

THE TROGON NEWS

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

Hello, I'll start my first President's message with a positive theme. HAS had its most active year ever ending this June: our members led over 100 field trips, (all of which were open to the public) these included the weekly EOP bird walks, three different "once-a-month" bird walks at the San Pedro River, the fledgling "early morning" bird walks at Ramsey Canyon Preserve, and our monthly field trips to a variety of venues. Also some twenty two volunteers spent in excess of 550 hours leading these field trips, running our monthly meetings, publishing the Trogon News, following conservation issues, and serving as officers and directors. Considering our actual number of active members, these were remarkable achievements.

At our July meeting, after research and a lengthy discussion, the HAS Board decided (following the decision of many other Audubon Chapters) to purchase "Directors and Officers" insurance. This was not an easy discussion, not the least because such insurance is not cheap - approx \$1,000 per year. But ours is an increasingly litigious society and we by our Mission Statement are Conservationists with the goal of "promoting conservation and ecosystem restoration," "working to extend public awareness," and "seeking to inform and influence lawmakers." With the preservation of the San Pedro River as our first priority we are taking stands against the Smith Ranch near Benson, and "high density housing" near Palominas, also in the interests of biodiversity we have objected to the Forest Service plans to exterminate predators in our Wilderness areas using motorized vehicles, concealed poisonous gas and traps.

I am pleased to have this opportunity to be the President and leader of our very active chapter, we have no notions of reducing the number of field trips or of not pursuing our mission statement, both of which I hope you will continue to support. Mike.

Welcome to New HAS Members!

We would like to extend a warm welcome to our newest HAS members: Kerrie Kirkpatrick of Hereford, David Beaudette and Betty Blackmer, Patricia Couse, M. Alexander and Robert Strain of Sierra Vista, Adele of Benson, Janice Rice of Cochise, Suzannah Savitri of Tombstone, and Sue Leskiw of Eureka, California.

Thanks To Our Outgoing Trogon News Editor, Renell Stewart

We would like to offer a very special "thank you" to Renell Stewart for editing the Trogon News these many years and producing a consistently high-quality publication to disseminate chapter events and activities to the membership. Renell, we will miss your colorful, well-organized newsletters!

With the advent of the web, we have an effective means for reaching our membership in a more timely fashion. As a result, we have moved the schedule of events front and center on the home page of our web site (<http://www.huachuca-audubon.org/>) where it can be updated on a moment's notice. We will continue to offer the newsletter as a vehicle to highlight stories on recent field trips, programs, and other activities of Huachuca Audubon, albeit quarterly instead of monthly.

Board Directors and Officers For the Coming Year

At the recent Annual Meeting and Picnic in June, the new board members were selected. They are Mike Guest, President (succeeding Tricia Gerrodette whom we thank for her many years as President!); Rick Romea, Vice President; Phil Tucker, Treasurer; Sandy Kunzer, Secretary; Sandy Anderson, Tricia Gerrodette, Robert Weissler, Rick & Rikki Thompson, and Kerrie Kirkpatrick. Contact info is given on the last page of the Trogon News.

Committee News

The chairpersons for the chapter committees are as follows: Conservation: Tricia Gerrodette; Education: Sandy Anderson; Membership: Ginny Bealer; and Outings: Rick Romea. Note that Programs is still open to the first volunteer! Please contact the relevant chairperson if you would like to find out more information about the activities of a particular committee.

Local Programs and Events

Sep 7th, 8:30am, AZ Bird Conservation Initiative Meeting in Phoenix (see announcement below).
Sep 18th, 6-9pm, Public Comment on Arizona Game & Fish Strategic Plan in Tucson (see below).
Sep 19th, 7pm Huachuca Audubon Monthly Meeting, **Program on Brazil** in the Horace Steele Conference Room on the Sierra Vista campus of Cochise College in the library building.
Oct 17th, 7pm. HAS Monthly Meeting, **Program on New Zealand** by Betsy and Sandy Kunzer.
Nov 21st, 7pm. HAS Monthly Meeting, **Program on Ramsey Canyon CBC.**
Dec 30th, Ramsey Canyon Christmas Bird Count. Contact Ted Mouras for details (e-mail to tedmouras@mindspring.com).

Field Trips



Sep 10th, Sunday, 7:00 a.m. FSPR bird walk. Meet at San Pedro River Inn.

Sep 13th, Wednesday, 7:00 a.m. FSPR bird walk. Meet at San Pedro House.

