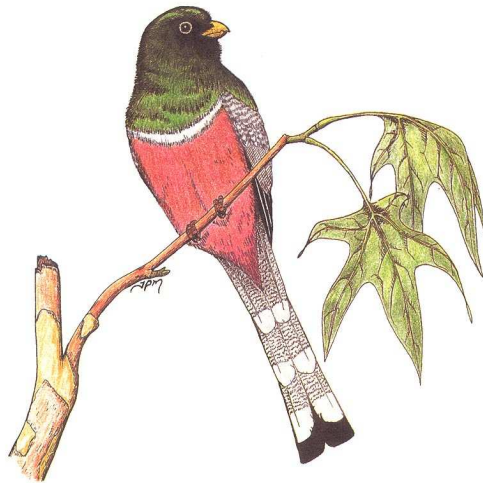


THE TROGON NEWS

HUACHUCA AUDUBON SOCIETY
Post Office Box 63, Sierra Vista, Arizona 85636
Volume XXXII Number 9, November 2004



President's Message

The pace always seems to pick up as we rush toward the end of the year, doesn't it? This month will have the casual and comfortable Thanksgiving bird count, done at home for just one hour, to warm you up for the more serious Christmas Bird Count. Don't be shy about volunteering for either of these, no matter what your skill level; help is always welcome.

November 4, 6, and 8 are also very important dates for San Pedro Valley residents. You'll be seeing newspaper inserts about the Upper San Pedro Partnership workshops on those dates. They will be identical, so pick the time and place that works for you. But pick one of them!! Many of you came to the first set of meetings sponsored by the USPP and I thank you for that. These workshops are a very important follow-on to continuing to make our voices heard in the water and environment discussions going on these days. This is absolutely one way to make a difference for our future. Please attend.

This month also includes the FUNdraiser at the mall. HAS sells tickets for \$5 and keeps the money, you get a special evening November 21 with discounts and door prizes (one of which is a large-screen TV). If you haven't left town for Thanksgiving, our monthly meeting is two nights later on the 23rd.

Local Programs and Events

Nov 20th, League of Women Voters Book Sale, in front of Ace Hardware, 8:00 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Nov 23rd, HAS meeting, 7:00 p.m., Mona Bishop Room, Sierra Vista Public Library. "Wildlife of the Lewis and Clark Expedition" Bob Luce will present this photographic safari that follows the Lewis

and Clark Expedition's route up the Missouri River in 1804-05 as they chronicled and described wildlife species new to the United States, many of which were also new to science.

Field Trips

Nov 6th, Saturday, HAS birding trip to Whitewater Draw, see details below.

Nov 10th, Wednesday, 8:00 a.m. FSPR bird walk. Meet at San Pedro House.

Nov 14th, Sunday, 8:00 a.m. FSPR bird walk. Meet at San Pedro River Inn.

Nov 27th, Saturday, 8:00 a.m. FSPR bird walk. Meet at San Pedro House.

Nov 7th, 14th, 21st, and 28th, Sunday's, 8:00 a.m. Sierra Vista Environmental Operations Park bird walks.

Dec 9th, Thursday, HAS birding trip to Patagonia Lake State Park. See below for more info.



Birding Trip to Whitewater Draw Wildlife Area

White Water Draw, in the Sulphur Springs Valley, is a spectacular birding area in the fall when the sandhill cranes return here from their northern homes. We will carpool to the valley on Saturday, November 6, so plan to meet at Sierra Vista City Hall at 8:30 am. The cranes fly out from White Water Draw at dawn to feed and return to the roosting site for mid-day "siesta" around 10:30, where we will be waiting. Thousands of cranes winging south from the fields create miles of black rippling ribbons in the sky, as well as a sound like an orchestra of French horns to our listening ears, and is not to be missed. I return many times every year to experience this remarkable and inspiring event. Many other birds also visit or winter in this habitat because of the water and nearby food, including waterfowl and shorebirds, hawks, falcons, eagles and owls, gulls, vermilion flycatchers, thrashers, towhees, and sparrows. So come enjoy a beautiful morning with our avian neighbors and your friendly fellow birders. We should be returning to Sierra Vista about 1 pm, so bring a snack or lunch and water, as well as sunscreen and hat. For further information, contact Nancy Aley at nancyaley@msn.com or 803-7689.

