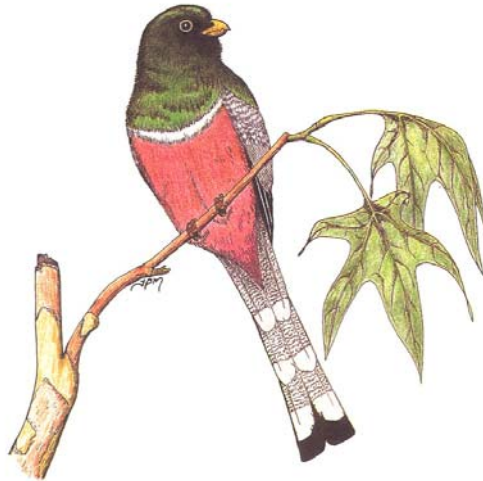


THE TROGON NEWS

HUACHUCA AUDUBON SOCIETY
Post Office Box 63, Sierra Vista, Arizona 85636
Volume XXXIII Number 1, January 2005



President's Message

Will we keep our title of America's "Birdiest Inland County"? It will depend on the results of the Christmas Bird Count held 12/26, but I have confidence all those sharp eyes out there spotted enough great birds to keep us in the running! I hope your holidays went well and were not too stressful, as can sometimes be the case.

We had a wonderfully energetic year with our conservation chair Sondra Gardner. We were very sorry to lose Stan and Sondra but sympathetic, since it was for health reasons. I hope you will support our new co-chairs, Conrad and Elaine Moore. They "interned" under Sondra and will be carrying the task forward. We will undoubtedly be asking you to get involved yet again in protecting the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, as we know it will be under assault for oil drilling. As bird watchers, we MUST also be conservationists, or there won't be any birds to watch!

Best wishes to everyone for the best possible year in 2005. And my deep deep gratitude for the hard work of my board members in 2004 (and many previous years as well for some of them!).

Climate, Climate Change and the Arctic

For all those who are interested in this topic, I would recommend at least a short visit to the following website: www.arctic.noaa.gov/detect. It is aimed at the general public and an even more poorly informed group: decision makers. The general heading states: "Providing information on the present state of Arctic ecosystems and climate in historical context". It seems to do quite a good job although I wish their definition of "historical" always went back further than I do. —Sandy Kunzer

Local Programs and Events

Jan 13th – 16th, 12th Annual Wings Over Willcox Sandhill Crane Celebration, for more info see Dec 04 Trogon News, check www.wingsoverwillcox.com, or call 1-800-200-2272.

Jan 18th, Tuesday, SEABA meeting, 7:00 p.m., Tucson Botanical Gardens, 2150 N. Alvernon Way, Education Room. Meeting will feature University of Arizona graduate student Jeff Oliver, speaking on butterfly host plant selection and the effect that this has on their young. Further information at 520/742-0071.

Jan 25th, Tuesday, HAS meeting, 7:00 p.m., Sierra Vista Police Department meeting room, 911 N. Coronado. The Cristalino Jungle Lodge in the far north of the state of Mato Grosso, Brazil, lies within some of the most extensive, intact, and biologically rich tropical rainforest on Earth. Join Mark Pretti and Karen Blumenthal, who spent three months working as guides at the lodge, as they attempt to convey the overwhelming richness of Cristalino and share some of the amazing natural history they enjoyed and learned about in what is certainly one of the greatest shows on Earth. To pique your interest in this topic even more, see pages 5-7 for an installment of Karen's and Mark's adventures in Brazil!

Field Trips

Jan 9th, Sunday, 8:00 a.m. FSPR bird walk. Meet at San Pedro River Inn.

Jan 12th, Wednesday, 8:00 a.m. FSPR bird walk. Meet at San Pedro House.

Jan 15th, Saturday, HAS birding trip. Once again Arnie Moorhouse has agreed to lead his Annual Sulphur Springs Valley Birding Safari. We'll meet in Elfrida at The Family Restaurant for breakfast at 7:00 a.m., or 8:00 a.m. for car-pooling. Contact Trip Coordinator, Mike Guest, 378-0667, for information or sign-up. Limited to 20 participants. \$10/ person fee.

Jan 22nd, Saturday, 8:00 a.m. FSPR bird walk. Meet at San Pedro House.

Jan 2nd, 9th, 16th, 23rd, and 30th, Sunday's, 8:00 a.m. Sierra Vista Environmental Operations Park bird walks.