Sep 16th, Saturday, 7:00 a.m. **Amerind Foundation/ Willcox Ponds.** Bird the Amerind Foundation grounds en route to the Willcox ponds. Meet at the Sierra Vista City Hall parking lot at 7:00am to arrange car pools. Leader: Rick Romea, 803-1160. Assistant leader: Alan Blixt, 515-9458.

Sep 23th, Saturday, 8:00 a.m. FSPR bird walk. Meet at San Pedro House.

Sep 3rd, 10th, 17th and 24th, Sunday's, 8:00 a.m. Sierra Vista Environmental Operations Park bird walks. Tours will be limited to 20 participants plus 2 docents.

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.

Weekly events

Every Sunday at 7:00am. **Bird Walk at Sierra Vista Environmental Operations Park.** Limited to 20 participants with two docents. Note: Owing to acts of vandalism, public entrance to the EOP is restricted to 7:00am to 3:30pm, Monday to Friday only.

Every Monday at 7:30am **Bird Walk at Ramsey Canyon Preserve.** Standard admission fees apply. Contact Rick Romea at 803-1160 for further information.

Monthly events

2nd Sunday at 8am Oct-Mar, 7am Apr-Sep. **Bird Walk at San Pedro River Inn.**

2nd Wednesday at 8am Oct-Mar, 7am Apr-Sep. **Bird Walk at San Pedro House.**

4th Saturday at 8am Oct-Mar, 7am Apr-Sep. **Bird Walk at San Pedro House.**

Remaining 2006 Field Trips

The HAS Outings Committee, Mike Guest (Chair), Sandy Kunzer, Rick Romea, and Erika Wilson have planned a variety of venues for the remainder of 2006.

Oct. 12th, Thursday. **Rio Sonora.** Leader: Sandy Kunzer, 803-8490.

Nov. 9th, Thursday, 8:00 a.m. **Huachuca Canyon.** Meet 8:00am at Gateway Park. Need to have US driver's licence to enter Fort Huachuca. Leader: Erika Wilson, 234-4359.

Nov. 29th, Wednesday, 7:30 a.m. **Whitewater Draw.** Meet at the Sierra Vista City Hall parking lot at 7:30 am to arrange car pools. Leader: Mike Guest, 378-0667.

Dec. 16th, Saturday, 7:00 a.m. **Patagonia Lake State Park.** Fifth Annual Birding by Boat and Land. Leave from Sierra Vista City Hall parking lot at 7:00am prompt. Small fee for boat ride, in addition to Park entrance fee. Limited to 18 participants. Reservations are essential, call the Leader: Sandy Kunzer, 803-8490.

AZ Bird Conservation Initiative Meeting

Dear ABCI Participants and Interested Parties:

This is another reminder with additional details in regards to our upcoming annual AZ Bird Conservation Initiative Meeting to be held in Phoenix on 7 September. The meeting is scheduled to begin at 0830. A draft agenda is attached.

Meeting Location: La Quinta Inn Phoenix North (NE corner of I-17 and Greenway Road)

2510 West Greenway Road

Phoenix, Arizona 85023

Main Line: 602-993-0800

To greatly assist in determining the number of hand-outs, chairs, etc. that will be needed for our meeting, please contact me *by Monday, 4 September* if you plan to attend. Please forward the agenda to anyone you think might be interested in attending, and please note; there is NO registration fee. I look forward to seeing many of you there.

Thank you,

Edwin Juarez
Arizona Bird Conservation Initiative Coordinator
Nongame Branch, Arizona Game and Fish Dept.
2221 West Greenway Road
Phoenix, Arizona 85023-4399
(602) 789-3516 - office
(602) 789-3926 - fax
email: ejuaraz@azgfd.gov <<mailto:ejuaraz@azgfd.gov>>
ABCI Website: http://www.azgfd.gov/w_c/partners_flight.shtml

Public Input Sought on Game and Fish Strategic Plan "Wildlife 2012"

The Arizona Game and Fish Department is seeking public comment on the draft "Wildlife 2012" plan, a strategic plan that will guide how the agency manages wildlife, outdoor recreational opportunities and its own operations for the next six years. The department develops a new strategic plan every six years.

The draft document is posted for review on the department's Web site at [azgfd.gov](http://www.azgfd.gov) <http://www.azgfd.gov/inside_azgfd/strategic_plan.shtml>. Six public meetings will be held around the state in September to provide an overview. Written comment will be accepted until Oct. 6.

