



# *The Cactus Wren•Dition*

*Summer 2003 • Volume LII, No. 2*

**CONTENTS:** [Events & Programs](#) • [From the Editor](#) • [Notes & Announcements](#) • [Gilbert's Feathered Friends Festival](#) • [Let's be "Friends"](#) • [Photo Quiz](#) • [Conservation - Southwestern Willow Flycatcher at the Crossroads](#) • [Classified Ad](#) • [Catering to the Neighbors](#) • [AZ Special Species - Three-toed Woodpecker](#) • [Photo Quiz Answers](#) • [Field Trips](#) • [Receipts & Expenditures for the Fiscal Year Ending 5/31/02](#) • [Field Observations](#)



**Black-capped  
Gnatcatcher**

photographed by **Jim Burns**  
at Patagonia Lake State Park  
in Arizona in January, 2003  
with Canon EOS 1V body,  
Canon 400mm f/2.8 lens and  
Fujichrome Velvia film.

## NOTES & ANNOUNCEMENTS

**Birdathon:** Don't forget to turn in your pledges to our treasurer, Herb Fibel, 1128 E. Geneva, Tempe, 85282. Pledge forms can be picked up at the monthly meetings, downloaded from our web site

[www.maricopaaudubon.org](http://www.maricopaaudubon.org), or mailed by request. Pledges must be received by May 14th to be eligible for prizes will be awarded in May for various categories including the most species seen, the best bird seen, most lifers seen, most money raised by an individual or a team, most hours spent birding, etc. See last month's Wrendition for a list.

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

**ABA Annual Convention** - June 2-8, 2003, in Eugene, Oregon. Call the ABA or check their website for more information.

**More birding and nature festivals.** [www.americanbirding.org](http://www.americanbirding.org)

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

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

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

### Gilbert's Feathered Friends Festival

By Laurie Nessel

**M**embers of Maricopa Audubon Society volunteered at the third annual Feather Friends Festival at the Gilbert Riparian Preserve at Water Ranch on March 29th. Of all the venues for table events, this is one of the most pleasant. The MAS table overlooked one of the recharge ponds. We had excellent views of a Snipe in the morning. Volunteers lead bird walks for adults and scouts. The best part for me was watching the utter surprise of a woman strolling the path when she happened to notice one of the Burrowing owls that have been relocated by Greg Clark to several burrows just feet from the paths at the Water Ranch. Thank you, volunteers, who stayed the entire event and brought their own scopes to share with the visitors? Don and Gloria Traicoff, Ann Peyton and Craig Fischer, Marjorie Eckman, Ginny Horlitz, Marceline DeWater, Bob Witzeman, Mike Rupp, Andrea Nesbitt and Theona Vivial. And a special thanks to Mike Rupp who donated 20% of the proceeds from sales of his "Birds-Eye Guide to 101 Birding Sites" and to Janet Witzeman who donated the proceeds of the sale of her "Birds of Phoenix and Maricopa County".

### Let's Be "Friends"

By Herb Fibel

For those of you who did not receive the last Wren-dition, you need to know that this will be the last Wren-dition you will ever receive in the mail, unless and until you become a "Friend of Maricopa Audubon". The short explanation is that in the near future National

## PROGRAMS

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

Join us for a pre-meeting dinner at Pete's 19th Tee, 1405 N Mill Avenue, Tempe (at the Rolling Hills Golf Course) starting at 6:00 p.m. Except for the September meeting which will be our annual potluck starting at 6:30. Each attendee is invited to bring a platter of his or her favorite h'ors d'oeuvres, sufficiently large enough to serve at least six people. We'll provide the eating utensils, the plates, and the drinks, bring a friend and enjoy swapping birding stories. The regular meeting will begin at 7:30

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

To conserve space, only a short list of our speakers and topics is included in this edition of the newsletter. A summary of each speaker's topic will be available on our web site ([www.maricopaaudubon.org](http://www.maricopaaudubon.org)) and in the next Wren•dition. Have a safe and birdy summer – we'll see you all next September!

### PROGRAM TOPICS September 2003 through May 2004

**September 2, 03:** David Reesor "Birds of Iceland." "Along the Santa Cruz River: Its Birds and Reconstruction Efforts"

**October 7, 03:** David and Jen MacKay "Birds and Natural History of Northwestern Mexico" **February 3, 04:** Peter Friederici "Those Exotic, Thick-billed Parrots of the Sierra Madre"

**November 4, 03:** Kathy Groschupf "Identifying Bird Sounds in the Field." **March 2, 04:** Bob Witzeman "Sky Islands of Arizona: Their Life Zones and Birds"

**December 2, 03:** Gary Rosenberg "Digital Photography Through a Telescope: A Tour Leader's Travels from Alaska to Peru." **April 6, 04:** Pat Graham "The Nature Conservancy in Arizona: Past, Present and Future"

**January 6, 04:** Ann Phillips and Kendall Drosen **May 4, 03:** Kenn Kaufman ????? (Stay Tuned!)

*From The Editor*

By Deva Burns

*"A man could be a lover and defender of the wilderness without ever in his lifetime leaving the boundaries of asphalt, powerlines, and right-angled surfaces. We need wilderness whether or not we ever set foot in it. We need a refuge even though we may never need to go there." - Edward Abbey*

