
Desert Rivers
Audubon
Magazine
Arizona's
Southern
Grasslands
FALL 2019
Plus
Origins of Domestic Fowl • The Lesser Nighthawk • Peregrine Wanderer




Birding with Desert Rivers Audubon

Our Speaker Series is the second Tuesday of the month, September through April at the Southeast Library, Greenfield and Baseline Roads, Gilbert. Doors open at 6:30 p.m. Program from 7-9 p.m. See desertriversaudubon.org for details.

November 12 – Birds of Arizona. Third generation Arizonan Charles Babbitt teaches us about the summer influx of birds from the Gulf of California, fall hawk and shorebird migrations, and great places to watch spring and fall passerine migration. He signs his new book, "Birding Arizona-What to know, Where to go" prior to the program.

December 10 - Birds Bringing Reluctant Neighbors Together. For 20 years, the Gila River Indian Community has opened its land to outsiders to help with their annual winter bird count. ASU Research Professor David Pearson talks about how this partnership has also opened a door to better understanding between the community and those living outside its borders.

January 14 – Arizona's Pygmy Owls. Ornithologist and nature photographer Stephen Vaughn looks at Arizona's two species of Pygmy Owls: the Northern Pygmy-Owl and the endangered Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl.

February 11 – Birding the Tropics. Nature photographer Cindy Marple introduces us to the tropical regions of the Americas, home to over 3000 species of birds—the largest avian diversity of any region on the planet.

March 10 - Live Raptor Show. Bring the kids and join us for a live raptor presentation by Liberty Wildlife Rehab Foundation. See birds that we normally see soaring far overhead and learn to help keep these birds safe.

April 14 - Dragonflies. ASU Professor Pierre Deviche introduces us to the beauty and biology of dragonflies.

Join Us in the Field!

Expand your knowledge of birds and make new friends by going along on a field trip sponsored by Desert Rivers Audubon Society.

Guided Birdwalks and Overnight Excursions led by experienced birders are a great way to expand your knowledge and make friends. For a schedule of these and other experiences around the area, check the calendar on our homepage at desertriver-saudubon.org. Formal field trips are also listed in our monthly email newsletter. Sign up by entering your email address in the form on our home page.

Our informal Pop-Up Birdwalks get you into the field to exchange knowledge with other birders. Groups meet at a promising location, then pool their expertise finding birds. These groups communicate via email, so if you are interested, contact our Field Trip Director, Gwen Grace, at gwengellen@gmail.com and she will put you on the list.

Birdwalks in the parks

Learn about Burrowing Owls on our guided **Owl Walk and Talk**, the fourth Saturday of the month year round. Join a guide at the ramada at Zanjero Park on Lindsay Road south of the 202, one hour before sunset.

Desert Rivers Audubon offers free **Family Birdwalks** led by our expert members in two area parks.

Join us on the third Saturday of the month, October – March, at the Gilbert Riparian Preserve, one of the top birding destinations in Arizona. Or, come to Veterans Oasis Park in Chandler on the first Saturday of the month, November – April.
The first walks step off at 8:30 a.m., with the last one going out at 11. We provide loaner binoculars and fun activities for kids!

Educating and inspiring our community to protect and preserve birds, wildlife, and their habitats.

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Desert Rivers Audubon Magazine

FALL 2019

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Presidents Message

Krys Hammers

A new season is upon us again at Desert Rivers. I love this time of year. The temperature starts to dip under 100 degrees. Friends reappear from northern climes and our events have begun. We have some interesting speaker programs lined up for this season. I hope that you will be able to attend!

We also offer bird walks at the Gilbert Riparian Preserve from October through March and at Veterans Oasis Park from November through April. These urban wetlands are bird magnets, and if you aren't familiar with them please let us show you around. These short walks start at 8 a.m. with the last one going out at 11. If you don't own binoculars, we can loan you a pair, and children are welcome, too. Come back each month and you'll see different birds! If you are familiar with these areas and the birds, we invite you to join our corps of volunteer leaders. We are an all-volunteer organization and we always need help at our events.

Gwen Grace, our field trip director, has expanded our field trip programs too. We continue to offer regularly scheduled field trips led by experts to hot-spots around the state. Recently we added pop-up trips. We gather informally and go to a great birding spot where we share our knowledge with each other. We also scout out and advertise the bird walks offered at local nature parks led by the resident naturalists. You'll have great choices for birding this season.

As our season begins we are studying newly released research that shows a major decline in bird populations. The leading causes of population declines are free-roaming cats, window-strikes and of course, habitat loss. It is hard to fight ever-expanding urban and suburban development, but we can be thoughtful about the environment we create around our homes. When we landscape with native plants and trees, we provide territory for the beneficial desert insects that native birds eat. Birds also require native plants for shelter, nesting and food. Your yard can make a difference to birds struggling to survive.

You can learn how to create a bird-friendly habitat at our upcoming Tour de Bird on November 2. At 13 locations across the valley you will learn how to make your landscape attractive to birds—and butterflies too. Tickets are $20, or $15 in advance. Get more information at www.desertriver-saudubon.org.

I hope to see you there.