"Public input will be important in helping us finalize the plan," says Bruce Taubert, the department's assistant director for wildlife management. "Everyone has a stake in the continued health of our state's

wildlife populations and in future recreational opportunities. It's important to make your viewpoint known."

Wildlife 2012 reflects the management direction the Arizona Game and Fish Commission has provided to the department for the next six years. The plan outlines priorities and strategic goals affecting four areas: wildlife management, off-highway vehicle recreation, watercraft recreation, and department administration.

The public meetings will include a presentation on the planning process and an overview of the plan's highlights. The meetings will be held from 6-9 p.m. on various dates and locations. Only the Tucson meeting is listed for HAS info.

Monday, Sept. 18, - *Tucson*, Arizona Game and Fish Department Tucson regional office, 555 N. Greasewood Road.

People will have the opportunity to ask questions, but no oral comment will be taken at the meetings. Written comment can be submitted at the meetings, or anytime through Oct. 6, by e-mail to wildlife2012plan@azgfd.gov <<mailto:wildlife2012plan@azgfd.gov>> or by U.S. mail to Wildlife 2012, c/o Funds & Planning, Arizona Game and Fish Department, 2221 W. Greenway Road, Phoenix, AZ 85023-4399.

Breeding Success for Mexican Spotted Owls on Ft Huachuca

Fort Huachuca has conducted Annual Monitoring Surveys for the Threatened Mexican Spotted Owl (MSO) since 1991 to comply with the Federal Endangered Species Act. Engineering and Environmental Consultant (EEC) biologists initiated the 2006 Fort Huachuca MSO surveys on March 7th. Seven designated Protected Activity Center (PAC) and Two Inventory Areas (IAs) were surveyed using the USFWS supported Standardized Survey Protocol.

Spotted Owl pair occupancy on Fort was confirmed in 8 of 9 sites. Successful reproduction was confirmed in 5 of 9 sites, with at least 8 young produced and fledged. The overall pair occupancy rate in 2006 was 90 % (7 pair and 1 adult female) for the 7 PACs monitored and 100 percent for the two IAs.

Reminder: Ramsey Canyon Christmas Bird Count

If you are interested in participating in the Ramsey Canyon Christmas Bird Count (RCCBC) on Saturday, December 30, 2006, please contact Ted Mouras via email at tedmouras@mindspring.com (phone: 803-0221) or Robert Weissler via email at weissler@aves.org (phone: 803-0794).

We look forward to seeing those of you who plan to participate on December 30. Details on the breakfast at the Lone Star Cafe in Hereford and the dinner at La Casita in Sierra Vista can be found on the web site (<http://www.huachuca-audubon.org>) or by e-mailing Ted or Robert.

-Ted Mouras and Robert Weissler



India and the Palace on Wheels March 2006

Part II: Birds and Other Wildlife

This is the second installment recounting the trip my wife Liza and I made to India in March, 2006 on a tour called the "Palace on Wheels" organized by Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT, www.ventbird.com). This installment will focus on the colorful, varied flora and fauna that we encountered. While birds were the focus of this tour, tigers were certainly one of its many highlights!

Just to review, our journey took us through north-central India. The tour 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.



We started birding in and around Delhi with visits to Humayun's Tomb and Qutub Minar. Among the first birds we spied were Rose-ringed and Alexandrine Parakeets roosting in the ancient monuments, along with Bank and Common Mynas in the parking lot, not to mention the near-ubiquitous Red-vented Bulbul. A nearby wetland along the Yamuna River that passes through Delhi produced an array of waders, shorebirds, raptors, and other birds including Common Hawk-Cuckoo and the striking White-throated Kingfisher.



As we traveled south from Delhi toward Agra, we were treated to a performance by a snake charmer. Of course, they know where the tourist buses and other vehicles have to stop when they cross into a new state, so they are ready to perform... and then try collect money from those who take photographs! Further down the road, we saw a group of Sarus Cranes, amongst the tallest birds we encountered on the trip, foraging in an agricultural field. At a rest stop, we caught sight of a Purple Sunbird, an iridescent gem in full sunshine. All along the roads, Green Bee-eaters were

found perching on telephone lines. A now-familiar bird of North America, the Eurasian Collared-Dove, was found in its native surroundings. But of the doves and pigeons, my favorite was the Yellow-footed Green Pigeon. At the Taj Mahal, we were treated to a Sharks vs. Jets encounter between rival bands of Jungle Babblers, a bird with an attitude – quite comical really!

