



The Cactus Wren·dition



Volume LXVIII, No. 4

Winter - 2014

Greater Roadrunner

Photo by Vicki Hire



Programs

programs

All programs will be held at our new meeting location: 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!

December 2, 2014

John Alcock

How to Become a Bug Watcher

John Alcock is a life-long birder with a continuing enthusiasm for these creatures. But in 1970, Alcock shifted from studying bird behavior to looking at insects in the field. This activity is a wonderful complement to birdwatching. Insects lead lives of great drama; they are everywhere, almost begging to be observed; and no special training is required to become a bug watcher. Birders can expand their horizons greatly by focusing down and spending a little time getting to know something about [insect] life on a little-known planet. Try it; you'll like it.

Committees/Support

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Maricopa Audubon Website

<http://www.maricopaaudubon.org>

Maricopa Audubon Phone

480 829-8209

"When one tugs at a single thing in nature, he finds it attached to the rest of the world."

John Muir

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.



John Alcock

John Alcock, Emeritus Professor at Arizona State University, is a behavioral ecologist. He has authored many books, including In a Desert Garden: Love and Death Among the Insects (1999).

January 6, 2015

Lisa Fitzner

Sagebrush Sparrows and the Bomb

Cloaked in secrecy and off limits to the public, portions of the Hanford Nuclear Reservation provide quality nesting habitat for Sagebrush Sparrows. Come learn about their breeding biology and the land they inhabit.

Lisa Fitzner is a former research biologist with Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.



Sagebrush Sparrow

February 3, 2015

Jody Kieran

Fallen Feathers, Rescue, Rehabilitation and Education

What should you do if you find a bird that appears to be injured, lost, or orphaned? What

should you not do? Come and meet some special friends from Fallen Feathers!

Jody Kieran is the Director of Fallen Feathers, Rescue, Rehabilitation and Education, which is located in Peoria, AZ.

Fallen Feathers Rescue, Rehabilitation, & Education



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.



Black-footed Albatross

On the Cover: Greater Roadrunner

Focal Length: 200mm, 1/500 sec, f/5.6, ISO 250
Chandler, AZ, September 2010 by Vicki Hire

Vicki says: "This Greater Roadrunner resided on my workplace campus in Chandler. We would often see him scurry across the parking lot to the adjoining field.

One autumn day, a co-worker rushed over to me and asked if I had my camera. Perched outside our offices was the roadrunner basking in the sunlight! From that day on, we made sure there was a bowl of water for him at the edge of the parking lot."



President's Message

by Mark Larson



Mark W. Larson

that we all have a duty to make our work count, not only for ourselves, but for future generations, too.

For the last seven nights I have been watching "The Roosevelts: An Intimate History" on PBS. The program has impressed upon me once again how lucky we are to be living in a free country, a country where we can work together to rise above economic catastrophe, where dissent is tolerated, where success is not only measured by monetary gain, but by social achievement as well. And, I am reminded

2014 has been a year of great losses for the Maricopa Audubon Society. On the second day of the new year we lost a pillar of the organization, our Treasurer and past President Herb Fibel. Then, recently, we lost our longtime Conservation Chairman, Bob Witzeman, a second great pillar. But, thanks in large part to them, the Maricopa Audubon Society has a legacy of great works: by fighting dams that would have drowned precious riparian habitats, by striving to protect our national symbol that nests in Central Arizona, by working to defeat an environmentally devastating mine, and by battling to protect a river corridor that is both the migration pathway for millions of birds and a national treasure.

There will always be new threats worthy of our efforts and we must never waver in our support for those who share our desire to leave the natural world a better place for our children and their children's children.. 🐦

Letter from the Editor

by Gillian Rice



Gillian Rice

American Robins everywhere. In this northern clime, I was astonished to spot a lizard with a bright green back basking on a boulder. It retreated to a crevice; we watched each other for some seconds and then I left it in peace. New York is home to only four species of lizard and so it wasn't difficult to identify my lizard as the Italian Wall Lizard, an invasive species.

I am often surprised by what can be found in urban environments. In this issue we focus on creatures that we might see in our neighborhoods. Vicki Hire visits a backyard in the Valley where "Arizona Jay" has compiled an extensive bird list. Matt VanWallene reports on leucistic birds, which have partially pale or white plumage. Mary Martin observes Burrowing Owls on a college campus and Gail Cochrane helps us learn more about Great Horned Owls. And what of those common denizens of the many ponds around our Valley, the coots: "Can they really fly?" asks Tom Gatz. Also spotted in the Valley's riparian areas and even in backyards are dragonflies and damselflies. Pierre Deviche focuses our attention on these charming creatures. Su Manje is our featured artist: she combines manmade objects and our local flora and fauna in haunting desertscapes. And don't miss Tales from the Field, news of books, and poetry by David Chorlton and Jasper Robinson.

Enjoy birding during our cooler weather and let me know what you find! 🐦

In September I was in New York for the 17th Annual International Exhibition of the American Society of Botanical Artists at The Horticultural Society of New York. The art and the stories behind them are at www.asba-art.org/exhibitions/17th-annual-international. This was the first time my art was chosen for the exhibition so it was a very exciting experience.

A whirlwind trip with only a few spare hours. Escape by train from Manhattan's bustle to the calm of The New York Botanical Garden. Under a clear blue sky, I reveled in the lush greenery and delighted in the antics of chipmunks gathering acorns. Invisible Blue Jays called from treetops.

War Birds by David Chorlton

*An English soldier in a muddy war
watches smoke rise and rain
fall while he listens
to the cawing that cuts through slow
passing time from a rookery.
He doesn't miss a bird
although the sound of guns
fifty kilometers deeper into France
carries all the way to the pigeons
cooing from the warm straw in a barn
and the instructions he is given
regarding appropriate use
of bayonets. Some days the sky
is clear and the air is cold and not a hawk
eludes him, even when
the Sabbath bells are ringing
and a flock of starlings breaks
out of the stubble. On other days
the mist makes every sound a captive
and a heron spreads its grey wings, never
knowing what the silence means.
When there is noise again, the far away
crackle of rifles, the birds
stop what they do
and then return to being woodpeckers, thrushes,
sparrows and geese, while the men here
would not recognize themselves
if the many songs and calls did not
remind them of who they used to be.*

And birds singing all day as if they were
trying to draw the heart out of me with dreams
of English woodlands and orchards.

— Siegfried Sassoon, diary entry

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>

Friday December 5

Glendale Recharge Ponds or Tres Rios

Visit one of these sites, depending on what's being reported online. Leave Scottsdale about 6:00 am to arrive at the ponds about 7:00 am. Both sites should be full of wintering waterfowl, plus some shorebirds. The sites have also been reliable for Bald Eagle, Osprey, common desert species and often something totally unexpected, such as gulls or terns. We'll wander the site for about three hours, regroup in a nearby coffee shop and go over our list. Return about noon. Limit 8
Leader: Kathe Anderson,
kathe.coot@cox.net

Friday January 23

Scottsdale's Urban Ponds.