2nd Sunday Bird Walk - 12 December 2004

The thirteen participants on the 2nd Sunday bird walk were treated to lovely winter sunshine. A large number of Pyrrhuloxia and a lone Sora doing its imitation of a phalarope provided the highlights of the outing. The Pyrrhuloxia were found in shrubs along the roads in the proximity of the San Pedro River Inn itself, while the Sora was out in the open in the upper pond. Also, a single White-winged Dove was seen perched on a telephone line in the parking area.

Curve-billed Thrasher and Canyon Towhee were conspicuous along the trail to the river as were Vesper and White-crowned Sparrow. Along the river, the most conspicuous birds were the woodpeckers with Gila and Ladder-backed Woodpecker well represented as was Northern (Red-shafted) Flicker. Good numbers of Bewick's Wren and White-breasted Nuthatch were also present there. Both Say's and Black Phoebe were likewise conspicuous. There were few raptors, but an American Kestrel pair and a couple of Northern Harriers did make an appearance.

The next 2nd Sunday Bird Walk is scheduled to depart from the San Pedro River Inn at 8:00 a.m. on Sunday, January 9, 2004. Once again, birders of all levels of experience are welcome to join us!

-Robert Weissler

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 (third 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 Ext. 12 or (h) 505-890-4083; I will be reachable at these numbers through the end of December. After that, if you can't email me, you can reach me (during the field weeks) at the Audubon Research Ranch Bunk House at 520-455-4659, or leave a message at the headquarters office at 520-455-5522, 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 2004). 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 2005 Mist Netting Schedule

Wednesday, January 12	Davis Pasture
Saturday, January 15	Audubon Research Ranch
Saturday, February 12	Davis Pasture
Wednesday, February 16	Audubon Research Ranch
Wednesday, March 2	Davis Pasture
Saturday, March 5	Audubon Research Ranch

-Dr. Janet Ruth

Birding and Natural History in Sonora, Mexico
April 25-30, 2005 & May 2-7, 2005

After a several year hiatus, the Huachuca Audubon Society will be returning to Sonora, Mexico for what should be exciting and bird-filled trips. 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.

Each 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.

El Cielo Nature Festival – Feb 20-23, 2005

Come and get a true taste of the tropics close to the Rio Grande Valley of Texas. Discover the wonderful El Cielo Biosphere Reserve guided by local and international experts. Birds, butterflies, rock art and orchids are some of the topics to be covered during the four days of field trips, conferences, and cultural events at Ciudad Mante, Tamaulipas in northeast Mexico. And by participating you will be contributing to the conservation and sustainable development of rural communities immersed in the Biosphere Reserve. For more information, see the festival's website at www.elcielofestival.com, or contact Sonia Ortiz at sortiz@teledinamica.com.mx or phone: 011(5281)8378-5926 or fax: 011(5281)8335-6119.

.Tres Rios Nature Festival – March 12-13, 2005

Enjoy a beautiful Arizona spring day and learn about "Tres Rios", the place where three rivers: the Agua Fria, Salt and Gila meet. This two-day event is a great family excursion that's close to home. The festival celebrates the rivers, wildlife, history and heritage of the community. Come experience the extensive children's area with hands-on crafts, live wildlife, educational displays and activities, story-telling and more. Listen and talk to experts about wildlife, the outdoors and rich history of the area. Take a beginning bird walk or sign up for a more advanced wildlife watching tour. Explore the many display booths and vendors. Enjoy a meal from the diverse food booths and listen to local entertainers.

The location is Estrella Mountain Regional Park – 14805 W. Vineyard Ave., Goodyear, five miles south of I-10 on Estrella Parkway. Times are 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Cost for festival admission is \$10 per car. A few classes and tours require an additional fee. For more information contact: Email: Tresriosfestival@cox.net, Website: www.tresriosnaturefestival.com, phone (623) 204-2130.

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.

Public Comments Needed on Five-Year Review of Mexican Wolf Reintroduction Project

The Mexican gray wolf was killed off in the United States decades ago. Since 1998, the Arizona Game and Fish Department and five other agencies have been involved in the reintroduction of the wolf to parts of Arizona and New Mexico, where the species once thrived. Wolves have been periodically released, and approximately 50-60 now live in the wild along the Arizona-New Mexico border.

The agencies involved in the reintroduction want to receive feedback on how the recovery effort is going so far. The five-year review is an opportunity for the public to comment on the project and how it's being managed. An outline of the review process and other related documents can be found at the Arizona Game and Fish Department's Web site: <http://www.azgfd.gov/comments>.