Near Agra, we traveled west to Bharatpur, a wetland wildlife sanctuary that was once a hunting preserve of the Raj. Painted and Woolly-necked Storks, Greater Spotted Eagle, White-throated Kingfisher, Dalmatian Pelican, Ruddy Shelduck, and Bar-headed Goose were some of the notable species we found. We hiked across a barren field to find a special bird, the Indian Courser. Nearby, Indian Roller kept an eye on us as we marched along the field. The first of many Rufous Treepies was found. In the afternoon, we visited Fatehpur Sikri where we saw a flock of Great White Pelicans circling overhead and Brown Rock-Chat behaving not unlike a Say's Phoebe in sallying forth from the ramparts of the ancient city. In late afternoon, we toured the Red Fort of Agra where raptors included light and dark morph Booted Eagles.

From Agra, we boarded the chartered train "The Palace on Wheels" and headed south from Madhya Pradesh all the way into Maharashtra. Along the route south, we saw flocks of Rose-colored Starling from the train. At Gondiya Station, the reception for the arrival of the train was a spectacle of its own as the city turned out in numbers with media fanfare. It is worth noting that the native peoples of this area, the Gonds, would see their name used to name the ancient super-continent of Gondwana - the Indian sub-continent is a remnant of that super-continent that split off only to slam into Asia to create the Himalaya.

From Gondiya, we traveled by bus to Kanha National Park, where would see both male and female tigers from atop asian elephants (the elephants are the only safe means to move through the forest to the tigers - and they dutifully moved branches out of the way so we wouldn't get clobbered!). The lodges just outside the park were charming. Inside we were treated to spectacular game animals, including Sambar, Barking and Spotted Deer, Gaur, Langur, and a solitary Wild Dog, birds (e.g., Orange-headed Thrush, Tickell's Blue Flycatcher, and Black-naped Monarch) living in the Sal forest that was accented



with native mango trees. The sight of native Indian Peafowl calling from high in the trees was quite something to behold. Moreover, I finally saw a countable, native Red Junglefowl (aka, chicken - the ones on the Hawaiian Islands do not count!). Some of the other notable birds of the park were Scarlet and Long-tailed Minivet, Golden-fronted Leafbird, Velvet-fronted Nuthatch, Bay-backed Shrike, Greater Racket-tailed Drongo, Indian Grey Hornbill, and the numerous Large-billed Crows. Jungle Owlet was seen several times throughout the park.

We returned north by train to reach Ranthambore National Park, a thorn-forest preserve at the edge of the desert in Rajasthan. The landscape here was a tropical deciduous forest very reminiscent of that of Sonora, only with a different array of plant species. Among the interesting birds were White-browed Fantail, Coppersmith Barbet, Brown Fish-Owl, Indian Robin, and Oriental Magpie-Robin, Common Tailorbird, and Common Iora. Greater Painted Snipe was a very good find. Meanwhile, a highlight for me was a white-morph, male Asian Paradise Flycatcher, quite a striking bird with its long tail. The entrance to the park was gated with sprawling Banyan trees (*Ficus benghalensis*), while inside the park large euphorbias were conspicuous succulents on hillsides above palm-lined canyons and gorges. Well-camouflaged Eurasian (Indian) Thick-knee was a bit of a challenge to point out to other tour members.

Exiting the park, a close view of Black-rumped Flameback was spectacular! In the evening, we found Chestnut-bellied and Painted Sandgrouse at the edge of ponds outside the park.



Our final day of birding wrapped up with a trip to Sultanpur National Park outside Delhi. Besides adding Yellow-wattled Lapwing, we also found Red-necked and Peregrine Falcon, Black and Black-necked Stork, and a nesting Sarus Crane!

Once again, let me mention that we have posted a photo-essay of our trip to our web site <http://aves.org>. You can find it by browsing the following URL:

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

It is difficult to cover all the birds, mammals, and other creatures, not to mention the interesting plants and trees of India in a single account. Moreover, we only covered a small part of the sub-continent. There was more to this trip than just birds, but I hope you have an appreciation for the diversity of birds of South Asia that we encountered. The web site also shows the other aspects of the trip that made it so special. I highly recommend a trip to India for both its cultural and natural resources (and for the food!).

-Robert Weissler



Brazil: Chapada & Pantanal Enroute to Cristalino – August 2006

Greetings all. For those of you with whom we haven't been in touch for a while, a quick update is in order. For those of you who know where we are and what we're doing, you can skip to the next paragraph. As you may or may not know, in 2004 Karen and I spent three unforgettable months in Amazonian Brazil volunteering as guides at the Cristalino Jungle Lodge in the state of Mato Grosso. At the end of that life-changing experience, we made plans to return in 2006, and now, here we are and have been for 7 fabulous weeks.