This trip usually gets us between 35-45 species, depending on how lucky we are. The usual winter resident ducks and waterfowl are the targets, but common urban birds often show up to help boost the list. Sometimes we've seen Valley rarities such as Red-breasted Nuthatches, Common Mergansers and Bald Eagles. Start about 7:30 am from Scottsdale, and finish about 10:30 am. Limit 8.
Leader: Kathe Anderson,
kathe.coot@cox.net

Saturday January 24

Santa Cruz Flats

The chance to inspect wintering raptors as they perch on roadside poles in the agricultural areas south of Casa Grande awaits. This has been a productive area to see birds like Crested Caracara, Prairie Falcon, Ferruginous Hawks, various subspecies of Red-tailed Hawks, and Mountain Plovers. Leave Tempe at 7:00 am, with sunrise occurring before we arrive on the flats around 8:00 am. Bring binoculars (and scope if you have one), water and snacks, and wear subdued-colored clothing. Limit 11 plus leader (David Pearson).
Register with Larry Langstaff,
larrylangstaff1@gmail.com

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,
laurinessel@gmail.com

Wednesday February 4

Agua Fria National Monument

Explore part of Agua Fria National Monument. It is 40 miles north of Phoenix and has many canyons with riparian vegetation. Summertime brings nesting Yellow-billed Cuckoos to this area. The surrounding plateaus and hillsides have wintering sparrows and other birds of the grasslands and juniper habitats. Pronghorn make the Perry Plateau home. We will identify and discuss the plants of the area. Carpool from central Phoenix location to arrive around 8:00 am and return early to mid-afternoon. Difficulty: Moderate. Bring lunch and sturdy hiking shoes. Limit 10.
Leader: Larry Langstaff,
larrylangstaff1@gmail.com

Saturday February 7

Higley/Ocotillo Road Ponds

A return to these ponds will reveal wintering waterfowl and shorebirds, along with passerines and raptors. Meet at 8:15 am. Plan to bird the ponds for almost two hours. There are other good spots to bird nearby if you want to stay in the area longer. If you have one, bring a spotting

scope along with your binoculars. Easy: walk about 3/4 mile around ponds. Limit 12.
Leader: Larry Langstaff,
larrylangstaff1@gmail.com

Sunday and Monday February 8-9

Colorado River

We hope to explore a couple of the state parks and national wildlife refuges north of Parker and south of Lake Havasu City, staying at a modest RV park that has motel rooms and a good restaurant. We'll pack breakfast and lunch so we can be out in the field, but enjoy the restaurant Sunday evening. Leave about 6:30 am on Sunday morning, stopping at Tres Rios and other spots before we arrive at the motel. The next morning, explore most of the immediate area, have lunch and arrive back in Phoenix late afternoon, before the worst of rush hour traffic. Birds should include Clark's and Western Grebes, Common Goldeneye, loons, Osprey, and a variety of other waterfowl and desert birds. Difficulty: Easy to moderate; some hiking. Limit 8. Register by January 10.
Leader: Kathe Anderson,
kathe.coot@cox.net

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

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

Matt says: "Pictured here are 78 of the 80 individuals that I photographed in two four hour sessions on August 9 and 10. There were 28 Anna's, 20 Black-chinned and 32 Rufous Hummingbirds. I never would have guessed that there were that many individuals visiting my patio in the vicinity of Riggs Road and Arizona Avenue."



Photos by Matt VanWallene

Black-crowned Night Heron

by Jasper Robinson

*Black-crowned Night-Herons are extremely shy
Resembling ghosts moving through the marsh
Get too close and they'll fly soft as a sigh
Uttering loud "woks" loud and quite harsh
There's a delicacy in their motion
Gliding through water like a dancer
Standing tall...with conditioned emotion
Their prey romancing, such gallant entrancers
Gilbert is home to many of them
Stay still enough and one might be seen
A small but magnificent heron
Wading through dark waters soft as a dream
You would be lucky to see one around
A more worthy heron cannot be found*

Jasper Robinson is studying for her Master's
in Environmental Technology Management



Black-crowned Night-Heron. Photo by Jasper Robinson



Male Widow Skimmer. Photo by Michael Searcy

Michael says: "I found this dragonfly at the Gilbert Riparian Preserve. It's one example of a beautiful creature that is fairly abundant, but that most never see."

A Clever Trick

By Mary Martin

My husband, a very successful fisherman, always used to tell me: "The number of fish you catch is directly proportional to the number of casts you make." That did not keep me from building myself a shade tent, and curling up under my bass boat seat to take a nap, but I will admit that his saying is true.

And it is true with birdwatching, as well. The more you walk about with your binoculars, looking, the more you will see. Not as catchy, but you get the idea.

That was proven to me when two fellow birders and I agreed to meet on the Scottsdale Community College campus to look for Burrowing Owls. This, despite the fact that two of us had just been there about a week earlier. This was a great decision.

We were rewarded by seeing three of the Burrowing Owls right away and then after a beautiful walk, we found two more owls on the ground, near their burrow. They were in the early sun and provided us with wonderful viewing.

While we watched, they began to tussle with each other. Although they did not look markedly different from adults, we assumed we were observing two youngsters playing.

All of a sudden, the one on our right flopped down on the ground and played dead, with one foot held limply in the air. We figured this



Young Burrowing Owls. Photo by Denny Green

was a ruse, as they weren't fighting that hard.

The owl remained still for about 30 seconds, long enough for the second one to lose all interest in it. Then it popped up and sat in the usual position looking us with that Jersey, "You lookin' at me, bud?" expression.

I searched online for "owl playing dead" and found Susan Stein at a site named Tooter4Kids (<http://www.tooter4kids.com/owls/enemies.htm>) who mentioned that Barn and Snowy Owls play dead. There was a quick mention of Elf Owls

playing dead, but nothing acknowledged the behavior in Burrowing Owls. Stein also mentions that Burrowing Owls make a sound like a rattlesnake that keeps skunks, coyotes, and ground squirrels away. We did not hear any clacking.

We suspect that the ruse must surprise a predator long enough to give the owl a chance at getting away.

What a magical experience. And it proves that my husband's adage is also true for bird watching. So, grab your binoculars and get out there where the action is. There are not many birds in the closet where I keep my binoculars... 🦉

Mary Martin is a naturalist-by-love

Welcome to Subirdia: Book Review

by Gillian Rice

Welcome to *Subirdia: Sharing Our Neighborhoods with Wrens, Robins, Woodpeckers, and Other Wildlife* by John M. Marzluff. Yale University Press, 2014. 320 pp. \$30.00.

"Are cities bad for biodiversity?" ponders John Marzluff. Although everything he has learned as a conservation biologist tells him they are, "the feathered collective" he encounters appears unconvinced. Marzluff encounters 26 bird species over four days in Yellowstone National Park but 31 species in New York's Central Park on two mornings. About 200 bird species are regularly encountered in both parks. From a bird's perspective, comments Marzluff, a large park created by humans is not all that different from one created by nature.

Some birds, like the Yellow-billed Cuckoo still avoid urban areas. Some exploit the city environment (think House Sparrow). And Marzluff shows how many birds such as finches, thrushes, tits, sparrows, corvids, and hummingbirds adapt to urbanization. He explores the urbanization responses of other creatures as well as birds, in a book richly illustrated by artist/scientist, Jack Delap.

Bird diversity tends to be greatest in suburbs, where 40 percent of all US residents now live. Why? Marzluff points to the wide range of habitats in a small area that includes diverse flora and therefore diverse bird food, often supplemented by birdseed.

Humans can facilitate biodiversity. People who retain dead trees and vegetation, provide nest boxes, water, and feed birds, enjoy the sound of birdsong, the wonder of watching a hummingbird raise her brood, and profit from the appetites of flycatchers and nighthawks that feed on insects, including mosquitoes. Through facilitation, argues Marzluff, we become part

of a natural mutualism benefiting other species that return the favor.

We tend to be simultaneously excited and saddened when we observe predation. Recently, with some apprehension, I watched from my kitchen window as a Curve-billed Thrasher took several minutes to tackle and then consume a Nightsnake. We can be alarmed when a Cooper's Hawk swoops in to take a dove. Yet, Marzluff reminds us that predation is a sign of health in an ecosystem; it implies ample prey to sustain and lengthen the food chains built above them.

In *Welcome to Subirdia*, Marzluff clearly explains the results of numerous scientific studies conducted around the world. This is a book for the layperson. Marzluff helps us to understand the ecology of our backyards. And, if you see a banded bird, he advises that you report it to the Bird Banding Laboratory (<http://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bbl/>).

