MARICOPA AUDUBON SOCIETY

the Cactus Wren·dition

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Gila Woodpecker
by Vicki Hire

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Mark W. Larson

It would be an understatement to say that it has been an eventful and sometimes difficult eighteen months or so but with luck and care you and your family have remained safe and unaffected by the COVID-19 virus. My hope is that you have and that you have gotten one of the vaccines that have already saved millions of lives. If by chance you are still unvaccinated, by all means get that done!

As your President, I want you to know that I believe that our meetings are more than business and a speaker. Instead, in person meetings are essential. They are important opportunities for us to interact, to make new friends with like-minded folks, and to renew longstanding friendships. I look forward to seeing you—in person—at our September meeting of the membership.

And, as concerns about the coronavirus begin to wane, we will resume other activities such as our popular field trips but, instead of our COVID protocol field trips, we will go back to running them as we did prior to the pandemic. I am pleased that our new Field Trip Chairwoman, Emily Thomas, is enthusiastic about her new role in the organization, and I hope that you will welcome her. As always, please communicate your ideas for field trips that you would like to see us offer.

Speaking of field trips, keep in mind that numerous studies have confirmed that contact with Nature is beneficial to us in multiple ways—physically, emotionally, and spiritually. And, that contact with Nature does not necessarily need to be in the form of an official, guided field trip. Spending time in your backyard or a brief visit to your local park can provide these benefits as well, so get out there and enjoy the wonders of the natural world we have here in Arizona!

During our hot summer, remember to provide fresh water for the birds and wildlife. Create an oasis in your yard. It will serve all the 'usual suspects' but a surprise visitor is always possible.

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. No experience necessary. 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

We open this issue with the good news that meetings in person return as from September, so I look forward to meeting more members at Papago Buttes Church of the Brethren, starting on September 7th. You will find Field Trip information on page 6, compiled by our new Field Trip Chair, Emily Thomas.

Even without taking a drive, most of us can enjoy birds by just looking outside. Of course some of us are more fortunately located than others, but where there are feeders there are birds. And sometimes birds are attracted by whatever is growing out there in the yard. I had no idea, four years ago, how interesting the traffic would be at this house in Ahwatukee, not far from South Mountain. My current yard list is at fifty species, which includes the regulars along with spring and fall migrants stopping by and other occasional visitors.

Watching the regulars, including House Finches, Lesser Goldfinches, Abert's Towhees, Northern Mockingbirds, Curve-billed Thrashers, Verdins, hummingbirds and the doves, has always been a source of daily pleasure here, while a Hooded or Bullock's Oriole made several days special, as did the Black-headed Grosbeaks. Then there are interesting observations, such as a Phainopepla spending a few days close by and taking advantage of the bird bath, or the Green-tailed Towhee finding something he likes for a few days before continuing his journey. And just when I thought I had another mockingbird, I looked more closely and saw it was a Loggerhead Shrike. On summer evenings there are Lesser Nighthawks, and sometimes even in daylight one of them surprises me by flying up from a nearby yard. The first winter here, there were Pine Siskins, but they haven't been back, yet.

This is a great area for Gilded Flickers, and there are flocks of Rosy-faced Lovebirds now common at spots all over the Valley. The winter months bring many of us the Cooper's Hawks, and so often the activity here stops suddenly as if a thud of silence just hit the sky. We know why. And speaking of hawks, I know two Red-tailed Hawk nests not far away, and I'm used to seeing one hawk (even two) while I'm on the early morning dog walk, high up in a tree watching and waiting. A Ladder-backed Woodpecker showed up for a few days late last year, no doubt taking a detour from his usual desert life. A Western Kingbird will show his virtuosity in flight as he goes after an insect, looking to be as at home among the palm trees as on those power poles along Arizona's highways. While it isn't exactly my back yard, the pond a five-minute walk away often has over a dozen kinds of water birds in the winter months.

You will find more on back yards in these pages, starting with Vicki Hire's account of the year at her, more rural, back yard, and continuing through accounts of what others have found scientifically useful or emotionally uplifting. We should never under-estimate what is immediately around us.

Thanks to all of you who took advantage of our Zoomed meetings, and I hope we can anticipate a more social birding life once again from here on.

David Chorlton
Editor

Committees/Support

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David Chorlton
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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

We are returning to in-person meetings September 7. Please follow the latest CDC guidelines regarding the wearing of masks and booster vaccinations.

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, ½ mile south of Thomas. If northbound, turn left (west) at Oak Street, ½ 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. Meeting starts at 7:30, come at 7:00 to socialize. 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.

Bendire's Thrasher
by Laurie Nessel

Sage Thrasher
by Laurie Nessel

Dr. Molly Hunter

September 7

Chrissy Kondrat-Smith: Identification of Thrashers

Chrissy is a Permits Biologist at Arizona Game and Fish.

October 5

Harriet and Andrew Smith: The Astonishing, Astounding, Amazing Sonoran Desert

The Sonoran Desert ecosystem extends from the southwestern United States into northern Mexico, and is an ecological hotspot of biodiversity due to its vast array of habitats. Authors Harriet and Andrew Smith will introduce us to the wonders of this ecosystem as well as the importance of environmental education outreach and conservation. They will sign copies of their book, available for sale at the meeting. All proceeds from their book will fund projects of Friends of the Sonoran Desert, a nonprofit [501(c)3] organization whose mission is to preserve and protect the Sonoran Desert.

Harriet Smith, Managing Director, Friends of the Sonoran Desert, is a retired clinical psychologist who grew up in Tucson, Arizona. As a child, she awoke to the coos of Mourning Doves, hiked on trails where the vibrant colors of cactus blooms plus the sound of rattlesnakes caught her attention, and swam in natural desert pools that filled after monsoon rains. Her desire to contribute to conserving the Sonoran Desert motivated her to write this book. She authored Parenting for Primates, 2005, Harvard University Press. Andrew Smith, Director, Friends of the Sonoran Desert, is President's Professor Emeritus and a Distinguished Sustainability Scientist in the School of Life Sciences at Arizona State University. Since 1991 he has served as Chair of the IUCN Species Survival Commission Lagomorph Specialist Group. Books include A Guide to the Mammals of China, 2008, Princeton University Press, and Lagomorphs: Pikas, Rabbits, and Hares of the World, 2018, Johns Hopkins University Press. In 2015 he received the Aldo Leopold Conservation Award from the American Society of Mammalogists.

