



# The Cactus Wren-dition

Volume LXXI No. 3

Fall - 2019



*Crow's Claw Cactus, watercolor,  
by Gillian Rice*

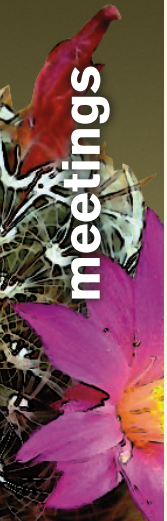


*Pied-billed Grebe  
on a floating nest, Papago Park  
by Peter Clarke*



Gillian Rice

COMMISSION



MAS holds meetings (membership is not required) on the first Tuesday of the month from September through April at Papago Buttes Church of the Brethren, 2450 N. 64th Street, Scottsdale (north of Oak Street on the west side, between Thomas and McDowell roads). If southbound, turn right from 64th Street, 1/2 mile south of Thomas. If northbound, turn left (west) at Oak Street, 1/2 mile north of McDowell, and then right at the Elks Lodge. Continue past the lodge and turn right into the church parking lot. Look for the "Audubon" signs. Pre-meeting dinners (September through April) are held at 6:00 pm at Noodles Ranch Vietnamese Cuisine, 2765 N. Scottsdale Road at the southeast corner of Scottsdale Road and Thomas in the south part of Scottsdale Crossing Plaza. The May meeting is our annual banquet. Please check the Spring *Wren•dition* or our website for details.

## Committees/Support

**Arizona Audubon Council Rep**  
Position Open

**Bookstore**  
Sochetra Ly  
503 860-0370

**Poet Laureate**  
David Chorlton  
480 705-3227

**Website**  
Laurie Nessel  
602 391-4303  
[laurienessel@gmail.com](mailto:laurienessel@gmail.com)

**Maricopa Audubon Website**  
<http://www.maricopaaudubon.org>

**The Earth has received the embrace of the sun and we shall see the results of that love.**

*Setting Ball*

## An Investment in the Future

Bequests are an important source of support for the Maricopa Audubon Society. Your chapter has dedicated itself to the protection of the natural world through public education and advocacy for the wiser use and preservation of our land, water, air and other irreplaceable natural resources.

You can invest in the future of our natural world by making a bequest in your will to the Maricopa Audubon Society. Talk to your attorney for more information on how this can be accomplished.



House Finches. Photo by Kevin McGraw

### September 3, 2019

#### Kevin McGraw: Backyard Bird Feeding

Backyard bird feeding is now more than a billion-dollar industry nationwide, and with this activity come many benefits, such as drawing attractive small birds to our yards and provisioning them with valued resources. However, there may be dark sides to bird feeding, and this could include the spread of disease at our feeders that attract dense populations of avian visitors. Here I will discuss the first field experiment of its kind to investigate the extent to which routine bird-feeder cleaning can impact disease severity and spread in a common feeder-visiting passerine (the House Finch).

*Kevin McGraw is Professor and Associate Director for Facilities in the School of Life Sciences at Arizona State University. He came to ASU in 2004 and leads a research team that investigates two main areas – the evolution of exaggerated traits in animals and urban behavioral ecology. His group's primary foci have been on the control and function of ornate colors of birds (especially finches and hummingbirds), and how birds acclimate and adapt to the many ways in which humans modify city environments. Students in his lab have also studied elaborate coloration in animals such as chameleons, butterflies, and jumping spiders. He has mentored many students in research during his 15 years at ASU, including 7 post-doctoral researchers, 8 PhD graduates, 2 current PhD students, and over 300 undergraduates.*

### October 1, 2019

#### Hawk Watch International with Dr. Dave Oleyar

HawkWatch International's Senior Scientist Dr. Dave Oleyar is a conservation biologist and population ecologist with over 20 years of experience working with raptors and other birds in western North America. Join Dave to hear about the work HWI does with a focus on two projects that include



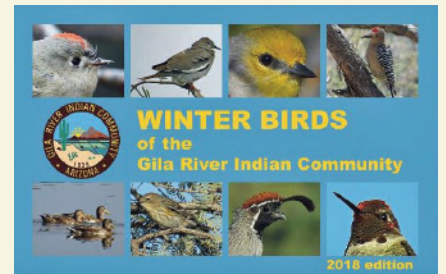
Dr. Dave Oleyar

sites in Arizona. HWI and the NPS monitor raptor migration each fall at Yaki Point on the south rim of the Grand Canyon. Find out what we've learned here and at other migration sites across the west. Oleyar also leads studies of small forest owl communities and the tree hollows they use to roost and nest. This work involves citizen scientists and takes place in the Chiricahua Mountains of southeast Arizona and in northern Utah.

### November 5, 2019

#### Dr. Dave Pearson: Birds Bringing Reluctant Neighbors Together (Gila River Indian Community)

Dave Pearson has been invited to survey for birds on the GRIC for a year and a half to help with their conservation efforts. These are an extension of the annual winter bird count they sponsor that Maricopa Audubon members have been assisting with for over a decade. Pearson will illustrate how birding on the reservation adjacent to the southern county border has opened his eyes to how little most Phoenixians know about our neighbors and how much we depend on them without knowing it.



**On the Cover:** Crow's Claw Cactus, *Ferocactus latispinus*, 14 x 11 in, watercolor on paper, ©2015

A Mexican native, this stumpy cactus brightens my garden in winter with colorful flowers and spines. The Crow's Claw Cactus is an excellent choice for xeriscape (low water use) backyards in the Phoenix area.

For more of Gillian Rice's artwork see page 18.

# President's Message



Mark W. Larson

Welcome back to the Valley of the Sun, or if you never left, welcome back to activities such as the monthly meetings and field trips of the Maricopa Audubon Society! This summer your Board of Directors has been active planning for the future and responding to challenges.

One of those challenges was the loss of our outstanding editor, Gillian Rice, who stepped down to spend more time with her aged and ailing family members. We wish them well.

Stepping up to fill her role as editor is our poet, David Chorlton. David has some ideas that will help to continue the excellence we have come to expect and I'm sure he will add his own spin to the publication. Please give David your full support and encouragement.

The Maricopa Audubon Society is an environmentally active organization as evidenced by recent events. One, we have been supportive of a non-profit in Prescott that is attempting to conserve a key riparian habitat called Coldwater Farm along the Agua Fria River near the town of Humboldt. In March and then again in June, field trips by MAS Board members to this property showed that it is, indeed, worthy of conservation. In June, for example, there were so many species of birds singing and seen, some of which are uncommon, or in the case of the Southwestern Willow Flycatcher, endangered.

Two, MAS and the Center for Biological Diversity collaborated on a case in Federal court to protect the habitat of that same flycatcher. Credit goes to Vice President Robin Silver, M.D. and the attorneys representing us for winning the case. As a result of winning, we were awarded a refund of the attorney fees, a total of almost \$20,000!

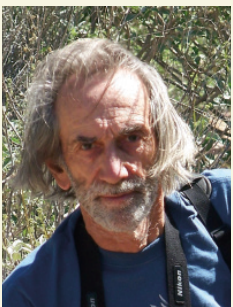
In July, I attended the biannual convention of the National Audubon Society, held this year in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. There were field trips and some light entertainment, but there were also many workshops in which I participated that were designed to increase skills for reaching out to less-served communities, creating student chapters on campus, improving member services, and strengthening member involvement. I think that some of these experiences and new knowledge will help to improve our Chapter.

I look forward to seeing all of you again soon. 🐦

Mark W. Larson  
President

## Letter from the Editor

by David Chorlton



David Chorlton

Having come to look forward so much to seeing what each new *Cactus Wren•dition* would bring, I was sad to learn that Gillian Rice was stepping down as editor. She brought a wealth of information and insights to these pages, for which we send many thanks and good wishes. Perhaps not all of us knew she is a fine botanical artist, so I'm delighted to feature her here in that capacity.

For the contents in my first issue as editor, I send my appreciation to all contributors. Some stepped up to short term requests for an article that, I hope, will begin a sequence of regular features, including a detailed study of what goes on in a year at a specific site or region. This time, Cindy Marple tells about the cycle of life at Gilbert Water Ranch. Loving birds as we do, we often find ourselves facing an injured or orphaned bird and aren't always sure of how best to help. Rehabilitators deserve our appreciation and support, so I hope to give space to those who perform the miracles that keep birds flying, with Liberty Wildlife first. Thanks to Megan Mosby for telling us about them.

We shall continue to bring news of conservation efforts: the good, the bad, and the ugly. With my background in art and literature, I've learned that confronting the bad doesn't have to be ugly, and that maintaining an aesthetic to what we do is a good principle in making our arguments against harmful propositions. The fine photographs here testify to what we need to protect.

We live in a state with such a wealth of birds. That even applies within city limits, where a sharp observer might identify even more than the ninety or so species I have seen within walking distance of our house in Ahwatukee, not too far from South Mountain. Some are just passing through, like the Green-tailed Towhee who stops off for a couple of days in our back yard area during migration, while a Snowy Egret at the nearby pond or the Red-tailed Hawks show up at any time. Even the everyday visitors continue to hold our attention, the Gilded Flickers for instance. Others make grander excursions and seek out the rare in exotic places. This publication is here for all. If passing it around among neighbors makes them more aware of what they are seeing, that would give us yet another purpose.

