



# DESERT RIVERS AUDUBON SOCIETY

VOLUME 3 - SPRING 2010 NEWSLETTER



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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Mike Rupp

## AUDUBON AT HOME

Krys Hammers

### Notes on Spring Migration

Welcome to the Spring issue of the Desert River's newsletter. Migration is in full swing! In addition to announcements and our regular features, I've lined up a few articles that relate to **spring migration**, one of our best birding periods. Authors Jim Burns, Jerry Lang, and Pete Moulton have written about returning warblers and emerging odenata, and our announcements reflect various opportunities to see migrating species returning to Arizona.

One "birder" who was very busy each spring was our namesake- John James Audubon, and Richard Rhodes' biography gives us a glimpse into the ruggedness of this character and his times:

*After a while in the wilderness, he wanted get back to his wife and son. He'd been wandering along the Mississippi valley in southern Illinois. About a hundred and sixty-five miles from his home in Henderson, Kentucky. For this guy, that was walking distance. He set out at his usual steady pace, cutting diagonally across the state through forests, fields and swamps. There were bears, snakes and maybe some dangerous people. He had a gun and knew his way around rough country. But he hadn't expected so much water. It was ankle deep much of the time. He said later that his shoes kept slipping off, and this slowed him. Still, he was a tireless walker, doing 45 miles in a twelve-hour day. On dry roads he could walk for stretches at about 8 miles per hour, a running speed for the rest of us. If you hadn't known this, you might've pegged him for a foppish French dude. He had those manners. And the accent.*



*Yet he was tough. He slept in the open, and by day kept up the steady pace, making notes about wildlife and birds as he went. He was interested in the pinnated grouse, or Greater Prairie Chicken. And once described a bird he'd seen as a "carbonated warbler," whatever that might be. He reached the Ohio, found a ferry to take him across, then walked home. Three and a half days and a hundred and sixty-five miles later, he was in the arms of his wife and son. The next day, he*

*up and went for a walk in the country. Why not? He was a hard guy. A two-fisted birdwatcher. They hadn't heard that phrase yet, back in 1811. They hadn't heard of this guy either, at the time. But they would eventually know his name: Audubon.*

The prior of a Cistercian Abbey in Germany, writing about AD 1250 reported that a man had tied a parchment to the leg of an adult Barn Swallow with the message "Oh Swallow, where do you live in winter?" He must have been delighted to get the message back in spring- "In Asia, in the home of Petrus".



This account may well be the first bird banding experiment in history, but fanciful theories abounded back then, and Olaus Magnus, Bishop of Uppsala Sweden, insisted that northern birds went to roost in reedbeds in the fall, allowed themselves to gradually sink into the mud, and spent the winter asleep there. The woodcut above from Magnus's book of 1555, illustrates this notion as fishermen haul in both fish and Barn Swallows from a lake.

*To find the universal elements enough; to find the air and the water exhilarating; to be refreshed by a morning walk or an evening saunter; to be thrilled by the stars at night; to be elated over a bird's nest or a wildflower in spring - these are some of the rewards of the simple life. ~John Burroughs*

### Backyard Bird Habitats

Our backyards are our own private little pieces of nature and can provide a measure of serenity for us. To be able to sit in a shaded area and watch and listen to the birds that you've attracted is a great experience. Maybe you can hear water running from a waterfall or fountain. Sounds great, doesn't it? Well the birds love it too.

So how do we get to that kind of backyard? Go native. Think about providing food, shelter and water to birds by using native landscape plants. The first thing is to eliminate or minimize the grass in your yard. Green grassy lawns are not native to the desert. They can take a lot of water and maintenance. It was a happy moment when I sold my lawnmower. I thought of the times when I was mowing a lawn that was mostly dirt when it was 105 degrees out. I now have more time for that shade sitting thing.



Even if you are can't bring yourself to completely eliminate grass, you can still plant native flowers, shrubs and trees. You can have plants in bloom in your yard year-round in our climate. For example, Chuparosa will grow to a good size, blooms year-round and attracts hummingbirds as well as any feeder would. It will become thick and tangled, which provides shelter for other birds. My Abert's Towhees love to forage in and under my Chuparosa and Lesser Goldfinch will dive into the bush for protection in an instant. The saguaro is a great plant for birds. Cavity nesters love them. The blooms provide a source of food and they attract insects that the birds will also eat. Palo Verde trees have a beautiful spring bloom and provide shelter and great nesting areas for birds. You can count on attracting Verdins to your yard with Palo Verde. The best thing about providing shelter is the recommendation not to prune and trim plants to any great extent. Of course, all these native plants will survive on very little water, our scarcest resource in the desert.

A water source for a bird can be as simple as a hose that drips. The sound of dripping water is a magnet for birds. You can also provide a bird bath as a water source. If you have still water, you can buy a device from Wild Birds Unlimited that agitates the water so that you won't be providing a breeding area for mosquitoes. They also sell a great drip system where the water drips from a higher point, which magnifies the dripping sound. Of course adding a water feature such as a stream, pond or waterfall can be very nice.

Native plants often provide food for birds, but you can also provide supplemental food with bird feeders. Finches and Goldfinches love those thistle sacks, but my Juncos and Abert's Towhees have also learned how to eat from the sack. Most birds will eat seed from platform feeders. Woodpeckers will also come to suet feeders. Verdins love the oranges and apples that I put out for them. Of course, hummingbirds will frequent feeders and also buzz your flowering plants.

Desert Rivers Audubon will soon implement a Bird Habitat Recognition Program. The people who care for property that provides a proper bird and wildlife habitat, regardless of the size, will be recognized. A sign will be provided so that you can influence your friends and neighbors to also "go native." Parks, schools and businesses can also set aside an area for a recognized bird habitat. Once their habitats have matured, we can provide short bird talks for these groups.

There are lots of reasons to use desert landscaping such as lower water bills, less maintenance, attracting birds; but really it's all about that shade sitting thing!



# MONARCH BUTTERFLY MIGRATIONS

Article : Gail Morris

Photos : Southwest Monarch Study

The Southwest Monarch Study, coordinated by Chris Kline (Director of Education, Grange Insurance Audubon Center), is studying the migration patterns of Monarch Butterflies in Arizona. It is well accepted that Monarch Butterflies East of the Rocky Mountains travel to the mountains near Mexico City during the winter. Monarchs West of the Rockies migrate to the coast of California. Since Arizona is South of the Rocky Mountains, where do Monarchs go? Or, do they go anywhere at all?

We often hear that there are not any monarchs in Arizona. Yet in 2009 over 2,000 monarchs were spotted and tagged around the state! At one time it was even thought that monarch butterflies were not found in the Phoenix area. This past Fall we were pleasantly surprised to find monarchs nectaring and laying eggs on Desert Milkweed (*Asclepias subulata*) in town. Recently it was believed that Desert Milkweed was too fibrous as a host-plant. Now we have a new area to explore.

Since 2003 citizen-scientists of the Southwest Monarch Study have tagged and released monarchs passing through Arizona in the Fall. We place a small blue tag on the discal cell of their wing – this is their center of gravity and doesn't affect their flight in any way. The blue tags are like a license plate that say they passed through the state of Arizona. In the last few years four tagged Arizona monarchs were recovered in the over-wintering sites outside of Mexico City. Last year for the first time four blue-tagged monarchs were spotted in California: two at Camp Pendleton and two at Ellwood Main near Goleta. Of these, one was identified as being tagged just five miles away from a monarch that flew South to Mexico City! We have so much more to learn about flyways through the state.



The Southwest Monarch Study also has identified a small cluster of overwintering monarchs at the Rio Salado Restoration Habitat in downtown Phoenix for the past four years. The Desert Botanical Gardens is a winter haven for monarch butterflies – you can often spot them in the Herb Garden. Many people think these are escapees from their Fall Monarch Exhibit, but wild monarchs were first spotted at the Desert Botanical Garden on September 11, three full weeks before the butterfly pavilion opened.

