

THE TROGON NEWS

HUACHUCA AUDUBON SOCIETY
Post Office Box 63, Sierra Vista, Arizona 85636
Volume XXXIII Number 6, June 2005



President's Message

Summer arrived rapidly and with a vengeance, didn't it? Whew, hot! I hope many of you will come to our picnic at Gray Hawk Ranch on June 13. It's a little different this year; we're trying it on Monday since so many board members were unable to attend on various weekends. We hope that won't discourage folks from coming, because we're going to start it late in the afternoon.

Start arriving after 4:30, we'll plan to eat at 5, followed by our annual meeting/election of officers and board members (short) and a chance to visit the river and bird after that, when it's cooler. Need directions? Call Sandy Anderson. We have a number of new members (welcome!) and we hope you will be able to join us at this potluck picnic so we can get to know you. PLEASE bring your own plates and utensils in addition to your food contribution. HAS will supply a variety of beverages, both alcoholic and non.

Summer is a non-meeting time but of course is an exciting time for birding. The Southwest Wings Birding Festival is August 10-14 this year, headquartered in Bisbee. HAS will have a table with information and we could always use some volunteers to staff it and answer questions from the visitors. Can you give a few hours? Call Tricia Gerrodette.

Protection of that fabulous riparian habitat, the San Pedro River, continues to be an issue. Stay tuned for what you might be able to do to help. Volunteers are how HAS continues to function and do the work it does. If we're not doing something you think we should be doing, it's because no one (like YOU!) has stepped forward to take the task on. That's how it works. Hope you have a great summer and please consider getting involved in our work.

Local Programs and Events

Jun 7th, Tuesday, SAVE Program, 7:00 p.m., Sierra Vista Public Library, Mona Bishop Meeting Room. Robert Bridges, Fort Huachuca Ecologist, will describe aggressive current and future water conservation measures. Fort Huachuca has reduced its groundwater pumping by nearly 50 percent since 1990. The program is sponsored by the Southeast Arizona Volunteer Education program, and there is no cost to attend.

Jun 13th, Monday, HAS Annual Picnic Potluck and meeting, 4:30 p.m. See below for details.

Field Trips

Jun 5th, Sunday, 7:00 a.m. Meet at the City Hall parking lot to carpool for HAS field trip to Garden and Sawmill Canyons seeking the higher elevation warblers, Zone-tailed Hawk, etc., Limited to 12 participants only. **Note** you Must carry a photo ID in order to enter Fort Huachuca. Boots recommended, bring snack and water. For further information or reservation call the Leader - Erika Wilson (234-4359).

Jun 8th, Wednesday, 7:30 a.m. FSPR bird walk. Meet at San Pedro House.

Jun 12th, Sunday, 7:00 a.m. FSPR bird walk. Meet at San Pedro River Inn.

Jun 18th, Saturday, 7:00 a.m. Friends of the Huachuca Mountains bird walk. Meet at Carr House parking lot.

Jun 23rd, Thursday. SEABA field trip to see Dragonflies of Fort Huachuca. For more information, please call 520/742-0071 or see website at www.naba.org/chapters/nabasa/home.html.

Jun 25th, Saturday, 7:00 a.m. FSPR bird walk. Meet at San Pedro House.

Jun 5th, 12th, 19th, and 26th, Sunday's, 7:00 a.m. Sierra Vista Environmental Operations Park bird walks. Tours will be limited to 20 participants plus 2 docents.



PARTY!! PARTY!!

Come to our annual picnic potluck and meeting. It will be held Monday, June 13, at Sandy Anderson's Gray Hawk Ranch. Call Sandy for directions. The ranch is close to the river and we will bird in the early evening after we eat. HAS will provide the beverages and you will provide the food. You will also bring your own plates and utensils, please, so we don't generate trash. Gather after 4:30, eat at 5, socialize with old friends, meet some new ones (please come out new members, wherever you are), and swap birding stories.

See You in September!

The Trogon News will be on hiatus until the September issue. Have a wonderful summer!!

"Audubon Adventures" for Local Schools

This year HAS has the goal of significantly increasing the number of "*Audubon Adventures*" which we provide to local schools. These popular natural history mini-magazines are enthusiastically received and used by grade schools nationwide and afford a wonderful introduction into the world of nature as seen by young eyes and minds. Please help us achieve our goal by using the form included in this issue.

