



DESERT RIVERS AUDUBON SOCIETY

VOLUME 4 - SPRING 2011 NEWSLETTER

In This Issue :

- Audubon at Home Column
- Conservation Reports
- Gripping Bird Feet - J. Lang
- Roger Tory Peterson - R. Wright
- Birding Muleshoe Ranch - K. Anderson
- The Snowy Egret - M. Rupp
- Notable Arizona Sightings
- The Family Album
- The Kids Page



Great Blue Herons at 91st Ave Wastewater Treatment Plant - Mike Rupp

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Krys Hammers

AUDUBON AT HOME

Michael Hodgins

DRAS Members

The membership is the lifeblood of any organization. Some of our members are avid birders, while others may be more interested in conservation. Some are very active and enjoy the social aspect of belonging to a group. Others may join just to support our educational activities. Some are very young and some of us are not. Regardless of each member's specific interests, I know one thing about each of our members. We all feel some sort of connection to nature. At Desert Rivers, we try to offer something for every nature lover.

We have a wide variety of field trips. Some may require some strenuous walking and some where you barely have to get out of the car. Some destinations are beautiful locations. Others are literally sewage ponds. Some destinations are long drives and some are in our own backyards. I've been on field trips where we've spotted and identified wildflowers, snakes, lizards, tarantulas, squirrels, a bobcat, a ring-tailed cat, and always a variety of bird life.

We've also had a wide variety of programs. We've explored birds in Africa, Antarctica, and New Zealand, as well as the Gilbert Riparian Preserve. We've had programs on eco-tourism, climate change, water resources in the desert, and the Audubon at Home program. We've talked about hummingbird banding, and the reintroduction programs for both the Mexican Wolf and the California Condor. Every year we've had Liberty Wildlife bring some education birds in for a program. We have even shared the wonderful experience of releasing some of their rehabilitated birds back to the wild.

For those that like to give back, we always have volunteer opportunities. Since we are an all-volunteer organization, just about any skill you have can be put to use. We have been very fortunate to have very talented people step up to take on leadership roles in the chapter. Our artists and graphics people have created signs and drawings for our brochures. Our technical and administrative members are great assets to our Board of Directors in the day to day running of the chapter. Of course, our members with bird identification skills and those interested in working with children are often called upon to lead birdwalks at our regular monthly events at Veterans Oasis Park and the Gilbert Riparian Preserve. Even folks who just like to talk to people can help out working behind the book table at meetings or in the tent at festivals.

We try to allow for some social time before and after meetings. We wear name tags so that you don't need to be embarrassed about not remembering our names. Car-pooling is encouraged on field trips. This isn't just for environmental reasons, but also so you will get to know your fellow birders. Our annual BBQ is purely social and always a lot of fun!

April is Membership Month and we look forward to seeing many of our members at our monthly meeting. Whether or not you are able to attend in April, I hope that you will share your experience with Desert Rivers Audubon with your friends and neighbors who are also outdoor enthusiasts. Please invite them to join us. We all share something— not just a discount in the nature store, something very deeply special - a connection with nature.



Sustainable Eating

By Michael Hodgins
Director of Sustainable Food Systems
Rio Salado College

One of the more popular definitions of sustainability can be traced to a 1987 United Nations conference. At the conference, sustainable developments were defined as those that "meet present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs". When considering the sustainability of food; social, economic and environmental demands should be taken into consideration.

Most folks, after reading this article, will not turn their entire backyard into a garden, never eat meat again and only buy food items produced within a 150 mile radius. I have found that the best way to approach folks about eating a more sustainable diet is to suggest small steps that can be taken. Here are a few easy tips on how to become more sustainable through the food you eat. Eat Less Red Meat and Cheese- I am not a vegetarian and I am not suggesting that you must stop eating meat to eat sustainably. However, ruminant animals such as cows, goats and sheep play a very large role in climate change. Methane gas, which is the natural result of bovine digestion, and nitrogen are emitted by the animals' waste. In fact, livestock account for 18% of the global warming effect, which is more than all transportation combined! Also, it takes approximately 16 pounds of grain, usually grown with chemical fertilizers, insecticides and herbicides, to produce one pound of industrial beef. Therefore, when eating beef look for grass-fed beef and reduce your portion size. Picking one day a week to not eat any meat is also a step in the right direction for the diehard meat eater. Cheese, being a by-product of cows, also carries a high carbon footprint. Try flavorful spreads such as hummus, chutneys or tapenades and leave the cheese off of your sandwich. Use hard cheeses such as Parmesan or Cotija which will give a huge flavor punch with a much smaller portion needed. Soy and nut cheeses are also more eco-friendly cheese alternatives.

Eat Seasonal Foods- The first step to eating seasonally is to know when foods are in season. The Univ. of Ariz. Cooperative Extension has a great planting calendar at <http://ag.arizona.edu/pubs/garden/az1005.pdf>. Seasonal foods are very obvious when shopping at farmers markets because that is all that they generally have for sale. When shopping at the supermarket, learning the seasonality of foods is also very important because the supermarket is full of non-seasonal foods. If you are eating grapes in the dead of winter, they are coming from South America and being air-freighted here. Stick to fruits such as apples and pears which are in-season. Seasonal foods are generally more nutritious as there is less time between producer and consumer.

Eat Sustainable Seafood- The Monterey Bay Aquarium has a terrific Seafood Watch Program, <http://www.montereybayaquarium.org/cr/seafoodwatch.aspx> that is updated twice a year highlighting the most sustainable fish, the acceptable alternatives and the last group which I call the "don't even think about it" group. Seafood from the last group is generally either overfished, produces habitat damage or excessive by-catch. According to the Monterey Bay Aquarium, "75% of the world's fisheries are either fully exploited, over exploited or have collapsed." Check the Seafood Watch before making your next seafood purchase. Generally, fish that are flash frozen right after being caught and trucked to market are more sustainable than fresh fish that are being air-freighted around the world.

With just a few simple steps, you will be on your way to eating a more sustainable diet!

Feral Cat Update

Article : Mike Evans



Black-necked Stilt chick being eaten last year by one of the many feral cats that roam the Gilbert Riparian Preserve. Many chicks of all species will be preyed upon this spring unless these cats are removed quickly, and a plan is instituted to keep cats out of the Preserve. **Brendon Grice photo.**

Gilbert's Riparian Preserve at Water Ranch still has a feral cat problem. When you received our last newsletter, Save the Cats Arizona (STCA) had asked for one more chance to trap and remove the cats by themselves. They had been given until January 18th to remove all of the cats. On January 18th, trapping was to resume by the town and the team of Audubon volunteers. All food found in the preserve was to have been removed and the feeding of the feral cats was to have ceased. I asked you to stay tuned for more to come on this.

What has actually transpired would make a great case study on how politics and public policy decision-making and implementation can be influenced by interest groups. When you throw into the mix the usual aversion to controversy by elected officials and municipal leaders, and add in the flavoring from an upcoming town council election, good public policy decisions become very difficult to make. Since I'm sure you aren't ready for a grad school seminar, I'll just hit the highlights.

We knew that the feral cat lobby had begun to contact town officials as a result of our trapping of cats. So, we sent a note out on the AZ-NM Birding Listserv that the University of Arizona administers. We asked for people to contact the Town of Gilbert officials to support the complete removal of cats from the Riparian Preserve. During this time, we learned that the feral cat advocates were planning on attending the January 13th Town Council meeting. We made plans to attend with a small group of board members to monitor what transpired. On the afternoon of the council meeting, we learned that the town had struck a deal with the feral cat advocates to give them one more month to remove the cats and allow the feeding of the cats to continue during that time. But STCA was told that the colony would be ended. A new deadline of Feb. 18th was set for ending STCA feeding and caring of the Water Ranch cats.