One last note about language: the first Czech president after the fall of communism, Vaclav Havel, objected to the word "environment." He argued that it suggests an environment is something outside us, whereas we are very much a part of the web of life systems, and to harm them is ultimately to harm ourselves. 🐦

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Field Trips .....	4
Conservation Update .....	5
Book Review .....	6
Fishing from the Sky by Melinda Louise .....	7
Liberty Wildlife by Megan Mosby .....	8
A Year at Gilbert Water Ranch by Cindy Marple .....	10
Centerfold photograph by Cindy Marple .....	12
Remembering Pete Moulton and Mary Jo Ballator by Laurie Nessel .....	14
Putting the Pieces Together .....	17
Artist's Eye on Nature/Gillian Rice .....	18
The Green Scene on Vultures by Vicki Hire .....	20
Poem by David Chorlton .....	22
Two Photographs by Rick Clarke .....	23

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### AMAZONSMILE

Maricopa Audubon Society is now registered on Amazon as a charitable organization. Go to MAS Facebook page for details or use the following AmazonSmile link for Maricopa Audubon Society:

<https://smile.amazon.com/ch/86-6040458>

Log onto your Amazon account and a percentage of your purchase will go to MAS!

# Maricopa Audubon Society Field Trips & Workshops



**Car Pooling:** Please make every effort to organize your own car pool, consolidate vehicles at meeting places and/or contact leaders for car pooling assistance. Be courteous to the trip leaders and help cover their gas costs. We recommend that passengers reimburse drivers 10 cents per mile each.

## Reminders:

- Avoid wearing bright colors. Wear neutral-colored clothing and sturdy walking shoes.
- Bring sunscreen, sunglasses, head protection, and water.
- Always bring your binoculars. Bring a scope if recommended.
- Submit trip and leader suggestions to the Field Trip Chair, Larry Langstaff.
- Unless stated otherwise, reservations are required.

**Day Passes:** Many locations in the National Forests require Day Use Passes. For details, see <http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/tonto/passes-permits>

## July-October, date TBA

### Stewart Mountain Desert Tortoise Quest.

Have you ever seen a Sonoran Desert Tortoise in the wild? Increase your chances of stumbling upon one of these iconic desert creatures by searching in their preferred habitat after a summer monsoon. Learn about this keystone species and how threats such as the massive Woodbury Fire affect their chances of survival. We are not setting an exact date for this trip near Saguaro Lake until the conditions are right. We will collect email addresses and phone numbers and contact you one day before or possibly the morning of the walk (be sure to check your email on rain days!). It could be a weekend or weekday. Learn about the behavior, life cycle, and status of the tortoise. Difficulty: 4 (steep, rocky terrain, and hot, humid weather). Bring snacks, sun protection, hat, sturdy hiking shoes, and plenty of water. We usually start before daybreak and return by noon but I would like to try a late afternoon trip this season. Limit: 10.

Leader: Laurie Nessel, [laurienessel@gmail.com](mailto:laurienessel@gmail.com) or 602 391-4303 to get on the call list. Please include your cell number and preference for dawn or late afternoon.

## Monday, October 28th

### Prescott Area lakes

Trip will begin at Granite Basin Lake, a small reservoir near the Granite Basin Wilderness in Prescott. Gigantic stacked boulders somehow fit together securely enough to make a mountain that rebounds sound off its cliffside that would put the acoustics at Gammage Auditorium to shame. Majestic and breathtaking, this scenic lake has a fun mix of classic riparian cottonwoods, willows, and sycamores surrounded by juniper and pine. Next, will be visiting both Willow and Watson

lakes, both of which can have waterbirds in the thousands this time of year. Birds that we will be looking for will include ducks, jays, woodpeckers, warblers and raptors. Difficulty: 1, limit 11 in three cars. Bring water and snacks. Car pool from Phoenix, leaving at 6:00 am.

Leader: Dara Velasquez.

To reserve, send cell phone number to: [dara.cv@gmail.com](mailto:dara.cv@gmail.com)

## Wednesday, October 30th

### Seven Springs

We'll leave the Scottsdale area about 6:45 am and bird our way into Seven Springs. There, we'll explore a trail and one or more picnic areas to see what migrants are lingering, and what might be coming in, such as American Robins, Cedar Waxwings and Townsend's Solitaires. We can hope for a nice variety of desert species on the way there, plus resident woodpeckers, titmice, wrens and towhees. Weather permitting, we'll eat a picnic lunch and return to Scottsdale about 1ish. Limit 8. Reservations required. Difficulty: 1-2. Meeting place and carpooling logistics will be determined a few days before the trip.

Leader: Kathe Anderson

Please register at [kathe.coot@cox.net](mailto:kathe.coot@cox.net)

## Saturday, November 9th

### Tres Rios Wetlands

Tres Rios stands for "Three rivers" and refers to the confluence of the Salt, Gila, and Agua Fria Rivers. It is a 700-acre environmental restoration project that releases reclaimed wastewater back into what would be naturally dry desert scrublands. It is now home to an extensive variety of wildlife such as bobcats, beavers, muskrats, skunks, raccoons etc., and is an oasis magnet for migratory birds. Walking distance may be up to five miles, but we may be permitted to enter the most extensive portion of the wetlands for this trip. We could have some exciting observations such as huge flocks of blackbirds, and close looks at waterfowl and shorebirds! Difficulty: 2-3 for potential mileage walked. Limit 7. Bring water and snacks. If you have a spotting scope, we may use it.

Leader: Dara Velasquez.

To reserve, send your cell phone number to [dara.cv@gmail.com](mailto:dara.cv@gmail.com)

## Tuesday, November 12th

### Payson

We'll leave Fountain Hills about 6:30 am to arrive in Payson about 7:30. We'll explore ponds and parks that have been fruitful in the past for ducks, meadowlarks, bluebirds, woodpeckers, nuthatches, and more. Weather and time permitting, we'll seek out a couple of trailheads in Payson's extensive trail system, just to see what might be there. Wrap up about 1:30 pm, to return to Fountain Hills about 2:30. No entrance fees at this time.

Meeting place and carpooling logistics will be determined a few days before the trip. Limited to 8 people.

Leader: Kathe Anderson

Please register at [kathe.coot@cox.net](mailto:kathe.coot@cox.net)

## Sunday, December 1st, 2019

### Tres Rios Overbank Wetlands

This large site of constructed wetlands at 91st Ave. and the Salt River hosts a large variety of wintering waterbirds and they should be arriving in good numbers by the first of this month. Tres Rios can produce some surprises, so we will be looking for late fall migrants. In addition, sightings of coyotes and bobcats are not unusual. The trails are level and easy, but we may walk as far as five miles round trip, so be sure to bring water and a snack. We will arrive early in hopes of witnessing the departing clouds of both Yellow-headed and Red-winged Blackbirds. We may also see raptors such as Prairie and Peregrine Falcons or even a Merlin! If we're lucky, we may see a Sora, a Virginia Rail, or even a Least Bittern. Limit: 6

Leader: Mark W. Larson

To register, call 480 310-3261



## AZFO Annual Meeting

### 20-22 September, 2019

#### Ashurst Hall, NAU campus, Flagstaff

Ashurst Hall, NAU campus, Flagstaff  
The 13th annual AZFO state meeting will be in Flagstaff this year!

The Flagstaff area hosts diverse habitats for birding including an Important Bird Area. The meeting will feature mini-expeditions to a handful of the under-birded locations; presentations about ongoing research on the status, behavior, and distribution of Arizona birds; a chance to put your skills to the test with an audio and visual identification contest; and opportunities to learn about how you can become more involved with AZFO.

There will be mini-expeditions on Friday and Sunday. Meeting registration opens 1 July. Check back soon for further details on lodging and a meeting schedule!

You don't need to be a professional ornithologist to attend. This event is open to birders of all levels.

For meeting details, registration and suggested accommodations, visit <http://www.azfo.org>

If you have any good quality birding or nature books you would like to donate to the AZFO annual booksale, please bring them to the September MAS member meeting or contact [Laurienessel@gmail.com](mailto:Laurienessel@gmail.com)

# The Big Sit!

23RD ANNUAL MAS BIG SIT! & BIRDS OF PREY  
Salt River at Granite Reef, Tonto National Forest  
Saturday, October 12 & Sunday, October 13, 2019  
7-9am



This Big Sit! is an annual, non-competitive fundraiser held around the world to promote birds and the birding community. We will gather to count bird species seen from a 17' diameter circle at Granite Reef Recreation Area. Funds raised this year will go to Cornell Lab of Ornithology, to support their poignant new film, *Birds of Prey*. Maricopa Audubon Society will host a screening of this film at the Papago Church of the Brethren. Please check our Events page online for more information. The main object of this event is, and always will be, sitting out in nature with friends, and enjoying not only the wildlife but the camaraderie. This year we are holding two Big Sits! to accommodate more people.

