



DESERT RIVERS AUDUBON SOCIETY

VOLUME 3 - WINTER 2010 NEWSLETTER

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Krys Hammers

AUDUBON AT HOME

Krys Hammers

New Endeavors

We at Desert Rivers could have rested on our laurels, but instead we continue to find new ways to engage our communities. We've always had a compelling and visually-appealing newsletter, successful field trips, interesting programs, and popular family birdwalks. We added our Early Birds program and now we have a dedicated and enthusiastic group of young people engaged in birding and bird conservation. We're working on the Mike Rupp Photojournalism scholarship to help young people continue their nature education. We've had our Beginning Birding class taught at several venues. This year we will add an Intermediate Birding class.

This year, we've rolled out our Bird Habitat program to encourage businesses, parks, schools and individuals to make their landscaping more bird-friendly. Now we are adopting the Hummingbird Garden at Desert Breeze Park in Chandler. It is in need of some attention. Some plants will need to be replaced. Some invasive plants will need to be removed. But I look at it and see a showcase of lush, colorful desert landscape full of Hummingbirds and other desert bird species. I see a demonstration garden where we can educate and inspire our community on urban bird-friendly habitat. I see the starting point of an annual Bird Habitat Tour, where the public is invited to tour the recognized bird habitats in private yards and public open spaces.

None of this happens without the hard work of our dedicated volunteers. Desert Rivers is blessed to have so many great partners and committed members who give so selflessly of their time and resources. It's the heart of what helps us to thrive and accomplish our mission.



Sandpipers in morning flight at the Gilbert Riparian Preserve
Photo: Denny Green

Urban Wetlands

As birders, we are probably acutely aware of the benefits of our Urban Wetlands. These are little gems scattered around the metropolitan area. Tres Rios was one of the first and a project is now underway to develop 480 acres of emergent wetlands just west of the current site. We are most familiar with the Gilbert Riparian Preserve on the East side of town. Gilbert is also developing a new urban wetland in the Southeast part of the city. Chandler and Glendale joined in with the Veterans Oasis Park and the Glendale Recharge Ponds. These wetlands recharge our desert aquifer, provide wildlife habitat, and provide recreation facilities for our fellow citizens.

Water in the desert is a valuable resource. Instead of letting highly treated effluent, or waste water flow out of the desert, it is being diverted into basins. Each basin is filled and then allowed to drain out. This allows the available water to flow into different basins and means that we'll always find some of them full, muddy or dry. The water seeps down through all the layers of sediment and rock and continues to be purified as it does. Eventually it recharges the aquifer, keeping the water in our desert where we need it most.

One of things that attract such a diversity of bird species to these urban wetlands is the differing levels of water in these ponds. Some ponds will be totally full much to the delight of Grebes and diving ducks, who like deeper water. They should always find a pond that has deep water within the wetlands area. Pintails and Wigeon like the shallow ponds where the water is draining out. They forage on aquatic plants and algae found in shallow ponds. Teals and many shorebirds prefer muddy puddles where the water is almost all drained. They favor dining on the crustaceans, mollusks and insects that are found in the mud. All of the ponds will have a deep water part that will always have water in it. Fish can survive in these parts of the basins, despite the ebb and flow of the water levels. This provides a food source for Egrets, Herons, and Osprey. Of course, any water source in the desert allows for vegetation to grow and attract a wide variety of songbirds, sparrows, woodpeckers and blackbirds. Arizona's own Abert's Towhee is a real desert riparian specialist and loves the thick underbrush near riparian areas.

Because of the diversity of birds, we know these urban wetlands as bird watching hotspots, but they are recreation areas that everyone can enjoy. Some have all the amenities of any urban park, with restrooms, play structures, and fishing ponds. Gilbert Riparian Preserve even has a Dino-Dig area and an Observatory. You will often find people there walking or jogging simply because it is a nice open space. There are trails suitable for horseback riding or bicycling. Most of the trails are wheelchair accessible.

We at Desert Rivers enjoy these wetlands because it gives us a venue to fulfill our mission of nature education. We lead free family birdwalks at the Gilbert Riparian Preserve on the 3rd Saturday of the month and the Chandler's Veterans Oasis Park on the 1st Saturday of the month. Please join us for a walk and tell your friends and neighbors about it.

The Urban Wetlands are such a bonus for all of us. They're good for the environment, for wildlife and for recreation. Kudos go out to our public officials who have had the foresight to build these oases in the desert.

Early CBC Reports

Article : Walter Thurber

The 111th annual Christmas bird count is history. Now the count compilers are busy following up on unusual sightings and crunching the numbers. The counts are sponsored by the National Audubon Society to monitor the distribution and abundance of our bird populations over time.

Some preliminary results were available at press time and I wanted to share them with Desert Rivers Audubon members. The emphasis will be on unusual species and other highlights for our seven local counts. Each count was conducted on one calendar day between December 14, 2010 and January 5, 2011.

Salt Verde River: This Northeast Valley count is traditionally held on the first day of the count period. Two of the best finds were Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and Eastern Phoebe. The compiler is Kurt Radamaker.

Hassayampa River: The compilation is complete for this Wickenburg area count. The Gray Hawk, two Eastern Phoebes and Western Tanager were notable. Also on the list was Pacific Wren, a new species split off from Winter Wren last year. The compiler is Vanessa Montgomery.

Phoenix-Tres Rios: Four species of geese were noted, including four Greater White-fronted Geese. A Black-and-white Warbler was sighted and a Roseate Spoonbill showed up for count week. Some 150 species were noted, a record high. The compiler is David Powell.

Superior: Count results for the Boyce Thompson Arboretum were available at press time. The best finds there were Black-chinned Hummingbird, Bell's Vireo and Cassin's Vireo. Woodpeckers and wrens were numerous. 'Superior' weather helped draw a record number of participants (about 60). The compiler is Cynthia Donald.

Gila River: The notable birds on this Southwest Valley count were Red-breasted Merganser, Bonaparte's Gull, Ruddy Ground-Dove (nine), Barn Swallow and Chestnut-collared Longspur. The count week additions included Roseate Spoonbill, Pacific Wren, Northern Parula and Swamp Sparrow. Ideal weather conditions prevailed. The compiler is Troy Corman.

Carefree: Poor weather hampered the birding effort here, with mostly cloudy skies, wind, periodic snow and hail, and temperatures in the 30s all day. One count sector was inaccessible due to high water. Canvasback, Common Merganser and Eurasian Collared-Dove occurred for the second time. Peach-faced Lovebirds have staged a comeback and five were counted. The compiler is Walter Thurber.

Dudleyville: Gray Hawk, Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet, Bell's Vireo and Bullock's Oriole were the top birds here. Other noteworthy sightings included Ruddy Ground-Dove, Lewis's Woodpecker, Pacific Wren, Winter Wren, Black-and-white Warbler and Golden-crowned Sparrow. High elevation birds were scarce. A record high 44 people participated in this latest local count. The compiler is Doug Jenness.

