moderate. Limit 12.

Leader: Myron Scott, 480 968-2179  
[gaia\\_3@netzero.com](mailto:gaia_3@netzero.com)

## Monday, March 23

### Clear Creek and Beasley Flats (near Camp Verde)

This trip includes a shady park with a little stream, and an open area good for sparrows. Chaparral and higher desert should reveal titmice, jays, Bushtits, Spotted Towhees, woodpeckers and other birds we don't see often in the Valley. Previous surprises included a Wood Duck and small flock of Lawrence's Goldfinches. Start about 5:30 am from Scottsdale to start birding after dawn in the Camp Verde area, and return about 3:00 pm. Picnic lunch. Limit 8.

Leader: Kathe Anderson,  
[kathe.coot@cox.net](mailto:kathe.coot@cox.net)

## Sunday, March 29

### Lower Salt River

A close-to-the-city field trip that includes driving along the Bush Highway between Granite Reef Dam and Saguaro Lake, making several stops in recreation areas along the Salt River. Because this is within Tonto National Forest, north of Mesa, participants require a day-use parking pass. As spring migration starts, a day's list of 50 species should be rather easy. Expect Eared Grebe, Lucy's Warbler, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Verdin, Osprey, Violet-green Swallow, Anna's Hummingbird, Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, and Bald Eagle. Bring lunch, and a scope, if available. Limit: 15.

Leader: Richard Kaiser, 602 276-3312,  
[rkaiserinaz@aol.com](mailto:rkaiserinaz@aol.com)

## Saturday, April 18

### Reptiles in the Four Peaks foothills with Randy Babb

Join Randy on a warm spring day in search of the ancient ancestors to birds. The Mazatzal Mountains are home to an astonishing assortment of lizards, snakes, and even desert tortoises. We'll do our best to encounter as many of these fascinating creatures as possible during the day's outing. Wear sturdy walking shoes and long pants for protection from rough brush. Limit: 15.

Register with Larry Langstaff,  
[larrylangstaff1@cox.net](mailto:larrylangstaff1@cox.net) or text to 480 710-0431

## Monday, April 27

### Lower Camp Creek

This is on the way up to Seven Springs, north of Scottsdale. It usually hosts a Zone-tailed Hawk nest in the summer; the birds should have arrived by late April. Other birds include desert species, and in the

creek bottom, under huge shade trees, we can hope for orioles, tanagers, grosbeaks and other migrants that frequent riparian areas. The hike out will be toasty, but doesn't last that long. Difficulty: moderate. Start about 5:00 am from Scottsdale and wrap up at an air-conditioned coffee shop about 10:00am. Limit: 8.

Leader: Kathe Anderson,  
[kathe.coot@cox.net](mailto:kathe.coot@cox.net)

## Saturday, May 2

### Sunflower-Mt. Ord

Among the species we should see are Gray Vireo, Scott's Oriole, Black and Zone-tailed Hawks, and Black-chinned Sparrow. On Mt. Ord we will look for the Arizona warblers as well as migrating Hermit and Townsend's Warblers. Bring lunch. Limit: 10.

Leader: Charles Babbitt, 602 840-1772,  
[cjbabbitt@cox.net](mailto:cjbabbitt@cox.net)

## Third Sundays, May-October (May 17, June 21, July 19, August 16, September 20, October 18)

### Beginning Butterflies and Dragonflies at Gilbert Water Ranch

This area is outstanding for beautiful butterflies, dragonflies, and damselflies. Learn to identify local butterflies including Painted Lady, Queen, and Fiery Skipper as well as common dragonflies and damselflies such as Western Pondhawk, Flame Skimmer, Blue-ringed Dancer, and Familiar Bluet. Suggested \$5.00 donation to support the Gilbert Riparian Preserve. Bring binoculars (close-focus preferred), water, and hat. *Common Dragonflies of the Southwest* by Kathy Biggs on sale for \$10.00. No reservations. Easy. Meet 7:00 am May-September, 7:30 am October at the Dragonfly Ramada just south of the parking lot, east of Greenfield Rd., off Guadalupe Rd., just east of the Gilbert Public Library in Gilbert.

Leaders: Janet Witzeman and Laurie Nessel

## Thursday-Friday, May 28-29

### Globe/Pinal Mountains

Get organized soon for this leisurely foray to Globe and Pinal Peak. Stay overnight at Noftsgar Hill Inn B&B, written up as one of the top 10 B&Bs in an old schoolhouse in the country (\$135 double occupancy). Rosalie, our hostess, absolutely gets the birding schedule and will likely send us off early with coffee, fruit and a

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[facebook.com/MaricopaAudubonSociety](https://facebook.com/MaricopaAudubonSociety)







muffin, and expect us back about 10:00 am for a scrumptious meal. The plan is to bird Boyce Thompson Arboretum or another site on Thursday afternoon, have dinner in Globe and spend the evening at the B&B. If anyone is interested in an evening birding class, we can probably arrange that. I'll work with those who express interest about what topic you prefer. Friday morning, we'll enjoy the lower portion of Pinal Peak up one road early in the morning, and the higher portion of Pinal Peak up another road after brunch. This trip should get us a nice collection of desert to mountaintop birds during the busy nesting season—warblers, vireos, tanagers, woodpeckers, nuthatches and more. Difficulty: Easy. Start from the Gilbert area about 1:30 pm Thursday afternoon and return about 5:00pm on Friday afternoon. Limit: 8. Leader: Kathe Anderson, [kathe.coot@cox.net](mailto:kathe.coot@cox.net)

### Friday, June 5

#### Jail Trail in Cottonwood:

This is a new trail to me, but is a destination for some bird walks at the Verde Valley Birding and Nature Festival. Black Hawks reputedly nest in the area, and other birds should include kingfishers, tanagers, Southwestern Willow Flycatcher and swallows. Cottonwoods line the trail and offer shade; about 2 miles round trip. Difficulty: easy to moderate. Start about 5:00 am from Scottsdale and look for an early lunch (around 11:00 am) in Old Town Cottonwood, before heading back south to arrive about 2:30 pm in the Phoenix area. Limit: 8. Leader: Kathe Anderson, [kathe.coot@cox.net](mailto:kathe.coot@cox.net)

### 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](mailto:laurienessel@gmail.com)

Note: We do not use the email list for anything other than the described purpose.