While the Southwest Monarch Study is slowly learning more about the Monarch butterfly's Fall migration, little is known about their Spring migration. Since many birders are out in the field and riparian areas around the Phoenix metropolitan area and the state, we are hoping you can help us learn more. Usually around Valentine's Day the Monarch butterflies at Rio Salado and the Desert Botanical Garden start mating and moving around the state. We hear of an occasional monarch sighting in February through May. But from mid-May through June in six years only one monarch was spotted. In July we see monarchs slowly start appearing in Springerville and also the Southeastern portion of the state near St. David Cienega or Canelo. Much about their movements is unknown.



## Legend

- Confirmed Hot Spot
- Confirmed Overwintering Spot
- Suspected Hot Spot
- Suspected Overwintering Spot

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# CONSERVATION NEWS

Richard Filley, DRAS Vice-President

Audubon's Christmas Bird Counts continue to aid conservation efforts by providing bird population data to Audubon scientists and other organizations. Here is one man's account of his experiences with six Christmas Counts in three states.

Have you had a birding experience that changed everything? Maybe it was looking at an unusual bird up close for the first time, or perhaps attending your first bird festival? I've been birding less than two years, and for me a real game changer was taking part in the last two Christmas Bird Count (CBC) events, held annually under the direction of the National Audubon Society. The combination of seeing lots of new birds (including 31 lifers between this year and last), traveling all day (often hiking or walking), and making new friends (while sharing adventures) make taking part in at least one Christmas Bird Count each year something I would recommend to most any birder.



After hearing about the CBC at a Desert Rivers Audubon Society general membership meeting, I did my first Christmas Bird Count at the Tres Rios Wetlands in December 2008. It was cold, we looked for birds all day long, and the day ended with a downpour. But I saw lots of new birds and new places, and was hooked.

The plans I made for the next year's 2009-10 CBC were ambitious, and included two counts in Arizona, two in Southern California, and two in Washington. Held this past year for the 110th consecutive year, the CBC is the world's longest running 'citizen science' project. Over 50,000 volunteer birders fanned out across 1,821 designated CBC locations across North America from December 14, 2009 to January 5, 2010. Collectively, we counted exactly 53,693,518 birds.

That's a big number, but I can relate to it. On December 14, 2009 I began my CBC odyssey with a local count known as the Salt - Verde Rivers Count, directed by DRAS member Kurt Rademaker. Among the many species I counted while hiking eight miles cross country along the north bank of the Salt River east of the Valley that day were 37 Phainopepla. In total, the volunteers on the Salt - Verde count tallied 703 Phainopepla, the most of any count area in the nation this year.

The National Audubon Society note that "the data collected by observers over the past century allow researchers, conservation biologists, and other interested individuals to study the long-term health and status of bird populations across North America. When combined with other surveys such as the Breeding Bird Survey, it provides a picture of how the continent's bird populations have changed in time and space over the past hundred years. The value of citizen science - volunteers like me and you collecting needed information - can't be overestimated, since there is no other way to obtain the data. In 2007, Christmas Bird Count data was instrumental in the development of two Audubon State of the Birds Reports - Common Birds in Decline, which revealed that some of America's most beloved and familiar birds have taken a nosedive over the past forty years, and WatchList 2007, which identified 178 rarer species in the continental U.S. and 39 in Hawaii that are imperiled. These reports helped scientists and policy-makers to both identify threats to birds and habitat, and promote broad awareness of the need to address them.

After my first CBC here in Arizona I traveled to Seattle, doing the Lake Sammamish - Cougar Mountain - Issaquah CBC, led by renowned bird and wildlife recordist Martyn Stewart. He is British and his sense of humor kept my mind off of the fact that it drizzled all day. A few days later I boarded the Vashona, a boat big enough to have a heater for a cold but clear day taking a look at the birds of Quartermaster Harbor. Once back in Arizona, I took part in the Cave Creek CBC headed up by DRAS chapter member Walter Thurber. Finally, I headed off to Southern California for a day counting the birds of the North Salton Sea, followed by a day spent at and around Mile Square Park in Orange County.



In his book *Of a Feather: A Brief History of American Birding*, Scott Weidensaul explains that the Christmas Bird Count actually started as an alternative to what were called 'side hunts' or 'match hunts.' Today, we'd call them 'killing contests,' since the objective was basically to shoot as much game - including birds - as possible. As Weidensaul tells it, "even a dedicated hunter like Frank M. Chapman could be moved to revulsion by the sheer waste of a match hunt. On Christmas day 1900, 27 people hit the woods, field glasses in hand, in 25 locales, from New Brunswick to Louisiana to California. By the end of the day, the teams had tallied more than 18,000 birds of 90 species, and the Christmas Bird Census (later Count) was born."



Madera Canyon, Atacosa Highlands, Boyce Thompson; there are some Arizona counts on my 'Bucket List' for sure. But I'll have to look further afield if I want to keep getting lots of lifers at my Christmas Bird Counts. Hmmmm... I wonder how cold it gets in Alaska at Christmas?

*Held this past year for the 110th consecutive year, the CBC is the world's longest running 'citizen science' project.*

Salton Sea Marshes



# THE NEOTROPICAL CONNECTION

Article : Dr. Jerry Lang - Photos: Bruce Taubert

**When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe.**  
**John Muir**

What does your morning cup of Columbian coffee have in common with the beautiful yellow warbler you just spotted at the Riparian Preserve? The answer is, they both have a neotropical (Central and South American) connection.

Besides providing 'mountain-grown coffee, the Neotropics provide mountain forests, rainforests, wetlands, and grasslands that are key to the survival of 340-plus migratory songbirds. Most of the fifty-two species of warblers breeding in North America, spend more time in their neotropical winter habitats than they do in the north. Declining numbers of many migratory birds including warblers, vireos, flycatchers, tanagers, and others are linked to extensive loss of winter habitat.

An article by T. Edward Nickens in the April 2006 National Wildlife Magazine cites research showing the importance of South American winter habitat for the golden-cheeked warbler. Although there is enough habitat in North America to support approximately 220,000 pairs of warblers, there is only enough Latin American highland pine-oak forest in the species' winter range to support 34,000 pairs. Similar limitations imposed by lack of suitable winter habitat are common to many other migrant songbird species.

Environmental pressures continue to increase in tropical America. The burgeoning human population in South America is expected to grow by 100 million before 2025. Natural forests across South America continue to be cut at highly unsustainable rates with 20 percent of Amazonian rainforests already destroyed. Rainforests and montane forests are replaced with livestock grazing lands, sugarcane fields for biofuel production, soybean monoculture, sun coffee, banana plantations, and other land uses contributing little to the needs of songbirds. When the impacts of invasive species, pesticide contamination, exotic bird trade, climate change, and even locally intensive ecotourism are added to the permanent land use changes, neotropical migrants face a formidable challenge.

To meet this challenge, Birdlife International, in cooperation with National Audubon and many other NGOs throughout the Americas, are identifying Important Bird Areas (IBAs). Over 2,300 IBAs encompassing approximately 250 million acres have been identified in the neotropics to date. The goal is to eventually identify approximately 4,000 globally significant IBAs in the region.

The IBA program starts with identifying and prioritizing sites for conservation and is followed by community involvement and planning to insure long-term preservation, restoration, and monitoring. The IBA concept works only when local populations

including citizens, private landowners, communities, conservation organizations, and governmental entities are thoroughly integrated into the process.

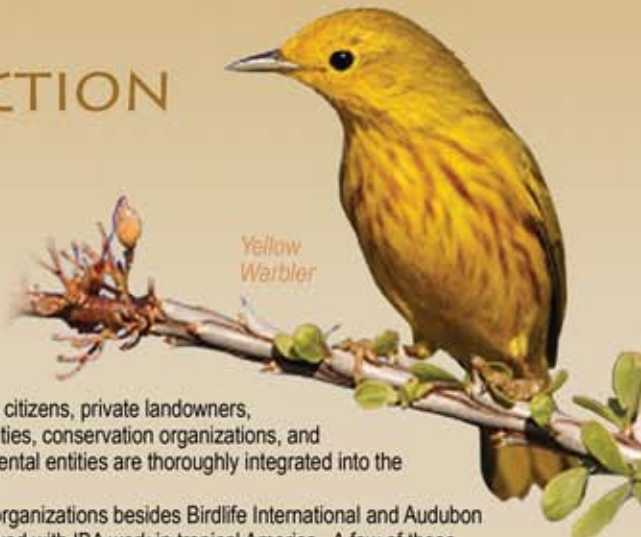
Many organizations besides Birdlife International and Audubon are involved with IBA work in tropical America. A few of these include the American Birding Association (ABA) and their Birders' Exchange (BEX) Program, The Nature Conservancy, the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, and the Rainforest Alliance. As Desert Rivers Audubon members, we can all play a role in helping neotropical migrant birds survive and thrive in their winter habitats. A few actions we can take might include:

Reducing our carbon footprint. Climate change is already contributing to loss of cloud forests, disappearing tropical mountain glaciers, and increased frequency of droughts and floods.