Cover Photo : European Starling - Jim Burns

Birder's Notebook

Young Birders Camp: Learning in the Field

Birders treasure moments when they witness bird behavior. For Kathryn Dick (right in the photo) one of those moments occurred during the 5th Annual Arizona Young Birders Camp at the Southwestern Research Station (SWRS) in the Chiricahua Mountains this June. "It was really cool to see three birds interacting when a Cassin's kingbird joined a common raven in a combined effort to drive away a red-tailed hawk," she said.

Kathryn, a junior at Scottsdale Christian Academy in Phoenix, and Isabella Arellano (left), a sophomore at Mountain View High School in Mesa, received scholarships to attend the camp from Desert Rivers Audubon Society. "The presentations given by professional birders and scientists were so informative, and I gained greater knowledge in a variety of topics, such as entomology and bird nesting habits," said Isabella.

Happy Birthday Riparian Preserve!

The Riparian Preserve at Water Ranch turned 20 this fall, and the town of Gilbert threw a party on October 12. Five recharge basins comprise the 110-acre preserve that opened 20 years ago this year. The basins recycle treated wastewater to recharge Gilbert's aquifer. At the same time, the riparian habitat is home to some 286 species of birds, making it one of the premier birding spots in Arizona. "The Riparian preserve is a refuge from the hurly-burly world of modern life," says Mike Evans, who helped establish the preserve and these days serves as Desert Rivers' conservation director. Our chapter has hosted monthly birdwalks around the preserve since we were founded. Member and popular field trip leader Kathe Anderson has led birdwalks there since 1999.

Tour de Bird Is Back

Join us on November 2 for our annual self-guided ramble through bird-friendly habitats at homes and parks in the East Valley. Homes on the tour demonstrate how native plantings can be used to create spaces pleasing to birds and humans. See a range of landscaping styles, from desert natural to formal. Homeowners and volunteer bird watchers will be at every property to point out native plants and answer questions.

Tickets are $15 in advance on our website or at Wild Birds Unlimited in Mesa or may be purchased at any stop on the tour for $20. For information see DesertRiversAudubon.org.

Join the 117th Christmas Bird Count!

The National Audubon Society has been conducting the annual Christmas Bird Count since 1900. Teams of volunteers spend a day in the field sometime between December 14 and January 5 to record every species and every individual encountered in a 15-mile diameter circle. The data is compiled into an extensive ornithological database used to monitor bird populations and environmental health.

"You don't have to know anyone, or even know your birds well—you can always help as a spotter or record-keeper," says bird guide Kathe Anderson. Often teams gather for dinner at the end of the day to compile data and swap stories. If you would like to participate, check our website for information on how to get involved.

Required Reading: Report on the Decline of Birds

Birders know that the feathered creatures we seek, study and photograph are struggling to make it in a world that's increasingly hostile to their needs. But according to a report published in the journal Science in September, there are 3 billion fewer birds alive in North America today than there were 50 years ago. The plunge occurs in populations of birds you would expect to decline, such as those who nest in vulnerable habitats. But our common birds – even starlings -- logged the deepest declines. "Feeder birds like the Dark-eyed Junco declined by nearly 170 million individuals, the study's models estimated, while White-throated Sparrows dropped by more than 90 million," Audubon reports.

A detailed summary of the findings is available at no charge on the Audubon website at https://bit.ly/2kon7IM.

Tis the Season

As the year comes to a close we hope you will put Desert Rivers Audubon Society on your gift list. You can trust us to use your donation in support of education programs and conservation. This past year we logged more than 600 volunteer hours leading free public birdwalks. Our speakers are top notch. Our Tour de Bird contributes to habitat restoration by converting homeowners to the native landscaping cause. Help us do this good work. Mail your contribution to Theona Vyvial, 258 E Spur Ave, Gilbert, AZ 85296. Or donate through Paypal on our website at www.desertriversaudubon.org/giving-support.html

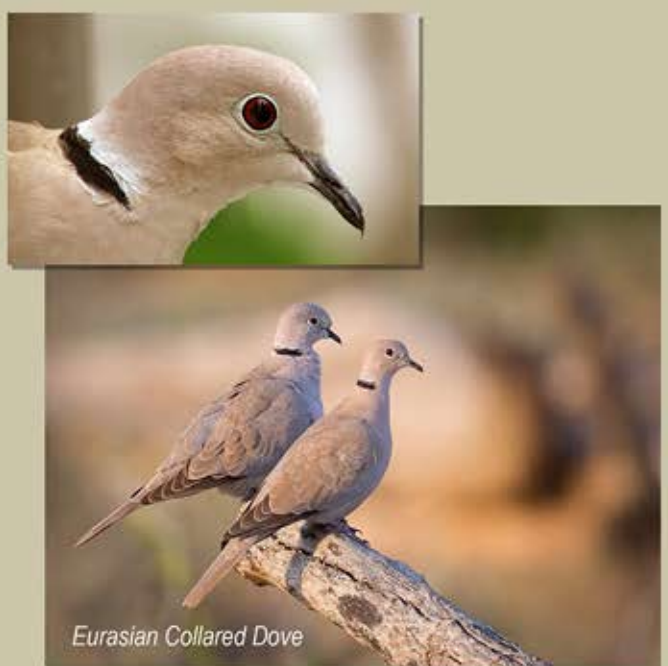
Conservation
Commentary

Mike Evans

I long for the bygone days of the hegemony of the White-winged dove.