AUDUBON ADVENTURES 2005-2006



Last year Huachuca Audubon Society was able to place eighteen sets of *Audubon Adventures* in local school classrooms enabling the students to examine “Birds of Prey: Hunters in the Air”, “Flutterby, Butterfly”, “Native Plants, Naturally”, and “Sharing the Earth” These educational kits are well received by teachers and students alike and we know of many more classrooms where they would be welcome.

More new subjects will be added by National Audubon society for next year’s *Audubon Adventures* kits.

The teacher’s classroom resource manual provides background information on the subject matter, detailed lesson plans, tips for outdoor study, hands-on-activities, research material and relevant web sites.

Forty-one dollars and fifty cents will bring this excellent study program to one teacher and his/her students for one year. But, any donation will be welcomed. We are now commencing fund-raising for next year and invite you to name the teacher and/or grade school of your choice.

Audubon Adventures is funded in part by donations from individuals, membership fees for Friends of Huachuca Audubon, and our ongoing educational outreach funding.

Please send your donation to The Treasurer, Huachuca Audubon Society, P.O. Box 63, Sierra Vista, AZ 85636. Huachuca Audubon Society is a registered non-profit organization, all donations are tax-deductible and will be acknowledged with a letter.

AUDUBON ADVENTURES DONATION

Name _____
Address _____

Amount _____
Teacher/ grade School _____

2nd Sunday Bird Walk – May 8, 2005

With the peak of migration near completion, the nine participants on the 2nd Sunday bird walk from the San Pedro River Inn were treated to the colorful array of breeding birds along the river. The weather was ideal, if breezy at times. As we started from the inn, a Green Heron flew out of the pond and Curve-billed Thrasher was calling with its familiar "wit WIT!"

Before reaching the river, we saw a very late Lark Bunting in its striking breeding plumage. This bird does not breed in our area, so it was not expected to be here. A short time later, a couple immature Gray Hawks were sparring with an adult Swainson's Hawk in an interesting aerial dance. Along the river, migrating Wilson's Warblers were still numerous with a few Yellow-rumped, Townsend's, Black-throated Gray, and Lucy's Warblers along with Common Yellowthroat by the water and many Yellow Warblers singing from the canopy adding variety to the mix. Song Sparrows and Black Phoebe were conspicuous as we moved north beside the river. Summer Tanagers and Yellow-breasted Chats were common if not always conspicuous except by their songs and calls. Meanwhile, the Vermilion Flycatchers were adding their own usual dash of color. Gila and Ladder-backed Woodpeckers were seen and heard often. And there were still Chipping Sparrows to be found. All in all, a very rewarding morning of birding!

The next 2nd Sunday Bird Walk is scheduled to depart from the San Pedro River Inn at 7:00 a.m. on Sunday, June 12, 2005. Once again, birders of all levels of experience are welcome to join us!

-Robert Weissler

Sonoran Splendors By Mark Pretti

Birding and natural history don't get much better than in southeast Arizona in spring unless, perhaps, you travel further south into the state of Sonora, Mexico, where, in late April and early May, 16 enthusiastic travelers joined me for two exceptional Huachuca Audubon trips. These six-day adventures turned out to be well timed as we experienced some of the best that Sonora has to offer. Decent winter rains were in evidence as we enjoyed flowering *Cordia*, *Ceiba*, saguaro, guayacan, brittlebush, tree ocotillo, *Lysiloma*, *Tabebuia*, palo verde, and others. Several large *Ficus* trees, as well as a few mulberries in Santa Ana and *Ribes* in some of the canyons, were in fruit and provided great opportunities for observing resident and migratory frugivores.

The pleasantly cool weather made for very comfortable conditions as we traveled along the lovely Rio Sonora to Hermosillo and up Highway 16 to the Yecora area where we spent several days amidst the pines and oaks of the higher elevations and the tropical deciduous forest (TDF) of the Madrean foothills. During the trip, stops to enjoy birds, butterflies, plants, etc. were made at many of the usual spots that past trips have visited.