Continuing urban sprawl, inadequate groundwater laws, restrictive state trust grazing leases, state park closures, seemingly interminable attempts to raid the Heritage Fund. These are a few of the issues that effect the state of conservation in Arizona. But you shrug your shoulders thinking, "What can I do?" Well, you can start by participating in elections. As a non-profit 501C-3 organization, we cannot endorse candidates, but we can encourage you to get involved. Register to vote if you haven't already (deadline August 12th). You can download forms from the secretary of State's website ([www.sosaz.com](http://www.sosaz.com)). Get to know the candidates in your district, contribute \$5 to their clean elections campaign (deadline August 22nd). Vote in the primary Sept. 10th (early voting begins August 8th) and the general election Nov. 5th (early voting begins Oct. 3rd). You can request an early ballot from the county recorder <http://recorder.maricopa.gov/absentee.htm> 602.506-3535 and vote from home. Vote in the primary Sept. 10th and the general election Nov 5th. Several useful sites include the non-partisan Arizona League of Conservation Voters <http://www.azlc.org/scorecard/score1.htm> for the 2002 Arizona Legislative Scorecard. Also, the Grand Canyon Chapter of the Sierra Club has a comprehensive guide to the 2002 legislative session and scorecard on your representatives [http://arizona.sierraclub.org/political\\_action](http://arizona.sierraclub.org/political_action)

On the ballot is a legislative sponsored initiative involving land exchanges of state trust

lands. The legislature has tried to amend the constitution through ballot measures to allow state land swaps four times since 1990 and four times the public saw the inadequacy of those measures and rejected them. Amending the constitution requires a proposition that limits three-way land swaps which usually favor developers, that allows for greater public review and a complete environmental impact analysis. MAS opposes this initiative.

Another way to get involved, from the comfort of your home, is by subscribing to the Audubon Activist Alert. You will receive late breaking alerts requesting that you contact your representatives concerning environmental legislation. Call Shawn Baur at **602.828.3607** or email [shawnbaur@hotmail.com](mailto:shawnbaur@hotmail.com). Thank you, Shawn, for your diligence on the many important local as well as national issues that effect our environment.

I look forward to serving you as President of Maricopa Audubon Society. Have a good summer and I hope to see you at the September potluck. Please feel free to contact me or anyone on the board with suggestions, comments, articles fro the newsletter, program ideas or volunteering opportunities.

## COMMITTEES/SUPPORT

### Activist Alert:

Shawn Baur  
602-828-3607  
[shawnbaur@hotmail.com](mailto:shawnbaur@hotmail.com)

### Arizona Audubon Council Rep:

Herb Fibel  
408-966-5246  
[herbertsfibel@aol.com](mailto:herbertsfibel@aol.com)

### Audubon Phone 480-829-8209

### Book Store

### Field Observations

Janet Witzeman  
602-840-6089  
[jwitzeman@aol.com](mailto:jwitzeman@aol.com)

### Hospitality

### Web Page

Michell Fulton  
480-968-5141  
[webmaster@maricopaaudubon.org](mailto:webmaster@maricopaaudubon.org)

Maricopa Audubon Web Site  
[www.maricopaaudubon.org](http://www.maricopaaudubon.org)

Maricopa Audubon Society is a non-profit, tax exempt, 501(c)(3) organization. In 2003, we celebrate 50 years of enjoying birds and protecting the habitat on which they depend.

## AN INVESTMENT IN THE FUTURE

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

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

1

Audubon will no longer share a portion of you national membership dues (the funds we used to use to finance the publication and mailing of your Cactus Wren-dition). If you wish to receive future issues of the Wren0dition, you must become a "Friend". You can do so by sending a check payable to Maricopa Audubon Society for \$20 or more to Herb Fibel, Treasurer, 1128 E. Geneva Dr., Tempe, AZ 85282. Doing so will assure that you receive future issues of the Cactus Wren-dition through May of 2004.

If you did receive the last previous newsletter, and still haven't sent in your "Friends" check, be aware that this will be the last issue of the Cactus Wren-dition that you will receive.

As of this writing (April 3, 2003) MAS has made 113 new "friends". In addition, we've 'grandfathered' in 24 other people who will receive future issues of the Wren-dition, but only through December 31, 2003. They only exception to this rule is our 'comps' (such as libraries, and other Audubon affiliates).

113 out of 2,100 is just a little more than 5% of our nationally assigned membership, but I must tell you that the positive comments about what we're trying to do and about the Wren-dition that accompanied your checks have been most gratifying.

If you have not already done so, please consider becoming a "Friend of Maricopa Audubon". "Friends will receive discounts on merchandise sold by the chapter at meetings, free raffle tickets, and a 10 percent discount on the price of our annual banquet.

We hope to hear soon from each of you out there.

2

## SUMMER 2003 - PHOTO QUIZ

By Jim Burns

**THIS ISSUE'S CLUE**—Those of you following Arizona bird reports on birdwg05 last fall should have seen this one coming. all three of these photos were taken at Boyce-Thompson Arboretum State Park.



A) Good Photo,  
Easy Bird



B) Good Photo,  
Difficult Bird



C) Bad Photo,  
Easy Bird

3

## SOUTHWESTERN WILLOW FLYCATCHER AT THE CROSSROADS

By Bob Witzeman



**Southwestern Willow Flycatcher.** This federally endangered neotropical migrant fights for its survival in the Southwest's few remaining streamside habitats that have not been destroyed by dams, diversions, cattle grazing and groundwater pumping.

Photo credits: Jim Burns

*The problem is not the unavailability of energy resources but, rather, our inability to conserve and use what we have wisely.*

Jeffrey Platts, 1/2/83

Recently it was announced that Verde River water was being emptied from Horseshoe Reservoir into Bartlett Reservoir to prevent flooding the habitat of the federally endangered Southwestern Willow Flycatchers nesting there. Some newspaper writers recently claimed Arizonans would face a water crisis as a result of the Endangered Species Act and the Horseshoe releases.

It turned out no water was lost because the winter's rains were insufficient to flood the bird's habitat in Horseshoe. Besides, the reservoir is usually empty in the area by the start of the flycatcher's late May/June nesting season.