The final tallies and participant lists will be posted on the National Audubon website (www.audubon.org) by February 15, 2011. You can view and print count reports there or learn where a particular species was found. To access this information, click on Birds/Christmas Bird Count/Results: Current Year.

the cats. On January 18th, trapping will resume by the town and the team of Audubon volunteers. All food found in the preserve will be removed and the feeding of the feral cats will cease. A feral cat management plan, as well as a plan to deal with the dumping of any other household pets, is in development by the Town and we will continue to assist in that process. Stay tuned for more to come on this.

For further reading on birding and feral cats, here are five links:

Information from the University of Michigan:

http://umd.umich.edu/dept/rouge_river/cats.html.

Information from the American Bird Conservancy's Cats Indoor campaign supported by the Arizona Game and Fish Department and National Audubon Society: <http://www.abcbirds.org/abcprograms/policy/cats/>.

National Audubon's Cats Indoor campaign: <http://web4.audubon.org/bird/cat/>. Here are two links to local author Jim Burns articles on feral cats at the Riparian Preserve: <http://www.jimburnsphotos.com/pages/2-25-10.html>. & <http://www.jimburnsphotos.com/pages/7-18-08.html>.

Editor's note: Mike Evans is the Conservation Director for Desert Rivers Audubon and a former Gilbert Town Council member.

Feral Cat Issue Update

Article : Mike Evans

The Riparian Preserve at Gilbert's Water Ranch Park has a feral cat problem. In a survey conducted by Town of Gilbert employees at the end of October, 72 feral cats were counted. Two hidden litters of kittens were also suspected to be present because of the presence of two lactating mother cats. Dozens of cats were running amok in a facility conceived and designed for migratory waterfowl and shorebirds. What went wrong?

This problem has been building for many years. Riparian Preserve Director Scott Anderson first noticed eight years ago that cats were becoming more visible in the Preserve. No one is sure how the problem began, but we are certain of what has caused it to grow. Irresponsible cat owners have dumped their unwanted cats in the Riparian Preserve. The town has partnered with a cat rescue group, Save the Cats Arizona, which has used the scientifically dubious practice of Trap, Neuter, and Return, known by the acronym TNR. However, as long as two and a half years ago, it became obvious that Save the Cats Arizona was not being successful at managing the problem, let alone resolving the problem.

Desert Rivers Audubon Society (DRAS) first spoke to town officials about the problem in 2006. At one point, a "cat summit" was called and representatives of several cat rescue groups, Town of Gilbert employees, and DRAS were set to sit down and hash out a solution agreeable to all sides. But, the meeting was called off at the last minute because of planned protests by militant feral cat advocates.

The problem continued to grow, with the assumption being made that the ongoing housing crisis was increasing the dumping of unwanted cats. With the obvious increase in the number of cats, how to deal with the problem became a regular part of conversation among the birders visiting the Preserve.

This past July, on behalf of the Desert Rivers Audubon Board, I met with Gilbert Mayor John Lewis, Town Manager Colin Dewitt, Community Services Director Jim Norman and Mr. Anderson to express the concern of the DRAS Board and to propose a set of policy changes to deal with the cat problem. We shared with the town leaders an article, *Felines Fatales*, from a recent Audubon magazine. Here is a link to that article: <http://www.audubonmagazine.org/incite/incite0909.html>. We requested that the policy of Trap, Neuter, and Return be stopped and trap and remove used instead. We also asked for an ordinance to outlaw the feeding of feral cats on town property. We further proposed that the town start a media education program on the evil of dumping house cats at the preserve and to advocate an indoors only policy for the family cat. Finally, we offered to partner with the town on all of these efforts. Our meeting was positively received and commitments to pursue some of the policy options were made.

In late October, Riparian Institute Director Scott Anderson called me and said he'd had enough with the cats. He asked for another meeting and wanted to focus on trapping and removing the cats. DRAS President Kryss Hammers and I met with Mr. Anderson and his staff. We discussed a program to trap and remove all of the cats.

One of the items needed by the Riparian Institute was a supply of live traps. We realized that if TNR was no longer going to be used, then the preserve employees and their volunteers would need to regularly trap to remove any new cats that showed up. We spoke with fellow Audubon members at the Audubon Arizona office and with the Maricopa Audubon Society. Both agreed to assist in the purchase and donation of live traps to the Riparian Institute, a registered nonprofit organization.

Once we began to trap, we were quite surprised by our results. Of the 26 cats we trapped, only 2 had been sterilized, a dismal 8%. All of the cats were one to two years old. As Mr. Anderson said, "We knew why the population was exploding. It was no longer cats being abandoned at the preserve. Cats were being born, fed, and raised in the preserve." Four of the trapped cats were placed for private adoption and 22 were taken to the Arizona Humane Society.

Save the Cats Arizona has asked for one more chance to trap and remove the cats themselves. They have been given until January 18th to remove all of

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WHITE - FACED IBIS

Often seen around watercourses, rivers, and ponds in the valley, this exotic-looking bird excites both experienced and amateur birdwatchers with its antics, glossy plumage colors, and huge down-curved bill. Let's take a look at *Plegadis chihi* of the *Threskiornithidae* family.

Article : Mike Rupp
Photos : Denny Green

During the winter months one of the more interesting species we often find in our outings and field trips is the White-faced Ibis, a spectacular bird due to its size, iridescent plumage, and often large numbers. Flocks of ibis can regularly be seen in the morning at the 91st Ave Water Treatment site on the north side of the Salt River bed. The best spot is on the entrance road to the Hayfield Site.

Easily confused in flight with cormorants, the ibis has similar habits and flies up and down river courses like the cormorant, especially in the morning during the "fly out", and evening when they return to roost. The ibises can be separated from the cormorants by looking closely at their bills, smaller body size, and by their less steady flight. Flocks of 200 or so are not uncommon during the winter. The other species that can be confused with the White-Faced Ibis is its exact cousin, the Glossy Ibis. The Glossy Ibis has a completely different range. Whereas the White-faced Ibis is considered a western species, the Glossy normally only occurs along the east coast, with no range overlap with the White-faced Ibis. It too has iridescent plumage and similar habits, and is only distinguishable by its eye color, which is dark rather than red/pink like the White-faced. There have been a couple confirmed sightings of Glossy Ibis in the valley in years past, but they are very rare.

The White-faced Ibis is seen here predominantly during the winter months and migration periods, but stragglers can be seen well outside the "normal" periods, so seeing them throughout much of the year is quite common. The fact that Arizona is at the northern limit of its winter range, at the southern limit of its summer range, and directly under its migration routes assures the Arizona birder a good chance of seeing the ibis.

Although they occur in large numbers here, breeding is a rarity. The *Arizona Breeding Bird Atlas* edited by Troy Corman and Cathy Gervais-Wise lists only one confirmed breeding occurrence back in

2000 at the Cibola National Wildlife Refuge on the Colorado River. That year, two USFW service biologists found approximately 75 nests on a tule island inhabited by around 1500 birds, with eggs and young confirmed. There has been an unconfirmed report of a nest from Mormon Lake, but no other breeding reports. Summer breeding occurs in an area stretching from northern California east to Utah and north into Wyoming. Their wintering range is all across Baja and Mexico. It is suspected that breeding might occur here more often if local water levels didn't fluctuate so much, which creates unreliable feeding opportunities and nesting habitats.