"We encourage people to read the documents and submit written comments to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on specifically what is and what isn't working well in the reintroduction project," says Terry B. Johnson, chair of the adaptive management group that oversees the project. "The Service is only accepting written comments submitted through the U.S. mail, and public comment will be crucial to determining how best to operate the project so wolf recovery and human dimensions are appropriately balanced."

Four meetings will be held, so the public can talk about the project and ask questions. Members from all of the cooperating agencies will be on hand. Meeting dates and locations: Jan 26 – Truth or Consequences, N.M., Jan 27 – Glenwood, N.M., Jan 28 – Alpine, AZ, and Jan 29 – Phoenix, AZ. Details on the public meetings and an address to send in comments on the wolf project are also included on the Web site at azgfd.gov/comments.

Even though Karen Blumenthal and Mark Pretti have now returned from serving as guides at Brazil's Cristalino Jungle Lodge, we still have two more installments describing their adventures. These “journals” are just too enjoyable and enlightening to pass up! Karen and Mark will be presenting this month's HAS program that will no doubt be one of the year's highlights. (See page 2 for location, date and time.)

Adventures in the Amazon – Chapter 4

A large part of Cristalino's magic is its isolation from much of the rest of the world. The absence of roads and cars, phones and televisions, any form of media, shopping, 24-hour electricity, and so many of the activities and things that occupy our Arizona lives create a clear sense of place and a feeling of belonging in the landscape. In

other words, we're quite at home. The staff who has included us in their family and the rhythm of the work augment the feeling.

The nine or ten regular staff at the lodge are, to the person, generously endowed with gifts of patience, flexibility, and have-fun-at-work attitudes. This being so, visitors are happy, the lodge is successful, and nature-based tourism continues to play a role in regional conservation. The four men who work as boatmen and guides are led by Francisco who, in addition to coordinating most of what goes on here, is also the conscience and soul of the place, as well as the one who continually, and with graceful subtlety, sculpts the group dynamic into an ever-positive form. Though our Portuguese is fine for getting along and having fun, it is painfully inadequate when it comes up against our desire to share our thoughts and gratitude to Francisco. Among the other staff is Rosa, Francisco's sister and now ours, too, by temporary adoption. We call her Santa Rosa because of her limitless thoughtfulness. Rosa cooks, cleans, does laundry and takes care of everyone with endearing attentiveness. She, and the other ladies, as well as the cook, Joao, have a particular fondness for Karen who is included in the gossip sessions and who has become the unofficial lodge English teacher, though I have a feeling that the English lessons are just another excuse to play.

We've been enjoying the early stages of the rainy season which, so far, have consisted of afternoon clouds and either a gentle spattering or a good downpour every 2-4 days. The wildlife response to the moisture is immediate, particularly within the local amphibians. Tree frogs, which had been pretty quiet if not mute, are chirping and burping in the forest. Occasionally we find one in a water filled tree cavity or hugging a low branch. A species of frog in the genus *Leptodactylus*, whose members are sometimes known as 'WHOOOP' frogs, lives in a burrow and sounds off with the intensity and carrying power of a foghorn within minutes of a decent rain. Trees that had been leafless are again green, mangoes are getting fat, and bird song and nest-building behavior has increased.

The most illustrative element of the rainy season has been its habitat shaping impact. Almost every afternoon rain is preceded by a wind that can vary from a few strong gusts to a batten-down-the-hatches gale. These gales, we are told, are the norm, and they appear to be an important natural disturbance that contributes to structural and resource patchiness in a forest that can appear deceptively uniform. The build up of towering thunderheads occurs with surprising speed here, quite unlike the summer rains of southeast Arizona where you can see it coming long before it arrives. As the skies and the forest understory darken, a stillness and quiet occur. Then comes a sound we've never heard before. From an unknown distance away, a soft hum rises then quickly gains volume. It reminds one of falling rain, but in fact is a powerful downdraft descending from high in the sky and racing across the forest canopy. If the downdraft is large enough, the 'falling rain' analogy is swept aside by a freight train of rustling leaves and falling branches, and your thoughts leap from 'what a cool sound' to 'maybe I shouldn't be out here'. In the wake of the wind one can see part of what makes this place tick. After just two such events, we found trees of all sizes down on all of the lodge trails. This seasonal reshuffling of the arboreal deck does several things. First it opens gaps in the canopy through which precious light can reach the previously dark understory where both opportunistic and patient plants can literally and figuratively have their day in the sun. *Cecropia*, *melastomes*, *piper*, morning glories and other racehorses germinate and bask in solar glory. So, too, do more patient species that have been biding their time in the shade as small stature plants. The warmth, exuberant growth and production of leaves, flowers, nectar, pollen, and fruit can attract a food chain of invertebrates, lizards, birds, and mammals. Secondly there is the addition of a jackpot of organic matter to the forest floor where the work of fungi, bacteria, termites, beetles and other invertebrates completes the circle of nutrient and energy flow. This disturbance dynamic and the many microhabitats found here (bamboo thickets, seasonally flooded forest, ephemeral forest streams and ponds, high canopy, riverine, and the dry rocky outcrops) make it the place to be.