The town has set up a mediation process headed by former Town Presiding Judge David Phares. The town staff was represented by Jim Norman, Community Services Director for the town. The Riparian Preserve is part of this department. All of the meetings between the town, the feral cat advocates and DRAS have been led by these two men.

A meeting was held on Jan. 26th to discuss the feral cat management plan for the preserve. At that meeting STCA agreed to our long desired goal of not having a feral cat colony at the Riparian Preserve. The meeting was amicable and a spirit of cooperation was evident. STCA agreed to cooperate with Riparian Preserve staff members to trap the remaining cats. Another meeting was scheduled for Feb. 16th.

Several different trapping strategies are being tried, but none is proving very successful. Between the Jan. 26th and Feb. 16th meetings, STCA only trapped four cats. Town employees trapped twelve.

By the Feb. 16th meeting, the population of cats had been cut to twenty three. Of these, STCA said that twelve of the cats were their cats and that they had a relationship with them. They asked that feeding only be withheld immediately (a day or two) before trapping. We believe that these remaining cats will only be trapped when they become really hungry. The preserve staff agrees that the feeding should only be minimal. And with shorebird nesting season right around the corner, we want all of the cats gone by mid-March, especially any hungry ones!

Since the Feb. 16th meeting, town staff has managed to trap two more cats. STCA have not trapped any. We have written to town staff to express our concern with how long this process is dragging on and that no definite end is in sight. We want feeding to end now and trapping to accelerate so that all of the cats are gone by the time the shorebirds nest, which is in March. As with the last article, stay tuned. There is more to come on this issue.

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

Gulf Oil Spill Update

From National Audubon

Report by the National Commission on Gulf Oil Disaster & Recommendations

"We must heed the clear warning laid out by the courageous members of this commission, and call for a 'timeout' for drilling in America's Arctic Ocean". Published: Jan 11, 2011, New York NY - Statement by David Yarnold, Audubon President



"The report uses two words the drillers didn't want to hear: 'systemic failure.' Make no mistake: the report says drillers are unprepared for disasters like this. Even after killing 11 and triggering the worst environmental disaster in a generation, industry spokespeople want to distract us from the truth. They claim this was an isolated instance caused by rogue companies. That's an insult to the families who suffered and to anyone who wants to see reasonable safeguards.

"The report is clear; the Interior Department is outgunned by the drillers and needs the people and the dollars to police the industry.

"This is a rare instance where something good can arise from tragedy. We can use BP's fines to restore a way of life to the region that has suffered the most. That would be a solid first step toward environmental restoration along the Gulf Coast region. We know that the natural buffers, the wetlands and the forests can regrow. It's just a question of political will and money and the Commission says we should bring both to bear.

"We strongly agree that a large majority of Clean Water Act penalties should be directed, as soon as possible, to environmental restoration in the Gulf Coast region. This summer, Gulf communities suffered grim economic and environmental consequences as oil washed onto their beaches, contaminated their fisheries, and seeped into their wetlands. The report's recommendation to fund coastal restoration in the Gulf is a critical first step toward rebuilding an ecosystem that has been shattered by an unfettered energy industry. Audubon also joins the commission in calling for scientific studies and long-term monitoring efforts so desperately needed to understand and mitigate the spill's effects.

"Audubon urges the White House, Congress, and the oil and gas industry to fund and enact swift and comprehensive reforms. A system so riddled with complacency and incompetence must not be permitted to endanger more human lives and precious natural resources, in the Gulf and elsewhere.

"Even now, the federal Bureau of Energy Management, Regulation and Enforcement is considering Shell Oil's proposal to drill in the Beaufort Sea next summer, despite the lack of a credible oil spill response plan - risking a disaster that could eclipse what was seen in the Gulf of Mexico. We must heed the clear warning laid out by the courageous members of this commission, and call for a 'timeout' for drilling in America's Arctic Ocean.

"Audubon thanks Co-Chairs of the Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling, Senator Bob Graham and William Reilly, as well as the other distinguished Commissioners for their dedication in identifying the causes of this disaster as well as charting a course for improved rules and regulations regarding offshore drilling. They have provided a clear blueprint for the reforms and restoration support essential to ensure the future health and productivity of the Gulf coast's communities, wildlife and ecosystem. Now it is up to Congress and the Administration to act."

Oil Spill Commission's final report is at : <http://bit.ly/b2ntsV>

www.desertriversaudubon.org 2

Getting a Grip on Bird Feet

Article: Jerry Lang, Ph.D

While watching Black-necked Stilts at the Riparian Preserve, my wife commented that it looked like their knees bent backward as the birds moved forward. In other words, they were somewhat like politicians – appearing to go in one direction (campaigning) while actually going in the opposite direction (after elections). This somewhat confusing appearance of bird legs and feet requires a little explanation. (I'll leave the political explanations up to you.)

A bird's thigh down to its 'knee' is not visible since the upper portions of the leg are underneath the body feathers – very modest these birds. The first visible backward-bending leg joint is equivalent to our lower leg bone (tibia). The lower forward-bending part of a bird's leg is actually like the arch of our foot (metatarsus or tarsus), and the bird's foot is analogous to our toes. The bones of a bird's legs and feet are solid and heavier than most of the other bones – many of which are hollow to reduce weight. The heavier leg bones provide a lower center of gravity, which comes in handy when staying upright in flight or when trying to land.

Most biologists agree that modern birds are close living relatives of the dinosaurs. The presence of scales on the exposed portions of many birds' feet and legs is an indication of this ancient reptilian relationship. Scales and scutes (larger scales) on a bird's legs are of the same composition as feathers and chemically much the same as reptilian scales. In fact, the genes that control scale development in birds can be found in the same DNA strands of alligators. Bird claws or talons are specialized scales that grow continuously and are worn away by daily activity.

While thin scaly legs and feet might look like they would freeze at the first sign of cold winter weather, birds have obviously developed ways to prevent this. Although birds don't have to keep their legs and feet as warm as their internal body organs, they do need to keep them above freezing. Many muscles controlling leg and foot movement are located closer to the bird's body where they are near core body temperature. These muscles control the lower leg and foot by tendons – somewhat puppet-like. The tendons can function efficiently at lower temperatures than can muscles. Blood circulation within bird legs is fine-tuned to bring warm arterial blood from the body into close proximity to cooled venous blood returning through the leg. This helps warm returning blood before it re-enters the bird's body core.



The external scales on legs and feet are more resistant to freezing than is exposed skin. Birds in colder climates often have partially or almost completely feather-covered legs even though they also have scales. If their legs become too cold, many birds will alternate standing on one leg while pulling the other leg and foot up close to their body. Birds may also lower their bodies down over their legs and feet to maintain warmth.

Another vexing question I've pondered on sleepless nights is "Why don't birds fall out of trees when they go to sleep?" (You can see how exciting my life is!) The trick of sleeping birds (not sleepless humans) again involves tendons. Most passerine or perching birds have three toes pointing forward and one (the equivalent of a "big toe") pointing backward. When the bird lands,



The most common foot arrangement is three toes forward and one backward.

the toes wrap around a perch and the tendon involuntarily locks them into place as the bird hunkers down. When a bird extends its legs (jumps up or stands up), the tendon unlocks releasing the toe grip and allowing take-off. Although three toes forward and one toe backward is the most common foot arrangement among birds, there are many variations that reflect adaptations to different ways of life. A few passerines such as nuthatches have two toes pointing backward and two toes pointing forward all equipped with sharp nails. This toe arrangement coupled with a low center of gravity allows nuthatches to scramble up and down trees at will. Although not passerines, woodpeckers have evolved a similar toe arrangement, but have a higher center of gravity, which is why you don't see woodpeckers upside down on the sides of trees! Kingfishers have a unique arrangement of toes with the middle and outer toes partially fused, which helps these birds dig their nest burrows into mud embankments.