Brazil, much like the U.S., is one big place, with several lifetime's worth of exploring to be done. Limited to just one precious lifetime, we've narrowed down, at least for now, our focus to Mato Grosso, a state whose biogeography is reminiscent of other highly diverse places. California, our previous home, and Arizona, our present home, come to mind. After leaving high and dry southeast Arizona on July 1, our four-month adventure started with a day in Miami, where we enjoyed the U.S. at its most tropical. Warm, humid, and green with epiphytes, gumbo limbo, and mangos, Miami was an interesting stepping stone to tropical points further south.

Perhaps it's because we're still reasonably young, or perhaps it's because of the powerful masking effect of the anticipation that goes with coming to Mato Grosso, but the long journey to Cuiaba (the capital of M.G.) was pretty benign this year. After getting our rental car, which would serve us well on many a dusty road, we headed about an hour north of the city to Chapada dos Guimaraes National Park where we spent five perfect days enjoying the lovely Pousada Penhasco, the adjacent forests (broadleaf evergreen as well as dry), and some great birds. Chapada is a small part of the Planalto of Mato Grosso which is in turn a small part of a high and generally dry trans-Brazilian plateau dotted with several mountainous areas that together create a gently zigzagging east-west line that divides two great watersheds. The land to the north drains towards the mighty Amazon while the land to the south drains to the less mighty, but still huge, Paraguay and Parana Rivers.

In Chapada, cliffs of sandstone laid down hundreds of millions of years ago provide a dramatic background against which to enjoy and learn about equally dramatic birds. Though the birds were great, perhaps our fondest memory of Chapada is of the brief but refreshing cool spell that our arrival coincided with. Crisp mornings and deliciously cool "sleeping weather" allowed us to be out in the field all day, exploring, learning a lot, and marveling at the parade of avian wonders. The pousada, perched atop the plain, has a heavily forested slope dropping down to amazing sandstone cliffs. In the forest, we found planalto hermits zipping about as hermits do, a masked yellowthroat skulking low in the thickets, pale-breasted robins conspicuously everywhere, flavescent warblers working the ground, a lovely tropical screech owl, and planalto slaty antshrike looking much like two of its cousins that we see here at Cristalino. At the cliffs, cliff flycatchers (gotta love those birds named for the obvious) were common, and we had our first looks at red-crested finch, a striking ooh-and-aah bird that, though it would later turn out to be fairly common, always commanded our full attention.

At Chapada, we had our first taste of the Brazilian cerrado, a low stature dry forest that in the middle of the afternoon looks almost as unpromising for birds and wildlife as a Walmart parking lot. The sandy landscape reminded us a bit of the savanna and mountain pine ridge habitats (minus the pines) of Belize. Melastomes (a widespread neotropical plant family) were abundant, and there was our old friend *Curatella americana*, supposedly the same species that occurs from southern Mexico to northern Argentina. *Curatella* is a great plant with large thickish leaves impregnated with silica (sand) that deters browsing by herbivores who value their teeth. A species of *Cochlospermum*, a tree genus we know well

from the tropical dry forests of Mexico and Belize, was also there, but in a dwarf form. Two-foot tall stalks were topped with the same bright yellow, buttercup-like flowers that, as they do elsewhere, emerge during the dry season. In the cerrado we had great luck with white-banded and white-rumped tanagers, striking little things that travel in pairs or small groups, occasionally bursting into animated duets. Cinnamon and burnished buff tanagers were also great as was curl-crested jay (looking and behaving a lot like the tufted jays of the Durango Highway that some of you have seen), rufous-winged antshrike, gray monjita, coal-crested finch, red-shouldered macaws, and a bunch of other birds that we wouldn't see elsewhere. One of the most interesting events in the Chapada was an apparent effect of local soils on the colors of the resident chalk-browed mockingbirds. The chalk-broweds are fairly common in Chapada and further south in open, dryish country. Normally they are colored much like our grayish northern mockingbirds, and in the Chapada, on the south side of the highway where the sand is a tan color, they are colored just so. However, across the street along the Agua Fria Rd. where the sand is rich in iron oxide, the birds are an odd orangeish color that at first had us scratching our heads. Observations of their behaviors and some vocalizations solved the identification mystery, but still left us wondering how the rust was making it on up the food chain and into their feathers and also why the orange birds, unlike the chicken, didn't cross the road.

