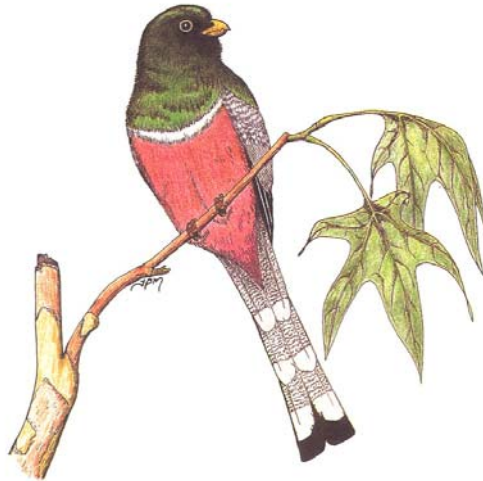


# THE TROGON NEWS

HUACHUCA AUDUBON SOCIETY  
Post Office Box 63, Sierra Vista, Arizona 85636  
Volume XXXII Number 10, December 2004



## President's Message

Happy Holidays!

As usual, the holidays seem to be such a busy time. I hope many of you will come to our holiday potluck on December 12. It's a weekend and daytime get-together, so we frequently get folks who don't come to our nighttime meetings. Come enjoy the fellowship. Bring your own plates and utensils, to minimize our trash and waste, as well as your tastiest offering!

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service has re-done their proposal for critical habitat for the Southwest Willow Flycatcher and rather amazingly has omitted the SPRNCA. I know some of you have heard or even seen the flycatcher down there, and Dave Krueper recorded a number of sightings, even an attempted nesting. Huachuca Audubon will be writing a formal comment to the service, protesting the omission.

Dr. Bill Branan and I continue to represent Audubon Arizona on the Upper San Pedro Partnership at their many monthly meetings. The Partnership pulled together their first report to Congress required by last year's legislation. It's being modified somewhat as it moves through the federal agencies and should be finalized by the end of the year and then available to the public. Meanwhile, we're working on the Partnership plan for 2005, which has tended to be more of a catalogue of projects than a plan but is moving somewhat towards being an actual plan. The Partnership has still not been able to come to grips with the public's perception that the water problem can't be very real as long as hundreds of homes continue to be approved and built with very few water restrictions.

### Local Programs and Events

**Dec 12<sup>th</sup>**, Sunday, HAS Holiday Party, 1:00 p.m., Mona Bishop Room, Sierra Vista Public Library. See below for more details.

**Dec 26<sup>th</sup>**, Sunday, Ramsey Canyon Christmas Bird Count. See below for more information.

### Field Trips

**Dec 8<sup>th</sup>**, Wednesday, 8:00 a.m. FSPR bird walk. Meet at San Pedro House.

**Dec 9<sup>th</sup>**, Thursday, HAS birding trip to Patagonia Lake State Park. See below for more info.

**Dec 12<sup>th</sup>**, Sunday, 8:00 a.m. FSPR bird walk. Meet at San Pedro River Inn.

**Dec 18<sup>th</sup>**, Saturday, 8:00 a.m. FSPR bird walk. Meet at San Pedro House.

**Dec 5<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and 26<sup>th</sup>**, Sunday's, 8:00 a.m. Sierra Vista Environmental Operations Park bird walks.



### Birding Trip to Patagonia Lake State Park

Traditionally a most popular, well attended, and birding- productive HAS annual event. Again we will have the pleasure of Ron Hummel as our boatman and local birding hotshot. On Dec 9<sup>th</sup>, we'll meet at the Sierra Vista City Hall parking lot for a 7:00 a.m. departure by carpool. We need to be at the Visitor Center at 8:30 a.m. (and 10:00 a.m.) in order to sign on and be fitted with life jackets. Our first boat will leave at 9:00 a.m. sharp, with the second at 10:30 a.m. sharp. Only eight persons per boat, so advance bookings are essential. Warm layered clothing with a good windbreaker is strongly recommended. The second boat party will go directly to the park trailhead to bird. Note: there is a \$7 park entry fee per vehicle, and \$3 fee per person for the boat ride. Due to the distance involved, donations to carpool drivers are expected. Contact the leader, Mike Guest, 378-0667 with any questions and to make reservations.