Buying shade-grown coffee and chocolate. The National Audubon Society lists over 50 species of migratory songbirds using shade-grown coffee plantations where forest habitat is preserved. Sun-grown coffee plantations destroy forest habitat, increase erosion, and are heavy users of pesticides and fertilizers.

Ordering organically grown cut flowers. Seventy percent of cut flowers sold by US florists originate in Columbia and adjacent South American countries where they are treated with heavy amounts of pesticides.

Organizing a Birders' Exchange (BEX) equipment drive to provide new or



Yellow Warbler



Red-faced Warbler



Yellow-rumped Warbler



Black-throated Grey Warbler



Lucy's Warbler

used binoculars, scopes, field guides and reference materials to cooperators throughout Latin America.

Participating in a BEX training workshop in Central or South America. Joining, contributing to, and participating in some of the many national and international organizations working on behalf of birds in the neotropics.

As you sip your shade-grown morning coffee, resolve to take action insuring that your children and grandchildren will have an opportunity to enjoy the beauty of a yellow warbler and all the other feathered visitors forming part of the neotropical connection.



Common Yellowthroat



Wilson's Warbler



# DRAGONS AND DAMSELS



*Red Saddlebags*

Article and  
Photos : Pete  
Moulton

**A**rizona birders learn early that birds are most numerous and varied near surface water, and consequently most of us concentrate our birding efforts near watery habitats. We also learn early that birds don't live in a vacuum, and that plenty of other species inhabit these same areas. Some are small and secretive animals that we hardly notice, while others are large, and attract our attention. Chief among the latter category are the dragonflies and damselflies, known collectively to entomologists as the insect Order Odonata, and known more familiarly as odonates, odes or d-flies to their aficionados.

We can hardly fail to notice the dragonflies. They're large animals, among the largest of our insects, and strong fliers. Their habits make them very visible, as they patrol endlessly over the open water, searching for food and mates, or perch openly on waterside vegetation in the manner of a flycatcher or Accipiter, waiting for food or potential mates to fly by. Many dragons are brightly colored or strikingly marked, and a select few are both. The damselflies are a different story. They're smaller than the dragons, and their weaker flight frequently limits their activities to the protected interior of waterside vegetation, where they can be difficult to observe. Their colors are just as bright, and their patterns equally striking, but their smaller size and more secretive nature unfortunately render these attributes harder to appreciate.

Differences in features such as color, pattern, size, and behavior will lead the thoughtful naturalist to conclude that different species are involved, and so they are. Arizona hosts some 66 species of dragonflies and another 55 of damsels. The total of 120 or so of odonate species, while not as great as Arizona's bird and butterfly lists, still provides a satisfying diversity for us to pursue, and we find that we can chase odes in the field in much the same manner as we do those other groups. Dragons and damsels have fieldmarks. Their fieldmarks may be a little different from those we're used to using for birds, but that's simply a matter of making allowances for their differing anatomy. Amateur odonatists often keep life lists, and many make trips to new areas in search of regionalized or rare species, just as birders do; for them the satisfaction of adding a new species to an ode life list is just as great.

So how do we start odonatizing? The best place to start is to become somewhat familiar with the insect body plan. The bodies of insects consist of three major divisions: the head, the thorax, and the abdomen. These are all quite noticeable in odonates, and all can provide clues for identification. The heads consist mainly of eyes and jaws. Odonates have large compound eyes, so large in most of our dragons that they cover the entire side of the head, and meet on top in a long seam. In the damsels, the eyes, while still large, are more like beads stuck on the sides of the face, and separated on top of the head by a distance greater than the diameter of an eye. This is in keeping with the odes' predatory nature. They hunt by sight, and in some ways their visual capabilities are greater than ours: they can see farther into the ultraviolet spectrum than we can, for one example, and they can detect the flickering of light at a rate twice our ability, for another. The eyes can be distinctive in color, and therefore useful in the matter of identification. The face of a dragon consists mainly of mouthparts, again an adaptation for a predatory lifestyle. In many dragons the color of the face is a fieldmark; the faces of damsels are usually color coordinated with the rest of the insect, but in some the faces are contrastingly marked, and serve as useful fieldmarks.

The thorax is the bulky structure between the head and abdomen which supports the locomotory structures: six legs and four wings. A dragonfly's thorax may be plain and coordinated with the rest of the insect's color scheme, or it may contrast. In many dragonflies the thorax may be one color, with contrasting vertical or oblique stripes. The thorax of a damselfly usually coordinates with the rest of its color scheme, and often has lengthwise striping. The color, presence or absence of stripes, and relative widths and shapes of the stripes can all be useful in identification.

The slender rear part of an odonate is its abdomen, which consists of ten distinct segments. By convention, we

*Continued on opposite page*



*Blue Dasher*



*American Rubyspot*



*Dusky Dancer*



*Serpent Ringtail*



*Roseate Skimmer*



## DRAGONS AND DAMSELS CONTINUED

number these from one, at the base of the abdomen where it attaches to the rear of the thorax, to ten, at the very tip. The abdomens of males are typically more slender and more brightly colored than those of females, though the patterns are usually the same. The abdomen may be plain, or marked with a distinctive pattern. This is more grist for the identification mill.



*Painted Damsel*

The wings of dragonflies and damselflies may be clear, uniformly colored, or distinctively patterned. Markings and colors are species-specific, and therefore constitute fieldmarks.

Once we've found our odonate, observed it in detail (close-focusing binoculars are very useful for this), and noted all the features we can see, we can then attempt to identify it by means of a field guide. Yes, there are field guides available for odonates, fewer perhaps than are available for birds or butterflies, but the number is growing. Sidney Dunkle got the ball rolling in 2000 with his Dragonflies Through Binoculars. This book covers only the dragonflies, but includes all 300+ species known to occur in North America north of Mexico. He plans to introduce a companion volume for the damselflies at a future date. Kathy Biggs published in 2004 her fine little Common Dragonflies of the Southwest, a guide that covers both the dragonflies and damselflies that are most likely to be seen in our region. The last word to date is Dennis Paulson's thorough and scholarly Dragonflies and Damselflies of the West, which has quickly become the standard by which all future guides will be measured. A companion volume dealing with eastern species is in the works, currently scheduled for publication in 2011. For the beginning odonatist, Biggs' little book will be most useful in the field, while the Paulson book deserves a place of honor in any naturalist's library.



*Arroyo Bluet*

### Where to see "Odes":

*Rio Salado Restoration Area - Central Ave & Salt River, Phoenix*  
*Granite Reef Rec. Area @ the Salt River - Power Rd north, Mesa*

*Papago Park ponds - north of the Phoenix Zoo*

*Boyce Thompson Arboretum - Superior, AZ (east of Phoenix)*

*The Gilbert Riparian Preserve - southeast corner Greenfield and  
 Guadalupe Roads in Gilbert*

*Tres Rios Wetlands - 91st Ave. & Salt River, Phoenix*

*Hassayampa River Preserve - Hwy US 60 south of Wickenburg*

*Each location has its own selection of species. Odonatists who wish to find the widest variety of species should try all of these spots, as well as any other open water.*

## BLUEBIRDS TAKE SPOTLIGHT ON LOCAL CHRISTMAS COUNTS

This past winter marked the 110th year of the National Audubon Society Christmas bird counts. Once again volunteer birders took to the field to add a new layer to over a century of data vital to conservation. Over 2100 counts were conducted from Alaska to Antarctica.

