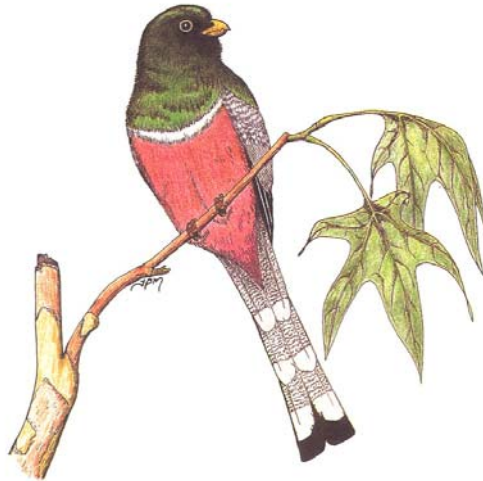


THE TROGON NEWS

HUACHUCA AUDUBON SOCIETY
Post Office Box 63, Sierra Vista, Arizona 85636
Volume XXXIII Number 2, February 2005



Great Backyard Bird Count

The Great Backyard Bird Count will take place over four days from February 18 thru February 21 in 2005. This joint program of Audubon and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology is a great way to get members out in the field during February.

Participants can view the new press release at www.birdsource.org/gbbc <<http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc>> and use it to promote the event through local press contacts. We'd like to increase participation by ten percent this year, to 55,000 checklists, and we hope you can help. Any questions or ideas are welcomed; contact Paul Green at pgreen@audubon.org <<mailto:pgreen@audubon.org>>.

Local Programs and Events

Feb 15th, Tuesday, SEABA meeting, 7:00 p.m., Tucson Botanical Gardens, 2150 N. Alvernon Way, Education Room. Dr. Barbara Terkanian of the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum will speak. Further information at 520/742-0071.

Feb 22nd, Tuesday, HAS meeting, 7:00 p.m., Sierra Vista Police Department meeting room, 911 N. Coronado. Alan Blixt will present an informative talk on Australia.

Field Trips



Feb 6th, Sunday, 7:30 a.m., HAS birding trip to Sweetwater Wetlands, Tucson. Meet at City Hall parking lot to arrange carpools. Possible additional areas are Avra Valley Wastewater Treatment Plant or Tohono Chul Park (entrance fee), depending on current bird sightings. Call leader: Mike Guest 378-0667 to register or for further information.

Feb 9th, Wednesday, 8:00 a.m. FSPR bird walk. Meet at San Pedro House.

Feb 13th, Sunday, 8:00 a.m. FSPR bird walk. Meet at San Pedro River Inn.

Feb 23rd, Wednesday, 9:30 a.m. Southeast Arizona Butterfly Association Field Trip to Colossal Cave County Park. From Tucson, go east on 22nd St, and turn south on Old Spanish Trail. Follow it about 17 miles to Colossal Cave Park. From I-10, take exit 279 (Vail/Wentworth Rd.), turn north, and follow the signs for approximately 7 miles. Meet in front of the little cafe in the park. There is a charge of \$3 per car to enter the park. A donation of \$5 per person to SEABA for the field trip would be appreciated. Wear sturdy shoes, a hat and sunscreen, as well as bringing adequate water and lunch. Close focusing binoculars would be very handy. Expected species are Desert Orangetip, Checkered White, Mourning Cloak, and Red Admiral. Cold or rainy weather will cancel the trip. For more information, please see website at <http://www.naba.org/chapters/nabasa/home.html>.

Feb 26th, Saturday, 8:00 a.m. FSPR bird walk. Meet at San Pedro House.

Feb 6th, 13th, 20th, and 27th, Sunday's, 8:00 a.m. Sierra Vista Environmental Operations Park bird walks.

2nd Sunday Bird Walk – 9 January 2005

The first 2nd Sunday bird walk of the new year started auspiciously with wonderful winter weather. The highlights included three Common Mergansers and two Ring-necked Ducks on the ponds at the San Pedro River Inn just as the walk got underway.

With the lovely weather, the birds generally were in no hurry to get moving, so the activity increased as the sun emerged from behind the clouds. Gila and Ladder-backed Woodpecker were once again the common birds along the river with Northern (Red-shafted) Flicker. A Great-horned Owl was spotted as it crossed the river and landed in a nearby cottonwood. It took the keen eye of one of the participants to find this large bird since it was perched on the far side of the tree. Once found, the bird could be seen peering back at us as we enjoyed its features. Several Gadwalls took flight as we passed nearby along the river. Meanwhile, the beavers had been busy; the dams they built created deep pools where the river was held back. The downed cottonwoods were additional evidence of this industrious river dweller's presence.