Marzluff outlines practical ways to support the native communities in which we live. Examples are planting native vegetation and keeping your cat indoors. To Marzluff, "the city kills with a meow and a squealing of brakes." Yet, where urban planners explicitly consider nature in the design of buildings and the arrangement of built versus natural space, "biophilic cities" improve the health of people and their ecosystem. If nature lives only in distant preserves, nature becomes less relevant and more fearsome to people: they devalue nature and lose the will to conserve.

It is true that nature preserves are expensive and so tend to be rare in cities, notes Marzluff. I feel fortunate to reside in the Phoenix Metro area, where I have easy access to wildlife havens such as Rio Salado Habitat Restoration Area, Gilbert Riparian Preserve, and our extensive mountain preserves. 🦉



Fledgling Great Horned Owl. Photo by Matt VanWallene

During winter's long nights there's always a chance that a supreme predator may perch awhile on your rooftop. The Great Horned Owl kills for a living, employing frightful talons capable of squeezing 80 pounds of pressure. These weapons are enforced against a wide range of meek creatures from centipedes and small snakes to rats, mice, cottontail rabbits, and skunks. Even hawks and falcons asleep on their roosts are vulnerable.

Although the Great Horned Owl is the largest of Arizona's owls, averaging 22 inches in length with a wing span of over four feet, people startled by a night time encounter with a Great Horned Owl will often swear the animal they saw was far larger. This owl strikes a chord within humans, something of awe and ancestral respect. The unmoving yellow eyes, the heavy curved beak, and the radial pattern of feathers in the facial disk create a haughty impression dismissing of us *Homo sapiens*.

If you are fortunate to see a Great Horned Owl up close in a wildlife presentation you will observe the superb adaptations of this hunter. Luminous eyes see in near total darkness and keen hearing makes the tiniest rustle fatal for a small mouse in the night. The feathers of a Great Horned Owl are a feat of engineering and

artistry. Super soft, flexible feathers carve the air silently. The leading edge of the flight feathers is serrated in a comb-like design, which cuts down on wind resistance and ensures that the pursuit of prey is undetected until too late. Even the coloration of the plumage works in the owl's best interest. Dark grey, buff, and white barring creates camouflage that allows the bird to roost unnoticed in even a desert tree in broad daylight.

I've seen two Great Horned Owls recently. One perched on the very edge of the neighborhood school's roof, overlooking the grassy patch where the cottontails nibble before dawn. The other owl prepared for the evening hunt on the chimney of a nearby house, his bulk and ear tufts outlined by the darkening sky. More owls seem to be around at this time of year and it is believed that northern residents come to winter in the Valley.

From late December through February, breeding pairs declare their territories with haunting calls. The early breeding season brings the opportunity to claim nests previously built by Red-tailed Hawks or other raptors. Great Horned Owls don't bother with nest building and take other birds' nests or simply lay their eggs on any ledge, platform, or beam that offers nearby hunting opportunities.

The two or three owlets spend a relatively long time mastering the arts of flight and prey pursuit. About six weeks after hatching they begin to branch, hopping to nearby perches and ledges. They gradually learn to fly over the next month, a process that's not always elegant. But it takes the youngsters even longer to learn to kill their own food. Parents feed and protect their fledged young for three to four months. Next year's breeding season is upon them when mom and dad finally boot their dependents out into the world.

It's good to remember that a fluffy fledgling owlet on the ground isn't always in need of rescue. Unless it's near a busy street or otherwise unsafe, watch to make sure there aren't parents still caring for that youngster before you intervene. 🦉

A Sonoran desert enthusiast, Gail tries not to miss nature's daily dramas. She blogs at www.onelookout.com

great horned owl

Bedtime Stories for the Child Within: Book Review

by Heather Langdon

Desert Fables: *Bedtime Stories for the Child Within* by Ann McDermott. Desert Drifter Publications, 2014, 392 pp. \$14.95.

Containing stories about everything from cottontails to cliffroses, Ann McDermott has a casual and thoroughly enjoyable writing style in her book, *Desert Fables: Bedtime Stories for the Child Within*. With over 100 short fables to choose from, it is best to follow McDermott's advice and read one or two stories a night, lest you be overwhelmed by the magic within. This is a book that entertains as well as inspires reflection, and rushing the process minimizes the joy found in this fun work of fiction.

It is obvious in reading this book that Ann McDermott truly loves the Sonoran Desert, and all of its inhabitants, and has spent much

time observing and studying their habits. No creature or plant is too small to escape her attention - even the lowly silverfish insect has a story to tell! With an eye for educational storytelling, any naturalist or naturalist-in-training will enjoy the details that this author weaves into her fables.

I greatly enjoyed this whimsical blend of naturalism and mythos and all of the stories within. It was hard to pick a favorite fable, although "The Election of Dawn's Herald" comes close. Anyone who calls the desert home should read this book. McDermott is a fantastic storyteller and all of her fables are told with humor and warmth. Her latest book is *Songs from the Desert*, which came out in August 2014. 🦉

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Can Coots Fly?

by Tom Gatz

This question came from a staff member at the Desert Botanical Garden (DBG) one winter, perhaps because we had been holding our volunteer meetings at the zoo where coots are common (the avian variety, that is), especially in the winter months. Yes, they can fly. But when I got to thinking about it, had I ever seen one flying overhead? I polled my other birder friends, and we had all seen them flutter over the water, but hardly anyone had ever seen one flying much higher than about 15 feet off the water, usually when flushed by a dog, boat, or bird of prey. And even then they only fly weakly for a short distance before quickly plopping back down again. They are common on larger Phoenix park and golf course ponds including those just south of the DBG in Papago Park but not on the little pond in the DBG. This is likely because they need lots of open space where they can run laboriously along the surface of the water before they can start their take-off flight. The DBG pond's runway may be too short for a coot to become airborne.

Each year some coots migrate from central Canada all the way south to Central America and back again between their nesting and winter grounds. So if we never see them flying overhead, how do they migrate so far? They must be pretty good at it since some old coots live for over 20 years. It turns out that they only migrate at night, alone or in loose flocks, often at considerable heights, dropping down to alight in the pre-dawn darkness before we birders begin to stir. They fly high enough to occasionally be killed by flying into tall

television towers, and on one early April night in 1948, a misguided coot flew through an open window and killed itself on the opposite wall of the room on the 11th floor of the former Holman Hotel in Athens, Georgia. An airplane flying over Tennessee once struck a coot flying at 4500 feet.

The coot is universally described as a quarrelsome and belligerent bird, more than ready, willing, and able to engage in either ritualized or outright physical conflict with its own or other avian species. About the only aquatic birds that it avoids tangling with are the American White Pelican and the Canada Goose.

American Coots sort of look and act like ducks, but they are not related. Often in large winter flocks, coots are the most gregarious members of the normally secretive, marsh-dwelling rail family. Mostly vegetarian, coots swim well but do not have webbed feet. Instead they have flexible lobes along each long toe that fold back when the foot is moved forward in the water to minimize resistance and extend outward to give push on the backward stroke. Even their legs are flattened laterally to cut down on drag when swimming. Pretty energy-efficient for an old coot. 🦆

Reference: Brisbin, Jr., I. Lehr and Thomas B. Mowbray. 2002. American Coot (*Fulica americana*), *The Birds of North America Online* (A. Poole, Ed.). Ithaca: Cornell Lab of Ornithology; retrieved from *The Birds of North America Online*: <http://bna.birds.cornell.edu/bna/species/697a> doi:10.2173/bna.697a

(This article originally appeared in the Desert Botanical Garden volunteer newsletter *Gatherings*.)

Tom Gatz has been a MAS member since 1981.



Coots, sometimes called "mudhens," have a white, chicken-like beak adapted for feeding on vegetation. Photo by Tom Gatz.