Ducks, geese, and many other waterbirds have three enlarged front-pointing toes with webbing in between that folds as the foot is drawn forward and flairs on the backstroke. The fourth toe has atrophied to a spur. Cormorants, gannets and pelicans have four functional toes connected by webbing. American Coots have three lobed toes pointing forward and a large hind toe. This arrangement is a compromise allowing both improved swimming and walking.

Large flightless land birds that rely on running have two (ostriches) or three (emus and rheas) forward-facing toes that are flat to the ground thus providing more traction and power. At the other extreme in terms of size and leg strength are the Apodidae (hummingbirds and swifts). Apodidae means "without feet", and while that's a misnomer, these birds won't win any foot races. Hummingbirds can do little more than perch and shuffle sideways. Swifts cling to vertical surfaces with their atrophied feet, which have four toes, two of which can be rotated backward mainly to manipulate nesting materials. Raptorial species (owls, eagles, falcons, hawks, kites, ospreys) generally have four widely spaced heavily padded toes with large, strong, curved claws (talons). The same leg tendon that assists birds in holding on to a perch is also what clamps the toes of a raptor around its prey.

Continued on page 12

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Article : Rick Wright



Coming of Age

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, Gellert.



It seems like every time I've turned around in the last six or seven years there's been a Roger Tory Peterson jubilee to celebrate: the 10th anniversary of his death, the 75th of the first field guide, the 100th of his birth. And now, already, it's time to mark half a century of the second edition of the Field Guide to Western Birds.

That edition is only a couple of years older than I am, and it was the first bird book I owned. I didn't use it for long, abandoning it for the colorful convenience of the Golden guide; but little books have their fates, and my 1961 Peterson is on my shelf again—a legacy from my wife's mother, who found it in a used bookstore some years after I'd pruned it from my library.

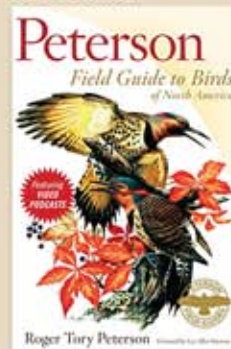
Peterson didn't tackle the west until 1941. Like many early observers who had cut their birding teeth between Cape May and Cape Ann, he long thought that the field situation in the west was so complicated as to make a standard "field guide" treatment impossible. There's something strange about that claim, disingenuous even, given that the American West in the decades before 1934 had actually been better furnished with bird books than the East: birders on the coast, from Washington to California, had been profiting from Ralph Hoffmann's first-rate *Birds of the Pacific States* since 1927, and even today, Florence Merriam Bailey's work remains informative and useful.

In the first edition of his western guide, Peterson paid a special homage to Hoffmann's book: the new field guide, he wrote, was intended not as a replacement of *Birds of the Pacific States* but a "companion piece." By the time of the second edition, 20 years later, Peterson was treating Pacific States as a relic of the past (even though it would be reprinted, posthumously, in 1955).

What happened?

As reviewers like Alden Miller pointed out, Peterson's 1941 western guide was, like its eastern predecessors of 1934 and 1939, focused strongly on the types of visual characters that could be deduced from birds in the museum drawer; the implication is that Peterson's personal experience in the west—still a dozen years, remember, before the *Wild America* adventure with James Fisher—was insufficient to address matters of habit, habitat, behavior, and song with the same authority enjoyed by Hoffmann. Twenty years later, though, the western field guide had "come of age," as Peterson put it, and the book's new comprehensiveness claimed more or less expressly to render all competitors obsolete.

existence—of geographically variable populations of certain species is left untreated, where in the first edition Peterson had expatiated helpfully and at length on a number of interesting and important cases. Now, fatally, we are told that "subspecies have no definite entity," and that we should simply forget them lest we be led into error. For decades, this recommendation was taken as authoritative, a significant hindrance to the advance of field identification in North America.

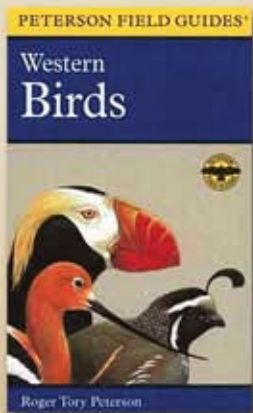


The innovation most proudly trumpeted in 1961 was Peterson's repainting of the plates, including more than 650 new color figures. In the first edition of 1941, color was reserved for the immediate pre-passerines—the hummingbirds and woodpeckers—and the more vividly plumed songbirds; those and the black and white plates were scattered through the text. Twenty years later, nearly all the more than 600 species treated are illustrated in color, with supplementary two-tone diagrams provided for certain water and shorebirds most often seen at a distance. All 60 of the plates are assembled into a separate section in the middle of the book; together with their facing-page annotations, they form—for the first time in a Peterson guide—a sort of book within a book, capable "in most instances" of "tell[ing] the story without help from the main text."

This privileging of the visual over the verbal, a feature that would become more pronounced with each new edition of the field guides, affected the style of Peterson's painting. In the early editions of the eastern guide, and in the first edition of the western, "all modeling of form and feathering" was "eliminated" so as to focus the observer's attention on pattern. By 1961, though, Peterson's artistic ambitions had advanced considerably, and though he repeats his earlier protestations (weakening the 1941 claim of "elimination" to "subordination" 20 years later), the second edition's plates are startlingly different: the birds are notably three-dimensional, each illustration marked by the illustrator's profoundly modernist and realist aesthetic. They are, most of them, by no means accurate, but they are striking, even ornamental, far more closely resembling Peterson's studio paintings than the crude (and eminently instructive) cut-outs in his earlier field guides. It is hard, 50 years later, to recapture the shock of a birder on first opening the then-new Peterson, but go to the library and try: open the first and the second editions side by side to the jays or the grosbeaks, and you may catch a hint of how revolutionary the revised book must have seemed.

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Continued on page 11



The new, second edition of the western guide dwarfed the first, with fully 25% more pages and six times as many color illustrations, all gathered, for the first time, into an easily consulted central section complete with a facing-page text. Perhaps most important was the extension of the book's coverage north of the 49th parallel—and all the way west to Hawaii, an innovation not repeated (if I remember right) in any North American field guide since.

Not all of Peterson's changes were additions, though. "Accidental" species were ghettoized in an appendix; many of them, of course, have proved to be regular, even common, in the 50 years since the book's publication. And the identification—even the

Birding Muleshoe Ranch

Article: Kathe Anderson

Photos: The Nature Conservancy

"Welcome to Muleshoe! Before I forget, I need to tell you we've had a lot of rattlesnakes here recently...a lot of rattlesnakes. Here's the key to your casita. Just park past the sign to the hot tubs, go through the gate, and your casita is on the left. Watch out for the snakes. They like to curl up in the sun on the tile patio in front of the casitas.

We have a resident bat. We don't know how it gets in, but it sleeps in this canister light. Our hostess led us to an indoor light, and there, tucked not six feet above our heads, is a tiny winsome bat. The enchantment begins...

Here's a map of the trails on site. Please leave it behind as we will use it again. We try to live gently on the earth here. Any questions? Oh, and be careful of the snakes!"