Last year, the Big Sit! was postponed from October to January, due to the beginning of the abundant rainy season. While we saw a good variety of ducks in January, we almost froze doing so on an overcast day in sustained winds! We hope for good weather this year, and a great variety of species due to the cusp season in October—late Neotropical migrants lingering before heading south and early northern waterfowl and shorebirds arriving, as well as our resident desert collection—Northern Cardinal, Abert's Towhee, Song Sparrow, Gila Woodpecker, and possible Common Yellowthroat and Bewick's Wren, among dozens of other possibilities. Last year, some of us spotted one of the reintroduced

river otters swimming in the Salt River. Bald Eagles have nested near the site of the Big Sit! and other likely raptors include Osprey and Cooper's Hawk—a preview to the film described below!

The Big Sit! is officially scheduled from 7-9am, but folks can arrive earlier and stay later.

At 9am, we'll have snacks, compare notes and make a list. Bring your coffee, breakfast and a snack to share.

We'll collect cash, checks and credit card payments onsite (\$10-15 suggested donation for Cornell Lab of Ornithology). Please make checks payable to "Maricopa Audubon Society" with "Big Sit" on the memo line. However, if you're new to the Big Sit! concept, and just want to drop by for 15-20 minutes to see what it's like, feel free to do so on Sunday, Oct 13, 2019, without making a donation. If you register with Kathe below, we'll make sure we have enough snacks for everyone. This is a great opportunity for families with kids and others to get a taste of birding!

To participate, contact [Kathe.coot@cox.net](mailto:Kathe.coot@cox.net). If we get a large response, we will set up two circles in the area.

Anyone may donate by cash, checks (to "MAS") and credit cards at member meetings, or credit cards online ([MAS.org/About Us/Donate](https://MAS.org/About/Us/Donate)) or mail checks to, Vicki Hire, MAS Treasurer, PO Box 603 Chandler, AZ 85244 🐦



## Conservation Update

by Mark Horlings

### San Pedro Cienegas and the Arizona Eryngo

Arizona Eryngo (*Eryngium sparganophyllum*) is a small, rare plant now found in only two places in the United States: Tucson and cienegas (springs) of the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area. Arizona Eryngo has as many common names as its known U.S. habitats, since it is also called "ribbonleaf button snakeroot." Protecting the plant's habitat can protect the cienegas and the aquifers upon which they depend. Protecting the cienegas will help keep water flowing in the San Pedro River.

Maricopa Audubon Society (MAS) and other environmental groups recently sued the Fish and Wildlife Service for failure to meet a mandatory one-year deadline set by the Endangered Species Act. In April, 2018, MAS and others petitioned the Fish and Wildlife Service to list Arizona Eryngo (not to mention ribbonleaf button snakeroot) as endangered.

The Endangered Species Act requires some response to such petitions within a year. Fish and Wildlife has not acted. Hence the pending lawsuit.

### Mountain Streams Damaged in Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest

Visitors to upper elevation streams in the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest have reported damage to streams and streamside habitats from stray horses and cattle. The Forest Service and Fish and Wildlife Service have received notice of the damage but have not acted. Accordingly, MAS and others filed a formal Notice of Intent to sue both agencies in June, 2019. MAS' filing included numerous recent photos documenting the damage caused by the stray horses, cattle and non-native elk.

### Oak Flat and the Resolution Copper Mine Update

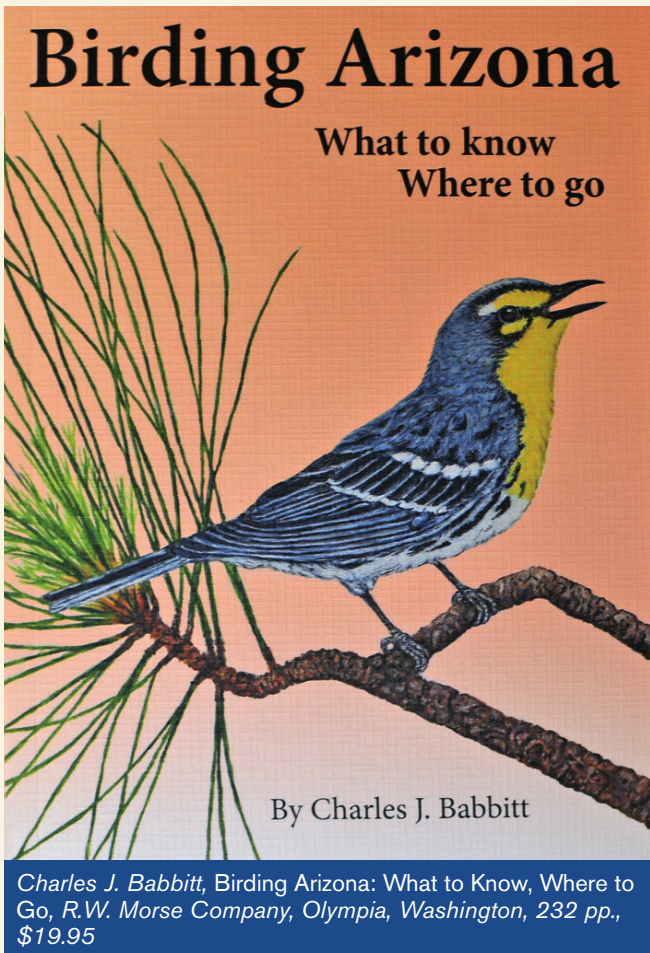
Tonto National Forest has announced that its draft Environmental Impact Statement addressing the effects of the proposed block cave copper mine will be issued this summer, probably in August.

MAS and its allies have spoken at numerous public meetings and have submitted scoping comments to ensure that the Environmental Impact Statement accurately assesses the many issues created by this mine. The Resolution Copper Company plans to pile tailings 400 feet high near the Boyce Thompson Arboretum and acknowledges that Oak Flat, sacred to the Apache, will eventually collapse from underground blasting. MAS and other groups will have 90 days to comment after the draft Environmental Impact Statement is released.

### 404 Permits Update

On June 28, 2019, Arizona's Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ) announced that the seven committees formed to advise ADEQ whether and how to assume responsibility for issuing Clean Water Act permits had completed their work. The committees issued white papers which are available on ADEQ's website. ADEQ hopes to publish final plans for the takeover this year.

After ADEQ assumes this Clean Water Act responsibility, it will review projects proposing to fill or dredge wetlands, review their environmental effects, and then approve, deny, or seek changes to the project. When federal agencies make these decisions, courts review them under the Endangered Species or National Environmental Policy Acts. State control would remove this oversight. 🐦



Charles J. Babbitt, *Birding Arizona: What to Know, Where to Go*, R.W. Morse Company, Olympia, Washington, 232 pp., \$19.95

## Book Review

by Mark W. Larson

**Seldom do I pick up a book that is useful, instructive, well-written, and entertaining to read. Mr. Babbitt's *Birding Arizona: What to Know, Where to Go*, is all these things and more. While the target audience is beginning and intermediate birders as well as visiting birders, even those with wide experience will undoubtedly learn more about Arizona and its birds by reading this book.**

The relatively small volume is packed with information about places to go birding as well as personal anecdotes of visits to those sites and the encounters with the birds the author experienced there. And each story, each experience relates not only the facts but also insights about bird behavior and relationships with other species.

Reading *Birding Arizona* is something like traveling through much of the state with an especially experienced and knowledgeable friend, listening as he recounts his years of learning about the state's birds and other wildlife. On this trip you will not be birding in the most well-known and famous sites in southeastern Arizona but visiting some less known but equally productive areas worthy of your time and effort. One criticism might be that there are some large portions of Arizona that are not covered, for instance in the White Mountains near the New Mexico border and, especially, along the Lower Colorado River, although there are some interesting mentions of some rarities that can be found there.

The book is well organized and clearly laid out in the opening chapter. In next sections are discussions of some special groups of birds before the chapter describing places to visit in various parts of the state. These mini-site guides begin with the Phoenix area, followed by the San Francisco Peaks near Flagstaff, then notes on birding the Kaibab Plateau, a discussion of bird finding on the Navajo Reservation in northeastern Arizona, and wrapping up with a trip to the San Rafael Grasslands. Each of these sections is preceded by a helpful full-page map that shows the sites described in the section.

The penultimate chapter, "Fun Ways to Count Birds," provides suggestions and anecdotes about participating in citizen science projects such as Christmas Bird Counts and Breeding Bird Surveys and the final chapter, "Birding and the Environment" offers some valuable perspective about the role of birds in our lives and their importance in the natural world.