Many Yellow-rumped (Audubon's) Warblers were observed along the river plus the usual Black and Say's Phoebes, Bewick's Wren, and White-breasted Nuthatch. Curve-billed Thrasher and Canyon Towhee were seen along the trail to the river along with Vesper and White-crowned Sparrow. A male Cardinal added a fine exclamation point to the day's observations on the final leg of the walk as we approached the inn.

The next 2nd Sunday Bird Walk is scheduled to depart from the San Pedro River Inn at 8:00 a.m. on Sunday, February 13, 2005. Once again, birders of all levels of experience are welcome to join us!

-Robert Weissler

Outings Committee

Mike Guest, Chair, and members Harry Bergtholdt, Sandy Kunzer, Teresa Miranda met to plan future outings. Our thanks to those who responded to Sandy's request for venue suggestions, some of them appear below. In March we'll try new areas around Sonoita and/or Harshaw Canyon; April - we'll visit the EOP on a weekday; for May - an owl prowling; and in June - Sawmill Canyon. We are hoping to obtain some top-notch leaders for these events, plus we're also investigating one or more day trips into nearby Sonora, and a possible visit to the Circle Z ranch. As they become known, further details will appear in the Trogon News and on our web site. We hope you'll join us often.

-Mike Guest

2004 Ramsey Canyon Christmas Bird Count (RCCBC)

Each year the number of participants in our CBC grows. This year we had a record 89 participants, including 20 feeder watchers. While the total number of birds counted was well down from last year's 20,000+, to approximately 13,500, we still recorded 147 bird species. We also recorded high counts for 10 species.

Our "owlers" once again hit the road early and recorded an amazing nine Whiskered Screech-Owls. Last year we were the high count in the United States for these owls, and I suspect we will be once again. After 59 birders met for breakfast at the Lone Star Café we took off into an unusually warm and sunny day, with high temperatures into the upper 50s by mid-afternoon. We had 26 parties out birding and were again able to cover areas we had not been able to address in recent years. We had a number of new "feeder watchers" in addition to those who have been watching their feeders for us for many years. Birders joined us from Canada, California, and Colorado. We wrapped up the count with a dinner at the Sierra Suites, catered by Johnny Carino's, where we had a quick compilation to estimate the results of the count.

The high counts included "Mexican Duck" (267); Sora (9), Violet-crowned Hummingbird (2), Gila Woodpecker (124), Mexican Jay (448), White-breasted Nuthatch (121); Painted Redstart (7); Rufous-crowned Sparrow (93); Northern Cardinal (12); and House Finch (1277). For the Gila Woodpecker, White-breasted Nuthatch, Rufous-crowned Sparrow, and House Finch this is the second year in a row that they have been a "high count" species. While some of these high numbers may be attributed to the increased number of participants, it probably doesn't account for all of them. We also saw a number of unusual birds including Cinnamon Teal, Wood Duck, Costa's Hummingbird, Ruddy Ground-Dove, Ash-throated Flycatcher, and Western Flycatcher.

I would like to extend a special thank-you to Robert Weissler, our RCCBC secondary compiler, for his help in arranging the meals and coordinating the participation of the feeder watchers. His efforts can be seen by how well those two areas went this year. I also want to thank Mike Guest for much-needed updating of our count bird list and administrative form. Finally, I want to thank all our participants for continuing to make our counts so successful.

-Ted Mouras, Compiler, RCCBC

Touring to Save Oak Flat

By Ted Gartner

An ear-catching series of “wik wik wik” bird trills drift in the breeze. I turn to my right and ask “What is it?”

“Northern Flicker. Red-shafted.” So says Laurie Nessel, and Laurie should know; she’s President of the Maricopa Audubon Society. Interestingly enough, although the Northern Flicker is a woodpecker and can climb up the trunks of trees and hammer on wood like other woodpeckers, it prefers to find its food on the ground. And certainly there isn’t much finer ground for birds in Central Arizona than that which we were standing on at the moment: Oak Flat Campground near the Town of Superior.