Coot feet have flexible lobes along their toes that aid in propulsion when swimming and help support them when walking along muddy shorelines. Photo by Tom Gatz



An American Coot in flight, a rare sight, captured by professional photographer Jerry Ting in 2006

Local Birder Babs Buck Publishes New Haiku Book

Previously published haiku author, Barbara (Babs) Buck recently completed a 263-page book, *SUN MOON SKY Book of Haiku*.

Classical three-line haiku poetry thrives on the interplay of nature and humanity. Anyone who enjoys poetry of any kind or who enjoys the out-of-doors will find sensations to savor in each brief verse, some more delectable than others.

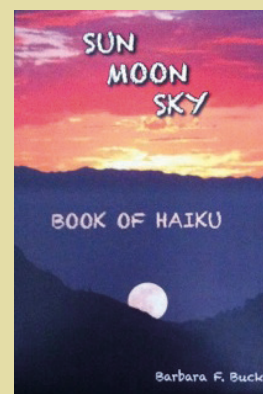
Babs discovered the haiku art form when she lived in Japan for three years in the early 1960s. Combining her passion for nature, birding, and haiku resulted in her

winning first place in a haiku contest at the Southwest Wings Birding Festival in 2013.

That haiku is included in the book:

*Walking in the pond
Among hundreds of geese
One Sandbill Crane!*

More information at brbrbuck0.wix.com/barbara-buck



Christmas Bird Count

by Walter Thurber

The National Audubon Society has conducted Christmas bird counts since the year 1900. Volunteers from throughout the Western Hemisphere go afield during one calendar day between December 14 and January 5 to record every bird species and individual bird encountered within a designated 15-mile diameter circle. These records now comprise an extensive ornithological database that enables monitoring of winter bird populations and the overall health of the environment.

Participants are typically assigned to teams based on their bird identification skills and endurance. Many counts hold a compilation dinner at the end of the day where results are tabulated and stories shared. There is no longer a participation fee. Help is needed on most of these counts, so find one or more of interest to you and contact the compiler for information.

Date	Day	Count Name	Compiler	Phone	Email*
12/14	Su	Grand Canyon	Brian Gatlin	928-638-7968	brian_gatlin@nps.gov
12/14	Su	Jerome	Julie Wills	928-300-9775	jwills282@hotmail.com
12/14	Su	Saint David	Tom Wood	520-432-1388	tom@sabo.org
12/14	Su	Tucson Valley	Rich Hoyer	520-325-5310	birdernaturalist@me.com
12/15	Mo	Chino Valley	Russell Duerksen	928-925-5567	duerksen@msn.com
12/15	Mo	Salt-Verde Rivers	Kurt Radamaker	480-585-1606	kurtrad@mexicobirding.com
12/17	We	Green Valley-Madera Canyon	Clark Blake	520-625-1015	mcblake@nas.com
12/18	Th	Patagonia	Abbie Zeltzer	520-604-6320	amindajar@gmail.com
12/18	Th	Prescott	Carl Tomoff	928-778-2626	tomoff@northlink.com
12/18	Th	Sedona	Rich Armstrong	928-282-3675	richarmstrong@q.com
12/19	Fr	Elfrida	Tom Wood	520-432-1388	tom@sabo.org
12/20	Sa	Ajo-Cabeza Prieta NWR	Kim Veverka	520-387-4987	kim_everka@fws.gov
12/20	Sa	Avra Valley	Mary Lou Cole	520-578-0114	birdingnana@msn.com
12/20	Sa	Hassayampa River	Vanessa Montgomery	623-465-0012	hassayampacbc@yahoo.com
12/20	Sa	Mormon Lake	Terry Blows	928-774-8028	terence.blows@nau.edu
12/20	Sa	Nogales	Michael Bissontz	520-577-8778	seetrogon@comcast.net
12/20	Sa	Santa Catalina Mountains	Brian Nicholas	520-760-3583	weehawker2@yahoo.com
12/22	Mo	Phoenix-Tres Rios	Marceline VandeWater	602-689-4356	marceline@ermaroni.net
12/26	Fr	Superior	Cynthia Donald	480-283-4515	planres@earthlink.net
12/27	Sa	Flagstaff-Mount Elden	Terry Blows	928-774-8028	terence.blows@nau.edu
12/27	Sa	Portal	Jackie Lewis	520-558-2287	winjac12@vtc.net
12/29	Mo	Bill Williams Delta	Kathleen Blair	928-667-4144	kathleen_blair@fws.gov
12/30	Tu	Gila River	Troy Corman	602-482-6187	aplomado@cox.net
12/30	Tu	Havas NWR	DeeDee DeLorenzo	928-758-2707	poncho@citlink.net
01/02	Fr	Atascosa Highlands	Jake Mohlmann	610-390-2424	mohlmann2@yahoo.com
01/02	Fr	Carefree	Walter Thurber	480-483-6450	wathurber@cox.net
01/03	Sa	Appleton-Whittell	Robert Weissler	520-234-1792	weissler@aves.org
01/03	Sa	Martinez Lake-Yuma	Henry Detwiler	928-247-3098	henrydetwiler@earthlink.net
01/03	Sa	Payson	Dave Hallock	928-474-9475	eldoradh@rmi.net
01/03	Sa	Timber Mesa	Mary Ellen Bittorf	928-367-2462	mcbitt30@cableone.net
01/04	Su	Buenos Aires NWR	Bonnie Swarbrick	520-240-3737	bonnie.swarbrick@gmail.com
01/04	Su	Camp Verde	Bea Cooley	928-526-5069	bea.cooley@gmail.com
01/04	Su	Dudleyville	Doug Jenness	520-909-1529	d_jenness@hotmail.com
01/05	Mo	Glen Canyon	John Spence	928-608-6267	john_spence@nps.gov
Unknown		Pipe Spring NM	Paula Ogden-Muse	928-643-7105	paula_ogden-muse@nps.gov
Unknown		Ramsey Canyon			

Nearby New Mexico Count

12/28	Su	Peloncillo Mountains	Nicholas Pederson	505-417-8665	ndpederson83@gmail.com
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Issued 10/21/2014

Arizona Jay ~ The Valley's Backyard Bird Whisperer!

by Vicki Hire



You can call him Jay... or you can call him Arizona Jay... or you can call him the Valley's Backyard Bird Whisperer, so his fellow birders say. With a list of 181 total backyard bird species, Jay is on track for 125 species just this year! And that's not just boastful backyard bragging.

Well-known in the birding community for his discovery of a Magnificent Hummingbird in his backyard, Jay's observation was only the seventh sighting ever recorded in Maricopa County. The Mag stayed for five days at Jay's feeder, from November 6-11, 2008.

Adding another feather to his cap, Arizona Jay was recognized by the Arizona Field Ornithologists (AZFO) for his backyard discovery and photograph of an eastern Winter Wren in January 2009. You can find Jay's photo of the wren and a recording of its call from his backyard at the following link:

http://www.azfo.org/gallery/2009/html1/WIWR_Mesa_Moore_20090124.html

Just shy of one acre, Arizona Jay's backyard is located in central Mesa and is what I would call a perfect confluence of location, landscape, and of course know-how. Flood irrigation provides Jay the luxury of having riparian-like environment with a variety of mature trees including a huge spruce tree, pomegranate, fig, peach, plum, several citrus trees, a California fan palm, and a mesquite to name just a few. Covering a large arbor are grape vines that also provide fruit and shade to visiting birds.

The property is bordered on the east by a canal and on the north by an open field with a grazing cow. A pecan grove lies to the west, and a football field is in the distance. The influx of birds passing through is enormous. A high voltage powerline crosses the property, providing a corridor or flight path. A compost pile more than 20 feet long, and a brush pile provide ample hiding places for visiting birds and wildlife..

Each morning at dawn, you can find Arizona Jay scanning the sky from his backyard. "It is amazing; he spends the day with his binoculars up! No wonder he spots more birds," comments friend and fellow birder Fraser Brooks.