From Chapada, we headed south to one of the world's largest freshwater wetlands, the legendary Pantanal. The freedom of having our own vehicle was a plus as it was hard to go more than a mile without stopping multiple times for giant river otters, jabiru and maguari storks, red brocket deer, herds of capybara, white-headed marsh-tyrants, yellow-collared and hyacinth macaws, great rufous woodcreeper, and blooming *Vochysia* trees. The combination of permanent rivers and ponds, seasonally wet areas, savannas, and islands of thick forest, in addition to the undeveloped nature of the landscape (though there are and have been cows for several hundred years) in the Pantanal makes it one of South America's greatest wildlife shows. We loved the three lodges where we stayed as they were equally good for yummy food, great service, and awesome wildlife. The road that allows access to all of this has been given the generous name of The Transpantaneira Highway. Highway is the generous part of the name as this wonderful road is rough and rocky and passes over a steady series of wooden bridges that are best crossed while convincing yourself that just on the other side, there's a jaguar and a crowned eagle fighting over a giant anteater carcass. But somehow they all work, as does everything else in this wonderful place.

We headed for Cristalino with a bird list of about 270 species as well as a long list of new plants. After a great sleep on the overnight bus, arriving in Alta Floresta was a sweet homecoming. Some of our closest Brazilian friends - Vitoria (the woman behind the lodge and local conservation), Zuleica, and Rosa were there to greet us, as was a five-month old harpy eagle in a perfectly situated nest in the hotel's forest fragment. Now over six months old, the harpy is out of the nest but still in the fragment of forest where it was, against all conventional odds, born.

After arriving at the lodge and enjoying about four days of natural history updating, the work began, and, as we expected, it hasn't stopped since. And therein lies my excuse - five weeks without a day off - for not having communicated with you all earlier. Since it will likely be another week or two, or maybe five or six, until there's another writing window open, I'll briefly summarize by saying that Cristalino is better than ever. The staff, most of them new to us, is superb fun, hard-working, great with the guests, and all around great to live with. The food is to die for, the birds and other wildlife as amazing as ever, the conservation work impressive, the weather warm but with the same cool nights, and the vast pristineness of this place still as striking in its ability to work its way into our hearts and minds as it was two years ago. We've once again entered that special place within where life is quiet and clean and our

minds, unoccupied by the trappings of our other world, are as palates brushstroked by the whims of the natural world. Most of the guests this year have been pleasantly different from those of our last experience as we've enjoyed field time with many biologists and experienced field naturalists, providing us with even more learning opportunities.

So much for my brief summary.....

And now a brief sort-of-commercial break, and a worthy one I must say, to plug our friends at Eagle Optics, Tim Austin and Mike McDowell, who generously donated a great spotting scope that we've brought to Cristalino and that the Brazilian guides here will get great use out of. Not only does Eagle Optics provide great products and great service, but they've made a valuable contribution (the lodge, unbelievably, hasn't had a scope!) to supporting the nature-based tourism that is the foundation upon which all the great forest protection in this area is based. Check out www.eagleoptics.com.

And now, back to our letter.

For those of you interested in our species lists, so far, including the Pantanal and Chapada, we've seen 540 species of birds (with many new ones, including 17 just for the lodge area), about a dozen reptiles and amphibians, and 23 species of mammals including you know who. This morning while traveling the river with Rob & Eve Gill (with whom we saw our first harpy eagle two years ago in almost exactly the same spot), we slowed the boat to check out the call of a silvered antbird amidst a thick wall of vegetation. The antbird was nowhere to be seen in the dense tangle, but no worries as Karen glanced to the left to spot a jaguar sitting on the bank staring at us from a small but clear opening about 50 feet away. An amazing view it was as seven pairs of human eyes were mesmerized by the large cat's golden-eyed stare. Even with an unobstructed view, the cat, with its fantastically cryptic coloration, merged magically with the shadows and dappled light and appeared to be almost more of a fluid outline than a solid being. The outline became solid matter when it slid slowly behind the tangle and paused. After paddling slowly forward, we then gently drifted by with tremendous views of the cat perhaps just twenty feet away. We watched the cat from a distance for about twenty minutes before it wandered back into the forest. Power, grace, and all of the other obvious adjectives you can think of and more can be attached to this animal and still you feel helpless to describe its presence. Unlike our last jaguar encounter, when the British couple we were with found out that they were out of film when the jaguar appeared, this time, the British chap sitting in the front of the boat was ready and got some great shots which we hope to share with you in the future.

