

VERMILION FLYCATCHER

TUCSON AUDUBON

Spring 2024 | Vol 69 No 2

WONDERFUL
WARBLERS



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Matt Griffiths, *Editor-in-Chief*

Melina Lew, *Design*

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ON THE COVER

Red-faced Warbler by Hemant Kishan. Hemant, who blogs and Flickr-posts under his nom de plume of “digitalplumehunter,” pursues his mission of “bearing photographic witness to the visual brilliance of our avifauna” with zeal and passion, and is particularly fond of the varied birdlife in the Tucson area.

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HOPE FOR THE WEARY WARBLER

SPRING! Time for penstemon and globemallow galore! Mornings filled with birdsong, and maybe some late nights, if you happen to have a lonely mockingbird nearby. Paying closer attention to the roads to avoid making roadkill of basking snakes and lizards. And yes, warblers, stopping over to rest and forage, fueling the remainder of their migration, or setting up shop for breeding season.

To stop and think that right now, as I sit here writing, millions of warblers and other birds are either on course or preparing for their great migration, I feel overwhelmed with awe, and with worry. Author Scott Weidensaul communicates the magnitude and majesty of migration in his books, *A World on the Wing* and *Living On the Wind*, and his words represent this far better than mine:

Bird migration is the one truly unifying natural phenomenon in the world, stitching the continents together in a way that even the great weather systems, which roar out from the poles but fizzle at the equator, fail to do. It is an enormously complex subject, perhaps the most compelling drama in all of natural history...

...Today, however, the biggest threats to migratory birds do not come from the barrel of a gun, nor are they easily cured by passing laws. They arise from habitat loss and the wholesale environmental changes we have imposed on the natural world.

I think of those little floofs making their epic journeys back to their breeding grounds, and wonder if they will come back to find the place they left to be undisturbed, or unrecognizable. The pace of development occurring across our landscapes—whether for tract housing, energy, mining, or just another generic shopping plaza—is stunning, from Tucson to Tallahassee. I struggle to come to grips with it, knowing this is playing out in some fashion across the globe, and that unique habitats like prairie, thornscrub, and glades are falling victim to our relentless desire to build and consume, or to war, or performative border walls.

Then I visit a home like the Applegates', pioneering Habitat at Home partners and ambassadors, and see how they've transformed their property into an oasis for birds in the midst of a townhome development. Their example of what can be done in a built landscape to recover native habitat for desert fauna (including a Sonoran desert tortoise named Saguaro); their evangelism for creating and/or preserving habitat in an anthropocentric world, gives me a glimmer of hope. I wonder how many migrating birds might spot their backyard stream and stop for a respite.



I invite you to join them, if you are so privileged as to have a yard or business, in making your space a haven for birds (a shameless plug for our Habitat at Home program). Call your local policy makers and parks and rec departments, ask what they're doing to support wildlife in public places, and speak up for threatened habitats. Weary warblers are counting on us!

For the Birds,

Melissa Fratello
Executive Director
mfratello@tucsonaudubon.org



Saguaro the tortoise in the Applegates' yard, Kari Hackney
Townsend's Warbler, Greg Lavaty



ALMANAC of BIRDS

April to June

Are you ready for the transition from spring to the “foresummer?” The latter is our local term for the hottest, driest time of the year and the period before summer rains arrive: June. Despite the heat, bird activity is great as breeding and migrant warblers appear and owls begin calling at all elevations. Hummingbird numbers explode and late breeders such as Yellow-billed Cuckoo and Varied Bunting finally arrive to take advantage of monsoon abundance. The birding is hot, and you might be too. If so, here are some cooler and wetter locations you can visit at this time of year.