On several visits, I've watched Jay carefully log his bird sightings, which he has methodically kept daily since



Jay Miller (L) with fellow birder Matt VanWallene (R). Each folded stack represents six months of daily recorded bird sightings.

2006. Using his cell phone to reference the time of day, Jay records the four letter band code for each species he identifies, as well as the exact hour and minute of the sighting. Additional notes are added, such as which direction the bird is coming from, whether it is perched, or feeding.

In addition to identifying the species, date, and time, Jay also notes the forecasted weather in the morning prior to birding. Afterwards, he checks the Falcon Field Airport website to get the exact weather temperature and conditions for that day in Mesa.

Each month Jay summarizes his backyard bird activity on a graph, giving the viewer a remarkable visual of both resident and migrating birds. His meticulously kept records are bound in six month increments, and when I inquired about a sequence of sightings on one of the graphs, within seconds Jay was able to trace back to the very moment the sightings occurred, and

provide the details.

When asked if he would share some tips with potential backyard birders, Jay was adamant about providing plenty of feeders and water to attract birds. He keeps three hummingbird feeders, a thistle feeder, a wire pecan feeder, a ground feeder, and a perch feeder filled. The most important attraction is a water bowl with a drip on



*American Kestrel taking mealworm from bowl.
Photo by Vicki Hire*



his property, which Jay believes draws in as many birds alone as do all the other feeders combined. He also distributes about a pound of seed daily, scattering it as though he is seeding his lawn. He uses cracked corn, as well as a mixture of black oil sunflower seeds and wild bird seed, and prefers to use a peanut-butter and cornmeal based suet.

My favorite piece of advice offered from Arizona Jay to new backyard birders is to "Look far and listen close." His words of wisdom include "not going back inside after you've filled the feeder, but to stay and observe outside." Another good piece of advice from Jay: use 7 power or



Jay Miller. Photo by Vicki Hire

below binoculars for less shake as they tend to be lighter weight than 10 power binoculars.

"Jay has the unique talent to bring together time of year, habitat, bird calls, and coloration to search for or recognize species throughout the state," says Matt VanWallene who frequently birds with Jay. "There is never a time when I have gone birding with him that I didn't thoroughly enjoy the experience."

For seven years straight, a female American Kestrel visited Jay's Mesa backyard. I had the exciting opportunity to watch one day as she swooped down to eat mealworms from a dish at his feet! It was absolutely amazing. Sadly, Jay says she was chased away last year by another kestrel that arrived on the scene, undoubtedly after hearing 'tweets' from her feathered friends. The new arrival couldn't have picked a better backyard to land in!

Join Jay's efforts, and help ensure a safer journey for migrating birds. Backyards are key stopover points for many species. You can make your backyard a bird-friendly rest stop with a few simple things like providing water or scattering seeds. You can contact Jay at

ArizonaJay23@cox.net. 🐦

Vicki Hire is MAS Publicity Chair.

The Great Backyard Bird Count February 13 — 16, 2015

Be prepared to be a part of the world's largest instantaneous snapshot of bird populations ever recorded!

It's free. It's fun. Anyone can do it! And like its name implies, it takes place right in your own backyard.

Here's how to get started:

Register at: <http://gbbc.birdcount.org/>

Count birds for a minimum of 15 minutes anytime during the four day GBBC, recording date, time of day, and location.

Enter your results online by clicking on "submit observations" on the website homepage.

www.allaboutbirds.org is a great website to use for help identifying your birds.

The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) is an international annual event that is great fun, as well as a learning experience for everyone – from the novice to the expert, and is a joint project between the National Audubon Society and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

Take the opportunity to engage your friends and families with nature. The GBBC is fun because anyone can participate, regardless of age or ability! And, whether you spend as little as 15 minutes or the entire four days, your contribution helps researchers learn more about our environment.

The data you collect will provide useful information to scientists at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, enabling them to better evaluate fluctuations in bird populations. The GBBC is useful in monitoring movements of species, such as the Sinaloa Wren from Mexico to the desert southwest, and helps conservationists determine the driving force behind such species movements, such as climate change.

In 2014 there were 34.5 million bird observations submitted on 144,109 checklists to the GBBC. According to <http://gbbc.birdcount.org/>, 2014 was the most detailed four day snapshot ever with a reported 4,296 species of birds from 135 different countries, and representing all seven continents. From more than 124 thousand checklists submitted from the United States to just one from Mozambique, citizen scientists made the GBBC an outstanding success. See the complete listings of countries, species observed, and photos on the website.

The 18th annual GBBC will be held Friday, February 13 and continue through Monday, February 16, 2015.

Mark your calendar and have your binoculars, pen, and paper ready. Help protect birds and the environment that we share. Together we can make our local birds count! 🐦

The Fascinating Puzzle of Leucism

By Matt VanWallene

Hopefully, you saw leucism in the title and a white-morph Reddish Egret in the picture below. You then said: "Wait a minute....." If you will indulge me, I will get to that egret later.

So what is leucism and a leucistic bird? If a bird has dark eyes but is pale all over or "pied" with a patch or patches of white or paleness, it is leucistic, an inherited condition. This is due to pigment cells not developing. Albinism is a genetic mutation that affects an entire bird. Its pigment cells have no melanin (related to black, brown, gray, and earth-toned colors) and the bird has pink eyes, caused by blood vessels behind the eyes, which have no other color. When encountered in the field, leucism can throw you for a loop. Having white where there should be color can result in a new species, at least in your imagination. My first leucistic bird was a female Great-tailed Grackle that has been around for a number of years. It has two outer primary feathers on its left wing that are white. This past summer, I saw what I assume is an offspring with the same defect. The defect made the bird personal, so I was happy to see my friend and neighbor on a regular basis.

I have subsequently seen leucism on a hummingbird, flycatcher, duck (could have been mutt duck genes), cardinal, and a very special juvenile Curve-billed Thrasher. The home where my wife grew up is in Kearny, Arizona (elevation 1,860 ft.), a copper mining town along the Gila River, southeast of the Valley. It is a great location if you want to be immersed in the Sonoran Desert. I've seen snakes, deer, mountain lion, javelina, squirrels, lizards, a great variety of insects and a lot of birds. We got a call from my sister-in-law reporting a regularly seen white Curve-billed Thrasher near the house. I made an excuse for a family visit and drove out.

On the patio I set up a portable blind constructed of PVC and shade screen. I slipped out at dawn with a cup of coffee and fingers crossed. Just a couple of hours into the session discouragement approached. It was mid-June and the blind was situated in direct sun. Every minute reminded me of where I was. A juvenile Black-throated Sparrow and a Desert Spiny Lizard held my interest but still no thrasher, at least not one

without color. Some quail cheepers are always welcome as was the female cardinal with a striking crest.

Sunrise is at 5:30 am on June 17; it took till 8:15 am before I got my first view and after only a few shots, the thrasher was gone. It did come back though, several times. The encounter caused me to do more research, which led me to David Sibley's website,



Curve-billed Thrasher. Photo by Matt VanWallene

<http://www.sibleyguides.com/2011/08/abnormal-coloration-in-birds-melanin-reduction/>.

After reading the details, I sent him a link to my thrasher pictures and he posted some observations!

One of my very early birdwatching encounters was a hunting white morph Reddish Egret. Stunning. A beautiful bird both in appearance and hunting techniques. Sibley hints at the possibility that leucism is involved with such color variations. He writes: "Is the underlying mechanism of white morph birds like Reddish Egret similar to any of the causes of 'abnormal' plumage, such as leucism?"

We consider a white cardinal 'abnormal' because it is rare, and white Reddish Egrets 'normal' because they are common, but they may have similar origins. I don't know."