My family has always accused me of bias against the White-winged Dove (or WWDO, if you're a bird counter or lister). Every spring, resigned, I await the arrival of those annoying interlopers and cheer their departure every fall. Only then can the poor little Mourning Doves (MODO's) and Inca Doves (INDO's) feast in peace in my backyard. Sure, the House Sparrows and House Finches compete for the seed, and the Abert's Towhees show up if they are hungry or nesting, but I enjoy seeing the MODO's and INDO's get to eat their fill without competing against the much larger WWDO's.

WWDO's are such pigs! They shove the smaller birds away and chow down as much seed as they can, as fast as they can. Yeah, I get it. They need to refuel from the migration north, and nest, hatch and fledge the next generation before bulking up for the trip back—all in a few short months. But I tire of seeing them take over the hopper, tube and sunflower feeders, and even attempt to breech the little finch feeder. Let's face it. They're bullies. My summer-long screed about the hegemony of the White-winged Dove is justified.



A new invasion

Then Eurasian collard Doves (EUCD's) invaded. Where did they come from? Just like most things unwelcome in Arizona, probably California. If the WWDO's are domineering, the EUCD's are militaristic! First comes the scouting party, then they arrive in numbers. The balance in our checking account is insufficient to pay for the bird feed that the collared doves and WWDO's wanted in my back yard these past two summers.

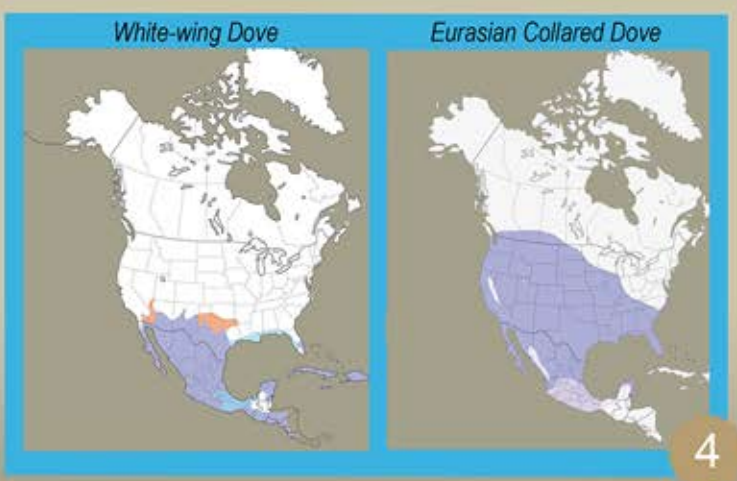

White-wing Dove

This summer, things went downhill fast. As the WWDO's were appearing, a pigeon—or Rock Dove or Rock Pigeon, whatever ABC calls them now—showed up, hanging around with a group of five or six EUCD's. I immediately ran them off, and cries of "No pigeons!" were heard across the neighborhood. In 25 years of backyard bird feeding, never once had a free-loading pigeon landed in my yard. But, like the EUCD's, one brings four more, then a half dozen, then two or three dozen at a time. I quit ground feeding. I quit using the hopper feeder. Then I cut feeding back to every other day. Still the pigeons came. They started roosting on the roof. I found my inner Clint Eastwood, shouting "Get the hell off my roof!" Still they came. I've cut down to feeding just on weekends, and still the pigeons come.

Government acts

So, I wasn't surprised to read that Mesa has banned backyard bird feeding. The Arizona Republic reported that Tempe and Phoenix had already passed similar ordinances. The optimistic idea behind these ordinances is that pigeons and doves will be thwarted by legislated restrictions in feeding practices. No ground feeding; feeders must be enclosed in a cage with one- or two-inch openings to prevent pigeons and doves from accessing the food; feeders must be equipped with a tray that catches any seed that falls. Hence, house sparrows and finches will be able to feed; hummingbirds are not covered by the ordinances. And maybe the new ordinances will quiet the complaints about bird feeders (the people, not the hanging devices!).

What now? Check out examples of feeders that comply with the new ordinances at Wild Birds Unlimited. They have several models to show you. Put them on your Christmas wish list. And say a prayer to St. Francis of Assisi that the poor unfortunate Mourning and Inca Doves still get enough to eat.



The Grassland Pilgrimage

Adam C. Stein

The obsession first sparked nearly twenty years ago, during my university ornithology course. No, not my obsession with birding – that was already in full swing – but my obsession with one particular bird and its habitat in Arizona.

As an undergraduate of Northern Arizona University and a lifelong native of Arizona, I thought I was well-versed on the state's birdlife. But one morning, my classmate brought in a road-kill specimen he had encountered over the weekend. I spied him showing it to the professor and caught a glimpse of a contrasting black and white pattern in the ball of feathers. My interest was piqued, I moved closer and wormed my way into the conversation. They continued to talk as I stared at this lifeless form. What was this strange creature? It was clear that I did not know what it was and had never seen it.

It turned out the bird was a male Chestnut-Collared Longspur. It was mid-spring and the male had already shed its dull sparrow-like winter plumage, and now sported a black chest and belly, a cream throat and a chestnut collar. It was absolutely stunning. I thought to myself, how could such a lovely bird have escaped my attention for so long? My research began almost immediately.

