

THE TROGON NEWS

HUACHUCA AUDUBON SOCIETY
Post Office Box 63, Sierra Vista, Arizona 85636
Volume XXXIII Number 9, November 2005



President's Message

This could be a very dangerous column for me but I'm going to go ahead and try it anyway. Because this is Thanksgiving month, I'm going to try for some thanks. We can probably all be grateful that we live in this area with abundant wildlife and birds and reasonably good weather. Our environment is still nice, although the falling water table in the Sierra Vista area means our special desert river is at great risk.

I know I'm grateful for the people I know and work with who are concerned about our world. That certainly includes all the volunteers who help with all the bird walks that are offered around here. And the volunteers on the HAS board of directors are a special group. Some have been around since HAS was formed over 30 years ago (Ginny Bealer!!), some have been on the board for many many years and help keep me focused (Mike Guest), and all contribute something. We have quite a nice mix of talents right now, with new people moving to the area and getting involved.

And this part was the danger for me! To name a few people or even a group of people means I might (probably) miss some. Since I'm doing this column in a frantic hurry, it's almost certain I have done so. Please forgive me and know I appreciate everything you might be doing on a personal level. And don't forget to participate in the Thanksgiving Bird Count. I've left forms at Wild Birds Unlimited.

Welcome to New HAS Members!

We would like to extend a warm welcome to our newest HAS members: Matthew Caron, Maya Decker, and Rose Ann Rowlett, all of Portal, Sam Simpson of Benson, and Pat & Verna Berry of Churchville, Maryland.

Local Programs and Events

Nov 22nd, Tuesday, HAS Meeting, 7:00 p.m., Sierra Vista Police Department community meeting room, 911 N. Coronado. Join naturalist and bird guide Mark Pretti for a Central American journey to Belize - Jewel of the Caribbean. With its largely undisturbed tropical forests, abundance of rivers, tremendous diversity of flora and fauna, outstanding birding, rich human history, low human population, and strong conservation ethic, Belize is one of the finest natural destinations in the world. This small Central American country hosts over 550 species of birds – including toucans, woodcreepers, tanagers, antbirds, hummingbirds, raptors, waders, and more – about 150 species of mammals, and 150 species of amphibians and reptiles. During this presentation, made possible by the generosity of several excellent digital photographers Mark has shared Belize trips with, we'll enjoy colorful images and learn about many of the birds and other tropical treats of this fabulous place.

Field Trips

Nov 4th, Friday, 9:00 a.m. SEABA field trip to San Pedro National Conservation Area. Meet at the **San Pedro House Parking lot off SR90 east of Sierra Vista and west of the River. The annual Rabbitbrush walk will cover several of the washes of the San Pedro National Conservation Area and hopefully the rabbitbrush will be in full bloom. Possible species include Great Purple Hairstreaks, all three species of Lady, Mexican Fritillaries, Western Pygmy-Blues and more.** \$5.00 donation requested. **Contact Hank Brodtkin - hbrodtkin@cox.net /520-803-9700 for information. Inclement weather will cancel.**



Nov 5th, Saturday, 7:30 a.m. HAS field trip to Whitewater Draw. Meet at the Sierra Vista City Hall parking lot to arrange car pools. Carry water and snacks, back for late lunch. Leader: Mike Guest, 378-0667. Note: Due to the high price of gas, car pool passengers are expected to provide adequate compensation to their driver, about 8 cents per mile.

Nov 9th, Wednesday, 8:00 a.m. FSPR bird walk. Meet at San Pedro House.

Nov 13th, Sunday, 8:00 a.m. FSPR bird walk. Meet at San Pedro River Inn.

Nov 14th, Monday, 7:00 a.m. HAS field trip to Huachuca Canyon. Meet at Gateway Plaza, Fry Boulevard. Need to have US driver's license to enter Fort Huachuca. Any questions contact the Leader: Erika Wilson, 234-4359. terika88@cox.net

Nov 26th, Saturday, 8:00 a.m. FSPR bird walk. Meet at San Pedro House.

Nov 6th, 13th, 20th, and 27th, Sunday's, 8:00 a.m. Sierra Vista Environmental Operations Park bird walks. Tours will be limited to 20 participants plus 2 docents.