Birding Trip to Patagonia Lake State Park

Traditionally a most popular, well attended, and birding- productive HAS annual event. Again we will have the pleasure of Ron Hummel as our boatman and local birding hotshot. We'll meet at the Sierra Vista City Hall parking lot for a 7:00 a.m. departure by carpool. We need to be at the Visitor Center at 8:30 am (and 10:00 am) in order to sign on and be fitted with life jackets. Our first boat will leave at 9:00 a.m. sharp, with the second at 10:30 a.m. sharp. Only eight persons per boat, so advance bookings are essential. Warm layered clothing with a good windbreaker is strongly recommended. The second boat party will go directly to the park trailhead to bird. Note: there is a \$7 park entry fee per vehicle, and \$3 fee per person for the boat ride. Due to the distance involved, donations to carpool drivers are expected. Contact the leader, Mike Guest, 378-0667 with any questions and to make reservations.

Grassroots Workshop

Free! Free lunch!! Learn what grassroots advocacy is and how it impacts the legislative process. Workshop by Judd Klement, Grassroots Coordinator from NAS, on Saturday, November 13 from noon to 3 p.m. To sign up, contact Jessie Shinn at Tucson Audubon at 520 628-1730 or jessieshinn@qwest.net. Learn how you can be more involved and use your power as a constituent.

? QUO VADIS ?

The Outings Committee will be meeting shortly to plot our outings for the first six months of 2005. We do have our tried and true trips. But, any suggestions as to new or preferred destinations, together with the best month to visit, will be most welcome. Please communicate them to Mike Guest, Sandy Kunzer, or Harry Bergholdt. ASAP.

A Beautiful Day at Villa Verde

Saturday 9 October dawned a beautiful day for a Huachuca Audubon birding, natural history and social excursion to the Villa Verde area just south of the border at Naco. Unfortunately no one from our Society was there to see it! Because only two individuals had signed up by 48 hours before the trip I initiated negotiations with Juan Caicedo, our erstwhile leader, about whether it would be worth his time to lead such a small group. While these telephone calls were going back and forth, one of the prospective attendees called to cancel, so the fate of the trip was sealed.

Alright folks, what are we doing wrong? Are we not scheduling trips to the right places? Are they not on convenient days of the week and at convenient times? Are the trip leaders too old and ugly? Are you just getting burned on places within the reach of a day trip? But a recent, proposed multi-day trip to Bosque del Apache also went begging. This is your Society. Where do you want to go and when? Please call me at 520-803-8490, by e-mail at sbkunzer@theriver.com or snail mail at 4969 S. Laredo Pass, SV 85650 with your wishes, suggestions, outrage or indifference.

-Sandy Kunzer

Attention Members!

Third Alert!

As mentioned in earlier issues of the Trogon News, the HAS Board of Directors has decided that paper copies of the Trogon News will cease production after the Dec. 2004 issue, except for those members who are willing to state that they do not have access to the Internet. If you fall into this category, please contact Renell Stewart at 378-6318 or Mike Guest at 378-0667 with your name, address and phone number. (Please leave a message if there is no answer.) Those without Internet access will continue to get a paper copy but the BoD is not sure how long this privilege can continue without an increase in dues.

Normally the Trogon News is posted to the HAS web site at <http://www.huachuca-audubon.org/> or <http://has.hypermart.net/> by the first of every month. We would like to request that you put this date on your monthly calendar to check for each new issue. But if you prefer to receive a reminder from us, send an email with your name and email address to Renell Stewart at stewartr3@mindspring.com and Mike Guest at mwguest@juno.com. Please remember to notify us of any email address changes.

In summary, beginning with the January 2005 issue of the Trogon News, only those members with no Internet access and who have contacted us to that effect will receive a mailed paper copy of the newsletter. Members with Internet access and who have contacted us with their email addresses will receive a monthly email notification stating when the newsletter is available on the HAS web site. Other members with Internet access and who don't require a monthly email notification will check the HAS web site for the new issue on the first of each month. If we don't hear from you, we will assume you fall into this last category.

Please understand that the difficult decision of curtailing paper issues was prompted by rising production costs, the difficulty in finding volunteers willing to help in the processing of each issue and the perception that we will be better stewards of the environment by using less paper. We appreciate your cooperation and understanding.

