

# THE TROGON NEWS

HUACHUCA AUDUBON SOCIETY  
Post Office Box 63, Sierra Vista, Arizona 85636  
Volume XXXI Number 11, January 2004



## President's Message

I hope everyone had an enjoyable holiday season and didn't overdo it too much. The new year will see new battles and new concerns where the environment is concerned. The energy bill failed to make it through Congress, but that just means it will be back in January. I don't think we can expect a shift in its focus on subsidies for "dirty" energy, with only minimal support for clean or renewable energy. And I'm surprised the omnibus spending bills didn't self-ignite, they were loaded with so much pork!

Our outings committee has laid out an exciting and ambitious schedule for this coming year. Our conservation committee continues to work their way through the development code for the City of Sierra Vista. Our fundraising committee has produced some T-shirts that will be available at the January 6 membership meeting. They're coming just in time, as we haven't had HAS shirts for many years, and my old one is very frayed and just about worn out!

Although I don't know the January program as of press time, I'll have something to start the year out right. And you need to come to find out if we won the "library lottery" or if we'll have a different meeting date starting in February.

## Local Programs and Events

**Jan 6<sup>th</sup>** HAS meeting , 7:00 p.m., Mona Bishop Room, Sierra Vista Public Library. Robert Behrstock will present Arizona Dragonflies 101.

**Jan 15<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup>** Wings Over Willcox. See December issue of Trogon News for more info.

### Field Trips

**Jan 11<sup>th</sup>** 8:30 a.m. FSPR bird walk. Meet at San Pedro River Inn.

**Jan 14<sup>th</sup>** 8:30 a.m. FSPR bird walk. Meet at San Pedro House.

**Jan 17<sup>th</sup>** Arnie's Annual Sulphur Springs Valley Birding Safari. Meet 7:00 a.m. at Elfrida, The Family Restaurant, for breakfast or 8:00 a.m. for car-pooling. Leader: Arnie Moorhouse. Contact: Mike Guest, 378-0667, for information or sign-up. Limited to 20 participants. \$10 /person fee.

**Jan 24<sup>th</sup>** 8:30 a.m. FSPR bird walk to be led by HAS member. Meet at San Pedro House.

**Jan 4<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 18th, and 25<sup>th</sup>** 8:00 a.m. EOP bird walks.

### February Field Trip in Search of LBJs

February 20: Los Cienagas National Conservation Area and The Audubon Research Ranch. Meet at the Sierra Vista City Hall west parking lot at 7:00 a.m. to car pool west in search of "those little brown jobs" otherwise known as sparrows. Raptors? Probably. Pronghorn? Possibly? Grazed land? Certainly. Ungrazed land? Certainly. After exhausting our patience trying to identify those X\* & \$% @ LBJs we will travel to the Research Ranch for an orientation on what it is, why it is there, what they do and why and how they do it. Bird research and relations with ranching neighbors will be included. Weather permitting and if the group is interested a short drive around the Ranch will conclude the trip. Bring warm clothing and a picnic lunch that can be enjoyed in the warm setting of the education building.

No reservations are necessary. Contact Sandy Kunzer (520) 803-8490 or sbkunzer@theriver.com for further information.

### 2nd Sunday Bird Walk 14 December 2003

With winter rapidly descending on the upper San Pedro River valley, the participants in the 2nd Sunday Bird Walk from the San Pedro River Inn were treated to an interesting array of raptors, winter sparrows, and colorful resident birds. Particularly numerous were Pyrrhuloxia. Among the many Vesper and White-crowned Sparrows were bold Black-throated Sparrows and diminutive Brewer's Sparrows. A few Yellow-rumped Warblers, Loggerhead Shrike, White-breasted Nuthatches, Bewick's Wrens, Curve-billed Thrashers, and various towhees were sprinkled among the other birds. The group had excellent views of both Cooper's and Sharp-shinned Hawks, Kestrel, Northern Harrier, and Red-tailed Hawks. The female Hooded Merganser was not seen, but that was mainly because a flock of waterfowl had exploded into flight from one of the ponds at the Inn -- possibly including the merganser which had been seen regularly by the Inn's proprietors there. A large group of thirty or so Mule Deer was browsing near the Inn as we returned from the river.