Even if it had been a very wet year, and the reservoir had remained partially filled, the bird's willow lined riparian nesting habitat there represents an infinitesimal fraction of Arizona's 6.8 million acre-foot (MAF) annual water budget.

In dry years the Salt River Project (SRP) and valley cities (Phoenix, not SRP, "owns" the upper end of Horseshoe) can obtain CAP water or groundwater. There is such a surplus of CAP water that homeowners' property taxes here are being raided so it can be pumped 1100 ft. uphill from the Colorado River and sold at giveaway prices to Arizona agribusiness. This enables Arizona to use its huge CAP entitlement. Even now, in drought times, CAP surplus is being recharged into the ground. Ironically, Frank Welsh, author of "How to Create a Water Crisis" points

federally subsidized surplus crops) and alfalfa (the great water glutton) are extravagantly squandered on some two-thirds of that 78%.

Forty percent of Arizona's annual water budget comes from pumped groundwater. Agribusiness and certain cities like Sierra Vista and Prescott extract huge, river-killing amounts of groundwater under Arizona's river aquifers. Barely flowing fragments of Arizona's rivers remain, including the San Pedro, Gila, Salt, Verde, Bill Williams, and Santa Maria.

SRP takes their profits from selling electricity to homeowners and valley municipal users to provide subsidized, below-market priced water for growing primarily surplus and water-wasting crops. The reason for this is that the tax-exempt, federally subsidized SRP is operated and controlled by agribusiness.

Welsh's book points out that if you make any resource artificially cheap, it discourages the market forces which make efficient use of that resource. If gasoline was federally subsidized and sold at 50 cents a gallon, it would defy conservation, and increase pollution and commuting distances. Water costs less to municipal, industrial and agricultural users here in the arid Southwest than in rustbelt cities such as Chicago and New York due to the myriad of federal water and power subsidies here. We surround ourselves with a panoply of artificial lakes, golf courses and Bermuda lawns using our underpriced water.

out that groundwater levels are so high in parts of Phoenix that skyscrapers' basements are flooded.

Currently agribusiness uses 78% of Arizona's water but produces less than 2% of Arizona's income. Most of Arizona's water is used to grow crops that are surplus, glut-on-the-market crops or grown by natural rainfall elsewhere. Water for feed grains and cotton (which are

Our state's streams (including the Colorado River and CAP) provide 3.6 MAF. This is enough to support at least 15 million people and doesn't count the 2.7 MAF of groundwater being pumped here. With conservation we could cram in even

[\(Continued on Page 5\)](#)



### SOUTHWESTERN WILLOW FLYCATCHER AT THE CROSSROADS (continued)

**By Bob Witzeman**

more. Do Arizonans want more traffic gridlock and air pollution? No doubt, by 2050 Arizona will be receiving subsidies like floated icebergs and desalinized ocean water.

Returning to the flycatcher: these birds moved into the former riparian habitat of both Horseshoe and Roosevelt Reservoirs during our recent drought years. The endangered birds were simply returning to the locations where they had lived earlier.

As the result of the recent Roosevelt Reservoir Habitat Conservation Plan (an agreement under the Endangered Species Act between SRP and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service), SRP agreed to temporarily not fill Horseshoe in 2003. The agreement allows SRP to fill those long dry portions of Roosevelt Reservoir and flood the 250 or more endangered flycatchers nesting there. In return for flooding out the endangered bird, SRP will purchase over \$17 million in riparian habitat elsewhere.

As noted earlier, only degraded fragments of Arizona's riverine habitats have survived dams, diversions, groundwater pumping and cattle grazing. Happily, Roosevelt's Habitat Conservation Plan land requires SRP land purchases adjacent to the San Pedro, Verde and elsewhere to retire private riparian lands being destroyed by cattle grazing and by groundwater pumping adjacent to those aquifers (for growing water-greedy forage crops).

## CATERING TO THE NEIGHBORS

**By Ann McDermott**

Over the years, one of my favorite wild neighbors has been the Western Screech Owl. I've had a number of close encounters with it and look forward to more. I hope the human population growth in my area won't preclude that.

I had often heard the 'bouncing ball' call of the owl long before I knew who it belonged to. Especially on nights of the full moon, the calling would go on for extended periods of time. Then I heard Troy Corman imitating a Western Screech Owl while trying to bring up small birds from the bushes during a birding outing, and I finally knew my neighbor's identity.

I've been fortunate to have a few good sightings too. Several times while out on a walk I have passed nearby and been pleased when it didn't flush, but sat still and watched me through eyes closed to the merest slits so that the bright yellow of its irises wouldn't beam right through its attempt at camouflage. And that camouflage is just about perfect too.

The cryptic gray/black/white plumage is tough to see up against the flaky bark of a mesquite trunk or even the gravel base of a driveway, where it once sat while my dogs walked right by it without noticing. I marveled how they had not seen it, then marveled again when it continued to sit still as I walked by, only a few feet distant. It sat as still as a garden gnome, as if it were perfectly safe perched in a tree, instead of perfectly vulnerable, perched in my driveway. Without a doubt, its absolute motionlessness is what saved it from my dogs!

attention. Only about seven inches tall, I really did wonder if my eyes were deceiving me.

Another time a human neighbor and her two-year old son paid a visit. They walked down my patio to my back door, passing by an owl sitting silent and still on the edge of a planter. They stopped, pointed, amazed by the fact that it didn't spook. The son is now three and still points out where he saw that owl.

I have no explanation for these rare occasions of boldness on the Screech Owl's part, but we're all glad to have shared a moment with this tiny member of our community.

A neighbor friend of mine is a carpenter, and when Ken Kaufmanns published his specs for a Western Screech Owl box, I cut out the article and took it over to him. My Christmas present last year was the finished owl box, hung in a palo verde near my home. I do hope someone takes up residence this spring, though I haven't seen evidence of that yet. THAT'S a family I'd love to have next-door.