Matt Griffiths
Communications Coordinator
mgriffiths@tucsonaudubon.org





Long-billed Curlew, Hemant Kishan



Common Black Hawk, Ned Harris



Orange-crowned Warbler, Francis Morgan

SHOREBIRD MIGRATION

April is primetime for wader watching in Southeast Arizona at Willcox Lake, Whitewater Draw, Benson STP, wet farm fields, and Sweetwater Wetlands when the settling ponds have water in them. Roughly two dozen species can occur semi-regularly in the region, the vast majority of them passing through on their northward migratory journeys. From the smallest Western and Least Sandpipers to the imposing Long-billed Curlew, muddy shores and flooded fields teem with birds probing the soil and water surface. Well-known long distance travelers such as the Wilson's Phalarope, and the more rare and sea-going Red-necked Phalarope, can be found swimming circles in ponds and lakes. Larger shorebirds more frequently found on west coast beaches such as Marbled Godwit, Long-billed Dowitcher, and Willet pass through on their way to breeding grounds in the Mid-west and Canada. Joining the more-often present Spotted Sandpiper along the shores of lakes and creeks is the Solitary Sandpiper that arrives in April also on its way to Canada. Although both can be found in Southeast Arizona year-round, the Black-necked Stilt and American Avocet show up in larger numbers and will breed in the region. Known for wading in deeper waters—and called “marshpipers” because of this—Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs are long distance migrants from South America that frequent ponds and lakes. Joining our very common resident Killdeer, the smaller Snowy and Semipalmated Plovers are often found scurrying lakeside in late spring. Shorebird watching in Arizona is a surprising and exciting activity for us desert rats!

ARAVAIPA CANYON HAWKS

It might seem counterintuitive, dangerous even, to take a rugged hike in a desert creek in early summer, but a visit to Aravaipa Canyon can be downright pleasant. Located in the northern part of the Galiuro Mountains, this steep-walled canyon runs with water year-round (that you have to walk through most of the time) and is shaded well by mature cottonwood and willow trees. These cooler conditions benefiting you also provide great nesting habitat for multiple bird species including several hawks. The star of the show is undoubtedly the Common Black Hawk, a neotropical species that barely makes it into the US in the southern half of Arizona. These short-tailed and very broad-winged birds find the Aravaipa riparian area rich with their favorite prey items: lizards, frogs, and fish that they often catch while wading through the water on their relatively long legs. The Zone-tailed Hawk is another southwestern specialty species found in Aravaipa. It can be difficult to distinguish from the Black Hawk and also from the Turkey Vulture, which it mimics to take advantage of prey that may not be paying attention to the normally harmless carrion eaters. It's very worth your time to scan a kettle of upward spiraling vultures because every now and then one of them will turn out to be a Zone-tailed! Finally, the diminutive and beautiful Gray Hawk also nests in the tall trees of the canyon and utilizes the drier adjacent mesquite and desert habitat to hunt for lizards. Listen for their mournful weeeeeee-ooooo calls echoing off the stony walls.

BEAR WALLOW WARBLERS

June is the hottest and driest month in Southeast Arizona, so why not head up into the cool forests and find a mountain spring? A great location to check out is Bear Wallow Canyon and Spring on Mt. Lemmon. The spring is a short walk to the bottom of the hill from the Sunset Trailhead and usually has water year-round. Even in the cool shade of the conifer forest, this water source is a magnet for all types of birds and the riparian vegetation mixed with adjacent drier habitat is especially attractive to multiple warbler species. The presence of white pine and Douglas fir mixed with Gambel oak brings in Red-faced and Virginia's Warblers, two sought after species in the Sky Island mountain ranges. Olive and Grace's Warblers can also be found here foraging high in the ponderosa pines that they favor. Painted Redstart and Black-throated Gray Warbler are more typically seen in lower elevation oak/pine habitat, but both do venture up higher into the Bear Wallow area. Finally, two species that we mostly associate as “winter warblers” down in the desert valleys are also summer breeders in the mountains. A sweet warble you might not recognize could be a Yellow-rumped Warbler singing away in the forest, and more rare but still possible, some Orange-crowned Warblers breed in the higher elevations. Extend your walk by starting in upper Bear Wallow and traveling downstream and under the highway through the tunnel. You have an excellent chance of seeing other great birds such as House Wren, Golden-crowned Kinglet, and Broad-tailed Hummingbird.

WAITING FOR WARBLERS

Excerpt from *A Season on the Wind: Inside the World of Spring Migration*

Published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt in 2019. Used with permission.

Guest Author Kenn Kaufman



Black-throated Gray Warbler, Matthew Studebaker

Imagine we had the power to create new kinds of birds. Imagine we decided to invent the ideal group of birds for avid birders, perfect for firing up the most dedicated watchers.