November 2

Dr. Molly Hunter , The Changing Role of Wildfire in Arizona Ecosystems

Dr. Hunter is an Associate Research Professor in the School of Natural Resources and the Environment at the University of Arizona. Her main duty is to serve as the primary science advisor for the Joint Fire Science Program, a partnership among U.S. Forest Service and Department of Interior that funds scientific studies to inform wildland fire management. Dr. Hunter also serves as a Public Information Officer, supporting wildfire incidents in Arizona in cooperation with the Arizona Department of Forestry and Fire Management. Prior to coming to the University of Arizona, Dr. Hunter was an Associate Research Professor in the School of Forestry at Northern Arizona University, where she taught a variety of continuing education courses for fire management professionals, maintained an active research program in fire ecology and management, and co-founded the Southwest Fire Science Consortium. Dr. Hunter has a PhD in Forest Science from Colorado State University and a BS in Plant Biology from the University of California at Davis.

Field Trips

August 17, Tuesday

Kachina Wetlands, and the Arboretum in Flagstaff

We'll start about 5 a.m. from Scottsdale to arrive on site a little before 8 a.m. It will likely be cool, but warm up quickly. We will explore the wetlands, looking for Western Bluebirds, swallows, high elevation species such as nuthatches and Steller's Jays, and see what waterfowl and raptors show up. In the past, we've been treated to ibis, Sora, Virginia Rail, Ruddy Ducks, phalaropes, Osprey and kestrels, among others. We will continue to the Arboretum where we'll eat a picnic lunch and look for additional birds, particularly Rufous and Broad-tailed Hummingbirds. Return to the Phoenix area about 3:30 p.m. Bring a picnic lunch. Entrance fee to the Arboretum admission: $10, $7 for seniors, and free for Desert Botanical Garden members."

Leader: Kathe Anderson

Difficulty: 1-2—mostly even footing, and lots of walking.

Limit: 6. $10 per person gas money recommended for your driver. Donations in my car will go to CEDO.

To register, go to https://maricopa-audubon-society.ticketleap.com/kachina-wetlands-and-arboretum-in-flagstaff/

September 8, Wednesday

Glendale Recharge Ponds

Expect to be hot, and hot on the trail of returning shorebirds. We'll start from Scottsdale about 5 a.m. to arrive in Glendale before the sun comes up. We'll prowl the wetlands hoping for the usual variety of birds: mostly ducks, raptors and other water-loving species like Black Phoebes, pipits and swallows, but we'll hope for an abundance of shorebirds returning from points north. Perhaps we'll get lucky with some unusual species for the desert, like Dunlin or Whimbrel. We'll find a cool indoor spot to go over the list. Bring water! Return to Scottsdale by 10 a.m.

Leader: Kathe Anderson

Difficulty: 1-2—mostly even footing, and lots of walking.

Limit: 6. $4 per person gas money recommended for your driver. Donations in my car will go to CEDO.

To register, go to https://maricopa-audubon-society.ticketleap.com/glendale-recharge-ponds/

September 9, Thursday

Granite Reef Recreation Area—Lower Salt River

We will be expecting more migrant birds moving through here, and summer breeding birds should be plentiful. Leader Rob Bowker is well acquainted with this location and wants to encourage beginning to intermediate birders to sign up. A few duck species, and long-legged waders can be seen here, along with the mesquite bosque birds, including Lucy's Warblers and Northern Cardinals. To see the most bird activity, we will meet at 6 a.m. at the Granite Reef parking lot (3.5 miles north of the Power Rd/Loop 101 intersection).

This area is within Tonto National Forest and requires a "Tonto Daily Pass", a one day-use parking pass per car, available at gas stations, sporting goods stores, and convenience stores. A Golden Eagle pass (now called Senior Pass) is valid too. Please buy one for your car before the day of the trip.

Leader: Rob Bowker

Difficulty: 2

Limit: 6

To register, go to https://maricopa-audubon-society.ticketleap.com/granite-reef-recreation-area/

September 11, Saturday

Northsight Park—North Scottsdale

Meet at parking lot north of Thunderbird on 84th St. This daybreak (6 a.m.) birding trip will explore the lush desert habitat in this area, avoiding the human activities by the early start. The paths are level and an easy walk, about one mile total distance and about two to three hours of birding, depending on bird activity. Typically, wintering sparrows and resident species can be seen, and some early migrants should be around, such as Lucy's Warbler and Ash-throated Flycatcher.

Leader: Brian Ison

Difficulty: 2 (one mile walk)

Limit: 6

To register, go to https://maricopa-audubon-society.ticketleap.com/northsight-park/

October 20, Wednesday

Oak Flat and Boyce Thompson Arboretum

We will leave Gilbert about 5:45 a.m. to head straight to Top of the World, a few miles beyond Superior, then work our way back, with stops at Oak Flat, Boyce Thompson Arboretum and Queen Valley, to end up at Gilbert Water Ranch for a picnic. These various habitats should give us a nice collection of avian desert residents at different elevations. Expect to wrap up in Gilbert about 2 p.m. Bring a picnic lunch. Entrance fee to the Arboretum: $15.

Leader: Kathe Anderson

Difficulty: 1-2—mostly even footing, and lots of walking.

Limit: 6. $10 per person gas money recommended for your driver. Donations in my car will go to CEDO.

To register, go to https://maricopa-audubon-society.ticketleap.com/route-60/

November 10, Wednesday

A Variety of Ponds in Tempe and a Variety of Birds

This easy local trip will start about 7:15 a.m. at Tempe Town Lake (with stops at Tempe Marketplace and Tempe Center for the Arts), continuing to the ponds at ASU Research Park, and ending at Kiwanis Park to check out the pond there. We can expect the usual variety of winter waterfowl plus common urban desert birds and hope for some unusual species. This is an excellent beginner's trip, often with excellent close-up views, and may include some surprises that keep more experienced birders interested. Wrap up about 11:30 a.m. A scope would be an asset at Tempe Town Lake.

Leader: Kathe Anderson

Difficulty: 1-2—mostly even footing, and lots of walking.

Limit: 6. $3 per person gas money recommended for your driver. Donations in my car will go to CEDO.

To register go to https://maricopa-audubon-society.ticketleap.com/tempe-ponds/

Barn Owl by Cindy Marple

The Barn Owl

The Barn Owl
(Tyto alba)

Though it roosts in abandoned
factories or barn-lofts,
this mid-sized, widespread

owl with dramatic, white, heart-
shaped facial disc is not
a human emblem—

its characteristic call
a penetrating *shree*,
feeding on voles, mice,

the occasional small bird;
summer nights hunting from
sundown to dawn, low-

flying, hovering on long,
sound-absorptive wings.
Still, met, of a sudden

—pale mask floating in full dark—
you might well mistake it
for a heart in shock.