If anyone is interested in having a Western Screech Owl box made to Ken Kaufman's specifications, my friend, Bob Allen, can be reached at 623-584-1502. He's a talented carpenter, so if you have the specs for any owl box or bird house, he can make it for you. Actually, if you want a wall unit for your living room, he can make that too. But it's the owl boxes that will bring in the most fascinating neighbors you could ever wish to have.

Enjoy spring and all those  
community members nesting in and

## AZ SPECIAL SPECIES - THREE-TOED WOODPECKER

**By Jim Burns**

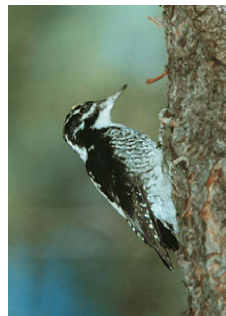


Photo by Jim Burns

I know, I know. Regular readers of this series will be very curious to see how I am going to stretch my oft-reiterated criteria for Arizona's special species--species found only here or more easily here than in any other state--to cover Three-toed Woodpecker. *Picoides tridactylus* can, after all, be found in ten other states across the mountain west as well as eastward along the Canadian border from the Great Lakes to New England. But, throughout that range it is an uncommon and nomadic bird, certainly never easy to find anywhere.

The answer lies in the nature of Nature. Nature is not static. Nature is dynamic and She abhors a vacuum. Her agents of cataclysmic change—water, wind, and fire—periodically create vacuums which She seeks immediately to fill. I would like this series and its criteria to be dynamic as well, responsive to those natural events which affect and change our state's avian life and how we relate to it.

At dusk on September 15, 2002 I stood in a small meadow in the center of the Leroux Burn on the south slope of the San Francisco Peaks outside Flagstaff. Tapping was audible in every direction, subdued but constant, so pervasive through the specter of blackened pines it was spooky. Glassing 360 degrees without changing my position I counted eight Three-toeds and three Hairy Woodpeckers, and I could hear (yes, this is actually possible!) two different bark beetles ratcheting away in their hidden catcombs nearby.

I was able to walk the perimeter of the Leroux Burn, which occurred in June, 2001, in a couple hours. As forest fires go, Leroux would be merely a postage stamp on the vast face of last year's Rodeo-Chediski fire which would take days to explore by auto. You can see where I'm going with this, and the Engraver Beetles are already there, some predating the fire, others having followed the smell of the burning wood chemicals to the smoke's source.

No one is quite sure how Three-toeds find a fire site, but congregate

characteristic. Like Black-backed they lack the inner rear toe of other woodpeckers and, though they do excavate into the wood for their nest holes, they flake bark rather than excavate when foraging, wood-boring beetle larva being the dietary staple. The handful of nests I have found have all been at eye level in blackened snags of burned out pine, and the nest holes have had extensive areas of flaked bark around them.

In Arizona Three-toeds and Hairies are found in the same habitat, but Three-toeds are always quieter and less active than the latter, and will allow much closer approach, often seeming quite tame. Outside of breeding season, mated pairs can be found together maintaining vocal contact and exchanging food items as they feed through an area. I was once privileged to watch a family of four working a burn in Alaska, the adult male "teaching" a juvenile male, the adult female, a juvenile female, the young birds obviously going through trial and error trying to duplicate the parents' flake and forage techniques.

The Three-toed's contact call is a typical woodpecker "pik" reminiscent to me of a Ladder-back or the alarm call of an American Robin. It is deeper and more resonant than that of a Downy, but much softer and lower than that of a Hairy. Three-toeds are clinal across their range in the U.S., our Arizona population being part of the *dorsalis* race, the lightest overall with the least barring on its white back. At first glance, females of Three-toed and Hairy can be confused, but Three-toeds will always have barring on the flanks whereas Arizona Hairies are all white below giving a much "cleaner" appearance. The drumming of these two species reflects their personalities. The Three-toed's is rather soft and deliberate, almost tentative compared to the louder, faster beat of a Hairy.

Prior to our state's recent fires the best places to find Three-toeds in Arizona were the Sunrise Campground off state route 260 between Pinetop and Greer, and on the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest around Hannaagan Meadows

around your house!

### Classified Ad

**Birding and More:** Naturalist journeys, small group or custom ventures combine geology and natural history with quality birding experiences.

Owner/guide Peg Abbott has 20+ years experience providing in-depth knowledge, impressive logistics, great meals and accommodations. Utah, Alaska, Arizona, New Mexico, Galapagos, Ecuador, France, Mexico and more! [www.naturalistjourneys.com](http://www.naturalistjourneys.com), or toll free 866-900-1146, or email at [peg@naturalistjourneys.com](mailto:peg@naturalistjourneys.com)

5

they do, most likely settling in and raising larger broods wherever their nomadic wanderings intersect with concentrations of their beetle prey. Beetles will be at their peak in the Rodeo-Chediski this summer and next. Three-toeds will be too, and they should be easy to find with a little diligence.

*Picoides tridactylus* is one of our rare species actually named scientifically and commonly for an outstanding physical

along U.S. 191 south of Alpine. The accompanying photo was taken in September, 2002 in the Leroux burn, certainly a recent hotspot created for this species by dynamic and unforeseen natural forces. For the next three years the vast Rodeo-Chediski footprint may well be the easiest place in the country to find this much sought, retiring yet tame, fire and infestation specialist of the north woods.

6

## Photo Quiz Answers

By Jim Burns

Cursory glances or occluded views might lead an observer to think these three birds were all of a species, especially if all were seen proximally on the same day. Superficially the three are similar - ground foraging birds with erect postures, dark upperparts, obvious eyering - it could be a whole flock of these guys, or maybe it's an invasion! But let's slow down and cast some critical focus on structure and on the shape and extent of those spots.