I found a few niggling errors and inconsistencies in the text, but all are minor when weighed against the value provided by this work. I recommend that you acquire this book by one of our former MAS presidents, Charlie Babbitt, because I am certain that it will enrich your birding experiences and, perhaps, enhance your life in general. 🐦

## Annual Report for Fiscal Year Ending May 31, 2019

by Vicki Hire, Treasurer

### Income

<i>Birds of Phoenix &amp; Maricopa Co.</i>	6,834
Audubon Membership	6,563
Investments	6,515
MAS Membership	2,383
Donations	2,367
Monthly Book Sales	1,454
Banquet	1,212
Fry's Community Rewards	409
Big Sit	195
Interest	140

**Total Revenue 28,072**

### Expenses

<i>The Cactus Wren•dition</i>	16,319
Conservation	2,382
Banquet	1,942
Education	1,686
Insurance	1,602
Book purchases	1,511
Website	1,444
Rent	1,300
Honoraria	1,291
Birds of Phoenix & Maricopa Co.	1,225
Hospitality/Condolences	259
Administration	189
Property Tax	76

**Total Expense 31,227**

# Fishing from the Sky

by Melinda Louise

**Early one spring morning, I was wandering along a riparian marsh in the Phoenix area looking for birds – or whatever else might come along – when I first became fascinated, mesmerized even, by Ospreys. I had been watching this one particular Osprey. With talons extended, it suddenly plunged into the water, rising up triumphantly grasping a fish and flying away. I was frozen in place, awe-struck.**



*Osprey hovering on the lookout for fish.  
Photo by Melinda Louise*

A fishing bird, the Osprey is a large chocolate brown and white raptor with yellow eyes and a distinct shape as the wings form an M-shape when gliding over water during the search for fish. It astounded me to see that this bird can plunge, feet-first, down over three feet beneath the surface, catch a fish, then be able to get back up into the air and fly away with its meal.

The underside of an Osprey's foot is covered with spines (spicules), which facilitate its holding on to slippery fish. An Osprey will often aerodynamically position a fish headfirst in its talons before taking it to a feeding perch or nest. And the Osprey is the only raptor with a reversible outer toe, which allows it to grasp prey with two toes in front and two behind.

On my first visit to Yellowstone National Park, my partner Steve and I were at Grand Geyser with hundreds of others waiting for



*Osprey on a nest near Lamar Valley.  
Photo by Melinda Louise*

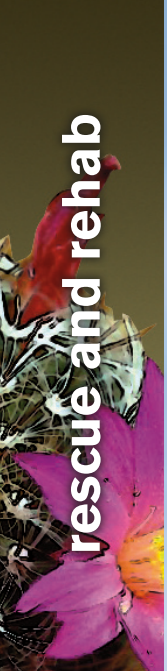
it to erupt. There we were, a mass of humanity, sitting on the benches, waiting. Watching. Waiting. All but me. I was facing the opposite direction to everyone else, busy watching an Osprey cruising along the Firehole River. Occasionally it would hover in one spot, watching, and suddenly dive down into the river after a fish.

Steve caught me on camera, this time with my attention on another dazzling Osprey display. That picture became the masthead photo on my blog. 🦅

*An enthusiastic birder, Melinda Louise especially enjoys watching ospreys. For more of her exploits, visit her blog, [GallopingHorseBlog.com](http://GallopingHorseBlog.com)*



*Melinda watching an Osprey along the Firehole River.  
Photo by Steve Klug*



# YOU'VE FOUND A BABY BIRD! OH NO! WHAT DO YOU DO?

**Luckily, for the compassionate person, there is Liberty Wildlife in Phoenix, ready and waiting to help with your all of your wildlife needs. Liberty Wildlife is a wildlife rehabilitation, natural history education and conservation organization that has been able to help over 110,000 animals since 1981 when it was incorporated by Dr. Kathy Orr, an avian veterinarian. In the 38 years since then, Liberty Wildlife has grown from a small backyard rehab center taking in 90 animals a year to a large state-of-the-art hospital that last year alone assisted almost 9500 animals. The new Liberty Wildlife is located in a LEED Platinum building on the south side of the Rio Salado.**

No longer just a rehabilitation organization, Liberty Wildlife offers over 1000 educational opportunities a year to students of all ages both on-site and across the state. Using over 70 educational ambassadors including raptors, ravens, vultures as well as numerous native reptiles and a few small mammals including a coatimundi, we introduce the public to nature and science the fascinating way... up close and personal. Our offerings range from school programs, community events, scout troops, assisted living, university classes, and a variety of on-site programs including a "duck experience", an eagle feeding in our amphitheater, individual wildlife encounters with handlers for a close-up experience unlike any place else. Summer camp, public hours, speaker series, and other community events take advantage of the wildlife experience every day.



*Surgery at Liberty Wildlife on a Bald Eagle*

Adding also to the mission of Liberty Wildlife is our Research and Conservation arm, which works with corporations, agencies and the public to mitigate for negative impacts on wildlife. Our ultimate aim in this regard is to find solutions. A current study with SRP is taking place in our 180-foot flight cage where power equipment and a prototype power pole have been installed with cameras looking on, to help identify causes for electrocutions of large birds and to investigate the



*Dr. Orr checks an owl's eyes.*





interaction of smaller birds with power equipment. A solution to these issues could be a prototype used in many other areas to solve the problems of negative impact between power equipment and birds.

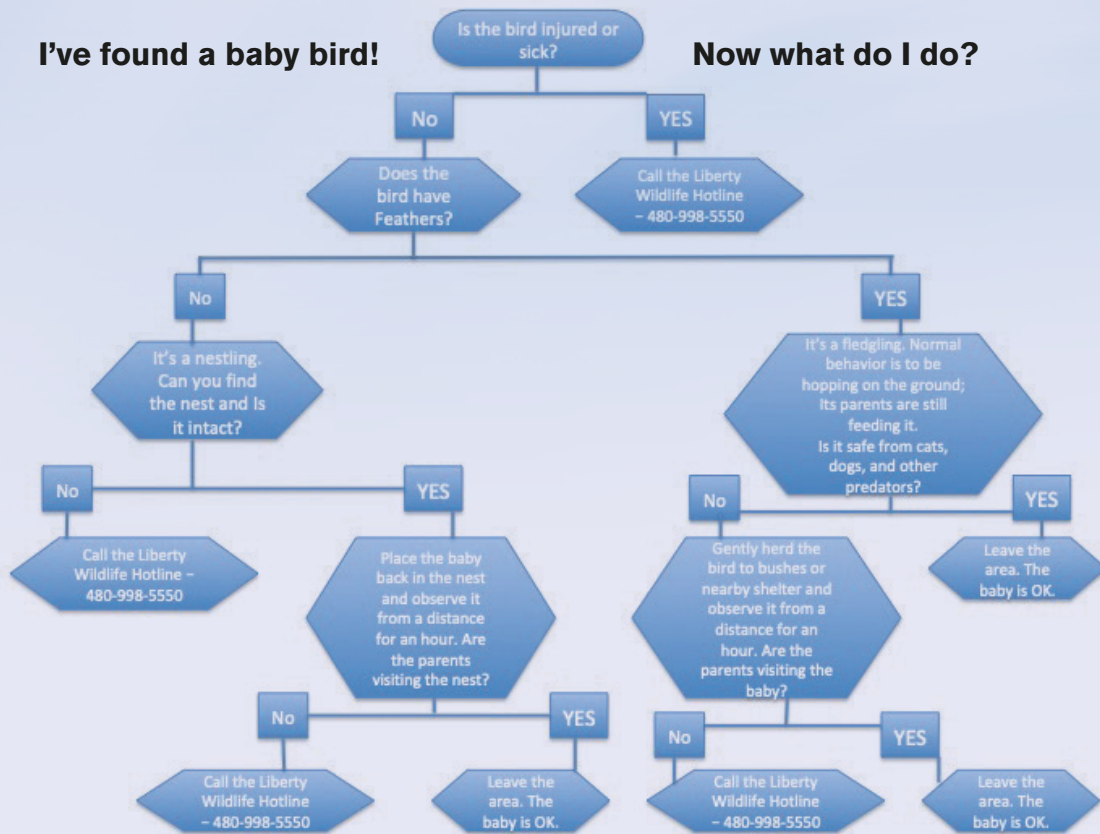
The newest addition to the Liberty Wildlife stable of offerings is our Non-Eagle Feather Repository. Since it was determined that migratory birds needed protection, the unintended consequence was that Native Americans no longer had a legal means to acquire feathers and bird parts used for religious and ceremonial purposes. The Native American culture greatly depends on their closeness to wildlife in their lives, and the inability to continue this practice has presented challenges to the continuance of cultural practices. Liberty Wildlife is one of two entities allowed to give legally recognized Native Americans access to feathers. Since the beginning of the program in 2012, we have sent out over 4000 orders to 178 tribes in 48 states making it a very successful national program.