Jeredith Merrin

Jeredith lives in Tempe, and this poem appears in her book OWLING, published by Grayson Books www.GraysonBooks.com

Goshawks in Summer

And they will never fence the skies
Ian Tyson

A high meadow swings
between mountains competing
for a cloud, where a kestrel hangs
on the air with
his ultra-violet eye
lasered on prey. It's a light-headed walk
from one forest to the next,
where deep rooted shadows
allow enough light through
to gild a kinglet's crown.
Grass flows for miles and water
flashes through it
where a dipper goes down
into the current and back
up. Summer takes a deep breath
just before the thunderhead
marks late afternoon and time
to shelter where
the goshawks have waited
out every storm for centuries
until the sky
was returned to them.

David Chorlton

Near Silverton, Colorado by Roberta Chorlton

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CONSERVATION UPDATE

by Mark Horlings

An Update on Arizona Wildfires

The Arizona wildfire season began early again this year. Oak Flat Campground and Boyce Thompson Arboretum were threatened by the Telegraph fire, as was the town of Superior. As of this writing, all appear to have been spared.

Fossil Creek also escaped nearby fires. However, upland areas surrounding Fossil Creek, already damaged by overgrazing, burned. MAS and its allies are evaluating the risk that, if grazing continues at the present level, erosion from the upland grazing leases will damage Fossil Creek. Action to cut back the amount of legally-permitted grazing may be needed.

New Mexico Meadow Jumping Mouse Lawsuits

The most recent Wren*dition announced that MAS' lawsuit to protect this small mammal had been settled. The Forest Service agreed to repair and maintain fences designed to protect the mice in Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest from feral horses. In addition, the Forest Service promised an early decision on measures to remove the horses.

In New Mexico's Lincoln National Forest, grazing cattle threaten another population of the endangered mouse. MAS and its co-plaintiffs settled their lawsuit after the Forest Service promised it would redo the consultation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife which the Endangered Species Act requires. Unfortunately, the second consultation reached virtually the same, unsatisfactory conclusion. On June 4, 2021, MAS and its co-plaintiffs served a new Notice of Intent to sue.

Damage to the San Pedro River

A recent survey documented continuing damage to the San Pedro River south of the San Pedro House. Three threatened or endangered species: the Northern Mexico Gartersnake, the Huachuca Water Umbrel, and the Yellow-billed Cuckoo, occupy the area between San Pedro House and the Hereford Bridge.

The San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area allows cattle grazing on allotments away from the river. Federal stewards of public lands, in this case the Bureau of Land Management, must enforce the contracts governing grazing allotments. Otherwise, fences designed to protect the river and its critical habitat fall into disrepair, and cattle head straight for the water.

The recent survey showed extensive damage to habitat along the river. Cattle have also damaged St. David's Cienega, habitat for the Huachuca Water Umbrel upriver from the San Pedro house. MAS and its allies have filed Notice of Intent to sue, seeking to force the Bureau of Land Management to repair and maintain the fences.

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

amazonsmile

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!

Sage Grouse by Mark Horlings

On April seventeenth, my daughter Amy and I rose at two-thirty, met our guide Andrew an hour later, and entered a blind in Harney County, Oregon at four-thirty, hoping to see Greater Sage Grouse. Amy had attended the Harney County Birding Festival two years before but the sage grouse didn't show. This year, they had been on their lek daily for a couple weeks.

We traveled from Frenchglen to a ranch south of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, then five miles on a gravel road in a four-by-four truck, then three more miles, mostly cross-country, in a Utility Terrain Vehicle. The night was clear, no moon but many stars. Andrew put us in a scientific frame of mind by pointing out the spot where MIT scientists had erected radio telescopes the year before, telescopes designed to test whether more hydrogen was in the atmosphere 200 million years ago than had been previously thought. Harney County and Western Australia are apparently the two best spots for these measurements.

Dark is required for the hydrogen tests, and the inside of our blind definitely qualified. For the first half hour, I thought we were looking out at a mound about as high as our eyes and close, sure to block much of the view. As the night receded, I realized the top of the mound was in fact the top of the hill, our horizon, a good hundred feet away and the top edge of the lek.

Andrew heard the first grouse flying onto the lek well before we saw any. The grouse we saw first were dark clumps, moving among lighter clumps of grasses. In the starlight, the birds would turn occasionally, flashing twin white chest patches. In a field of muted colors, the white shone, and when the birds turned, we could see that white feathers covered their fronts, then ran behind the birds' necks like a woman's stole, highlighting the dark head and neck. The birds' tail feathers, separated into perhaps twenty dramatic spikes, framed the oval of white.

When visibility improved, about a dozen displaying birds were on the lek. With their chests out and their spiked tails erect, the males looked like inverted horseshoes, and it was hard to believe they could fly. However, a couple flew in after first light. Absent the postures they assumed for display, they looked to be agile flyers.

The grouse share territory with ranchers, farmers, miners, and coal and oil companies in ten Western states, and efforts to protect them have become confrontational. Courts blocked most of the Trump Administration's efforts to open grouse habitat to oil and gas development, but the long-term outlook remains uncertain. A federal agency concluded in March, 2021, that sage grouse populations have dropped eighty percent since the 1960s and forty percent just since 2005.

Three males stood together near the center of the lek. Others stood by themselves near the outer edges. For the first ninety minutes or so, all flashed their appeal, chests out, eyes up, and tail feathers pointing straight up. Most pumped their air sacs, offering a brief view of mustard yellow skin midway down their chests. The rhythm was consistent, first a single chest convulsion while the head and neck drew back, then a brief quiet, then a sort of double hiccup as bodies and heads convulsed twice more. If females were present, we could not see them.

We saw some signs of aggression: a male in the group of three running several steps towards the others, then stopping before contact. In general, however, things were more peaceful than we had anticipated. The solitary birds at the edges of the lek were never approached by others, and birds only a few feet from others would turn their backs to each other. Though they continued to display their own attractions, they seemed to be ignoring their rivals. After a couple hours, two birds from the central group of three stopped displaying and settled down comfortably next to each other. The males' displays are commonly described as "struts" but much of the movement seemed more like a stroll.

Cattle grazed nearby. Neither the cattle nor the sage grouse seemed interested in the other. Early on, a coyote appeared at one end of the lek and then walked through. The birds clearly saw the coyote but did not seem alarmed, and the coyote never rushed them.