## Tales From The Field



### Peregrine Falcon By Jasper Robinson

*Silently perched, waiting to take flight,  
A beauty that was wondrous to behold  
Taking off, flying with speed and might,  
A fierce raptor with a spirit so bold  
Landing again, its stare pierced to the soul  
Silently watching with curious eyes  
To be swift as lightning is his main goal  
Filling the air with loud, distinctive cries  
Flying fast and strong, yet soft as can be  
A marvelous wonder for such a small size  
He spots things as far as the eye can see  
Then flies off ready to catch his great prize  
Successful in even an urban land  
To spot one so near was certainly grand*

*Jasper Robinson is studying for her Master's in Environmental Technology Management. She discovered this Peregrine Falcon on ASU's Polytechnic Campus.*

## Maricopa Audubon Society to Hold Elections in April

This year's election will take place at the General Membership Meeting on Tuesday, April 7, 2015. 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, call a member of the Nominating Committee: Mel Bramley 480 969-9893, Ginny Horlings 602 279-2238, or Liz Hatcher 602 482-9357. Be sure to indicate the position for which you would like to be nominated.

All Board positions, except the Editor of *The Cactus Wren•dition*, are elected by the membership. (The Editor is appointed by the Board). 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 currently holds that position. (Contact information for current Board members can be found on the back cover of this edition of the *Wren•dition*).

# Birding the Kansas Corn Harvest

By Larry Langstaff

**M**y wife's cousin has a farm in southwest Kansas. This provides a great opportunity for my wife and me (retired public school teachers) to join the fall harvest and for me to get a lot of birding in on the side. In mid-September 2014 we traveled there for our second season. I really get a kick out of exploring new places with new habitats, and after spending most of the last 37 years in Arizona, I wondered what I could see in Stanton County, while I drove a truck, hauling corn during harvest.

On the very first day this past season, I found a Rock Wren on the cement wall of a silage pit. The year before I discovered one inside an abandoned cement-walled house, beating its feathers on the window as it tried to use that as its exit. It had forgotten that it entered through the open wooden door. I



*Roosting Monarch butterflies. Photo by Larry Langstaff*

seed wheat from my wife's cousin. His curiosity in what I found was satisfied when I told him that I found two raptors, two species of owls, and two fish-eating birds around his ponds. Besides a first county sighting of a Black-crowned Night-heron by his pond, there were many smaller birds in the trees that probably would classify that site as a "migrant-trap." I will most likely revisit his ponds next fall to record them.

As a former science teacher, I am interested in helping collect information about birds wherever I am. In order to do that, I contribute all my sightings to Cornell University's Citizen Science Project, eBird. Stanton County has not had much birding coverage in the past. During the 2013 harvest, my contributions included the first sightings for eight species: Belted Kingfisher, Wilson's Snipe, Mountain Bluebird, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Sandhill Crane, American Pipit, and Peregrine Falcon, and on the last day of harvest, hiding in the last field of standing, unharvested corn: an American Bittern!

Species I recorded most often in 2014 were Horned Larks, Western Meadowlarks, and Eurasian Collared Doves. I saw three species of owls within 10 miles, including nine Burrowing Owls in a prairie dog town in the Cimarron National Grasslands. Barn Owls nest in abandoned well-houses. Back in 1995, while visiting there, I inspected two different abandoned well-houses about a half mile apart, and found two adult Barn Owls and seven owlets in each of them! They continue to nest there, adding to the piles of pellets in the well-houses each year. One early afternoon I discovered an adult Great Horned Owl roosting on the ground. It was in tall weeds on the north-facing slope of a dry drainage pond, at the edge of one field. Another day I found an electrocuted Great Horned Owl on a power pole. After the bird dropped to the ground, we were able to inspect its talons, beak, and the silent-flight-inducing fringed leading edge of its wings.



*Great Horned Owl, edge of wing feathers. Photo by Larry Langstaff*

entered the small house and shooed it back out the door, but I sure didn't expect to find Rock Wrens in the flat farmland of Kansas!

Besides the migrating passerines that I found this fall sheltering in trees among the farm fields and around farmhouses, I discovered hundreds of Monarch butterflies. On several evenings they folded their wings to rest for the night on the lower hanging leaves of the prairie-native linden trees planted in the yard of the farmhouse where we stayed. I reported their migration stopover to Project Journey North.

I was surprised to find a White-breasted Nuthatch and a Lincoln's Sparrow in locust trees by a wash winding through some Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) land (see sidebar). Other species I saw on or over the CRP land near that wash included: Western Meadowlark, Horned Lark, Northern Harrier, Prairie Falcon, and Northern (Red-shafted) Flicker.

Open water is scarce in that county, but a neighboring farmer has two ponds supporting lush growth of cottonwood, willow, ash, and Russian olive trees. I asked permission to walk around them one Sunday when I wasn't driving a truck. The next day I talked to the farmer when he stopped to buy some



*Great Horned Owl talons. Photo by Larry Langstaff*





*Sandhill Cranes at sunset. Photo by George Andrejko. Photo courtesy of the Arizona Game and Fish Department.*

Besides using eBird to maintain my life lists for Stanton County and Maricopa County, eBird is valuable to me for:

- 🦋 Comparing sightings with other birders;
- 🦋 Checking what birds can be expected in states, counties, or "Hotspots" that I expect to visit;
- 🦋 Viewing maps for specific species distribution;
- 🦋 Learning what rare birds are being seen where;
- 🦋 Reviewing which birds I have seen in different counties, states, countries, and at dozens of "Hotspots", like the Riparian Preserve at the Gilbert Water Ranch (where more species (299) have been reported than in any specific site in Arizona).

During the corn harvest in late October 2013, I stood in a field talking with another trucker about his lifetime of experiences driving a semi, when I heard what sounded like teenage girls talking behind me. I turned around and looked. Of course, I saw none. Then I thought someone must have left a radio playing in one of our nearby trucks. Well, that wasn't true either. Then the sound increased enough so that I could pinpoint it coming from somewhere up in the sky. I searched, and to my astonishment, saw about sixty squawking Sandhill Cranes flying south about 40 meters above us. After that, I watched for cranes every day!