Ideal: with dozens of different kinds, because birders, even more than most people, love variety. Ideal: just the right balance of challenge and reward. We'd make them tiny, active birds, adept at dodging behind leaves, hard to see, but painted with bright colors and patterns, so they'd be worth the effort. Some would be easy to recognize at a glance; some would be much more difficult. Some would flit through treetops; others would lurk in thickets, to keep birders looking everywhere. All these birds would be strongly migratory, passing through in a rush at certain seasons, so that no one would ever, ever have time to get tired of them. Each migration season would end all too soon, leaving the fans eager for the next visit of their perfect birds.

In other words, if we were trying to create the ideal birds to keep the birders endlessly enthralled, we would invent the American warblers.



Yellow Warbler, Hemant Kishan

The name “warbler,” in itself, is not a precise term. It has been applied to almost three hundred species of birds on six continents. Almost none of those birds ever makes a genuine warbling sound, and many species bearing the name are utterly unrelated. The name was first given to a handful of European birds long ago, and during the age of exploration it was slapped onto anything that fit the general profile: very small, active birds, hunting tiny insects among foliage. Apparently this niche is a fruitful one, and different groups of songbirds have evolved to fill it, over and over, in different parts of the world. As a result, birds called warblers today could belong to any one of 13 distinct families—unrelated, but with convergent lifestyles.

Nothing in the job description requires these small insectivores to be colorful. Indeed, most are not. Almost all the things-called-warblers in Europe, Asia, and Australia wear drab tones of olive, gray, or brown. So do most of the things-called-warblers in Africa. But America is oddly blessed. For no obvious reason, most American warblers, members of the family Parulidae, have bright colors or striking patterns or both. Aside from a few dull exceptions, most American warblers—especially adult males in

spring—are decked out in bright yellow, green, blue, orange, or chestnut, with patches or stripes of black or white. With more than fifty species north of the Mexican border, the diversity of color patterns is phenomenal. Their bright hues and sheer variety make the American warblers perennial favorites for those in the know.

No other birds draw such a stark separation between birders and nonbirders. The average nonbirder is unaware that warblers exist. They're so small, so filled with nonstop flitting energy, so good at hiding, that it takes an effort to see them at all. Most of the time they're high in treetops or deep in brushy tangles. They seldom come to bird feeders. In winter, when they would be easier to see in leafless trees, they're gone: all our northern warblers migrate south in fall, most going deep into the tropics. So the typical nonbirder has never seen warblers and has no reason to think about them.

Birders, on the other hand, think about warblers a lot. We obsess over them. The elusive nature that makes warblers invisible to the typical person only makes them more alluring for us. We want to track them down and see them all, and then see them again.

In my own birding history, I came to warblers late. Birds captured my imagination when I was six years old, so by the time I was eight or nine I certainly knew about warblers. I had read all about them, but I'd never seen one. No warblers nested in our suburban Indiana neighborhood. Undoubtedly a few came through in migration, but my eyes weren't attuned to noticing creatures so quick and small. I had no binoculars yet, so even if I had spotted a warbler, it likely would have been just a puzzling little bird that got away.