Most exciting perhaps was the Merlin capturing a sparrow and flying off toward the San Pedro River with his catch. And to add to the building excitement for the Ramsey Canyon Christmas Bird Count, a dark morph buteo was perched on a telephone pole in Palominas near the Highway 92 bridge over the San Pedro River. While dark morph Red-tailed Hawks are the most likely dark morph raptors to be encountered in the area, the small bill was a tantalizing hint at a possible dark morph Rough-legged Hawk. The bird was not seen in flight, so a more conclusive view was not to be had unfortunately.

The next 2nd Sunday Bird Walk is scheduled to depart from the San Pedro River Inn at 8:30am on January 11, 2004.

—Robert Weissler

## HAS Field Trip to Bosque del Apache

About a year ago, HAS members expressed an interest to travel to Bosque del Apache for a field trip. We made this field trip on the weekend of November 14-16, 2003. Mike Guest and Harry Bergtholdt were the only participants. This certainly was a big disappointment, especially for those that missed the opportunity.

Bosque del Apache is one of the birding paradises of the United States. Sitting between two mountain ranges in the lovely Rio Grande River valley. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service manage the area for the betterment of wildlife and birds in particular. The stands of cottonwood blazing in all their golden glory backed by the local mountains made great backgrounds for thousands of geese rising from the scare of an eagle or coyote. Splendid cool weather along with sunrises and sunsets added to the picture that hundreds of photographers were there to capture for their perfect shot.

After 3 hours on Friday and all day Saturday Mike and Harry studied over 65 species of birds. Finding the few Ross's Geese among the Snow Geese was a big challenge. After the first one, the second one came much easier. The official count of the day included 23,100 snow geese, 45,000 ducks, and 5,300 sandhill cranes. Boy, how do they count all of them! I gave up after the first 50. The water birds certainly made up for the short supply of sparrows and warblers.

Accommodations in Socorro were great, topped off by the New Mexico green chili dishes to die for.

On our return trip we spent a short time at the Wilcox Ponds, certainly not the attention getter of the magnificent Bosque del Apache, but the ponds were teeming with shorebirds and water birds to add to our trip count.

—Harry Bergtholdt



### **Photo by Mike Guest**

### **Radio Show**

Thursday mornings from 7 to 8 a.m., on KTAN 1420 AM, there will be a new, temporary radio show. It's focused on community issues, particularly related to BRAC and Fort Huachuca's future, and is being sponsored by the Huachuca 50. There were a few shows in December already, on growth and water. Then 4 Thursdays in January will cover 4 more topics. Bill Branan and Tricia Gerrodette, along with Holly Richter and Bill Childress, are scheduled to be on the January 22 show, with a topic of environmental issues.

### **The Great Backyard Bird Count**

The Great Backyard Bird Count is coming again in February. This is a citizen science project, where all of us birdwatchers report our sightings to Cornell Lab of Ornithology. That helps the scientists track birds in all parts of the country. It's February 13-16 and you can participate one day or all days. Information can be entered at [www.birdsource.org](http://www.birdsource.org). The count is sponsored by National Audubon Society, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, and Wild Birds Unlimited.

### **Thanks, Robert!**

Many thanks to Robert Weissler for his expertise and help in getting our newsletter posted to the HAS web site - <http://has.hypermart.net/>. Because of his assistance, you can now view current and past issues (back to September 2003) of the Trogon News. As a reminder, if you would still like to transition from receiving a hard copy black & white newsletter via mail to viewing the increasingly more colorful electronic version, please send an email to Renell Stewart ([stewartr3@mindspring.com](mailto:stewartr3@mindspring.com)).