### A) Good Photo, Easy Bird

Those of you who have followed this feature from its inception have seen this species before. And you should have immediately noticed this bird's short, conical bill is quite different than the longer, thinner, straighter bills of our other two quiz birds, for sure placing it in a different family than theirs.

This bill shape says "sparrow," and the combination of light bill with lighter lower mandible and the heavy, sharply triangular breast spots resembling mountains on a map which coalesce into one large central spot says "Fox Sparrow." Our January/February, 1999 quiz also featured a Fox Sparrow, with the note that "at least one is reported somewhere around the Valley every winter." This year there were at least three and possibly four wintering at the arboretum. That is a flock for species of bird that isn't considered a flocking species!

End of story? Not quite! Some ornithologists, though acknowledging zones of intergradation, consider the four main subspecies of Fox Sparrow to be separate and distinguishable, and the species may be taxonomically split if and when DNA studies are completed. The "Red" Fox Sparrow, the nominate subspecies, *illaca*, breeds across the northern taiga and winters primarily in the southeast. "Sooty" and "Slate-colored" Fox Sparrows, *fuliginosa* and *schistacea* respectively, breed in the northwest and winter in the southwest. The "Thick-billed" of California, *stephensi*, closely resembles Slate-colored by has a massive bill.

The consensus of experienced birders who saw multiple Fox Sparrows at the arboretum this winter was that there were two Sooties and at least one Slate-colored present. Our quiz birds is one of those Sooties, photographed last October, showing little or no facial contrast and heavy spotting extending all the way down the flanks. Slate-colored often have little or no spotting on the belly and lower flanks, a noticeably paler loreal area, and enough of a lower face pattern to be considered sub-moustachial and malar stripes. My side view slides of our quiz bird showed no wingbar and dorsal contrast, whereas my slides of the Slate-colored showed a faint but distinctive wingbar and a definite contrast between gray back and rump and red wings and tail.

a clean white background, but stops at the lower belly. This description does not fit our second bird, so let's explore the four remaining species which, in addition to Bicknell's, belong to the genus *Catharus*.

Separating the *Catharus* thrushes without benefit of color is going to be an exercise in oversimplification. It will grate on the purists, but remember that the purpose of the quiz is not to make you an identification expert but to give you some starting points, some building blocks, and for this genus of structurally identical species, we're going to have to do it with plumage features.

Veery shows an indistinct eyering and a very weak malar stripe. Its spots are weak and light against a buffy background which is decidedly darker than its white belly. It has gray flanks but its spots do not extend down into the flank area. This is not a Veery. Veery is possible but not to be expected in fall migration in Arizona. It has nested locally in the White Mountains in the past, but not recently. If you see a Veery in Arizona, the Arizona Bird Committee wants documentation.

Swainson's Thrush typically displays the strongest face patterns of the *Catharus* congeners. It will show a warm and distinctly buffy eyering and loreal area which gives the species a pronounced "spectacled" appearance. It has dark spotting which runs together to form streaking against a warm, buffy background which fades to off-white on the belly. Based mainly on our quiz bird's rather plain face, this is not a Swainson's. Swainson's nests locally in the White Mountains and is rare fall migrant.

Gray-cheeked Thrush has no face pattern at all. The eyering is indistinct and incomplete through there may be a thin, dark malar stripe. It is heavily and darkly spotted against a light, buff to off-white background. It has the darkest and most extensively colored flanks of the *Catharus* thrushes. Based mainly on our quiz bird's bold and complete eyering and its very light, probably white, chest color, this is not a Gray-cheeked. Gray-cheeked is an accidental fall migrant in Arizona, not to be expected. If you see a Gray-cheeked Thrush in Arizona, the Arizona Bird Committee wants documentation.

The Hermit Thrush was photographed at the arboretum in January, '02. Without the benefit, in living color, of the contrasting reddish tail, without the consideration of probability, and with the presence of at least half a dozen other Hermies (a veritable flock!), I believe this bird could for sure be passed off as a Gray-cheeked, possibly as a Swainson's, but probably not as a Veery and certainly not as a Woody. Hermies are common breeders in Arizona's mountains, common migrants throughout the state, and are not hard to find in the lowlands in the winter. They are in fact, the only thrushes found in the U.S. in winter. Based on

## Field Trips

By Mark Horlings

### Car Pooling:

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

### Legend:

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

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

### Reminders:

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

### Saturday, June 21

**Seven Springs & Camp Creek.** In the Tonto National Forest, near Carefree. Golden Eagle, Bridled and Juniper Titmouse, and Black-chinned Sparrow are possibilities. Bring lunch. Limit 15. Difficulty 2. Contact leader for information and reservations.

Leader: Laurie Nessel  
(480) 968-5614

### Sunday, June 29

**Hart Prairie Preserve-Flagstaff.** We will meet at The Nature Conservancy headquarters, 2601 N. Fort Valley Road (which is also Hwy 180) in Flagstaff at 7:00 a.m. and carpool to the preserve. Sightings of Clark's Nutcracker, Cordilleran Flycatcher, Warbling Vireo, Western and Mountain Bluebirds and Williamson's Sapsucker are likely. Our leaders have led bird trips at the Hart Prairie Preserve since 1996 and are familiar with the area, a special plus since many birds will be nesting. Bring lunch. Call for reservations and information. Limit 15. Difficulty 2.

Phoenix Contact: Mark Horlings  
(602) 279-2238 ([MHorlings@aol.com](mailto:MHorlings@aol.com))

Leaders: Diana & Bill Herron (928) 774-2182

### Saturday, July 12

**Page Springs.** We will visit the Page Springs fish hatchery near Camp Verde and bird other nearby locations. Possible sightings of yellow-billed cuckoo, Wood Duck, Western & Cassin's Kingbird, and summer warblers. . Spotting scopes are helpful. Bring lunch. We will meet near Camp Verde at 8:00 a.m. and break up in the early afternoon. Limit 15. Difficulty 2. Call leader for information and reservations.

