

THE TROGON NEWS

HUACHUCA AUDUBON SOCIETY
Post Office Box 63, Sierra Vista, Arizona 85636
Volume XXXIV, Number 2, February 2006



President's Message

President's Day, Valentine's Day, the shortest month, and the Great Backyard Bird Count. Do you suppose we'll actually have some winter weather before winter ends? It's sure been a strange one so far. I've heard reports from numerous people that they've seen trees that started to bud in January because of the mild weather.

I hope you'll note elsewhere in the newsletter a couple of meetings that are mentioned. I know meetings are not usually fun (except our membership meetings, of course!). Goodness knows, I go to enough of them to be aware of that! I try not to over-ask your attendance, so when I do ask, I hope you know I consider it an important event.

Welcome to New HAS Members!

We would like to extend a warm welcome to our newest HAS members: Lidia Barrios and William Wilson of Safford, Verona L. Webb, Duane Nelson and Susan Willig of Sierra Vista, Pat Mosteller of Bisbee, Lorretto Williams and Melvin L. Milne of Benson, and Edward L. Henley of Elfrida.

2006 RCCBC

It's not too early! For those who really like to plan ahead, mark your calendars for the 2006 Ramsey Canyon Christmas Bird Count – Saturday, December 30!

Local Programs and Events

Jan 30th, Monday, SPRNCA Future/BLM Planning Meeting, 5:00 p.m., Oscar Yrun Community Center, see below for details.

Feb 4th, Saturday, INA Meeting, see below for details.

Feb 28th, Tuesday, HAS Meeting, 7:00 p.m, **Cochise College** (hey, we like to keep you on your toes). At press time we don't have the meeting room number, so please go to the Library for further directions. Tony Battiste, who entertained us last year with his slides of Alaska, will take us a much shorter distance to the Salton Sea. Tony has birded the Sea once or twice a year since about 1987, mostly during the spring and summer months. He has photographed many of the sought-after species such as Wood Stork, Yellow-footed Gull, Burrowing Owl, Fulvous Whistling Duck, Inca Dove and Least Bittern. Come and share your questions and/or experiences on this most unique birding destination.

Mar 21st, Tuesday, HAS program will be 3rd Tuesday, NOT March 28th. We'll have the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance (SUWA) presenting their slideshow, "Wild Utah: America's Redrock Wilderness".

Field Trips

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

Feb 9th, Thursday, HAS field trip. Join Dieter Kamm on a visit to Whitewater Draw and Rucker Canyon Road; the nearest hotspots for Cranes, Geese, Eagles, and a variety of accipiters. Meet at the Sierra Vista City Hall parking lot for carpools leaving at 7:30 a.m. prompt. Carry lunch and water. For further information call Dieter at 452-8811.

Feb 12th, Sunday, 8:00 a.m. FSPR bird walk. Meet at San Pedro River Inn.

Feb 25th, Saturday, 8:00 a.m. FSPR bird walk. Meet at San Pedro House.

Feb 5th, 12th, 19th, and 26th, Sunday's, 8:00 a.m. Sierra Vista Environmental Operations Park bird walks. Tours will be limited to 20 participants plus 2 docents.

Mar 11th, Saturday, Bird the EOP on other than a Sunday! Leader: Sandy Kunzer, 803-8490.



2005 Ramsey Canyon Christmas Bird Count

The 2005 RCCBC on 18 December was a tremendous success with 156 species reported and over 17,000 individual birds counted. The 156 species is the second highest RCCBC species count ever. We had 45 observers in the field and 18 feeder watchers looking for birds on a near perfect December day. We observed a number of unusual species including: Ruddy Ground-Dove, Barn Swallow, Wilson's Warbler, Dusky-capped Flycatcher, and Blue Grosbeak. Eurasian Collared-Dove also showed up on our count for the first time with 16 birds observed. Overall we had higher numbers of sparrows and hawks this year than in the recent past and we recorded high counts for the following species: Green Heron (2), Cinnamon Teal (12), Sharp-shinned Hawk (12), Northern Goshawk (2), Wild Turkey (56), Rock Pigeon (268), Anna's Hummingbird (24), Broad-tailed Hummingbird (3), Acorn Woodpecker (107), Eastern Phoebe (2), Ruby-crowned Kinglet (272), Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (3), Northern Mockingbird (69), Orange-crowned Warbler (8), Green-tailed Towhee (185), and Lincoln's Sparrow (308). We also had near record highs for Painted Redstart and Vermillion Flycatcher. I would like to thank all the participants and extend a special thanks to Robert Weissler for all of his assistance in planning and executing this year's RCCBC. For a complete listing of all of the results of the RCCBC please go to <https://www.audubon.org/bird/CBC/>.

