



the Cactus Wren·dition



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SPRING – 2021



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by Veronica Cook

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Mark W. Larson

If you have heard the word “unprecedented” more frequently than usual lately, you are not alone: as in an unprecedented election, an unprecedented pandemic, an unprecedented inauguration, etc. When will it end and when can we get back to normal and hold our meetings in person?

It is frustrating for all of us, but we must persist as nature will persist. As an organization, we need to press forward into the future, with our belief that connecting to the natural world around us is not only worthwhile, but essential to the human spirit. That is part of our mission in Audubon—to help more people connect to and care about birds and the natural world. All of us need to become evangelists for nature!

Without alienating anyone, please encourage anyone you know, anyone you meet who shows an interest in nature to become a member of Maricopa Audubon. Many people in the public think that Audubon, if they have even heard of Audubon, is all about and only about birds. But you should know that the Maricopa Audubon Society is about birds, habitat—especially riparian habitat—and all other components of the natural world. That is why we have been in court frequently over our history to conserve and protect special places for future Arizonans.

There is a place in the west Valley called the “Thrasher Spot.” Located at the Salome Highway and Baseline Road, this piece of Sonoran Desert is known as where, at the right time of the year, a person might find all the species of thrasher that can be found in Arizona: Curve-billed, Bendire’s, Crissal, Sage, and the enigmatic LeConte’s. For years, serious birders from around the country have sought out these species at the Thrasher Spot. But now, that undeveloped piece of lower Sonoran Desert is under threat from a solar energy farm.

We have now engaged a team of environmental scientists to survey the thrashers in the Thrasher Spot. The county’s planning and zoning department will be holding hearings about rezoning this parcel and we hope to have the results of this carefully done survey to present to the decision-makers. With luck, the study’s results will show the environmental importance of this site, not just to birders but to the birds, and the decision will be made to deny the company’s application to place the facility at the famed Thrasher Spot. Surely there must be other sites in the desert with just as much sunshine as this famed location! 🐦

Mark W. Larson
President

Open Board Position: Publicity

The Maricopa Audubon Society is seeking a member to fill the role of Chairman/ Chairwoman of the Publicity Committee. The Publicity Committee writes press releases and communicates with the media. If you have experience with these tasks please contact any Board member to express your interest in serving. One would not necessarily need to be a year ‘round resident of the Phoenix area to serve effectively in this role. Contact any Board Member if you might be interested in filling this role in Maricopa Audubon.

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



David Chorlton

“Were it not for the way you taught me to look at the world, to see the life at play in everything, I would have to be lonely forever.”

– *Ted Kooser*

First, my thanks for the help in putting this issue together. My thoughts are directed, sadly, by my wife Roberta's passing in December, and the occasion leads me to take stock of her values and how they relate to what we stand for at Maricopa Audubon Society.

As a musician and lover of the arts, Roberta's aesthetic sense led to a natural affection for birds. We took the greatest pleasure (and I still do!) in watching the backyard traffic, and even when a new yard bird wasn't one to set the rare sightings alerts off, it was a thrill for us. The latest was a Ladder-backed Woodpecker who found the suet we put out. A walk to the pond drew interest in whatever water birds were present and so on throughout our waking lives. She loved trips to Costa Rica and the Chiricahua Mountains, as well as to Madera Canyon.

Had she been given the chance to say anything about birds and birding, it would have been to emphasize the everyday beauty in what surrounds us. She was politically active and knew that we have to be engaged to protect what we value. She was an organ donor, and I learned that her corneas will give sight to the recipient. I hope he or she comes to enjoy seeing the birds as much as she did.

I am constantly reminded of the joy sharing the planet with birds brings, and want to convey that fact here in the spirit Roberta would have encouraged. And she would have begged for vigilance and action now we have a chance to act for new and better policies affecting wildlife. 🐦

David Chorlton
Editor

amazon smile

Maricopa Audubon Society is now registered on Amazon as a charitable organization. Go to the 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!

Committees/Support

Arizona Audubon Council Rep
Position Open

Bookstore
Sochetra Ly
503 860-0370

Poet Laureate
David Chorlton
480 705-3227

Maricopa Audubon Website
<http://www.maricopaaudubon.org>
Be sure to check it. You never know what you'll find!

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

Sitting Bull

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.

Sign up for the e-newsletter!



To receive updates and supplements to *The Cactus Wren•dition*, sign up for the monthly (September to May) e-newsletter. No membership required. It includes meeting and field trip reminders, special events, and citizen science projects.

To subscribe, email: laurienessel@gmail.com

Note: We do not use the email list for anything other than the described purpose.

Meetings...

All member meetings are by Zoom until further notice. Please visit our webpage or subscribe to our eNews (lauriennessel@gmail.com) for the Zoom link. Meetings begin at 7:30 pm.



Pied Tamarin by Micah Riegner

TUESDAY, MARCH 2, 2020

Primates of the Amazon: Diversity, Ecology, Biogeography with Micah Riegner

The Amazon Basin, with its myriad rivers, sustains the highest biodiversity of any region in the world, a diversity that is reflected in its primates. For the past eight years, Micah has been leading trips in Amazonian Brazil where he has become increasingly fascinated by these primates. Join him as he delves into the taxonomy, ecology and biogeography of the Marmosets, Tamarins, Uakaris, Sakis, Howlers, Capuchins, Woolly Monkeys and Spider Monkeys that call the Amazon home. He will share stories, photos and videos of these odd, rare and dazzling creatures.

Micah Riegner, a native of Prescott, grew up birding throughout Arizona. He studied at Prescott College and, while he was working on his master's degree studying woodcreepers in Brazil, he began leading tours for Field Guides. He has since led numerous tours throughout



Great Gray Owls by Paul Bannick

Arizona and Latin America, mostly in Brazil, Suriname, Bolivia, and Mexico. When he's not in the field, he stays busy painting birds and making videos for Outbirthing with Field Guides, a video channel about birding and conservation.

TUESDAY, APRIL 6, 2020

Great Gray Owls with Paul Bannick

This evening brings a rare and intimate look into the life history of one of the world's most charismatic birds. Learn the morphology, habitats, breeding cycle, hunting strategies, and related issues through photos of behaviors rarely, if ever, captured before. Bannick also covers the threats to this species in an effort to inspire conservation and education.

Paul Bannick is the award-winning author and photographer of two best-selling bird books: Owl: A Year in the Lives of North American Owls (Braided River 2016) and The Owl and The Woodpecker, Encounters with North America's Most Iconic Birds (Mountaineers Books 2008). In 2020 he released two new books: Snowy Owl: A Visual Natural History and Great Gray Owl: A Visual Natural History. Paul's photography has won awards in several prestigious contests, including those hosted by Audubon Magazine and the International Conservation

Photography Awards. His photographs can be found in bird guides including Audubon, Peterson, and The Smithsonian and have been featured in a variety of publications including The New York Times, Audubon, Sunset, Nature's Best Photography Magazine, and National Geographic online. He has appeared on TV and Radio including NBC Nightly News, PBS, NPR and regional stations. Bannick presents dozens of owl and woodpecker programs at bird festivals, fundraisers and conferences across the continent. He is the Director of Major Gifts for Conservation Northwest, a Seattle-based non-profit dedicated to protecting, connecting and restoring wildlands and wildlife from the coast of Washington to the Rockies of British Columbia.