WHERE TO SEE WHITE-FACED IBIS LOCALLY:

Gilbert Riparian Preserve, 91st Ave. Hayfield Site, flooded farmfields in the west valley all the way to Arlington, Salt River Restoration Habitat on Central Ave. and sites along the Gila River going west.



Food sources include insects, frogs and newts, crayfish and other crustaceans, fish, and earthworms. Some of these food items are abundant in irrigated fields in agricultural areas in the west valley, and flocks numbering in the hundreds are often seen foraging among alfalfa and other winter crops.

Nationally, this species is not endangered, but is a "species of concern" in a few states as some state-wide populations are known to be decreasing. According to some reports, this may be the result of habitat loss from reclaiming wetlands, and pesticide use.

Their vocalizations are pretty distinct, consisting of low grunts and squawks. A whole flock of ibis feeding, preening, and chasing each other can be heard from a distance, and will not be soon forgotten. On one occasion, I led a field trip to the west valley that gave us a look at around 100 White-faced Ibis flying round and round a pool in the early morning light- one of those sights that create an indelible memory forever.

As little as ten years ago, there were a couple large pond habitats on the west side that have since disappeared. Let's hope that there will be no further loss of wetland habitat, and eagerly await the opening of the "new Cobble Ponds" wetlands on the west side of 91st Avenue south of Broadway Rd. While serving the valley by providing additional wastewater treatment capability, the new ponds will give us a large net increase in wetlands habitat that surely can provide the opportunity for increases in populations of the ibis and other riparian species, and that is very good news for this species.



A perimeter of ponderosa pines exhaling their fresh scent.

In one corner, a wetland surrounded by reeds.

Azure skies with the San Francisco Peaks sitting on the horizon about twenty miles north.

Near the middle, a couple of snags—excellent perches.

Sunken meadows awash with wildflowers, particularly dazzling sunflowers.

Such is Kachina Wetlands—a name too limited for the variety of habitats it offers! In the ripeness of summer, a morning spent at Kachina Wetlands is a welcome escape from the Valley of the Sun's sizzle. At first, a birder might seek the sun to ward off the chill; by late morning, all polite layers of clothes have been peeled off. A stroll around the site reveals a smorgasbord of bird species, from soaring Ospreys to secretive sparrows, burping coots to charming Mountain Chickadees. Impossible to miss are the Western Bluebirds that sit high on stalks of spent blossoms. They offer a quick education to compare plumage phases from plump speckled youngsters to stunning sapphire adult males.

Chipping Sparrows zip across the path and disappear into the grasses, joining less cooperative family members. Lesser Goldfinches perform their acrobatics on seed heads.

Swallows swoop around in varied abundance, mostly Violet-green and Barn Swallows, catching light and flashing iridescence. The snags seize the swallows occasionally, but not for long. A parade of species take up the best seats in the house sequentially—American Crows, Red-winged Blackbirds and House Finches, among others. The woodpeckers that visit the snags, a Hairy and a Northern Flicker, are too busy probing for snacks to notice the view.



To get to Kachina Wetlands, take Exit 333 off I-17 and head west, under I-17. Take the first right onto Tovar Trail, for about 1 1/5 miles. Near the end, turn right into a rough parking lot. Wander through the gate in the parking lot, among ponderosa pine, towards the open meadowlands. No amenities at the Wetlands, although there are picnic tables and restrooms in the park near the turn onto Tovar Trail.

Birding the Kachina Wetlands

Article : Kathe Anderson

Photos: David Rosenberg

The wetlands offer brilliant rusty Ruddy Ducks with their K-Mart blue plastic bills. Wilson's Phalaropes sail like tiny white galleons. Coot babies require double-takes—they could be mistaken for an exotic species. Northern Shovelers, Mallards and Ring-necked Ducks float in and out of the reeds. Common Yellowthroats announce their presence but rarely reveal themselves. Is that a rail calling?

A pair of juvenile White-faced Ibis sweep into view, circle, descend and disappear. Later, they are found, so busy examining the mudflats of an empty pond that photographers get great shots. Nearby, uncharacteristically quiet Yellow-headed Blackbirds are equally absorbed in exploring the reeds. A kestrel streaks across the sky. The reliable Black Phoebe flutters out from its perch and back. On the way back to the car, through the pines, a White-breasted Nuthatch sounds its toy trumpet and works its way down a tree. Yellow-rumped Warblers flit here and there. An oblivious Stellar's Jay pokes about in the shade.

By mid-morning, dollops of whipped cream clouds begin to appear. By late morning great frothy meringues of cumulus begin to offer welcome intermittent shade. By the time birders are on their way back to Phoenix, an afternoon monsoon is probably bursting over Flagstaff. Birders are sated, though, their feast of species a memory—only to be renewed with the next, much-anticipated visit to Kachina Wetlands.



Siberia South?

The highlight of any birder's season is the discovery of a vagrant, a rare bird encountered well outside what the maps and the field guides traditionally assert as its "normal" range. And it only stands to reason that one's chances at encountering such an outlander improve at the edges of a given region. Here in North America, the fall and winter rarity seasons find birders flocking to the corners and coasts of the continent: to California and Newfoundland, Florida and Alaska, Texas and, of course, to Arizona, where every year and nearly every season produces an impressive haul of wanderers rarely or never seen elsewhere in the US and Canada.

The most famous and the most frequent of Arizona's avian vagrants, naturally, are strays from south of the border. Over the past couple of decades, with increased observer attention and obvious climate change, certain species once accounted the rarest of the rare have become nearly reliable at the cooler time of the year: always delightful to see, such "Mexican" wanderers as **Northern Jacana**, **Rufous-backed Robin**, or even **Crescent-chested Warbler** no longer raise eyebrows and heart rates the way they might once have. But Arizona, especially the southeast, is still a rich hunting ground for unexpected tropical guests from Middle America or even beyond, such as Cave Creek's **Gray-collared Becard**, Tacna's **Couch's Kingbird**, or the startling **Brown-chested Martin** that spent an early February day hawking insects over Patagonia Lake a few years ago.

We forget sometimes, though, that Mexico and the Neotropics are not the only geographic source of potential vagrants to Arizona. In spite of our low latitude, there is a wide selection of boreal birds, from the northernmost climes of America or even from far eastern Asia, that sooner or later will appear in the state. Careful Arizona observers have already turned up such wanderers as **Harlequin Duck**, **Snow Bunting**, **White-winged Crossbill**, and **Common Redpoll**, and other, even more exotic northerners have appeared in nearby states. Open minds and open eyes are sure, given world enough and time, to discover some of them here as well.

Not surprisingly, several water birds are high on my personal list of northern species to look for. Perhaps the most likely is **Common Crane**, an Old World species individuals or even family groups of which are drawn south nearly every year in flocks of **Lesser Sandhill Cranes** from breeding grounds in Siberia and the Russian Far East. These large, black-necked and black-bustled cranes have been seen as close by as New Mexico, and with the rapid increase in size of the **Sandhill Crane** flock wintering in southeast Arizona's Sulphur Spring Valley, it's only a matter of time, and not much time at that, until one is detected there, too.