What I soon discovered was that this bird was a winter visitor, arriving in mid to late October and staying until late April. For the majority of their time in Arizona, they drop those dramatic looks to become nearly indistinguishable from the many other sparrows found in the state. More intriguing was that they come from the Great Plains, a vast area of grasslands and prairies. Things started to click. Even though I had spent a great deal of time exploring Arizona, I was biased towards the cactus-filled deserts and the pine-rich northern regions. Discovering this species for myself opened my eyes to whole ecosystems I had neglected up to that point.

A large percentage of Arizona happens to be native grassland. These grasslands are broadly categorized into three main types, distributed along the eastern part of the state from the north down through the south: subalpine, plains and great basin, and semi-desert grasslands. Grasslands are vital wintering grounds, not only for the Chestnut-collared Longspurs, but also for several other birds coming from the Great Plains such as the Baird's Sparrow and Sprague's Pipit.

Populations of these three species have been declining in recent years, renewing interest in the long-term protection of their winter homes. Premier semi-desert grassland habitat is preserved and managed at sites across southern Arizona such as the San Rafael Grasslands, Las Cienegas National Conservation Area, and the Appleton-Whittell Research Ranch of the National Audubon Society.

In addition to providing a winter home to these three prairie specialists, these grasslands are the habitat of other resident species of passerines unique to grassland habitats—Botteri's Sparrows, Grasshopper Sparrows, Cassin's Sparrow, Rufous-winged Sparrows, Eastern Meadowlarks, and Horned Larks to name a few.

Birding in grasslands presents new challenges. The monotony of the habitat and the superficial similarities of the birds occupying them, coupled with the fleeting glimpses that many species give you, can turn off some birders. In these places, your ears become your best friend: the sound of a buzzy insect-like call versus a "bouncy-ball" call can help you identify that little brown bird as a Grasshopper Sparrow or a Botteri's Sparrow.

The world of the grasslands and its rich birdlife opened up to me that morning over twenty years ago. It helped me identify a personal knowledge gap and a connection we share to ecosystems far to the north. Over the years, I have gotten to know each of these protected areas and many of their inhabitants. But in all of my visits – I have failed to see the one bird that was my inspiration, the Chestnut-collared Longspur. Winter after winter, I would make the pilgrimage and scan the horizon over some lonely cattle tank to no avail.

Then last January, as the sun was setting after an evening of searching, I pointed my car towards the highway resigned that my Chestnut-Collared Longspur had eluded me again. I put the car in park to open the last gate, when much to my amazement, I spooked a large flock of longspurs. I soaked in their beauty and tilted my head in gratitude for all of the inspiration that they had invoked in me.

Rufous winged

Chestnut

A Few Grassland Bird Species

The Wild Roots of Domestic Fowl

Jerry Lang

Many people, including birders, eat eggs for breakfast or enjoy barbequed wings with a cold beer. In the U.S. we consume about 75 billion eggs and 9 billion chickens each year. Although you won't find domestic chickens, turkey, geese, and ducks on any birding checklist, these species all originated in the distant past as wild stock.

Domestication of the chicken began 8-10,000 years ago in Southeast Asia with the confinement of Red Junglefowl (Gallus gallus). It seems that modern chickens also carry some genes from Gray Junglefowl (G. sonneratii) that code for yellow skin. Red Junglefowl still roam the forests of Southeast Asia. Males are colorful birds with a mix of orange, brown, red, gold, gray-white and green feathers. During mating season, they have a black feather in the middle of their backs and small orange plumes over much of their bodies. Females are more muted and brownish in color. Both sexes molt in June and October. Mating occurs throughout spring and summer. Male mating behavior includes 'tidbitting,' during which they repeatedly pick up and drop food in front of the female while bobbing and twitching their heads and making cluck-like calls.

Females lay eggs throughout the breeding season. After 21 days of incubation, chicks fledge in 4-5 weeks. Junglefowl have a lower body weight than domestics, egg production starts later, and eggs are fewer and smaller. Red Junglefowl consume an omnivorous diet consisting of insects, seeds and fruit. Behaviorally, Junglefowl are more socially interactive, more aggressive toward threats, more susceptible to stress and more likely to search for foreign food sources than are chickens.

After a few thousand years of domestication in Southeast Asia, domestic chickens arrived in the Indus Valley around 2000 BC. Chickens had arrived in Egypt by about 1350 BC, China by 1122 BC, the Greek and Roman world around 700 – 500 BC and Britain around 100 BC.

The Egyptians initially used chickens more in cockfighting than in casseroles. They used large 'ovens' heated with camel dung and straw to artificially incubate eggs, presumably of thoroughbred fighters.

Greeks enjoyed chickens as a delicacy at their symposia/drinking parties. Roman priests raised sacred chickens used as auguries to make decisions in the Roman Senate and on the battlefield. The non-sacred chickens apparently served Roman chefs in the creation of omelets and development of various stuffing recipes. Roman farms raised up to 200 chickens at a time, and farmers studied ways of fattening their charges with everything from wheat bread soaked in wine to mixtures of cumin seeds, barley and lizard fat. They also discovered that castrated roosters (capons) fattened nicely.

With the demise of the Roman Empire, chickens in Europe devolved into smaller and less productive birds more like their Junglefowl ancestors. They would remain this way until the Middle Ages and the beginnings of more industrialized agriculture.