In the fall of 2014, although I recorded five more first sightings for Stanton County in eBird, the best part of birding during the corn harvests was observing the migrating cranes. Cold fronts seem to push them south, and finally, on the very last day of harvest, November 2, late afternoon views showed cranes on the move. With my Steiner 10 X 50 binoculars, I sat on the top of my truck waiting for my next load. I looked across the fields for miles into the distance, to the north, west, and east. I counted over 2000 Sandhill Cranes nearing the southern Kansas border. Very soon, it was time for me to join the migrating cranes and go on my own journey southwest to Arizona. 🦋

*Larry Langstaff, the grandson of two Montana homesteaders, taught Junior High Science for Mesa Public Schools for 26 years, and enjoyed sharing knowledge of birds, bugs, and botany with his many students.*

## The Conservation Reserve Program

**T**he National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition explains: "In some parts of the country, marginal, highly erodible lands are not ideal for agricultural production – it's better for the long-term health of the soil to keep them covered with grass or trees year-round. In more productive fields, conservation buffers – like riparian buffers, grassed waterways, and contour grass strips – are often needed to prevent sediment and nutrients from polluting water bodies. The primary purpose of the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is to conserve and improve soil, protect water quality, and provide wildlife habitat by establishing long-term cover, primarily grasses and trees, on highly erodible land or land in need of conservation buffers that has previously been in row crop production. In exchange for cost-share and rental payments, farmers remove environmentally sensitive land from production and plant resource-conserving land cover to protect soil, water, and wildlife habitat." Source: <http://sustainableagriculture.net/publications/grassrootsguide/conservation-environment/conservation-reserve-program/>

# Spring Wildflowers: A Sonoran Desert Sensation

By Gail Cochrane

The Southwest is known for stunning blooms of wildflowers, brilliantly colored and tended by nature alone. Seeds of lupine (*Lupinus arizonicus* and *Lupinus succulentus*), owl's clover (*Castilleja exserta*), larkspur (*Delphinium scaposum*), desert sunflower (*Geraea canescens*) and poppy (*Eschscholzia californica* ssp. *Mexicana*) lie dormant in the soil, waiting for the perfect conditions to germinate. About once every ten years we get the rainy fall and winter that allow glorious blankets of flowers to sweep across the landscape.

The seeds of these gaudy spring annuals must germinate in the fall. They need a good drenching rain sometime between September and early December, of at least an inch. They further require continued substantial rains every month through March. Even then, drying winds

may stunt the tiny plants, especially cold winters can inhibit the growth of the seedlings, or a robust population of seed eating animals can decimate the seed stores. The hoped-for displays of colorful blooms cascading across the low desert are the result of well-spaced winter rains, mild temperatures, and windless days. Recognizing the exacting conditions makes the showy annual displays all the more miraculous.

Winter rains fall on the Sonoran Desert as a result of seasonal troughs

of low pressure over the western US that push storms normally destined for the Pacific Northwest south across a broad band of the Southwest. This flow of air becomes established and one storm will follow another for several weeks. Soft winter rains fall for days, soaking the soil and bringing snow to the higher elevations. These weather patterns are opposite in character to summer's tempestuous monsoon downpours.

The annual plants that grow as a result of winter rain make up nearly half of our total plant species. Hardly



*Delphinium scaposum*, Tall Mountain Larkspur, 11" x 5," colored pencil, ©Margaret Pope, 1999

noticeable in the shadow of the cornflower blue lupines and gold colored poppies are desert annuals meek and modest. Desert plantain (*Plantago ovata*), buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum*), and fiddleneck (*Amsinckia menziesii* var. *intermedia*) are among the annuals with tiny inconspicuous flowers that bolt to seed without fanfare. All together, these plants provide a tasty biomass that is the foundation of food for many animals every year.

If the conditions are not perfect, there will still be

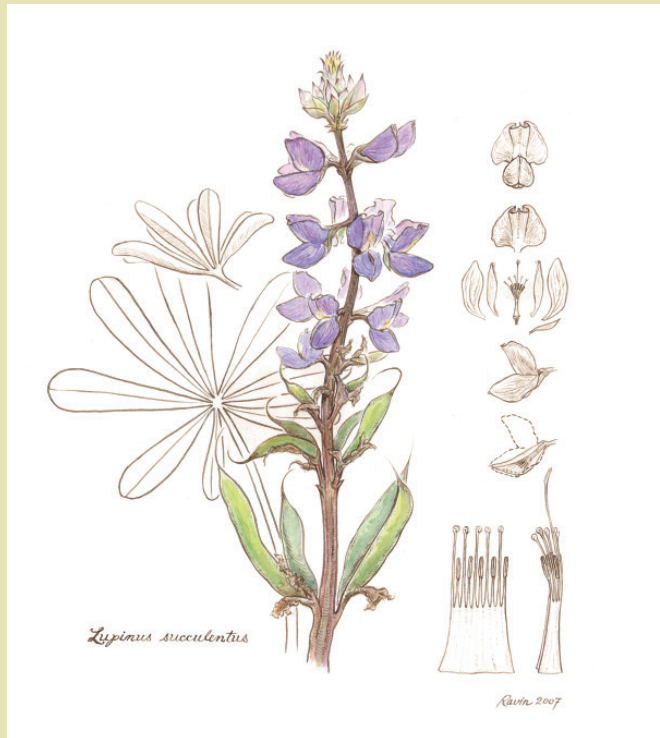


*Eschscholzia californica* ssp. *Mexicana*, Mexican Gold Poppy, Framed size 20" x 15 1/2," colored pencil, ©Cynthia Hartwell 2011.



a limited bloom as the plants strive to produce a few seeds for the following years. During drought winters the seeds wait in the soil the entire year, and longer. In some areas hundreds of thousands of accumulated seeds are contained in a single square meter of desert soil. Critters such as the harvester ant, kangaroo rat, and sparrow survive on these seeds and may themselves become food for insectivores, reptiles, raptors, and mammals.

The uncertainty of the winter rainfall is mirrored in the reproductive cycles of many desert plants and animals. Gambel's Quail that forage on tender plant sprouts and feed their young protein rich seeds won't reproduce in very dry years. They instinctively know there will not be



*Lupinus succulentus*, Arroyo Lupine, Framed size 16" x 20," watercolor and walnut ink, ©Deborah Ravin, 2007

enough food for their chicks. Other species of birds and mammals breed less often or not at all during droughts.