Dusky Thrush



Common Crane



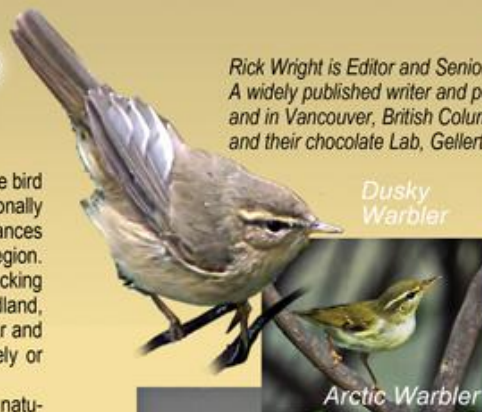
Lesser Black-backed Gull



Rustic Bunting

Article: Rick Wright

Rick Wright is Editor and Senior Leader at WINGS Birding Tours. A widely published writer and popular speaker, he lives in Tucson and in Vancouver, British Columbia, with his wife, Alison Beringer, and their chocolate Lab, Geller.



Dusky Warbler



Arctic Warbler



Smith's Longspur



Little Bunting



Falcated Duck

Equally exciting discoveries await Arizona gull watchers. Recent seasons have seen **Mew** (Short-billed) and the state's long-expected first **Lesser Black-backed Gulls**; larophiles should also be alert for Iceland Gull, which has wintered not far from the state's eastern border in New Mexico. **Slaty-backed Gull**, since its first appearance in the Lower 48 more than a quarter century ago, has gone from a mega-rarity anywhere to a plausible possibility everywhere—and occupies second place, after **Common Crane**, on my list of boreal predictions. The natty **Black-tailed Gull**, a common Asian species, seems poised to follow in Slaty-back's webbed footsteps, with a number of records at unexpected inland locations in recent years.

With **Garganey**, **Green-winged (Common) Teal**, and **Tufted Duck** firmly on the state list, Arizona might already have its full complement of fancy northern waterfowl. But **Emperor Goose** occasionally wanders south along the Pacific Coast, from which a short flight could take one to an Arizona reservoir; the species has already occurred inland on the Great Plains. Still a very long shot, the strikingly handsome **Falcated Duck**, with populations rebounding dramatically in its Asian range, may be establishing a weak pattern of vagrancy in the Pacific Northwest. Appealing enough to birders, such tasty anatid morsels are irresistible to large birds of prey, and who knows when a **Gyrfalcon**—that most magnificent of arctic raptors, already recorded in California—will follow the ducks south to enjoy the desert warmth?

Boreal songbirds, too, are among the potential nova as they flee the harsh conditions of a northern winter. Baja California's astonishing **Little Bunting** from just a couple of years ago points to an entire suite of "Sibes" that could pass over (and ideally land in) Arizona in fall and winter. Another Asian emberizid, **Rustic Bunting**, already tallied several times in the continental US, is always worth looking for, as is **Smith's Longspur**, an American breeder that occasionally drifts west from its usual Midwestern haunts. **Dusky Thrush** is perhaps just a pipedream, but the colorful little Siberian accentor, native to the same parts of the northern world, is, to my mind, an inevitable addition to the Arizona list, having occurred as close as Idaho and California. Harder to detect and devilish to identify, but still worth keeping in mind, are a pair of Old World "warblers." **Arctic Warbler** breeds in Alaska and occurs at times in California, while the same state has multiple records, sometimes involving several birds in a single season, of **Dusky Warbler**.

Which one of these strays will be Arizona's next new bird? It's as impossible to say as it is entertaining to guess. It may be years before most of these species are recorded in Arizona, and some of my predictions may simply be wrong (it's happened before). But the most valuable item in the birder's toolkit is awareness, and knowing all the possibilities is the only way to be sure that none of them, not even the remotest, goes unnoticed.

Arizona birders are already used to relying on field guides to far-flung places in identifying southern vagrants. Excellent print resources for the identification and natural history of the northern birds mentioned in this essay include Brazil's *Birds of East Asia*, Svensson et al.'s *Birds of Europe*, and *Rare Birds of California*. Reports of the Arizona Birds Committee are available on line at the Arizona Field Ornithologists' website, azfo.org.

Waders and Warblers of the Gilbert Riparian Preserve

All Photos : Cindy Marple

The Gilbert Riparian Preserve continues to astound with an ongoing series of rarities appearing over the last few months to join the good seasonal assortment of wintering ducks and resident egrets and herons. These Preserve photos from our "resident photographer" Cindy Marple attest to the beauty and serenity that can always be found at the Preserve while birding to see some of the over 200 species that have been recorded there. The Preserve is the site for Desert Rivers free monthly birdwalks program on the third Saturday each month, starting at 8am at one of the roadsides just south of the parking lot. Liberty Wildlife is in attendance



McGuire's Warbler

Warblers



Wilson's Warbler



Lutescent Warbler



Yellow-rumped Warbler



Tennessee Warbler



Orange-crowned Warbler



Magnolia Warbler

at these walks with various live raptors that can be seen close up along with information presented by expert Liberty staff. As mentioned in Kays Hammer's Audubon at Home column on Page 1, wetlands are a vital resource for Arizona birds by providing a riparian habitat in the middle of our usually dry desert. The surprising diversity of bird species found at the Preserve attest to the importance of wetlands and are correctly characterized as "desert oasis". In March Desert Rivers members will be giving guided bird walks at the Feathered Friends Festival - a great opportunity to bring some friends to discover the wonders of the Gilbert Riparian Preserve. More information can be obtained from the Riparian Preserve website: www.riparianinidaho.org

Waders



White-faced Ibis



American Bittern



Great Egret



Cattle Egret



Black-crowned Night Heron



Wood Stork



Green Heron



Snowy Egret



Great Blue Heron

EVENTS & FIELD TRIPS

JAN-FEB-MAR 2011

CHECK DRAS WEBSITE FOR ADDITIONAL TRIPS

To reserve a spot on any of these trips contact
Susie Vaught at azvaughts_2@msn.com or 480-898-7564

FIELD TRIP - SCOTTSDALE PONDS, led by Harvey Beatty
Sat, January 22, 7:30am – 12:00pm

These urban ponds have a good assortment of wintering birds including geese, ducks, herons, egrets, shorebirds, raptors, and passerines. Eurasian Wigeon has been seen each year for several years. We normally see more than fifty species. Bring a scope, if available, snacks, and water. Bring lunch if you want to bird past noon. Wear layered clothing and be prepared for chilly, breezy weather in the early morning.

FIELD TRIP ASU RESEARCH PARK, led by Kathe Anderson
Mon, January 24, 7:30am – 9:00am

This is a short walk designed for folks who want to start their week with a little in-town, relaxed birding before heading to work. We'll walk the sidewalks along a lake or two at the Research Park, with the expectation of seeing a variety of waterfowl and some common urban/desert birds. Limited to 8 participants. Please register with Kathe at kathe.coot@cox.net.