From our humble beginning has sprung a life-changing offering. With that in mind, let's go back to the baby bird that you found. Just make a call to our hotline and help is on the way. The following schematic is a systematic attempt to help you determine what to do when you find an orphaned bird. If all else fails call 480-998-5550. 🐦

*Megan Mosby is the Executive Director for Liberty Wildlife.*

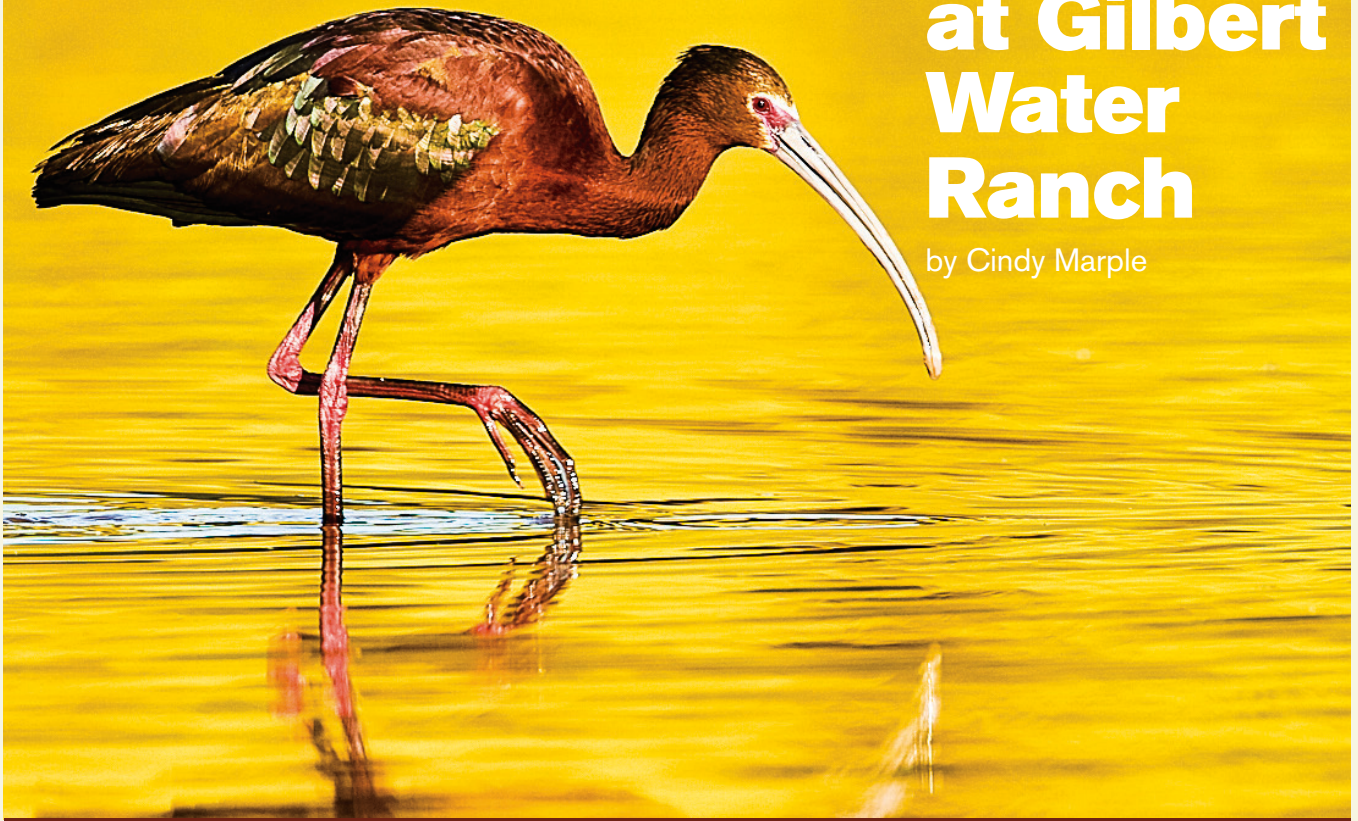
**I've found a baby bird!**

**Now what do I do?**



# A Year at Gilbert Water Ranch

by Cindy Marple



*White-faced Ibis*

**The Riparian Preserve at Gilbert Water Ranch is one of the premier birding sites in Maricopa County. I'm fortunate to live nearby, and have been birding and photographing at the preserve for some 15 years. While some months are "birdier" than others, every season brings something different to enjoy.**

Fall-Winter (Nov – mid March) highlights are waterfowl and raptors. Waterfowl acquire breeding plumage and are easier to identify. They are present in large numbers, with occasional Gadwall, Bufflehead, Redheads, and mergansers joining the flocks of pintail, shovelers, teal and Ring-necked Ducks. Northern Harriers, Red-tailed and Harris's Hawks, and an occasional Bald Eagle may be seen hunting over the ponds. Peregrine Falcons like to sit on the transmission towers

at the south end of the preserve; check the topmost bars. Wintering shorebirds congregate in shallow water. Look for the cryptic Wilson's Snipe along shorelines and in near-dry basins. Wintering songbirds include wrens, kinglets, various thrushes and several sparrow species. Occasionally, vagrants over-winter, probably the most famous of which was the Streak-backed Oriole in 2006-7 and 2007-8.



*Spring: Olive-sided Flycatcher, May*

Spring (Late March-May) is a peak time for species diversity. Some winter birds linger, summer residents return, and migrants pass through, particularly in late April. It's possible to log 70+ species in a single visit. Typical migrant families include flycatchers, warblers, orioles, tanagers, buntings, and shorebirds. Be sure to keep an eye to the sky for swifts, swallows, gulls and terns. Cliff Swallows build their mud nests under bridges on the

**Photos by Cindy Marple**

eastern canal. Courtship is in high gear as waterfowl pair up before leaving. Resident breeding Stilts and Avocets have some noisy and entertaining squabbles as they defend territories and mates.

Early Summer (June-mid July) is the quietest time of the year. It's the season of nesting with lots of fledglings and juvenile birds. These can be confusing to ID- particularly the juvenile Verdin! Look for Gila Woodpeckers, doves and Curve-billed Thrashers nesting in the Saguaros.

Little "walking fuzzballs"- precocial chicks of Killdeer, stilts, avocets, and quail, along with Mallard ducklings, can be found typically in basins that are near- dry or have shallow water. For the past few years, Least Bitterns have nested regularly in the reeds of the fishing pond.

Late Summer (Late July-Oct) sees the return of migrants on their southbound journeys, beginning with shorebirds in late July. Warblers are a bit more challenging now as most have their drabber fall plumage; some of the more uncommon species show up in October. This is the time to look for post-breeding dispersal vagrants, which in recent years have included Tricolored Heron, Dickcissel,



Early summer: Least Bittern fledgling, June

Painted Bunting and White-rumped Sandpiper. It's worth braving the hotter weather, just get out in the early morning when it's most active and most tolerable. Wintering waterfowl also return during this time, also wearing their drab nonbreeding plumage. If you want to hone your waterfowl ID skills, late Sept through Oct is the time to work on it here. 🦆

Cindy Marple is a birding enthusiast and photographer. See more at: <https://www.cindymarplephoto.com>



Late summer: Hermit Warbler, September



Fall/Winter: Cinnamon Teal male, February

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To receive updates and supplements to *The Cactus Wren•dition*, sign up for the monthly (September to May) e-newsletter. It includes meeting and field trip reminders, special events, and citizen science projects. To subscribe, contact [laurienessel@gmail.com](mailto:laurienessel@gmail.com)  
Note: We do not use the email list for anything other than the described purpose.





*This Green Heron was photographed on pond #1 at GWR in Sept 2016. There was a floating log that the herons and egrets were using to perch on and hunt from for a few days. Green Heron is a year-round breeding resident at GWR. Photo by Cindy Marple*

# Pete Moulton: A Tribute to a Legend March 1, 1949 – March 29, 2019

by Laurie Nessel

in memoriam



Pete Moulton. Photo by Laurie Nessel

MAS friend, naturalist and photographer, Pete Moulton, passed away unexpectedly last March.

Pete started birding while attending Colorado College. His brother Mike, visiting from university studies, identified a Brown Creeper Pete found. Pete said he was astonished that not only was there a name attached to this tiny nondescript bird, but that Mike knew it. Pete started a life-long fascination with birds and all creatures with which they share their environment. He frequently reminded everyone that “Birds don’t live in a vacuum.” During his life, he traveled widely in the US and Mexico, always thirsting for more knowledge. Past MAS secretary and program chair, Cindy West, recalled that he eschewed organized trips with professional guides, preferring the frisson of discovery to the vapidness of being told what he is seeing. Pete did his homework, bolstered by a photographic memory and brilliant mind.

Author and long-time species compiler Janet Witzeman recalls one morning in 2002, birding the old Tres Rios ponds when Pete called out a Black Saddlebags, and then other dragonflies and damselflies that she and Bob had completely overlooked. The stunning colors, patterns, and glittery wings were compelling. They were hooked. When Bob began photographing these beauties, Pete patiently responded to each request for identification.



Anna's Hummingbird in a potted plant sale at Boyce Thompson Arboretum

ASU professor Pierre Deviche tells a similar story. He and Pete were catching up on their latest birding adventures after a chance encounter at Gilbert Water Ranch in 2005 when Pete suddenly stopped in his track: *Look, there is a Mexican Amberwing!* While Pete was sneaking up on the mystery creature, all Pierre could do was follow in his steps and peek over his shoulder, trying to figure out what he was after and hoping to get a glance at it. Sure enough, there was an amberwing, posing at eye level at the tip of a thin twig. Pete did it over again: *Do you see the Blue Dasher over there?* A double slip of the tongue: did he really mean Blue-Gray Gnatcatcher but it came out as Blue Thrasher? Nope. A Blue



Ferruginous Hawk

Dasher it was! Pierre had until then never paid attention to dragonflies but his curiosity and interest were piqued.