Be Social! 

Find MAS on Facebook

[facebook.com/](https://facebook.com/MaricopaAudubonSociety)

[MaricopaAudubonSociety](https://facebook.com/MaricopaAudubonSociety)

Field Trips

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 2021

Higley and Ocotillo Rds. Ponds

Meet leader Larry Langstaff at 7:30 am for a two hour survey. This location has great views of a variety of wintering shorebirds and ducks, along with raptors, and passerines on a flat walking route. If you have never seen a snipe, this is your chance(really!). Scopes are a good addition to your binoculars. This is an eBird hotspot that has produced 216 different species over the years.

WHO: Open only to Maricopa Audubon Society members. You may join MAS any time before the trip on our website.

WHERE: Enter north of Ocotillo, east side of Higley.

WHY: To enjoy birding with others while safely following CDC and state coronavirus guidelines.

HOW: Registration is required. Limit: five plus the leader. To register, email: larrylangstaff1@gmail.com. 480 710-0431

When you register, please include your phone number in case the field trip needs to be cancelled or for any post-trip messages such as contact tracing.

On the day of the field trip participants must:

- A. Show up on time
- B. Sign the liability waiver
- C. Provide a current email address
- D. Carpool only with members of your own household
- E. Wear your mask
- F. Stay 6 feet from others when possible

Bring binoculars, a field guide, hat, water, snacks, and personal hand sanitizer.

FRIDAY, MARCH 5, 2021

South Mountain Park—Pima Canyon Trail

Meet leader, Larry Langstaff, at 6:30 am, by his green Ford pickup, at the trailhead, for this two to three hour survey. We will walk up a sandy wash, with some rock-stepping when gaining elevation, aiming for the elephant trees southwest of the CCC structures. Round trip will be close to three miles, but could be shortened. Spring migration should be about a month away, but wintering sparrows, a Hermit Thrush, and maybe an oriole will show up. Hummingbirds of two species that nest in the wash will be available for study. Gilded Flicker, Loggerhead Shrike and

towhees are probable. This site has 145 species on its eBird hotspot list. Hopefully the winter rains will have produced some annual growth to feed the insects and animals. Difficulty is a 2, and no scope is needed! Good tread on shoes is helpful!

WHO: Open only to Maricopa Audubon Society members. You may join MAS any time before the trip.

WHERE: Pima Canyon Trailhead, west of 48th St and Guadalupe

WHY: To enjoy birding with others while safely following CDC and state coronavirus guidelines

HOW: Registration is required. Limit: five plus the leader. To register, email: larrylangstaff1@gmail.com.

When you register, please include your phone number in case the field trip needs to be cancelled or for any post-trip messages such as contact tracing.

On the day of the field trip participants must:

- A. Show up on time
- B. Sign the liability waiver
- C. Provide a current email address
- D. Carpool only with members of your own household
- E. Wear your mask
- F. Stay 6 feet from others when possible

Bring binoculars, a field guide, hat, water, snacks, and personal hand sanitizer.

SUNDAY, MARCH 21, 2021

Lower Salt River

Meet leader, Richard Kaiser, in the Granite Reef Recreation area parking lot, near the bathrooms, at 7:30 am for a three hour morning survey. This well-known and close-to-the-city field trip involves a drive along the Bush Highway between Mesa and Saguaro Lake, with three stops for birding in recreation areas along the Salt River. Spring migration should be starting, which could afford us views of Lucy's Warbler, Ash-throated Flycatcher, and Violet-green Swallows. Lingering winter residents that we could spot are Yellow-rumped Warbler, Lesser Goldfinch, Eared Grebe, and Ruby-crowned Kinglet. Also likely are sightings of Bald Eagles, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, and Phainopepla.

This area is within Tonto National Forest and requires a "Tonto Pass", a day-use parking

pass for all drivers available from sporting goods stores and convenience stores along Power Road leading up to the river. Bring a scope, if available.

Leader: Richard Kaiser, rkaiserinaz@aol.com, 602-276-3312.

WHO: Open only to Maricopa Audubon Society members. You may join MAS any time before the trip.

WHERE: Granite Reef Recreation Area parking lot, about 3.5 miles north of the Loop 202/Power Road intersection.

WHY: To enjoy birding with others while safely following CDC and state coronavirus guidelines

HOW: Registration is required. Limit: five plus the leader. To register, email: rkaiserinaz@aol.com, 602-276-3312.

When you register, please include your phone number in case the field trip needs to be cancelled or for any post-trip messages such as contact tracing.

On the day of the field trip participants must:

- A. Show up on time
- B. Sign the liability waiver
- C. Provide a current email address
- D. Carpool only with members of your own household
- E. Wear your mask
- F. Stay 6 feet from others when possible

Bring binoculars, a field guide, hat, water, snacks, and personal hand sanitizer.

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>

CONSERVATION UPDATE

by Mark Horlings

PROGRESS ON THE VERDE RIVER

Last September, MAS and other conservation groups sued the Forest Service for failing to protect the Verde River from wandering cattle. Ranchers have ignored rules requiring them to keep cattle away from the river, and the Forest Service has failed to enforce those rules.

Now, however, the Forest Service has begun to move. A contractor was hired and, at last report, 80 feral cattle had been rounded up and removed. The Forest Service's wrangler is searching for the remaining 300 head of cattle.

MIGRATORY BIRD TREATY ACT

On January 5, 2021, the Trump Administration finalized a rule narrowing the impact of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA). Under the new rule, the criminal penalties imposed by the MBTA will not be imposed unless killing the birds was the intent of the action. Inadvertent bird killings, no matter how extensive, will not be prosecuted.

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology estimates that industry kills between 450 million and 1.1 billion birds per year. Most kills result from industrial accidents, toxic discharges, oil spills and other mistakes. These losses and other risks have resulted in the loss of about 30% of all U.S. birds over the past half century.

This change may or may not prove to be a big deal. Historically, the largest bird killings, as well as the largest penalties, have involved inadvertent killings. For example, after the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, British Petroleum paid more than \$100 million in MBTA penalties, money used to clean the Gulf of Mexico. On the other hand, the Trump Administration already had a policy of not prosecuting unintentional bird kills. The new rule's main purpose seems to be to tie the hands of the next Administration. Because the Trump Administration formally adopted the new rule, it binds the Biden Administration until it is formally rescinded, a process that takes time and some administrative agility.

MOUNT GRAHAM RED SQUIRRELS

This lawsuit is suspended while the parties talk. If successful, the suit will force the Forest Service and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to designate new critical habitat and to clear that habitat for the remaining Mt. Graham Red Squirrels.

After fires wrecked the designated critical habitat for the endangered squirrels, federal agencies agreed to re-evaluate critical habitat and to remove summer homes and an abandoned Bible camp. The houses and camp threatened habitat further down the mountain where the squirrels had relocated.

The federal agencies appear to be relying on a policy of delay. They have informed MAS and other parties that they wish to evaluate the Bible camp and cabins in separate, independent studies.