On our first day, having just passed out of the Rio San Pedro drainage, we stopped at a small cienega in the upper reaches of the Rio Sonora watershed. Orioles, warblers, flycatchers, a belted kingfisher, and several gray hawks were seen amidst the Gooding willows and a wonderful variety of sedges and grasses that, fortunately and interestingly, are fenced off from cattle. Along the Rio Sonora route, we found black-bellied whistling duck, green kingfisher, common black hawk, side-by-side black-tailed and

black-capped gnatcatchers (the first of many seen during the trips), and the endemic elegant quail (in the Baviacora area).

On Hwy.16 we stopped at La Colorado where birds of the Sonoran desert, such as rufous-winged sparrow and gilded flicker, always seem abundant. We then made the obligatory stop at the Rio Matape, a desert oasis that's always a fun place. Along with the fish and frog laden perennial stream, the seepwillow and Bonpland willow thickets are great for birds – here we had drop-dead looks at elegant quail and watched nesting rose-throated becards, great kiskadee, a zone-tailed hawk drinking at the stream, green kingfishers, a brief look at a happy wren, varied bunting, and great views of streak-backed, hooded, bullock's, and orchard orioles.

Higher up in the TDF, the palm canyon at km 196 was rocking with activity – tropical parula, black-vented oriole, five-striped sparrow, black-throated magpie jay, Sinaloa wren, rufous-backed robin, and many other species were attracted to the lushness of the spring-fed spot as well as a fruiting rock fig. Up in the Sierra Madre, the Mesa Campanero was outstanding with mountain trogon, gray-silky flycatcher, brown-backed and Townsend's solitaires, fantastic looks at crescent-chested warblers, (black-eared) bushtits, white-striped woodcreeper, and lots more. The beautiful towns of Santa Ana and Santa Rosa (where the beer is cold and refreshing) were as productive as ever – yellow grosbeak, rose-throated becard, squirrel cuckoo, more magpie jays and streak-backed orioles, and one of the best prizes of the second trip, a gray-crowned woodpecker. The Barranca Arroyo Hondo near Yecora was a little slow for the first trip but amazing for the second. While nesting blue-mockingbirds were a highlight, we also were fortunate to enjoy russet and orange-billed nightingale thrushes, white-throated robin, Gould's wild turkey, tufted flycatcher, rufous-capped brushfinch, spotted wren, slate-throated redstart, rusty sparrow, and a northern pygmy owl feeding a lizard to its mate in the nest cavity.

Butterflies were unusually abundant considering the dry season timeframe. While a concurrent trip to Yecora by Hank and Priscilla Brodtkin and Jim Brock resulted in over 100 species, us mere mortals found between 30 and 40 including tropical goodies such as white-striped and zilpa longtails, zebra heliconian, Mexican fritillary, blackened bluewing, laviana white-skipper, glaucous cracker, and avocado swallowtail.

Thanks to all who participated for your interest, enthusiasm, camaraderie, for sharing a great week, and for helping to raise \$640 for Huachuca Audubon. I'm planning to repeat the trip for HAS April 29 – May 4, 2006. If you're interested, please contact Mark Pretti at 803-6889 or mpnaturetours@earthlink.net.

Of the 182 bird species seen on the two trips were;

Common black hawk, Gray hawk, Short-tailed hawk, Zone-tailed hawk, Elegant quail, White-tipped dove, Band-tailed pigeon, Eurasian collared-dove, Squirrel cuckoo, Violet-crowned hummingbird, White-eared hummingbird, Elegant trogon, Mountain trogon, Green kingfisher, Gray-crowned woodpecker, White-striped woodcreeper, Northern beardless tyrannulet, Nutting's flycatcher, Tufted flycatcher, Sulphur-bellied flycatcher, Tropical kingbird, Thick-billed kingbird, Great kiskadee, Rose-throated becard, Black-throated magpie jay, Happy wren, Sinaloa wren, Spotted wren, Black-capped gnatcatcher, Blue mockingbird, Brown-backed solitaire, White-throated robin, Rufous-backed robin, Orange-billed nightingale thrush, Russet nightingale thrush, Red-faced warbler, Tropical parula, Crescent-chested warbler, Slate-throated redstart, Painted redstart, Rufous-capped warbler, Olive warbler, Streak-backed oriole, Black-vented oriole, Varied bunting, Rusty sparrow, Rufous-winged sparrow, Five-stripe sparrow.