That very same day, Pierre purchased an early edition identification book and proceeded to learn as much as he could about these fascinating insects. Field trips would never be the same, all thanks to Pete. Pierre recalls many encounters with Pete that “turned into lengthy conversations about wildlife – mostly birds and insects – in particular aspects of their taxonomy and evolution, two topics that were close to Pete’s heart. I almost always walked away from these conversations humbled and in awe of Pete’s knowledge and insights into so many interesting questions. Pete genuinely enjoyed sharing his boundless knowledge of nature with others and he was exceptionally generous with his time. These are among the qualities that make a great mentor and a friend whom one truly misses after he is gone.”

Cindy Marple, nature photographer and frequent MAS program speaker, always enjoyed running into Pete in the field. She will forever refer to those annoying twigs that get in front of the birds she’s photographing as “Evil Stick People,” a term she learned from Pete. She will think of him every New Year, as Pete used his first bird photo of the year for his social media avatar. Cindy remembers him as “generous with his knowledge



Male juvenile Rufous Hummingbird at Ash Canyon

about birds and dragonflies and fun to be around, and he is greatly missed."

Past MAS program chair and longtime friend of Pete, Cynthia Donald, shared another of Pete's gems, "Be good and if you can't be good, be careful." Paul Wolterbeek, former information specialist and volunteer coordinator at Boyce Thompson Arboretum recalls that Pete and Cynthia volunteered as bird walk guides at the state park from 2000 through 2018. They guided hundreds of guests over the years and Pete also guided dragonfly walks, teaching how to differentiate a Flame Skimmer from a Red Rock Skimmer.

Author, blogger and nature photographer Jim Burns wrote that "Pete Moulton's name is next to 'wealth of information' in the book of phrases. He turned me on to dragonflies when I hadn't even looked at one since high school biology class, and he led me by the hand, figuratively, for the first couple years of my infatuation with photographing them. In the outpouring of memories about Pete from his many friends and acquaintances, one word kept popping up: helpful. Amen."

Nature photographer Bernie Howe wrote that it's not often that someone touches so many lives. "Pete was admired by so many people from everywhere."

Janet and I were honored to have Pete join us on our monthly MAS dragonfly walks at Papago Park last summer, where he regaled us with tidbits from his readings and eminent



Immature Pied-billed Grebe

naturalists he encountered. He had a wicked memory and sly sense of humor. He would deadpan deliver some quirky statement, then wait for a reaction with grinning eyes and a smirk. Jack Sheldon wrote that Pete was so genuine, he touched so many of us. Jack will remember Pete's welcoming, boisterous greetings, delivered with a smile, and a great conversation would always follow.

Pete was a charter member of MAS' Big Sit! fundraiser, started by Herb Fibel in October 1996. It's no joke that on April 1st, 2003, Pete gave what is arguably the first program anywhere in the Phoenix area about dragonflies. His breadth and depth of knowledge and his enthusiasm was contagious. It can be said without hyperbole that Pete was the father of the odonata movement in Phoenix.

Pete's photos were featured in Kathy Biggs' seminal 2004



White-eared Hummingbird in Phoenix (Record)

field guide *Common Dragonflies of the Southwest, Arizona Highways, AZFO, and Arizonensis.org* (Michael Plagens' Arizona Naturalist website). He even was a guest photographer for Today's Mystery Bird on the GrrlScientist feature in The Guardian. His entries were selected for various photography contests. Janet noted that Pete's bird photos are not only beautiful, but captured the unique behavior and "personality" of a species. Plagens wrote "An artist gives us an opportunity to see the world as he or she sees the world. Pete gave us a most beautiful and unique view which all of us who knew him and/or his work will continue to appreciate. I was waiting for a huge folio of his photos to be published so I could share them again. Could it still happen?"

Pete shared his bird images on the Facebook group *Birding-Arizona and the Southwest* (click "members" and "Pete Moulton") along with didactic quizzes and pithy, often witty captions, such as calling a Black-bellied Whistling-Duck "Not a real duck, but an honorary one." A wealth of material to amuse and instruct remains on his homepage ([facebook.com/pete.moulton.9](https://facebook.com/pete.moulton.9)), and at [ipernity.com/doc/291507/photos](https://ipernity.com/doc/291507/photos).

Rest in Peace, Pete. You will be remembered. 🐦

# Remembering Mary Jo Ballator

in memoriam



Mary Jo Ballator. Photo by Laurie Nessel

**Many of Pete's photos were taken at Ash Canyon Bird Sanctuary, hosted by Mary Jo Ballator. On April 5th, Mary Jo wrote "Pete's immense knowledge and generosity will be missed by very many folks. Not to mention his fabulous photography... – feeling sad." Mary Jo passed away May 25, 2019, aged 74, at a hospice in Tucson surrounded by her family. The Ash Canyon Bed and Breakfast she created was later renamed The Ash Canyon Bird Sanctuary.**

Tony Battiste, a friend, wrote, "Mary Jo was loved and cherished and was knowledgeable of everything to do with the natural world. She was a master gardener, enthusiastic bird watcher, protector of everything living: creepy crawlers, insects, reptiles and mammals. She created a garden especially for the birds, but the banquet that she served daily drew every other kind of living thing, raccoons, ring-tailed cats, fox, javelina, deer and pesky Black Bears that often destroyed her feeders. Mary Jo could easily have ended their behavior by calling in Game and Fish to have the bears removed, but that was not in her nature. She knew that the end of her nuisance would also mean the end of the bears' existence and that would be contrary to all she believed in. If she couldn't kill a spider, she surely could not live with the thought of being responsible for the death of a bear."

The appearance of a Plain-capped Starthroat in 2003 placed her garden on the birding map. She opened it up to the public from dawn to dusk, even after she had to give up operating her Bed and Breakfast. Birders seeking to add the Montezuma Quail to their life lists invariably found what they were looking for in Mary Jo's garden.

The sanctuary is now the Mary Jo Ballator Bird Sanctuary, and is in need of volunteers who can maintain the feeders and act as docents to assist visiting birders. A memorial is tentatively planned for September.

From the Southeastern Arizona Bird Observatory comes this information about how birders can help:

"At <https://bit.ly/RememberingMJB> you can leave a message for the family and/or others and a remembrance of Mary Jo. You can also leave an e-mail address to be notified when donations are being accepted for a new non-profit being established to maintain the sanctuary and keep Mary Jo's legacy alive. We are hoping to raise enough funds to pay outstanding expenses and create a fund to help with site-host, maintenance and other on-going expenses." 🐦

## Grocery shopping?

Support Maricopa Audubon when you shop at Fry's Food Stores.

MAS is part of Fry's Community Rewards Program. Register your Fry's VIP card and select Maricopa Audubon #89166 as your non-profit organization at no cost to you. Go to <https://www.frysfood.com/topic/new-community-rewards-program>

## Help MAS with an Employer Matching Gift

Many Maricopa Audubon members aren't aware that their employers may include a matching gift program in their benefits package. Programs vary from business to business, but they generally offer a dollar-for-dollar match when an employee makes a personal gift to a nonprofit organization like Maricopa Audubon Society.

Please visit your human resources department or charitable giving department to see if this opportunity is available to you. You usually have to fill out and submit a form, which is sometimes done online. If you have already made a donation to MAS in the past year, you may be able to get a matching gift after the fact from your employer for up to 12 months later. 🐦



# Putting the Pieces Together

by David Chorlton

**Do you check your email regularly? Or does your email tend to attack you with too many messages to make sense of? Rather than an age of “Fake News” we are in one of an abundance of facts, projections, observations, and occasionally a note of seemingly minor importance that resonates with us as birders. Here are some picks from what made its way, by one route or another, to my computer screen in the early summer:**

From the Friends of Cave Creek Canyon, for instance, comes this: This has certainly been the year of the Elegant Trogon. As Dave Jasper says, “it’s the best year in at least 10 years”. Dave should know as he has been the foremost bird guide in Portal for the last 25 years. Later in the update is news that eighteen of the birds were found in the June count in the Chiricahua Mountains.

Another good news note, made available from KNAU: The Peregrine Fund says one of its biologists confirmed the nestling last week at Vermilion Cliffs National Monument. It’s the first hatching of a California Condor in the wild during the current breeding season. *The Peregrine Fund says the condor likely is two months old. California Condors are making a comeback in the wild three decades after they were on the brink of extinction. The first birds raised in captivity were released at Vermilion Cliffs near the Arizona-Utah line in 1996.*

Not so good news was the Woodbury Fire, which broke out in June. In a brief exchange with the Southwest Fire Science Consortium at Northern Arizona University, I received this: *The Woodbury Fire will have both negative effects (low desert- saguaro habitat) and positive effects (mid desert- mesquite and other shrubs).* If you participate in the Superior Christmas Bird Count this year, some of its area will be affected.