Among the countless other highlights, a sighting of a group of 82 scarlet macaws, 45 of which were perched in a single tree, from the tower on our first evening at the lodge will be placed in the "unforgettable" section of our personal memory files.

We hope that all of you are well and enjoying the summer and that many of you will think about coming to Mato Grosso and Cristalino in the future.

Time to get back to work, which has been fun, exciting, rewarding, at times exhausting but all worth it in the hope that it will contribute a little towards keeping this place as wildly rich as it is.

All the best,
Mark & Karen

Travels in Northern Mexico – Spring, 2006

I was wondering how this year's spring trips to Sonora and Chihuahua would compare to the great experiences we had in 2005, especially considering the contrast of last year's unusually wet conditions in northern Mexico to this year's extreme dryness. As usual, nature came through with abundant surprises and record numbers of bird species on both trips.

Huachuca Aududon has been making trips to Sonora for many years, and it appears that the Rio Sonora/Highway 16 route is as productive as ever. This year's trip, April 27-May 2, was blessed with great weather and an excellent group of enthusiastic and fun nature lovers. The wonders of spring migration were well illustrated along the Rio Sonora where warblers, vireos, orioles, swallows, sparrows, and many tanagers were seen. Green kingfisher and gray hawks were right where they usually are while Eurasian collared doves, which I saw for the first time in Mexico near Bacoachi in 2005, were seen all the way to Hermosillo this year. Silky oaks, native to Australia, were in full bloom in the small towns, and many were colorfully decorated with western tanagers and Bullock's and hooded orioles while a beautiful ring-necked snake was a surprise outside of Baviacora.

Though the Rio Sonora route is lovely with its Chihuahuan desert to tropical thornscrub transition, it's the dramatic ascent of Highway 16 from the low Sonoran Desert into the Sierra Madre that provides the first big highlight of the trip. Stopping first in the Sonoran Desert, we found a few of its signature species, rufous-winged sparrow and gilded flicker, as well as nesting cactus wrens and curve-billed thrashers, phainopepla, and a few others. An antelope jack rabbit in this spot was a life mammal for most of the group. The Rio Matape was outstanding again with the first of many elegant quail seen as soon as we exited the van. Breeding orchard orioles (yes, there is a small, isolated breeding population of orchard orioles just a few hundred miles south of us), happy wren, great kiskadee, lazuli bunting, tropical kingbird, streak-backed oriole, and many others were found at this desert oasis where we also had a brief and unexpected sighting of a bobcat in the mesquites. Upon arriving at our first good stand of tropical deciduous forest (TDF), we emerged into a starkly leafless habitat except for one huge, green, and, unfortunately fruitless fig. The initial silence was soon broken by the strident wheek! of Nutting's flycatchers which suddenly seemed to be everywhere. A nice pair of black-capped gnatcatchers put on a delightful show, many varied buntings were working the flowers of a Ceiba tree, and three hummer species (berylline, violet-crowned, and broad-billed) were hawking insects around the fig. Further up the highway the forest around the spring at Km 196 was dripping with birds. Yellow grosbeak, tropical parula, five-striped sparrow, varied bunting, black-vented oriole, Sinaloa wren, and white-tipped dove were some of the stand outs within the flurry of activity. As usual, striking blackened bluewing butterflies were seen here as well.

Up around Yecora, the action was equally exciting. Up in the pines and oaks of the Mesa Campanero, several mountain trogons did a masterful job of trying to outshine painted redstarts, crescent-chested warblers, "black-eared" bushtits, Mexican chickadee, olive warbler, Scott's oriole, and many migrating Townsend's and hermit warblers. Though I've been to the well-known barranca just down the road dozens of times, I've never seen it as birdy as it was this year (and that includes all six stops we made there!). You know things are going well when you get to the point of someone saying "What was that?", and the response is "Oh, just another blue mockingbird." In addition to this Mexican endemic, we enjoyed a virtual non-stop parade whose members included flame-colored tanager, white-throated robin, slate-throated redstart, tufted flycatcher, white-eared hummingbird, both russet and orange-billed nightingale thrushes, rusty sparrow, spotted wren, brown-backed solitaire, elegant trogon, rufous-capped warbler, and a rare prize in Sonora, red-headed tanager.