**2nd Sunday Bird Walk
8 January 2006**

A mild winter morning gave the nine participants a chance to see and hear a good variety of residents and winter visitors near the inn. The highlight of this particular walk was a Violet-green Swallow that circled directly overhead for the better part of a half hour. Very unusual in winter, this bird would have been a terrific addition to the Ramsey Canyon Christmas Bird Count (CBC) a few weeks prior.

An American Wigeon on the pond was accompanied by a couple of Coots. On the power line overhead, a female Belted Kingfisher chattered from a convenient perch. Gila and Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Curve-billed Thrasher, Northern (red-shafted) Flicker, Pyrrhuloxia, and Canyon Towhee were conspicuous around the inn as well as along the river. Likewise, a Great Blue Heron was seen perched in the willow by the pond and along the river.

As we walked toward the river, we enjoyed several Green-tailed Towhees along with quite a few Lincoln Sparrows mixed in with the White-crowned, Vesper, and Brewer's Sparrows. At the river, a Great Horned Owl was in nearly the same location as we found it a month ago. Although Black Phoebe was ubiquitous along the river, Yellow-rumped Warblers seemed concentrated into a single stretch of the river. Abert's Towhees were also conspicuous in the immediate vicinity of the river. A flock of 18 Gadwall was seen flying in formation over the river.

Near the end of the walk after we split into two groups, a White-tailed Kite dive bombed a Red-tailed Hawk over the fields near the pond at the north end of the property. Northern Harrier and American Kestrel rounded out the raptors seen during the walk.

Meanwhile on Saturday, the day prior, I participated in a pilot for a new CBC centered on the Audubon Research Ranch. I covered a portion of Fort Huachuca at the southeastern edge of that count circle. The highlights included six Grasshopper Sparrows at Site Maverick and a first year, female Olive Warbler in oaks and juniper along a fire break above Cemetery Canyon.

The next 2nd Sunday Bird Walk is scheduled to depart from the San Pedro River Inn at 8:00 a.m. on Sunday, February 12, 2006. Once again, birders of all levels of experience are welcome to join us!

-Robert Weissler

Irrigation Non-expansion Area (INA)

Who's still irrigating??!! Well, probably nobody anymore. But someone could start up. So to prevent that, the two state senators for this area, Marsha Arzberger and Tim Bee, are proposing a bill to create an INA for this valley. Although it will impact very few people, there are rumblings that some opposition may surface. At press time, a meeting is supposedly scheduled for the morning of February 4. Please pay attention to the news to get the details and can just a few people attend to support what seems like a no-brainer? Your president will be out of town or she would surely be there. So how about if someone else takes just a few hours at the most to thank our senators for their proposed action - a small step from the state to protect the SPRNCA.

Friends of Huachuca Audubon Society

Friends of Huachuca Audubon Society would like you to join their ranks. We don't offer a beautiful, glossy magazine, but then, we won't continually ask you for donations, or try to sell you Xmas cards! Plus your full subscription will stay with Huachuca Audubon to help support our educational outreach programs - currently restricted to providing *Audubon Adventures* to local schools. Nineteen classrooms this year. In comparison National Audubon allows us less than \$3 per subscription per year as "shared revenue." For membership information see page 8.

Spring in Mexico with Huachuca Audubon

Join the Huachuca Audubon Society this spring as we visit Sonora and Chihuahua at one of the most enjoyable and bird-rich times of year.