The Rewilding Institute featured an article on wildlife corridors, stressing the importance of preserving migration routes: *In the twentieth century, conservation efforts focused on protecting important wildlife strongholds like national parks and wildlife refuges. However, a growing body of science has recently helped elucidate the importance of daily and seasonal migration routes that can span hundreds of miles with little respect for political boundaries. Over the last decade, the U.S. Forest Service designated the first wildlife corridor in Wyoming, the Western Governors Association launched an initiative designed to further understand and protect connectivity, the Department of the Interior issued a Secretarial Order encouraging western states to increase research efforts, and congressional leaders introduced legislation to identify and designate wildlife corridors throughout the country.*

Here is a small domestic item worth knowing about. In anticipation of having palm trees trimmed, as requested by the HOA, some research led to this on the website of The Reeves



*This, by the way, is Maxi who oversees editorial work on the Wren•dition. Outdoors, meanwhile, the local lovebird flock includes some interesting color variations.*

Law Group in southern California: The federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 makes it illegal to destroy or disturb nests with birds or eggs in them. This means if you find a nest that is active, unless you get a permit to do so (not so easy), you legally have to wait the four to six weeks in which it usually takes young birds to fledge before you can remove the nest. On top of that, states can have their own regulations, too. . . which suggests that careful observations are in order during yard work, and perhaps making HOAs aware of possible conflicts with early trimming deadlines. Consult the Migratory Bird Treaty Act site, where there is a link to a detailed list of protected birds: <https://www.law.cornell.edu/cfr/text/50/10.13>

From a new book: the Peterson Reference Guide to Sparrows of North America (by Rick Wright, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt), comes the claim that instead of Abert’s Towhee we should use Abert Towhee, and so on through all those bird names that use a name with the possessive. Mr. Wright says: “There is considerable reason to abandon the false possessive in English names, which otherwise forces us into such barbarous constructions as ‘the Baird’s Sparrow’ and potentially confuses the species name with circumstances of actual ownership, such that it can be impossible to know whether a given specimen is an example of *Centronyx bairdii* or a sparrow that happens at one time to have belonged to Spencer Baird.” Whether this brings controversy, the book is well worth looking at.

Finally, on the subject of communicating important ideas, this news item about Sir David Attenborough previewing a new BBC series at the big Glastonbury rock event:

*The 93-year-old’s distinctive voice can be heard saying: “Planet Earth has seven extraordinary continents, each one unique, each one full of life. This is the story of those seven worlds. We will see how life developed on each continent and so gave rise to the extraordinary and wonderful diversity we know today and we will see why this precious diversity is being lost”. Sir David told the audience they had been listening to the sounds of ocean creatures featured on Blue Planet II. “There was one sequence in Blue Planet II which everyone seems to remember. It is one in which we showed what plastic has done to the creatures that live in the ocean. It had an extraordinary effect and now this great festival has gone plastic-free.” He said this had saved more than one million plastic bottles of water from being drunk.*

Some years ago, in the course of a telephone conversation I had with Herb Fibel, he suddenly veered off topic and began a lengthy complaint about water bottles. Herb saw the nature of the problem, so does David Attenborough. 🐦



# Artist's Eye On Nature: Gillian Rice



**Serving as editor of *The Cactus Wren•dition* from Summer 2013 to Summer 2019 was a joy. I learned about the natural world and worked with interesting and talented people. When I wanted to devote more time to my family, David Chorlton agreed to volunteer as your new editor. I am honored that he asked me to share my art with you.**

In 2003, I started botanical art classes and in 2010, achieved the Desert Botanical Garden's Certificate in Botanical Art and Illustration. Because I hadn't held a paintbrush since age 13, learning to paint was an exciting journey. To be regarded as botanical art, a work must demonstrate the artist's technical skill in portraying a plant with scientific accuracy as well as aesthetic appeal.

I focus on plants of arid lands. A cactus grows slowly and never wilts: the perfect painting specimen! My favorite subjects are the plants in my garden. Having live specimens also helps me to capture a plant's character. But when I place wildflowers in a jar of water, they move in surprising ways. I must draw quickly – not a simple task when I measure every stem, every petal, and every other part. Photographs assist.

My preferred medium is watercolor and preferred substrate, vellum. Used for centuries, vellum connects me to botanical artists of long ago. I prefer deer vellum, from a deer that has lived its life in the woodland's fresh air before it was hunted for meat. The vellum's color provides an appealing background for a plant. Vellum gives a painting a special luminous quality and is perfect for my drybrush, stippling technique. I build up layers and layers of paint in different colors and rarely mix and test "just the right color" before applying it to the vellum. Experimenting with color

on my actual painting is risky but can result in distinctive effects. I use a limited palette of six colors or fewer, which I put on a white china plate.

Under a large magnifying glass, I paint many tiny dots and strokes. For a plant with large leaves this is time-consuming, but meditative. My technique is perfect for painting around cactus spines and working on details.

I have completed scientific illustrations in pen and ink for The University of Arizona Desert Legumes Program. My work also appears in *The Sonoran Desert Florilegium*. I am Secretary for the American Society of Botanical Artists (ASBA) Board of Directors and a contributor to ASBA's journal, *The Botanical Artist*. 🐦

Learn more about botanical art at <https://www.asba-art.org>  
Contact: [gillian55@me.com](mailto:gillian55@me.com)



**Desert Bluebells, *Phacelia campanularia*, 10 x 8 in, watercolor on vellum ©2016**

My front yard fills with wildflowers each spring. Everyone does not appreciate these beautiful flowers that attract native bees and other insects. My neighbor and I sowed our first wildflower seeds years ago only to be dismayed by letters from the City of Phoenix saying someone had filed a complaint about our "weeds." My scientist neighbor soon convinced the City of Phoenix representative that native wildflowers are not weeds and are beneficial for the environment. Our wildflowers won a reprieve. Many other neighbors now let wildflowers flourish.



**Mexican Hat, *Ratibida columnaris* var. *pulcherrima*, 8 x 8 in, watercolor on vellum, ©2018**

A small patch of Mexican Hat appears each year in my backyard to dance in the breeze. Most have yellow petals, but my favorites are those with rusty red ones.



**Bitter Aloe, *Aloe ferox*, 15 x 11 in, watercolor on paper, ©2018**

This aloe, indigenous to southern Africa, is happy near my front door and I love its blooms. The markings on the insides of the leaves left by the imprints of the toothed edges of other leaves fascinate me. This painting was selected by a jury to appear on the Join/Renew Membership page of ASBA.



**Paper Spine Cactus, *Tephrocactus articulatus* var. *papyracanthus*, 16 x 11 in, watercolor on paper, ©2013**

This cactus from Argentina is a free spirit that expands into an unruly clump. It drops cone-shaped segments that sometimes struggle into new plants. This painting was selected for ASBA's 17th Annual International exhibition at The Horticultural Society of New York, 2014.



## ARE YOU A FRIEND?

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# Connecting with nature makes Arizona a fun and better place to live!

Compiled by Vicki Hixie  
Photos by Vicki Hixie



## It's a Dirty Job! The Value of Vultures

**Did you know** Vultures perform a dirty job, but somebody's gotta do it? Our world would be very unsanitary and foul-smelling without them. They are nature's sanitation crew and they are very important to the ecosystem. Scientists study vultures to monitor the health of the environment, because vultures are considered "indicator species", or a barometer to assess how both human and natural occurring activities are impacting the area. <sup>1</sup>



*Turkey vulture*



*Black vulture*

**Did you know** Vultures have a corrosive stomach acid which allows them to eat dead animals without getting sick? If you ate rotten meat, you would probably get sick, but vultures don't because their stomach acids have a pH of almost zero and they can actually stop the spread of disease such as botulism, anthrax, cholera, salmonella and even rabies by feeding on rotting corpses! <sup>2</sup>

**Did you know** All vultures have bald heads so when they feed on carrion, bacteria and other parasites cannot burrow into their feathers and cause infections? Vultures have sharp, hooked beaks for ripping apart remains of dead animals, but because they have weak feet and legs they do not carry food back to their nest. Instead they gorge at the carcass and regurgitate food from their crop to feed their young. Sometimes they eat so much they are unable to fly and must regurgitate to lighten their load before they take off.

**Did you know** Vultures have wide wingspans, which let them soar for long periods of time while they look for something to eat? If they hit a thermal, or warm pocket of air, they can soar for hours without flapping their wings! A myth is that vultures circle in the sky, waiting for animals to die. This is false as they cannot sense when an animal is dying. They locate a carcass usually by their keen sense of smell, sight, or the sight of other predators feeding. Vultures lack a syrinx so they can only hiss, growl or snarl.

**Did you know** There are 23 species of vultures which are divided into two groups? New World vultures are from North America, and Central & South America; Old World vultures live in Africa, Asia, and Europe. New World vultures include: California Condors, Andean Condors, Turkey Vultures, and Black Vultures. The common name vulture comes from the Latin *vultur* meaning "tearer". A group of vultures has many names depending on what they are doing: A large group can be referred to as a "venue" or "committee"; when a group is in flight it is called a "kettle"; and a group feeding on a carcass is called a "wake". You can find both Turkey and Black Vultures in Arizona's Sonoran Desert!