The Spanish and English brought European chickens to the New World. Evidence suggests that several centuries prior to European chicken introductions, Polynesians brought chickens to the Pacific coast of South America. In all cases, chickens were readily accepted by Native Americans and used for sport and food.

Turkeys originated in the New World from the Wild Turkey (Meleagris gallopavo). The Aztecs domesticated the first Wild Turkey about 2000 years ago from a subspecies no longer in existence. They used the birds for meat and eggs and used the feathers for decoration.

Turkey derived from Aztec stock

The Anasazi also domesticated turkeys in the Four Corners Region, but there is no genetic evidence of this subspecies in modern-day domestic Turkeys. Evidently, all current-day domestic Turkeys came from Aztec stock.

Spanish traders took Aztec-domesticated Turkeys back to Europe where they acquired the name 'Turkey' since they were often shipped through Turkey. The first "Christmas turkey" mentioned by the English was in 1573.

Turkeys arrived with the Pilgrims on the Mayflower. However, the colonists soon found abundant Wild Turkeys throughout New England that had a better flavor, since they foraged on native mast (fruit) of chestnut, beechnut, and walnut trees.

Although the Wild Turkey almost disappeared in the late 1800s, they've made a tremendous comeback with more than 7 million birds currently roaming the forests of North America. The National Wild Turkey Association has been highly successful in working with states and other agencies in re-establishing the Wild Turkey.

Geese were domesticated more than 4,000 years ago from either Graylag Geese (Anser anser) or from the Swan Goose (Anser cygnoides). Egyptians netted and penned thousands of these geese as they migrated between Africa and Europe.

Geese had religious significance for the Romans. A flock kept in the Temple of Juno was credited with saving Rome from the Gauls by creating a racket when they detected the intruders thereby, alerting the Roman guards.

Domestic geese have been selected for larger size (22 vs. 7-9 pounds for Greylags) and higher egg productivity (50 - 100 vs. 5-12 eggs per year). They have also been selected for white feathers since they look better dressed and pinfeathers are not so easily detected.

Domestic geese retain an ability to fly, but usually remain near where there is reliable food and protection from predators.

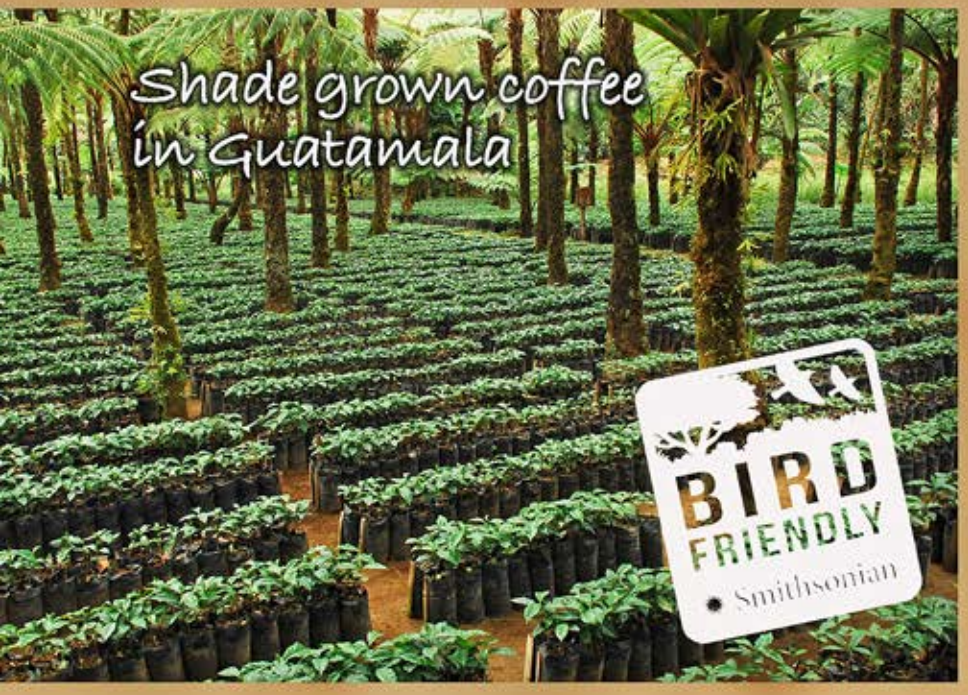
Muscovy Duck

Almost all domestic varieties of duck have been derived from the Mallard (Anas platyrhynhos) although some domestic breeds trace origins to the Muscovy Duck of South America. The first domestication of ducks apparently took place in Southeast Asia about 4000 years ago. Domestic ducks and wild Mallards can still interbreed creating a wide range of hybrids. Pekin ducks are the most common domestic ducks. They grow rapidly and produce an abundance of eggs.

Industrialized farming and poultry capitalism now provide the world with a huge source of protein, but often at the cost of mistreating these animals. As birders and consumers, we should support humane farming practices involving these birds that all have a wild and proud heritage.

THERE'S A BIRD IN MY COFFEE!

Gwen Grace



Recently a friend invited me to join her for coffee at a café halfway between her place and mine. Now I don't drink coffee after 9 a.m., but friendships being sacred I agreed to meet her for a midmorning cup. I arrived late and she already had her coffee. So, I bounded up to the counter to order from an exotic list of choices, none of them familiar.