The Turning Year

"There's No Place Like Home" when you live in the Sonoran Desert"!

by Vicki Hire

Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz was right: there's no place like home for watching birds and wildlife, especially when you live in the Sonoran Desert of the Southwest. Greater Roadrunners and Coyotes are only two of the more than sixty mammals, 350 birds, 100 reptiles, and 2,000 native plants that call this desert home.1 The Sonoran Desert is one of the hottest deserts in North America, and it covers approximately 120,000 square miles, stretching over southwestern Arizona, southeastern California, and the western half of the state of Sonora, Mexico. My back yard in this amazing desert is just over three acres and although small, the wildlife that it supports amazes me. I wouldn't trade the unique beauty of this desert and the excitement it provides for life in the city. It's a place where nature can be tested and viewed to its extreme limit, yet a place of solace too.

From January through December, it's a never-ending wonder of wildlife activity. From January through March, we watch as American Kestrels, Red-tailed Hawks, and Cooper's Hawks hunt for their prey, mostly cottontail rabbits and round-tailed squirrels that abound. We've photographed a Zone-tailed Hawk fly overhead, and a family of Harris's Hawks teaching their young to hunt. Northern Cardinals, House Finches, House Sparrows, Harris's Antelope squirrels are permanent residents. Anna's and Costa's Hummingbirds, White-crowned Sparrows, and Eurasian Collared Doves are frequent visitors. Once a Hooded Oriole arrived damp from a rain and sheltered in a Palo Verde, and a rarer visitor the House Wren once quickly hopped in for a rest on the patio. Another winter day we were thrilled to discover a phasmid or "Walking Stick" insect on a creosote bush.

During the spring months of April through June, Gila Woodpeckers and Gilded Flickers squawk while competing for hanging seed blocks and drilling holes into our saguaros, as the Gambel's Quail scurry across the desert floor quite often with young ones. A Great Horned Owl perched in a large Ironwood tree awoke me one morning with his hoots.

Continued on next page...

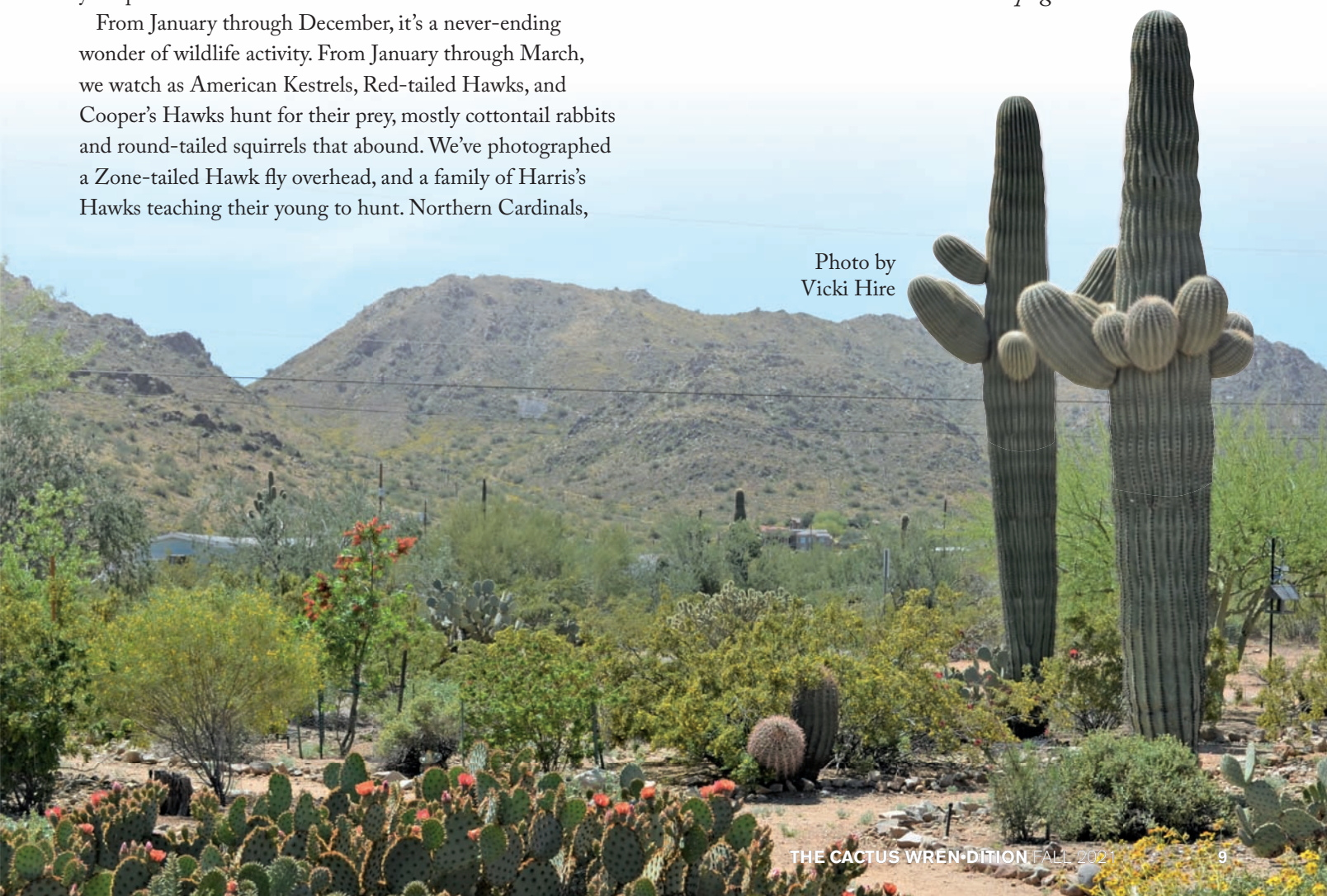


Photo by Vicki Hire

In the evenings, Western Screech-Owls frequent a water feature on the property. An occasional Ladder-backed Woodpecker visits the ironwoods and Verdins are in constant motion in the desert palo verde trees. Couch's Spadefoot Toads appear and desperately try to lay their eggs in our swimming pool, an accurate predictor of monsoons to come. And of course, our resident kingsnakes, Sonoran gopher snakes, coachwhip and Mohave rattlers begin to emerge. I'm sure there's a diamondback or a sidewinder out there somewhere, but so far, I haven't seen one on the property.

Lesser Nighthawks arrive by the summer months July through September, and they swoop down to our swimming pool to catch a drink nightly, sometimes while we are swimming. It is an amazing sight, as they make quick sharp turns then open their mouths wide to take a sip. They are so quick that I've only managed to take a few blurry shots of their antics. Turkey Vultures fly overhead scanning the landscape, along with an occasional Black Vulture. We once had a committee of Black Vultures take dips in our swimming pool, preening and tidying themselves after they'd devoured a large roadkill in less than eight minutes.