FIELD TRIP- BOULDERS RESORT , CAREFREE- led by Linda Covey
Sat, January 29, 7:15am – 9:45am

A short walk around the lovely grounds of the Boulders Resort in Carefree AZ. We will stay on roads or flat trails for an easy trip. This area should have a variety of usual residents, along with some wintering visitors. We may find a few song birds such as cardinals, goldfinches, bluebirds, along with wrens, vireos, thrushes and flycatchers and perhaps a few woodpeckers and wintering raptors. After the trip you may wish to enjoy breakfast at the restaurant. Limited to 8 people.

BIRD WALK DAY, VETERAN'S OASIS PARK
Sat, February 5, 8am – 12pm See: www.desertriversaudubon.org

DRAS MONTHLY PROGRAM at Gilbert Community Center
Tue, February 8, 7pm – 9pm See: www.desertriversaudubon.org

FIELD TRIP PRESCOTT - led by Kathe Anderson
Mon, February 14, 6:45am – 2:00pm

We'll start with a short stop at Fain Park in Prescott Valley, and head to the Highlands Center for a walk in the woods, before visiting one or more lakes in Prescott. We should collect a nice variety of higher elevation songbirds, woodpeckers and wintering waterfowl, including Spotted Towhees, White-breasted Nuthatches, Hairy and Acorn Woodpeckers, and Common Mergansers, among many others. Limited to 8 participants. Please register with Kathe at kathe.coot@cox.net.

BIRD WALK DAY -GILBERT RIPARIAN PRESERVE
Sat, February 19, 8am – 12pm See: www.desertriversaudubon.org

FIELD TRIP RIO SALADO HABITAT REST. AREA- led by Tom Gaskill
Sat, February 26, 7am – 12pm

February is prime time for wintering raptors at Rio Salado, and we'll hike through the best raptor areas (Central to 19th Avenues). Ten raptor species are common in late winter at the Rio, with several more (including bald eagle) possible. The shallows near 19th Avenue usually provide lots of riparian birds and wintering waterfowl. The channel and the banks should be buzzing with hummers and busy with sparrows, while the 19th Avenue flatlands should produce shrikes (and often produce surprises). The entire trip will be on foot (about five miles total). The trails are mostly flat, but some parts are a bit rocky, so wear sturdy, comfortable shoes. Bring scope (if available). Susie or Tom Gaskill at gaskillthomas@gmail.com

BIRD WALK, VETERANS OASIS PARK
Saturday, Mar 5, 2011 See: www.desertriversaudubon.org

TRES RIOS NATURE FESTIVAL at Estrella Mountain Regional Park
Saturday & Sunday, Mar 5&6, 9am to 4pm both days, free admission.

DRAS MONTHLY PROGRAM at Gilbert Community Center
Tuesday, Mar 8, 2011

FIELD TRIP SWEETWATER WETLANDS, TUCSON - Claudia Kirscher
Sunday, Mar 13, 2011

This urban riparian area is located along the Santa Cruz River. Built in 1996, the ponds treat secondary effluent from reclaimed water at the adjacent Roger Road Waste Water Treatment Plant. This area is known for its rarities posted on the Listserve, and has habitat for a wide variety of birds and wildlife in and around its ponds, cattails, willows, and cottonwoods. A reliable area for a variety of wintering ducks, vagrant shorebirds, sparrows, warblers, wrens, and an occasional hunting raptor. Bobcat and Grey Fox have also been seen. Wear sturdy walking shoes, involves extensive walking along flat, graded trails. Bring spotting scope, snack/lunch, and water. We will return to Phoenix by about 2 p.m.. Info on where to meet and when will be available with reservations.

BIRD WALK DAY-GILBERT RIPARIAN PRESERVE
Saturday, Mar 19, 2011 See: www.desertriversaudubon.org

FIELD TRIP SRPM INDIAN COMMUNITY - led by Kathe Anderson
Mon, March 21, 7am – 9am

Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community, east of Scottsdale, with Rousseau Sod Farms. This is a short exploration of the area east of Scottsdale Community College, where we'll start to look for Burrowing Owls. The open fields and occasional canal usually yield a variety of raptors, sparrows, blackbirds, plus meadowlarks and desert species. Limited to 8 participants. Please register with Kathe at kathe.coot@cox.net.

FEATHERED FRIENDS FESTIVAL
Saturday, Mar 26, 2011 See: www.riparianinstitute.org/featheredfriends.cfm

FIELD TRIP SPARROW ID - led by Tom Gaskill
Sat, March 26, 6:30am – 3:00pm

7th Street & Salt River bottom. Discover the joy of watching sparrows. No, really. Learn to love the little brown jobs, rather than to fear or to dismiss them. Your trip leader has been involved with sparrow conservation since he was a child and guarantees that sparrows and other LBJs need not induce anxiety if you know what to look for. We will concentrate on shape (what Kenn Kaufman calls "the generic approach"), behavior and habitat, and not on fine points of plumage colors. Reference handouts and guided field experience will help you appreciate these delightful little birds. We will start at the 7th Street (not 7th Avenue) parking area at the Rio Salado Habitat Restoration Area and will visit two or three East Valley locations (to be determined bases on the winter rains and where the good crops of weed seeds are). Difficulty level 2 - appx 5 miles walking, bring snacks, water, lunch, wear sturdy shoes, hat and sunscreen. limit 15. Reservations: Susie or Tom Gaskill gaskillthomas@gmail.com

Paul Kinslow Exhibit at Boyce Thompson Arboretum Visitor Center Gallery in January

Scottsdale artist and DRAS member Paul Kinslow has exhibited his paintings in numerous venues and he's been published in periodicals including Southwest Art, Better Homes and Gardens, Gourmet, Canoe and Kayak, and Climbing Magazine. Kinslow's also an Arizona State Parks volunteer, and we're pleased to showcase new works in the Visitor Center gallery. January's exhibit opens this weekend, Kinslow hopes Members will stop by for his 'meet-the-artist' opening reception Jan. 9, Sunday, from 1 to 3 pm. <http://arboretum.ag.arizona.edu/paulkinslow.html>



From the AZ Field Ornithologists. See complete details and **many** more reports on the AZFO web-site - www.azfo.org - "Photo Documentation" pg.



Black Scoter (*Melanitta nigra*), Lake Havasu, Bill Williams River NWR peninsula, Mohave County. This Black Scoter was discovered at this location by David Vander Pluym and Lauren Harter and photographed by John West on 29 December 2010. There are at least two other Black Scoters reported from the Lower Colorado River Valley this year as well (Parker Dam and Senator Wash). The rarest of the three scoter species in Arizona with about 10 accepted records for the state. This year has seen an exceptional number of reports. Most records are of female plumaged birds. The most recent AOU checklist split Black

Scoter (*Melanitta nigra*) into two species. The species in North America and eastern Siberia is now called Black Scoter (*Melanitta americana*) and the species of Europe and the rest of Asia is called Common Scoter (*Melanitta nigra*). There are no records of Common Scoter in North America. Note the bird with the dark cap contrasting with the pale cheek patch.