### **Conservation Corner**

In Sierra Vista, we are ever mindful of saving water in our desert environment. I was intrigued by an article which appeared in the Delta Discovery October 1, 2003 that describes what happens when you can actually see exactly how much water you have left and know that there is not enough to get you through the year. Kipling Layton, Jr., author of the book, Tundra Teacher Tales, is principal of the Yupik Eskimo village school in Kwillingok, Alaska. The village is in southwest Alaska on the Bering Sea Coast close to the mouth of Alaska's second largest river, the Kuskokwim. There is no road access to Kwillingok. The way in and out is by plane or boat. Mr. Layton has given permission to reprint his article in the Trogon Newsletter to help Arizonans understand how a community adapts to life without fresh water despite proximity to the sea and the river.

-Sondra Gardner

## Hoping for rain to fill the barrels

By Kipling Layton, Jr.



### Tundra Teacher Tales

The water fountains at Kwigillingok School are turned off. The student showers located in the restrooms are boarded up. The bathroom sink fixtures have those irritating spring-loaded faucet knobs, the ones you push down instead of turning, where you hope you are able to get your hands wet before the water stops. Posted on the doors of the school restrooms are signs informing you not to wash your hair. Another sign adorns the wall above the washing machine requesting only full loads of wash should be done, instead of washing several small loads. It's all in the name of water conservation.

I was told that it isn't feasible to drill a water well close to the ocean because the water is too salty for modern filtration systems and it's way too costly to build a desalination plant. Therefore, the school and community depend on the run-off from rain for their water supply. Once it freezes, that's it. The stored water has to last all winter long.

From what I hear, our water will run out around April. Although there are times where the winters are warmer and it rains as much as it snows. But they only come around every fifty years or so.

Last winter was one of the "warmer" ones. I heard the school was able to "squeak by" on what was left of their stored water until it rained in the spring. I don't think I'll be in Kwigillingok 49 years from now to see the next one, but it

does give me a lot of time to get used to gathering water in the winter.

The best way to begin is to marry a woman who thinks ahead. Although I've been trying to steal the credit for her idea, it was Irene who suggested we put our belongings into buckets and ship them to Kwig when we moved. She wanted to use the emptied buckets to catch rainwater draining off the roof. There are now seven buckets and two trashcans full of rainwater, which we'll use as a backup in case our holding tank runs dry or the pump dies. I just hope Irene will share her water with me.

Whether she does or not, I anticipate I will be making use of the ice pick I've seen in our house. I'll be in charge of chipping blocks of ice from one of the ponds or lakes around Kwigillingok and hauling them back to the house so they can melt.

If it snows, I can always walk far away from the house and scoop up snow with our buckets. I don't want to use the snow right outside our door. There are too many dogs, including ours, that "mark their territory" close to the house.

We'll probably be down to sponge bathing and wearing the same clothes over and over by the time the winter ends. But whatever the season may bring, we are prepared as best we can be.

## **SPARROWS! SPARROWS! SPARROWS! SPARROWS!**

This is your chance to see Baird's Sparrows and Grasshopper Sparrows up close and personal! Anyone who's interested in sparrows and can walk briskly across grasslands can help flush sparrows into mist nets. See secretive grassland birds in the hand.

**WHAT?** Study of the effects of the Ryan wild fire on wintering grassland birds (second year post fire). The 38,000-acre Ryan wild fire swept through the southern Sonoita Valley in April 2002, burning 90% of the Audubon Research Ranch, as well as much surrounding grassland and oak savannah foothills. This study is repeating previous protocols on the Research Ranch and an unburned BLM site to determine how this fire affects wintering grassland birds for several years after the fire. The study involves flushing and mist netting grassland birds, primarily sparrows, as well as other survey and vegetation measurement protocols. We need your help in flushing sparrows!

**WHERE?** Two sites in the Sonoita Valley – the Audubon Research Ranch and the Davis pasture on the BLM Las Cienegas RCA. Meeting places will be identified and directions provided.