Goodbye and Hello

I will be retiring as conservation chair of the HAS within the next month or two as I sadly say goodbye to all the wonderful friends I have met in Sierra Vista. I plan to return to see everyone from time to time from my new home in Asheville, North Carolina where I will be much closer to my family. Conrad Moore and Elaine Moore have graciously consented to take on the job of cochairs of the conservation committee. Welcome these two pros, dedicated birders and conservationists.

Conrad is interested in developing a grass roots water conservation movement. He believes that community activism and personal conservation will lead to the greatest reduction in the water deficit in the Sierra Vista subwatershed. Local governing bodies, which have failed to respond to constituents' concerns about the water deficit, seem to be much more focused on supporting rapid growth than on water conservation. Conrad will be inviting everyone who is interested to join him in this effort at education, letter writing, and possibly development of an email network of like-minded residents in Cochise County.

Elaine will take over responsibility for running the San Pedro Important Birding Area project that was so ably spearheaded by Ed Malais. We recently said good-bye to Ed when he moved back to the state of Washington. Elaine will be looking for volunteers to work on this project. Those of us who were involved in the project had a wonderful time with early morning hikes along the river and excellent bird sightings.

Please email me at drsondra@cox.net to tell me that you will be able to work on one or both of these projects.

-Sondra Gardner

2004 Ramsey Canyon Christmas Bird Count

The 2004 Ramsey Canyon Christmas Bird Count (RCCBC) will be held on Sunday, 26 Dec, so please mark your calendars. This year I'll be assisted by Robert Weissler as our secondary compiler, so feel free to contact either of us although the focus of Robert's efforts will be on the "feeder watchers" and on arranging the breakfast and compilation dinner. You may also have the ability to perform "on-line" registration this year (they've had some problems with this at the website www.audubon.org/bird/CBC) although you'll still need to contact Robert (803-0794) or me (803-0221) in order to work out the details of where you will bird and when and where we will meet for breakfast and dinner. The details on this year's RCCBC will be provided starting in late September/early October. Ted Mouras, Compiler, mourast@saic.com and Robert Weissler, 2ndry Compiler, Weissler@aves.org.

HAS Christmas Party PotLuck

Come One, Come All to our Christmas Party PotLuck followed by our first annual Elegant Trogon Holiday Silent Auction! Please save the date, December 12th at the Mona Bishop Room, Sierra Vista Library with our potluck at 1pm and silent auction starting at 3pm. We are already stacking up a bountiful, beautiful array of donations...a night's lodging at Casa de San Pedro's exquisite bed and breakfast, living native AZ pine tree trimmed with homemade bird treats from Mike Hocker of Southwest Native Garden Designs, Master Gardener, Cheri Melton's handmade bird habitat nest boxes and feeders, Phil & Marcia's Wild Birds Unlimited goodie basket for your birds, and much more! Please invite your friends and neighbors to come and share with us some good old fashioned Xmas cheer and good will! Please call Kate Scott at 520-455-5190 with any donations or to help out with trimming the tables, Xmas tree or to lend a hand during the auction!

Two of HAS' favorite members, Karen Blumenthal and Mark Pretti, are off on an adventure at Brazil's Cristalino Jungle Lodge where they're serving as birding and natural history guides for a few months. Luckily for us, they're being kind enough to update us on their experiences. Here's the second installment describing their adventures.

Adventures in the Amazon – Chapter 2

The experience of a first visit to new habitat with new species, sounds, and natural rhythms is profoundly humbling and simultaneously incredibly exciting. Among the many amazing natural history stories are some that reveal themselves all at once, others that tease with clues carefully portioned out until the full story is understood, and, of course, those that remain baffling, reinforcing the realization of how little we really know. Among the favorite stories in the last few weeks are the following.