Sonora, April 29 - May 4, 2006

After two outstanding trips in 2005, the HAS will be returning to Sonora, Mexico, in 2006 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 180 species encountered in 2005 were green kingfisher, gray hawk, Sinaloa, happy, and spotted wrens, streak-backed and black-vented orioles, brown-backed solitaire, blue mockingbird, orange-billed and russet nightingale thrushes, rufous-backed and white-throated robins, black-throated magpie jay, elegant quail, rusty and five-striped sparrows, white-tipped dove, white-striped woodcreeper, gray-crowned woodpecker, slate-throated redstart, tufted flycatcher, rufous-capped brushfinch, crescent-chested warbler, and mountain trogon. Flowering plants, butterflies, reptiles, and a tremendous diversity of habitats will also be enjoyed.

Chihuahua, May 23-26, 2006

Semi-desert grassland, Chihuahuan desert scrub, oak woodland and mixed conifer forest make up the varied habitats we'll visit on this journey in northwest Mexico. In the vast pine forests and drier foothills we'll likely encounter Madrean species including elegant and mountain trogons, crescent-chested warbler, slate-throated redstart, brown-backed solitaire, Mexican chickadee, buff-breasted flycatcher, white-striped woodcreeper, russet nightingale thrush, and the stars of the show, thick-billed parrots. We'll also look for eared quetzal and striped sparrow and explore the general ecology of the plants and animals of the area. On our way into and out of the Sierra Madre, we'll stop at the excellent museum at the Paquime ruins to learn about the rich human history of the region and also the charming town of Mata Ortiz, made famous by local artist Juan Quezada who, inspired by the pottery of the Paquime people, resurrected the art which has flourished in his home town.

For more information and detailed itineraries, please contact Mark Pretti at (520) 803-6889, mpnaturetours@earthlink.net or www.markprettinatortours.com.

The Great Backyard Bird Count Returns for its Ninth Season February 17-20, 2006

New York, NY & Ithaca, NY, December 2, 2005 - The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC), a joint project of Audubon and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, returns for its ninth season February 17-20, 2006. Bird enthusiasts of all ages can share their love of birds with a friend, a child, a scout troop, a class, or a co-worker - opening new eyes to the joy of birding and the fun of creating a unique snapshot of winter bird abundance and distribution across the continent.

“The level of energy created each February by Great Backyard Bird counters is phenomenal,” said Dr. Paul Green, director of Citizen Science for Audubon. “What always amazes me are the new discoveries made by people across North America. Some bird watchers even send digital photos to back up their reports. Last year participants sent in more than 1,000 photos and many are now part of the GBBC web site gallery.”

Everyone can participate, from beginning bird watchers to seasoned experts. During the count, bird watchers can tally up birds for as little as 15 minutes, or for as long as they like, keeping track of the highest number of each bird species they see together at one time. People are encouraged to report birds from public lands and local parks, as well as from their own backyards. Participants enter their numbers online at www.birdsource.org/gbbc <<http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc>> and can explore sightings maps, lists, and charts as the count progresses.

For more information contact the Cornell Lab of Ornithology at cornellbirds@cornell.edu <<mailto:cornellbirds@cornell.edu>> or (800) 843-2473 if in the United States; (607) 254-2473 if calling internationally; or contact Audubon at citizenscience@audubon.org <<mailto:citizenscience@audubon.org>>; (215) 355-9588 Ext. 16.

Field Trips for Disabled Birders in Maine

The American Birding Association has become aware of the need for modified field trips designed for birders with limited mobility or limited endurance. Therefore, for the first time ever, the 2006 convention in Bangor, Maine, through the Physical Limitations Track, will offer three such trips. Two of these trips will focus on land birds that can be found in accessible “hot spots” near Bangor, and in the stunning Acadia National Park. The leaders for these trips will include Victor Emanuel and Barry Lyon from Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, and Rick Wright of Aimophila Adventures. The disabled birders will join the rest of the ABA group for the third trip, which will be a boat trip to the waters surrounding Petit Manan, a breeding island used by Atlantic Puffins and other seabirds. During this trip, we will have the expertise of Wayne Peterson of Field Guides Incorporated and Massachusetts Audubon, to guide our smaller group.

For detailed information about this June 19-25, 2006, Bangor, Maine, convention, please visit the official website at www.americanbirding.org (click on Bangor convention, then field trips, then scroll down to the Physical Limitations Track), or contact me, Darlene Smyth at smythd@comcast.net or 1-520-297-2315. I hope to see you there!