OAK FLAT & RESOLUTION COPPER

As of this writing, it appears that the Forest Service published the final Oak Flat Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on January 15, 2021, a year earlier than expected. An early release of the EIS allows Resolution Copper to trigger a provision in the 2015 Defense Authorization Act. That provision compels transfer of about 2,500 acres of Oak Flat to Resolution Copper no later than 60 days after Tonto National Forest issues the final EIS.

Resolution Copper hopes to mine a deposit of copper 7,000 feet below Oak Flat. Indian tribes, particularly the San Carlos Apaches, and conservation groups fought the mine for decades. A new book, *Oak Flat: A Fight for Sacred Land in the American West* by Lauren Redniss effectively explains the Apaches' case.

Faced with effective opposition, Resolution Copper convinced Arizona politicians to insert a provision in the 2015 Defense Authorization Act saying that the EIS required by the National Environmental Policy Act would be prepared but that, regardless of problems the EIS identified, Resolution Copper would get Oak Flat 60 days later. Resolution now expects to own Oak Flat on or around March 15th of 2021.

NEW MEXICO JUMPING MEADOW MOUSE

This small endangered creature lives in the upper elevation meadows and streams of the Black River watershed in the White Mountains. MAS and other plaintiffs filed suit to force the Forest Service to remove feral horses threatening mouse habitat. Court proceedings are suspended while the parties negotiate to seek a settlement.

SOLAR PROJECT WILL SURROUND THE THRASHER SPOT WEST OF PHOENIX

First Solar Corporation plans to develop 3,200 acres west of Phoenix into a solar energy farm. Thousands of sun-tracking photovoltaic panels, each 13 feet high, will be installed near the intersection of Baseline Road and Salome Highway. The site lies close to the Palo Verde Nuclear Plant and will connect with its grid, carrying electricity to major customers.

The site surrounds the Thrasher Spot familiar to MAS members and birders across the country. According to *Birds of Phoenix and Maricopa County* (3rd Edition, 1918, p. 65), "more people have probably seen their 'lifer' LeConte's Thrasher here than any other place in the United States." Some are uncommon, but none of the Thrasher species in the area are threatened or endangered.

First Solar intends to leave about a thousand acres undeveloped. The land most familiar to MAS members, near the intersection of Salome Road and Baseline, will not be developed.

In December, the MAS Board of Directors approved a grant to study the area, estimating populations of the different Thrasher species and searching out other portions of the 3200 acre site that might contain significant populations of Thrashers or other wildlife.

At hearings planned for early 2021, the Planning and Zoning Commission will consider First Solar's project plans and the zoning changes necessary for the project to go forward.

THE GREAT WALL OF ARIZONA

by Michael Gregory



Quitobaquito Spring
by Roberta Chorlton

A variety of objections have been raised against the thirty-foot tall steel border wall, ranging from the aesthetic (“it’s an eyesore”), cultural (“it separates traditional transborder communities”), economic (it’s costing billions of dollars, as much as \$41 million per mile in parts of Arizona, that could be better used elsewhere), procedural (“it’s being built with no-bid contracts”), appropriative (“it’s illegally taking funds from the military budget”), humanitarian (“it interferes with the rights of people seeking refuge from political terrorism and climate disaster”), effectual (“it is easily breached with ladders and battery-run saws”), proprietary (“it’s taking private properties by eminent domain”), religious (“it’s destroying sacred Native American sites, including graveyards and age-old traditional places of worship”), etc.

But for many of us, the main objection is ecological: the wall divides wildlife communities, destroys natural habitat, endangers irreplaceable sources of water, disrupts waterways, blocks migration routes and mating circuits, puts up 24-hour lighting that upsets nesting and other processes, and in general puts wildlife, including many threatened and endangered species, at greater risk in

arid lands where survival is already difficult. It’s being built with absolutely none of the normal safeguards of environmental, freedom of information and administrative procedures laws, all of which have been waived by executive fiat.

Many of these problems are most obvious in Arizona, where construction has been largely on public lands where construction can proceed unimpeded by legal procedures required on private lands. Federally-designated Arizona lands where the wall is going up include the Coronado National Forest, the San Bernardino, Cabeza Prieta and Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuges, the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area, and the Coronado and Organ Pipe National Memorials. In each of these, construction has been proceeding even faster than usual in the past few weeks in order to comply with former President Trump’s directive to finish as much as possible before the end of his term.

One of the greatest objections is that planned wildlife openings in the wall are too few and too small, only about fifty openings across the whole state, the size of an 8½ x 11 sheet of copy paper. About the size for a large house

THE GREAT WALL OF ARIZONA

cat, but totally inadequate for adult javelina, deer, mountain lions or jaguars, and spaced so far apart that for many animal communities they may as well not exist.

On the San Bernardino, in the extreme southeast corner of the state, the wall has already gone up across major washes impairing waters of endangered fish and amphibians the refuge was established to protect. In adjacent Guadalupe Canyon and the remote Peloncillo Mountains, the contractor is destroying habitat by dynamiting rugged backcountry to make a thirty-to-fifty foot corridor for the wall which will prevent cross-border passage of jaguars.

Local ranchers and other residents of the area have noted that the wall is entirely unnecessary here because Border Patrol electronic surveillance and personnel in the past few years have effectively stopped illegal traffic in the area.

At the San Pedro, often noted as the last free-flowing river in the Southwest, the wall and accompanying bridge have gone up across at the southern tip of the National Conservation Area.

The SPRNCA, which was brought under federal protection by President Reagan with broad bipartisan support from Congress in 1988, has long been recognized as one of the most biologically diverse places in the world, providing habitat for more than 80 species of mammals, two native and several introduced species of fish, more than 40 species of amphibians and reptiles, and over 350 species of birds.

Conservationists have been unanimous in declaring the wall across the San Pedro as a disaster-in-the-making since the proposed gates in the riverbed section are far too small to allow passage of tree trunks and other debris normally carried by the swollen river in flood season. Critics point out that if the electronic and personnel to be provided by the Border Patrol is adequate to curtail illegal traffic when the gates are left open as planned during rainy periods, the same security could be provided year-round without the economic and ecological costs of the wall.

In Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument, contractors began blasting Tohono O'odham sacred sites near Quitobaquito Springs in August 2019. Since then they have used so much groundwater to mix concrete for the wall that the spring's flow has hit record lows. This reduces to mudflats much of the unique desert pond, essential to the endangered Quitobaquito pupfish and Sonoyta mud turtle and other wildlife, as well as being for centuries sacred to Native Americans in the area.

Construction of the wall and consequent destruction on Tohono lands, which in violation of several federal laws and agreements was done without required consultation with and despite a number of published objections by the Tohono O'odham Nation, has led in recent months to unprecedented demonstrations and peaceful protests by tribal members of the tribe, and to hearings in the US House of Representatives.

Of the situation at Quitobaquito, noted southwest ecologist Gary Nabhan says, "As many as 40 species [of birds] have been absent in the last year there as the additive effects of border wall construction, pumping, and dynamiting exacerbated other long-term stressors, like climate change, and pushed the ecosystem to the breaking point." Hydrologists seriously question the possibility of the spring's flow ever being restored.