There were eight of us touring Oak Flat Campground area on this beautiful Fall morning. Besides Laurie Nessel and myself, our group included Sandy Bahr (conservation outreach director for the Grand Canyon Chapter of the Sierra Club); Lori Faeth (Governor Napolitano’s natural resource policy advisor); Jason Keith (policy director for the national Access Fund); Jim Waugh (director of the annual Phoenix BoulderBlast); and Curt Shannon (on behalf a Friends of Queen Creek, a local coalition of outdoors groups dedicated to maintaining permanent recreational access to the Oak Flat Campground area).

The reason for our tour of Oak Flat: a foreign-owned mining company, Resolution Copper, has recently acquired the old Magma Mine near Superior and is planning to resume mining in the area. Resolution Copper is trying to acquire Oak Flat Campground via a congressionally legislated land swap so that they can mine a vein of copper ore that is 7000-feet deep in the area. This would effectively end public recreational access to one of the most spectacular outdoor recreation areas in Arizona.

Oak Flat campground was recognized by President Eisenhower as an important recreational resource as far back as 1955, when he signed Public Land Order 1229 which specifically put this land off limits to future mining activity. It is a world-class natural resource for hiking, camping, rock climbing, birding, bouldering, canyoneering, and other recreational uses. The Oak Flat area is the largest outdoor climbing area in Arizona and home to the largest outdoor climbing competition in the world, the annual Phoenix BoulderBlast. Oak Flat was listed at #2 on a recent Maricopa Audubon’s list of key birding hotspots in Central Arizona. Five of the bird species that have been sighted at Oak Flat are on the national Audubon Society’s watchlist of declining species that are of national conservation concern: Black-chinned Sparrow, Costa’s Hummingbird, Harris’s Sparrow, Lewis’s Woodpecker, and Gray Vireo. On the eastern border of Oak Flat is Devils Canyon with some of the finest remaining riparian habitat in Arizona. It is the opinion of the Friends of Queen Creek coalition that these public lands are best kept in public hands.

From Oak Flat Campground, we drive a short distance to the outskirts of the nearby Magma Mine area, and then hike up an old dirt road to a dramatic overlook atop the towering cliffs of the Apache Leap. The old mining town of Superior nestles in the foothills below. Considering that the previous Magma Mine closed less than ten years ago, one has only to look at the boarded up storefronts along Main Street in Superior to realize that the economic benefits of mining are not sustainable.

Unfortunately, Governor Napolitano has expressed support for the Resolution Copper project because of the jobs it would bring to the Superior area. We hope that our state and federal officials would think twice before automatically approving the Resolution Copper project just because it promises a few

hundred jobs for a decade or two. This is a shortsighted philosophy that ignores the long-term benefits of tourism, recreation, and wildlife watching that Oak Flat has to offer.

According to a recent article in the Arizona Republic, nearly a million birders may be scrambling around Arizona in search of bird-watching opportunities. Economic figures for bird-watching alone aren't available, but Sam Campana of Audubon Arizona said one study estimates wildlife watching in Arizona yields \$1.5 billion annually in total economic impact. The majority of wildlife watchers are birders. In addition, the Outdoor Industry Association estimates that over 1 million Arizonans have participated in car-camping, and over 168,000 Arizonans have participated in outdoor rock climbing. These user groups help contribute significantly to the hundreds of millions of dollars spent on outdoor gear each year in Arizona, which when combined with the economic impact of wildlife watching is certainly a significant and sustainable impact on state and local economies as long as we have places like Oak Flat to recreate in.

If the Resolution Copper mine is approved as currently proposed, the copper will go to China; the profits will go to England and Australia; and Arizonans will get the shaft. We need to do what we can, with what we have, and in the time that we have, to preserve the Oak Flat area for future generations to enjoy. For more information and to help, you can contact Friends of Queen Creek at their website, www.friendsofqueencreek.com, or send e-mail to info@friendsofqueencreek.com.

The Best of Bird Friendly Coffee

Certainly all Huachuca Audubon members are aware of the benefits of shade grown coffee for birds, other wildlife, watersheds, and the communities whose economies are largely dependent on work in coffee plantations. And some of you, particularly those who visited CAPULIN coffee in the village of Tecuitata on the San Blas trip and those who heard Daniel Fourwinds' presentation at an HAS meeting a few years ago, are aware of the even greater benefits of hand-processed organic shade grown coffee.

At present there are about a dozen households in the Sierra Vista area that have been consistently purchasing CAPULIN coffee and supporting rural Mexican communities and both resident and migratory birds. Because of that support, CAPULIN Coffee is establishing a local buyers club with benefits for coffee drinkers, the people in west Mexico who grow and produce the coffee, and of course the tropical forests there.