Dec 10th, Saturday, HAS field trip to Patagonia Lake State Park. Fourth Annual Birding by Boat and Land. Leave from Sierra Vista City Hall parking lot at 7:00 a.m. prompt. Small fee for boat ride, in addition to Park entrance fee. Limited to 18 participants. Reservations are essential, you must contact the Leader: Sandy Kunzer, 803-8490. sbkunzer@theriver.com Note: Due to the high price of gas, car pool passengers are expected to provide adequate compensation to their driver, about 8 cents per mile.

HAS Field Trip – 10 Oct 05

Seven people attended the Huachuca Audubon Society's trip to Willcox, with a stop at the Amerind Foundation grounds en route. Permission to bird on the Amerind grounds was obtained thanks to Alan Blixt; we were welcomed by the Amerind's director, Dr. Ware. We wandered along dirt roads through grassland studded with huge rock outcroppings and a mix of trees and shrubs. About thirty Turkey Vultures rose unsteadily from their roost site and then re-settled as we passed. A single Cassin's Vireo was spotted working its way through a mesquite, the best migrant of the morning. Next we had wonderful views of Crissal Thrashers, one of which flashed his dark rust undertail coverts at us before diving into a thicket. In this same area we had both Green-tailed and Canyon Towhees. Sparrows were common—we saw Chipping, Brewer's, Vesper, Black-throated, Savannah, and White-crowned. Next came a small pond filled with cattails and edged with willows, hosting a Red-tailed Blackbird and a Black-tailed Rattlesnake, which was the non-bird highlight of the trip. Back near the main buildings were a Plumbeous Vireo and a Red-naped Sapsucker. Altogether we found 33 species on the Amerind grounds and agreed this is a worthwhile stop for birds.

At Willcox, our first stop was at a rain pool along the exit road west of town where we counted ninety Long-billed Curlews, the highest count of this species I have had in Arizona. At the golf course pond there were four Pied-billed Grebes, plus the usual coots and a mix of ducks, a Great Blue Heron and Green Heron, but no Black-crowned Night-Heron. Working our way around Lake Cochise we saw an immature Greater White-fronted Goose, which has been there since mid-September, and nineteen Eared Grebes, plus ten species of duck: Gadwall, American Wigeon, Mallard, Cinnamon Teal, Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail, Green-winged Teal, a male Redhead, Ring-necked Duck, and Ruddy Duck. Only two White-faced Ibis were present and one Snowy Egret. Shorebirds were not plentiful; only Killdeer, American Avocet, Western and Least Sandpipers, and Long-billed Dowitcher. The best raptors were two N. Harriers here for the winter and two lingering Swainson's Hawks soon to be southbound. We found 44 species in the Willcox area; combining our two locations, we had 70 species for the day.

-Erika Wilson

Plan Now to Attend 2006 Wings Over Willcox

January 12-15, 2006, is just a few short months away, so mark your calendars and plan to visit Willcox, Arizona, for the 13th Annual Wings Over Willcox Birding and Nature Festival. This exciting weekend of birding and natural history tours and seminars is sure to be fun for the whole family. A complete list of activities, as well as local lodging and restaurants, can be found at the festival website: www.wingsoverwillcox.com.

The keynote speaker at the Saturday night banquet will be wildlife biologist Roderick C. Drewien. For more than 35 years, Drewien has studied the movements, life histories, and conservation challenges facing cranes in western North America. He will share his extensive knowledge of the cranes' annual cycles from their breeding grounds, through their spring and fall migration stopovers, to their wintering areas.

The following letter was sent to every Audubon chapter for which Sandy could identify an e-mail address.

Colleagues,

Huachuca Audubon Society is writing to you to bring a serious local conservation issue to your attention and ask for your help in publicizing it. Many of your members will have seen the recent national publicity on the “Minuteman Project”, in Cochise County along the Arizona border with Mexico. Most of the attention was on the social and potential national security issues involved with illegal immigration across this border. Very little, if any, attention was directed towards the severe environmental consequences experienced here at “ground zero”.