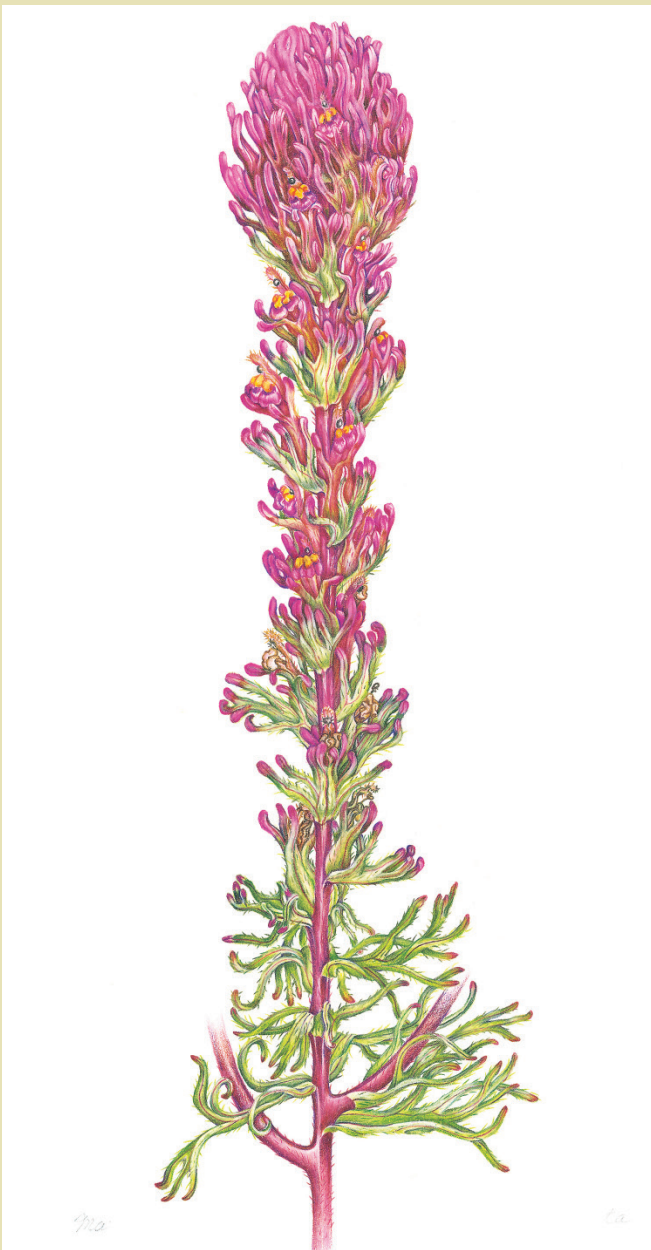
For all their unpredictability, the two rainy seasons contribute to a diversity of plant forms in the Sonoran Desert that supports a rich population of wildlife. Rainfall in the different seasons generates two dissimilar crops of blooming plants. In addition, the various methods plants use to deal with limited water and extreme temperatures provide great variety in plant structure, from fragile annual wildflowers to stately saguaros. Diversity is then increased among pollinating insects, nectar eating birds, bats, and small mammals that have relationships with the plants. These creatures provide a prey base for larger birds, reptiles, and mammals. In this way, biannual rains allow the Sonoran Desert to support a more varied ecosystem than any other desert. 🐦

A Sonoran desert enthusiast, Gail tries not to miss nature's daily dramas. She blogs at [www.onelookout.com](http://www.onelookout.com)

#### Further reading:

Phillips, S.J. and P.W. Comus, eds. 2000. *A Natural History of the Sonoran Desert*, Tucson: Arizona Sonora Desert Museum Press.

Shubinski, R. 1995. *Desert Wildflowers*. Arizona Highways.



*Castilleja exserta*, Owl's Clover, 10" x 5," colored pencil, ©Margaret Pope, 1997

# Raising Owlets is Not Easy

By Matt VanWallene

Six years ago *The Arizona Republic* published a picture that caught my attention. A man on top of a cherry picker was strapping a laundry basket under the canopy of a palm tree. While trimming that tree a landscaping company had dislodged a raptor's nest. The substitute nest worked and the raptors raised their brood.

Thinking of a palm tree with a raptor nest made me envious. We made a family decision to stop trimming our California desert queen palm. Without its twice-yearly haircut, the palm took about two years to start looking shaggy.

As the tree "matured," we received flyers from tree trimming companies. Business cards appeared in our front door. Then the doorbell started to ring. My wife designed a "Bird Sanctuary" sign, which we obtained from [buildasign.com](http://buildasign.com). I framed and mounted it. The advertising stopped.

At about the same time, the first Barn Owl came to visit. It started to leave pellets under the tree. Three years later, we saw a mating pair. I was exercising the dog at 5:00 am before a birding trip, when the owls flew overhead calling to each other. We didn't return from the trip till after sundown and my birding group saw one of the owls exiting the palm tree.

We continued to find pellets and parts of prey under the tree. Our excitement amplified when we found a couple of

eggshells. Within a week though, two whole eggs spilled out of the nest site. A few weeks later, while cleaning the yard, I found an owlet that had fallen out of the nest. It had been there a couple of days. I felt sad. I started to check the tree on a daily basis and just a few days later I found another owlet had dropped and not survived. Mom had

built the nest on the oldest fronds, which had given way with the increased weight and activity.

Through the ensuing months I continued to see pellet and prey activity below the tree and occasionally saw or heard the pair. I did not want a repeat of the nest failure so decided to build a nest box to help the couple along. Within a month, a bee colony moved in. I thought about letting the bees live there, but I have a neighbor who is allergic to bee venom and so I removed the nest.

In early May, some eggshells were found on the wrong side of the tree. The parents had not moved into the nest box as I had hoped. In hindsight, I should have mounted it on the east side of the tree, which is the preferred nest location. On Sunday afternoon, May 11, I found an owlet. It was dehydrated and had been bitten

by ants. I was heartbroken. I could not put the owlet back in the nest, as the site was very unstable. I wrapped it up and drove 32 miles to Liberty Wildlife, a place I knew well. It was 6:30 pm; I was lucky to get there before the take-in window closed. The whole experience was very unsettling.

Barn Owls lay 5-6 eggs, each two to three days apart. I knew I still had hope of a fledgling because of the detritus below the nest site, but just five days later, again in the afternoon, I found another owlet on the ground. The research I had done on Barn Owls mentioned the frequency of this problem but it still did not prepare me. This one was in much better shape than the one from five days prior, but the dark cloud of dread that accompanied me on my first trip to Liberty Wildlife was with me again.