**Did you know** Turkey Vultures are just over two feet tall (27 inches), have a wingspan of about 5 1/2 feet, have a dark-brown body, a red bald head, pink legs and feet and longer tails than Black Vultures. The Black Vultures are outnumbered in the United States by their relative the Turkey Vulture. They are also slightly smaller with a wingspan of about 5 feet, and their tails are short and rounded. Black Vultures have no sense of smell, rely on their eyesight and often follow Turkey Vultures to get their next meal. Both of these vultures use the technique "urohydrolysis", urinating on their legs to keep cool in hot temperatures and as a means to disinfect their legs of bacteria after feeding on a carcass. <sup>3</sup>

- 1 <https://www.desertmuseum.org/vultures>
- 2 [https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/black\\_vulture/lifehistory](https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/black_vulture/lifehistory)
- 3 <https://www.discoverwildlife.com/animal-facts/birds/facts-about-vultures>

### EXTRA

**Did you know** Vultures have their own holiday? The International Vulture Awareness Day was first observed in 2006 and is celebrated on the first Saturday in September.

Many zoos and nature preserves have fun and informational activities that day to help everyone learn how valuable vultures are. In the fall, flocks of Turkey Vultures can be observed perched on cliffs waiting to depart at the Boyce Thompson Arboretum in Superior, Arizona.

*Vicki is an accountant and nature enthusiast*

## Green Scene True or False?

- T F 1. Vultures sometimes eat so much they cannot fly afterwards.  
 T F 2. There are 38 species of vultures in the world.  
 T F 3. A group of vultures feeding is called a wake.  
 T F 4. Black Vultures cannot smell and rely on their eyesight to find a carcass.  
 T F 5. Vultures sometimes get food poisoning when eating decaying meat.

## Guess this Bird!

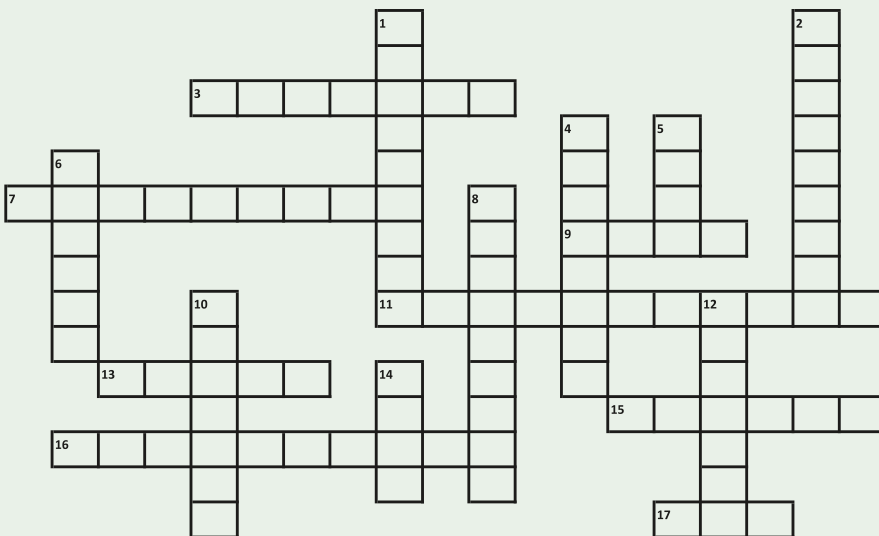
**CLUE:** This New World Vulture is critically endangered. They only produce 1 egg every 1-2 years. Their crop can hold 3 pounds of food, so they may only eat every 2-3 days!



Photo by Matt vanWallene

## It's a Dirty Job! The Value of Vultures

Answers on page 22



### Across

- 3 Both Turkey and Black vultures are found in Arizona's \_\_\_\_\_ Desert.  
 7 A group of vultures gathered on the ground.  
 9 A group of vultures feeding on carrion.  
 11 Vultures \_\_\_\_\_ food to feed their young.  
 13 Black vultures have no sense of \_\_\_\_\_.  
 15 The lower larynx or voice box in a bird.  
 16 Vultures are nature's \_\_\_\_\_ crew.  
 17 Sometimes vultures eat so much they are unable to \_\_\_\_.

### Down

- 1 Scientists consider vultures indicator species, or a \_\_\_\_\_ to assess how human activities are impacting the environment.  
 2 Urohydrosis is a means vultures use to \_\_\_\_\_ their legs of bacteria after feeding.  
 4 Turkey vultures, Black vultures, and California Condors are \_\_\_\_\_ vultures.  
 5 Turkey vultures have \_\_\_\_\_ colored legs and feet.  
 6 Vulture beaks are sharp and \_\_\_\_\_.  
 8 Vultures have wide \_\_\_\_\_ which allow them to soar for long periods of time.  
 10 There are 23 \_\_\_\_\_ of vultures in the world.  
 12 A warm pocket of air that vultures use to soar.  
 14 Vultures have a corrosive stomach \_\_\_\_\_ that keeps them from getting sick.

**CHECK OUT OUR NEW WEBSITE AT:** [www.maricopaaudubon.org](http://www.maricopaaudubon.org) where you can:

- Become a member of the Friends of MAS or renew your Friends membership
- Donate to MAS conservation projects
- Subscribe to the e-newsletter
- View and download past issues of *The Cactus Wren•dition*
- View the calendar of events (field trips, workshops, programs)
- Email MAS officers and committee chairpersons



## Green Scene Puzzle Answers

### Answer to Guess this Bird

California Condors are critically endangered; the species is on the 2016 State of North America's Birds' Watch List, which includes bird species that are most at risk of extinction without significant conservation actions to reverse declines and reduce threats. As of 2013, there were more than 230 individuals in the wild in California, Arizona, and Baja California. According to Partners in Flight, about 95% live in the U.S., and 5% in Mexico. Condor recovery has been slow because of their slow reproductive rate: females produce only 1 egg every 1–2 years and do not achieve sexual maturity until age 6–8 years. In 2010 the Peregrine Fund reported that 72 percent of condors tested in the Vermilion Cliffs, Arizona, showed lead in the blood, and 34 condors had to be treated. The only route to self-sustaining wild populations will be by solving the lead-poisoning problem. Promising first steps have been taken, including a 2008 ban on lead ammunition used for hunting in the condor's California range, and an innovative voluntary program in Arizona.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/California\\_Condor/lifehistory](https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/California_Condor/lifehistory)

### Answer to True or False?

1. TRUE
2. FALSE
3. TRUE
4. TRUE
5. FALSE

### Answer to the It's a Dirty Job! Value of Vultures! Crossword Puzzle

#### Across

- 3 Sonoran
- 7 Committee
- 9 Wake
- 11 Regurgitate
- 13 Smell
- 15 Syrinx
- 16 Sanitation
- 17 Fly

#### Down

- 1 Barometer
- 2 Disinfect
- 4 Newworld
- 5 Pink
- 6 Hooked
- 8 Wingspans
- 10 Species
- 12 Thermal
- 14 Acid

## Early Roost

Poem by David Chorlton

The vulture is a peaceful bird  
who rises every day  
to a height from which  
the ground's a dizzy plane  
tilting with the weight of light  
and yellow wildflowers  
and dotted with a carcass here  
and there. He rides the thermals,

balances on heat,  
and hangs out of gravity's reach  
until the kettle reassembles  
for the evening descent;  
except today

when darkness sweeps all  
before it now the mountains  
have dissolved into clouds  
that swell and flash. Thunder  
rumbles out of Mexico.

Willows tug at the riverbanks,  
grasses strain at the edges  
of paths beside them

and the paths begin pulling free  
of the earth, as the vultures  
come down at noon  
where they spend every night  
holding to a bare limb,  
ready for whatever comes  
to roll from their black mantles.

# TWO

by Rick Clarke



*Focal length was 150mm, 1/2000sec, F5.6, ISO 800, Sony RX 10. Rick says he heard a loud screeching in the back yard, grabbed his camera, and saw this immature Cooper's Hawk with a Gila Woodpecker.*



*I was at Papago Park with Justin Jones, and we came across this Pied-billed Grebe floating nest. The mother has her baby on her back. I had never seen a Grebe nest before.*



# Maricopa Audubon Society

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## Monthly Meeting

Please see meeting information on page two. Contact a board member if you have questions, or check out our website at [www.maricopaaudubon.org](http://www.maricopaaudubon.org)

## Membership Information and How to Receive *The Cactus Wren*•dition

Two distinct memberships exist: membership of the National Audubon Society (NAS) and membership of the Friends of Maricopa Audubon Society (MAS).

To become a member of the NAS please go to:  
[www.audubon.org/audubon-near-you](http://www.audubon.org/audubon-near-you)

We send *The Cactus Wren*•dition to all current members of NAS if you are assigned to or choose MAS as your local chapter. NAS provides MAS \$3.00 per year for each member assigned to us.

To become a Friend of MAS, please pick up a form at the book sales table at our monthly meeting or visit our website, <http://maricopaaudubon.org>

For specific questions please contact our Membership Chair.

## Submissions

Copy for *The Cactus Wren*•dition must be received by the editor by email by January 15, April 1, July 1, and October 1. Articles not received by the deadlines may not appear in the upcoming issue. Some issues may feature a specific focus, so please feel free to enquire and take the theme into account. Email to: *The Cactus Wren*•dition Editor, David Chorlton: [chorltondavid3@gmail.com](mailto:chorltondavid3@gmail.com)

## Opinions

The opinions expressed by authors in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect the policy of the National Audubon Society or the Maricopa Audubon Society.

## Reprinting of material

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