

THE TROGON NEWS

HUACHUCA AUDUBON SOCIETY
Post Office Box 63, Sierra Vista, Arizona 85636
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President's Message

Another Audubon year is almost over. "We" should know better than to ask for help through the newsletter but "we" seem to keep trying. I don't know how else to communicate with several hundred members. A nominating committee of Alan Blixt and Erika Wilson is contacting folks to look for volunteers who want to help Huachuca Audubon.

If contacted, I hope you will consider giving the club some of your time. If not contacted but willing, PLEASE call someone on the board or someone you know and step forward. I asked for help at an Audubon booth at the Sierra Vista Earth Day fair and got zero response. Please don't let the same thing happen for the board positions.

Our most urgent need, in my opinion, is for a newsletter editor. Renell Stewart, whom I can't possibly thank enough for her years of work, has new duties at work and needs a replacement. This is truly a critical position and Renell might even have had some fun with it occasionally!

May is also International Migratory Bird Day, on May 13. Friends of the San Pedro River are going to hold their Spring Festival that day. Sonoran Joint Venture is partnering with them to have even more activities, and HAS is invited to participate as well. It is, after all, about the birds!!

Welcome to New HAS Members!

We would like to extend a warm welcome to our newest HAS members: Joan F. Tavares of Benson, Willard A. Troyer, and Robert Pratt of Sierra Vista.

Local Programs and Events

May 13th, Saturday, 6th Annual San Pedro River Spring Festival, San Pedro House. Various events throughout the day. Call 459-2555 or visit www.sanpedroriver.org for info.

May 23rd, Tuesday, HAS monthly program, 7:00 p.m., Horace Steele conference room at Cochise College. (The room is inside the library building at the college but outside of the actual library.) Oscar Yrun Community Center. Are jaguars endangered or is the Endangered Species Act itself endangered? Lots of attempts have been made over the years to change the Act, sometimes to improve it, usually to gut it. This year still has the potential for effectively nullifying the power of the ESA. Come hear Scotty Johnson from Defenders of Wildlife give us an update and show us some terrific jaguar photos.

May 25th, Thursday, Southeast Arizona Volunteer Education (SAVE) Program, 7:00 p.m., Mona Bishop Room of the Sierra Vista Public Library. Tom Runyon, Fort Huachuca hydrologist, will showcase Fort Huachuca's water conservation projects and explain the many steps the fort has taken to reduce the fort's water pumpage.

Field Trips

May 6th, Saturday, 6:30 a.m., HAS field trip to Gray Hawk Nature Center and San Pedro River. See details below.

May 10th, Wednesday, 7:00 a.m. FSPR bird walk. Meet at San Pedro House.

May 14th, Sunday, 7:00 a.m. FSPR bird walk. Meet at San Pedro River Inn.

May 27th, Saturday, 7:00 a.m. FSPR bird walk. Meet at San Pedro House.

May 7th, 14th, 21st and 28th, Sunday's, 7:00 a.m. Sierra Vista Environmental Operations Park bird walks. Tours will be limited to 20 participants plus 2 docents.

May 1st, 8th, 15th, 23rd and 30th, Mondays, Ramsey Canyon Preserve, 7:00 a.m. "Early Bird" Walks. Join Rick Romea or other excellent birders for a walk up the canyon before normal opening time. Standard admission fees apply. Call Rick at 803-1160 for further information.



Birders! Insomniacs!

Saturday, May 6, 6:30 a.m. is the time. Gray Hawk Nature Center is the place. Sandy Anderson will guide us around her special, private section of the San Pedro River (inside the NCA). Reservations are not required. Expect sun, warm temperatures, possible insects, some scrambling over uneven terrain and to be able to listen to Sandy's enthusiastic, running commentary on all things natural. Dress and equip accordingly. Directions: East on Charleston Road six miles to Escapule road, turn right. 1 1/2 miles to the first left - Gray Hawk lane. Follow around to the right. Gate has # 3918. Any questions call trip coordinator - Sandy Kunzer, 803-8490.

Needed: Birdwalk Leaders

Dutch Nagle and Friends of the San Pedro River are looking for a pool of individuals who would be willing to lead scheduled birdwalks. These walks are for the 2nd Sunday (from San Pedro River Inn), and the 2nd Wednesday and 4th Saturday (both from the San Pedro House) of each month.