I had wanted to call to see how the first owlet was doing, but those beautiful folks at Liberty can take in more than 100 patients on a given day. I knew they had more important things to do. So the second patient was wrapped up and taken on the long drive to care. I went through the normal check-in procedure. Then Jan Miller,



Bird Sanctuary. Photo by Matt VanWallene



Nest box built by Matt VanWallene. Photo by Matt VanWallene





the Animal Care Coordinator, came to the window. She said "Are you the one who brought in the owlet last week?" I said "yes," but my mind was racing. "Would you like to see it?" asked Jan. Unbelievable: she came back with both owlets.

Over the next two months, activity continued at the nest site. On July 4, an owlet fledged with a very poor landing in the crown of a short Mediterranean fan palm. It gathered its wits and flew off into a neighbor's pine tree. The next day I got a great photo of it roosting in a pecan tree next to the nest site. We heard the fledgling nightly asking to be fed. It takes about a month for the fledgling to become independent.

Throughout this period the two rescues were in the back of my mind. I got a call from Liberty in the first week of September to ask if I wanted to participate in the

owlets' release. I was ecstatic. Not only did they survive, but for me to be able to participate in a release was amazing. To make things more exciting, Liberty asked that I recommend a location close to my home for the release. A friend of mine, Vicki Hire, suggested a farm off Queen Creek Road managed by Bill and Betty Turner. Both in their 80s, they have farmed in the southeast Valley for more than 40 years. They had just lost their son the week before.

Skeptical at first, Betty quickly warmed to the idea of hosting a release site. Two days later we gathered before sundown. Terry Stevens, Operations Director of Liberty Wildlife, arrived with the birds in separate transportation boxes that contained two mice for a snack. Betty was given the first bird to release. The bird, a female, was extremely vocal, with Betty

doing her best to calm her. A lift, and the bird took off. I was given the second bird. My heart was racing. To have a raptor just a foot from my face was exhilarating. I lifted and opened my hands. He was free. 🦉



Rescued owlet.  
Photo by Matt Van Wallene



Liberty Wildlife foster mother Barn Owl with Matt's rescued owlets (back left, and back right). Photo by Jan Miller



Matt VanWallene releases Barn Owl. Photo by Terry Stevens

Matt VanWallene and his wife, Bobette, have lived in their southeast Valley home for 30 years. Their latest project is attracting a nesting pair of American Kestrels. They have already had a successful brood of Gila Woodpeckers fledge from a nest box. If you are interested in attracting birds to your home, go to [nestwatch.com](http://nestwatch.com); it's a wonderful site that guides you to success.



# Cowbirds — Poor Parenting Or Genetic Ingenuity?

By Tom Gatz

In 1974 the first known nest of a chubby, quail-sized seabird called the Marbled Murrelet was found 150 feet up in a Douglas fir tree in California's Santa Cruz Mountains, south of San Francisco. With that discovery, the nests of all of the species of birds known to breed in North America had been documented. Or had they?

Technically speaking, nests built by two of Arizona's breeding birds, the 7.5 inch-long Brown-headed Cowbird and slightly larger Bronzed Cowbird, have never been found. That's because they don't build nests, incubate their eggs or feed or care for their young. So how do they persist as species? Actually they do reproduce quite well here in Arizona and elsewhere. They have evolved to parasitize other birds' nests and let other species, ranging in size from gnatcatchers to cardinals, do all of the parenting work for them. Female cowbirds literally stalk the females of other songbirds and, once they discover their nests,



*The Bronzed Cowbird, identified by its fiery red eyes, was first recorded in Arizona in 1909 and also lays its eggs in other birds' nests. Photo by Pete Moulton*



*Brown-headed Cowbird. Photo by Denny Green*

they sneak in and either add one of their own eggs or remove one of the host's eggs and replace it with one of their own. Cowbird eggs often hatch before the eggs of most other songbirds so their young get a head start and out-compete the host's young for food. The songbird stepparents

unwittingly feed the largest mouth in the nest bowl, which is usually that of the baby cowbird. Since female cowbirds can lay 40 eggs in a season, they can seriously reduce the reproductive rates of other native songbirds. If a species is already rare due to

habitat loss, cowbirds can push it toward extinction. For this reason, most bird-watchers despise cowbirds; but let's take a closer look at how and why this seemingly despicable behavior evolved. Most ornithologists believe that Brown-headed Cowbirds probably did not seriously affect the populations of most songbird host species before Europeans showed up here with herds of sedentary livestock. It turns out the cowbirds developed their breeding strategy while following the large herds of bison that once roamed the west. The seed-eating cowbirds (formerly called "Buffalo Birds") would also eat grasshoppers and other insects stirred up by the bison. However, the bison never stayed in one place long enough for the cowbird to complete a nesting

cycle. Hence the development of nest parasitism behavior was necessary so they could reproduce without being left behind by their mobile food source, the migrating bison. And the cowbirds never remained in one place long enough to seriously impact local songbird populations.

All that changed when the sedentary herds of domestic livestock arrived, and the cowbirds switched from following the roaming bison to hanging out around cattle pens. Cowbird nest parasitism rates then increased and became concentrated in one place for so long that it began to affect local populations of songbirds. Even in the absence of cows, the supplemental food provided by birdfeeders and agricultural fields can also result in unnaturally high levels of cowbirds. Sometimes, in areas of high cattle concentrations where impacts from cowbirds are serious, wildlife officials need to trap and remove them to lessen their impact on endangered songbird species such as the Southwestern Willow Flycatcher that nests along rivers here in the southwest.

So it turns out that the seemingly wayward parent cowbird is actually genetically "hardwired" to do what is in the best interest of its offspring's survival, as any good parent would do. 🐦

*Tom Gatz has been a MAS member since 1981.*

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



# Resolution Copper Land Exchange Becomes Law

By Mark Horlings

On December 15, 2014 President Obama signed the Defense Appropriation Act for 2015. The Act directed the Forest Service to exchange 2400 acres of land containing Oak Flat and Apache Leap to Resolution Copper Mining.

The land exchange is intended to allow Resolution Copper to build the controversial copper mine near Superior long opposed by Maricopa Audubon Society. Resolution Copper itself has estimated that the land above the block cave mine will eventually collapse and leave a crater two miles wide and 1000 feet deep. Resolution Copper has completed one shaft approximately one and one half miles deep into the ore body. It plans four more shafts.

Mine supporters, including both Arizona US Senators, inserted provisions for the exchange in the Act because several previous bills which dealt with the proposed mine and the taking of Oak Flat as a single issue died in committee. The San Carlos Apaches and other tribes learned that the land exchange had been slipped into the Act in early December and lobbied vigorously against it.