### HAS Holiday Party Potluck

Save the Date! December 12<sup>th</sup>, Mona Bishop Room, Sierra Vista Library for our Holiday Party Potluck followed by the first annual Elegant Trogon Silent Auction! Potluck starts at 1 p.m. with silent auction beginning at 3 p.m. Of course, while you dine on the tasty fare, you can sneak a peek at the beautiful holiday items. If you are planning a retreat after the holiday madness... consider bidding on a night's lodging at Casa de San Pedro's exquisite bed and breakfast! Go native this holiday season with a living Christmas tree trimmed with homemade bird treats from Mike Hocker of Southwest Native Garden Designs. It's a treat for your eye and your garden all year round if you keep making the bird goodies! Recipes will be included! Cheri Melton offers her handmade, creatively finished, bird habitat nest boxes and feeders, so please consider your avian visitors an offer them a little food and shelter when they need it the most. We encourage one and all to think "green" this holiday season and remember to bring your own napkins, plates, cups, glasses and cutlery for the potluck. We'll provide extra eco-friendly napkins if you forget! We'll have separate bins on hand for any items that require recycling or composting, but we hope that what you bring you'll take home for your own garden compost! Please invite your friends and neighbors to come and share with us some good old fashioned holiday cheer and good will! Please call Kate Scott at 520-455-5190 for any last minute donations or bring it to the auction and we'll make room!

**Wanted: Feeder Watchers!**  
**2004 Ramsey Canyon Christmas Bird Count (RCCBC)**



It's time once again to mark the RCCBC on your calendars. This year we will hold it on Sunday, 26 Dec. We had great weather and a great count last year with 150 species counted. As always, feeder watchers were a big part of last year's success and we are again seeking new participants to count their "yard birds". Your feeders need to lie within the RCCBC circle in order to be included in the count. The RCCBC circle runs roughly south of Fry Blvd and Hwy 90, west of the San Pedro River to Miller Peak, and south almost to the border with Mexico. See the map at Wild Birds Unlimited for more detail or check out the RCCBC map on-line at the Huachuca Audubon web site (<http://www.huachuca-audubon.org/RCCBC.html>). Also, see the RCCBC web page for details on the meeting time and place for breakfast and on reservations for the catered RCCBC "count tally" dinner. All you need to do is to record the species and estimate the number of individuals of each species that you see on the 26<sup>th</sup>. Provide me with this information and an estimate of the time you spent watching or walking your property and an estimate of the miles you walked. If you are interested in joining one of our bird count teams or watching your feeder(s), please contact me at (520) 803-0794 or via email at [weissler@aves.org](mailto:weissler@aves.org).

-Robert Weissler

**Clay and Patricia Sutton to Be Featured at Wings Over Willcox**

Wings Over Willcox is proud to present Clay and Patricia Sutton as the keynote speakers for the January 15, 2005, WOW banquet. A husband-and-wife team with over 40 years of experience between them as professional naturalists and authors, the Suttons will share their love of hawks and eagles and the "how to's" for finding and studying them.

Clay and Patricia Sutton have studied hawks and eagles for the past 25 years. They live near Cape May, a world-renowned migratory crossroads that is famous for its hawk migration. In their program, "How to Spot Hawks & Eagles," they will share the excitement of fall at Cape May and the excitement of the migration at many other hotspots they have visited, such as Duluth, Minnesota; Hawk Mountain, Pennsylvania; and Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge in Texas.

There will be special emphasis on finding raptors throughout the seasons, including wintering raptors in southeastern Arizona's Sulphur Springs Valley. "How to Spot Hawks & Eagles" is a slide program based on their recent book of the same name, and will cover raptor basics, finding hawks and eagles both near and far, and when and where to go. The Suttons will relate the fascination of hawk watching and convey the excitement of searching for, studying, and enjoying our spectacular birds of prey. They will be available for personal signing of their books after their talk.

For more information about the Suttons and a complete list of Wings Over Willcox tours and seminars, visit [www.wingsoverwillcox.com](http://www.wingsoverwillcox.com) or call 1-800-200-2272.

-Diane Drobka

### **2nd Sunday Bird Walk -14 November 2004**

A small group of intrepid observers braved a potentially rainy day to enjoy the first 2nd Sunday bird walk that felt like winter. Perhaps the most interesting birds seen were the Eurasian Collared-Dove at the beginning of the walk and the Great Egret at the very end as cars were pulling out. Both birds were seen in the vicinity of the ponds at the inn. And both birds are uncommon in our area.

We were also treated to upwards of twenty Pyrrhuloxia accompanied by Curve-billed Thrasher and Green-tailed Towhee. In fact, we had a Towhee sweep as Abert's, Spotted, and Canyon were also seen. Woodpeckers were much in evidence with Gilded Flicker and Red-naped Sapsucker joining the noisy Gila Woodpeckers, Ladder-backed Woodpeckers, and Northern (Red-shafted) Flickers. A female Belted Kingfisher was active by the largest pond. Sparrows were best represented by White-crowned, while a few Lincoln's were here and there. Surprisingly, Vesper Sparrows were not seen until the last half hour.