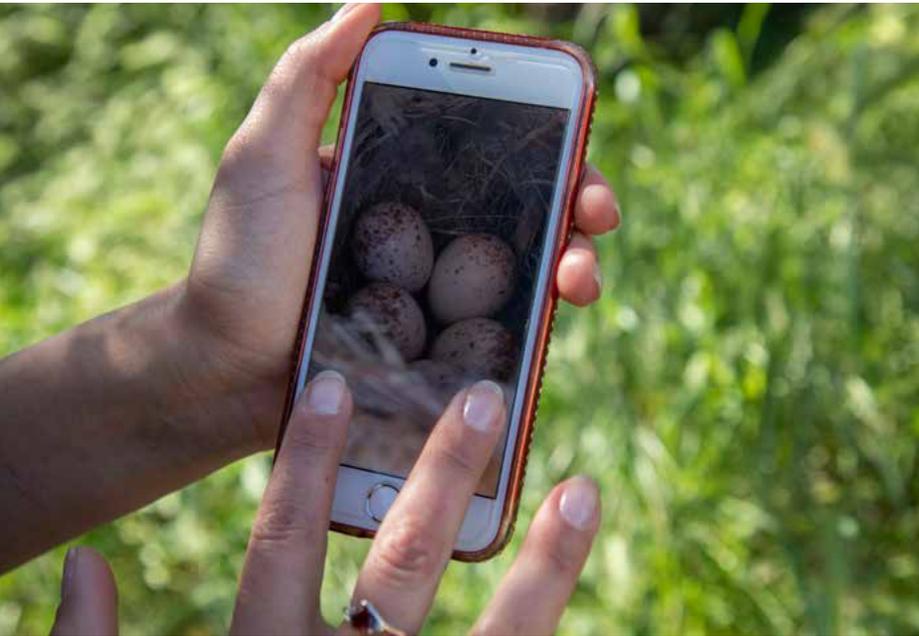
Then when I was eleven, after my family had moved to Wichita, Kansas, I connected with adults of the local Audubon chapter and began to join their field trips. I vividly recall the May day when a handful of the Audubon adults stood looking at a nearby grove of trees, casually mentioning birds they were seeing: a Nashville Warbler, a Blackpoll Warbler, an Orange-crowned Warbler. I was staring at the same trees and seeing nothing but a wall of green leaves. I wondered, wildly, if these people were making things up to make fun of me. Finally a bird flitted out onto an open twig where I could find it in my cheap department-store binoculars: a tiny bird, brilliant yellow, with red stripes down its chest. Yellow Warbler! It twitched this way and that on its twig, an intense flame of nervous energy, before zipping back into the foliage. After that I had only vague glimpses through the leaves. But that quick, clear view moved warblers from abstract idea to reality in my mind. The fact that I had waited so long to see them fueled a fascination that would never fade.



Kenn Kaufman burst onto the birding scene as a teenager in the 1970s, hitch-hiking all over North America in pursuit of birds, an adventure later chronicled in his cult-classic book *Kingbird Highway*. He is an illustrator, editor, and author of a dozen books, including his series, *Kaufman Field Guides*.

Kenn Kaufman is a special guest at the 2024 Southeast Arizona Birding Festival! See page 13 for more info.

HOUSE HUNTERS: CREATING NESTBOXES *for* LUCY'S WARBLERS



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Lucy's Warblers' eggs viewed from nestcam, Luke Franke; Feeding a family of nestlings in a triangle nestbox, Paula Redinger; Recently fledged juvenile, Paula Redinger; Lucy's Warbler, Hemant Kishan



Lucy's Warbler investigating different nestbox designs, Luke Franke

You know it is officially spring in Southeast Arizona when the melodious songs of Lucy's Warblers fill the outdoors. Often found up in the tree canopies, these tiny gray birds are hard to spot, but are immediately recognizable by their beautiful three-step tune. Lucy's Warblers stand out as one of only two cavity-nesting warblers in North America. Additionally, they are the sole warbler species known to nest in the driest regions of the lowland desert. Lucy's Warblers have a small distribution range. They winter on the west coast of Mexico, but beginning about mid-March they arrive in Arizona, which lies in the heart of their breeding range. Based on recent eBird trends, their northern expansion has been reaching southern parts of California, Utah, Colorado, and New Mexico. Lucy's Warblers breed most often in dense lowland riparian mesquite bosques or woodlands. They are also found in palo verde, ironwood, and cottonwood, among others, but their ties are strongest to mesquite trees. Used for foraging and nesting, native mesquites are prime real estate for these birds.

Currently, Lucy's Warblers are a focus species for Important Bird Areas in Arizona due to habitat destruction and degradation in their breeding range. Large, cavity-bearing mesquites have become more scarce due to firewood harvest, declining water tables, development, and over-pruning. In addition to this, scientific literature does not have a lot of information on Lucy's Warblers. Their small range coupled with elusive behavior has resulted in them being very understudied.

Tucson Audubon has been researching Lucy's Warblers since 2015 when we began our nestbox preference experiment. There was a long-held belief that Lucy's Warblers would not use nestboxes, unlike most other cavity-nesting birds. However, a multi-year study proved that it was just a matter

of creating the right type of box. We studied the dimensions of their nests in mesquite branch splits and curling bark. One thing stood out: most nests had two points of exit and entry. After field-testing eight designs of varying dimensions, the triangle design seemed to be the preferred style with a 73% selection rate.