Galiuro Mountains

So began our short sojourn at The Muleshoe Ranch Cooperative Management Area, a natural wonderland at the end of a thirty mile dirt road northwest of Willcox. (The road continues, but becomes rougher. After the last and deepest

had stopped at Sweetwater Wetlands outside of Tucson, and Cochise Lake in Willcox, jumpstarting our bird list with a host of waterfowl, shorebirds and raptors. The seemingly endless dirt road through high desert at the end of the day was alive with birds on both sides, but we didn't stop to investigate.

We took a brief stroll to explore a bit, hoping for nighthawks in the dimming light, but saw none. So the three of us dragged the table and chairs from the covered patio out under the open cloudless sky, popped open our first bottle of wine and dove into enough snacks to feed a football team. Birding is hungry business. Stars began to emerge as the sky turned from gold to peach, from indigo to black, and the silhouettes of nearby trees and distant hills disappeared. We drank in the lush stillness with the cabernet, a perfect September evening.

The first bird of the next morning was a Bewick's Wren, busy in the shrub right outside our casita's big living room window. We made coffee (a coffee maker is provided), sliced the banana bread (not provided), and wandered to the deck overlooking the dry streambed below to await dawn and the warming sun.

Our coffee steamed in the chill, and few birds thought it was warm enough to rise. Then, one by one, they began to arrive—Bridled Titmice, Black-headed Grosbeaks, an indiscernible empid, a Brown-crested Flycatcher. Could we have just stayed there and watched the parade all day? Perhaps, but we were restless.

We explored the dry streambeds wherever they were wide enough to give us a sense of safety from the snake-infested grasses. (Or so we thought.) We visited other buildings on the site, checked out the hot tubs, walked the road we came in on, and the part we didn't attempt in our vehicle. We enjoyed the shade of the sycamores and mesquites, crossed open areas and corrals, and



crossing, we were as far as we were going.)

We'd barely made it on time; there was a 5pm deadline to get a personal greeting with our key. On the way down from Phoenix, we

Arizona Native Plants

Article: Doug Green
Past Pres., AZ Native Plant Society

skirted rock outcroppings and muddy puddles. Midday, we tried the balcony at the visitors' center for a treetop view, and in the late afternoon, headed out on a slow hike uphill to gorgeous vistas in every direction.

Our wanderings rewarded us aplenty. Two prominent snags attracted a variety of birds. Most dazzling was a Blue Grosbeak, rich sapphire against an Arizona azure sky. Lesser Goldfinches and Lazuli Buntings came and went in small flocks. Yellow Warblers were common. A Painted Redstart gave us a good look, as did a Wilson's Warbler. The few kingbirds were outclassed by one brilliant Vermilion Flycatcher. Turkey Vultures swirled in the distance. Violet-green Swallows swept past on a mission.

We were unprepared for the insects—some unsettling, others mesmerizing. The site was teemed with thick-bodied grasshoppers, called lubbers by our hostess. They were strikingly colored—leaf green, blue, yellow and red. But



they appeared to be sluggish and drunk, jumping slowly and lowly, only to fall over upon landing, and staggering onto their feet again to try anew. We watched them intently, but were unnerved by their numbers. Our passing a leaf-littered area would send scores into slow-motion retreat, rustling, stumbling and righting themselves. Butterflies, on the

other hand, were magical. At murky puddles they gathered in abundance. Yellow and orange seemed the predominant colors, although one site attracted a host of tiny silvery beings, exquisite miniature ballerinas. In another spot, the butterfly profusion was overwhelming. We were transported into a butterfly fairland, surrounded by hundreds of delicate creatures in dappled sunlight. We were awed and humbled.

Of course we didn't leave Muleshoe Ranch without trying the hot tubs. Pristine and sublime, nestled under trees along Hookers Hot Springs, they shouldn't be missed. We abandoned our binoculars, sank to our chins, and let the last care of our busy lives in Phoenix wash away. Only forty hours after we arrived, we started to pack to leave Muleshoe Ranch. It seemed as if we'd been there

a long, relaxing week, and yet we were not ready to depart. On the long road back to Willcox, kestrels perched on cacti, and a crowd of Lark Buntings flew and landed several times in front of us. We escaped un-snaked. For more information, search the web for Muleshoe Ranch Arizona or go to:



<http://www.nature.org/wherewework/northamerica/states/arizona/travel/art22005.html>.

The website describes the Preserve as semi-desert grasslands straddling the Sonoran and Chihuahuan Deserts, at about 4,100 feet. Another website with good information is at:

<http://www.mountainvisions.com/Aurora/muleshoe.html>



There are few places on Earth that offer the diverse plant and animal life as that which is found in the Sonoran Desert, Chihuahuan Desert, the Painted Desert, the Mongollon Plateau, and the Colorado Plateau regions of Arizona.

One particular plant is the Bidelow's Ragged Rock Flower (*Crossosoma bigelovii*) that grows right out of the dry, rocky slopes and ledges of our Arizona mountains and canyons at elevations of 1000 to 4000 feet. This is an extremely well named plant, as its name aptly describes its growing environment.

Most often it presents itself in the form of a loosely limbed, scraggly shaped shrub. It can attain a height of five to six feet, however, it is prevalent in shorter dimensions.

It's thick, leathery leaves are bluish-green in color, ovally shaped, and up to 3/8" wide by 3/4" long. Their alternating leaves are often clustered on short shoots. However, it's flowers and their aroma are the most outstanding features of this plant. It's five paddle-shaped petals are openly and somewhat evenly spaced. The white to purplish white blossoms are 1" to 2" in diameter. These blossoms have an abundance of stamens (male pollen producers) usually in the range of 15-50 per flower head. The pleasant aroma of this flower is outrageously fragrant. It has the savory scent of jasmine in sweetness, and exudes a delicious, very distinctive fragrance at some distance from the plant. It's a real "lift" to smell this flower while in an area that is almost devoid of any other appreciable plant growth.



Look for these special flowers during its February through May blooming season. The plant can be viewed while hiking many of the trails within South Mountain Park or by stopping along permissible roadside pull-overs to bserve and smell their flowers up close.



Ragged Rock Flowers can be found in many other areas of Arizona that have terrains similar to the rocky slopes of South Mountain Park. When one smells the aroma of *Crossosoma*, you know it's springtime again! What a fantastic feeling!

The Arizona Native Plant Society (ANPS) is a group of concerned citizens who share a common love of and concern for Arizona's native plant species. To contact ANPS for plant information or membership, see their website at: www.anps.com ANPS holds monthly meetings, field trips, and is involved in local teaching on botany in public schools and nature events.

The Snowy Egret

Article : Michael Rupp
Photos : Denney Green



Just about any visit to local ponds, marshes, wetlands, or irrigated farm fields is sure to turn up this ubiquitous member of the Ardeidae family - the Snowy Egret. Though perhaps not as impressive as its larger cousin the Great Egret, this species is still a delight to observe as it forages, preens, battles other males, and assembles at times in large flocks.

A quick look at the guide books will fill you in on the relative size, weight, and field marks of this far ranging wading bird, but it often takes a few years to become intimately acquainted with the Snowy Egret's behaviors, as it does with most bird species. From my experience doing nature video over the last few years with an extremely long telephoto video lens, I have had the chance to see the Snowy up close and personal so to speak. From spending long hours under cover along the Salt and Gila Rivers and time at the "usual" haunts like the Gilbert Riparian Preserve and the Glendale Ponds, I've been able to witness the beauty of this most interesting bird.