Most of you who know us well know that our version of an exciting day in the field often includes a nice pile of mammal crap, what we naturalists refer to as scat. Scat in the tropics is a gold mine of biological activity and perhaps one of the best reminders of two natural truths. First, in nature, just about everything, from a single cell to an entire continent, is habitat for something, and second, nothing (unlike in the world we've created for ourselves) goes to waste. The neat thing about mammal scat is that you can sometimes read a pretty full story from just one little sample - who was there, when did they pass by, and what did they eat last. A pile of particularly pungent droppings composed entirely of animal matter (fur, bones, perhaps a claw of two) with an adjacent 'scrape' in the leaf litter where the critter may have scattered a few leaves over the droppings is the typical calling card of a cat. Yesterday afternoon, Karen noted just such a scenario on one of the Cristalino trails, at which point the fun began. The nutrient content of most animal waste is fairly well known to people but perhaps more appreciated by insects. The six-leggeds that may show up at one of these nutrient bonanzas include butterflies, beetles of various species, flies, bees, and wasps. The scat we observed had one big, beautiful, iridescent green male dung beetle completing the dungball that undoubtedly would prove irresistibly attractive to a female. Several smaller dung beetles were working away as well while a few blue-green blow flies danced around. But the stars of the show were two large rove beetles. These beetles, in the family Staphylinidae, are often predatory and some have fascinating tricks for finding a meal. The story of these guys as we interpreted it goes something like this. They have a color and shape that makes them look like, you guessed it, a little piece of poop - a nice trick that likely helps

avoid scaring away the blowflies that are going to lay the eggs that are going to hatch into the larval maggots that the beetles are going to eat, that is unless they don't first eat the adult flies themselves. Though the camouflage is good, apparently it may not be good enough, and the beetle has evolved a special enticement to the flies. These beetles can evert, from the tip of their abdomen, a wiggling, maggot-colored protuberance that seems to say, "Hey blowflies, no predatory rove beetles to worry about here. See, there are big fat healthy maggots feeding away just like yours will do if you land to lay some eggs." Now is that one of the coolest stories you've ever heard or what?

Among the less common birds around are yellow-browed tody flycatchers. These cute yellow and black puffballs have long, narrow, often-cocked tails and unusually long, wide, flat bills. Among the 400 or so species of tyrant flycatchers (the largest family in the Americas) are a tremendous range of forms and behaviors that represent enormous adaptive radiation. Among these flycatchers are terrestrial species that glean from the ground or low plants, arboreal species that eat mostly fruit, some that glean leaves and twigs, and many that flycatch on the wing. When foraging, the tody flycatchers sit still (but only briefly) and zip upward to glean insects from the undersides of leaves. This is a great strategy when you consider that they eat lots of hard-to-catch leafhoppers, those harmless, (usually) green little insects that sometimes land on you and hop away with impressive speed before you can flick them off. If you're a warbler or anwren bouncing around on the twigs and leaves, you can forget about catching leafhoppers (as they'll be hopping away long before you get near) and instead focus on things like slow moving caterpillars. So here's this bunch of food (leafhoppers) out there that few things can access. Enter the tody flycatchers with their long, wide bill (lots of surface area for catching fast insects), their speed, their sharp vision, and their 'death from below' hunting strategy. This slicing out of narrow niches is part of what contributes to the great avian diversity of South America.

Those of you who have been to Pook's Hill Lodge in Belize (and have perhaps, like me, dreamed about it ever since) may remember the infamous four o'clock plant. This legume, in the genus *Calliandra*, has a southern sister species here at Cristalino. Like its Belizean counterpart, the local four o'clock bush puts forth a new bloom of flowers each day. Starting at about noon, the day's flower buds open to release two-inch long stamens that slowly unfurl from the cramped bud where they've been waiting like a bunched up wad of thread. It takes about four hours for the red and white stamens to fully stretch out and take their lovely, pollinator-attracting form. They remind me of a pinkish, sky-filling firework frozen in mid-burst. A little after five-thirty and just before dark, nectar is flowing and hummingbirds and sphinx moths are zipping and dipping from flower to flower. But these little beauties are just the opening act. At about six-thirty, the pinnately compound leaves fold themselves up like a just-finished novel and offer a hint that there's more to come. Birds and moths, capable of hovering, drop down to the flowers from above and aren't too concerned about where the leaves are positioned, but another creature, which swoops in from below, is denied flower access if leaves are in the way. So here we have a plant that not only opens its flowers late in the day and presumably hits peak nectar production in the dark hours but also goes the extra energy-requiring mile to move the leaves out of the flightpath of what we assume is its primary pollinator, nectar-feeding bats. Interestingly, though everything about these plants says 'chiropterophily' (to which you might say 'whatophily'), we have yet to see a bat on the Brazilian version whereas the Belizean plant is a bat air traffic controller's nightmare. The present hypothesis is that we just can't stay up late enough to see the bats.