Black-tailed Jackrabbits, always on guard, come to drink in the evenings and enjoy an occasional carrot we put out for them. Coyotes jump the property fence to drink from the bird bath and water saucers. Desert hairy scorpions, one of the largest species in Arizona and whose burrows can be 8 feet deep, emerge at night searching for prey. Several Regal horned lizards reside on the property, most likely drawn to the overabundance of ants. Nocturnal Western Banded Geckos hide beneath stored wood. My husband, Ron, has become accustomed to finding various lizards, longnose snakes, centipedes, and ants.

As fall advances October through December, we anticipate visits from Black-tailed Gnatcatchers, Phainopeplas, Loggerhead Shrikes, Brewer's Sparrows, Oregon Juncos, Black-throated Sparrows, and Says Phoebes that always excite us. The ever-entertaining and year-round residents, Cactus Wrens and Curve-billed Thrashers, thrive. We once had a couple of packrats make their presence known by chewing the wiring in one of our cars, an expensive lesson we learned the hard way.

As urban development looms closer, I can only hope that the natural world around me will continue to thrive for future generations to appreciate and enjoy. My family is trying to do their part by maintaining native plants, forgoing pesticides, and providing water for birds and wildlife to ensure there will always be something new to discover and enjoy in our backyard. For me, there's no place like home.

[1]https://www.biologicaldiversity.org/programs/public_lands/deserts/sonoran_desert/index.html

Coyote drinking by Vicki Hire

To a Say's Phoebe by beth Liechti

Say's Phoebe Nestlings by beth Liechti

At dusk, I turn on the front porch light and glance up. Ten feet above, a clump of brown and green catches my eye under the porch roof. A small gray head with intense black eyes pokes out at one end and a black tail twitches at the other.

Earlier, a similar nest had appeared under the patio roof on our back deck. And a few days later, I was disheartened to see the nest strewn across the ground, probably the casualty of high winds that tore through the West Valley, releasing spring into the Sonoran Desert.

Then appeared a tightly wound lair of dried leaves, twigs, and mossy underbrush. I'll be darned if that's not clumps of dog hair from the brush that I let fly into the backyard lining the perimeter. What a thrill! I may have aided in the building of your baby refuge.

Here we were: you little mama bird and me, both building homes in the desert: you under an eave and me caged in a rental, while I searched for a house. After years, my dream of living in Arizona had come true.

Turning the deadbolt makes enough noise to cause you to flit away. After several sightings, I conclude you are a Say's Phoebe—*Sayornis saya*—a first for my birdwatching log. After living in the humid forests and meadows of the East coast, I see you are a Western bird that prefers arid habitats.

You, "the most colorful of the phoebes," are one of three phoebes belonging to the tyrant flycatcher family. A commercial concern that sells bird paraphernalia in northern Arizona describes you as "plain and nondescript." You, dear Say's Phoebe, are anything but plain. Piercing eyes. Gray topcoat. Ebony tail. Your gray throat and breast contrasts with a buff orange belly that flashes when you take flight.

One evening, I hear one, then another, mournful whistle. Searching the shadows of a short palm, I spot the pair calling to each other. Once you find a good nesting site, you use the site year after year. Perhaps that is the case this spring when I discover you.

Your babies hatch in a couple of weeks and nest for a couple more. I can't wait.

beth Liechti is currently exploring Arizona backcountry trails on Storm, a 16-year-old romping, stomping Arab gelding. She is a U.S. Army veteran.

A View from Home

Swallows in the fast air
over the pond; a new nest for the Red-tail
in a tree tall as the sky; a Green-tailed Towhee
picking the invisible
from the backyard's earth,
and the hands
on the year's clock meet
in springtime prayer.

- David Chorlton

Green-tailed Towhee by David Chorlton

Bullock's Oriole
by David Chorlton

BROOD PARASITES

Article and photos by Matt VanWallene

We live in a unique part of the U.S. where Bronzed (BROC) and Brown-headed (BHCO) Cowbirds' ranges overlap. Both species are brood parasites which lay their eggs in other species' nests. One of their host species is Abert's Towhee (ABTO). ABTO is the predominant species in the yard, my having identified twelve individuals in a two hour feeder survey.

A few years ago I watched a BHCO go into a pomegranate tree after an ABTO had flown out. I inspected the site a short while later and discovered a nest with an odd assortment of eggs. I knew this was something special and set up a ladder from which I could photograph the nest with a telephoto lens. In addition to using Cornell NestWatch protocol, I was chirping every time I approached the ladder and while taking pictures.

Post processing the photos I was able to identify two ABTO eggs, one BHCO egg, and one BROC egg. Two of the eggs were smaller than the BROC egg and had gray bumps on them. Five years later I resent the mystery egg basket to my "Bird Chronicles" readers asking for another try. Larry Langstaff sent pictures to a friend who had connections with the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology.

Rene, a WFVZ staff member, gave this assessment: The small white eggs are from a second female Bronzed Cowbird because there is a fair degree of egg size variation in this species. The raised markings on the eggs are probably caused by stress, an excess of calcium distributed to the shell or the bird is sick. Also, this is "normal" on chickens, when the chicken is young, sometimes bumpy shells can occur for a while until her egg-laying cycle has established.

NEST CHRONOLOGY

July 4: Discovered ABTO nest while watching a female BHCO sitting in the grass. After the ABTO flew from the nest, the BHCO went into the pomegranate tree.
July 5: The host ABTO lays its second egg.
July 15 (day 12): The BROC egg with the crack in it is pushed out of the nest.
July 16 (day 13): The BHCO egg and the first ABTO egg hatch.
July 18 (day 15): Second ABTO egg hatches, second small BROC egg is expelled from the nest.
July 19 (day 16): Large BROC egg is expelled.
July 23 (day 20): The younger ABTO chick is dead in the nest.
July 24 (day 21): The dead chick is expelled from the nest.
July 27 (day 24): Both birds left the nest, saw the ABTO chick on a branch close to the nest, both chicks were 11 days old.

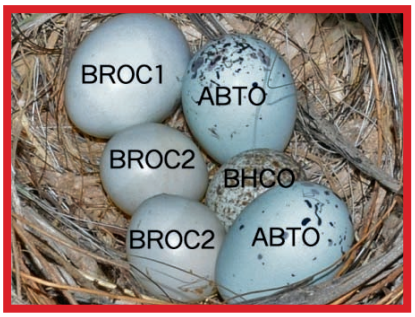
Matt VanWallene, has been a backyard birder for 15 years. To read the entire story and to see many more pictures go to hollandwest.com/projects/ then click on the nest picture.