Please let Dutch know at 378-7229 if you can do this and he will add you to the list. Hopefully, everybody will get a chance to lead as well as a chance to rest between walks.

2nd Sunday Bird Walk – 9 April 2006

Terrific weather and many Spring migrants greeted the 19 participants on the April 2nd Sunday Bird Walk. The highlight for many was the sighting of not one, but at least two, perhaps three, Painted Redstarts doing their "fan dance" in trees along the river. The pair of White-tailed Kites that have been seen in recent months now are building a nest in a cottonwood near the inn. High in the sky, several Swainson's Hawks were soaring along with the Red-tailed Hawks, while Northern Harrier and American Kestrel were seen over the fields, and the tantalizing call of the recently-arrived Gray Hawk was heard. Ruddy Ground-Dove was still present on the premises of the inn itself.

Other migrants and breeding birds included empidonax flycatchers including Gray Flycatcher, a "Western-type" and possibly a Hammond's. A large gathering of Lucy's Warblers was conspicuous in willows in several places along the river. A couple Black-throated Gray Warblers were seen high in the canopy of the gallery forest with Yellow Warblers, while MacGillivray's Warbler was possibly seen, if briefly, in the underbrush, a Common Yellowthroat spied nearby, and one of what will soon be many Wilson's Warblers was also encountered. Scott's Orioles are migrating through along the river, while a Hooded Oriole was seen well at a feeder at the inn. A few Blue-gray Gnatcatchers were observed in mesquite, willows, and hackberry trees. Both Cassin's and Western Kingbirds have arrived in significant numbers, while Ash-throated Flycatcher was seen in a couple locations throughout the walk. Barn Swallows are back as well, with a single Northern Rough-winged Swallow seen flying past us. And White-winged Doves were calling throughout the area and seen numerous times.

Some winter birds still present included Green-tailed Towhee, and White-crowned Sparrow, with a couple Vesper's, Brewer's, and Lincoln's still seen as well. Resident birds were conspicuous as usual, including Gila and Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Curve-billed Thrasher, Northern (red-shafted) Flicker, Bewick's Wren, White-breasted Nuthatch, and Canyon and Abert's Towhees. Black and Say's Phoebes are now outnumbered by little red lightbulbs, the exquisite Vermilion Flycatcher. A brief glimpse of Great-horned Owl was had along the river, while a couple Barn Owl nestlings were seen with a scope Michael Marsden had set up below the nest box at the inn.

The next 2nd Sunday Bird Walk is scheduled to depart from the San Pedro River Inn at 7:00 a.m. on Sunday, May 14, 2006. Once again, birders of all levels of experience are welcome to join us!

-Robert Weissler

Coronado National Forest Revision

On April 20, 2006 I attended a meeting sponsored by the Sky Island Alliance. The U.S. Forest Service is undergoing a plan revision process for the Coronado National Forest. This plan is to be written over the next three years. The Sky Island Alliance is trying to bring together a diverse number of organizations to form a Coronado Planning Partnership. We worked on establishing a number of guiding principles to help the Partnership in presenting its plan to the Forest Service. Many issues were discussed including protecting cultural resources, ecological restoration, fire management, livestock grazing, mining, motorized recreation, special management areas, research, wild species and habitats, and several more. Jennifer Shopland and David Hodges are in the process of setting up the Sky Island Action Center which will become the information hub for the Coronado Planning Partnership. In addition to conservation groups the Sky Island Alliance hopes to include seven Native American groups, hunters, ranchers, and landowners. I will continue to attend meetings as we go forward and will continue to update our members.

-Alan Blixt



India and the Palace on Wheels March 2006

Part I: Overall Impressions

My wife Liza and I traveled to India in March on a tour called the “Palace on Wheels” organized by Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT, www.ventbird.com). This unforgettable journey through north-central India started in Delhi, then headed south to Agra and the Taj Mahal, where we joined the tourist or heritage train called the “Palace on Wheels” that took our group further south across the Tropic of Cancer to Kanha National Park. We then returned north to Ranthambhore National Park and the pink city Jaipur, the capital of Rajasthan, before returning to Delhi. With a large group of 37 participants and a train with 22 “saloons” or cars, VENT provided four guides in addition to Victor himself, namely Bob Fleming, an expert on Nepal and India who speaks fluent Hindi, Jerry Bertrand, and Mimi and David Wolf. Their expertise was complemented by a large in-country staff led by Raj Singh. Obviously, this was much more than just a birding trip (or for that matter, a tiger photo-safari), so let me start by sharing my lasting impressions and memories of a country clear on the other side of the world from us.