Conservationists and human rights advocates are calling for all construction on the wall to be halted, openings of appropriate size and location for wildlife to be made immediately, and for the rest of the wall to be brought down in due course. 🦅

Michael Gregory is a longtime advocate for the preservation of the San Pedro ecosystem. He lives in McNeal, Arizona. His website is: www.michaelgregory.org

Help MAS with an EMPLOYER MATCHING GIFT

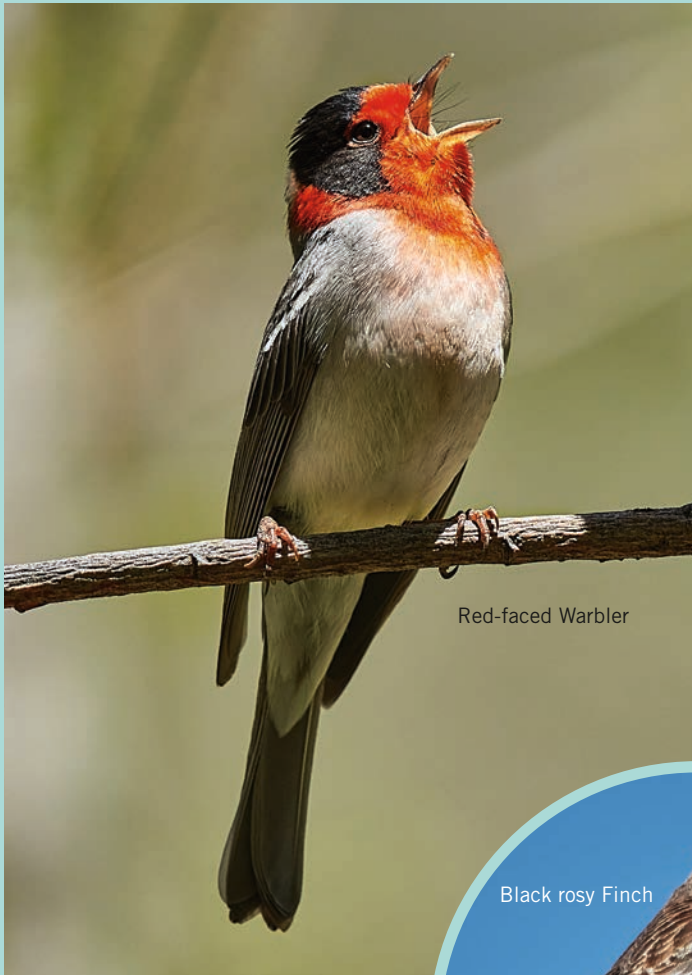


Many Maricopa Audubon members aren't aware that their employers may include a matching gift program in their benefits package. Programs vary from business to business, but they generally offer a dollar-for-dollar match when an employee makes a personal gift to a nonprofit organization like Maricopa Audubon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

Please visit your human resources department or charitable giving department to see if this opportunity is available to you. Your employer may require you 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.

The Turning Year: *Northern Arizona*

by Charles Babbitt — Photos by Cindy Marple



Red-faced Warbler

Mergansers, Greater Scaup, Greater White-fronted and Snow Geese and one year a very rare Eurasian Wigeon. The lakes are also a good place to search for arctic-breeding Rough-legged Hawks and watch wintering Bald Eagles and look and listen for Pinyon and Steller's Jays along the side of Anderson Mesa. An evening trip up to the Arizona Snowbowl might produce a Northern Saw-whet Owl—a diminutive owl whose monotonous calls begin in earnest in early spring.

As spring turns to summer the pine forests of northern Arizona begin to fill with the songs and calls of grosbeaks, tanagers, vireos, and warblers. This is a great time to escape the scorching heat of the valley and head for the much cooler climate of the San Francisco Peaks just outside Flagstaff. Some good birding spots in this area include the Hart Prairie Preserve, Fern Mountain, and Little Spring all located on the flanks of the old volcano.

In the area's aspen groves look for Williamson's and Red-naped Sapsuckers. Mountain Bluebirds, Western Tanagers, Green-tailed Towhees and Red-faced Warblers are just some of the birds that nest in the area. Two very locally occurring Arizona breeders can also be found here — MacGillivray's Warbler and Dusky Flycatcher. At night listen for the swooshing sound of courting Common Nighthawks and the soft hooting of Flammulated Owls a highly migratory species which migrates in late summer to wintering grounds in Mexico and Central America.



Black rosy Finch

Northern Arizona's extensive forests, canyons, plateaus, and ancient volcanos offer Arizona birders a unique opportunity to find many sought after bird species not regularly found in other parts of the state. Four distinct seasons and an impressive variety of habitats make for outstanding birding year round. Because of the vastness of the area this article will focus primarily on birding locations around Flagstaff which is only a two and a half hour drive from metropolitan Phoenix.

In early spring lakes south of Flagstaff like Mormon Lake and Lake Mary provide exciting birding as waterfowl begin migrating through on their long journey north. Trips to these lakes can easily produce over a dozen different duck and goose species including some uncommon species like Hooded and Red-breasted

Summer birding around the Arizona Snowbowl can often produce boreal species like Red Crossbill, Clark's Nutcracker, Golden-crowned Kinglet, and an occasional American Three-toed Woodpecker. You might also stumble upon a Dusky Grouse. As you walk through the spruce-fir forest listen for the ethereal voice of the Hermit Thrush and the bouncy up and down song of the Brown Creeper.

Fall migration — at least for a few species — starts in early July. This is the case with Rufous Hummingbirds who begin migrating through northern Arizona around the second week of July. For most species, however, fall migration begins in earnest in late August. This is the time to begin checking water areas around Flagstaff for migrating shorebirds or watch the spectacular fall hawk migration at Yaki Point on the south rim of the Grand Canyon.

Many birders like to chase rare and unusual migrant and vagrant species in the fall. Not far from Flagstaff are two of northern Arizona's best and most productive fall migrant traps: Cameron Trading Post and Meteor Creator RV Park. Cameron Trading

The Turning Year:
Northern Arizona



Post sits on the edge of the Little Colorado River gorge. Its courtyard — planted with bushes and flowers and shaded by large trees — has attracted an impressive number of rare species over the years including Kentucky, Magnolia, and Chestnut-sided Warbler, Ovenbird, Common Grackle and Great Crested Flycatcher to name just a few. Meteor Creator R.V. Park along I-40 east of Flagstaff is, likewise, a very productive migrant trap, its bushes,

trees, and watered lawns acting like a magnet for birds flying across the arid and sparsely vegetated landscape to the north.



Beginning in November there is usually an influx of rare northern-breeding species into northern Arizona. A few are typically found each winter. They include species like Black-capped Chickadee, Harris's and Tree Sparrow and Black Rosy-Finch. In recent years northern Arizona has had midwinter first state records of White-winged Crossbill and

Common Redpoll. In the Flagstaff area birders should be on the lookout for Northern Shrike and Rough-legged Hawk. Winter is a good time to search residential and riparian areas around Flagstaff for finch species like Cassin's Finch and Evening Grosbeak especially during flight years. Birders should also check the area's Russian Olive thickets which can attract numbers of wintering species like American Robin, Western Bluebird, Townsend's Solitaire, Pine Siskin and American Goldfinch.