Biologically, Cochise County is rich and diverse, combining a cottonwood-willow riparian corridor, rare in the Southwest, with semi-desert grasslands, then rising through oak forests to montane zone conifer-clad peaks. We are home to the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area (SPRNCA), a globally important migration corridor for millions of birds each year and one of The Nature Conservancy’s “Last Great Places”; several “sky island” ranges, including the Huachuca Mountains, home to Miller Peak Wilderness and world renowned Ramsey Canyon Preserve; and the National Park Service’s Coronado National Memorial.

All of these resources are being severely degraded by the heavy human traffic, which has much more personally important priorities than concern for our environment. New and inappropriate trails are worn in the landscape. Switchbacks are cut in existing trails. Literally tons of trash are left on the landscape, distressing the human eye and psyche and threatening the lives of local wildlife. In addition, fires set deliberately or by accident are taking an increasing toll on habitat. Tens of thousands of acres have burned in human caused fires in the last few years. Since much of the travel is at night, many animal species seem to be declining, possibly due to the invasion of what used to be “low impact time” as well as space.

Unfortunately, one of the ironies is that some of the U.S. Border Patrol’s proposed solutions (fences, roads and authorization to take ORV’s into wilderness) to the problem may end up doing as much damage as the illegal entrants themselves.

We ask that you publicize our under-reported problem to your membership and bring it to the attention of your congressional representatives. It is only when there is a national solution that the severe degradation of this sensitive area will be contained. If businesses and individuals in your area who hire illegal aliens were held accountable under current laws, the demand for these workers would decrease to the point that our damaged environment might have a chance to recover.

Thank you for your attention and action.

Tricia Gerrodette
President, Huachuca Audubon Society, Arizona

Space Age Technology Helps Rescue Endangered Condor in Arizona

An endangered California condor is alive and thriving today, after it was rescued with the Space Age help of a satellite transmitter. The bird, one of less than 300 condors in the entire world, was apparently attacked by another animal last month at the Vermilion Cliffs National Monument in Arizona. Biologist rescuers were able to determine that something was wrong and track down the condor with the help of the transmitter attached to its wings.

"Biologists noticed that this bird had not been seen in two days, so they used data downloaded from its satellite transmitter to determine its location and then found the bird hiding in a crack along a rocky slope," says Kathy Sullivan, a condor biologist with the Arizona Game and Fish Department. "The condor was dehydrated and had puncture wounds on its body. It appeared to be the victim of a golden eagle or coyote attack." The condor was taken to The Phoenix Zoo, where it received antibiotic treatment and started recovering from its wounds. The bird has now fully recovered and will soon be released back into the wild.

"This is the perfect example of the value of cooperation between all the individuals and agencies involved in the California condor reintroduction project," says Thom Lord, condor field manager for The Peregrine Fund. "If it hadn't been for the transmitters supplied to us by the Arizona Game and Fish Department, The Peregrine Fund's biologists on the ground, or the zoo's timely diagnosis and treatment, there is no doubt that this bird would have died."

The Arizona Game and Fish Department has purchased a dozen transmitters to monitor condors, and money was just set aside to buy nine more. Transmitters are already on 14 condors. The birds wear the transmitters on their wings, and the devices send messages to a satellite, so scientists can monitor condor movements within Arizona and as they begin to travel to other states, including the area around Zion National Park in Utah. "The transmitters give us precise locations daily, without us having to physically track the birds," says Sullivan. "Because of this, we have been able to track 300- and 400-mile trips for a few condors."

Visitors to the Grand Canyon's South Rim and the Vermilion Cliffs area may see condors in flight. The transmitters also reveal rare appearances in other parts of Arizona as far east as the White Mountains and as far south as Sedona.

In 1982, only 22 California condors were left in the world. Biologists captured them in an effort to save and breed the species. Experts now care for the birds and periodically release them in California, Mexico, and Arizona, as the population begins to rebound. Condors were reintroduced in Arizona in 1996. Now, 55 live in the wilds of our state. Only 121 condors live in the wild worldwide; 158 are being cared for in captivity. California condors have been federally listed as endangered since 1967. The birds can weigh up to 26 pounds and have a wingspan of up to 9 1/2 feet. The condor reintroduction in Arizona is a joint project of several partners, including Arizona Game and Fish Department, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, The Peregrine Fund, Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, Kaibab National Forest, and the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources.