Out at the River Road ponds near Arlington, I remember doing video of a flock of around 150 Snowys all foraging for fish in shallow pools left when the ponds were being drained. That was a picture of a true feast, as each bird could eat as many fish as it wanted, having been concentrated into a tight mass available to the whole flock. In between feeding, males were "jump flying" up a few feet into the air in mock fights to establish their supremacy during mating season. What a sight, with outstretched wings and feet flying- chaotic, but still, the picture of grace and beauty, similar to the egret photos provided for this article by Denny Green. As if a magic signal had gone off, all these egrets took to flight at the same moment in a rush of wind and sound-sort of a "mini" flyout like one can see at Bosque del Apache with Sandhill Cranes and geese. Sights like this are common in the farmfields out west all the way to Hassayampa and Arlington along Old Hwy 80. Look for irrigated fields in particular, and you may also find Long-billed Curlews and American Pipits. These fields are well known for large flocks of Yellow-headed Blackbirds, White-faced Ibis,

and Brewer's and Red-winged Blackbirds. On many Desert Rivers field trips, participants have seen literally thousands of birds feeding in these fields and flying in great swirling balls that turn en masse and produce very interesting visual patterns.

On another occasion, while staked out on the Salt River with camouflage, a couple Snowys were "bottom stirring" for fish just a few meters from my position. This fishing technique is noted in various guide books, but is not seen all that often in "busy" locations where there is a lot of activity. It seems your best chances of seeing this is when you are hidden or quiet and unthreatening. On this occasion, these two spent about a half hour walking a few feet, stirring up the bottom with a shaking foot, and grabbing any fish that appeared close to the surface. This tactic seems to work well, as each ate quite a few small fish in addition to the small frogs, tadpoles, and insects that are a part of their regular diet.

Snowys are a particular treat for kids that Desert Rivers leads on first-time nature walks at a couple riparian locations. When these "city kids" whom have possibly never seen any birds other than the commonest "neighborhood" birds see a group of Snowys, it is truly as if they were on an African safari. So great is their pleasure at seeing these fairly large birds and their cousins fly with magnificent outstretched wings that they really do have a life-changing experience. We have seen kids return for another walk armed with their own binoculars rather than the "loaners" we provide.

Such is the grandeur and beauty of the wader with the "little yellow slippers", a field mark peculiar to this species. Its Old World cousin, the Little Egret, is the same in all respects, and can be found throughout Europe, Africa, Asia, and Australia. In our hemisphere, it is found in all tropical climates from the US to South America.



One Snowy Egret among a flock of its larger cousin, the Great Egret

*A flash of pure white caught my eye
Across the bedroom window I caught its flight
I sped to my office overlooking the lake
There she was, for goodness sake
A beauty in porcelain, a testimony to nature
The Snowy Egret in full stilted stature
Regal and poised, stalking her prey
What a generous contrast to this gray dreary day
Yellowed beak chiseled and legs like a ballerina
Steady as an artist's hands adding a china white patina
Then quick as lightning she dove under a lily
Arose like a prima donna with her lunch...such a pity
The little frog's eyes bulged from his underneath
As his feet disappeared inside of her beak
Dining around this lake full of feasts
Agile as ever on stilted feet
This beautiful bird with a pale underbelly
I named her a favorite...the lovely Grace Kelly
Susan K. de Vegter*

Special Programs

Joy Dingley

If ever there was a place to indulge your senses in the outdoors, then surely it is Boyce Thompson Arboretum. A sunny but not too hot Saturday in March found members of the Desert Rivers Audubon Society and an assorted group of children and helpers rubbing and smelling eucalyptus and herb leaves, stroking the tree trunks and searching for birds. A pretty normal activity for a bird club, except that many of the children were blind.



You can expect some bemused expressions if you tell people you are going to take some blind children on a bird walk; surely using your eyes is the essence of bird watching? For some decades, however, many people involved in the pastime have preferred to use the term "To go Birding" because all your senses are involved when searching for birds, especially your hearing.

So Desert Rivers Audubon Society thought it might be possible to arrange a walk to introduce blind children to the world of bird song and started to work out how it could be done. First we needed the children and the Phoenix Foundation for Blind Children (seeitourway.org) runs a wonderful program of sport and recreation for children at the weekends and yes, they were interested in our suggestion. Volunteers to lead the children in the walk came forward; we had our own box of replica bird eggs and skulls for the children to touch plus a box of bird talons courtesy of the Arizona Game and Fish Department. We just needed something to take the place of our usual Beginners Guide to the Birds of Phoenix booklet and a CD of some bird songs seemed ideal. So more thanks are due to Pierre Deviche and the creators of the ASU "Ask a Biologist" website who allowed us to download some of their recordings.

A picnic in the shade is a perfect way to end a visit to Boyce Thompson so after our walk we did just that. By now the children knew that the bird that sounds like a car with a flat battery is a Cactus Wren, the one who was calling something like "Hi Sweetie" was a Verdin and they could hear a hummingbird from around 100 feet. For most it was the first time they had visited the Arboretum; we don't think it will be their last.



Another annual bird walk that we offer is with **Hope Kids**, an organization that provides family support and events and activities for children with terminal medical problems. This large group tours the Gilbert Riparian Preserve with DRAS

leaders and loaner binoculars and scope stations. To get information on these annual "special birdwalks", contact Joy Dingley at joy.dingley@cox.net Desert Rivers Audubon, serving the East Valley, is dedicated to inspiring and educating the community to protect and preserve birds, wildlife and their habitats. For more information, see www.desertiversaudubon.org

EVENTS & FIELD TRIPS

APR - MAY - JUN 2011

Check DRAS website for additions and changes
Make reservations with Susie Vaught, Field Trips Director;
azvaughts_2@msn.com Home, 480 898-7564.

FIELD TRIP - DUDLEYVILLE, led by Pierre Deviche

Sat, April 9, 5:30am - 2:00pm (Dudleyville is between Phoenix and Tucson)
We will spend most of our time exploring the San Pedro River where we should find a good variety of local breeders and migrants. This is a good area for Common Black-Hawk, Gray Hawk, and Mississippi Kite, it might be early in the year and so all these birds might not be back yet, but we can try! We do anticipate seeing plenty of passerines. On the way back and if there is time, we will stop by Kearny Lake, which is along the way. The lake does not hold much variety in terms of breeding waterfowl, but a surprise is always possible.

DRAS PROGRAM - The Ecology, Behaviour, and Reproductive Biology of Sonoran Songbirds, presented by Dr. Pierre Deviche

Tuesday, Apr 12, 2011 at the Gilbert Community Center, Gilbert
Dr. Deviche will emphasize how some Arizona songbirds are adapted to breeding towards the end of summer and in synchronization with the annual monsoon, and discuss adaptations of these birds to cope with the harsh environmental conditions of the Sonoran Desert. Work on this topic has the potential to help us understand how birds may be affected by climate change that is predicted to occur during the remainder of the 21st century.

FIELD TRIP - 2 DAYS IN PATAGONIA AREA, led by Kathe Anderson

Apr 21 - 22, 2011, Thurs-Fri. Two full days to visit Patagonia, staying at the Duquesne House B&B. We'll start early on Thursday, stopping at Sweetwater Wetlands and Las Cienegas National Conservation Area on the way there. On Friday, we'll visit the Roadside Rest, Patons and the Patagonia-Sonoita Creek Preserve. There may be other stops, depending on timing and energy! Estimated return time to the Valley: about 7pm. The Duquesne House B&B is a real treat! Rooms are \$125 for 2; additional people in a room are \$35 per person, up to four. There are only 3 rooms. Limited to 8 participants. Trip is full- please contact Kathe at kathe.coot@cox.net to be placed on the wait list.

FIELD TRIP - MADERA CANYON, led by Pierre Deviche

Saturday, May 14, 2011 (south of Tucson in the Santa Rita Mountains)
On the trip to Madera Canyon, we will stop at interesting places along the way, looking for migrants and local breeders. We will drive to the end of the road in Madera and then hike up one of the trails in search of local birds. Again, there should be a good mix of migrants and local breeders.