Dr. Clay Green of Texas State University researches the ecological significance of plumage coloration in herons and egrets. White plumage may confer a foraging advantage in open (unvegetated) water habitat



White-morph Reddish Egret. Photo by Matt VanWallene



as fish appear to detect the presence of dark plumaged birds. However, Green has found no evidence for this presumed advantage in foraging comparisons between white and dark plumaged species of herons. Within the plumage dimorphic Reddish Egret (*Egretta rufescens*), however, this presumed advantage is evident in behavioral comparisons between white and dark morphs using specific foraging tactics at varying depths of water.

Does this imply a natural selection toward white plumage in the egret family? Are we witnessing the early stages of the white morph Reddish Egret becoming a separate species, the "Whitish Egret?" With that in mind I now have a white morph Curve-billed Thrasher! 🐦

Matt VanWallene is MAS Treasurer.

Further reading:

Green, M.C. 2005. Plumage Dimorphism in the Reddish Egret: Does Plumage Coloration Influence Foraging Habitat Use and Tactics? *Waterbirds*, 28 (4): 519-524. Accessed online on September 22, 2014 at <http://gato-docs.its.txstate.edu/biology/Green-2006/Green%202005.pdf>

Green, M.C., and P.L. Leberg. 2005. Influence of Plumage Colouration on Prey Response: Does Habitat Alter Heron Crypsis to Prey? *Animal Behaviour* 70: 1203-1208. Accessed online on September 22, 2014 at http://gato-docs.its.txstate.edu/biology/Green-and-Leberg-2005_AnimBeh0/Green%20and%20Leberg%202005_AnimBeh.pdf

Monitoring Reddish Egrets



Clay Green banding Reddish Egret nestlings at East Flat Spoils, Laguna Madre, Texas, September 2008. Photo by Austin Hill.

Clay Green has been studying Reddish Egrets for over 10 years. While he first began studying Reddish Egrets to further examine plumage coloration in a dimorphic species, he has also been involved in research on foraging and nesting ecology, dispersal, and migration of Reddish Egrets in Texas, Mexico, and the Caribbean. As part of this research, he has banded over 1,500 Reddish Egret nestlings, and in collaboration with Dr. Bart Ballard at Texas A&M-Kingsville, has deployed 50 satellite transmitters on Reddish Egrets in Texas. Of note, three banded Reddish Egret nestlings that hatched in Bahía Kino, Sonora, Mexico have been re-sighted in the southwestern U.S including a hatch year bird re-sighted in Gilbert, AZ in September 2012 by Lindsay Story and Troy Corman. 🐦

Avian Humor by Holland West



I'm not a wishbone!

As the Dragon Flies....

By Pierre Deviche

All photos by Pierre Deviche



Painted Damsel - Hesperagrion heterodoxum - Male

Mid-summer may not be what most Arizona birders think of as the most exciting time of the year. At this time temperatures in the low deserts soar, often limiting outdoor activities to a few early morning hours. And although some monsoon-dependent bird species are then most vocal and in full breeding condition, many others are already completing their breeding cycles, becoming noticeably more difficult to find than in spring and early summer. Furthermore, northbound migration is generally over while "fall" migration has not begun. Yet much can be gained from braving Arizona heat! One reason is that summer and early fall are prime seasons for observing and studying our damselflies and dragonflies, collectively called odonates.

Arizona is endowed with approximately 135 odonate species, a number that is relatively small when compared to the more than 450 North American species. And over 180 species are found in the state of Maryland and the District of Columbia even though the combined area of these two regions is much smaller than that of Arizona! As another example, Maricopa County has an official list of about 70 odonate species but is home to around 150 breeding bird species. However, numbers are not everything and there are many reasons why odonates deserve our attention. One of these is that a substantial proportion of Arizona odonates are primarily Mexican species that reach the northern limit of their distribution here and are found nowhere else in the country. Looking for these will take you to some of the most spectacular and biologically interesting locations that our state has to offer, such as Sycamore Canyon, California Gulch, and canyons of the Huachuca Mountains. Arizona has a great diversity of ecosystems ranging from alpine lakes



Twelve-spotted Skimmer - Libellula pulchella - Male



White-belted Ringtail - Erpetogomphus compositus - Male

to marshes, rivers, and isolated desert oases. Given this diversity and the state's size, our odonates include species with a mostly northern distribution along with southern species that barely reach into the state. With regard to their geographical distribution, the latter are the equivalent of our Elegant Trogons, Rufous-capped Warblers, and Thick-billed Kingbirds!

“AS ALL ODONATES DEPEND ON THE PRESENCE OF WATER FOR THEIR REPRODUCTION, SOME SPECIES ARE INCREASINGLY USED AS BIO-INDICATORS OF AQUATIC HABITAT QUALITY.”

Odonates also are ideal subjects for nature photographers. They vary greatly in size, ranging from the tiny forktails that forage in grassy areas to the Giant Darner, the largest North American odonate. Many species are every bit as colorful and spectacular as our brightest birds, a feature that is reflected in their names: Neon Skimmer, Cerulean Dancer, Desert Firetail, Fiery-eyed Dancer, and many others. In addition, they are often approachable and thus also easily photographed. Even casual observers readily notice that many odonates prefer to perch relatively low and out in the open.



Desert Shadowdamsel - Palaemnema domina - Male

Growing interest in odonates and particularly in their photography is amply demonstrated by the recent and rapid proliferation of books, websites, and online social groups that are dedicated to them.

But as is the case for birds, odonate observation and photography are not only fun and enjoyable, but also serve the purpose of documenting the presence of these organisms in space and time. This information can then be “officially” entered into the OdonataCentral



Neon Skimmer - Libellula croceipennis - Male

website (<http://www.odonatacentral.org/>) – the equivalent of eBird, with which most birders are now familiar. Remember that the number of odonate species is relatively small compared to that of other groups of organisms (Arizona has approximately 330 butterfly species!), and so learning to identify most of them is not particularly challenging and certainly within the reach of anyone motivated to do so.

Another particularly attractive aspect of studying odonates in Arizona is that many aspects of their biology and ecology are poorly known. Much has been learned but much more remains to be discovered about their seasonal movements (some species are migratory!), life cycles, long-term changes in distribution, and behavior. Each of us can contribute to the knowledge of these insects' biology. Doing so is scientifically important. As all odonates depend on the presence of water for their reproduction, some species are increasingly used as bio-indicators of aquatic habitat quality. Furthermore, odonates play an important ecological role. Indeed, aquatic larvae and flying adults are eaten by many animals ranging from fish to birds and, being themselves carnivorous, odonates consume large numbers of invertebrates. In the next decades, further habitat degradation by humans and global climate changes – especially the forecasted decrease in annual precipitation in the southwest US – may markedly affect the distribution, diversity, and numbers of odonates within our region. It is only by carefully documenting their current and future status that we will be able to identify these changes.

To learn more, visit: www.azdragonfly.net 🦋

Pierre Deviche is Professor of Environmental Physiology at Arizona State University, where he and his team study the behavioral and physiological mechanisms by which organisms adjust to their environment.

In Memoriam: Robert A. Witzeman, MD

(remembrances compiled by the Editor)

Our late Conservation Chair Bob Witzeman always began his conservation column in *The Cactus Wren•dition* with a quote and I will continue his tradition with a quote expressing a sentiment I think he would have echoed:

"We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect." Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* (1949).

Carolina Butler (www.oralhistoryoftheyavapai.com) shares her memories of Bob:

"The interdependent relationships of the environment which humans value lost a great defender August 30, when Bob Witzeman, 87, died. He was a longtime leader in MAS and endeared himself to us because he was so nice and pleasant and encouraging. But with Bob it concealed a human dynamo who converted his passions and endless energy into action and achieved a long list of awesome results. Bob was active to the very end.

"I met Bob and his wife Janet in the early 1970s and together with Frank Welsh (author *How To Create A Water Crisis*) quickly put our heads together to work on water issues. Fighting Orme Dam took years of work until its defeat in late 1981. It was an unbelievable come-from-behind victory. We saved a culture, the Yavapai tribe of the Fort McDowell Reservation. We saved rare Bald Eagles nesting along the Salt and Verde rivers. In 1976, three pairs were part of a small band of seven nesting pairs remaining in an eight-state area of the Southwest.