**WHEN?** One Wednesday and Saturday in each of three months (January – March). See dates and locations below, and check your schedule.

**CONTACT?** Dr. Janet Ruth, U.S. Geological Survey, Research Ecologist; email: janet\_ruth@usgs.gov; Note: email communication is preferable and will be accessible when I'm in Arizona as well. Phone: (w) 505-346-2870 or (h) 505-890-4083; Note: I will be reachable at these numbers until about Jan. 3. After that, if you can't email me, you could leave a message at the Audubon Research Ranch 505-455-5522, but please don't inundate them with calls.

Please contact me if you are interested and let me know which dates you plan to attend. Provide an email address and home phone number if at all possible. This will help me determine whether I have sufficient bodies (or need to draft more volunteers). I will also know how to contact whom if some problem forces me to cancel a particular event at the last minute (some of you remember the rain and high winds of 2003). In other words, if you don't tell me you're coming or don't give me a phone number and I have to cancel, I won't be able to give you a call.

### **Winter 2004 Mist Netting Schedule**

Wednesday, January 14	Audubon Research Ranch
Saturday, January 17	Davis Pasture
Wednesday, February 4	Davis Pasture
Saturday, February 7	Audubon Research Ranch
Wednesday, March 10	Audubon Research Ranch
Saturday, March 13	Davis Pasture

### **HAS Returns to Sonora**

After a several year hiatus, the Huachuca Audubon Society will be returning to Sonora, Mexico this spring - April 22-26 - 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 and through Sonoran Desert and tropical deciduous forest into the pines and oaks of the northern Sierra Madre. Among the birds encountered on a trip at this time in 2003 were green kingfisher, gray hawk, happy and spotted wrens, streak-backed and black-vented orioles, rufous-bellied chachalaca, brown-backed solitaire, blue mockingbird (doing a 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-striped woodcreeper, tufted flycatcher, crescent-chested warbler, and many more.

The trip will be limited to 8 participants. The all-inclusive cost from Sierra Vista is \$600, which includes a \$50 tax-deductible donation to HAS. For a detailed itinerary or to register, contact Mark Pretti at 803-6889 or [mpnaturetours@earthlink.net](mailto:mpnaturetours@earthlink.net).

### **Plea for help!**

As you are all aware (I hope), the Board of Directors of your Huachuca Audubon has authorized the expenditure of about \$3,000 for advertising and incidental expenses connected with the Vacation Raffle. This was done at my suggestion in the sincere expectation that we could be successful in raising funds for our ongoing programs; especially in education. While I have not lost hope, the results so far have been disappointing.

How can you help? In several ways. If you are already planning to attend a nature based festival in the next couple of months, please consider carrying flyers and a poster to the site and distributing them. If you have contacts in other chapters or organizations that we could use, please let me know. If you have other inexpensive ways that we could "get the word out", please let me know. And finally, the most expensive way to help: buy a chance to take 3 of your relatives or best friends on a trip tailored specifically enthusiasts by Mark Pretti. If you have traveled with Mark you can imagine how inspiring that could be and if you have not; just ask someone who has.

Thanks in advance for your help  
Sandy Kunzer

### **State Council**

The collection of Audubon Societies in Arizona meets approximately 4 times a year under a rotating venue schedule. The Arizona Audubon Council is coming to our area the last weekend in March, and once again the Research Ranch has offered to host the meeting. This is wonderful for the out of town folks, as the ranch also has facilities for them to stay, and they always seem to love to come. As the hosting society, we should welcome folks and our responsibilities include planning for the necessary meals. This represents an easy way for you to meet these activists from around the state, without having to drive very far.

Please do come and express our deep thanks to the many people who have helped push for San Pedro River protection for years. Activists from White Mountains, Phoenix, Tucson, Sedona and Flagstaff were vocal for many years when Huachuca Audubon was missing in action for several reasons, including the very hostile climate down here. It was wonderful to have the strong support from our two major population centers. We should show them our appreciation!

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## MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

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.