At any season northern Arizona is an exciting place to go birding. This article has touched on just a few of the area's many great birding locations. Take some time this coming year to visit, explore and enjoy this vast and scenic area. 🐦

Two from Ahwatukee

One Winter's Dawn

The owl is done
 with pulling his moonlit shadow on a string
 along the wash. His calls fade
 as a winter-red chill
 rises behind the urban trees.
 The sound is half feather,
 half claw, and it repeats
 until it roosts
 in the world's inner ear.
 A Cooper's Hawk from Heaven
 flies down among the doves and leaves
 a streak of panic in the air
 just as a loose
 and lazy strand of cloud snags
 on the moon's rim
 when it slips behind South Mountain
 while the sun ascending
 drapes a roseate sheen
 across it. It's a cold light
 that blows down the street
 at year's end, and the night's last
 coyote is resting,
 ears cocked to the tilt of the wind
 while he licks the taste
 of stars from his lips.

The Hundred-and-eleventh Day

The sky disentangled itself
 from an ocotillo's
 arms. One hundred and ten
 dry days. A rumbling
 began in the dark, then
 a flash blanched the faces
 of the animals on the mountain
 as they turned toward the scent
 of rain. It began
 before daylight, galloping down
 the wash, pausing for breath
 and starting again
 on the front porch lantana
 where a hummingbird
 leaned back on a leaf
 with its beak pointed
 to capture each vertical drop
 as it fell.

David Chorlton

WHITEWATER DRAW WILDLIFE AREA

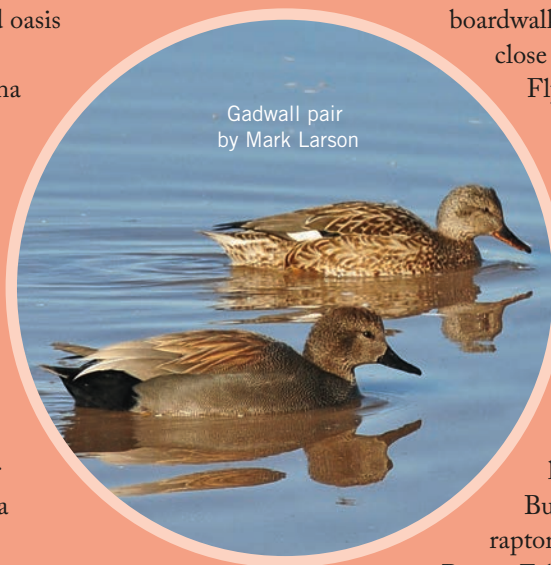
by Mark Larson



Loggerhead Shrike by Mark Larson

This 1,500-acre grassland oasis in Cochise County was purchased by the Arizona Game and Fish Department in 1997. The number of wintering birds has increased dramatically ever since and today, the area is the winter home to many thousands of Sandhill Cranes. It is, perhaps, the finest place in Arizona to view this species close-up in large numbers. The cranes come to Whitewater Draw from as far away as Alaska and, possibly, Siberia!

Throughout the winter Whitewater Draw provides habitat for numerous species besides the cranes, including a large number of duck species, including Mexican Ducks, as many as 200 Snow Geese, and various wading birds. In addition, the excellent



Gadwall pair
by Mark Larson

boardwalks over the marsh can bring you close to songbirds such as Vermilion Flycatchers and Loggerhead Shrikes, as well as to Black-necked Stilts and American Avocets.

Also on the property is a former hay barn that has sheltered both Great Horned and Barn Owls in the past, so this is always worth a visit. What's more, the surrounding lands support wintering Lark Buntings, Lincoln's Sparrows, and raptors such as Ferruginous Hawks, Prairie Falcons, and Golden Eagles.

Whitewater Draw is about 3 miles west of the small town of McNeal and about 20 miles north of the Mexican border. It is well worth a visit, especially during the winter season. 🦉



Sandhill Cranes and Moon
by Elizabeth Leslie



WHITewater DRAW WILDLIFE AREA



Whitewater Draw
by Denise Sigworth



Northern Shoveler by
Mark Larson



Vermilion Flycatcher
by Mark Larson

The LeConte's Thrasher

More than just a checkmark on our list

by Tom Gatz



The National Audubon Society says that “there are desert birds and then there are desert birds. LeConte's Thrasher is an extreme, favoring the hottest, driest, and lowest deserts in the U.S.” Photo by Steve Kelling, Macaulay Library.

According to the book *Birds of Phoenix and Maricopa County*, more birders have probably seen their “lifer” LeConte's Thrasher at the “Thrasher Spot” in Maricopa County than at any other place within its limited range in the southwestern U.S. and northwestern Mexico. Sometimes, however, after seeing this bird, we rush off to look for yet more new birds to checkoff on our life lists, perhaps without learning much at all about this interesting desert-nesting specialist. Let's take a closer look.

This shy species favors the lowest, hottest, and driest habitats in the United States and nests in very low densities. They rarely, if ever, drink water, even on the few days of the year when it is available, especially in places like Death Valley. They apparently get all of the moisture they require from their food. If the winter is too dry and food is scarce, they may not even nest at all in some years. As late winter/early spring nesters, unlike other thrashers, they add a third layer of “padding” to their nests, possibly an adaptation to insulate their eggs and young from the cold nighttime temperatures. This species was first discovered in the 1850's in Yuma County by Dr. John LeConte, a Boston entomologist and was originally named “LeConte's Mocking Bird”.

Also unlike most of our other thrasher species, they avoid developed areas, specializing in sparsely vegetated habitat with lots of bare, sandy ground. Still, they somehow manage to stay mostly hidden, as they dash from one lone saltbush or other low shrub to the next with their tails cocked up, almost like a pale little roadrunner. The males only sing for about a total of one hour each day during the nesting season; most often during midmorning and at dusk and often take naps in the middle of the day, so get there early. While non-migratory, this elusive species is difficult to find if you miss the seasonal “window” from January to March when they are singing and nesting. It is somewhat similar to the Crissal and Curve-billed Thrashers but it is much paler, with a contrasting dark tail, dark lores in front of the dark eyes, tawny under the tail, and it has its very long, slender, decurved beak.