Sonora: From Desert to Sierra Madre
2-7 May 2005
By Robert Weissler

We all know of the many tropical species of birds that find their northern limit in Sonora, but it was surprising and rewarding to find out just how close! That opportunity came in the form of a Sonoran Tour offered by Mark Pretti Nature Tours. I had my eye on this trip for some time, but an article in *Winging It* some months ago described the very route and provided extra motivation to finally do it. Having joined his West Mexico Tour two years ago, I can attest to the high quality of the entire experience with Mark! He is the consummate guide, relating varied aspects of the natural history of birds with other fauna, flora, geology, and local culture (augmented on geology by the expertise of Sandy Kunzer!). I was joined by my friend Ron Beck who came out from California to join us for the tour. I can say without hesitation that we were both blown away by the experience (and I've taken many tours with VENT, so that is saying something special indeed!).

For me, the flora was as interesting as the birds and other fauna. The trip route took us down the Rio Sonora to Hermosillo where we would spend the first night. Our stop at a small cienega near the source of the Rios Sonora and San Pedro provided a glimpse into the past of the San Pedro River. The lazy, thickly vegetated watercourse is a stark contrast to the down-cut, channelized San Pedro River north of the border. Soon thereafter we saw many Black Vultures in the warmer, southern facing Rio Sonora Valley, less than an hour from the border at Naco. As we made our way south, we stopped at a river crossing with Green Kingfishers diving into the water. A dark-lored White-crowned Sparrow nearby is an uncommon migrant here. The vegetation changed more rapidly than expected. The Ocotillo was in vigorous bloom and soon was joined by Tree Ocotillo, then by Organ Pipe Cactus, and even Hecho (or variously Etcho) Cactus. The Hecho reminded me of West Mexico, but here these specimens of columnar cactus were just as robust, reminiscent of Saguaro, but with more slender arms and more of them. The species of birds now included Black-capped Gnatcatcher and Elegant Quail among others.

The next day was even more amazing. We embarked from the Hotel San Martin in Hermosillo and followed Highway 16 east, first through Sonoran Desert, then tropical thorn scrub and tropical deciduous forest (TDF), and finally up into the oaks and pines of the Sierra Madre Occidental. At the Rio Metape, we were excited to find Great Kiskadee, more Elegant Quail, and Streak-backed Oriole. Meanwhile, the Palo Verde accented the desert scrub with a beautiful pale yellow. Mark explained the concern over south African Buffel Grass that has been planted throughout the desert and introduced fire into an environment where native desert plants are poorly adapted for it. We enjoyed lunch under a stately Guamuchil tree by the Rio Yaqui.

As we ventured east, the desert scrub was replaced by tropical dry forest with the gray Boat-spine Acacia and Tree Morning Glory accented by a late bloom of Amapa, the first violet blooms of Guayacan, and by Feather Tree and Senna. The birds seen at the Palm Canyon included Sinaloa Wren, Tropical Parula, Black-vented Oriole, Varied Bunting, and our first group of Black-throated Magpie Jays. We continued up into the mountains with some slopes still having the introduced grass and others characterized by hydrothermic soils that only certain species of oaks tolerate well. It reminded me of the Emory Oaks in Bisbee, albeit an otherwise very different setting down in Sonora. Before reaching Yecora, we stopped at Barranca Arroyo Hondo, a place we would visit several times.

Up in the Sierra Madre, we were treated to spectacular birds on the Mesa Companero and Barranca Arroyo Hondo including Mountain Trogon, several Crescent-chested Warblers, Rufous-capped Warblers, Brown-backed Solitaires, Slate-throated Redstarts (who put on quite a show in Arroyo Hondo), White-striped Woodcreeper, Blue Mockingbird, Tufted Flycatcher, White-throated Robin, and a cooperative Northern Pygmy Owl at its nest cavity. Getting good views of Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush was as special as the Blue Mockingbird, because both are among the most stealthy of the birds we encountered. We even heard Military Macaws high above the narrow canyon of Arroyo Hondo! The montane forest included many unfamiliar species of oaks and the striking Texas Madrone with its smooth, red trunk.