Ruddy Ground-Dove (*Columbina talpacoti*), Patagonia-Sonoita Creek Preserve, Santa Cruz County. These Ruddy Ground-Doves were discovered and photographed by Brian Uher-Koch on 24 December 2010 approximately 200m east of the northern intersection between the Railroad and Creek trails. Rare visitor to Arizona, usually in winter and usually in the company of Inca Doves. Present in good numbers some years, but absent in others. Dark bill, unscaled breast and underparts, rufous upperparts.



Red-breasted Sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus ruber*), Lower Madera Canyon, Whitehouse Picnic Area, Pima County. This Red-breasted Sapsucker was discovered by Brian Uher-Koch on 22 December 2010, although it was first reported on 27 December 2010 by Allen W. Jahn, Wayne Jahn, and Dr. Jeffrey A. Jahn. It was photographed by Brian Uher-Koch on 22 December 2011 and by Laurens Halsey on 28 December 2010. Casual transient and winter visitor to Arizona. Red feathering extends down the breast without evidence of a

black breast band, and feathers on the back of the crown and nape are red-tipped. The sapsucker face pattern is very indistinct. The back and face pattern suggest this bird could be of the nominate race (*S. r. ruber*).

Short-tailed Hawk (*Buteo brachyurus*), intersection of Hampton and Ridgeway in Tucson, Pima County. This Short-tailed Hawk is presumably the same bird returning for its fourth winter in Tucson. It was first reported this year by Jim Notestine on 28 October 2010. It was photographed by William Higgins on 20 December 2010. This

species has recently expanded its range into SE Arizona and has bred in the Chiricahuas. It is accidental outside of the Sky Islands, but may be expanding northward. The aberrant plumage of this bird has generated some controversy. It does not appear to be a typical adult light morph Short-tailed Hawk. Short-tailed Hawks normally have buffy underparts only in their first year and then are presumed to molt into the white underparts typical of adults. However, the sequence of plumages and molts in Short-tailed Hawk is poorly known (Miller and Meyer, 2002, *Birds of North America*, Online).



NOTABLE ARIZONA STATE SIGHTINGS

Lapland Longspur (*Calcarius lapponicus*), Babbitt Tank, Coconino County

Two Lapland Longspurs were discovered at this site on 09 December 2010 by John Coons and Jason Wilder. Photographs were taken by Jason Wilder on 13 December 2010 and Eric Hough on 12 December 2010. Casual transient and winter visitor to the state with fewer than 15 accepted records. Monson and Phillips (1981) mention records for northern Arizona from Meteor Crater, western Navajo tribal lands and at Round Rock, and east of Holbrook and at Petrified Forest National Park. Jacobs (1986) also mentions two birds reported from Many Farms Lake on the Navajo tribal lands. The dark auricular region outlining the face and chestnut nape can clearly be seen. The smudgy black chest, white belly, and yellow bill are consistent with Lapland longspur.



Sedge Wren (*Cistothorus platensis*), Thumb Rock Cove, Pena Blanca Lake, Santa Cruz County. This Sedge Wren was discovered and photographed by Alan Schmierer on 27 November 2010 and was photographed again by Andrew Core on 02 December 2010. Alan describes his discovery: "Just after 7:00AM this morning I

discovered a Sedge Wren at Pena Blanca. It was on the south shore of the Thumb Rock cove. If you were to park in the Lower Thumb Rock parking area and follow the south shore path there are wide spots in the path, one of which has orange peels on the pavement. The bird was 5 feet up in a tree between the orange-peel wide spot and the next one east. Potential first state record if accepted. Monson and Phillips (1981) included it on their hypothetical list based on a report of three or four at the Arizona portion of the San Simon Cienega on 10 December 1979 but no further details are provided. Only North American Wren with the combination of a streaked back, streaked crown and barred wings.

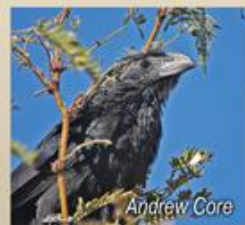
Roseate Spoonbill (*Platalea ajaja*), Glendale Recharge Ponds, Maricopa County. This Roseate Spoonbill was discovered by Ken and Linda Bielek and photographed by Jeff Ritz and David Vander Pluym on 19 November 2010. This is an

immature because it lacks the red shoulders of an adult. It is a first year bird because of the fully feathered head. Second year birds also lack the red shoulders of adults, but have the bald forehead typical of adults and are usually brighter pink. Adult plumage is acquired in the third year. Although considered a regular visitor to the state through the 1970's, it has been much rarer and less regular since, probably associated with the decline of waterbird habitat in the Colorado River Delta in nearby Mexico. There are about 25 accepted records, including several previous records from Maricopa County.



Groove-billed Ani (*Crotophaga sulcirostris*), Whitewater Draw, Cochise County

This Groove-billed Ani was discovered by Gordon Lewis and photographed by Andrew Core on 05 November 2010. A rare vagrant to Arizona, mainly in the fall. The last accepted record was in 2006 but this is the third one reported this year. The bill makes this bird unmistakably an ani. This is probably a first year bird.



Possible State Record

from 4th Qtr 2010

From the Arizona Field Ornithologists website



Photo: James Jerome

Trumpeter Swan (*Cygnus buccinator*), Wigwam Golf Resort, Litchfield Park, Maricopa County

This Trumpeter Swan was reported to the AZFO sightings database by someone who only left a first name. Mark Stevenson called attention to this report and Gary Nunn was the first to confirm the bird's presence on 20 December 2010. The bird is on a private golf course and only visible from the road with a scope. Jack Holloway received special permission from the course managers to photograph the bird and was accompanied onto the course by course employees. He took these photographs on 21 December 2010. According to personnel at the course, the bird has been present for about a month. It is also reported to be extremely tame and to allow approach within 10 feet. Trumpeter Swan is accidental in Arizona with only three previous records. However, because of on going and aggressive re-introduction programs in North America, sightings in Arizona may be expected to increase. Provenance is always an issue with rare waterfowl. This bird is banded, but only with a color band, not with a federal metal band. In addition, this band color is not listed among those used on wild Trumpeter Swans by the Trumpeter Swan Society (here), although the three digit code is consistent with the marking of Trumpeters. We are currently seeking information about what the band tells us about the bird's origin. The fact that it is apparently extremely tame is also suspicious. The best characters for adult Trumpeter Swan visible in these photographs are the wide black skin connecting the bill and the eye and the V-shaped white feathers on the forehead. Adult Tundra Swans have a narrow connection between bill and eye and a U-shaped forehead. Nearly all adult Tundra Swans have a yellow spot on the skin in front of the eye which this bird clearly lacks. All Trumpeter Swans have a red border on the lower mandible, but this is occasionally present on Tundra as well.