Extinction Bill Pending in the Senate

In September, the House passed a bill sponsored by Congressman Richard Pombo (R-CA) that would significantly weaken the Endangered Species Act, one of America's strongest and most successful laws for protecting biodiversity and saving our most vulnerable birds and wildlife.

Senator Crapo (R-ID) has introduced a similar bill. So far no committee action has been scheduled but we expect congressional action on this and possibly other ESA bills in the coming weeks. Of course the Endangered Species Act is a top Audubon priority and we will need a lot of chapter and grassroots support to stop attempts to weaken the existing law in the coming months. Check the Audubon website at <http://www.audubon.org/> for more information on these and other issues.



SPRNCA's Future/BLM Planning

BLM is holding some meetings (open house) to get public input on how to best manage the public lands that fall under the Tucson Field Office. That includes the SPRNCA as well as plenty of other land. The Sierra Vista meeting will be January 30, from 5 to 7 p.m., at the Oscar Yrun Community Center. If you can't make that one, the next closest meeting would be in Tucson on February 22. But you can also do it all via the web.

The absolutely most important message HAS members and friends can convey is two-fold. One, BLM must claim its federal water right for the SPRNCA. Two, BLM must then assert or defend or whatever strong words you want those rights. This is THE most important thing BLM must pursue for there to be a living ecosystem in our future and our birds' future. BLM needs to receive these comments from dozens if not hundreds of people. Another important issue, but moot if the river dies, is to make the grazing moratorium permanent. Attend a meeting if you can but absolutely resolve to get a comment in to the BLM.

How to Keep Science out of the Endangered Species Act

As a wildlife biologist, I have studied mountain lions in the Southwest, hippopotamus in West Africa, and Mexican spotted owls and northern goshawks in Arizona. Although I earned my doctorate nearly 20 years ago, on some mornings I still pinch myself to see if I am dreaming or if indeed I am awake and actually getting paid to do what I love. Because I enjoy such a privileged life, and because I got into this business to make a difference, I donate at least 100 hours per year to conservation activities. One of my services has been to help write or implement recovery plans for species listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act. I currently serve on the team writing the recovery plan for the ocelot, and as an advisor helping to implement the recovery plan for the Mexican spotted owl.

The House of Representatives recently passed HR3824, which would gut the Endangered Species Act in several ways. Here I address only one of them: the House bill would cripple how science is used to add species to the list of endangered species and to write recovery plans. If the Senate passes this bill, I will never serve on a recovery team again. Nor, I suspect, will many of my colleagues. The maddening thing is that HR3824's science provisions are a solution in search of a problem. The use of science under the Endangered Species Act is not

broken and does not need to be fixed. The Fish and Wildlife Service already uses sound science in listing decisions, recovery plans, and consultations. Don't take my word for it – take the word of Congress itself. In 2003, an arm of Congress, the Government Accountability Office, had independent scientists review all 64 listing decisions made during 1999-2002. The title of the GAO report says it all: “The Fish & Wildlife Service uses sound science in listing decisions.” The GAO further noted only 10 of the 1,260 domestic listed species have been removed from the endangered species list after new scientific information indicated the original listing was not warranted. Can any other public or private enterprise claim an error rate under 1%? More importantly, these 10 species were removed from the list once the new information became available. In other words, science worked exactly as it should: it corrected errors in light of new information. A few years earlier Congress asked the National Research Council report to evaluate how science was used under the Endangered Species Act. Their report similarly concluded there was no “major scientific issue that seriously hinders implementation of the “Act”.

But I digress. I've told you that use of science does not need to be fixed, but I haven't explained how the House bill will wreck it. In short, Section 3 of HB3824 would make it hard for the Fish and Wildlife Service to use models (“studies without empirical data” in the language of the bill) or to use any scientific information that has not been peer-reviewed. At first glance, this seems reasonable – all scientists are in favor of empirical data and peer review! But these provisions would cripple scientific participation in conserving endangered species. First, the bias against models runs counter to the National Research Council report (mentioned above) which unanimously recommended greater use of modeling, such as population viability analysis, in decisions and plans related to endangered species. The federal government relies on models when it launches a rocket into space, embarks on a new military technology program, designs a dam, or makes a weather forecast. Why should we pass a law telling federal agencies not to use models to conserve endangered species? Second, the prohibition on science that has not been peer-reviewed means that federal agencies and recovery teams could not consider information in graduate theses, reports of state and federal agencies, and documents prepared by consultants. In my experience, recovery plans have been vastly improved by our ability to use these types of information. In many recovery plans, including the ocelot plan I am now writing, MOST of the critically important information is in theses and reports that were not subject to formal peer review.