Having just read about bird friendly shade-grown coffee, I asked for that. The barista's eyes dilated, and his assistant opened the refrigerator behind her and tore out large silver bags of coffee, checking for identification or certification. None found. Then I sensed panic and hostility growing in the line behind me.

I'm from Washington State, home of Starbucks, and I know how to spit out your order like no other order and stand back. As the line grew, I began to study the tea list instead. Turns out shade-grown coffee is not that popular.

Why Shade Grown Coffee?

I think shade grown coffee should be popular, especially among birders.

The article I was reading before that coffee date informed me that most varieties of coffee are naturally intolerant of sun. The bushes prefer a canopy of diverse trees that filter the light and mulch the soil with their leaves. In 1972, a coffee hybrid was introduced that increased coffee yields and was easier to grow and harvest. But this new variety needed full sun, so farmers and industrial growers began burning or cutting down the forest, a process we call deforestation. Three-quarters of the world's coffee is now grown in full sun, using chemical fertilizers and pesticides that are harmful to the environment.

Birds are the losers. Migratory songbirds overwinter in the forests, and deforestation is one of the factors contributing to their decline. That's why the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center (SMBC) took action. Decades ago, the SMBC began working with coffee plantations in South America to encourage the reintroduction of shade trees on coffee farms. In the beginning the Smithsonian even paid farmers to plant larger trees, because a mix of trees of different heights appeals to different bird species. This effort led the Smithsonian to develop a certificate awarded to organic growers who raise coffee beneath a forest canopy, the strictest shade grown certification of all.

The Smithsonian coordinates farm inspections and watches closely to be sure the shade grown practices are economically feasibility for the farmers. In Western El Salvador, inspectors reported that farms reported "more than half of the farms did very well with certification, even in the first year."

Certification leads to Bird Friendly Coffee

The SMBC reports that certified Bird Friendly Coffee farms now produce about 13 million pounds of beans annually. The certification helps farmers gain access to high end markets so they can make more money from their crops.

The Certified Smithsonian Bird FriendlyTM seal on packaging alerts customers that the coffee they are buying is good for birds. According to the Smithsonian, "When [customers] purchase sustainable Bird Friendly Coffee … the profits circle back to farmers. Earning more for their environmental stewardship is a good incentive for farmers not only to maintain existing Bird Friendly habitat, but also to attract new farmers to the program and protect even larger areas of forest."

Where to Buy Bird Friendly coffee

Buying coffee marked organic and/or shade-grown, available in specialty supermarkets, is a great first step. To be sure you get beans that meet the Smithsonian's stringent standards, go to the SMBC web page at nationalzoo.si.edu/migratory-birds/bird-friendly-coffee and consult their list of roasters. You may also purchase from the National Audubon Society at audubon.org/coffee-produced-bird-friendly-habitats

The Lesser Nighthawk:

Now you see me, now you don't!

Kathleen McCoy

Imagine taking a walk early in the morning along a desert wash. You're enjoying the view when suddenly you see a bird struggling away from you. The bird looks injured, but you blink your eyes and like magic the animal disappears. Don't be worried. You have just come too close to the nest of a Lesser Nighthawk and she is trying to lure you away with her "broken wing" trick.

The Lesser Nighthawk has another trick up her wing; she does not make a nest but lays eggs on gravelly or bare, flat ground. When threatened, she can roll her eggs to a safer spot. Hatchlings as young as one to two days can crawl rapidly to the new area. Another advantage of a "non-nest" is that the mother can cool her two eggs by moving them to shade if the eggs get too hot, and then move them back into the original sunny position later in the day.

Interestingly, the nighthawk is not a hawk, but belongs to the Nightjar family. Masters of camouflage, Lesser Nighthawks have feathers that look like a combination of desert dirt mixed in with bark or tree leaves, which help protect them from predators. A close look will find a white patch on the throat of the male and a buff color patch on the female. The typical adult Lesser Nighthawk is 7.5 inches long weighing about 1.8 ounces. When on the ground Lesser Nighthawks look a little chunky, but in the air graceful and thin. Lesser Nighthawks have dark pointed wings with bold stripes near the tip, tiny legs and big eyes. Their small bill is nearly invisible but opens wide when hunting insects. Their large mouths are lined with hair-like bristle feathers that form a sort of insect sweep-net to trap prey. They need a little light to hunt, so don't be surprised to find them gobbling up insects that swarm around bright lights at night.

These little birds have a mighty appetite. One Lesser Nighthawk was found to have more than 500 mosquitoes in its stomach. Friends to farmers, Lesser Nighthawks keep insect populations down.

The largest number of Lesser Nighthawks are found in southern New Mexico, Arizona and Texas from mid-April to October. In winter they migrate to tropical areas of Brazil, Guatemala and Honduras. Lesser Nighthawks are increasing so with luck they should be around for many years.

Peregrine: Wanderer

Jim Burns

Slipping the shackles of logic, she folds up and plummets earthward, prey bound, through the layers of our imagination, ever mocking the boundaries our perceptions place upon her mastery of the ethereal world.

Some say she is a talisman, sent from beyond those boundaries by a being that embodies all our daydreams and our most fervid fantasies.

Some say she is a sorcerer, sent to fulfill those fantasies as she sweeps down the wind with scimitar wings, intent on the object of her immutable mission.