We now use the triangle nestbox in various conservation projects centered on Lucy's Warblers. One of our goals is to bring them into urban areas. Many Arizona homes have mesquite trees in their yards, but they are neatly manicured or too young to provide a natural nesting cavity. While those trees provide sufficient foraging opportunities, they do not offer good nesting sites, often forcing Lucy's Warblers to move to a better location that can provide both. With the addition of a nestbox, we can offer a safe and productive place for Lucy's Warblers to nest.

In order to track our efforts we encourage people who buy a nestbox to register it on our website. We now have over 670 registered Lucy's Warbler nestbox owners in Arizona, New Mexico, and Colorado.

Interested in hosting a Lucy's Warbler nestbox in your yard? Head to TUCSONAUDUBON.ORG/NESTBOX for construction plans or to reserve one at the Tucson Audubon Nature Shop.

Olya Weekley
Applied Conservation Project Manager
owweekley@tucsonaudubon.org



THE WARBLERS OF ARIZONA'S IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS

Arizona's 48 Important Bird Areas (IBAs) contain some of the most productive habitats for birds and other wildlife. For those that occur in Southeast Arizona, one of the biggest factors that impacts habitat, and therefore the bird species present, is elevation. Some bird families are so well represented in Arizona that you can find different representatives within nearly every habitat type. Warblers are a great example of such diversity in Southeast Arizona. Every year I look forward to spring, and all of the warblers that are soon to arrive, just in time for our busiest IBA bird survey season.

Here are two Important Bird Areas near Tucson and some of the warblers that make these areas special in spring and summer.

UPPER SANTA CRUZ RIVER IBA

This IBA centers around Tubac where there are several convenient access points to the Santa Cruz River and the De Anza Trail, an excellent way to explore this IBA. Ron Morriss Park is a great hawk watch spot in March, but it's also excellent for migrant and spring warblers.



YELLOW WARBLER

The male of this species is the brightest yellow you can imagine and he cheerfully sings sweet, sweet, I'm so sweet—the perfect sound of spring. This warbler is widespread through much of North America, with regional variability in the intensity of the rufous streaks on their bellies. The Yellow Warblers we see energetically bouncing around the cottonwoods and willows in Arizona have very pale streaks.

Yellow Warbler, Martin Molina; Common Yellowthroat, Greg Lavaty; Yellow-breasted Chat, Frank Retes



COMMON YELLOWTHROAT

The familiar witchity-witchity song of this warbler is a characteristic sound of wetlands and marshes all over North America. While they can sing quite loudly, they are often hidden in vegetation and can be very difficult to see. Every now and then, one will show itself, and it is such a treat to see the male's lovely black and white mask against their yellow chest.



YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT

Long considered a warbler, this bird was moved to its own family based on genetic studies in 2017. They don't really look like a warbler, but they do have amazing singing voices. Their loud and varied calls are often heard from dense vegetation along riparian corridors and they can be difficult to see. They are very good at staying just out of sight within the vegetation while making their presence very obvious with loud knocks, whistles, and various other sounds. There is a brief period in spring, though, when the males do fluttering flight displays and can be easier to glimpse.

SANTA RITA MOUNTAINS IBA

This is a rather large IBA covering the entire Santa Rita Mountain Range, which includes the famous Madera Canyon. Habitats include mesquite dotted grasslands, oak covered foothills, and mixed pines at higher elevations with ephemeral creeks lined with sycamores. All of this plant diversity leads to amazing bird diversity and, of course, lots of warblers.



PAINTED REDSTART

An iconic bird of the oak and pine habitat of our Sky Island mountain ranges. Their lovely red bellies contrast beautifully with their black bodies and white wing patches. They are often seen fanning their tails as they seem to dance their way up a trunk or along a branch and are a favorite of visiting birders. Their warbling song and distinctive two-part call is readily identified by ear with a little practice.



GRACE'S WARBLER

One of our smallest warblers, their trilling song that accelerates at the end is an iconic sound of the higher elevations of our Sky Islands in the spring and summer. They are very keen on pine trees, so if you hear one singing above you in a mixed stand of trees, they are almost certainly in the pine. They are worth the effort to see way up in the tall trees with their beautiful yellow throats and eyebrows and bright white undertails.