I can understand why people who have traveled to India say you either love India or hate it. In our case, it’s definitely the former. I can see how one could leave with a poor impression if one focused only on the trash and squalor of the cities, the chaotic traffic, the need to use bottled water everywhere, the spice of Indian cuisine if your palate is accustomed to milder fare...

But there are the contrasts to such images and experiences too. There is a significant first world embedded in that third world country.

Modernization is everywhere. The roads were well-paved even in the small towns (plenty of cheap labor, but also many willing workers where one might apply with 200 others for the same job). Delhi is in the process of putting in multi-lane freeways throughout the city for their plans include hosting the Asian Games in 2008, the Commonwealth Games in 2010, and perhaps the Olympics in 2016. New Delhi is full of construction, new corporate facilities (think off-shoring), plus the Indian Institute of Technology (the IIT featured in a segment on 60 Minutes last year), so the modern is displacing the modest particularly in this section of Delhi. And through a court challenge, the Clean Air Initiative, all

public transportation (auto-rickshaws, taxis, and buses) are required to use compressed natural gas (CNG), with special focus on Delhi.

Our tour guides emphasized how much the country has changed. Twenty to thirty years ago, there were few cars on roadways dominated by pedestrians, bicyclists, and human-powered, cycle rickshaws alongside camels and the odd Asian elephant. Today the streets of Delhi are choked with cars, trucks, buses, and three-wheeled auto rickshaws competing with the traditional forms of transportation – there are still camels, elephants, and even cattle sharing the roadway – gulp! This state of affairs is true of other cities too. In the smaller ones, there might be only a single, albeit paved lane shared by such traffic in **both** directions. And the road also serves as something of a social gathering place. But there is order to this chaos.

Drivers of faster vehicles are encouraged to honk to let others know they are coming and passing, despite only inches of clearance. And yet with all the continual honking, there appears to be no such thing as road rage! I can only imagine if Indians were replaced with westerners, they would all kill each other over repeated close-calls and cut-offs.



They have a well-educated, hard-working populace. English is spoken by a surprising portion of the populace, even in the poorer areas, as the lingua franca of India. And smiles are everywhere, no matter their station in life. There is a secular democracy, a government ruling benignly over the Hindus, Muslims, Jaines, Christians, and Buddhists, who all get along – an inherently tolerant society that is a surprise to those of us from the west where prejudices seem all too common. People are accustomed to thinking of Hinduism as a polytheist religion, but an equally apt description is that of a polymorphic monotheism (as suggested by tour coordinator Raj Singh and one of our guides Bob Fleming) – some may devote themselves to Shiva, others to Krishna, but they all practice essentially the same religion. The most notable prejudice was manifested by the advertisements in the Matrimonials section of the newspaper in which parents placed ads emphasizing the “fair skin” of their daughters, not to forget the significant dowry of the family, in soliciting husbands for arranged marriages. There is an example of such advertisements on the web site listed below. Speaking of examples, there are also photographs of the exquisite Kashmir rugs we saw, including one bought.

Did I mention that everyone was **extremely** friendly AND curious about foreigners? The inviting reception we received virtually everywhere is one of my most vivid and lasting memories of this trip – not to mention kids playing cricket matches in the street.

Despite the caste system, the notion of the “unclean” or “untouchables” is a thing of the past, legislated into oblivion.

Essentially, the caste system gives structure and tradition to their society, but members of the high and low castes are interdependent – the higher castes depend on the lower castes for certain functions only they perform, and for which they are respected. Speaking of respect, I was amazed at the quality of service provided by our Palace on Wheels saloon steward and attendant, Santosh Kumar and Prabhu Singh, whose attentiveness to our every need and genuine friendliness are unmatched in my experience, on board trains or otherwise.

We have posted a photo-essay of our trip to our web site aves.org.