There are 36 Christmas counts in Arizona. Three counts lie close to the East Valley and I thought you would like to know how they turned out. If you wish to see the complete results for these or any other counts, you can find them at [www.audubon.org/bird/cbc](http://www.audubon.org/bird/cbc).

The Salt-Verde Rivers count takes in the Lower Salt River Recreation Area, the Verde River north to Rio Verde and the Fort McDowell Yavapai Indian Nation. Also included are portions of Fountain Hills, the McDowell Mountain Regional Park and the Tonto National Forest. The count has operated at or near its present location since 1985. The count compiler is Kurt Radamaker.

The count was held on December 14, 2009. There were 48 participants and 149 species observed. The highlights included Dunlin, American Crow, Violet-green Swallow, Mountain Bluebird, Brown Thrasher and Chestnut-collared Longspur. Three unusual warblers were noted as well: Black-throated Blue Warbler (first count record), Yellow Warbler and American Redstart. The most abundant species were Mourning Dove and Gambel's Quail. Western Bluebirds nearly tripled--and Ring-necked Ducks more than doubled-- their previous high counts.

The Superior count includes the Boyce Thompson Arboretum State Park, a portion of Queen Creek, Queen Valley east to Whitlow Dam and the Town of Superior. The balance of the 15-mile diameter count circle lies within the Tonto National Forest, encompassing the Oak Flat and Kings Crown areas and reaching north into the Superstition Wilderness. A count was held here on Christmas Eve 1922. There was no activity until 2003 when the count was reinstated by Steve Ganley. The count compiler is Cynthia Donald.



This count took place on December 26, 2009. There were 52 participants and 93 species observed. Bufflehead and Williamson's Sapsucker were new birds for the count and Rufous-backed Robin was noteworthy as well. Although Black-throated Sparrow and White-crowned Sparrow were the most abundant species, there was a sharp decline in sparrows overall and Black-chinned Sparrow was absent. Wintering warblers were down as well. Record high counts were established for 12 species, among them Western Bluebird that doubled its previous high.

The Carefree count encompasses the towns of Carefree and Cave Creek, several Desert Foothills Land Trust preserves, and a portion of the Tonto National Forest that includes the Seven Springs Recreation Area and the headwaters of Camp Creek. Also included are the Spur Cross Ranch Conservation Area and the Cave Creek Regional Park. The count was established in 1992. The count compiler is Walter Thurber.

This count was held on December 30, 2009. There were 71 participants and 107 species observed, the species total tying a record set 13 years before. Ross's Goose, Bufflehead and Bald Eagle were new to the count. Two other surprises were Williamson's Sapsucker and Common Yellowthroat. The most abundant species were Gambel's Quail and Mourning Dove. Record high counts were set for 17 species, with Cedar Waxwing and Brewer's Blackbird doubling in numbers and Western Bluebird up 44 percent over last year. Inca Dove continued to decline and there were fewer hummingbirds and sparrows.

The Christmas counts offer opportunities to get outside and enjoy nature during the busy holiday season. All birders, beginner or expert, are welcome to participate. The count dates for next winter will be announced in October.



# UNDERRATED! THE BEST SPRINGTIME BIRDING SITE IN ARIZONA

Article and Inset Photos : Jim Burns

Background Photo : Grasslands at mouth of  
Madera Canyon, near Continental - Randy Prentice

Directions to Madera Canyon from Phoenix:

152 miles, about 2 hours 46 minutes - Leave Phoenix on the I10 Freeway southbound towards Tucson. In Tucson, take the I-19 Freeway towards Nogales, AZ on the right, then take Exit 63 for Continental Rd. Make a left turn at W Continental Rd, and then the third right turn onto Madera Canyon Rd/White House Canyon Rd, following Madera Canyon Rd up into the canyon where you'll find parking areas and campgrounds.



You may be aware of the chant reverberating now through sports arenas across the country. "OVER RATED!" "OVER RATED!" It's home town fans trying to get under the skin of visiting teams and players by verbally disrespecting them. Something akin to this happens to what I feel is arguably the best birding site in Arizona, Madera Canyon. Our state's birding cognoscenti don't seem to bird there much or recommend it to visitors because it isn't quite close enough to our southern border to reliably host vagrants, wanderers and overshoots from Mexico.

Poll a dozen top Arizona birders on their favorite place to bird in their home state and you might get twelve different answers, but you won't hear "Madera Canyon." For sure you'll get South Fork and Rustler Park in the Chiricahuas, Miller and Carr Canyons and the fort in the Huachuclas, and San Pedro River and Sonoita Creek. Mt. Lemmon, California Gulch, and Patagonia Lake will probably get a mention. Maybe even South Fork in the White Mountains. Primarily because listers want a chance at megararities like Green Kingfisher and Sinaloa Wren, localized breeders like Mexican Chickadee and Spotted Owl, and perhaps hard to find northern mountain species, Madera Canyon, though certainly not underbirded, is underappreciated and underrated. Let's take a closer look.

Part of Coronado National Forest, Madera Creek originates near 9,453 foot Mt. Wrightson and tumbles through pine/oak woods and granite outcrops toward the high desert far below. Through the canyon that is the creek's handiwork and bears its name, a single road winds upward for six miles past a small campground, two picnic areas, two bed and breakfasts, and a lodge with rental cabins. That road and the high country trails it accesses convey birders through four(!) life zones from the hot, dry Lower Sonoran (Saguaro Cactus, Gila Woodpecker, Cactus Wren) to the cool, wet Canadian (Quaking Aspen, Douglas Fir, Mountain Chickadee, Steller's Jay). This striking change in elevation and habitat is the essence of what the term "Sky Island" means, and the Santa Ritas, where Madera Canyon is located, most assuredly are Sky Island, every bit the rival of the more celebrated mountain ranges

to the south and east. Its four life zones give Madera a wonderful diversity of bird species which includes most, but not quite all, of those considered "southeast Arizona specialties." By virtue of its more northerly location, Madera also benefits from a bit more overlap between species at the southern limit of their breeding range (Virginia's Warbler) and those at their northern limit (Whiskered Screech-Owl). Madera is also closer (an hour south of Tucson) and more accessible (paved road to the top) than any of the other Sky Islands.

Here is a typical Madera itinerary. Once you've turned the corner in the hamlet of Continental and start upslope toward the canyon, begin listening and looking in the grasslands for three of the elusive sparrows on your list—Cassin's, Botteri's, and Rufous-winged, easy to hear, if not see, as they adorn singing posts on fencelines and mesquites. Rufous-crowned and Black-chinned are present too.

The first stop upcanyon is the Proctor Road parking area. Sought after species here are Varied Bunting and Black-capped Gnatcatcher. Learn the latter's vocalizations before you go, as all three gnatcatchers (Blue-gray and Black-tailed too) are possible in spring. A walk along Proctor and up the first section of the paved

footpath may also produce Crissal Thrasher, Hooded Oriole, and a Bobcat. In June, 1996 I photographed a pair of Five-striped Sparrows coming to the George West Waterfall on Madera Creek just below Proctor Road. Farther up, at White House Picnic Area, check for Scott's Oriole and Montezuma Quail and, if you're there after dark, Common Poonwill, Elf Owl, and Whiskered Screech-Owl are certain to be heard, if not seen. Painted Redstart and Sulphur-Bellied Flycatcher habitat begins a little higher at the Madera Picnic Area, but don't drive there. Walk up the trail and then walk back down for your vehicle—you get twice the coverage for the warblers, grosbeaks, and tanagers you missed going up.

Next, check out the feeders at the Santa Rita Lodge for woodpeckers, towhees, and seedeaters. Here you may also encounter Madera's resident Wild Turkey flock. Then continue up to the Madera Kubo cabins where Arizona's only reliable Flame-colored Tanager usually arrives by early April, filling this section of the canyon with sunburst color and its rollicking song, easily heard over the burbling of the Madera creek. Over the years the hummingbird feeders here and at the Chuparosa Inn just up the road have hosted nearly all of Arizona's mountain gems including Berylline, Violet-crowned, and Plain-capped Starthroat.