Descending from the mountains back into TDF near Santa Ana, we saw Yellow Grosbeak and Rose-throated Becard several times. A highlight for me especially was finding a Gray-crowned Woodpecker near its northern limit. The Piculus genus of woodpeckers is tropical with no representatives in the US. It reminded me of the Golden Olive Woodpecker in Costa Rica that I saw on my first day on a tropical tour back in 1991. The riparian vegetation included Montezuma Cypress and Rock Fig juxtaposed against hillsides with Hecho Cactus.

Well, there is so much more to tell, but at least I have given a taste of the tropics we experienced on this trip. I can't wait to do it again! Sandy and Betsy Kunzer took incredible photographs of this journey, so hopefully we can share some of the sights of this trip with readers too.



Pictures of Elegant Quail and Inca Dove courtesy of Sandy and Betsy Kunzer.

BirdPAC

Spring has sprung, and we have a great idea for how you can celebrate birds and the remarkable impact they have on our world. A perfect way to celebrate spring and the wonders of our environment is by contributing to **BirdPAC – the only political action committee dedicated to protecting birds!** So what is BirdPAC ? Well, the idea is simple. With nearly **70 million Americans** enjoying birds in their backyards, in parks, and other wild places we should be able to flock together and harness the collective desire to protect birds and protect their (and our) environment by **educating and endorsing** environmentally responsible candidates who are strongly committed to better habitat conservation. It is truly a **CAMPAIGN FOR THE BIRDS!** BirdPAC is raising money this year in a campaign we call \$25 in 05 . Again, the premise is simple. We are **working hard to raise at least \$25.00 from conservation minded individuals**, like you, in order to **elect lawmakers** who will go to state capitols and Washington, D.C. and fight for better conservation. \$25.00 seems like very little to spend to ensure more birds come to our feeders, our refuges, and our wild places in the future. BirdPAC is helping individuals, like you, do more for conservation. For instance, on our site you can find the latest news (updated every 15 minutes) about birds and the environment at our NEWS NEST . We give you a squawk box to speak your mind about conservation issues facing us all on our interactive BirdBLOG. **BirdBLOG was one of the first web sites to announce the re-discovery of the Ivory Billed Woodpecker !** We are **tracking elections and candidates** all over the country, and on our site, you can find out more about who is running in your district. Finally, you can contribute online . Our secured server can happily handle your contribution whether it is \$5 or \$5000. BirdPAC is dedicated to electing the lawmakers that can help make it happen. Please, **contribute TODAY !**

16th Annual Fort Huachuca Mountain Lion Track Count

Sponsored by Sky Island Alliance

June 3-5, 2005

The Fort Huachuca Track Count is a tradition that dates back to the late eighties; in fact, it is the longest running volunteer tracking program in the country. Gathering data on the presence/absence of mountain lions within the Huachuca Mountains of southeast Arizona is an important step to understanding and conserving our great natural heritage within the Sky Island region. Based out of Split Rock Canyon on the Fort Huachuca Military Reservation, volunteers have an opportunity to visit a landscape that has been protected since the late 1800's. Not only will volunteers document tracks and sign of mountain lion, they will also have the chance to see bear tracks, trogons, turkeys, and other special wildlife of the Sky Island region.

We'll be staying on the Fort Huachuca Military Reservation. The campsite is in Split Rock Canyon. There are port-a-potties and a lodge with no utilities or facilities (for presentations only). **PORTANT:** To enter Fort Huachuca you'll need: **TWO** forms of identification - one of which must have your photo on it (e.g.. a drivers license). In addition, all vehicles entering the Fort must have proof of insurance and registration. **WHAT TO BRING:** You'll want to bring a tent, sleeping bag, food, plenty of **WATER**, and any other amenities you might want for the weekend (camp chairs, cameras and notebooks recommended). Folks arrive at various times Friday late afternoon and evening. (You can opt to arrive Saturday for tracking on Sunday.) Tracking begins at daybreak on Saturday and Sunday, so be prepared for early mornings. We usually return to camp late morning. Great side trips will also be available. Sky Island Alliance provides tracking materials (track guides, rulers, GPS units, digital cameras).

MPORANT: You must RSVP with an email and phone number. Contact Janice Przybyl, Wildlife Monitoring Program Coordinator at: janice@skyislandalliance.org or 520 624-7080 x203.