DRAS BBQ PICNIC - at Saffels Home, 805 N. Grand in Mesa. Starts at 6:30pm, Sunday, May 15, 2011

FIELD TRIP - BRADSHAW MTNS, led by Karen O'Neil

Sat, May 21, 5:30am - 3:30pm (between Phoenix and Prescott)
Karen O'Neil of the Prescott Audubon Society will lead a trip to the Bradshaw Mtns, SE of Prescott. We'll meet and leave Phoenix at 5:30am and return to Phoenix at 3:30 pm. Trip limit is 12 people. Spring in the Bradshaw Mts. is a wonderful time for breeding warblers--Painted Redstart, Red-faced Warblers, Black-throated Gray, Virginia's, and Grace's. With amazing luck, we might spot Olive Warblers. It may be possible to find hepatic and Western Tanager, Cordilleran Flycatcher, Western wood-Pewee, Plumbeous and Hutton's Vireo, Steller's Jay and Band-tailed Pigeon. With even more amazing luck, we might find a Greater Pewee! We might pick up a few migrants such as Townsend's and Hermit Warblers. This is a mountain field trip which involves a walk of approximately 1.5 (round-trip) miles of up and down, but not steep (birders' pace) at about 6500 ft. elevation, and a drive (no more than 2 miles one way) on dirt roads passable in passenger cars unless there has been recent, heavy rain which is unlikely at that time. Bring binoculars, lots of water, snacks, a quick lunch, a hat, comfy walking shoes or boots, and sunscreen. Spotting scopes are typically not needed.

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

NOTABLE ARIZONA STATE SIGHTINGS



Eurasian Green-winged Teal (*Anas crecca crecca*), Tempe Marketplace, water underneath McClintock Road, Maricopa County. This male Eurasian Green-winged Teal was discovered and photographed by Marcus Watson on 07 January 2011. There are only three previous records of this distinctive sub-species, including one at this location two

years ago. It is therefore possible this is the same bird. Horizontal white stripe on the side and the lack of a vertical white stripe on the breast distinguish this form from American Green-winged Teal (*Anas crecca americana*). Hybrids occur but usually have a faint breast stripe. Some authorities consider this form a separate species (e.g., Clements) but the AOU and ABA do not.

Rough-legged Hawk (*Buteo lagopus*), Sulphur Springs Valley, Cochise County.

This Rough-legged Hawk was discovered by Tom Woods and Sheri Williamson on 15 January 2011 during Hawk Stalk at Wings Over Willcox. It was photographed by Scott Olmstead on 16 January 2011 and Andrew Core on 19



January 2011. Very rare and irregular winter visitor. Perhaps decreasing. This Rough-legged Hawk, a light morph, shows the typical whitish head and black belly. In flight black carpal patches are visible on the underwing. Note the petite, small-headed appearance and proportionately small bill.



Louisiana Waterthrush (*Seiurus motacilla*), Patagonia Roadside Rest, Santa Cruz County. This Louisiana Waterthrush was discovered 16 December 2010 by Mark Stevenson on private property (permission granted for CBC), but is occasionally visible from the Patagonia Roadside Rest. It was photo-

graphed by Andrew Core on 07 January 2011 and Alan Schmierer on 08 January 2011. Louisiana Waterthrush is a very sparse transient and winter resident in southeastern Arizona. Louisianas tend to have lighter streaks, and as noted before, heavy streaks are absent from the throat and extreme upper chest.

Black-legged Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*), Saguaro Lake, Maricopa County.

This Black-legged Kittiwake was discovered and photographed by Troy Corman on 21 January 2011. Casual winter visitor to Arizona with only about a dozen records. Smaller than Ring-billed Gull. Identification fairly easy for 1st winter individuals with bold and very contrasting wing pattern, slightly notched tail with black tip, and extensive blackish patch on lower hind neck and blackish head spot.



Yellow-billed Loon (*Gavia adamsii*), Colorado River, Parker, AZ, Mohave County. This Yellow-billed Loon was discovered by David Vander Pluym, Lauren Harter, Andrew and Vernon Howe, Sandy Koonce, Sandy Remley, and Bob and Susan Steele on 15 January 2011 and it

was photographed by Sandy Remley on 15 January 2011 and by John West on 19 January 2011. There are six previously accepted records for Arizona, four of those in the Lower Colorado River Valley.

Black Scoter (*Melanitta nigra*), Parker Dam, La Paz County.

This Black Scoter was discovered by Rick Fridell on 11 December 2010 and photographed in Arizona by David Vander Pluym on 26 December 2010. It seems to spend most of its time on the California side of the river. 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, so it is perhaps increasing. 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. Dark cap with a contrasting pale cheek patch identifies this scoter. The all dark bill indicates a female.



White-winged Scoter (*Melanitta fusca*), Lake Havasu off Mesquite Bay, Mohave County.

This White-winged Scoter was found on 22 January 2011 by Lauren Harter and David Vander Pluym from a boat with Captain Jim Logan, Sherry Lewis, Bea Cooley, Brooks Hart,

Tom Linda, and Terry Blows. It was photographed by David Vander Pluym the same day. Rare winter visitor, it has returned to being annual in the state after nearly a decade of very few records. The area it was in was checked thoroughly a couple days ago and has been checked regularly this winter, so it recently arrived. Large dark duck with white secondaries. Also the sloping forehead with feathering onto the bill and white oval patch on these feathers.

Mew Gull (*Larus canus*), South of the Laughlin-Bullhead City Bridge, Mohave County.

This Mew Gull was discovered by Lauren Harter and David Vander Pluym and photographed by David Vander Pluym on 29 January 2011. There are twelve previous state records. Small size and thin small dull pink bill with a black tip. Largely brown, white, and gray gull with brown smudged underparts, brown tail, heavily brown flecked uppertail coverts, and brown unpatterned underwing coverts. These points rule out Ring-billed Gull. These points and the brown tipped inner primaries identify this as the North American subspecies *L. c. brachyrhynchus*.



Harlan's Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis harlani*), Continental, Pima County.

This Harlan's Red-tailed Hawk was discovered by Laurens Halsey on 4 December 2010 and was photographed by him several times between 18 December 2010 and 17 January 2011. Rare winter visitor to Arizona Dark trailing edge to wing makes this an adult bird. Body plumage all blackish with a few light (white) feathers on the breast. Distinctive tail pattern.

Red-breasted Sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus ruber*), Jacobs Park, Pima County.

This Red-breasted Sapsucker was discovered and photographed by Andrew Core on 10 February 2011. Casual transient and winter visitor to Arizona. Red head with very limited and subdued black-and-white head striping and a very faint shadow of a breast band.



The Audubon Online Guide to North American Birds

Following in the footsteps of the famous Audubon printed Bird Guidebook, the new Online Guide to North American Birds is now available. It features 750 species of birds in 22 Orders and 74 families. The guide covers all of North America's regular breeding birds—approximately 580 species—as well as an additional 180 or so nonbreeding species that regularly or occasionally visit North America north of Mexico.

There are a variety of search options and aids to bird identification, plus articles and other tools.



QUICK GUIDE



BROWSE BY FAMILY



BROWSE BY COMMON NAME



ADVANCED SEARCH

Want to identify birds in the field?

Audubon also has Apps available for your phone, iPad, iPhone, and Laptop that you can use while you birdwatch. These are comprehensive programs that cover 750 bird species.