Montezuma Quail



Painted Bunting



Berylline Hummingbird



Whiskered Screech Owl



Cassin's Sparrow

The quintessential Madera Canyon experience lies on the unpaved trails above the upper parking area. This is where the search for the Holy Grail, Elegant Trogon, begins. The uninitiated assume trogons, because they are hard to find, are shy and reclusive. They are not. They're just hard to find. North of the border they are at the northern limit of their breeding range, and Madera may host only one or two pairs in a given year.

Listen for the odd, barking dog call, or just sit and wait. One may find you. Elegant Trogons are not ridge hoppers. They travel up and down their home canyon hunting caterpillars and fruit. Once discovered, they can be remarkably confiding as they hunt like a vireo on valium, sitting for minutes at a time on one limb, slowly turning their heads this way and that trying to get a visual on a food item. Once found, of course, a trogon's singular shape and radiant colors explode upon the senses, and the first time viewer always knows he has just experienced the ultimate North American bird. A slow springtime walk up any of these upper trails should also reward with good looks at resident Black-throated Gray, Grace's, Red-faced, and Olive Warbler in addition to more northerly migrants like Hermit and Townsend's Warblers. Twenty-one flavors of flycatcher have been recorded in the Canyon, Northern Goshawk and Northern Pygmy-Owl are present but elusive, and Mexican Jays are always conspicuous on their boisterous neighborhood patrols.

Granted if you want Mexican Chickadee in Arizona, you'll have to drive halfway to Texas, and you won't find Green Kingfishers in Madera either, but I have seen Spotted Owls there on several occasions in several locations. Despite its length and cathedral vistas out over the broad Santa Cruz River Valley, Madera's trails are small, intimate chapels filled with the song, shape, and color of nearly all of those south-of-the-border bird species that draw birders to Arizona from around the country.

Every bend in the trail or road may afford an avian surprise or at least a visual feast of falling water, weathered rock, and intricate tree back patterns. For me there is no better springtime birding venue in Arizona than Madera Canyon. It's close and it's cool in all the multiple meanings of that word. Can you say underrated?



Flame-colored Tanager



# EVENTS & FIELD TRIPS

## APR. - MAY - JUNE 2010

Rocky Point Field Trippers

### ROCKY POINT FIELD TRIP REPORT

A group of friends and I made a three day birding trip to Puerto Penasco, Mexico, 2/27 through 3/1. Commonly called Rocky Point, this area is only 5 hours drive from Phoenix and offers reliably great birding opportunities. A wide variety of Pacific coast and Alaskan birds winter here, sometimes an arctic rarity or two. Although we did not go to the garbage dump or the waste treatment sites (well-known hot spots for a variety of gulls), we managed 68 species by birding the town marina, the Malecon breakwater, the second estuary, Sandy Beach lava rocks near Playa Bonita, Cholla Bay estuary, Pelican Point, and Tucson Beach. A **Western Bluebird** was a surprise in the parking lot at our hotel, Laos Mar. Saturday was challenging with 30+ mph winds, but yielded **Red-breasted Merganser**, **Common Loon**, **Eared Grebe**, **Belted Kingfisher**, and **Yellow-footed Gull** in the Marina. **Brown Pelicans** were stunning in breeding plumage. We were fortunate to see many birds either in or beginning breeding plumage over the weekend, including **Pacific** and **Common Loon**. As larophile-wanna-bes, we tallied five types of gulls, up close views, including **Heerman's**, **Ring-billed**, **California**, **Herring**, and **Yellow-footed** in all plumages. Four types of terns were a real treat, often standing next to one another for detailed comparisons **Royal**, **Elegant**, **Caspian** and **Forster's**. The weather Sunday and Monday was sunshine and minimal breezes. Fortified by fabulous breakfasts at Xochitl's Cafe in Cholla Bay, we added **Surf Scoter**, **Surfbird**, **Ruddy Turnstone**, **Brown Booby**, **Long-billed Curlew**, **Whimbrel**, **Marbled Godwit**, **Black-bellied Plover**, **Sanderlings**, **American Oystercatcher**, **Large-billed Savannah Sparrow**, and **Reddish Egret**. Surprises were a **Loggerhead Shrike** on the estuary shoreline, a **Lincoln's Sparrow** bathing in rainwater near a tide pool, and **Common Goldeneye** in a tide pool and diving in the surf. Our Monday morning birding ended with a small flock of **Red Knots**, perfect ending for a perfect weekend. Thanks to all of the sharp-eyed participants. Good birding, Claudia Kirscher

### UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS/EVENTS

#### International Migratory Bird Day

Sat, April 10, 8am - 1pm at the Rio Salado Habitat (map)  
Bring the kids and come to the Rio Salado Habitat to celebrate with DRAS. Lots of fun! Enjoy all the various environmental and conservation games and booths, bird walks, and more! This Festival is always a lot of fun for all ages. Desert Rivers Audubon will have our two booths there, with our book sales, and children's activities, and we will be leading bird walks throughout the day. More info to follow later.

#### DRAS General Membership Meeting, Tue, April 13, 7pm - 9pm

132 W. Bruce, Gilbert, AZ in the Gilbert Community Center in Page Park

**FIELD TRIP - Dudleyville, led by Pierre Deviche, Sat, April 24, 6:30am - 2:00pm**

**FIELD TRIP - Joint trip with Tucson Audubon, Gilbert Riparian Preserve Saturday, May 8, 2010, leader Richard Filley**

**DRAS BBQ/Potluck Dinner - Tues, May 11, 6:30-9pm Location TBA**

Watch the DRAS website, Field Trips Page/Caendar for new trips, changes, and additional info on all DRAS Field Trips. More trips and events will be added in the coming weeks.

### CTA Goodman Elementary School Field Trip



Jim Banyai with kids



Joy Dingley

**School Field Trips** are one of the several tasks our Education Director Joy Dingley handles for the chapter. On Feb. 25th Joy and DRAS volunteers Jim Banyai, Pat Lawson, and Mike Rupp, hosted 80 third graders from the CTA Goodman Elementary School with teacher Kay Ryan at the Veterans Oasis Park in Chandler. In addition to their birding walk around the ponds at VO, these kids saw live raptors brought by Claudia Kirscher and Carol Marshall of **Liberty Wildlife**, and enjoyed a teaching program given by the **Environmental Education Center** staff. For many, this was their first introduction to birds and the facilities at VO, and is sure to be remembered. Kids received our **Beginners Guide to Birds of Phoenix** booklet and a workbook specially prepared for this event. We are always in need of volunteers for these events. If you would like to help with our education programs, please contact Joy Dingley at [joy.dingley@cox.net](mailto:joy.dingley@cox.net)



Looking for Burrowing Owls!



Claudia Kirscher



# NOTABLE ARIZONA STATE SIGHTINGS

**Brant (*Branta bernicla*), Lakeside Park, Pima County.** This Brant was found by Anne Galli and Joe Carragher on 22 January 2010 and photographed by Tom Ryan and Cynthia Barstad the same day. Brant is usually strictly coastal and confined to salt water. It is very rare in Arizona with only 11 previous records. It has only been previously reported twice in the state in the last decade (2005, 2008) and there are only three previous records for SE Arizona. The white neck marking is diagnostic.



Photo- Tom Ryan



Michael Nicosia

**Red-shouldered Hawk (*Buteo lineatus*), Watson Woods Riparian Preserve, Yavapai County.** This Red-shouldered Hawk was discovered by Michael Nicosia on 9 November 2009 and photographed by Michael on 23 January 2010.

According to the "Birds of Prescott, Arizona" by Dr. Carl S. Tomoff this bird is considered to be an accidental winter visitor. However, Red-shouldered Hawk has been increasing

recently in Arizona and may be expanding its range eastward from California. There are seven documented reports of this species in the AZFO archive since 2007. Just enough of the breast pattern of this immature bird is visible in these photos to eliminate other species. The heavy barring and streaking is consistent with this being a B. l. elegans, the expected western subspecies.

**Red-necked Grebe (*Podiceps grisegena*), Lake Pleasant, Yavapai County.** This Red-necked Grebe was discovered and photographed by Troy Corman on 15 January 2010. Red-necked Grebe is a casual winter visitor to Arizona, particularly away from the lower Colorado River. Apparently fewer than a dozen state records. However, there has been a slight increase in records the past few years.