BLACK-THROATED GRAY WARBLER

This striking warbler is often seen foraging in an oak searching for tiny insects throughout the western US. Within our Sky Island IBAs, they are present in spring and summer. Listen for their buzzy song, and if you see one, look very closely for the bright yellow spot just in front of the eyes of this beautiful, black and white streaked bird.



WILSON'S WARBLER

Due to its energetic movements and ability to utilize many habitat types while migrating through our region, this warbler is easy to spot. It's bright yellow and the male has a dark black cap, traces of which can be seen on the female. Their harsh *chimp* call note is ear catching, standing out as "something different," making them even more prominent as they pass through our region.



TOWNSEND'S WARBLER

With a bright yellow and black striped face, this warbler is a lovely migrant to spot in the spring. They don't nest in our region, but pass through on migration in good numbers and can be seen busily gleaning oaks or mesquites for insects to refuel on their journey north to nest. Interestingly, they are often observed on their wintering grounds consuming sugary honeydew from sap-drinking insects.

Warblers are most abundant in Southeast Arizona during spring and summer, and our Important Bird Areas are excellent places to search for and enjoy them.

Painted Redstart, Matthew Studebaker; Grace's Warbler, Greg Lavaty; Black-throated Gray Warbler, Matthew Studebaker; Wilson's Warbler, Hemant Kishan; Townsend's Warbler, Alan Schmierer



Jennie MacFarland,
Bird Conservation Biologist
jmacfarland@tucsonaudubon.org

When and Where to Find Warblers on Mt Lemmon

Dr. Charles van Riper III,
School of Natural Resources
and the Environment &
US Geological Survey
Southwest Biological
Science Center, University
of Arizona, Tucson, AZ and
Henry Johnson, *Mt Lemmon
images*, Summerhaven, AZ

The higher altitude forests of Mt Lemmon, just north of Tucson, provide habitat for a number of breeding and migrating warbler species. We have been photographing and banding birds on Mt Lemmon for the past eight years and would like to share some of our results to help you find warblers on the mountain. There are several warbler species that breed on the mountain, such as the Red-faced Warbler, but most of the warblers only use Mt Lemmon during migratory stop-over periods. Spring migrants are less common and are found on the mountain over a shorter duration than are warblers that utilize the mountain during the fall migration period.



Hermit Warbler, Hemant Kishan



Red-faced Warbler, Henry Johnson; MacGillivray's Warbler, Henry Johnson; Virginia Warbler, Hemant Kishan

WHEN IS THE BEST TIME TO LOOK FOR WARBLERS ON MT LEMMON?

We use the standard metric of birds/net hour on our banding data to reveal the timing of warbler presence and relative abundance of each species. We capture wild birds using mist nets and subsequently band them for future identification. By placing mist-nets repeatedly in the same locations we can compare bird numbers captured over different time periods. Be aware that one needs to have the proper federal and state banding permits to conduct mist netting. We have captured and banded over 1,500 birds during our research on Mt Lemmon, and this past fall captured several unusual species such as the Northern Waterthrush and Least Flycatcher, along with the normal mix of resident birds and migrating warblers, flycatchers, and vireos. We have been able to mist net annually along Turkey Run Road and up the Aspen Trail, and our results demonstrate a continued use of Mt Lemmon by spring and fall migrating warblers as stop-over habitat.

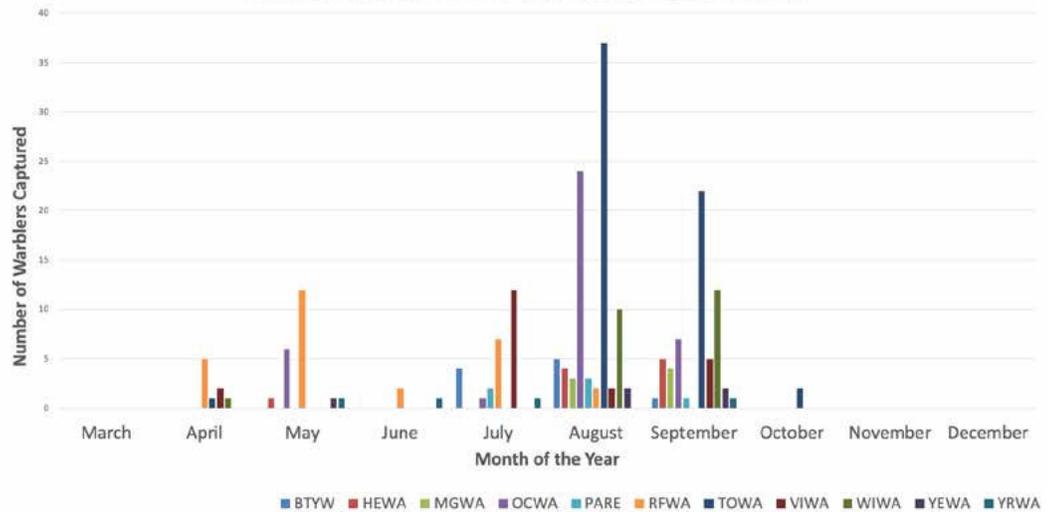
Several of the warbler species that are attracted to Mt Lemmon are fir specialists, like the Townsend’s and Hermit Warblers (Figure 1). The Virginia’s and Black-throated Gray Warblers do not nest as far north as the fir specialists, so they are seen earlier in the fall migration period. The Orange-crowned Warbler, a generalized warbler species, is relatively more