As scientists, we are trained to carefully evaluate scientific papers, peer-reviewed or not. We volunteer to write recovery plans because we can use our special training for public benefit. If the House has its way, recovery plans will be short, unscientific, and ineffective. As a scientist, I will have no part in writing them. Scientists do make mistakes, and sometimes these mistakes affect endangered species. A recent review (which I chaired) of scientific literature on the endangered Florida Panther found some scientific inferences used in issuing biological opinions were horribly flawed. Ironically, these unsound inferences were contained in peer-reviewed, empirical papers that the new law would enshrine as “best science.” More important, after receiving our report, the Fish and Wildlife Service stopped using the flawed ideas. As with the listing decisions described above, the scientific process detected and corrected unreliable science in a timely fashion.

The beauty of science is not that it gets everything right every time, but that it is self-correcting. Good science cannot be legislated. We must rely on our scientists and our management agencies to use science responsibly. We are fortunate that, by and large, this is already the case for decisions related to endangered species. When the Endangered Species Act was passed in 1973, Arizona had no Mexican wolves, California condors, or black-footed ferrets. Thanks to the Act, these species now live in Arizona, our bald eagles, Mexican spotted owls, and peregrine falcons are more secure, and no Arizona species has gone extinct. For 32 years, the Endangered Species Act has invited scientists to participate in this remarkable success story. I hope the Senate will not join the House in locking us out.

Paul Beier is a professor of conservation biology in the School of Forestry at Northern Arizona University. His website is <http://oak.ucc.nau.edu/pb1>

This editorial appeared in (Flagstaff) Arizona Daily Sun 29 October 2005, and Society for Conservation Biology Newsletter November 2005.

Mail Correspondence to:
HUACHUCA AUDUBON SOCIETY
P.O. Box 63
Sierra Vista, AZ 85636

HUACHUCA AUDUBON SOCIETY DIRECTORY

| | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| President, Tricia Gerrodette | 378-4937 |
| | <triciag@outb.com> |
| Vice President, Bob Luce | 458-0542 |
| Secretary, Mike Guest | 378-0667 |
| Treasurer, Phil Tucker | 803-8440 |
| Field Trips, Mike Guest | 378-0667 |
| Programs, Tricia Gerrodette | 378-4937 |
| Conservation, Conrad & Elaine Moore | 803-7646 |
| Education, Sandy Anderson | 458-0542 |
| Membership, Ginny Bealer | 378-6341 |
| | <vbealer@mindspring.com> |
| Publicity, Heather Guest | 378-0667 |
| Trogon Editor, Renell Stewart | 378-6318 |
| | <stewartr3@cox.net> |
| Historian, Vacant | |
| Hospitality, Heather Guest | |
| Director, Sandy Kunzer | 803-8490 |
| Director, Sandy Anderson | 458-0542 |
| Director, Alan Blixt | 515-9458 |
| Director, Robert Weissler | 803-0794 |
| Director, Mark Pretti | 803-6889 |
| AZ Audubon Council Rep. | |
| Tricia Gerrodette | 378-4937 |
| Webmaster, Mike Guest | 378-0667 |

Huac Aud Soc
B03
7XCH

MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

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.

Friends of Huachuca Audubon Society – Individual - \$10 annually, Household - \$15 annually. Provides no affiliation to National Audubon. Make check payable to Huachuca Audubon Society.

The *Trogon News* newsletter is provided to all members via the HAS web site - www.huachuca-audubon.org.

Mailed copies or monthly email notification is available upon special request to HAS editor and/or secretary.

Send all checks to Huachuca Audubon Society, PO Box 63, Sierra Vista, AZ 85636.