LeConte's Thrasher needs undisturbed ground to forage for insects and other invertebrates under desert shrubs, occasionally supplemented by bird eggs, seeds, lizards and even small snakes. Agriculture and urban development have eliminated much of their former habitat. The Arizona Game and Fish Department ranks the LeConte's Thrasher as a “Species of Greater Conservation Need”. The U.S. Fish

The LeConte's Thrasher

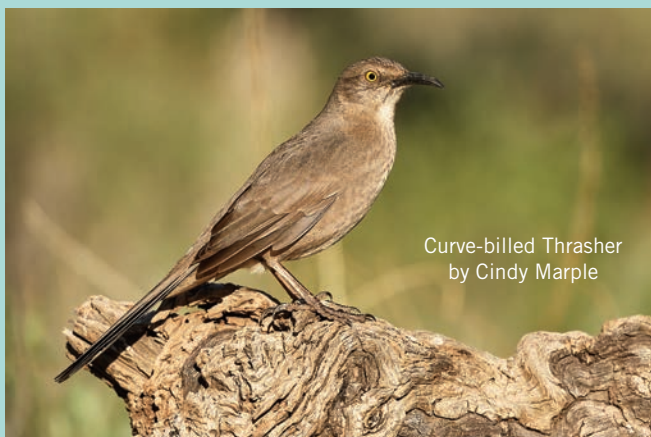
More than just a checkmark on our list



Bendires Thrasher
by Cindy Marple



LeConte's Thrasher
by Cindy Marple



Curve-billed Thrasher
by Cindy Marple

and Wildlife Service lists it as “A Bird of Conservation Concern”. Partners in Flight lists it as a species of “Conservation Concern: Red Watch Species”, cites a 67 percent loss of population since 1970, and lists the major threats as “Changing rangeland conditions, agricultural conversion, urbanization, energy/resource extraction, and climate change” and, just recently, proposed conversion of desert habitat near the “Thrasher Spot” to solar fields.

For detailed directions on how to find this species, see pages 65-66 in Witzeman and Corman (2017) or go to: <http://www.birderfrommaricopa.com/the--thrasher--spot-at-baseline-road-salome-highway.htm>.

Please DO NOT play recorded calls. It wastes valuable energy for males to respond to non-existent intruders in this already challenging environment. One site suggests you will need at least two of these three things to see this special bird: a scope, patience, and luck. Good luck!

Thanks to Carol Beardmore and Troy Corman for making helpful suggestions to improve this article. 🐦

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Tom Gatz has been a Maricopa Audubon Society member since 1981

Wren•dition Revisited

From Summer, 2009

conservation

Bird Populations and Global Warming

Bob Witzeman

"In every walk with nature, one receives far more than he seeks."
— John Muir (1838-1914)

Temperature and weather changes from global warming have elicited dramatic bird population changes in Arizona since my wife and I arrived in Arizona in 1958. Many Arizona birds have moved northward in their breeding ranges and in their overwintering localities.

When we first arrived in Phoenix it was unusual to find Neotropical Cormorants or Black-bellied Tree Ducks in Maricopa County. They could be found in southern Arizona. Now they are a year-round inhabitants here in central Arizona.

Reasons why overwintering warblers and other migrants are less common may be global warming and/or habitat losses to both their nesting habitats and their neotropical migratory habitats. Sun coffee, palm oil and row crop plantations, rainforest logging, forest conversions to croplands, and slash and burn logging for cattle grazing are some of the culprits. Phoenix Christmas Counts in past decades had a great many (sometimes thousands recorded) of Yellow-rumped Warblers wintering along the Salt River and elsewhere. I could hardly ever visit my backyard some years back without hearing several of them. Now they are the exception.

The National Audubon Society and American Bird Conservancy (NAS/ABC) recently reported that nearly 60% of the 305 species found in North America in winter are shifting their ranges northward by an average of 35 miles.

However, the extension northward of U.S. grassland nesting species has not occurred. Only 38% of our grassland species mirrored the northward trend of other U.S. grassland nesting species. Far from being good news for U.S. species

like Eastern Meadowlark and Henslow's Sparrow, this reflects the grim reality of our severely-depleted grassland habitats. It suggests that these species now face a double threat from the stresses of both habitat loss and climate adaptation. In Arizona grassland habitats

have become victims of livestock overgrazing, rangeland conversions to farmlands and meteoric urbanization.

The North American species moving north the most from global warming has been the Purple Finch. It was calculated to have moved its nesting habitat an average of 400 miles north! We may expect to see fewer Canadian and Boreal life zone species such as Purple and Cassin's

Finches on Arizona Christmas Counts.

Overwintering sparrows here in central Arizona have sustained noticeable declines in our central Arizona Christmas Counts. Brewer's, Chipping, Song, White-crowned, Lark, Fox, and Lincoln's Sparrow declines may be victims of both global warming and/or losses of nesting or overwintering habitat here. These may be the result of North American logging, mining, oil and gas well-fields, urbanization, and the destructive livestock overgrazing of grasslands. These man-related impacts severely impact the nesting and overwintering sparrow habitats throughout the west.

Back in northern Ohio where I was raised and went to college and medical school the northward movement of bird species has been dramatic. Now when I return to visit family and friends I see southern U.S. species I never regularly encountered such as Mockingbird, Carolina Wren, Carolina Chickadee, Red-breasted Nuthatch, and Red-shouldered and Rough-legged Hawk.

In conclusion, we must take all aspects of global warming seriously. It's not just sun coffee, palm oil, sugar cane, neotropical deforestations and plastic grocery bags. It includes the impacts of our own auto, rail, and highway transportation decisions, and our nuclear, coal, sun, wind, tidal and wave power balancing acts. These issues deserve our utmost oversight and some technology miracles besides if we are to continue to enjoy the diversity of birdlife here. And we must add to that our continued due diligence for our grassland, forest, wetland, and riverine habitats.



Olivaceous Cormorant, photo by Jim Burns: Until recent years this bird was unknown to nest in Maricopa County. It has moved northward from Southern Arizona along with the Black-bellied Whistling Duck.

Sandhill Cranes

Beauty & Grace

by Vicki Hire



Did you know Sandhill Cranes are one of fifteen species of cranes worldwide? Two species of cranes are found in North America: Whooping Cranes and Sandhill Cranes. The Whooping Crane is considered an endangered species and is on the 2014 State of the Birds Watch List.¹ However, the Sandhill Crane is considered one of the most abundant species of crane on earth today. Biologists recognize five species of Sandhill Cranes, with three species that spend their winters in Arizona: The Greater Sandhill Crane, the Canadian Sandhill Crane, and the Lesser Sandhill Crane.

Did you know Sandhill Cranes have been migrating to Arizona for a long time? Petroglyphs of cranes have been found along the Gila River etched into rock by native people hundreds of years ago. Cranes are one of the oldest lineages of birds descending from prehistoric relatives. Fossilized remains of cranes have been found in Nebraska that are thought to be ten million years old.²

Did you know Sandhill Cranes are large birds with long, thin legs and necks? They have a bright red patch on their forehead and white checks. Their feathers are mostly gray, but sometimes look a reddish-brown because they like to preen themselves by rubbing mud on their feathers. The mud they use is often a red color because of the iron in the environment.

Did you know Sandhill Cranes can live in the wild for fifteen years? With an elaborate dance, they choose a mate for life. Sandhill Cranes like to nest in isolated wetlands such as marshes and bogs that have vegetation growing in standing water. Sometimes they will also nest on dry ground. They build their nest from plant materials, usually have two eggs. Both the male and female take care of the nest together.

Did you know the best time of year to see Sandhill Cranes in Arizona is from November to the end of February? More than 20,000

cranes winter each year in farmlands of Cochise County Sulphur Springs Valley. Many people visit Whitewater Draw to see the Sandhill Cranes, where the cranes fly out each morning to feed in the area and return in the afternoons and evenings.³

Did you know when Sandhill Cranes are threatened by predators they will leap into the air and kick their feet forward? The cranes are also threatened by loss of habitat and it is important to conserve wetlands because the future of Sandhill Cranes and other wildlife depend on wetlands to provide food, shelter, and nesting for their survival. At least one-third of the nation's threatened or endangered species live in wetland areas.