And last but not least a brief report of a most special morning on the Rio Cristalino. Taking off from the dock at about 6:30, we motored upstream through refreshingly cool morning air for several hours to reach a part of the river where the gradient is gentle, the water slow-moving and the plants and wildlife quite different from what we find around the lodge. Along the way were the usual Brazilian tapir, macaws, swallow tanagers, white-banded swallows, and kingfishers. Karen's sharp eyes spotted a neotropical river otter on the bank (a first for us) - we got a great look before it slipped away into the dark water. As we reached the first of the still sidestreams we were fixated on a beautiful pair of dueting black-capped donacobius. These gorgeous neotropical wrens look nothing like the wrens we're used to and are rarely found away from streamside vegetation. Their duet, with one uttering a harsh cactus wren-like call and the other a more musical two-note phrase, posed in the morning light and gave a mesmerizing performance. So mesmerizing, in fact, that we didn't even notice the family of six giant river otters eyeing us from about thirty feet away. These animals, well known from just about any TV nature special about the Amazon, were tops on our list of want-to-see's, but we never thought we'd see a sextet of these impressively large, almost snake-like aquatic weasels at such close range. We enjoyed their curiosity, odd vocalizations, and tremendous grace for almost thirty minutes before moving on in near disbelief. The hits kept coming with several groups of hoatzins, an odd monotypic (only member of its family) bird that has a diet (leaves) and intestinal flora not that different from a howler monkey. Other avian treasures were greater schiffornis, spotted tody-flycatcher, and a group of about 30 blue and yellow macaws swirling overhead and amidst the Mauritia palms whose fruits they were feeding on. Downstream we made a stop at a bump in the river bank where an anaconda sometimes basks. The reptilian gods were smiling this day as the anaconda was indeed home and basking in the sun in all its immensity in the well hidden spot. We've heard of how huge these creatures can get, but nothing approaches the reality of a coiled mass of muscle at least eight inches in diameter through most of its body, a head much larger than my hand, and a length estimated at about 20 feet. With an overwhelming sense of gratitude to evolution through natural selection, we began the return trip down river.

Interpreting natural history is good for the psyche - realizing how little you know is humbling and helpful in keeping the old ego in check. And though I'd be the first to admit that there's certainly a little ego-rush in making a good sighting to share with others, nowhere in my fertile imagination did I ever think I'd be saying 'Look, Jaguar!!' to a group of trip participants. Amazingly that's exactly what happened as we cruised the Cristalino in what must have been some state of unearthly grace. Sitting on a long white log hanging over the river was El Tigre himself, just staring at us as we drifted forward ever-so-slowly, taking pictures and video of this once-in-a-lifer. With the sun at our backs and the light as perfect as could be, we watched the feline miracle with awe, and he stared back thinking who knows what. Eventually, he stood up and walked slowly along the log, disappearing into the forest with a casual grace that made us feel appropriately fortunate and insignificant.

This place is often indescribable but certainly worth the attempt.

It's getting busy and the next ten days are going to be hectic. Yes, there is a catch to all this seemingly self-indulgent exploring, but it's worth the price. Our bird list, now approaching 300 species, may go into a holding pattern.

For those of you who wondered about heat, humidity, tropical diseases, biting insects, and other nasties, all we can say is that the southern Amazon is a whole lot more comfortable than places I've

been in the Sierra Nevada, Cascades, or coastal Texas. There are no mosquitoes (or malaria) to speak of. The few chiggers that seem to be around are sissies. There are a few biting no-see-ums by the beach, but their bites are pretty harmless. The main nuisance is ticks which come in small, medium, and large. It's those medium ones that find their way up my pant legs on a daily basis, but they, too, are so insignificant that I've been too lazy to tuck my pant legs in and then there's the sick naturalist humor of finding ticks on unmentionable body parts. I've never once considered running in the heat of midday in Arizona, at least from early April to late October, but we do it regularly here – it's surprisingly comfortable.

Best to all,
Karen and Mark



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