Overall a fairly large, stocky grebe. Bill yellowish, fairly heavy and straight; grayish brown neck with dirty white throat color extending crescent-like to the back side of head.



Troy Corman



Jeff Ritz

**Broad-winged Hawk (*Buteo platyterus*), Tres Rios Hayfield site, Maricopa County.** This adult Broad-winged Hawk was photographed by Jeff Ritz on 14 January 2010. Accidental in winter in Arizona, and most of the US as well. Rufous barred underparts, short tail with broad white bands.



Shaun Putz

**Rough-legged Hawk (*Buteo lagopus*), Mormon Lake, Coconino County.** This Rough-legged Hawk was photographed by Shaun Putz on 15 January 2010 at the Mormon Lake Overlook. Rough-legged Hawks are rare but fairly regular in Arizona, especially in the Northern part of the state. This is possibly the same bird that has wintered there in the past. A highly variable *buteo* with light and dark morphs. Light morphs have white tail with dark subterminal band, pale head, dark squarish carpal patch, and dark belly. They also have very small bills and fully feathered legs (not visible in this photo)

From the AZ Field Ornithologists. See complete details and **many** more reports on the AZFO website - [www.azfo.org](http://www.azfo.org) - "Documentation" pg.

**Varied Thrush (*Ixoreus naevius*), Battiste Bed and Breakfast garden area, Cochise County.** This Varied Thrush was photographed by Tony Battiste on 10 January 2010 in Hereford. Casual winter visitor to Arizona. Eyeline, breast band and wing pattern make this very distinctive thrush unmistakable.



Tony Battiste



Shaun Putz

**Red-necked Grebe (*Podiceps grisegena*), Colorado River above Lee's Ferry, Coconino County.** This Red-necked Grebe was photographed by Shaun Putz on 05 January 2010 during the Page, AZ Christmas Bird Count. This bird was a few miles above Lee's Ferry on the Colorado River. There are only about 10 previous records from Arizona. Note yellow bill and dusky neck.

**Red-throated Loon (*Gavia stellata*), Litchfield area, near Luke AFB, Maricopa County.** This loon was found and identified by John Arnett and Leah Dunn on 15 December 2009 with photos taken by Leah at the time. Typically a casual visitor to Arizona, although recently has proven to be almost annual in occurrence during the winter, particularly on reservoirs along the lower Colorado River. There are very few Maricopa Co. records. Obvious loon with small, relatively thin bill. Bill is often held at a slightly upturned angle, unlike heavier billed Pacific Loon. White of neck, throat, and face extends nearly around eye. The amount of white on the head and neck suggests this could be an adult.



Leah Dunn



Richard Fray

**Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*), Santa Cruz Flats, Pinal County.** This Ruff was discovered and photographed by Richard Fray on 08 January 2010. There are five previously accepted records of Ruff in Arizona with three additional documented reports pending with the Arizona Bird Committee. In basic plumage, Ruff is one of the more nondescript shorebirds. Its overall plain drab appearance is itself a field mark because it lacks many of the distinctive field marks of other shorebirds. Its shape is very distinctive with a plump body and small head. The straight, medium length stout bill is another good field mark as are the orangish legs. In flight, Ruff has a diagnostic U-shaped white rump patch.

**Black-throated Blue Warbler (*Dendroica caerulescens*), Ft. McDowell Tribal Lands, s. of Hwy. 87, Maricopa County.** This Black-throated Blue Warbler was discovered by Justin Jones, Marceline VandeWater and Troy Corman and photographed by Troy Corman on 12 December 2009. Typically a rare visitor in Arizona, particularly during fall migration with a few reported annually on average. There are many fewer winter records with this possibly the first for Maricopa County. Adult male Black-throated Blue Warbler identification is pretty straight forward. just below the bill.



Troy Corman

**Common Grackle (*Quiscalus quiscula*), Feeding station, Old Bisbee, Cochise County.** This male Common Grackle was discovered and photographed by Michael Turisk on 27 November 2009 in his backyard in Old Bisbee. Common Grackle is a casual transient and winter visitant with about a dozen records. Larger billed and longer tailed than Brewer's Blackbird.



Michael Turisk



# THE WONDER OF BIRD MIGRATION

Article : Mike Rupp

Few natural events on Earth are as spectacular and mind-boggling as the yearly migrations of land animals and birds of the air. Both in sheer numbers of participants and species, and the vast geographic ranges that are traversed, this twice annual event is truly without parallel. Although some land animals and marine mammals cover long distances traveling to breeding areas, the avian world boasts the greatest long distance migrants on the planet, and billions of birds on the wing during a migration cycle.

Some neotropical warblers travel around 3,500 miles to South American rainforests. Several hawk species routinely cover up to 7,500 miles on their trips from the US and Canada down to northern Argentina. Long-tailed Jaegers cover up to 9,000 miles on their journey from the Arctic to the Antarctic. But the all-time migratory champions are Arctic Terns, which fly from pole to pole, covering an astounding 12,000 miles, twice a year!

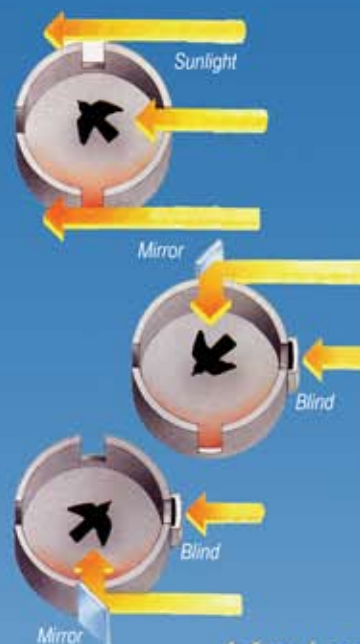
Considering a warbler's wingbeats might be around 10 per second, with a flight speed of around 30 MPH, an astounding figure of 4,176,000 wingbeats are needed to make their flights from the US and Canada to South American and Caribbean rainforests. Even more awesome than the physical demands met by these avian travelers twice a year, is the way that they navigate on these long journeys.

For centuries, migration was not understood at all - it's only been during the last few centuries that migration patterns have become known, chiefly because of the scientific classification of birds paired with an ever-increasing number of reporting observers in the field, and the miniaturization of tracking technology that allows for better radio tracking of birds.

Length of day determines when a bird will begin migration. That information is derived visually, but it's been found that a bird with it's eyes covered will still exhibit migration behavior, because at least some of it's sensory input comes from light sensitive cells *within their brains* which receive light *through their skulls*. Navigation involves the use of various inputs to orient the migrating bird to a direction and elapsed time of flight. It's now believed that a combination of processes work together, giving input to the bird's brain and directing it's actions. The eyes receive the majority of clues from it's surroundings, but other senses are also part of a bird's "compass". The three main means by which birds detect absolute north and other compass points are *magnetism, the sun, and the stars*. As the illustration below indicates, landscape features, smell, sound waves, and perhaps polarized light also play a role in avian navigation.

The findings from various studies and experiments are truly amazing, and define how very complex avian navigation truly is.

**Magnetic Force** - As pictured to the right, birds were placed in cages that were surrounded by magnetic coils that mimicked the Earth's magnetic field. Experiments showed that birds register the angle between the magnetic force and the Earth's surface. This angle indicates south in the northern hemisphere, and north in the southern hemisphere. The birds detected north, the direction of spring migration (1). The magnetic field was then turned 135 degrees, and after a few days the birds re-oriented themselves accordingly. (3)



**Sunlight** - To measure the effect of sunlight on daytime migrants (many birds migrate at night) light was shined into cages at specific angles. After establishing a particular angle long enough that the migration prone bird would continually fly in a constant direction, the light angle was changed 90 degrees by way of mirrors, resulting in the bird also changing it's flight direction by 90 degrees. This result remained constant relative to the direction of light entering the cage.

## A few Local Valley Migrants

**Vermilion Flycatcher** - Moves well south into Mexico for the winter with journeys of up to 2,500 miles.

**Blue-winged Teal** - Mid February heralds the arrival of this teal species, but it is a very sparse breeder. Departures to the south peak around September.