Baikal Teal (*Anas formosa*), Gilbert Water Ranch, Maricopa County

This Baikal Teal was discovered by Gary Nunn and photographed by Brendon Grice on 02 December 2010 in Pond 1 at the Gilbert Water Ranch and again on 03 December 2010 by James Jerome and Carl Stangeland, on 04 December by Mureil Neddermeyer, David Rosenberg and Cindy Marple and on 05 December 2010 by Bernie Howe. Gary Nunn writes on his original discovery of the bird: The bird appears to be in intermediate molt from juvenile or eclipse (basic) plumage into alternate plumage. The head (wow!), chest, underparts appear molted but flank feather and wing molt is not complete. It shows a small white vertical flank bar, and I could not discern any full scapu

Photo: Carl Stangeland



Photo: Mureil Neddermeyer



lars. Wings and the flank feathering just below the wings appear dark brown with paler brown edging. The wings having darker brown edges than the flank feathers. Further detailed photographs may provide better indication of the age and plumage state of the bird. I checked a few resources online and the plumage condition matched expectations for molt in this species at this date. "Potential first state record. However, the origin of rare waterfowl is always subject to question. Is the bird wild or an escape? The ABA Checklist 7th edition says of Baikal Teal: west coast Canada and US reports are considered vagrants while reports from the interior in CO, OK, LA, NC, OH, Ontario have been questioned because of uncertain provenance. When waterfowl are kept in captivity, their owners are required by law to mark them either with bands or by removing a hind toe (hallux). Of course, this is not always done. The photos show that this bird is not banded on either leg and has both of its hind toes. Although the bird is obviously molting into alternate plumage, in these photos the wing feathers also appear to be in excellent condition with no sign of fraying as might be expected in a captive bird, even on the older outer primaries. None of this proves that the bird is of wild origin, but the bird does not appear to have any of the obvious signs that would indicate captive origin.

Photo: Jack Holloway



THE VOLUNTEER AERIE

In our first article featuring our great Volunteers, we are spotlighting **Cindy Marple**, our wonderfully talented photographer-in-residence. Cindy provides most of our beautiful bird photos in this newsletter and other publications, also the slide shows for us and for other organizations. She also leads field trips for us, and volunteers at our Free Family Bird Walks. She presented our December program on her recent trip to New Zealand.

Cindy is originally from California, and has lived in the Valley for 29 years. She's an Electrical Engineering graduate of UC Berkeley, and is Operations Manager at Fujitsu Semiconductor Wireless Products. Her interest in photography began when she received a Kodak Instamatic camera in grade school. She's come a long way since then, moving to much more sophisticated cameras, and is an active member of the Phoenix Camera Club, and a moderator in the Wildlife Forum of naturescapes.net.

She's traveled extensively, photographing birds and landscapes in Antarctica, the Falkland Islands, Iceland, New Zealand, Kenya, Hawaii, and around the US to Florida, Texas, and up through the Rocky Mountain states and West Coast. She's a two-time winner of the of the "Best Nature Story" image at ACCC (Arizona Camera Club Council), of the three times it's been offered. We are most fortunate to have Cindy so willing to share her photographic talents with us! Thank you, Cindy!



Answers to Questions on Kids Page 14

Question 1 – Greater Roadrunner and Red Tailed Hawk

Well you probably knew that Roadrunners are famous for catching snakes and lizards. They will often work in pairs distracting the snake and moving around it until they have the chance to grab it. But did you know Red Tailed Hawks will also catch snakes? They use their wings to distract the snake, if the snake strikes at the wing feathers it will do the Hawk no harm and the Hawk can then take hold of the snake and fly off. If you ever see a Red Tailed Hawk carrying what seems to be a length of rope, look again because it may be a snake!

Question 2 – Curved Billed Thrasher and Northern Mockingbird

The Curved Billed Thrasher has one of the loveliest songs you will hear in the desert. Maybe that's why the Mockingbird copies him, even though the Mockingbird has a good song of his own. Birds call for all sorts of reasons; to say they have found food, to keep in contact with other birds, fledglings call to be fed and birds have alarm calls to give warnings of danger. Singing is sustained over a longer period than the call and is the way birds, usually the male, defend territory and attract a partner. Mockingbirds sing to say they are fit and healthy, that they can defend a nesting territory. It seems, however, that female Mockingbirds want a little more information than that. By learning and repeating other birds' songs the male may be letting the female know he's intelligent too.

Question 3 – Gila Woodpecker and Eurasian Starling

The Gila Woodpecker makes a cavity nest either in a tree or, here in the Sonoran Desert, in a Saguaro Cactus. Both the woodpecker and the cactus have adapted to live with each other. Afterwards other birds, like finches and Elf Owls, will use the cavity the Gila Woodpecker made in the previous year. The Eurasian Starling is an introduced and invasive species. That means it really shouldn't be in the United States, it was brought here by people, and it is doing too well here and causing problems. The Starling will take over the Woodpecker's cactus home even before the Woodpecker has laid eggs. They will also stop Finches and Elf Owls nesting in the old cavities. Starlings aren't "bad" birds, in fact we can learn a lot from them about living together but they are a problem and one that humans have created. Do you know of any other birds, animals or plants that have been introduced to the USA that are causing problems?

Great Backyard Bird Counts

October 5, 2010—The 14th annual Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) is coming up February 18-21, 2011. The four-day event is free and is open to bird watchers of all ages and skill levels. Participants watch birds for any length of time on one or more days of the count and enter their tallies at www.birdcount.org. The results provide a snapshot of the whereabouts of more than 600 bird species. The GBBC is a joint project of the National Audubon Society and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology with Canadian partner Bird Studies Canada.

The 2010 GBBC was another record-breaker with more than 97,300 bird checklists submitted by an estimated 63,000 volunteers from across the United States and Canada. These volunteers found connecting with nature to be great fun. "I enjoy being outdoors and birding is a source of relaxation and stress relief," wrote one participant. "Looking and listening for birds forces me to focus on the environment around me at a higher level of intensity, and notice things I might otherwise miss." From reports of rare species to large-scale tracking of bird movements, the GBBC provides insight into the lives of bird populations.

A few highlights from the 2010 GBBC:

A massive roost of nearly 1.5 million **American Robins** was reported in St. Petersburg, Florida. Will they be back in 2011?

The invasive **Eurasian Collared-Dove** keeps expanding its range. It was reported in 39 states and provinces during the 2010 GBBC. Where will this hardy dove show up next?

Tree Swallows showed dramatic increases in numbers during the last count, possibly because of warmer temperatures and earlier migration. Will that pattern hold true again for GBBC 2011?

Mid-February is chosen as the time for the Great Backyard Bird Count because it offers a good picture of the birds typically found throughout the winter months. It also coincides with migration for some species, such as the Sandhill Crane. That window of transition affords an opportunity to detect changes in timing for northward migration. On the www.birdcount.org website, participants can explore real-time maps and charts that show what others are reporting during the count. The site has tips to help identify birds and special materials for educators. GBBC participant surveys have shown that people really enjoy exploring the data and say they learn more about their local birds. "I looked at data with my 9-year-old son to help him learn about birds in our area," wrote one parent. "We talked about migration, bird flyways and compared bird counts for our area (coastal South Carolina) with where his cousins live (Wisconsin and Alabama). We found out our area has a much greater variety of birds in February than either of the other two."