A raven kept us guessing between Common and Chihuahuan until it vocalized a deep call -- a Common Raven. Northern Harriers and Kestrels were seen well, while a mystery falcon eluded close inspection. A Great-horned Owl burst forth from the trail in front of us along the river to a perch in a cottonwood. Farther along, an Orange-crowned Warbler joined a group of kinglets. Once again, a House Wren was seen near the hay barn, while Bewick's Wren and White-breasted Nuthatch were common along the river.

The next 2nd Sunday Bird Walk is scheduled to depart from the San Pedro River Inn at 8:00 a.m. on December 12, 2004. Birders of all levels of experience are welcome to join us!

-Robert Weissler

### **Birding and Natural History in Sonora, Mexico April 25-30, 2005**

After a several year hiatus, the Huachuca Audubon Society will be returning to Sonora, Mexico for what should be an exciting and bird-filled trip. Breeding birds and migrants should be abundant as we travel along the lush Rio Sonora, through Sonoran Desert and tropical deciduous forest, and into the pines and oaks of the northern Sierra Madre. Among the birds we may encounter are green kingfisher, gray hawk, happy and spotted wrens, streak-backed and black-vented orioles, rufous-bellied chachalaca, brown-backed solitaire, blue mockingbird (doing its perfect elegant trogon imitation), orange-billed nightingale thrush, rufous-backed and white-throated robins, black-throated magpie jay, elegant quail, rusty sparrow, white-tipped dove, white-stripped woodcreeper, tufted flycatcher, crescent-chested warbler, and with luck, eared quetzal.

The trip will be limited to 8 participants. The all-inclusive, double occupancy cost from Sierra Vista is \$700, which includes a \$50 tax-deductible donation to the Huachuca Audubon Society. For a detailed itinerary or to register, contact Mark Pretti at 803-6889 or [mpnaturetours@earthlink.net](mailto:mpnaturetours@earthlink.net).

Two of HAS' favorite members, Karen Blumenthal and Mark Pretti, are off on an adventure at Brazil's Cristalino Jungle Lodge where they're serving as birding and natural history guides for a few months. Luckily for us, they're being kind enough to update us on their experiences. Here's the third installment describing their adventures.

### **Adventures in the Amazon – Chapter 3**

Greetings all.

Yikes. We've already burned a month's worth of precious time here ..... and what a month it has been. Lest it all seem too cushy from our descriptions so far, we're presently two weeks into a four-weeks-without-a-day-off stretch. Certainly, sharing the southern Amazon with travelers is great fun, but there is a cumulative fatigue factor. And it can be downright painful when you're with folks who aren't all that interested in birds and then a big mixed flock of who knows what avian treasures comes by. If you're a birdwatcher, you know what we mean. If not, imagine being an art aficionado and visiting your favorite museum with a friend who is only interested in the cafeteria and the gift shop. Just the same, we continue to be treated to endless natural surprises.

Here's the latest:

There's a small group of fruit-eating, tent-making bats that roost on one of the trails. These little beauties, in the genus *Artibeus*, cut a perpendicular line from the outer two edges of a palm leaf inward toward, but not all the way to, the midrib so that the two halves of the leaf droop down to form a cozy little living tent. Finding their day roost is great as they reliably hang out there and can be shared with visitors. They also have temporary night roosts where they take the fruits they've plucked while foraging in the forest. In the night roosts they munch away on their fruit and leave a neat pile of dispersed seeds on the forest floor below. Of course, some of those seeds will end up as peccary, agouti, and squirrel food, but some won't, and that's all that matters to the tree.