-4 Aug AZ Game and Fish Wildlife News

Wanted: Feeder Watchers!
2005 Ramsey Canyon Christmas Bird Count (RCCBC)



It's time once again to mark the RCCBC on your calendars. This year we will hold it on Sunday, 18 Dec. 2005. We had great weather and a great count last year with 147 species counted. Last year we had a record 89 participants, including 20 feeder watchers, who recorded 147 bird species. We also recorded high counts for 10 species.

As always feeder watchers were a big part of last year's success and we are again seeking new participants to count their "yard birds".

Your feeders need to lie within the RCCBC circle in order to be included in the count. The RCCBC circle runs roughly south of Fry Blvd and Hwy 90, west of the San Pedro River to Miller Peak, and south almost to the border with Mexico. See the map at Wild Birds Unlimited for more detail or check out the RCCBC map on-line at the Huachuca Audubon web site (<http://www.huachuca-audubon.org/RCCBC.html>). Also, see the RCCBC web page for details on the meeting time and place for breakfast and on reservations for the catered RCCBC "count tally" dinner.

All you need to do is to record the species and estimate the number of individuals of each species that you see on Dec. 18th. Provide me with this information and an estimate of the time you spent watching or walking your property and an estimate of the miles you walked.

If you are interested in joining one of our bird count teams or watching your feeder(s), please contact me at (520) 803-0794 or via email at weissler@aves.org.T

Robert Weissler
RCCBC Feeder Watch Coordinator

2005 Ramsey Canyon Christmas Bird Count

This year, the Ramsey Canyon Christmas Bird Count (RCCBC) will be held on Sunday, December 18, so please mark your calendars. If you are interested in participating, please contact Ted Mouras via email at mourast@saic.com (phone: 803-0221) or Robert Weissler via email at weissler@aves.org (phone: 803-0794). As our secondary compiler, Robert will focus on feeder watchers, while Ted will arrange the parties that venture out into the field to cover the various areas within the count circle.

We will meet for breakfast at 6:30 a.m. at the Lone Star Cafe located at the intersection of Highway 92 and Hereford Road. During breakfast, participants will receive checklists, maps, and other information. The Huachuca Audubon Society will cover the tab for breakfast. We need a rough idea of how many folks will be joining us for breakfast, so please contact us by phone or e-mail address listed below if you plan to attend the breakfast.

Dinner and the count tally will be held at La Casita (465 E Fry Blvd) on the north side of Fry Blvd west of 7th Street (across the street from Cafe Ole). Dinner service will commence at 5:30 p.m. Dinner is the "Holiday Special" menu of baked ham, roast turkey, house salad, potatoes, dinner rolls, vegetables, stuffing, and yams. The dinner costs \$16 per person (including tax, gratuity, and use of the banquet room) and includes your choice of iced tea, lemonade, or coffee. Beverages from the bar cost extra. We have reserved the banquet facilities at the rear of La Casita, so we need to pay for the dinner in advance. Please let us know by phone or e-mail if you plan to join us for dinner and who will be joining you. In addition, we will need payment for the dinner by check in advance.

Please send your check (payable to Robert Weissler) by Friday, December 2, 2005 to the address below and please list the name of each person included in your check (at \$16/person):

Robert Weissler
Re: RCCBC Dinner
P.O. Box 1105
Hereford, AZ 85615

Again, please contact Ted via email at mourast@saic.com (phone: 803-0221) or Robert via email at weissler@aves.org (phone: 803-0794) with the names of members of your party. And don't forget to send the check for the dinner by the Dec. 2 deadline!

We look forward to a terrific dinner to cap a satisfying day of counting birds in the field or at home!

-Ted Mouras and Robert Weissler

Mail Correspondence to:
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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.

The *Trogon News* newsletter is provided to all members via the HAS web site - www.huachuca-audubon.org.

Mailed copies or monthly email notification is available upon special request to HAS editor and/or secretary.

Send all checks to Huachuca Audubon Society, PO Box 63, Sierra Vista, AZ 85636.