To purchase or obtain more info see the Audubon website at : www.audubonbirds.org

Welcome To Our New Members :

Supamas Sirichotiyakul Family
Gary & Pamela Passey
Hollis A Antosz
Rellie & Sigrid Lawyer
Caleb & Imelda Gerard/& Family
Richard Gaffney
Diane Moss
Anita Peterson Family

Peggy Thomas
Charles & Mary Graf
Patricia J.O'Brien
Daniela Yellan
Donald Barry
Catherine Dewar
Martina Wiesner

THE VOLUNTEER AERIE

This issue, we are spotlighting **Linda Long**, who plays a vital part as one of our prime birding experts, leading folks at our monthly Free Family Bird Walks. Regardless of the weather on our winter Saturdays, Linda has worked with us since we began, at Veterans Oasis Park in Chandler, and at Gilbert's Riparian Preserve. In addition to always being available to lead groups on our bird walks, Linda has taken the monthly bird census at Veterans Oasis Park, since before it opened. In this way, she is establishing a permanent record of bird sightings at the park for all of us.

Coming to the Valley 17 years ago from her native Connecticut, Linda found herself in a great place to begin some serious birding. Linda is employed in Documentation Control for a large company, and in her off time, she enjoys getting outdoors to bird. Linda has perfected the art of digiscoping with her



state of the art scope and camera. Linda recently returned from a birding trip to Puerto Rico with her sister, and of course, they were able to add to their Life Lists of birds seen. Linda says birding is relaxing to her, and she enjoys hunting for unusual finds. And of course, birding is a great way to be able to take in nature at its best. It's

always fun, being around Linda on our birding days, her wit and humor are infectious, and we thank her for being one of our "Super Volunteers." Come out for a bird walk with Linda, on one of our Saturday mornings. (Chandler's Veterans Oasis Park, 1st Saturdays, 8-12, November through April; and Gilbert Riparian Preserve, 3rd Saturdays, 8-12, October through March).

DRAS Board of Directors Nominees

The DRAS Board has staggered two year terms. So every year half of our Board is up for election. This year the candidates are:

President – Krys Hammers
Secretary – Nancy Eichhorst
Education – No candidate at this time
Public Relations – Eileen Kane
Programs – Marilyn Reiling
Volunteer Coordinator – No candidate at this time

If you would like to take on a leadership role in the chapter, please contact Joy Dingley at joy.dingley@cox.net.

Coming of Age, continued from page 4

Half a century on, it is obvious that that revolution was, in important ways, the beginning of the end for the Peterson juggernaut. The new emphasis on visual appeal at the expense of textual sophistication set the tone for the disappointing 1980 edition of the eastern guide—and for the several incarnations of both volumes that have appeared since. The paintings, both those by Peterson and those produced by other artists in the guides' posthumous editions, became ever more attractive, ever more decorative, and ever more outmoded as birders' demands for accuracy increased. At the same time, the texts forbore increasingly from offering the sort of detail that had been the hallmark of the estimable editions of the 1930s and 40s, transforming the Peterson guides from the bibles of expert birders into primers for beginners. They remain hugely and deservedly successful as such, and we can be grateful for the Peterson legacy in this, yet another jubilee year for one of the most important field guide series ever created.

Getting a Grip on Bird Feet continued

Individual raptors have highly specialized feet. For example, owls and ospreys have a typical three toes forward and one toe backward arrangement, but have the ability to rotate the small toe backward giving more dexterity to handle a greater variety of prey. Ospreys also have numerous small projections called spicules on the bottoms of their feet, which, along with fish hook-like talons, help in grasping slippery fish prey.

The prey of Sharp-shinned Hawks, Cooper's Hawks, and goshawks are mainly other birds living in forested or brushy areas. These hawks have long slender tarsi and toes, which assist them in thrusting their feet into thick brush and grabbing through a prey's plumage.

Peregrine Falcons have long toes with large toe pads and short tarsi. It's uncertain whether peregrines hit airborne prey at 200 miles per hour with their foot closed like a fist or open. Regardless, their feet and legs absorb a lot of shock but still get the job done.

Buteos like Red-tailed Hawks grab prey with their powerful feet and immediately sink their talons into the prey to kill it. They do this with one foot if the prey is small or use both feet for larger prey, grabbing the head with one foot and the body with the other.

Whether it's a swift clinging to a vertical surface with its tiny atrophied feet or an owl crushing its prey in its talons, birds' feet and legs tell us much about how they make a living and how species have evolved to survive in every climatic region on earth.

When I was growing up as a kid with big feet, my grandparents always remarked that I had a good understanding – corny I know. But an appreciation of birds' "under standings" helps me to more fully appreciate the winged miracles I love to watch.



Elegant Trogan at Madera Canyon - Cindy Marple



Tips from National Audubon

MAKE NATURE A PART OF FAMILY TIME!



*** I Spy:** Draw your children's attention to the natural world whenever you can, whether you're walking outside or looking out the window. Simple statements like, "Look at those baby flowers pushing out of the ground!" or "I see a bird making its nest" or "Do you want to chase after that butterfly?" will invite your young children to observe and engage in the natural world around them.

*** Fresh Air Fun:** No matter how old your children are, find ways to maximize their time outside. When weather permits, eat meals at an outdoor table or picnic on the grass. Let your infant play on a blanket or even take a nap in the shade of a tree. Make backyard and park play a regular part of each day's activities.

*** Car-Free and Care-Free:** Replace at least one car trip a week with a walk, a bike ride, or a walk combined with public transportation. Get your family in the habit of getting around the neighborhood without using the family car. It's healthy for people and the environment, and helps your family connect with the community, too.

*** Time Out:** Is your child busy with after-school activities every day? If so, consider canceling a class to free up one day a week for some unstructured fun outdoors. You might want to spend these afternoons in your own yard or immediate neighborhood. Or you may want to make special visits to natural areas in your town. Whatever you do, don't worry too much about what your child is learning. Focus instead on playing, relaxing, and celebrating the wonders great and small all around you.

*** Story Time:** Choose stories for your children that feature plants and animals, especially those that live in your region. These stories don't even have to be realistic. Many experts believe that an imaginative engagement with the living things around them helps children develop curiosity and respect for the natural world.

*** Journal Joys:** Make a nature journal with your kids and have them draw or write one observation of nature every day.

*** E-Tunes:** Sing songs about the plants and animals around you when you're with your children. The more connections they form, the more likely it is they will form a positive relationship with the natural world.

*** Puddle Stompers:** The next time there's a major downpour, venture outside with your kids. Let them discover the joys of stomping in puddles and seeing what the wet world looks like.

*** Harvest Time:** As often as possible, take your children to orchards, wild berry patches, farms, and other places where they can pick fruits and vegetables.



*** Keep it Simple:** Your children don't need a carload of tools and toys to entertain themselves outdoors. Small sticks can become boats that float down fast-running streams. Sail flower petals on a pond. Draw temporary pictures on rocks with stems dipped in water. Use big sticks to dig moats and patterns in the sand and mud. Skip stones. Build miniature forts with rocks, moss, and pine cones.

*** Moon Walk:** Go for a nighttime walk. Take a flashlight and explore one area not lit up by electric lights. What do you see? Hear? Smell?

*** Home Tweet Home:** Make a bird feeder and start feeding and watching birds out your window.

*** Bug Watch:** Head outdoors and have your kids find as many different kinds of insects as they can. Bring a magnifying glass for a close-up look!

*** Stroll on the Wild Side:** If you have an infant or toddler, consider organizing a neighborhood stroller group that meets for weekly nature walks.