"We also saved rare flowing stretches of two rivers in the Sonoran Desert, the Salt and the Verde. Saved also was rich riparian habitat with the highest bird population densities in North America. Saved were fish, amphibians, reptiles, mammals, vegetation, mesquite thickets and cottonwoods. Tubing, a popular summer recreation for thousands, was saved. Orme Dam had threatened to de-nature the environment.

"Many battles were ahead and our dynamo charged on. Bob also completed a valuable historical record of news clips, letters, etc., into four notebooks. These contain useful information for activists, students, researchers, journalists, plus inspiration for any reader.

"The way our friend Bob Witzeman lived his life is aptly described in a beautiful quote by Helen Keller: 'True happiness is not attained through self-gratification but through fidelity to a worthy purpose.'"

When Mark Larson, MAS President, remembers Bob Witzeman, he thinks of perseverance and courage. Courage in the face of adversity and hostility. Courage displayed in softly spoken words.



Bob Witzeman and Robin Silver at a court hearing, November 11, 2011

Perseverance when the mountain seemed to others to be too steep and too high to summit.

Mark recalls public hearings about (desert-nesting) Bald Eagles and the Mount Graham telescopes and Rio Salado and the San Pedro River and the proposed mine at Oak Flat when the bureaucracy and big business forces seemed insurmountable; yet, Bob would not be cowed into submission.

He continued the fight, calling on

friends to write letters to the editor as proxies for the wild things and wild rivers that could not speak for themselves. He came to those hearings and public meetings armed with the facts he had gathered from reliable, unbiased sources and presented them coolly to the assembled decision-makers.

Often, he was rebuffed or ignored, but he kept at it week after week, month after month, until they or their superiors backed off or were defeated in court.

Declares Mark: "Robert A. Witzeman, MD was one of the most effective conservationists in Arizona history. We, and future generations who will never have the pleasure to have known him as a man and as a friend, owe him a huge debt of gratitude. I urge you to repay Bob by getting involved in the next worthy fight."

Robin Silver, MAS Vice President, asks: "What can you say about the greatest conservationist in Arizona history?"

He continues: "In April 1989, Bob showed up with a protest sign at a Boycott Exxon demonstration that we organized at the Exxon station near his home. We spent the whole march comparing notes about our medical careers and ongoing conservation challenges. By that summer, we were working together as an inseparable team.

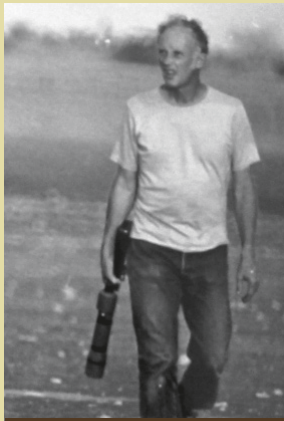
"For the last twenty five years, Bob and I talked nearly daily about some conservation issue. The 'two Jews' as we were called by University of Arizona priest-astronomers, angry that we were resisting their conquest of the Mount Graham summit. We would work together on a myriad of issues more than Mount Graham: Desert Nesting Bald Eagle, Mexican Spotted Owl, Northern Goshawk, Southwestern Willow Flycatcher, Mexican Gray Wolf, Fossil Creek, the Verde and the San Pedro to mention a few. Countless road trips, demonstrations, court cases, political meetings, non-political meetings, and even an occasional instructional bird walk, we've had quite the ride.

"The morning before Bob went birding for the last time, our conversation concerned the new Mount Graham campaign targeting the University of Arizona's remaining telescope partners.

"What can you say about the greatest conservationist in Arizona history? Thank you! And we are carrying on..." 🐦



Bob Witzeman with his completed pond with water lilies and damselflies Feb 2010. Photo by Mark Larson



Bob Bradley birding at
Painted Rock Dam
July 1975.
Photo by Bob Witzeman

In Memoriam: *Bob Bradley*

by Janet Witzeman

Bob Bradley passed away July 16. He was 89. Bob began birding in 1971 when he discovered a Rose-breasted Grosbeak in his north central Phoenix yard on January 30. He served as Field Trip Chairman for the Maricopa Audubon Society and was co-compiler of the Phoenix and Salt/Verde River Christmas Counts from 1979 to 1999. He conducted beginning birding classes for the Desert Botanical Garden and Rio Salado Community College. Bob acted as a guide for a number of visiting birders.

As one of the most active birders in Arizona, his Arizona State List was recorded among the top five. He continued birding after he moved to Grand Junction, Colorado when he retired as a metallurgical engineer. His final major birding trip was to Antarctica at the age of 87.

Those of us who birded with him will remember him as a serious contributor to Arizona field ornithology, as well as a fun guy to bird with. 🐦

In Memoriam: *Salome "Bix" Demaree*

by Janet Witzeman

Bix passed away July 6. She was 95. She began birding as a child in Vermont with her father. She was actively birding and keeping records in Maricopa County since she moved to Phoenix in 1945. In 1953, she was one of the founders of the Maricopa Audubon Society where she served as President and Education Chairman for several years. She was co-compiler of the Phoenix Christmas Counts for 25 years and a leader of the weekly bird walks at Encanto and Papago Parks for 30 years. Bix was one of the most active field trip leaders and guided many visiting birders. She was a charter member of the American Birding Association and a trustee of the Arizona Nature Conservancy.

Bix was the author of several articles, including "Nest Building, Incubation Period, and Fledging of Black-chinned Hummingbird" in *The Wilson Bulletin* (1971) and "Observations on Roof Nesting Killdeer" in *The Condor* (1975).

Probably her most important contribution to Arizona Field Ornithology was as co-author of the first two volumes of *Birds of Phoenix and Maricopa County, Arizona*. For the first volume, published in 1972, it was her field records that provided the bulk of the information on status and habitat of each species. Her species accounts and knowledge added greatly to Volume 2, published in 1997.

My first knowledge of birds and habitats in the county came from Bix. As soon as my children were enrolled in morning nursery school, I accompanied Bix on her weekly Wednesday birding trips. I will never forget my first trip with her when she took me to the old River Ranch at 43rd Avenue and the Salt River on a September morn in 1963. I was amazed at the number and variety of shorebirds. That was the beginning of my Maricopa County List. There followed many years of delightful weekly field trips with her that included scenic lunch stops with her colorful beach towels serving as our tablecloths.

Bix achieved her goal of recording 500 species on her Arizona State List. Bix led a happy productive life. She lives on in our memories and the important work she left behind.

We thank Bix's son Jim and granddaughter Jesse for the donation of her bird books to Maricopa Audubon Society and Arizona Field Ornithologists. 🐦



L to R Eleanor Radke,
Janet Witzeman, Bix
Demaree. Photo by The
Arizona Republic May
14, 1972

In Memoriam: *Eleanor Radke*

by Janet Witzeman

Eleanor Radke passed away August 4. She was 89. Her interest in birds began as a child growing up in Wyoming. Her serious study developed when she and her husband moved to a rural area of upstate New York. She co-founded a bird club and a wildlife sanctuary in that area. At that time she applied for, and was granted a bird-banding license. After moving to Cave Creek in 1964, she continued banding, and served as the editor of *North American Bird Bander* for 20 years. Her chief study was raptors. Eleanor was editor of *The Roadrunner* (predecessor of *The Cactus Wren•dition*) for several years. She also served as a bird rehabilitation volunteer in Cave Creek.

Probably her most important contribution to Arizona Field Ornithology was as co-author of the first two volumes of *Birds of Phoenix and Maricopa County, Arizona*. In her capacity as editor at Eldon Publishing, she was instrumental in the editing, printing, and publishing of both volumes, as well as adding her own knowledge of status and habitats of species in the County. For the 1972 edition, we met weekly at the Desert Botanical Garden where she served as a volunteer in the library there. For the 1997 edition, I spent my Saturdays with her at her home in Cave Creek, where javelinas nested in her yard and a family of Harris's Hawks was visible in a large saguaro in the distance.