The forest is surprisingly dense, thick with lianas and countless saplings, and perhaps contrary to how one might envision forest that has never seen roads, axes, or chainsaws. There are scattered big trees, three to four feet in trunk diameter, and there are a few giants with girths greater than six feet, but most of the trees are on the small side, six inches or less in width. If I were in the mountains of southeast Arizona, I'd be thinking about fire suppression and the thicket stands that result because of it. But here, where tree-fall disturbance is frequent and the natural turnover of the forest relatively rapid, dense thickets are a sign of natural forest function. The richness of species and the manners in which they use and thrive in the dense growth has sharpened our senses and taught

us much about how to 'see' this place. Almost all of the visitors who come here have come from the Pantanal where wildlife viewing is generally an easier Disneyland-drive-by-like experience. With their patience skills dulled, most of them struggle with the fact that they actually have to use their ears and look for animals here. Some of them get it, some don't.

The bird 'yard list' of birds is now up to 370 species with black and white hawk eagle, pied puffbird, brown jacamar, marbled wood quail, white-browed hawk, plain-crowned spinetail, speckled spinetail, olive-backed foliage gleaner, ornate antwren, fiery-capped manakin, southern nightingale wren, Amazonian umbrellabird, black-tailed leaftosser and many others joining the roster. Butterflies, which were over-the-top when we arrived in August but then dropped off rather dramatically, are on the rise as there are 'thickets' of lyside and orange-barred sulphurs on the beaches at midday. Our latest favorite among the lepidoptera is a type of skipper called a firetip. This spectacular animal (species unidentified as yet) rests with its wings closed, unlike most of its firetip cousins. Its dark wings contrast nicely with a body adorned with brilliant reds and Mr. Clean whites. The neat thing about it is that there is another species of firetip that makes it to southeast Arizona. Though the Arizona one is reasonably colorful, its name is dull firetip. We knew it had brighter family members south of the border, but had never seen one. Suddenly, with the sighting of this Amazonian beauty, the name 'dull firetip' makes perfect sense.

The trio of scarlet macaws that hangs out around the lodge, especially in the early mornings and evenings when their ear-splitting screams are apparently most meaningful, has been joined by a quartet of gorgeous blue and yellow macaws that have been showing up for three or four midday hours for the last few weeks. A tall tree on the edge of the clearing has become their afternoon siesta spot, and they faithfully arrive each day and settle in to preen and utter gentle croaks whose meaning we yearn to know. We continue to make respectful visits to Mrs. or Mr. anaconda, a creature whose presence continues to challenge our perception of reality.

The subject of snakes brings us to the latest chart-topper. A few evenings ago, while leading a night walk with some visitors, Karen's sharp eyes caught sight of a small coiled snake on the side of the trail just a few feet from where she was standing. Knowing something potent when she sees it, she and her guests took pictures and returned to the lodge with cries of 'Bushmaster'. My plans for an after dinner return to search for this reptilian legend of the neotropics were foiled by my well known inability to stay awake after 9pm, especially after a long day with another to follow. As luck, and more so the stationary behavior of the snake, would have it, I and several interested visitors were able to see it resting with an air of placid confidence in exactly the same place the following evening. As far as we know, it has been a while, maybe 4-5 years, since this nocturnal, cryptically colored, and secretive snake has been seen here. The bushmaster is a spectacular pit viper that, like the giant anaconda, has a powerful presence, even in a young 2-footer like this one. Among herpetophiles and neotropicophiles (if that's a word), the name bushmaster is one that arouses curious fear, cautionary respect, and perhaps most of all a great desire to see one of these near-mythical serpents. Now, thanks to Karen's naturalist skills and good fortune, we've been able to indulge those sentiments and add to them an appreciation of the striking beauty of this animal.

This may be our last visit to Alta Floresta for message delivery before returning to our other home in Arizona. Then again there may be a final Amazon chapter. Stay tuned.

We wish you well,
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.

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

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