Leader: Herb Fibel  
(480) 966-5246l

### Saturday, August 30

**Ramsay Canyon-Sierra Vista.** August is a great month for fledglings and early migrants. We will meet at 9:00 a.m. at the Nature Conservancy parking lot. Non-TNC members should bring \$5 for entrance. Expect temperatures in the 80's. Bring a lunch, ater, and a poncho or raincoat. We will return in the early afternoon. Limit 15. Difficulty 2. Call leader for information.

Leader: Mark Pretti  
(520) 378-2640

Phoenix Contact: Mark Horlings  
(602) 279-2238 ([MHorlings@aol.com](mailto:MHorlings@aol.com))

## RECEIPTS & EXPENDITURES FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING 5/31/03

By Herb Fibel

I've given up on trying to set forth our revenue and expenditures for the past fiscal year in pie chart form. Here, instead, are the straight dollar figures. Enjoy!

### Receipts

NAS dues share 8,861.00

"Birds of Phoenix" sales 4,015.00

### Expenditures

Wren-dition 10,421.00

Conservation 4,064.00



**B) Good Photo, Difficult Bird**

Were this quiz in color and our quiz bird's tail not partially in shadow, this would not be a particularly hard bird to identify. The thick, straight bill, the icy stare rendered by the proportionately large eye on the relatively plain face, the just-popped-erect posture, and the speckled breast pattern tell us immediately this is one of our spotted thrushes. In fact, those same field marks say the same thing about our third quiz bird too. There are six possibilities. Let's eliminate Bicnell's, based on geography, and see if we can sort out the remaining five.

Our quiz bird has a thin, petite jizz. It shows no face pattern other than its distinct eyering and a thin, dark malar stripe. Its spots are bold and dark against a white background, at least on the chest, but they are not crisp. They run together forming streaks, continue down the flanks becoming indistinct, and fade out against a background which could be gray or brown but is decidedly darker than our bird's white chest.

Wood Thrush is a spotted thrush, but it belongs to the genus *Hylocichla*. It is the biggest of our spotted thrushes, its larger size usually apparent because of its relatively plump body and proportionately large head which often appears peaked because this species raises its crown feathers when agitated. Woodies have bold white lores and eyering, distinctive horizontal black and white streaking on the ear coverts, and crisp, almost perfectly circular spotting that extends down the flanks, all the way on

this bird's white chest, it is probably the Rocky Mountain subspecies. Watch for Hermits' distinctive behavioral characteristic of cocking and then dropping the tail, particularly after landing.

**C) Bad Photo, Easy Bird**

Often when a bird is partially occluded by vegetation, I will take the shot anyway if the face is unobstructed and sharply focused. I always think it's going to look cool to see the sharp eye peering out through the unfocused foreground. Wrong! Either the bird gets lost in the overly busy frame or, as in this case, it looks like I photographed part of my thumb, and the lower half of the bird is soft or muddy. This contrast between sharp and soft never seems to be appealing to the eye, no matter how many ways I try it.

Based on the plumage characteristics we've discussed, how would you describe this third quiz bird? It's all right up there in the paragraph beginning with "Wood Thrush...." isn't it? This is the Woody discovered at the arboretum in the fall of 1991 by Anita Van Auken. The quote from my notebook the day I took this photograph reads "It's great to see this fat, dapper thrush here in the desert after looking at so many plain littler Hermits all these years."

One of my most memorable early birding experiences was seeing all five spotted thrushes within two days on my first trip to Pelee in mid-May of 1981. Another place to study them side-by-side is the upper Texas coast, third week of April. And you might see them together again in this space too.

Fundraising	3,450.00
Conservation donations	3,000.00
Bequests & general donations	2,791.00
Other merchandise sales	1,262.00
Interest	463.00
All other income	436.00
<b>Total Receipts</b>	<b>\$24,278.00</b>

Audit, tax prep. & insurance	1,750.00
Other mdse. Sales costs	1,683.00
Telephone related services	1,048.00
Audubon Council dues	1,038.00
Donations	850.00
"Birds of Phoenix" expenses	698.00
Audubon Adventures	621.00
EFA membership	500.00
Mailing related expenses	180.00
All other expenses	877.00
<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>\$23,729.00</b>

By Janet Witzeman

A Clark's Grebe, uncommon in the county, was discovered with about 250 Western Grebes on Saguaro Lake Jan. 25 (TC). Am. White Pelicans continued to be more numerous than usual. More than 100 were counted at 115th Ave. and the Gila River in mid-December and 70 were still present there in mid-January (TC); 273 were recorded on the Gila River CBC (TC); 36 were reported at Gillespie Dam Jan. 13 (MR); and 24 were seen on Tempe Town Lake Jan. 25 (TC). Brown Pelicans are found only rarely in winter, but this winter three were present all period at Tempe Town Lake (m.ob.). Twenty-eight Neotropical Cormorants were counted in the marsh at the e. end of Tempe Town Lake Jan. 11 (PM,CD) and 29 were observed at 115' Ave. and the Gila River Jan. 21 (TC).

Two Am. Bitterns, rare winter visitors, were discovered in the marsh e. of 115' Ave. and the Gila River Dec. 17 (TH). An immature **Tricolored Heron** was discovered at the confluence of the Salt and Gila Rivers Dec. 17-21 (TC) and provided the first winter record for the state. For the second consecutive year, large numbers of White-faced Ibis wintered in s.w. Phoenix: 80 were counted at the El Mirage Pond Dec. 8 (BG) and 300 were observed at 11 5t' Ave. and the Gila River Jan. 5 (RW,SBU).