Abert's Towhee's (ABTO) range follows the lower Colorado and Gila River basins. It is not sexually dimorphic. It is multibrooded, laying up to six clutches in one season. Both parents participate in feeding the young.

Brown-headed Cowbird's (BHCO) range is from Mexico to Canada. It is a brood parasite having 220 hosts of which only 170 are successful. Being an omnivore, malnutrition results from herbivore hosts. It can lay up to 36 eggs in a season.

Bronzed Cowbird's (BROC) US range follows states that border Mexico. It is a brood parasite. Fourteen eggs have been found in one nest. There are 101 known hosts.

To facilitate incubation the eggs were rotated multiple times a day.



The four mothers consisted of 2 BROCs, 1 ABTO and 1 BHCO.

I CALL HER SOPHIA

Article by Mark Wiens

It was early evening and above one hundred and ten degrees. She flew onto my backyard wall after standing in one of the neighbor's pine trees for about forty minutes. She was a Great Horned Owl. I called her Sophia. Once on the wall, the resident Great-tailed Grackle flew repeatedly at her, shrieking with great alarm. Suddenly Sophia furrowed her brows and walked several steps toward Mr. Grackle, who then flew away with all his family, not to be seen in my yard for several years.

From that day, Sophia came regularly to my back yard water fountain whenever temperatures surpassed one hundred and ten. Usually in late afternoon or early evening she came, waiting in the neighbor's tree before flying to the fountain. As time passed, she flew directly to the wall and then the fountain for that cherished drink. I was awestruck whenever she appeared, and by her second summer, when we invited friends for dinner, her visits were our entertainment. Such a magnificent and wild creature, and so close to us!

Sophia's third year arrival one May morning was different. Clearly not over one hundred and ten, she landed on the base of the water fountain and didn't drink for as long as usual. Then stepping off the water fountain and into the adjacent shaded garden area, she stood there as I left for work. Returning that afternoon, I eagerly looked to see if she was still there, and she was. However, she had perished, her lifeless body lying where I last saw her that morning. I was deeply saddened. I felt sad that my wild friend was gone, but profoundly honored that she had chosen my yard for both water sustenance in her health decline, and then to take her last breath. So, I enlisted the help of my son David, and we returned Sophia into Mother Earth's embrace, and said our goodbyes.

Mark Wiens, a member of the Maricopa Audubon Society, is a retired pastor and hospice chaplain. He started bird watching in 1983 when his wife placed a sunflower head on their apartment window ledge, surrounded as it was by much city concrete, asphalt, and an active train track. And a bright, sprite red cardinal showed up the next day!

SEEK AND YOU SHALL FIND: BECOMING A BETTER BACKYARD NATURALIST By Tom Gatz

There are lots of insects and arthropods as well as flowers and plants that we promise ourselves to look up and try to identify later, only to give up when we realize there are literally thousands of species to sort through and have no field guide that can cover them all.

Even if you are a little intimidated by loading "apps" (applications) on your smart phone, you have to try this one, even if you need to get a younger family member help you load and open it. It is called SEEK and it was created by the same folks who developed iNaturalist. This app is even easier to use: I call it "iNaturalist Light." The most amazing thing is that it can potentially identify just about any living organism, plant or animal, in real time, just by pointing your cell phone camera at the bug or flower, without even needing to take a photo of it.

Now I spend time in my backyard or neighborhood with the free SEEK app open on my cell phone, pointing the camera at every little spider, tiny flower, and unidentified beetle I come across. If I get close enough, with enough angles, the identification usually pops up on the screen, based on what is common in your neighborhood. Sometimes it can only get you to the family or genus level, but it at least it points in the right direction.

Once it identifies the flower, bird, bug, etc. for you, you can learn more about it on the same app. If you want to move up a step and share your sightings with the iNaturalist community, get that grandchild to show you how to use the iNaturalist app.

To learn more about the uses and differences between the two applications (both free), here is a helpful link: https://www.inaturalist.org/pages/seek_app

Try it. You are going to love this!

HOW TO HELP THE BIRDS AROUND YOU

1. Leave them water, all year 'round, and best in a shallow dish.

2. Feed the birds black oil sunflower seed or nyjer seed. You should see House Finches, Lesser Goldfinches, White-crowned Sparrows (in winter), and Mourning Doves.

3. Hang a hummingbird feeder and fill it with a recipe of sugar and water. Mix 4 parts water to 1 part sugar and let it boil for 2 minutes. Let it cool before carefully pouring it into the feeder. There is no need to buy the red colored mix at the store.

4. Place orange halves on a flat surface for Gila Woodpeckers and Gilded or Northern Flickers. Woodpeckers also like suet cakes, which will attract even more birds.

5. Don't use pesticides, either as sprays for weeds or poison for rats. Look for non-toxic solutions. Remember that owls will help control the rat population, and mockingbirds need insects.

6. Keep a brush pile in the yard for birds to use and sometimes hide in.

7. Don't trim trees too early. Birds may be nesting in palm trees and others well into the hot months in Phoenix.

Create a Backyard Haven for the Birds!

Compiled by Vicki Hire

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

Create a haven for birds in your very own backyard!

You've read and heard about the impact of climate change and habitat loss on our birds and wildlife. You can help make a difference by creating a safe place for native birds, as well as those birds that are migrating and in need of a stop-over.

Plan your Garden

Whether you have a large backyard, or a patio or balcony, you can still help. Even small areas or container pots that are planted with native plants can provide birds with seeds, nectar, and vital refuge all year long. Plan for continuous blooming throughout the year, and plant in groups of five if possible since pollinators prefer to feed on a mass of same species of flowers.

Plan your Garden

Native plants are best adapted to your local climate conditions. Talk with someone at your local Audubon chapter or local plant nursery if you aren't sure which plants to use or check out the native plants database for your zipcode at https://www.audubon.org/native-plants. Small shrubs and trees can provide nesting sites. Perennial plants and groundcovers provide seeds for birds. Sunflowers and their seeds are a great source of fuel for migrating birds. The tubular flowers of the honeysuckle are magnets for hummingbirds.