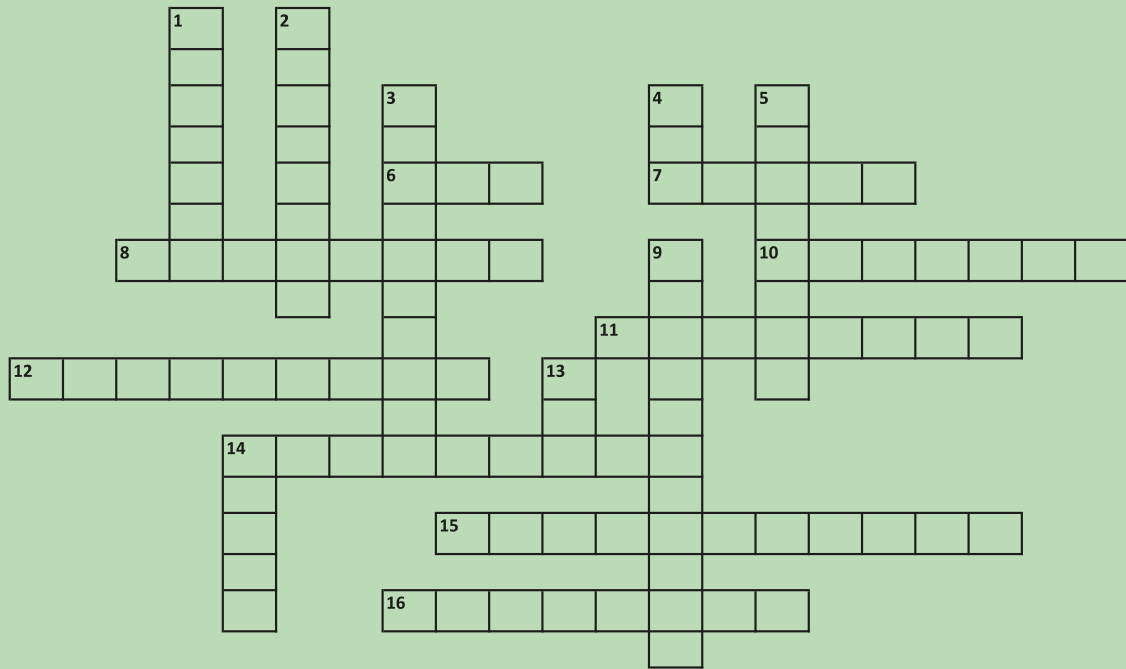
1 https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Whooping_Crane/lifehistory

2 <https://www.azgfd.com/wildlife/viewing/webcamlist/sandhill-crane/>

3 <https://www.azgfd.com/wildlife/viewing/wheretogo/whitewater/>

Sandhill Cranes — Beauty & Grace

Crossword Puzzle



Across

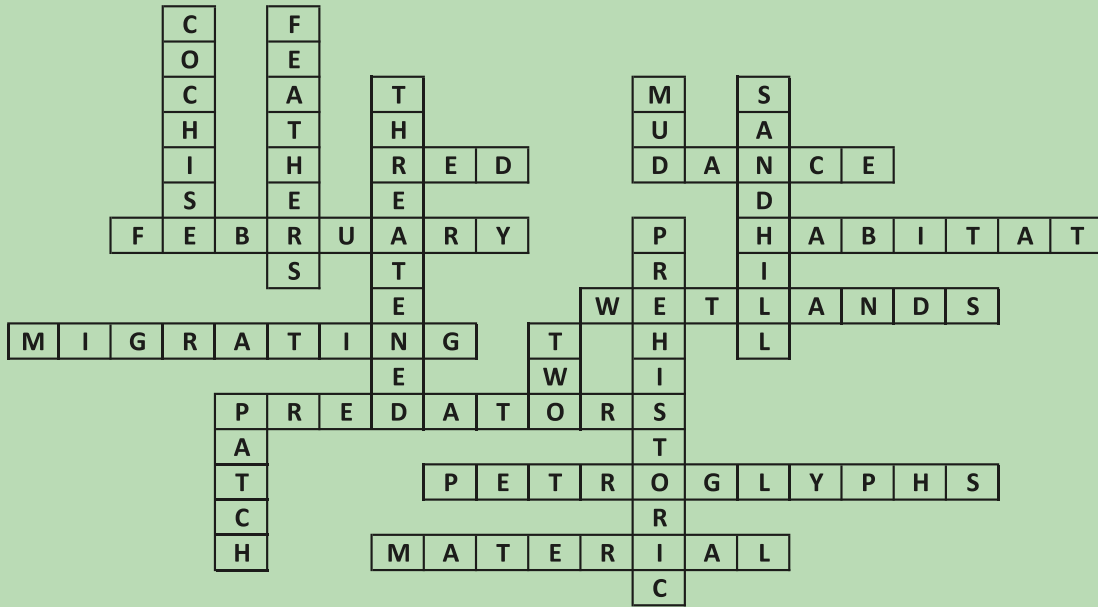
- 6 Mud used by Sandhill Cranes for preen is often a _____ color
7 When choosing a mate, Sandhill Cranes perform an elaborate _____
8 Between November and the end of _____ is the best time of year to see Sandhill Cranes in Arizona
10 In addition to predators, cranes are threatened by loss of _____
11 It is important to conserve _____ for the future of Sandhill Cranes and other wildlife that live there
12 Sandhill Cranes have been _____ to Arizona for a long time
14 Sandhill Cranes kick their feet forward when they feel threatened by _____
15 These have been found etched into rock along the Gila River
16 Sandhill Cranes build nests from plant _____

Down

- 1 More than 20,000 Sandhill Cranes spend the winter in _____ County's Sulphur Springs Valley in Arizona
2 Sandhill Cranes have mostly gray _____
3 At least one-third of the nation's _____ species live in wetlands
4 Sandhill Cranes preen their feathers with _____
5 Three species of _____ Cranes winter in Arizona
9 Cranes have a long lineage, descending from _____ relatives
13 Female Sandhill Cranes usually lay _____ eggs
14 Sandhill Cranes have a red _____ on their foreheads

Sandhill Cranes — Beauty & Grace

Crossword Puzzle Answers



Across

- 6 red
- 7 dance
- 8 February
- 10 habitat
- 11 wetlands
- 12 migrating
- 14 predators
- 15 petroglyphs
- 16 material

Down

- 1 Cochise
- 2 feathers
- 3 threatened
- 4 mud
- 5 Sandhill
- 9 prehistoric
- 13 two
- 14 patch



GUESS THIS BIRD!

This bird lives only in the Southwestern United States and Mexico. People travel to Arizona just to see this secretive bird that is a grayish brown with a black face mask.

Answer:

The Abert's Towhee is nearly endemic to Arizona. It forages for seeds and insects on the ground, and builds a nest usually near the ground in low shrubs.