Eleanor will be remembered for her long, happy, and productive life. 🐦

Nature Through the Artist's Eye: Su Douglas Manje



Su Douglas Manje lives and works in the desert of east Mesa. She was an art educator for more than 20 years, teaching art to students of all ages. She has exhibited her artwork professionally for over thirty years in Arizona and California. In Scottsdale, Arizona, the C.G. Rein Gallery and the Joan Cawley Gallery represented her work. Her artwork is in numerous private and corporate collections in North America. Su creates artwork at Arroyo Press Studio, a private printmaking and painting studio founded by her husband, artist David Manje. She has work at the Desert Botanical Garden displayed permanently in Gertrude's Restaurant and the Schilling Library.



Guarded Treasure
60" x 48" Acrylic on Canvas

Most movement in the desert is visible when the breeze pushes through the trees. The air streams like water through the dry wash bed. Even in the summer, it is noticeably cooler at dusk in the silent river of its dry, sandy bed. Time and light shift through the trees, as life rests waiting for nocturnal adventures. But movement in the brush along the wash bank occurs, because it is hard for young treasure to stay completely still. Seemingly in repose, hidden in shadow, the color of granite and sand, the guardian watches always.



The Shadows Slumber
60" x 48" Acrylic on Canvas

I paint life that exists inside cool shadows. The painting is quiet on the surface. The bright colors and light of the desert are a heavy, unmoving mass. Life in the desert breathes in the shadows and pushes back the danger of light. I mimic, with vibration of line and chaos of color, how desert plants and geography combine to conceal and protect the secrets of a shadow. I use acrylic paint so every color I choose and every line I create remain visible inside the shadows. I paint my desert, so that for a moment, time stops and secrets are revealed, yet slumber safely hidden for eternity.

Su says: "I grew up in a desert swept clean of native vegetation in the rural community of Chandler, Arizona. It was a landscape of one-lane roads bordered by irrigation canals and cotton fields. These roads connected the then small towns of the now merged Phoenix community. The vast, clean sky illuminated a horizon of mountains. I could see shadows shimmer and dance on the Superstition Mountains. The true desert was there filled with a forest of palo verde and mesquite trees. In my art, I explore this landscape. I investigate it. I mine it for gold. I wait, watch, and map it on my canvas. I tell its stories one vignette at a time. I paint the desert. It is my home and I can keep it safe and close on my canvas. It comforts me.

"I have studied art. I have taught art. At first I studied art for my own pleasure. But then I wanted to understand why are some so driven to watch and draw. This led to a doctorate in curriculum and instruction with a focus on research methodology. Drawing and painting are research methods. Drawing and painting are our earliest communication methods. They evolved into the abstract concepts of words, sentences, and stories. There is no communication and understanding without visual inspection. I watch and draw. I am a researcher. I document what I see and tell its story.

"Drawing is raw, direct truth for me. But painting is different. Painting allows me to embellish upon the structure of drawing with my experience, imagination, and color. Painting is intimate and messy. I investigate reality with drawing and embellish it with paint to add little deceptions and innuendo that uncover the essence of my subject."



Cosmic Aloe Amidst Treasures
36" x 48" Acrylic on Canvas

Inside the squares of tile and curves of pottery exists a universe of subtle variation, texture, and color, each inch a pleasure to visually explore. The potted aloe's surface shimmers with colors that move in a stream of dots and dashes that burst into the atmosphere and off into the cosmos. The rug is alive with a multitude of tiny brush strokes ready to break free. The collection of adored items is still in comparison, but the rabbit sculptures from Oaxaca are embellished with a constellation of dots that complement the aloe's cosmic presence. The man-made objects are just as alive with movement as the living plants and rabbit. It is not just a still life. Examine it closely. All seems to be contained within its structures now, but soon will break apart into atoms and radiate out into the atmosphere, just as the aloe is now doing. Dots of color moving like life force.



Trouble in Paradise
60" x 48" Acrylic on canvas

The Rosy-faced Lovebirds dive fearlessly and spin noisily as they fly between trees to the holes in the saguaro. The elusive coatamundi or ringtail hopes to cause trouble, but is never quick enough or concealed well enough to alarm the birds. The coatamundi is one of the few creatures of the desert I have never seen near our home. Once though, high in a mesquite, while watching the constant commotion of lovebirds, my mother glimpsed one. Excited, she asked others to come and see. I came to see. My father drove 30 minutes home from the farm to see the creature with big rings on his tail. Alas, a big ring-tailed house cat. To commemorate the event, I present, "Trouble in Paradise." And in the role of the cat, I have placed a coatamundi because really it's just perception.

The Violet Shadows Whisper
60" x 48" Acrylic on Canvas

The desert willow blooms violet from March to October. It is a perpetual spot of color in the withering heat of a desert summer. The willow's long, thin leaves exist in a tangle and move continuously with the breeze. Too long in the sun and one hears them whisper tales, of threats real and imagined. The terra cotta rabbits gossip about the possibilities. Is the threat in the spines of the cholla snaking through a clump of violent, violet opuntia? Or is it in the equally sharp, points of the carved jaguar's teeth or the spear like tips of the looming agave? The antelope squirrels remain calm and collect the fallen blooms.

I like to paint my desert: its harsh light, its vibrant colors, and deep shadows. I especially like to paint the willows in my courtyard. My father gave them to me. He grows desert trees and this willow hybrid was named Dora's Desert Rose, in memory of my grandmother. Sometimes, I arrange my objects on the walls to tell a little fiction and keep her memory company. Thus, I amuse my vision and paint my way through another too hot summer.



Maricopa Audubon Society

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Monthly Meeting

First Tuesday of the month, unless otherwise announced, September through April, 7:30 p.m. Our meeting place is 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. Pre-meeting dinners (September through April) are held at Rolling Hills 19th Tee Restaurant, 1405 N. Mill Avenue, starting at 6:00 p.m.

Membership Information

There are two ways to become a Maricopa Audubon member and to receive *The Cactus Wren•dition* by mail:

1. By joining the National Audubon Society. If you live in the Phoenix metro area generally east of 43rd Avenue, or in the East Valley other than in Gilbert, Chandler or most of Mesa, when National Audubon Society receives your check made payable to National Audubon Society and your membership application, you will be assigned to Maricopa Audubon Society, or you can send your check payable to National Audubon Society and your National Audubon Society membership application to Scott Burge, membership chair, and he will send it on in to National Audubon for you, or

2. By becoming a "Friend of Maricopa Audubon". In this case you will become a member of Maricopa Audubon Society only, and you will not receive the Audubon magazine or any of the other "benefits" of National Audubon membership, but you will receive a one-year subscription to *The Cactus Wren•dition*. "Friends" contribution categories are: Anna's Hummingbird-\$20; Verdin-\$35-\$99; LeConte's Thrasher-\$100-\$249; Cactus Wren-\$250-\$999; Harris's Hawk-\$1,000-\$9,999 and California Condor-\$10,000+. Mail your Friends membership application and your check made payable to Maricopa Audubon to Scott Burge, membership chair. All "Friends" members receive certain designated discounts. (If you reside outside the above-indicated geographical area, the only way to receive a subscription to *The Cactus Wren•dition* is to become a "Friend".) For National Audubon membership address changes or other questions call (800) 274-4201 or email chadd@audubon.org. For all other membership questions call or email Scott Burge.

Submissions

Copy for *The Cactus Wren•dition* must be received by the editor by e-mail, by January 15, April 1, July 1, and October 1. Articles not received by the deadlines may not appear in the upcoming issue. Email to: *The Cactus Wren•dition* Editor, Gillian Rice: editor.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.

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