Provide Water

Birds require water year 'round. Placing bird baths or saucers of water in your yard is important, especially in our dry desert. The sound of dripping or running water from a fountain will attract the wildlife. However, be sure to maintain your water feature and keep it clean to avoid harming birds and spreading disease or encouraging mosquitoes. To keep your birdbath fresh, just rinse and scrub it with nine parts water, one part vinegar. Forget using the synthetic soaps and cleansers because they can strip the essential oils off bird feathers. Make sure to refill the water every other day to keep it from bugging up.

Keep it messy

Don't remove or "dead-head" all your flowering plants after they bloom. Leave those seed heads as a source of food for the birds. Let fallen leaves keep your plants' roots cool and moist in the desert heat. Those leaves will also provide a habitat for insects, a favorite food of birds, frogs, and bats. Say no to chemicals and keep your yard safe for both bugs and birds.

Add fun feeders

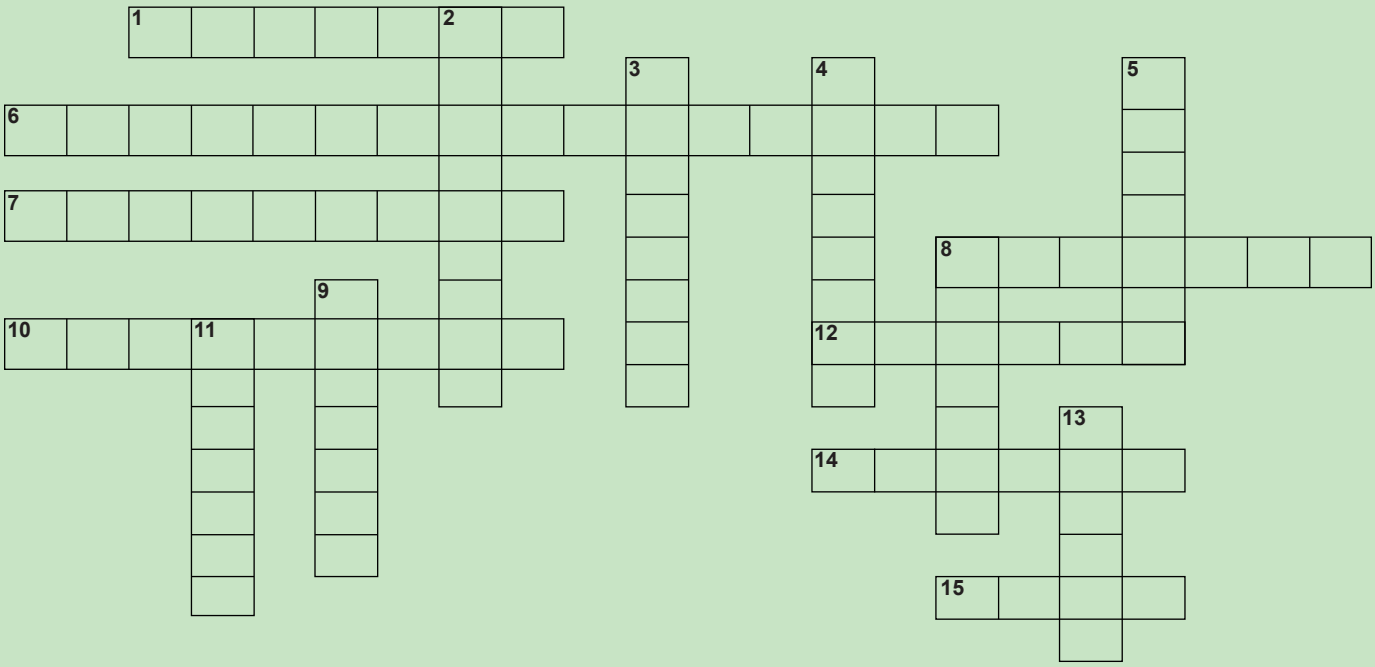
Don't forget to have some fun by adding a few seed feeders to your yard! Create natural homemade bird feeders by cutting an orange, watermelon, or pumpkin in half and removing the flesh. Then fill with seed or peanut butter suet and hang it from a tree branch using twine. Or recycle the cardboard roll from toilet paper, coat it with peanut butter and then press & roll it in bird seed. Slide the roll onto a tree branch and watch as the birds flock to it!

Relax and enjoy

Remember what is good for the birds is also good for people! By transforming your yard into a bird sanctuary, you're also creating a beautiful garden for everyone to enjoy. And while we're on the subject, check out the 2021 result of the Great Backyard Bird Count from around the world! https://www.birdcount.org/2021-final-results/ and get inspired for 2022!

Create a backyard haven for birds

Crossword Puzzle



Across

1. Keep your birdbath clean to avoid spreading _____ or encouraging mosquitos

6. This dove has a black crescent shape on the back of its neck

7. Say no to the use of _____ in your backyard

8. Small shrubs and trees can provide _____ sites for birds

10. If you have a patio or balcony, use _____ pots to plant native plants for birds and pollinators

12. _____ plants are best adapted to your local climate conditions

14. Fallen _____ provide a habitat for insects

15. Synthetic soaps can strip essential _____ off a bird's feathers

Down

2. Seeds from these plants provide a source of fuel for migrating birds

3. Plan and plant for continuous _____ in your garden throughout the year

4. The sound of _____ water will attract birds

5. Help scientists gather data by participating in the Great Backyard Bird _____ each year

8. Create a _____ homemade bird feeder by cutting a watermelon in half and hanging it from the tree branch using twine

9. To keep your birdbath clean, scrub with nine parts water and one part _____

11. Honeysuckle _____ flowers are magnets for birds

13. What is good for birds is also good for _____

Curve-billed Thrasher by Vicki Hire

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.

Guess this Bird

Clue: Seen often at backyard feeders, these birds are mostly brown color with a black crescent shape collar on the back of their necks.

Answer: Eurasian Collared-Dove. When walking, these doves bob their heads and flick their tails. They call out with three-syllable coos.

Crossword Answers

Across

1. disease
6. Eurasian Collared
7. chemicals
8. nesting
10. container
12. native
14. leaves
15. oils

Down

2. sunflowers
3. blooming
4. dripping
5. count
8. natural
9. vinegar
11. tubular
13. people

The Glitter in the Green: In Search of Hummingbirds
by Jon Dunn
Basic Books, and imprint of Perseus Books, LLC, Hachette Book Group. New York. 2021.
333 pp.,
ISBN 978-1-5416-1819-0,
$30.00 U.S.