**Turkey Vulture** - The influx of TuVu's begins in late January and fall migration southward peaks around September with birds departing for Mexico and further south.

**Swainson's Hawk** - Our few Swainson's Hawks arrive in mid-March from South America and are most often seen in open grasslands primarily in SE AZ. Hundreds of thousands migrate from the US into South America.

**Yellow Warbler** - This species arrives from the south about mid-March and breeds rather extensively here in addition to a large area north up into Alaska. They leave in September for Mexico and South America.

**Sora** - Yes, most Soras migrate! They leave around mid-July for Mexico and return around late March or early April, although some stay throughout the winter.



Continued on page 12



## THE WONDER OF BIRD MIGRATION CONT'D

Star "compass" experiments (right) consist of nocturnal migrants that stand on ink pads on the cage bottoms inside the dome of a planetarium. Conical blotting paper covers the sides of the cage, and receive marks from the birds' feet as they fly in their preferred direction. Rotating the stars produces a corresponding change of direction in the birds' flight, and when the sky is obscured, the birds become confused and move randomly, as shown in the lower diagram.



To accomplish long flights, birds must maximize flight techniques to be as efficient as possible. We've all seen different flight styles- these styles maximize flight efficiency for a particular species' needs. Migrants generally have wing shapes that provide the greatest amount of lift and soaring capability. Whether they employ thermal soaring, occasional gliding, bounding flight, or fairly constant wing flapping, each species faces a tremendous task each migration cycle.

As noted in Jerry Lang's article on page 4, the wintering grounds for migrants are just as important to their survival as their breeding areas. Both habitats need to be protected and conserved to guarantee their longevity. Of the approximately 650 bird species that inhabit North America, all but 130 of them migrate! 500 species migrate, and approximately 330 are "neo-tropical migrants". These bird species are dependent upon the rainforests, wetlands, grasslands, and deserts of Mexico and Central and South American nations.



The Bar-tailed Godwit has the longest known non-stop migration of any species, up to 6,300 miles. Satellite tracking shows their routes on the image to the left.

## MONARCH MIGRATIONS CONTINUED

If you spot a monarch butterfly let us know. Note the location and activity (flying, nectaring, etc.) No sighting is unimportant! You never know which bug can open a whole new page of discovery. We are especially interested in monarchs that have a blue tag (see photo). If you can read the three numbers and letter, or get a photo of it, we will be able to find where it was originally tagged and where it traveled. Not sure what a monarch butterfly (versus its close relative the queen) looks like? See: <http://www.swmonarchs.org/>

You can send Monarch sightings into the Southwest Monarch Study team at:  
[phoenixmonarchs@yahoo.com](mailto:phoenixmonarchs@yahoo.com)  
 602-881-5052 Gail Morris

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### Liberty Wildlife Volunteer Workday

May 15th is the date for our volunteer workday at Liberty Wildlife's facility in Scottsdale. DRAS volunteers will perform various tasks and have an opportunity to see Liberty's work up close. Limited to eight volunteers, lasts about a half day. Contact Marion Saffell at [marisaff@cox.net](mailto:marisaff@cox.net) or 480-668-9393 to join the volunteer group. Information on what to wear, times and location will be sent to each volunteer before the actual workday.

### Update on State Parks Budget Crisis

We are in eminent danger of losing Arizona's 27 State Parks and the Arizona Heritage Fund. Arizona State Parks has had no increase in operating funds since 2002 and an extremely limited capital budget since then. State Parks was prepared to limp along on revenue composed mainly of the entrance fees, state lake improvement fund, and the Heritage Fund which comes from the Lottery. However, the Arizona Legislature diverted and swept away about half of that, leaving State Parks with almost no source of operating funds. Parks have already started closing. Heritage Fund grants have been rescinded.

A referral to the ballot, HCR2040 would allow free day use of all of our State Parks for a fee on every vehicle registration. This was the recommendation of the Governor's Sustainable Parks Task Force. With this \$12 fee (part of which will go to the ADOT), Parks can generate approximately \$39 million per year. This would provide the necessary dollars for operation and maintenance of our State Parks System including the natural areas, historic parks, and lakes. This would also restore the Heritage Fund. Please call or email your Representatives and ask them to support HCR2040. Go to [www.azleg.gov](http://www.azleg.gov) or call 602-926-4221.

Janice Miano, Director of the AZ Heritage Alliance

### Candidates for DRAS Elections in April 2010

Vice-President	Richard Filley
Treasurer	Fran Thurber
Field Trip Director	Curtis Burns
Membership Director	Pat Lawson
Development Director	Kim Aranda
Conservation Director	Don Farmer

### Volunteer "Equipment Manager" Needed

DRAS is looking for a volunteer to manage the storage, delivery and set-up/take down of our display tents and tables at our monthly birdwalks and other events through the "season". Must have room for storage of 8- 4'x4' folding tables, 2- 5' tall folding tents, and a few bags of rolled display signage. Must also have an SUV or truck capable of hauling these items, primarily in the southeast valley area. If you could assist the chapter in this manner, please contact Marion Saffell at [marisaff@cox.net](mailto:marisaff@cox.net) or call 480-668-9393





# The Family Album

Family : Family: Sandpipers, Phalaropes, and Allies: (Scolopacidae)  
Article and Photos: Cindy Marple



It's April and northward shorebird migration is in full swing. Migration routes bring many shorebirds through our region, giving us an opportunity to see species more typically associated with coastal habitats. This family encompasses some champion long-distance migrants, which breed in the Arctic tundra and winter in the furthest reaches of the Southern Hemisphere. Vagrants are not uncommon as these birds can wind up well off-course on such marathon journeys. That gives birders good reason to spend time picking through flocks looking for "the one that doesn't belong". It's generally pretty easy to observe shorebirds, as they spend most of their time out in the open. Very few skulkers here! (OK, Wilson's Snipe can literally disappear before your eyes, becoming just another stripey rock...) The downside to seeing this family in migration is that we rarely see them in their full breeding plumage. Non-breeding plumage is mainly drab grays and browns, with little difference between many species. Add to this the complexity of juvenile plumages and the intermediate molts seen during migration, and you have one of the true birding challenges. This is a family where studying behaviors, voices, and the general outline of the bird (size and shape) is very helpful in identification. Scolopacids are a large and diverse family that includes Curlews, Godwits, Dowitchers, Snipe and more. They range in size from the diminutive Least and Western Sandpipers to the Long-billed Curlew. Most have long, pointed wings that facilitate their long migrations. The legs are generally long and slender, and all but Sanderlings have a stubby little hind toe that doesn't touch the ground. Where many shorebirds gather to feed, the variety among the bills becomes obvious, both in the length and the curvature of the bill. This facilitates many species using the same habitat, as the different bills lead to different feeding styles and food sources. Some, like Curlews and Willets, use their bills to probe deep in to mud and sand to find food. These bills are often specially adapted with nostrils and extremely tactile bill tips that help them find prey they cannot see. Many Sandpipers pick up their food from the surface of the mud or water. Phalaropes have a unique feeding style. They will spin like a top in the water, which creates a water column that brings food up to the surface, where they can easily grab it! Since enormous fat reserves are required to fuel migration flights, these birds will spend much of their time on migration stop-overs feeding. Pictured here are some of the migrant species you might find at locations around the valley such as the Gilbert Water Ranch and the Glendale Recharge ponds.



Willet



Wilson's Phalarope



Solitary Sandpiper



Long-billed Curlew

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### Want to know what events and programs are coming up on the Desert Rivers schedule?

By joining our Email Announcements list you will receive updates on DRAS events, programs, advocacy and volunteer opportunities. Just send an email to Michael Rupp at [mikerupp6@gmail.com](mailto:mikerupp6@gmail.com) with your request.