Ants are ubiquitous in the neotropics (though they are interestingly and fortunately absent from any of the lodge buildings). Their omnipresence and their biomass (likely exceeding that of all the mammals in a given area) are such that they are probably included in the ecological calculus of most living things here. Army ants, especially those in the genus *Eciton*, most definitely figure into the lives of forest floor and arboreal arthropods as well as the lives of many birds. The insect flushing activity of tens if not hundreds of thousands of hungry formicids (that's a fancy name for ants) is the daily meal ticket for several 'professional' antbirds. These pros are believed to get most or all of their food by capturing insects and other arthropods disturbed by a raiding swarm from their leafy hiding places. The fact that these birds can make such a specialized living tells you a few things about the ants, namely, that they're reliably abundant and hungry. An army ant swarm is an impressive sight, and, if it's large enough, an impressive sound, too. If you stand quietly, you can actually hear the sound of millions of small marching legs. You will also hear, and see, birds. Locally the ant-following pros include black-spotted bare-eye, bare-eyed antbird, scale-backed antbird, white-chinned woodcreeper, and white-backed fire-eye, all pretty striking creatures rarely found away from army ants. They're joined by semipros that include spot-backed antbird, white-browed antbird, dark-winged trumpeter and a few others. Then there are some slightly unusual opportunists whose m.o. is to make cameo appearances at the feeding frenzy for a quick bite before they return to their real jobs. The two most seemingly out of place that we've encountered so far are red-billed toucan and Spix's guan. The ants and the birds do a good clean-up job on their daily route, but they don't get everything. We once watched, and rooted for, a medium sized tarantula, which, after being flushed from its day roost, ran about as fast as a tarantula can to the top of a ten-foot tall finger-thin stick where it waited out the passing swarm. In this instance the spider chose well. The ants are excellent climbers, but perhaps this time, in assessing the small size of the stick, they calculated a poor likelihood of worthwhile plunder at the top and left the stick and the tarantula alone.....this time. Flitting around *Eciton* swarms are also fast-flying skipper butterflies that make super-quick pit-stops at the nutrient-rich droppings left by the attendant birds. Interestingly we've only seen the speedy skippers, as opposed to their more languidly flying and perhaps more easily caught lepidopteran cousins, join the party.

Some army ants are nocturnal. The ones we've seen here are minute, much like the little house ants that clean crumbs or spots of jam or honey from your floors and counters. What they lack in size, they of course make up for in numbers. Flashlight wielding naturalists are a nocturnal army ant's dream as the artificial light attracts unfortunate insects that are instantly besieged by the liliputian multitudes (to the morbid delight of the naturalists).

Early in our stay, on August 22nd to be exact, we found a solitary sandpiper along the river. Solitary sandpipers nest in the Alaskan and Canadian tundra (if I remember correctly) which, mileage-wise, is a loooooonng way from here. Habitat-wise it seems even farther. Its presence here in the southern Amazon is a fine testimony to the success, and maybe just the sheer adventure, of migration as a life strategy.

Within the region's evergreen forest are small islands of arid adapted species. The dry islands are granite outcrops depauperate in water absorbing and storing soil. When we first arrived, almost all of the island trees (of which almost every species, as far as we can tell, seems to be absent from the surrounding moist forest) were leafless. Now, in late September, after just a few scattered night rains, almost all are in full leaf, adding a new wardrobe of color and texture to the islands. Joining the unique plant community are certain vertebrates that are rarely found outside these warmer, drier, and sunnier islands despite the fact that they have quite capable wings and legs. Amazonian whiptails, present around the lodge clearing but absent in the dense forest, are one such dry island dweller. So, too, are Natterer's slaty antshrike (that's a bird) and white-fringed antwren (yes, another bird). Our favorite island inhabitant is a drop-dead-gorgeous frog in the genus *Dendrobates*. In the group sometimes called poison arrow frogs, this lemon yellow and jet black amphibian wonder is presently known from only one location on Earth, atop a nearby granite hill we call the Serra. The word is that the frog was only recently 'discovered' by researchers and has yet to be described. We never thought we'd see this rarity, but we were rewarded for waiting out a Serra-top rain (without raingear) by its unexpected appearance on the freshly moistened trail.

One of the more exciting moments in recent weeks was observing a rufescent tiger heron, a delicately patterned wader frequently seen along the river, fly a short distance from one waterside branch to another. As soon as it lit on its new perch, a previously invisible caiman shot up from the water like a titan missile from a submarine. The gaping jaws just missed the surprised but alert bird, and the hungry caiman immediately returned to its stealthy vigil.

The guest roster at Cristalino is wonderfully international. In the last month, we've had French, Dutch, Danish, Australian, English, Mexican, Spanish, Belgian, and Brazilian visitors. Oddly only one American so far. My rusty French was revived from deep inside some remote crevice of the central sulcus and turned out to be reasonably intact. Speaking of languages, none of the staff here speak a word of English, so we've had the pleasure of learning about fifty words of Portuguese which is fortunately fairly similar to Spanish, and, when combined with always useful sign language, is working splendidly. The staff which seems to have infinite patience has refrained from laughing at us. (More about the staff later as they are worthy of volumes of praise.)