CAPULIN is encouraging more Huachuca Audubon coffee drinkers to support the good work by joining the buyers club. They also hope that we can share with our neighbors and fellow coffee drinkers the important difference between natural, hand-processed coffee and a commercially produced, washed coffee.

The formation of a buying club will dramatically reduce the cost of shipping and provide a CAPULIN Consumer's Club price of only \$9.95/lb. of freshly roasted coffee with a minimum order of 20#s. **At present, they're looking for new buyers club members as well as a local coordinator to help with the ordering and distribution.** All you need is the willingness to help, a little time, and a little patience!

If you're interested in joining the buyers club and/or volunteering to be the local coordinator, or would like to find out more about CAPULIN, please contact Mark Pretti or Karen Blumenthal at 803-6889 or mpnaturetours@earthlink.net.

They're just getting ready for coffee cherry buying season for this year so it's a great time to network locally to help internationally! They could certainly use your help.

To find out more about the unique community and conservation benefits of CAPULIN Coffee, go to: www.capulin.com. or danile@capulin.com.

On Jan 25th, one of our biggest crowds ever was in attendance at the HAS monthly meeting to hear about Mark Pretti and Karen Blumenthal's adventures as guides at Brazil's Cristalino Jungle Lodge. Here is the last installment that Mark and Karen wrote while living at Cristalino.

Adventures in the Amazon – Chapter 5

With only a week of this wonderful life remaining, a sense of nostalgic savoring has set in. Each day may bring the last sighting of a silvery marmoset, the final soft toots of night monkeys, or the wild cackling and eerie purring of dark-winged trumpeters. With renewed attention, we're enjoying and trying to learn more about the common plants and animals that we see so often while continuing to enjoy new Amazonian treats.

Rains are becoming more frequent, and their arrival most evenings couldn't provide a more fitting accompaniment to the rainforest symphony. The river is rising, climbing about a foot in the last week, reclaiming many areas of exposed river bank, and giving us a preview of the high water experience that will come in January and February. Low spots in the forest have become seasonal ponds which have had an interesting magnetic effect on river and river-edge species, pulling them rather far into the forest. Our favorite forest pond is a small tea-colored puddle about a half-mile or so from the river. Crossing a half-mile of high forest to get to a shallow pool can be quite a feat for some animals, particularly species like Muscovy duck which seems to need (but obviously doesn't in this case) a longish runway for safe landings and take-offs. Then there are river and water edge species like sungrebe, silvered antbird, and band-tailed antbird that temporarily forego the comfort of their home turf on the river to cross the forest gauntlet. Yes, they have wings for getting around and could potentially go just about anywhere, but habitat specificity is so strong for so many creatures here that it's often unusual to see them away from their home turf, rather like the osprey we once had perched on a power pole outside our desert scrub home. The seasonal pools appear to be a hotspot of seasonally abundant resources, which, as is so often the case, have been deemed by evolution to be worth the risk of taking the shortcut through that 'dark alley' of forest.

There are about ten species of manakins at Cristalino, and the males of most of them are decked out in bright and oddly complementing color combinations. But apparently the striking colors alone aren't enough to satisfy those choosy females who also demand that the males perform elaborate displays that consist of sometimes bizarre vocalizations accompanied by equally bizarre avian acrobatics. Though we've found some manakins to be fairly conspicuous in Central America, they, like so many other things, are pretty secretive here. Plenty of patience and a little experience, however, can tip the odds in your favor. The most visible of the local manakins is the beautiful red-headed. The jet-black male wears a flaming red helmet, has a yellow iris that gives him a serious yet paradoxically and simultaneously comical look, and wears red and white striped underwear (which he reveals only when a female shows up and he's feeling particularly sexy). They have favorite perches from which they call and display, and once you learn where those perches are you can easily impress all your friends and neighbors by stopping suddenly on the trail and saying 'Look at that branch'. They look, see an empty branch, and say, 'I see a bare branch' to which you say 'just watch it' and suddenly Mr. manakin flies right on to the branch to a chorus of oohhs and aahhs. Cheap, but fun, trick.