Reviewed by Mark W. Larson

Seven years ago, I reviewed a new book about hummingbirds in the Wren-dition that was, essentially, an illustrated and annotated list of all the world's hummingbird species. This year, a more literary volume has appeared, The Glitter in the Green: In Search of Hummingbirds by Jon Dunn. If that first hummingbird book can be characterized as a list, then the latter book might be called a diary or a travelogue. Yes, it might be characterized as a diary or a travelogue but as we shall see, that would sell it short because there is so much more to this book.

We follow the British author as he travels to Alaska in the spring in search of the northernmost nesting species, the Rufous Hummingbird. Things do not go well. First, he arrives after the males have departed. After tramping through the forest for days seeing no hummingbirds at all and a close call with a bear, he at last encounters a female Rufous Hummingbird—at the lodge where he is staying!

Tellingly, one of the first places he goes to see hummingbirds after his disappointing experience in Alaska is southern Arizona. He describes the area as our country's "Holy Land" for hummingbirds. He is especially enamored of the Paton Center for Hummingbirds in Patagonia.

One of the charming aspects of this book is that Dunn engages people past and present about their relationships with hummingbirds. He is interested, not only in hummingbirds, but why people are fascinated and charmed by them. To some people, he finds that hummingbirds are mystical and possess supernatural powers.

Following a tip, he visits a back-alley shop in Nogales, Sonora where he finds stuffed hummingbirds on pendants sold to ward off evil spirits and he visits another, larger such place in an open-air market in Mexico City. Dunn references a self-portrait of Frida Kahlo wearing such a necklace.

He goes on to relate his experiences with hummingbirds and hummingbird guides in México, Costa Rica, Cuba, Colombia, and elsewhere in Central and South America in search of rare and unusual species. He even ventures offshore to the Juan Fernández Islands of Chile where he encounters the stunning Juan Fernández Firecrown. But rather than simply narrating these travels, Dunn relates the stories behind the discoveries and naming of these birds.

The book is illustrated with sixteen pages of color photographs, all of which were made by the author. Many of these are good to excellent while a few others should have been eliminated.

Jon Dunn is an exceptionally fine writer whose prose is painterly and a delight to read, so it is unfortunate that the book could have used more skillful editing. I found at least a half-dozen words misspelled or misused including Vermilion Flycatcher. And, at the Paton Center he observed both Violet-crowned and Violet-capped Hummingbirds, according to the text. There are a few grammar errors as well.

Do not allow my minor misgivings about this book prevent you from reading it or giving it as a gift to someone you know who is interested in hummingbirds. This a well-researched and elegantly written book, rich in both historical and ornithological detail that will enhance any reader's knowledge and appreciation of hummingbirds. It certainly did mine.

Laurie Nessel

Extinction: Casualties of the Anthropocene

Glass Art and Oil Paintings

Whether climate change, habitat loss or degradation, overconsumption, or invasive species, untold flora and fauna have struggled from the impacts of Homo sapiens since our dispersal from Africa nearly two hundred thousand years ago. With 7.5 billion people now, the devastation is accelerating. Our link to nature is eroding. We live diminished lives in landscapes of our own making. Many people are frozen in helplessness, apathy or greed, or are saving the planet one straw at a time. I cannot be a bystander to the sixth extinction. This series of beads and paintings is an homage to victims of uncontrolled growth. It is a reminder that we must fix the mess we've made, or become a victim ourselves. Ironically, glass has one of the higher carbon footprints of art mediums, so I try to mitigate my impact by volunteering and supporting environmental organizations, and going vegan. 10% of sales go to environmental advocacy organizations. The beads on this page are made entirely of soda-lime glass and measure approximately 2.75" x 1.5" x .75".

Extinction #5: Vaquita

Phocoena sinus | IUCN Critically endangered

Vaquitas, "little cows", have the smallest range (the northern Gulf of California), and size (4.5'), of any marine mammal. They live up to 21 years on small fish, crustaceans, and cephalopods. They use high-pitched sounds to communicate and echolocation to navigate and locate prey. They have no close relatives and are the only warm water porpoise. There are a dozen extant.

Extinction #7: Ivory-billed woodpecker

Campephilus principalis | IUCN Extinct

Ghost bird, Lord God bird was one of the largest woodpeckers in the world, (20" long, 30" wingspan, 2.9" bill). Native to thick hardwood swamps and pine forests of S.E. US. Rampant logging of primeval hardwood forests since the Civil War, as well as hunting and collecting, led to their extinction. The last confirmed sighting was in 1944 in Louisiana on the last old-growth habitat, owned by the Singer Sewing Company, which chose logging over preservation.

Extinction #9: Black-footed ferret

Mustela nigripes | IUCN Endangered

Once considered extinct in the wild, Black-footed ferrets were one of the first captive-bred reintroductions of an endangered species. Prairie dogs, their primary prey and a keystone species, lost 95% of their historic range due to eradication efforts by poisoning, plowing, industrial vacuuming, fumigating, and shooting to make room for cattle, crops, oil and gas and other development starting in the 1800s. Introduced canine distemper is another threat to both prairie dogs and ferrets.

Extinction #12: Yellow-billed cuckoo

Coccyzus americanus | IUCN LC

This does not consider the endangered western population as distinct. Neotropic migrants, Yellow-billed Cuckoos have one of the latest and shortest nesting cycles, from egg to fledge in as few as 17 days, following the emergence of their preferred prey: tent-caterpillars. Asynchronous egg laying staggers nestling growth. Males may remove youngest nestling if food is scarce. Both parents share nesting duties. They winter in South America.

The Messenger

Moth on Desert Lavender

Chuckwalla

The Messenger: Woodbury Fire 2019,

40" x 32", oil on gaterboard

The iconic Four Peaks of the Mazatzal Wilderness mark this Sonoran Desert landscape with its granitic boulders that harbor a diverse fauna. Desert Lavender ekes out a living in the gravelly soil. Woodrat, common chuckwalla, centipede and black-tailed rattlesnake find cover in the crevasses. A Common Raven, the Messenger, circles before the plume of combusted desert, semidesert grassland, chaparral, and pinyon-juniper, portending monumental changes to the biotic community. 123,875 acres burned, becoming the fifth largest wildfire in Arizona history at the time, but now pushed to number seven by the 2020 Bush Fire (193,455) and the 2021 Telegraph Fire (180,757).

Laurie Nessel lives in Tempe. Her work can be seen @laurienessel on Instagram and a new website laurienessel.com coming soon.

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MONTHLY MEETING

For location and information on monthly meetings, see page 4. Contact a board member if you have questions, or check out our website at 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

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, https://www.maricopaaudubon.org/join

For specific questions please contact our Membership Chair.

SUBMISSIONS

Copy for The *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

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.

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