Congressman Raul Grijalva, who led the fight in Congress against the mine for several years, also objected. Congressman Grijalva has stated that he and other opponents are not opposed to mining this ore but that the specifics of Resolution Copper's

plan trample the tribes' concerns and the environment. Despite these objections, once the land exchange became one small part of a 1600 page bill setting the budget and priorities for the Pentagon, passage was assured. Secretary of the



Canyon Towhee. Photo by Vicki Hire

Interior Sally Jewell described the legislative maneuvering over the land exchange "profoundly disappointing."

As enacted, the land exchange provisions shift the debate. The Act provides that 807 acres will be set aside and protected at Apache Leap to recognize that the San Carlos Apache tribe regards this land as sacred. Nevertheless, after considering the 807 acre parcel's location, Vernelda Grant, historic preservation officer of the San Carlos Apaches, said the mine will be "right next door" to Apache Leap and will detract from tribal members' experience.

The Act also requires the Forest Service to prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS). The transfer of federal land to a private entity is a "federal action" and so falls under the purview of the National Environmental Policy Act (a law that covers the entire US). However, the Defense Appropriation Act for 2015 directs the Forest Service to give Resolution

Copper title to the 2400 acres within 60 days after the EIS is completed. After title is conveyed, the land will be private, so presumably opponents would not be able to sue on the grounds

that the EIS was incorrect or incomplete. Once the land becomes private, the public no longer has recourse, including suing, under the National Environmental Policy Act.

Commentators differ on the effects of this provision. Although the Act's sponsors argue that the EIS provides environmental protection, Roger Featherstone of the Arizona Mining Reform Coalition notes that the transfer is mandatory, "not conditional on Forest Service approval." Jeffrey Altschul, President of the Society for American

Archaeology states that the Act "prejudges the outcome of the evaluation." Lawyers and courts will sort out this dispute.

One certainty is that the land exchange will be delayed several years while the EIS is prepared. New legislation sponsored by native tribes or environmentalists may cancel the transfer, as may changing markets. *The Wall Street Journal* (January 12, 2015) reports that copper has been in oversupply for the past four years, that copper prices have dropped 14 percent, and that new mines in Chile and Peru "continue adding to the glut." 🐦

Mark Horlings is MAS Conservation Chair.



Vermilion Flycatcher. Photo by Denny Green

## New Conservation Committee Formed

Bob Witzeman led Maricopa Audubon's conservation efforts for many years with dedication and singular success. Since Bob's death, the MAS Board has sought to ensure that MAS will play an active role in ongoing conservation work, such as Oak Flat and the proposed Resolution Copper mine, and habitat and wilderness area proposals for Tonto National Forest. MAS must also be prepared to respond to future threats to Maricopa County and Arizona's sensitive natural systems.

Robin Silver, MAS Vice President, Lisa Fitzner, and Laurie Nessel worked on many MAS campaigns with Bob Witzeman and know the issues. Other MAS veterans, including Tom Danielsen, have offered help.

Consequently, on December 16, 2014, the MAS Board voted to form a new Conservation Committee. Former Board member Mark Horlings will chair the Committee and serve as a member of the MAS Board. Ideally, those who have already contributed will continue and other MAS members interested in conservation and with time available are welcome to contribute to new and ongoing conservation work.



# All I Want For Christmas Is ... My Christmas Bird Count!

By Vicki Hire



CBC Peck Canyon 2012

**Y**es, Virginia, there is a Christmas Bird Count! And this season it was the 115th annual CBC and my fourth time participating.

If you've never had the opportunity to join the fun and excitement, read on to discover just what you've been missing! As a novice birder and photographer, I was lucky enough to meet a trio of unlikely compadres who were willing to let me tag along on my first CBC in 2012; we have made it an annual event since. It is something I anticipate with eagerness and delight, and I hope we can continue the tradition for years to come.

Our first CBC assignment was Peck Canyon in the Atascosa Highlands, just northwest of Nogales, on January 2, 2012. When I had to roll out of bed at 3:00 am to meet my cohorts at 4:00 am and begin our two and a half drive south from Chandler to Peck Canyon, I was wondering just what I had gotten myself into. But the moment we arrived at the check-in point, the exhilaration of the hunt kicked in.

Jay Miller, one of four team members for our section said, "My first CBCs were in the Phoenix area. Peck Canyon blew me away in the sense that as much as I knew about Arizona this was a place I would have never chosen to go to on my own. I couldn't wait to get my feet on the ground and listen to the hillsides for birds and animals."

That year a total of 54 participants recorded 133 species in the 15 mile diameter circle near the border of Arizona and Mexico. It was the fourth highest total species count ever that year, despite two area sections not covered and the number of participants down from 66 the prior year.

Never before had I seen a Grasshopper Sparrow or a Vesper Sparrow. I soon found out that Peck Canyon had a plethora of them. The highlight of our trip was when a member of our section team, Matt VanWallene, identified a Baird's Sparrow – only the third recorded sighting of the species since the Atascosa Highlands CBC began in 1960!

Afterwards, we joined many of our fellow birders at the Wisdom's Café for an evening dinner and tally of the day's bird species. Exhausted, we drove the 150 plus miles home, content that we done our part in something so much bigger than ourselves. Yes, we were certain we

would do it all over again!

Our commitment continued the following two years. We still were part of the Atascosa Highlands Christmas Bird Count, but were reassigned to Section 7, covering the town of Ruby, including the uppermost stretch of Chimney Canyon and Papago Tanks.



Western Bluebird 2012 CBC



All photos by Vicki Hire

Most notable on that trip was a huge sand dune created by the dumping of finely crushed mine tailings. Says birder, Matt VanWallene, "It felt like a huge scar." However, research conducted by entomologist Justin Schmidt of the Southwestern Biological Institute shows it is also ideal nesting habitat for at least 13 species of sand-loving wasps, and 14 species of velvet ants that parasitize the wasps.

Because this area was private property, Rich Hoyer, compiler for the Atascosa Highlands CBC, had contacted the owners and received permission for us to access their land.

Rich Hoyer followed up with an email to the volunteers stating that the final species count by the twelve teams participating was 142 species, three more than the previous high for this 52-year-old CBC, and more than 11,000 birds! Our section team counted 37 of the 142 species recorded on that December day in 2013.