You can find it by browsing the following URL:

<http://aves.org/india06/>

As a memento of the trip, I was outfitted with a turban as you can see (click the People and Parties link on the web site). Yes, I got to keep the turban, a gift from the farewell dinner. But I was not brave enough to wear it through the airports on the way home. Now if only I can remember how to wrap it properly!

Stay tuned for the next installment about this journey. Yes, I will get to the birds and other fauna and flora eventually. Check out the photos on the web site if you cannot wait.

-Robert Weissler



HAS Needs YOU!!!

As mentioned in last month's Trogon News and in this month's President's Message, HAS is in urgent need of "new blood" for officers, board members and newsletter editor. A handful of dedicated folks have carried the load for quite a few years and now need some help in continuing the work that has made HAS such a great chapter. With a membership of over two hundred, there must be some new folks out there eager and willing to step up to the plate! Don't be bashful! No experience is necessary. The only requirement is a desire to carry out Audubon's mission, and you've already exhibited an interest in that by becoming a member.

Additional responsibilities at work and on the home front have necessitated my resignation as Trogon News editor. I've sincerely enjoyed working on the newsletter, and I've felt like I was making a contribution to a worthwhile organization. Isn't there someone in our membership who would enjoy taking over this task or any of the other HAS vacancies? If you have any inclination at all in getting involved with the day to day operation of HAS's meetings, field trips, web site, education programs, newsletter, or conservation projects, please contact any of the HAS officers or board members listed on page 8. Thanks!

Lower San Pedro Important Bird Areas Inventory May 20th!

Come on out for this team-based bird inventory of the Lower San Pedro River on Saturday May 20th. This is going to be an exciting one-day survey effort covering 7-8 sub-areas from Dudleyville to near Cascabel. All eight Audubon chapters have the opportunity to send IBA team members. Camping opportunities will be available Friday night to facilitate this early morning survey for those that are interested. This will be a great time period for the survey with breeding birds singing to defend their territories and with the tail end of migration going on for some species traveling to the far north. This will be a great chance to see an area where many conservation activities are in the works, involving recently acquired conservation lands, retired mining lands, and lands up for purchase. Afterwards we will meet at La Casita Mexican restaurant in Mammoth, AZ (11:15 am) to share findings over lunch and have a short discussion on the conservation scenarios for this potential Important Bird Area. Folks can be on their way home right after lunch.

We hope to provide occurrence and relative abundance data on a number of key species that may qualify this area for Important Bird Area status in Arizona, notably: the Southwestern Willow Flycatcher, Gray Hawk, Common Black-Hawk, Mississippi Kite, Broad-billed Hummingbird, Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet, Tropical Kingbird, Thick-billed Kingbird, Bell's Vireo, Lucy's Warbler, Summer Tanager, Abert's Towhee, Indigo Bunting, Hooded Oriole, and Streak-backed Oriole. We expect to have a few biologists participating who know the area well and the potential distribution of the above species.

We will have two sites for camping the night before on Friday May 19th, one at the Nature Conservancy Preserve at Winkelman and one at the Nature Conservancy's Three Links farm near Cascabel. Teams will be two to three people who will survey all birds along a two 1 km transects with a short point count at the beginning and end of each. We will start surveying at 5:30 am and finish by mid-morning. We will pre-assign you your designated survey area, discuss the route and protocol, and provide you with data sheets.

Please RSVP with either Scott Wilbor, AZ IBA Conservation Biologist (520) 628-1730, Tucson Audubon Society, or Tice Supplee, Director of Bird Conservation, Audubon Arizona (602) 468-6470.

Southeastern Arizona Birding Trail Map

The Southeastern Arizona Birding Trail map unveiling ceremony is one part of the 2006 International Migratory Bird Day, a daylong celebration of nature at San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area. Activities include tours, workshops, talks and fun for the entire family. IMBD is sponsored by the Sonoran Joint Venture, Friends of the San Pedro River, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service International Program, and Tucson Audubon. More details can be found at www.sonoranjv.org/IMBD2006.html or by calling Sonoran Joint Venture at 520-882-0837 or the Friends of the San Pedro River at 520-459-2555. To purchase copies of the Southeastern Arizona Birding Trail map/brochure, visit www.seazbirdingtrail.com.

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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.
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