Eskimo Curlew – Gone But Not Forgotten

By Linda M. Feltner



“Linda measuring curlews at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History.” Photo by Ikumi Kayama.

As a bird artist, I shall never paint this curlew from life. No one can, in all probability. Bringing an extinct bird back to life through scientific illustration was my way of paying homage.

My personal interest stemmed from my husband, T. Ben Feltner, who re-discovered the Eskimo Curlew on Galveston Island, March 22, 1959, along with his friend Dudley A. Deaver. This sighting shocked the ornithological world and encouraged research for further evidence that the birds might have a viable population. Despite diligence on the part of many searchers along the Texas Coast, the last confirmed record in the contiguous U.S. occurred when two birds appeared on Galveston Island in late March, 1962, and left a few weeks later in early April. Formerly one of the most abundant birds in North America, the Eskimo Curlew (*Numenius borealis*) is now thought to be extinct.

Without personal knowledge of having seen the living bird, my research began by investigating resources that would

supply crucial information. Measuring specimens at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History provided a heavy-hearted but significant opportunity to get a feel for the size, coloration and variety. Further assistance from the Director Emeritus of the Slater Museum of Natural History, Dr. Dennis R. Paulson, enabled further study of their museum specimens.

My experience as a long-time birder and bird artist allowed me to build the bird using Whimbrels as models. Whimbrels are common shorebirds easily studied for general body structure, balance and posture. Illustrations could be built from measurements of museum specimens and the few revealing photos of the last living bird on Galveston Island taken by Don Bleitz. Of course, listening to first-hand knowledge from one of the few people alive today who has intensely observed the living bird, Ben’s knowledge and inspiration was invaluable.

Starting with a posture from a Whimbrel, anatomy was adjusted on seven to nine layers of overlying tracing paper to transition and reshape it to a new species. When the drawing was complete with feather patterns, bill and foot shape, it was transferred watercolor paper. The painting was digitally captured and printed in limited editions.

The single image, “Eskimo Curlew”, is part of the Artists for Conservation’s Silent Skies Mural, exhibited at the 27th International Ornithological Congress, 2018, in Vancouver, B.C. The mural features 678 endangered species of birds of the world and travels to international venues. (www.artistsforconservation.org/project/silent-skies)

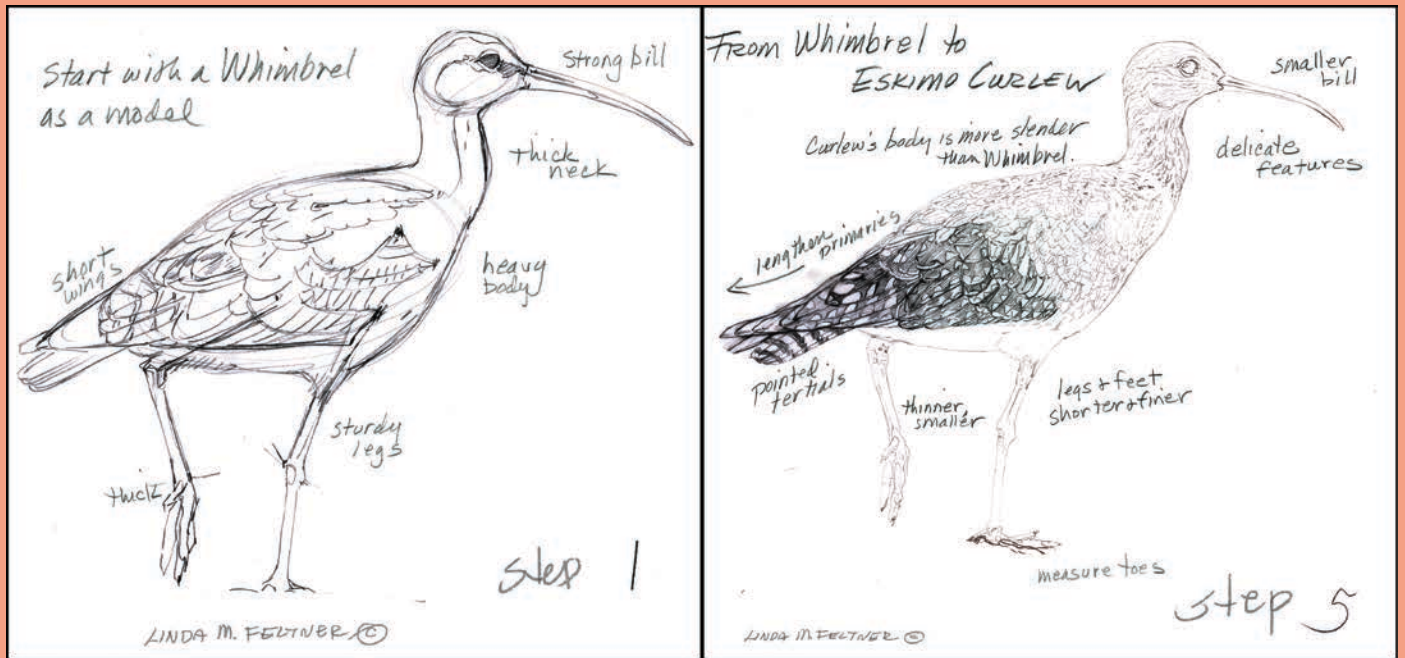
The curlew trio entitled “Eskimo Curlew-20th Century Bird” was exhibited in the gallery of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Washington D.C., as part of the Guild of Natural Science Illustrator’s 50th Anniversary Juried Exhibit.

My aim is to provide a spark, to awaken curiosity and invite questions, to promote an appreciation of the complexity of nature and to foster a desire to protect it.

Linda is an artist and educator, creating artwork for visitor centers and park trails. She teaches national Bird Drawing workshops and is an instructor for the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum Art Institute. She is a signature member of the Society of Animal Artists, Artists for Conservation and served as President of the Guild of Natural Science Illustrators (2016-18).

Contact: www.lindafeltner.com

Eskimo Curlew – Gone But Not Forgotten



"Steps #1 and #5 in the process of building the bird."



"First rendition of 'Eskimo Curlew' in color, 8x8 inches."

Eskimo Curlew
(*Numenius borealis*)

March 22, 1959. Galveston Island, Texas.

Previously thought to be extinct, a living bird was found by T. Ben Feltner and D.A. Deaver. This significant discovery sparked a global search for any remaining birds.



- About $\frac{3}{4}$ size of a Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*)
- Length 12-14" (30-36cm)
- Bill length 2" (5cm)

- Summer habitat: arctic tundra in Northwest Canada & Alaska
- Winter habitat: pampas of Argentina

Numbering in the hundreds of thousands, huge flocks once migrated through the Texas coastal region. The last confirmed record in the contiguous U.S. was on Galveston Island in early April, 1962.

LINDA M. FELTNER © 2018

"Eskimo Curlew-20th Century Bird", 11x15 inches, transparent watercolor.

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Due to coronavirus, we have delayed resuming our regular meetings. Contact a board member if you have questions, or check out our website at www.maricopaaudubon.org

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For specific questions please contact our Membership Chair.

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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

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