On January 4, 2015, my birding buddies and I teamed up once again. We volunteered to cover the Dudleyville CBC and for the first time our assignment was close enough for the four of us to perform a scouting trip two weeks in advance to familiarize ourselves with the area.

Team member, Fraser Brooks, our group's technical guru, brought along his iPad and iBird Journal app. With this amazing new technology we were able to explore and map out the latitude and longitude for our section of the CBC circle with precision. This previously would have been very difficult given the terrain.

Mostly desert scrub and bordered on the east by the San Pedro River flowing north into the Gila River, Fraser's initial reaction was "What a crummy area, devoid of birds." However, after we found where the birds were located,



Hermit Thrush 2013 CBC



Brewer's Sparrow 2015 CBC

he exclaimed: "What a beautiful day to go birding!"

Also assigned to the Dudleyville CBC was Muriel Neddermeyer, membership secretary for the Arizona Field Ornithologists. A six-year veteran of CBCs, Muriel has covered Dudleyville,

Superior, and Gila River. When asked to describe her best moment of this year's CBC, she said it was "when we flushed three Common Ground Doves by the river...it was pretty exciting at that moment considering it was slow going with the cold temperatures of the morning."

Of the 51 species my team identified, for me, memorable sightings were a Common Goldeneye, seen only once before at Dudleyville, and four Wood Ducks.

Dudleyville CBC compiler, Doug Jenness, later emailed volunteers with the results: "Our grand total of

116 species was about average, but notably the highest number in four years. However, the number of 5,976 birds was the lowest in all 15 years of the count."

The best part of CBCs is that there's a little something for everyone and compilers will tell you they can use all skill sets. Anyone from the athletic outdoorsman who can hike canyons, to the static birder - there are plenty of



Mine tailings CBC 2013

opportunities for all, and the more eyes, the better the count!

As a fellow birder commented, "With CBCs you get to see the other birders that you have met throughout the years, again and again".

If you want to surround yourself with good people who are doing good work, this is one opportunity that you should not miss. Make a New Year's resolution to participate in the 2015-16 Christmas Bird Count. You won't regret it! 🐦

Vicki Hire is an accountant at Amkor Technology and serves as MAS Publicity Chair.



# Building For Our Burrowing Buddies

By Sarah Shiota



*Banded Burrowing Owl at 24th Street and Rio Salado. Photo by Scott Bartelt*

**B**urrowing Owls: these wide-eyed, eight-inch tall owls are one of the public's favorite raptors and a few of us get the lucky opportunity to share a backyard with them. However, we have become their biggest threat as land clearing for construction and the poisoning of burrowing rodents are destroying the homes of these unique land-dwelling owls. But two major Valley non-profit societies have come to the rescue, working hard not only to rescue threatened owls but also to build new homes for those that must be relocated.

The raptor rescue organization Wild At Heart, Audubon Arizona, and the City of Phoenix have teamed up to fight for the Burrowing Owl. Owls spotted living in areas due to be cleared are captured and cared for by Wild At Heart until they can be released back into the wild in a proper home away from people and construction. Yet, each year Wild At Heart receives a large number of owls and must be able to relocate them quickly despite not always having the resources or manpower to do so. Cue the Downtown Owls Project. Working with a design created by one of the Wild At Heart staff, Audubon Arizona uses the time

set aside for its monthly "conservation workday" every two to three months to construct groups of burrows along the banks of the Rio Salado in central Phoenix. Often bringing out 75-100 volunteers each day, the work goes fast.

Burrows—made from artificial materials such as PVC pipe and overturned paint buckets—are grouped into fours with two entrances facing one direction and the other two facing a different direction. This gives the birds some variety and the opportunity to move burrows in case they feel threatened or if they want a better view

of prey along the riverbank. Each individual site contains an arrangement of four or five groups of burrows. This allows the owls to completely move their burrow location and, since groups of owls are released at each site, it also allows the owls to change communities. Five finished sites containing over 200 artificial burrows exist, with a



*Materials ready for building the owls' new homes. Photo by Scott Bartelt*



*Constructing the owls' burrows. Photo by Scott Bartelt*





*Volunteers at the conservation workday. Photo by Scott Bartelt*

sixth site in the works along the Rio Salado and around the Nina Mason Pulliam Rio Salado Audubon Center. All sites can be seen from walking trails along the river and the owls that inhabit the sites give visitors to Rio Salado Habitat Restoration Area (a City of Phoenix Park) an opportunity to see both the local community's work in action as well as a healthy natural riparian habitat.

The newest part of the Downtown Owls Project run by Audubon Arizona is Burrowing Owl Monitoring, which aims to collect data regarding the owls that use the artificial burrows: Are the tagged owls released by Wild At Heart still living in the burrows? Have any wild owls moved into the artificial burrows? Which burrows are used the most often; which are used the least? How many adult males and females are present at each burrow and have any juveniles been spotted? The data are useful to track the health and abundance of Burrowing Owls along the Rio Salado River, and also give Audubon Arizona a way to assess the success of the artificial burrows and the project as a whole. The data collected at these sites contribute to national data regarding the movement of Burrowing Owls seasonally and over a long period of time in response to human activity, which helps scientists to learn about the species and the human impact on the environment. Volunteers are always needed. Those who want to contribute to Burrowing Owl Monitoring receive an orientation to learn the etiquette of approaching the burrows as well as how to record the data.

I set out this past semester as one of the Audubon Arizona interns responsible for talking to school groups around the Valley and guests at the Center in an effort to encourage community action. What I found talking to students and adults in the area was considerable misunderstanding about native Arizona animals and the environment. Fortunately, that misunderstanding was backed by an enthusiastic willingness to learn and

to actually make a difference in the community. I found that attitude refreshing. Finding out about the Burrowing Owl burrow construction and monitoring projects only made me more excited to get out into the community and share my own knowledge. Although I have only been involved in both projects for a short time, I have witnessed substantial changes being made in each. The October conservation workday saw one of the largest community volunteer turnouts with over 150 guests showing up to help dig and construct burrows! While the monitoring project is still getting off the ground, I know a

number of volunteers already involved in tracking the birds, and countless other school groups planning to become



*Scott Bartelt gives an orientation to owl monitoring volunteers. Photo by Gillian Rice*

involved and using the surveying as an educational opportunity. I can only imagine what the upcoming spring months (and completion of the sixth burrow site and owl release) will look like! 🦉

## Citizen Science Opportunity!

If you are interested in getting your hands dirty digging burrows or monitoring owl activity, please contact Audubon Arizona at 602 468-6470 or visit [az.audubon.org](http://az.audubon.org)