common during the spring migration period. The Wilson’s Warbler, one of the more common warbler species in western North America, is not that common on Mt Lemmon and can be observed more frequently along the riparian corridors at lower elevations around Tucson.

Overall, the best time to observe migrating warblers on Mt Lemmon is during August and into early September. These birds undergo a circular migration of heading north along the west coast in the spring and then coming south further inland in the fall to take advantage of the increased insect food resources that result from our monsoon rains. Another reason for higher observed numbers during the fall is because birds tend to stay longer at stop-over sites than in the spring when they are migrating to the breeding grounds and timing of arrival is more important.

There are also several warbler species that breed on the mountain, like the Red-faced Warbler and Painted Redstart, that can be seen throughout the summer months (April-September). We have also observed a small number of Yellow-rumped and MacGillivray’s Warblers nesting on the mountain, with the latter preferring areas with greater shrub cover.

Warbler Abundance on Mt Lemmon, AZ (2016-2024)



(Figure 1) The number of warblers, expressed in birds/100 net hours, captured by mist-net on Mt Lemmon, AZ, between 2016 and 2024.

- BTYW = Black-throated Gray Warbler
- HEWA = Hermit Warbler
- MGWA = MacGillivray’s Warbler
- OCWA = Orange-crowned Warbler
- RFWA = Red-faced Warbler
- TOWA = Townsend’s Warbler
- VIWA = Virginia’s Warbler
- WIWA = Wilson’s Warbler
- YEWA = Yellow Warbler
- YRWA = Yellow-rumped Warbler
- PARE = Painted Redstart

WHERE ARE THE BEST LOCATIONS TO LOOK FOR WARBLERS ON MT LEMMON?

Over the past decade there have been several large fires on Mt Lemmon (e.g., 2020 Bighorn Fire) and the remaining patches of old growth fir-spruce forest are the best locations to find warbler species. Some of these locations are the Aspen Draw trail via Turkey Run Road, Bear Wallow trail, and the Marshall Gulch loop trail. All trails provide easy hiking conditions, but good binoculars are a must as the warbler species are mostly high in the canopy. Warblers are not detected as frequently in the ponderosa pine forests on Mt Lemmon. In fact, we have no warbler captures from all our mist netting at the ponderosa stands at Palisades, but we do capture some at the Rose Canyon Campground area.



Warbler habitat on Mt Lemmon, Charles van Riper

We wish to thank Teo Melis for his continued support of our USGS Emeritus program, and all the people on Mt Lemmon who provided permission to conduct research and mist-net on their private lands. Data for this paper are part of our larger research project on Mt Lemmon, which focuses on Western Cordilleran Flycatchers. If anyone would like to become involved with our flycatcher research on Mt Lemmon, please email us at charlesvanriper3@gmail.com.

Warblers in Arizona: An Historical Perspective

Gary Rosenberg is Secretary of the Arizona Bird Committee and co-author of the season bar graphs section of *Finding Birds in Southeast Arizona*.