Thirty-six Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks were counted at a lake in Ocotillo, s. of Queen Creek Rd. Feb. 9 (LR) and 40 were observed on the pond at the s. entrance to Chandler Airport Feb. 15 (HF,PM *et al.*). There were at least eight Ross's Geese reported in fields west and s.w. of Phoenix during the winter, plus one at Fountain Hills with a small "cackling" Canada Goose Jan. 25 at least to the end of February (TC *et al.*). Four **Trumpeter Swans** were discovered on the Camp Verde CBC Dec. 30 and one was re-found at a nearby ranch pond Jan. 11 where it remained at least until mid-February (TC *et al.*).

In addition to the Eurasian Wigeon wintering in Indian Bend Wash, a second individual was reported at the Gilbert Water Ranch Ponds Dec. 25 (RP). Four Greater Scaup were observed on Gordon Lakes in Avondale Jan. 2 (JT) and the two at the ASU Research Park increased to eight by Jan. 25 (TC). Three White-winged Scoters were found below Parker Dam Dec. 2 (MSt). A Long-tailed Duck was reported at Gila Farms Pond in early December and again Feb. 22 (PD). Seven Hooded Mergansers were counted on the Scottsdale Pavilions Ponds Jan. 19 (TC) and one was observed at the south of Ocotillo and Gilbert Rd. pond Jan. 19 (PM,CD). A Red-breasted Merganser, an uncommon winter visitor, was reported on Tempe Town Lake Jan. 29 (TG).

The pair of Red-shouldered Hawks returned to the Hassayampa River Preserve where they were observed in

w. of Phoenix in December and one was observed n. of Ocotillo Rd. in Gilbert Jan. 5 (PM,CD). One to two Clapper Rails were heard calling in the marsh at 115th Ave. and the Gila River Jan. 5 (RW,SBU). Fourteen Sandhill Cranes were observed in Arlington Dec. 1 (PM,CD).

A late-staying Semipalmated Plover was observed at the Neely Ranch Ponds in Gilbert Dec. 15 (RHu); there have been three previous December records in the county. Two Am. Avocets, rare winter visitors, were seen at the Gilbert/Riggs Ponds Jan. 19 (PM,CD),

four were found at the Neely Water Ranch Feb. 9 (PD), and two were still present there Feb. 15 (HF,PM *et al.*). Twenty-seven Long-billed Curlews were seen w. of the Cobble Ponds Dec. 7 (TC) and a high number of 106 were recorded on the Gila River CBC Dec. 27 (*fide* TQ; three were still present along Old US 80 Dec. 23 (PM,CD). Two Western Sandpipers, uncommon in winter, were found at 115' Ave. and the Gila River Jan. 5 (RW,SBU) and another individual was observed at El Mirage Pond from Jan. 5 at least to Jan. 12 (SG,RJ,TC). Two Wilson's Phalaropes, who usually leave by the end of October, spent the winter at the pond in Gilbert, s. of Ocotillo Rd. (m.ob.); there have been two previous winter records in the county.

A White-winged Dove was observed in Tempe on the early date of Jan. 23 (TH). Individual Ruddy Ground-Doves were found at Wilson and Hasen Rd. in s.w. Phoenix Dec. 1 (PM,CD), at El Mirage Pond Dec. 8 (BG), at the Gilbert Water Ranch Dec. 20 (SG), and in a ditch on Bruner Rd. in Palo Verde Feb. 9 (PM,CD); six were reported at the El Mirage Pond from Dec. 10 to Dec. 17 (BG). A Lesser Nighthawk, rare in winter, was found on the Gila River CBC Dec. 27 (*fide* TC).

The individual Broad-billed Hummingbirds, that were observed at Boyce Thompson Arboretum and the Desert Botanical Garden in the fall, remained through the winter (m.ob.). Individual Lewis's Woodpeckers were found e. of Maricopa Dec. 1 (CF) and Jan. 5 (RD), near Liberty, s.w. of Phoenix Dec. 17 (RW), along the Verde River Dec. 19 (RW), and in Tolleson Jan. 20-Feb. 1 (BG). A male Williamson's Sapsucker was discovered in a Scottsdale yard Dec. 17 (JBA).

A Dusky Flycatcher, a rare winter visitor, was discovered during the Gila River CBC Dec. 27 (TC). The Eastern Phoebe, at the Cobble Ponds since Oct. 27, remained there through the winter (m.ob.). A **Thick-billed Kingbird** was discovered w. of Yuma Feb. 15 and remained at least until Feb. 22 (*fide* HD); there have been four previous winter records for the Lower Colorado River area.

A N. Shrike, found on the Dudleyville CBC Jan. 4, was farther south than

Bell's Vireo usually departs in the fall in mid to late September, but one remained at BTA at least until Jan. 25 (MST).

During this warmer than usual winter, a few Tree Swallows (usually rare in winter) remained late or returned early: reports were of four at the El Mirage Pond Dec. 21 (JT), one at GFP Dec. 22 (PD), one in Tempe Jan. 29 (TG), two at GFP Feb. 8 (PD), and at least three in Palo Verde Feb. 9 (PM,CD). Violet-green Swallows don't usually return until early March; two were reported at the HRP on the early date of Feb. 8 (L&KB). A few N. Rough-winged Swallows remained through December: reports were of one at the Neely Water Ranch Dec. 26 (PD), four at the Gilbert Water Ranch Dec. 26-29 (PD,SG) and two on the Carefree CBC Dec. 30 (*fide* WT); several more had returned by the early date of Feb. 8 at GFP and at the Neely Ponds Feb. 9 (PD).