Down in the TDF around Santa Ana and Santa Rosa we had more good luck. The charming town of Santa Ana, with its quiet beauty, is one of my favorite spots in Mexico. There a small stream, lined with sabino and fruiting mulberry trees, served as the bird magnet, with Swainson's thrush, rufous-backed robin, squirrel cuckoo, white-striped woodcreeper, orange-billed nightingale thrush and yet another blue mockingbird putting in appearances. At the little oasis outside of Santa Rosa, black-throated magpie jays seemed to paint graceful blue and white lines across the sky with their many fly-bys, while elegant quail and five-striped sparrows came to the small pond to drink and give us some great views.

With a fantastic group, great food, perfect weather, some neat mammals (in addition to the jack rabbit and the bobcat, we also saw coyote, desert cottontail, rock and Apache fox squirrels, and cliff chipmunk), and a new record of 172 bird species, this was yet another memorable trip.

In late May, we journeyed southeast to Madera, Chihuahua to enjoy the high, cool, mixed conifer forest and a part of the Sierra Madre that both contrasts and compliments the Sierra Madre near Yecora in Sonora. Entering the range from the high, dry, grass and scrub-dominated east is very different than coming from the more tropical west with its palms, figs, and squirrel cuckoos. In Madera, the pines and oaks seem to go on forever, and one's birding thoughts may conjure images of avian ghosts in the form of the now-extinct imperial woodpecker. Though the woodpecker is gone from these dramatic mountains, several very special range-sharing species persist, namely eared quetzal, striped sparrow, and the local prize, thick-billed parrots. This year we had the great pleasure of spending another unforgettable morning with these marvelous birds. Being around thick-billed parrots is always a moving and energizing experience, and their frequent calling, nest-cavity exploration, mutual preening and courtship feeding were fascinating and beautiful against the gorgeous backdrop of pines, Douglas fir, quaking aspen, and Rocky Mountain maple. The red-faced and crescent-chested warblers, russet nightingale thrush, and mountain trogon were nice bonuses.

West of town are several of my favorite spots in the area. One, a moist sycamore-lined canyon with a surprising number of fruiting trees (chokecherry, coffeeberry, canyon grape, and Texas madrone) feels a little like home as this is where we found elegant trogon, sulphur-bellied flycatcher, eastern bluebird, painted redstart, hepatic tanager, blue-throated hummingbird, Arizona woodpecker, and bridled titmouse. The bird that has yet to cross the border, however, is the white-striped woodcreeper which we found here once again.

Another off-the-beaten-track riparian area, thick with willows and surrounded by great forest, is where we enjoyed an active group of striped sparrows, intent on building a ground nest in the bunchgrasses. An evening outing to this paradise-like area was a good choice this year not only for our great picnic dinner, but also for great views of at least three eared quetzals, a pair of common black hawks, a northern pygmy owl, and a zone-tailed hawk. Buff-breasted flycatchers were working the willows which lined a small and pretty stream in which speckled dace and ranid tadpoles were seen.

The Madera area is also rich in human history, and on our way down we stopped at the excellent Paquime museum while on the return we made a visit to the village of Mata Ortiz where some exquisite pots were purchased.

Northern Mexico's proximity, the good road conditions, nice lodging, and a wealth of great birds and natural history make these trips two of my favorites. Thanks to all who joined our 2006 outings and helped raise over \$500 for HAS. We'll be returning in 2007 – Sonora, April 24-29 and Chihuahua, May 22-25 – for what I'm sure will be more great trips. If you're interested in joining us and would like more information contact me at (520) 803-6889 or mpnaturetours@earthlink.net.

Mark Pretti

Mail Correspondence to:
HUACHUCA AUDUBON SOCIETY
P.O. Box 63
Sierra Vista, AZ 85636

**HUACHUCA AUDUBON SOCIETY
DIRECTORY**

President, Mike Guest 378-0667
<mwguest@juno.com>
Vice President, Rick Romea 803-1160
Secretary, Sandy Kunzer 803-8490
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Field Trips, Rick Romea 803-1160
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<triciag@outb.com>
Education, Sandy Anderson 458-0542
Membership, Ginny Bealer 378-6341
<vbealer@mindspring.com>
Trogon Editor, Robert Weissler 803-0794
<has_admin@huachuca-audubon.org>
Director, Rick Thompson
Director, Rikki Thompson
Director, Sandy Kunzer 803-8490
Director, Sandy Anderson 458-0542
Director, Alan Blixt 515-9458
Director, Robert Weissler 803-0794
Director, Kerrie Kirkpatrick 803-6889
AZ Audubon Council Rep.
Tricia Gerrodette 378-4937
Webmaster, Robert Weissler 803-0794
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