She is the perfect conflation of shadow and sky, wearing the perfect conjunction of feather and bone, and where her crystal vision intercepts an arc of avian imperfection, that mission will end in death.

Seldom seen and then only scantly realized, she is the feathered wraith that lurks always in our soul, ever relevant to the timeless journey through the primal world from whence we came.

Stealth and speed inform her journey, a handful of seconds, a heartbeat, then pewter lightning strikes from above, mostly unseen, a frisson of completion in her wild devolution from apex heights into our quotidian universe.

Shearing that universe in her endless search, she signs the fatal intersection with an explosion of blood stippled feathers that sends them wafting along the shards of wind she has scattered in her dance for survival.

Survival becomes her, every facet of her form designed with predatory purpose, the assassin's hood, the bladed beak, the daggered talons, all inhabiting the nightmares of those below her on the fraught and feudal pyramid of life.

Silently she stalks two disparate realms, inhabiting at once the lofty eyries hidden among the secluded summits of our outer limits and the visceral wells cloistered deep within the darkest recesses of our souls.

Shape shifting, she stirs in us the suggestion of an inscrutable disparity, the fleeting glimpse of what we left long ago behind and our evanescent longings for the heights to which we know we should now aspire.

Still she stays her pilgrimage, now a sacred symbol wandering the globe, incognizant of this disparity that enthralls us, sentient yet insouciant keepers of our destiny and hers.

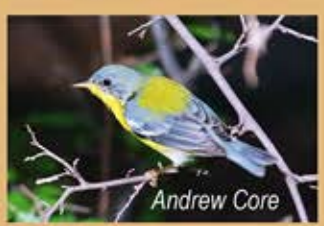
Notable Arizona Sightings

From the Az Field Ornithologists Photo Documentation Page. Complete listing can be seen at www.azfo.org

Reddish Egret (Egretta rufescens), Lake Havasu City, Mohave County. This Reddish Egret was found by Collin Price on 2 September and photographed by David Vander Pluym on 12 September 2019. Rare and increasing summer/-fall visitor in Arizona. Nearly all records pertain to juveniles and are likely from nesting areas along the Sea of Cortez (Gulf of California) in Mexico.

Purple Gallinule (Porphyrio martinica), Santa Cruz River, Tucson, Pima County. This Purple Gallinule was found by Rudy Corral on 11 September 2019 and photographed by Max Leibowitz . Rare, less than annual. There are 19 accepted records.

Blue-winged Warbler (Vermivora pinus), Ramsey Canyon Nature Preserve, Cochise County. This Blue-winged Warbler was found and photographed by Kordeen Kor on 31 August 2019. There are sixteen previous records of this species for Arizona split between spring and fall. Blue-winged Warbler and Golden-winged Warbler form a pair of closely related species that hybridize and compete with each other.



Tropical Parula (Setophaga pitiayumi), lower Florida Canyon, Pima County. This Tropical Parula was found and photographed by David Palmer on 27 August 2019 and photographed by Andrew Core on 6 September 2019. Eight previous state records all between late May and early July. If accepted by the ABC this would be a first fall record for the state. This individual was about 100m above the dam.

Ruddy Turnstone (Arenaria interpres), East of Yuma, Yuma County. This Ruddy Turnstone was found and photographed by Brian Johnson on 23 August 2019. Casual fall transient formely more regular. Less than 10 accepted records since being placed back on the review list in 2007.

Painted Bunting (Passerina ciris), WOW Arizona, Pima County. This Painted Bunting was found and photographed by Christopher Vincent on 05 August 2019. Painted Bunting is an uncommon to rare but regular, occasionally numerous late summer and early fall migrant in SE Arizona and is casual at other times and areas.

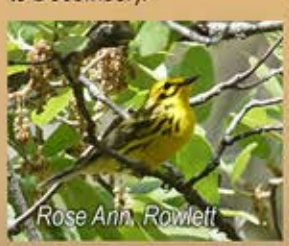
Roseate Spoonbill (Platalea ajaja), Watson Lake, Yavapai County. This Roseate Spoonbill was found by an unknown birder on 31 July 2019 and photographed by Bryan Patrick on 01 August 2019. Although considered a regular visitor to the state through the 1970's, it has been much rarer and less regular since, probably associated with the decline of waterbird habitat in the Colorado River Delta in nearby Mexico.

Yellow-green Vireo (Vireo flavoviridis), Empire Gulch, Pima County. This Yellow-green Vireo was found and photographed by Chris Benesh on 01 August 2019. A casual visitor to Arizona with 14 accepted records with a couple more pending. This report falls in with previous records which have occurred between late May and mid August.

Magnificent Frigatebird (Fregata magnificens), Canoa Ranch Conservation Area, Pima County. This Magnificent Frigatebird was found and photographed by Matt Smogor on 30 July 2019. Frigatebirds are casual in Arizona, with only three accepted records of Magnificent Frigatebird in recent years, and three accepted records of "frigatebird sp.", in the past 20 years.

Pacific Golden-Plover (Pluvialis fulva), Goldman Dairy Sludge Ponds, Pinal County. This Pacific Golden-Plover was found and photographed by Doug Jenness on 24 July 2019. Casual in Arizona with only 3 previous reports accepted by the ABC, though this is the second for Pinal County.