Participants may also enter the GBBC photo contest by uploading images taken during the count. Many images will be featured in the GBBC website's photo gallery. All participants are entered in a drawing for prizes that include bird feeders, binoculars, books, CDs, and many other great birding products. For more information about the GBBC, visit www.birdcount.org. Or contact the Cornell Lab of Ornithology at (800) 843-2473, gbbc@cornell.edu or Audubon at (202) 861-2242 ext. 3050, citizenscience@audubon.org. In Canada, participants may contact Bird Studies Canada at 1-888-448-2473 ext. 134 or gbbc@birdscanada.org. The Great Backyard Bird Count is made possible, in part, by generous support from Wild Birds Unlimited.



The Cornell Lab of Ornithology

Audubon

Canadian partner:



www.desertiversaudubon.org 12

The Family Album

Family : *Dabbling Ducks, Subfamily Anatinae*
Article and Photos: Cindy Marple

True Ducks are often classified in two groups that are described by their dominant feeding method, dabbling or diving. Last winter the Family Album focused on diving ducks, so this winter we will look at the dabblers. Most of the 16 North American species can be found in the Phoenix area in the winter time, with Pintail and Shovelers arriving in great numbers each year. We even get the occasional rare visitor, such as the Baikal Teal that made a brief appearance in December.

Most dabbling ducks are omnivorous. They will feed on invertebrates during breeding season or during molt, then shift to a plant-material diet at other times of the year. They feed by upending to reach submerged vegetation, or by filtering water at the surface. Many species have lamellae along the sides of the bill that help them to filter food out of muddy water. These can be seen at the base of the bill in the female Northern Shoveler photo. Some species may feed out of the water in fields or on manicured lawns. Their legs are more centrally placed on the body, compared to divers whose legs are set well back, and they are thus more agile on land. They also frequent more shallow water than divers tend to be in, and are also called Puddle Ducks.

Dabblers tend to be more buoyant than their diving cousins and ride somewhat higher on the water. They can take flight straight off of the water without the running start that the heavier diving ducks need. With the exception of some of the Mallard Group species, the male (Drake) of North American duck species has much more colorful breeding plumage than the female (Hen). So marked is the difference in plumage that males and females were initially thought to be separate species in some cases. As you might guess from this strong sexual dichromatism, the hens do virtually all of the work of rearing the young, from incubation on. Pair bonds are often formed on the wintering grounds prior to migration, but they typically only last up to the start of incubation. After breeding season, the males molt in to their basic plumage, which is generally similar to the female plumage.



Male & female Wood Ducks



Male Northern Pintail



Female Mallard



Male Green-winged Teal



Male Northern Shoveler



Female Northern Shoveler

ANNOUNCEMENT



During March the acclaimed artist Jim Burns is featured in the visitor center gallery at Boyce Thompson Arboretum with a solo exhibit of his feather-crip and breathtaking bird photography. From Blue Grosbeak to Brown Thrasher, Burns has photographed birds in all corners of Arizona and in all habitats -- his photos will be in the gallery from March 1-30. The Arboretum offers guided bird-walks on Spring weekends, and Burns is among expert birders who generously volunteer their time as interpretive guides -- read the complete schedule for winter/spring guided bird walks at ag.arizona.edu/bta (and look for the "featured artist" page for exact times for Jim's meet-the-artist gallery opening reception March 5). Books by Scottsdale author and wildlife photographer Jim Burns include "North American Owls: Journey Through a Shadowed World," and also "Jim Burns' Arizona Birds: From the Backyard to the Backwoods."

Daily admission includes weekend nature tours and also the chance to see Burns' gallery exhibit this month. See more of the author's work and read his excellent bird blog at jimburnsphotos.com you can also connect with Jim at facebook. Those without internet access who need more information about this exhibit may call Arboretum staff at 520-689-2723 during daytime business hours.

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 October through December, 2010.



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

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

Bashas'



Wild Birds Unlimited - David Covey and MaryAnne Kenefic for their donations of great raffle items at our monthly meetings. Please visit their store for your birding/nature needs at : NE Corner of Baseline and Gilbert Roads in Mesa.

Corporate Members : Salt River Project, Arizona Cactus Sales, (www.arizonacactusales.com), Bashas', Bass Pro Shops, Wild Birds Unlimited, Arizona Medical Network

KIDS PAGE

Keeping a Notebook

Ameya and Ty were the winners of our recent notebook competition. Here's a photograph of them with their prizes at our November meeting of the Early Birds Club at the Riparian Preserve at Gilbert.

We asked Emily Morris, a teacher naturalist at Audubon Arizona, to judge the notebooks and she chose these two because both Ameya and Ty used their notebooks a lot, remembered to date their entries and added detail that was important to them. Ameya prefers to write and Ty likes to draw her entries.

Why keep a notebook?

First of all it helps you remember what you saw – in two year's time you may not remember whether you saw your first Wilson's Warbler in April or May but you'll have the date (and the location) in your notebook.

Secondly it helps you to focus on what you are seeing. If you have to write a description or make a drawing of the unknown bird you are seeing you are going to have to look very carefully, you will be training yourself to note size, behavior, sounds, beak shape and plumage details. When you get back to your field guide you'll have a true record of what you saw and you'll be able to identify the bird more easily.

Thirdly – you can note down what you don't know. That way you have a list of questions to look up when you get home like "What was that tree I saw the warbler in, the one with the white bark?" or, "Why do feral rock pigeons have so many different types of coloring?"

Lastly – one day your notebook may be useful to science! When you are grown up perhaps some biologist will be researching the numbers of Verdin in Phoenix and whether they are doing well. Maybe you can find your notebook from 2011 and tell them just how many you saw and how often –or maybe you'll be the biologist!

Ameya and Ty



When I was young and the fairy tale of Goldilocks and the Three Bears was read to me I felt very sorry for the little bear who lost his breakfast, his chair and then his bed to Goldilocks. I still think she was a very rude young lady but it occurs to me that the story demonstrates something that happens every day in nature when two individuals compete for the same resources.

Who's been eating my porridge? Well, as far as I know none of the birds pictured here look for porridge but they do compete for the same resources, or in one case one bird uses another bird's song.

For each question can you match the birds in the photos so that you have a pair who compete against each other?

Here are the questions.

Question 1 - Who's been eating my dinner? Clue: two birds that eat snakes.

Question 2 - Who's been singing my song? Clue: two birds that both have beautiful songs and one copies the song of the other.

Question 3 - Who's been stealing my nest site? Clue: two birds that both nest in cavities.



Answers on Page 12

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MONTHLY MEETINGS

Meetings are held at the Gilbert Community Center in Gilbert, at 130 N. Oak Street on second Tuesdays at 7 to 9PM, September through May. Doors open at 6:30PM, and everyone is welcome. The center is 2 blocks north of Elliot Rd and two blocks 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>Senior Couples Membership.....</i>	<i>\$35.</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 : kvullis@audubon.org

Desert Rivers Audubon Society is a 501(c)3non-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 Krys Hammers at krys.hammers@cox.net

Newsletter Editor and Design : Michael Rupp, mikerupp6@gmail.com
Contributing Photographer/Writer : Cindy Marple, clmarple@cox.net
Printing : Arrington Graphics



January snow on the Bradshaw Mountains