And last but not least, the birds. Our one-month 'yard list' stands at 332 species. The birding is hands-down the most difficult, yet incredibly enjoyable, we've ever done. The dark understory, the numerous vine tangles, the bamboo thickets, the constant neck craning, the unfamiliar vocalizations, and the rapid movements of the birds at first were an exhaustive exercise in frustration. But now we've got the rhythms, and many of the calls, songs and behavior patterns down, and it's pretty much too fun to believe. Birding together has been great as we see, enjoy, learn much more as a team. Though all the birds are worthy of the highlight list, the human urge to pick favorites is too strong. The highlights are (if you're not into birds, you can skip this part, though you might be entertained by the rather exotic or just plain strange names):

Chestnut-belted gnateater, dark-winged trumpeter, rufous-capped ant-thrush, spotted antpitta, cryptic forest falcon (called cryptic because specimens were in collections for almost a century before a clever ornithologist figured out that it was a unique species that had cryptically eluded the taxonomists) slaty-backed forest falcon, 18 gorgeous species of parrots, blue-cheeked jacamar, over 30 species of antbirds including bare-eyed antbird, black-spotted bare-eye, and Manu antbird, green and rufous kingfisher, collared puffbird, rufous-necked puffbird, long-

billed woodcreeper, 7 species of toucan (favorite Gould's toucanet), rufous-tailed flatbill, yellow-browed tody flycatcher, razor-billed curassow, zigzag heron, black-girdled barbet, short-billed leaf-tosser, curve-billed scythebill, cinnamon attila, pink-throated becard, band-tailed manakin, flame-crested manakin, blue-backed manakin, screaming piha, pompadour cotinga, black-capped donacobius, paradise tanager, yellow-bellied dacnis, and pectoral sparrow.

This place has taken hold of our beings, cleared our minds, and brought us to a state of sharp but relaxed focus - exactly what we had hoped it would do and more.

Our best to you all.  
Mark and Karen

### **San Pedro River IBA Survey Needs Volunteers**

If you enjoy bird watching and would like to spend time getting more acquainted with the San Pedro River habitat, join the San Pedro Important Birding Area Survey Project. Teams coordinated by Conservation Co-Chair Elaine Moore will meet at the San Pedro House to conduct surveys six times during the coming year—one each in winter and summer and two each in spring and fall. Each survey will take around three hours and involve up to two and a half miles of walking. Since the surveys are recording a total of only 34 species, you need not be an “expert” birder! Each of six transects will include 15 to 20 of the 34 “focus” birds. Survey results will be used to help plan future conservation efforts for this globally important birding area. Contact Elaine for more information or to volunteer—phone, (520) 803-7646 or e-mail [elaine.moore@wku.edu](mailto:elaine.moore@wku.edu).

### **Attention Members! Fourth Alert!**

As mentioned in earlier issues of the Trogon News, the HAS Board of Directors has decided that paper copies of the Trogon News will cease production after the Dec. 2004 issue, except for those members who are willing to state that they do not have access to the Internet. If you fall into this category, please contact Renell Stewart at 378-6318 or Mike Guest at 378-0667 with your name, address and phone number. (Please leave a message if there is no answer.) Those without Internet access will continue to get a paper copy but the BoD is not sure how long this privilege can continue without an increase in dues.

Normally the Trogon News is posted to the HAS web site at <http://www.huachuca-audubon.org/> or <http://has.hypermart.net/> by the first of every month. We would like to request that you put this date on your monthly calendar to check for each new issue. But if you prefer to receive a reminder from us, send an email with your name and email address to Renell Stewart at [stewartr3@mindspring.com](mailto:stewartr3@mindspring.com) and Mike Guest at [mwguest@juno.com](mailto:mwguest@juno.com). Please remember to notify us of any email address changes.

In summary, beginning with the January 2005 issue of the Trogon News, only those members with no Internet access and who have contacted us to that effect will receive a mailed paper copy of the newsletter. Members with Internet access and who have contacted us with their email addresses will receive a monthly email notification stating when the newsletter is available on the HAS web site. Other members with Internet access and who don't require a monthly email notification will check the HAS web site for the new issue on the first of each month. If we don't hear from you, we will assume you fall into this last category.

Please understand that the difficult decision of curtailing paper issues was prompted by rising production costs, the difficulty in finding volunteers willing to help in the processing of each issue and the perception that we will be better stewards of the environment by using less paper. We appreciate your cooperation and understanding.

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New Member - \$20, two years \$30, basic rate - \$35, senior citizen or student rate - \$15, non-subscribing rate (membership without magazine) - \$20. Please contact the treasurer if you are interested in this option. Make check to National Audubon. Send to Huachuca Audubon Society, PO Box 63, Sierra Vista, AZ 85636. For membership changes and status call 1-800-274-4201. Trogon News subscription only - \$10 USA, International - \$15 (Make check to Huachuca Audubon Society.)

Please notify the Membership Chairman if you stop your mail and again when you restart it.