Cliff Swallows, who don't usually return until early March, were very early this year: reports were of two at GFP Feb. 8 (PD), two at the pond s. of Ocotillo Feb. 9 (PD), several at the Cobble Ponds Feb. 19 (BG), and 30 nest building under the bridge over the AZ Canal at Pima Rd. Feb. 16 (WT). A few Barn Swallows remained later than usual with reports of four at GFP Dec. 22 (PD), three n. of Palo Verde Dec. 25 (TC), two at the Neely Ponds Dec. 26 (PD), and two on the Gila River CBC Dec. 27 (*fide* TC).

Two Red-breasted Nuthatches were recorded on each of two Christmas Counts: the Gila River CBC Dec. 27 (*fide* TC) and the Carefree CBC Dec. 30 (*fide* WT). A Winter Wren, a rare winter visitor, was found on the Carefree CBC Dec. 30 (TC). Many Western Bluebirds, Am. Robins, and Cedar Waxwings were reported around Phoenix and at the HRP during January and February (m.ob.). A Varied Thrush was found on the Carefree CBC Dec. 30 (*fide* WT). The Brown Thrasher at BTA since early November, continued to be seen there at least through the end of February (m.ob.).

Greater than usual numbers of Rufous-backed Robins were found in Maricopa County as well as elsewhere in the state. Three individuals reported in the county were at Robbins Butte in early December (MSe), at 115' Ave. and the Gila River Dec. 14 (TC), and in Cave Creek Dec. 30 (NS). Five additional individuals were found in s.e. Arizona during the winter. The Rufous-backed Robin, at BTA since early November, was still present in late February (m.ob.).

The male N. Parula, found at the Cobble Ponds in October, remained through the winter and was still present there in early March (m.ob.). A late-staying male Yellow Warbler was observed at the Cobble Ponds from Dec. 17 at least to Jan. 12 (RJ,SG,TC,BG). A **Magnolia Warbler** was discovered at Topock Marsh on the Colorado River Dec. 2 (MST). Individual Townsend's Warblers were found during the Gila River CBC Dec. 27 (*fide* TC) and at the Cobble

another individual was found at Kino Springs in s.e. Arizona Feb. 10 and was still present in early March (m.ob.). A male Black-and-white Warbler, found at HRP Jan. 26 (CBu), was still present there Feb. 16 (TC). The female Black-and-white Warbler, found at the Agua Fria River oasis upstream from Hwy. 74 in November, was observed there again Feb. 16 (TC). An Am. Redstart was found during the Gila River CBC Dec. 27 (*fide* TC).

An Am. **Tree Sparrow**, a sparse winter resident in n. Arizona, was observed at the Wenima Wildlife Area near Springerville Dec. 11 & 15 (*fide* MST). Inadvertently omitted from the fall report was a Grasshopper Sparrow found along the Verde River near Rio Verde Oct. 14 (TC,TMc); this was in addition to the six other Grasshopper Sparrows reported during October. Previously the species was considered to be only a casual transient.

More than the usual number of Fox Sparrows continued to be observed: three (one "Slate-colored" and two "Sooty" forms) were found during the Tres Rios CBC Dec. 17 (RJ,SG), one was seen in Gisela Dec. 27 (JE), one "Slate-colored" form was found during the Gila River CBC Dec. 27 (*fide* TC), and two "Slate-colored" forms were recorded on the Carefree CBC Dec. 30 (TC). A Fox Sparrow was observed at the Desert Botanical Garden Jan. 13 at least to early March (SBA *et al.*). One of the "Slate-colored" Fox Sparrows, at BTA since early November, was still present there Feb. 1 (TC).

The White-throated Sparrow at BTA remained at least to Jan. 25 (MST). A Harris's Sparrow was seen in Gisela Dec. 26-27 (JE). The Pyrrhuloxia at the Desert Botanical Garden was still present there in early March (SBA). A male **Rusty Blackbird**, a rare visitor to the state, was discovered at Ganado Lake in n.e. Arizona Jan. 22 (PL). A female Orchard Oriole returned to a yard in Ahwatukee for the third winter on Nov. 22 and was still present in early March (SBA). Up to 35 Lawrence's Goldfinches were counted s.w. of Buckeye Dec. 27 at least until Jan. 12 (TC).

In Tucson, the Least Grebe continued to be seen at the Sweetwater Wetlands at least into early March (m.ob.) and a Clay-colored Sparrow wintered in a small patch of desert habitat in the north central part of the city (RHo *et al.*).

Abbreviations: Boyce Thompson Arboretum (BTA), Christmas Bird Count (CBC), Gila Farms Pond (GFP), Hassayampa River Preserve (HRP), many observers (m.ob.).

*Observers: Sally Barnes, Jack Bartley, Linda & Ken Bielek, Scott Burge, Cody Burkett, Troy Corman, Bix Demaree, Henry Detwiler, Pierre Deviche, Rich Ditch, Cynthia Donald, Jeff Estis, Herb Fibel, Craig Fischer, Steve Ganley, Tom Gaskill, Bill Grossi, Tom Hildebrandt, Rich Hoyer, Ron Huetter, Roy Jones, Paul*

(Continued from Page 9)

late January (BD) and one was seen flying from a nest along the Palm Lake Trail Feb. 8 (L&KB). There were more Merlins wintering than usual. Up to seven were counted s.

usual and provided the first record for Pinal County (TMC); another individual was seen w. of Kayenta in n.e. Arizona Jan. 22 (PL).

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

Ponds Jan. 12 (TC).

A Palm Warbler was observed at Five Mile Landing on the Colorado River Dec. 2 (MSt) and

*Lehman, Tracy McCarthy, Pete Moulton, Russell Payson, Lanny Richard, Mike Rupp, Mark Severson, Norm Shrout, Mark Stevenson, Walter Thurber, Jolan Truan, Robert Witzeman.*