### Liberty Wildlife needs your help!

Wildlife hotline needs volunteers! Liberty Wildlife assists over 4,000 native animals every year, providing medical care so injured wildlife has a chance to go back to the wild. When people find wildlife that is in distress they call our hotline and leave a message. Hotline volunteers work from home one day per week for 2-4 hours returning calls and giving advice. (We provide you with the resources to do this!) Hotliners help people help animals, and they also educate the public about native wildlife. Do you have a few hours a week you can donate to this mission? Please call 480-998-5550 and leave a message in box 2, or email [volunteer@libertywildlife.org](mailto:volunteer@libertywildlife.org)

### Your birding can benefit Desert Rivers!

Desert Rivers is in the preliminary stage of revising and reprinting the popular Guide to 101 Birding Sites, Phoenix, by Michael Rupp, and is looking for a few volunteers who can visit birding sites listed in the guidebook to verify information. This is a great opportunity to go birding with a purpose and benefit the chapter by field checking information for the new guidebook. A substantial donation to this project was made through Charles and Marion Saffell by the Arizona Medical Network, of which Charles is President, enabling the chapter to start a fundraising campaign to raise the additional amount needed to complete a printing of 5,000 books, the profits of which will accrue to the chapter. If your company or corporation might be a good donor candidate, or if you know of an associate or other source of revenue for this project, please contact Michael Rupp at [mikerupp6@gmail.com](mailto:mikerupp6@gmail.com), or 602-388-4072

### Desert Rivers has a Facebook Page!

You can become a "fan" and stay on top of DRAS events and activities by searching "Desert Rivers Audubon" at [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)

## DONORS AND GIFTS

Our appreciation goes to the following donors who have given to support a program or overall operating costs of the Desert Rivers Audubon Society from January to March, 2009.



**Bass Pro Shops** for use of their meeting room for Desert Rivers' Board meetings each month in the Mesa/Phoenix store.

**Bashas Supermarkets** support of the Chandler Family Birdwalks has enabled us to continue to increase participants and develop this wonderful event.



**Salt River Project** for printing this issue of the newsletter without costs to Desert Rivers. Thanks SRP for printing the spring issue each year for the chapter!



**Corporate Members :** Salt River Project, Arizona Cactus Sales ([www.arizonacactusales.com](http://www.arizonacactusales.com)), Bashas Markets, Bass Pro Shops

### New Members

John Krick      Craig Anderson      Bill Grossi      Neil Butchard  
Keith Nixon      Melanie Herring      John Gwilliam      Larry Theaker  
Lawrence & Ellen Steeg      Randall Greeley      Lisa Langell & Ben Frietag



# KIDS PAGE



This is a photograph of a size 10 1/2 ladies shoe next to the footprint of a **Great Blue Heron**.

The type of foot will tell you a lot about the lifestyle of a bird, remember that a duck swims a lot, and so does a coot, but a coot will also climb around in the undergrowth around a pond or lake.

A hawk is a raptor, which means he needs to grab his food, so which footprint has claws? A woodpecker also needs claws for hanging on to trees, cacti and walls, but he needs

**Here are some more footprints - can you match the footprint to the bird?**



Answers: D2 - B1 - C4 - A3

Next time you are out birding look on the ground as well as all around you- you may see footprints of a bird who went that way earlier.

## How can I start bird watching?

A lot of very famous bird watchers began by just going outside and looking at the birds. They often had no binoculars and they borrowed field guides; which are books about identifying birds; from their local libraries. Sometimes these books didn't even have colored pictures of the birds just black and white drawings.

So really all you need is an interest, your eyes, ears and a brain and a notebook and pencil.



Go out and make notes about the birds you see, write down the size, the number of them, where you find them, what they are doing, how they feed and what they feed on. Listen to the birds, what sort of sounds do they make? What shape is the bird and what color, what do the feet look like and what shape is the bill? If possible make a drawing of the bird and note any special marks or feathers.

The most important thing about bird watching is that you really look and listen and however good your equipment if you don't do that you won't be a good birder.

Eventually though you will want to do more and learn more and get the right equipment. So this is what you will need. Hat and water and comfortable shoes – this is Arizona, you don't want to get sunburned, dehydrated or get cactus in your toes.

Notebook and pencil – you will want to record all you see.



A field guide – or book showing you all the birds you are likely to see. There are lots of different types, go have a look in your library.

Binoculars – binoculars are really helpful for the close up views of birds that you need to tell one small bird from another. Most bird watchers like binoculars that are 10 x42 or 8 x 42 but many of these are too big for children to use. Your binoculars should fit so you can look out through both lenses at once and your fingers should be able to reach the focus wheel without you straining your hand. Now, we've started to get technical already. It's really best if you get a chance to try out a few pairs before you go into the shop.

Cost – a good field guide can cost around \$20. For binoculars you can get some really good pairs for under \$150.



Now that's a lot of money to pay before you even know if you are going to keep up the hobby and here are some suggestions to let you try out bird watching without spending too much.

1) Join our Early Birds Club which is a club just for youngsters 7 to 14. You can find details on this page of when and where we meet.

2) Come to one of our Family Bird Walks which we hold in the winter months at Gilbert Riparian Preserve and Chandler Veterans' Oasis Park. Details of these are on our Events Page.

3) Look out for Nature Festivals – here are some held in the area every year; Tres Rios Nature Festival, International Migratory Bird Day Event at Rio Salado and Feathered Friends Festival which is held at Gilbert Riparian Preserve. Look out for these on our website as they all feature family bird walks where you can borrow binoculars and go out with an experienced bird watcher.



If you already have access to binoculars and someone is willing to take you out but you live too far from Gilbert Riparian Preserve to join our Early Birds Club then look out for the monthly challenges we set for the club members. You can try them at home and send in your homework to me, Joy Dingley, at joy.dingley@cox.net I'd love to see it.



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## MONTHLY MEETINGS

Meetings are held at the Page Park Community Center in Gilbert, at 132 W. Bruce Ave, on second Tuesdays at 7 to 9PM, September through May. Doors open at 6:30PM, and everyone is welcome. Page Park is one block north of Elliot Rd and one block west of Gilbert Rd, near "downtown" Gilbert. See the DRAS website under "Events" heading for listing of topics and speakers. Refreshments provided

## GILBERT / CHANDLER BIRDWALKS

The Gilbert Family Birdwalks are held every **third** Saturday, September through April, at the Gilbert Riparian Preserve on the southeast corner of Greenfield and Guadalupe Rds, Gilbert, at 8AM. The Chandler Family Birdwalks are on the **first** Saturdays, same months, at 4050 E. Chandler Heights Rd in Chandler. Binoculars provided, walks are free. See DRAS website for complete details.

## BIRD LISTSERV - RARE BIRD ALERT

Bird alert information for rare Arizona and New Mexico birds can be obtained by subscribing to the bird listserv at the Univ. of AZ. This is the most popular method in the valley to know what rarities are in the area, and find out lots of other birding information. In your web browser, go to : <http://listserv.arizona.edu/cgi-bin/wa?SUBED1=birdwg05&A=1>

Follow the instructions to subscribe and receive daily emails

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## MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

We welcome your interest in becoming a member and participant of Desert Rivers Audubon. Your membership dues help support our outreach activities. You can join National Audubon and Desert Rivers Audubon by downloading a form from our website, and receive the bi-monthly Audubon magazine. Most Audubon chapters also have a "Friends" membership which entitles you to our quarterly newsletter, event priorities, and discounts on products and services.

<i>Students / Seniors (65+) Membership .....</i>	<i>\$20.</i>
<i>Individual Membership.....</i>	<i>\$25.</i>
<i>Family Membership.....</i>	<i>\$40.</i>
<i>Corporate Membership.....</i>	<i>\$300+</i>

**What is the difference between a Desert Rivers "Friends" membership, and National Audubon membership?** National Audubon and chapters are separate entities. All dues and gifts to Desert Rivers are used for local programs. You can be a member of Desert Rivers and also be a member of National Audubon simultaneously, or become a Desert Rivers member without joining National Audubon. You can even be a member of more than one Audubon chapter at the same time, regardless of your home address. If you are a National member, you can help this chapter by designating Desert Rivers as your "assigned chapter" by contacting : [knullis@audubon.org](mailto:knullis@audubon.org)

**Desert Rivers Audubon Society** is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization incorporated in Arizona, formed to provide environmental education and conservation opportunities to valley residents and advocate for our environment. For information on planned giving or bequests to the chapter, please contact Michael Rupp at [mikerupp@cox.net](mailto:mikerupp@cox.net)

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