The Family Album

Family : Hirundinidae - Swallows
Article and Photos: Cindy Marple



The return of migrant bird species is one of the true harbingers of spring. Few are as storied, though, as the return of the swallows to the Mission at San Juan, Capistrano. For over a hundred years, Cliff Swallows have returned to the ruins of the mission church on (or around) March 19, St. Joseph's Day. Their arrival was so predictable on that date in the 1930s that



the landowner convinced LA Radio stations to broadcast live on that day, and thus the legend-along with songs, celebrations and festivals-was born.

Swallows are a large family with some 89 worldwide species, and are found on all continents except Antarctica. They feed mainly on aerial insects, taken on the wing, which shapes both their migration patterns as well as some physical characteristics. As with other insectivores, species outside of the tropical regions are migratory, following the abundance of insects. All North American species are migratory.

Some cover tremendous distances; the Capistrano swallows overwinter in Argentina. Swallows share a very wide gape with Nightjars and Swifts, other families that also take insects on the wing. They are streamlined in shape and the generally long tails help with maneuverability in foraging. Anyone who has tried to keep these birds in their binocular field of view can attest to just how quickly they can change direction!

Although swallows are all cavity nesters, the structure of the cavity varies considerably. Cliff, Cave and Barn Swallows all construct mud nests. Bank Swallows, known as Sand Martins in the U.K., excavate tunnels into sand banks. Purple Martin, Tree, Violet-green, and Northern Rough-winged all use existing cavities in trees or other structures. Because swallows do such a good job of devouring insects, people have long had an interest in enticing them to stay nearby. The latter group has readily accepted nest boxes or similar artificial structures placed by people. The mud nest builders also have generally adapted well to human settlement, utilizing bridges, culverts, and eaves of buildings as nest sites. So it is that many swallow species have stable, even thriving, populations today.



Top Left : Violet-green Swallow, Top Right: Northern Rough-winged Swallows, Middle Left: Tree Swallow, Bottom Left, Cave Swallow, Bottom Right : Cliff Swallow



ANNOUNCEMENTS

DRAS BBQ FAMILY POTLUCK PICNIC - SUNDAY, MAY 15

Bring the spouse and kids and join us for our Annual Family BBQ Potluck Picnic! We'll meet at Charles and Marion Saffell's home, 805 N. Grand, in Mesa, for the fun and camaraderie we enjoy at our end of the season party. We'll relax and enjoy their cool, shady backyard, where we'll have home smoked pork and beef, with soft drinks and utensils included. Please bring a large covered dish, enough to serve 8-10 people, a side dish, salad, or dessert. Reservation info will be available on the Desert Rivers Calendar, tickets will be available in advance. Come at 5:30 p.m. to enjoy the music, and visit with our members and friends. Performers will be The Manny Moonz Duo, and The Dark-eyed Juncos, (Saffell's son, Chuck's band), playing acoustic oldies for our enjoyment. Adults \$6, Children under 12, \$3 donation. Don't miss the fun this year! RESERVATIONS: Claudia Kirscher at 623 934-5460

International Migratory Bird Day with Audubon Arizona

Saturday, April 09, 2011

9:00 am - 3:00 pm at the Nina Mason Pulliam Rio Salado Audubon Center, 3131 S Central Avenue, Phoenix. Join us for our annual nature festival, **Migration Celebration!** Explore the world of bats, butterflies, and birds as you stroll along our nature trail. See live hawks and hummingbirds up-close and make your very own wings. Crafts, food, activities, and family-fun for everyone! FREE admission. Just two miles south of downtown! <http://riosalado.audubon>.



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 through March, 2011.



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 participation and develop this wonderful event.



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, Bass Pro Shops, Wild Birds Unlimited, Arizona Medical Network

Up and Running!

Joy Dingley,
Photos : Cindy Marple

KIDS PAGE

You may have noticed that some animals are helpless at birth, often born blind and hairless, and others seem nearly fully developed. The same is true in the bird world. Some birds are born fully developed and can fend for themselves from the moment they hatch. Others crack open their eggs and have no feathers, unopened eyes, no way of feeding themselves and no way of keeping from getting too hot or cold.

There are two scientific terms for these states, **Precocial** (from the Latin meaning early maturity) and **Altricial** (from the Latin meaning needing to be fed). All birds fall into one of these two states but there are varying degrees. The most precocial birds of all don't live in America but if you went to Australia you might see on the "Megapodes" a very strange family of birds whose name means "Big Foot". These birds build mounds in which they leave their eggs to hatch. The chicks are born fully formed, with wing feathers. They can find their own food, run and in some cases fly right from the moment they get out of the incubator mound.

Here in the U.S. we don't have any birds quite like that but we do have some whose chicks can swim and run right from the start and who have a covering of feathers that will keep them warm and waterproof. Most of us when we think of baby birds think of them safely in nests. Well, the nest is the only place you can be if you are blind, featherless, can't stand or walk and can't keep warm. Nests aren't always safe though- snakes, lizards, coyotes, cats and bigger birds are always a risk so as soon as they can the parents will move the babies out, even if they can't fly well. You can find information about what to do if you encounter a small bird out of the nest on Liberty Wildlife's website at www.libertywildlife.org

Now here's a little photo quiz – see if you can answer it.

One of the birds below has very **precocial** chicks- they are covered in fluffy feathers and can keep up with the parents from the start. They can even find their own food.

One has **precocial** chicks who can keep up with parents but they have to be shown where the food is and how to eat it.

One has **semialtricial** chicks. They are born entirely dependent on their parents for food and protection, cannot run or fly. But they do have down to help insulate them.

The last bird has chicks that are **entirely helpless**, they cannot find food, cannot walk or even stand properly. They have no feathers on them at all and their eyes are closed shut. In fact, some people think they look downright ugly!



Elf Owl



Mallard



Gambel's Quail



Anna's Hummingbird



American Kestrel drawing by Hannah Demeter from Estelle Fosnight's 4th grade Art Club at Skyline Ranch School in Queen Creek. Her students produced some brilliant drawings of birds of prey, and this is just one example of the beautifully detailed work.

Answers

Mallards have **precocial** chicks – very soon after hatching the ducklings, already covered in a waterproof down, can swim around and find their own food. Every year though, some mallards nest in really silly places like a plant pot on top of a building or in a shopping mall. The ducklings can swim but they can't fly to the nearest water so you will hear stories every year of humans stepping in to transport the family to the nearest pond.

Gambel's Quail chicks are just bundles of fluff on what looks like two toothpicks but very soon after hatching they can run and keep up with their parents. The parents will have to show the chicks where to find food and what to eat but they learn this very quickly. Maybe you have seen all the traffic stop in a road in Phoenix while the drivers wait for a family of Quail to cross the road with Mum and Dad Quail panicking as the chicks run this way and that. So these chicks are **precocial** but not as much as the Mallards.

Elf Owls are the smallest owls in the world and they come to Arizona every summer to nest in holes, often in the ones in saguaro cactus that are made by the Gila Woodpecker. Usually there are two or three chicks and they are born with their eyes closed, they cannot fly and they are totally dependent on their parents to bring them juicy insects to eat. They do, however, have a covering of down from head to toe and this makes them very attractive to the human eye. So these chicks are **semialtricial**.

Lastly the **Anna's Hummingbird**, whose eggs are about the size of a jelly bean. When the chicks hatch they have closed eyes, no feathers and a completely dependent on their mother. If you have seen a baby bird without a down covering you will know it doesn't look that pretty and it takes a bit of imagination to picture the bird becoming as lovely as the adult hummingbirds. So here we have completely altricial nestlings. Incidentally the male hummingbird doesn't help in making the nest or rearing the babies so the female hummingbird has to do it all!

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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, October through March, 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** Sats. November thru April 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 : 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 Krys Hammers at krys.hammers@cox.net

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