Groove-billed Ani (Crotophaga sulcirostris), Patagonia-Sonoita Creek Preserve, Santa Cruz County. This Groove-billed Ani was found and photographed by Kathy West on 06 July 2019. Groove-billed Ani is a casual visitor. Nearly all records are concentrated into two time windows, either mid summer (late May to August) or late fall (October to December).



Prairie Warbler (Setophaga discolor), near Cypress Campground, Rucker Canyon, Chiricahuas, Cochise County. This Prairie Warbler was found and photographed by Rose Ann Rowlett on 16 May 2019. Prairie Warbler is one of the rarest of the eastern vagrant warblers in Arizona, with only 19 previous records.

Diary of a Field Trip: Condors Released to the Wild

Elizabeth Farquhar

Before release the birds are fitted wing-mounted number tags and radio or satellite telemetry, which field biologists use to track the birds in the wild. That's how Hauck knew that the new kids on the cliff spent the night within a mile of the release site. He said the birds usually hang around for about a month before working up the courage to explore. As of this writing, everybody was doing fine.

Our Desert Rivers group spent the rest of the day enjoying the North Rim of Grand Canyon. Back at the lodge, we headed out to Navajo Bridge looking for condors. Hauck says a group of the birds seem to prefer the bridge, but some of them—including a one without a tag—are there more often than others. The bird that is missing a tag fledged wild from a cave upriver last year. She often hangs out with her parents: her father, who wears tag 54, and her mother, tag H9. We spent a pleasant hour on the bridge watching them soar, then returned in the morning for another look before driving home.

Days later in my office I reviewed the photos I took of the condors on the bridge. Flipping through countless exposures of the birds in flight, I almost felt like I was flying, too. Then I realized that 54 and H9 were in many of the photos. Could their daughter have been there too? I'm betting she was.

Editor's note – Desert Rivers Audubon offers both day trips and overnights. Watch the Desert Rivers Audubon website and our monthly e-newsletter for dates and information, or contact our Field Trip Director, Gwen Grace at gwengellen@gmail.com.

It happened exactly the way Tim Hauck said that it would.

With dozens of spotting scopes and cameras aimed at the Peregrine Fund cages at the top of the Vermillion Cliffs, no one needed to worry about missing the moment when the first California Condor ventured from his cage. Sure enough, a cheer from the crowd heralded his flight, and within a half an hour all four had left the safety of captivity to start life in the wild.

Tim Hauck, who manages the condor reintroduction program for the Peregrine Fund, said that there were 600-odd birders at the release on September 28. Four Desert Rivers Audubon members among them. For Gwen Grace, this event was a bucket list moment. Veteran birder Theona Vyvial was well-prepared having visited the Peregrine Fund's World Center for Birds of Prey in Boise, Idaho, just weeks before. Mary Kiamar and I shared Gwen and Theona's eagerness to see the largest land bird in North America in its habitat.

We left Phoenix Friday morning, ducking off the road in Flagstaff for lunch at Macy's European Coffeehouse and Bakery. As we headed up Route 89 toward Cameron, we stopped at Sunset Crater Volcano National Monument. Stellar's Jays worked the pinyon pines looking for insects, and rabbitbush—covered in yellow blooms—grew up among the cinders in the lava flow.

A kitchenette apartment awaited us at the Marble Canyon Lodge, located on Route 89A just west of Navajo Bridge. Far from the lights of cities and towns, the sky was dense with stars, and after dinner we learned that Gwen is an amateur astronomer.

The next morning, we packed lunch in a cooler and headed 30 miles east to the condor release site on House Rock Valley Road. We were early, which gave us time to talk to other birders, including fellow Desert Rivers members. Atop the cliff, wild condors carved wide circles and dipped down to sample the calf carcasses placed within site of the still-caged newcomers. A Golden Eagle, the only bird that can challenge a condor for food, was spotted in the air as well.

Finally, Tim Hauck's crew on the ground gave the signal to the crew at the top of the cliff to open the cages. The crowd below hushed. Minutes went by, and we wondered if we would see a repeat of the 2017 release, when the birds lingered in their cages for two hours before taking off. As it turned out we waited only minutes. Condors are released when they are about 18 months old. The new members of Arizona's condor clan are X6, a female that hatched on April 22; X9, a male, who hatched the next day; XX, a male who hatched on May 31; and X7, another male who hatched on June 2.

Wintering Ducks

Young Birders'

All Photos: Jim Burns

Some ducks we'll find in the coming fall and winter months. Time to brush up on duck identification!

1 Hooded Merganser
2 Red-breasted Merganser
3 Blue-wing Teal
4 Northern Shoveler
5 Ruddy Duck
6 Redhead
7 Ring-necked Duck
8 Cinnamon Teal
9 Bufflehead
10 Gadwall
11 Northern Pintail
12 Green Wing Teal
13 Eurasian Wigeon

Join Our Young Birders Club!
The Young Birders Club meets the third Saturday of the month, October through April, at the Gilbert Riparian Preserve. Look for the Desert Rivers Audubon Society booth near the ramadas and we will be not far away. Each month we concentrate on a different aspect of birding, then we take a walk to see what awaits in the trees and on the ponds. Parents are welcome too! For more information, contact Anne Leight at birdannabelle@hotmail.com.

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