When a female does arrive on the scene, the male (and there are several in the neighborhood which biologists call a lek), sitting on his favorite perch, turns his back to her and wiggles his tail with the energy of kinglet on amphetamines. Then he flies to his second favorite perch from which he gives a strange buzzy call that sounds like he's winding himself up (which he is), and finally he flies right at the female, turning a few very tight circles around her and landing next to her to repeat the dance. All the while, of course, she acts as though she's at a boring cocktail party. More often than not, she just flies away, as though to say, 'Nice, but I bet there's a better one down the trail'and maybe there is.

The blue-backed manakin is a dreamy combination of jet-black body, bright yellow cap, and electric blue cape. But all that is nothing compared to the 'how the heck did this ever evolve' display that he performs for the female. Actually it's not a 'he' that performs it but a 'they'. When a female enters the lek, two males display from a perch, often low to the ground and usually in a very dense thicket (but fortunately not so dense that we couldn't observe this true wonder of the world). The males make weird bleating-lamb-like calls as they leapfrog over each

other in a wild cartwheeling performance of sound and color. It ends when the dominant male makes an emphatic 'wee-eeek!' call. After that he may, or may not, get lucky. Amidst the vibrancy, urgency, and energy output of it all, I usually end up thinking to myself, 'I'm glad I'm not a manakin'.

In the ten weeks that we've been here, and in the two months before that, we had heard of only one sloth sighting and were wondering why there seem to be so few or why they're so difficult to see. Well, we did finally see a southern two-toed sloth a few weeks ago, which was pretty neat. What was more exciting was that it was dead because it was in the enormous talons of a harpy eagle perched fairly low, in the open, and in great light right on the edge of the river. After a prolonged view that drifted into what seemed like a rich and full lifetime, it opened those fantastically broad wings, flew across the river to a more sheltered perch, and dined. One of the largest raptors on earth (you have to be fairly big if you pluck sloths and monkeys out of trees), the harpy is, rather like the big anaconda upriver, a presence, a force of nature, an animal that seems to look at you like with indifference and, to my eye, maybe even a hint of disdain. Here in the southern Amazon, she's/he's the top dog, at the top of her game, on her home turf, and we just don't matter that much to her. But she certainly matters to us. Her territory is huge, and she thrives in unbroken canopy forest. Along with jaguars, curassows, tapir and others, she's something of an indicator of intact, large-scale, high-quality habitat, and her presence tells us that all is well here.....for now. Another unlikely and unforgettable moment brought about by the usual series of serendipitous choices that led to us being in just that place at just that time.

Bird update - the yard list is now over 415 species with the latest favorites being orange-cheeked parrot (rare here), musician wren, ringed antpiper, spotted tanager, black-whiskered vireo, chestnut-backed antshrike, sirystes, dot-backed antbird, spotted puffbird, white-browed purplethroat, and eastern pewee and olive-sided flycatcher (two of only five U.S.-nesting birds that we've seen that winter this far south). Zigzag herons have shared their pre-dawn calls every morning for the last three weeks, and barred and cryptic forest falcons have been noisy, too. A farmer's market of fruits are hanging from the trees where we've gazed at a dozen or so tanager species as well as smartly feathered parrots, honeycreepers, and trogons. We've been amazed that one can see so much diversity in a relatively short time from a handful of trails along a ten-mile stretch of river.

Visitation has been relentless and we're tired and ready to pass the torch, which we hope to do as quickly as we can, to the new volunteers who have just arrived. It's been three months of some of the hardest, but most well paid, work we've ever done. We've been surprised at our ability to gain a beginner's proficiency with a language just by being around it, paying attention, and making the best use of context. Without knowing the alphabet or how to spell or read Portuguese, we've learned enough to get just beyond the basics and enter the realm of communicating ideas and feelings which has led us to become comfortably at home with the staff. Along with the intense culture shock we expect when we arrive in Sao Paulo, we know we're going to greatly miss these people and this place.

We feel an odd combination of mild panic and nagging melancholy lurking in the corners of our minds as our stay nears its end. We knew this would be a once-in-a-lifetime experience, but we seem to have become selfishly unsatisfied with that. Once is not enough. Our solace has been in considering the wonderful possibilities of a return trip and looking forward to a relaxing farewell week with Karen's parents who arrive later today.

We wish you all well and look forward to reconnecting after our Nov. 18th return.

THE END
Mark & Karen

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National Audubon Society - New Member - \$20, two years - \$30, renewals - \$35, Seniors - \$15. Membership includes subscription to *Audubon Magazine*. Make check payable to National Audubon Society. For NAS membership changes and status call 1-800-274-4201.

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