*Sarah Shiota is a nature enthusiast currently pursuing her dream of understanding the natural world and how we fit in it as she finishes up her first degree at Arizona State University.*



# Nature Through the Artist's Eye: David Manje

david manje



**D**avid Manje grew up in Bisbee and lives in the desert of east Mesa. David has exhibited his work for over thirty-five years. He has held gallery representation in Chicago, Jackson Hole, Santa Fe, Los Angeles, and Palm Springs. The Suzanne Brown Gallery and the Joan Cawley Gallery represented David in Scottsdale. He has work in numerous private and corporate collections in North America and abroad. In 1982, David started the drawing, painting, and printmaking program at the Mesa Art Center and was the lead instructor of this program for over 30 years. He designed the architectural infrastructure of the drawing and painting studio, printmaking studio, and the working courtyard for the Mesa Arts Center. In 1989, he founded Arroyo Press Studio, a private printmaking and painting studio where he creates his paintings, prints, sculptures, and drawings.



**Blossom Duet**  
36" x 48" Oil on Canvas

*Blossom Duet is a painting of a night blooming cactus. The fragility and whispering beauty of the blooms inspired the painting. These paintings always contain vast, dark backgrounds as a reminder of the flower's nocturnal nature. The bloom of the Echinopsis candicans or the Argentine Giant is not seen by all as its delicate nature, aroma, and color are ephemeral and begin to wilt away with the light of dawn.*



**Javelina Petite Jeté**  
22" x 30" Monotype

*This javelina print is known as a monotype print: a one of a kind print (as opposed to a monoprint, which is often used erroneously). I apply ink to the printing plate using an ink brayer, or brush, or wipe the etching or lithographic inks onto the plexiglass plate. These inks are generally quite viscous and must be thinned or in printmaker's jargon, extended. An apt comparison to ink in a can would be thick, cold peanut butter. Depending on the use, different ink modifiers are used. Refined linseed oil is commonly used to extend printing ink. Once the image has been achieved on the printing plate a special printmaking paper is placed onto the plate and slowly run through an etching press, which exerts extreme pressure. In the process of passing through the press the image on the plate is transferred onto the paper. Once the image is transferred there is very little ink left on the plate thus only one print can be obtained. In some cases, the approximate 10% of the ink left on the plate is printed again to achieve what is known as a "ghost print".*

**David says:** For a long time, I saw my artwork as an amalgam of numerous cultural, historical, geographical, and physical elements. It could be set in motion by a walk through nature, a simple contemplation, or a recollection of family stories about a Mexican legend or superstition.

In 2007, I was diagnosed with my first cancers: non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and bone marrow cancer. I survived two more cancers in the following years. During treatment, it was a time to put everything aside and concentrate on matters at hand. In retrospect, I can say that these experiences shed new light on the ordinary and brought me closer to knowing the delicacy and preciousness of life.

I have worked in numerous media but am most drawn to printmaking and oil painting. Printmaking offers an abundance of processes that can lend themselves to individual images. The layering, the forethought, the planning and the process that goes into a print is tantalizing and absorbing. I use and collaborate with many printmaking tools and materials such as various types of printing plates, inks and modifiers, different types of fine paper, brayers, exposing equipment, developing solutions, and always the printing press. Whether an image is achieved from a simple, single-drop monotype or a complicated photopolymer etching or silk-aquatint Collograph, the end result is always extremely rewarding.

Oil painting, on the other hand, is the direct opposite of printmaking in that it is direct and immediate. I never call a painting finished until I have revisited all areas of the canvas a minimum of six times, as images are worked up from general large and dark shapes to the eventual refined forms with many gradations of color, value, and refined detail.

The amalgam of my artwork has become more pure and simpler with the thread of life, mortality, angels, rebirth, flowers, and mystical journeys in flying boats running through my work. I find that printmaking and oil painting allow me to communicate an unending thread of imagery.





**Time at a Glance**  
60" x 48" Acrylic on Canvas

*Time at a Glance* was inspired by the Sonoran Desert's indicator plant, the saguaro (*Carnegiea gigantea*). Massive in scale and life span, its splendor, strength, and beauty still cannot elude the cycle of life. The saguaro too, like us, will succumb to the rigors of life and return its body to this earth. The ribbed skeleton of a saguaro juxtaposed to its living relative is an abbreviated visual statement regarding the perfection of the cycle from life to death.



**Nestled Wonder**  
48" x 36" Oil on Canvas

*Nestled Wonder* is a painting of a fishhook barrel cactus blossom (*Ferocactus wislizenii*). This blossom is a reminder of the perfection and the balance of the arid desert where adversities are met with properties equal in proportion to protect and allow its flora and fauna to flourish. This painting illustrates the wonderful and effective protection surrounding the blossom.



**Pair of Jacks**  
27"x17"x13" Cone 6 stoneware

*Arroyo Press Studio* is perched over a desert arroyo that, depending on the season, becomes a busy thoroughfare for javelina, bobcat, and jackrabbit. The less shy of the bunch like to come close to the studio and graze from quail seed blocks, drink, and lay in and around the dense cholla, saguaro, palo verde and creosote. I love to watch their antics as I sketch or photograph them. As I began to see these animals appear in my paintings and prints, it simultaneously beckoned working 3-dimensionally in clay, which I had put on hold for about thirty years. It was not long before I utilized the wonderful clay facility at the Mesa Arts Center where I have enjoyed bringing my desert friends to life. The "liebres," Spanish for jackrabbit, are constructed using a clay slab method. Once the hollow torso is complete and leather hard the rest of the form comes together. They are great fun as I like to imbue an anthropomorphic quality to them. Their eyes carry most of this attribute as they stare away or at each other only in liebre wonderment. I use a high-fire stoneware clay that is fired to cone 6 in an oxidation atmosphere. I like firing at this range as the shrinkage loss of the clay is much less than at higher temperatures. Cone 6 is also hot enough to vitrify or harden the clay making them impervious to weather and perfect for outdoor sculpture.



## 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 Papago Buttes Church of the Brethren, 2450 N 64th Street, Scottsdale, AZ (northwest corner of 64th Street and Oak Street, which is between Thomas Road and McDowell).

Please contact a board member if you have any questions, or check out our web site at [www.maricopaaudubon.org](http://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](mailto: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.wrendition@yahoo.com](mailto:editor.wrendition@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

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

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