Of the 50 species of warblers that have occurred in Arizona (51 if you count Olive Warbler, which technically is not a warbler and is now in its own family), only 11 are considered regular nesters here. An additional six species (including a few from Mexico such as Rufous-capped and Crescent-chested, and some “Eastern” species such as Northern Parula and American Redstart) have nested sporadically, or at least once. The remaining and majority of the species are considered migrants. These fall into at least two categories: regular migrants, and vagrants (mainly from either the Eastern United States, Canada, or Mexico).

The status of the rarer migrant warblers in Arizona has been well-documented, first in *Birds of Arizona* published in 1964, and subsequently by the Arizona Bird Committee. As of 1964, only about 30 warbler species were known from Arizona, with a few additional species considered *hypothetical* and undocumented at the time. It was really in the early 1970s, when birders in the state (and in the West) started looking for *rarities*, that rare warblers became a favorite focus. By the mid to late 1980s, not only had the state warbler list climbed to 50 species, but many species that were considered “accidental” were now considered casual in the state, with numbers of records for some rising every year. Many species, such as Chestnut-sided and Black-throated Blue Warblers, considered to be accidental vagrants before the 1970s, have been found to be annual in occurrence, and each has been documented hundreds of times now. Others, such as Blackpoll, Bay-breasted, Blackburnian, and Yellow-throated are still rare (not annual), but have occurred about 30

times each. Then there are some, including Cerulean, Connecticut, and Swainson’s, that have remained almost mythical in the state, each known from a single documented record. Other species, especially Northern Parula, Black-and-white Warbler, American Redstart, and Northern Waterthrush, were all once considered rarities and were initially on the Arizona Bird Committee review list when the committee was formed in 1972. These are now considered rare but regular migrants.

The warbler rarities from Mexico are always highly desired birds by Arizona and visiting birders. The first inkling that there was a set of Mexican species that wandered or dispersed north into Arizona came in 1961 with the first record of Fan-tailed Warbler at Baker Spring near Guadalupe Canyon—there are now 13 records for the state, including an amazing two on the same day in November 2022. Similarly, the first Rufous-capped Warbler was discovered in 1976 in Cave Creek Canyon, and now there are more than 30 records, and it has bred successfully several times. The first Crescent-chested Warbler was from Garden Canyon in the Huachuca Mountains in 1983, and there are now no fewer than 16 records, including breeding at least twice. The first Tropical Parula was found in Madera Canyon in 1984, and there are now at least 13 records. Lastly, the first Slate-throated Redstart was discovered in Miller Canyon in 1976, and it too has been found 16 times in Arizona. All of these species are regular in Sonora, Mexico within about 150 miles of the border, some much closer. Finding any of these “Mexican” warblers in Arizona is still a thrill.



Fan-tailed Warbler, Shawn Cooper



Slate-throated Redstart, Greg Lavaty

SOUTHEAST ARIZONA BIRDING FESTIVAL

PRESENTED BY
CARL ZEISS
SPORTS OPTICS



AUGUST 7-11, 2024
Registration opens Tuesday, April 30th

See the schedule and register at: TUCSONAUDUBON.ORG/FESTIVAL

Held at the DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel at Reid Park

Join us this August as we celebrate the diversity of bird life in Southeast Arizona. There's something for everyone!

- Specialized field trips designed to find sought after birds to add to your "life list"
- Bird photography workshops and opportunities to borrow the latest gear from our camera sponsors
- Daily social hours in the spacious Nature Expo where you'll make connections with birders from around the world
- Learn the basics of birdwatching in the field or the classroom with leaders who care

Featured Guests include:



Renowned birder, writer, editor, illustrator, and former Tucson resident, **Kenn Kaufman**. Join Kenn on a bird outing, or attend the culmination banquet on Saturday evening for a festive dinner and talk, "Discovery, Rediscovery, and the Sense of Wonder."



Catherine Hamilton, an incredible artist and passionate birder. Catherine is also the US ambassador for Birding for Zeiss Sports Optics and you won't want to miss her inspirational talk, "How to Draw a Sparrow."



Woodpecker specialist Steve Shunk. Search for the seven woodpecker species of Southeast Arizona with Steve during one of his three field trips and learn about their fascinating anatomy during his specialized talk.



CAPPING DEATH PIPES SAVES BIRDS!



Every day birds have to navigate the dangers of living in close proximity to humans. One such threat, lurking in plain sight, is the open-top vertical pipe. Commonly referred to as Death Pipes, these seemingly innocuous structures pose a significant risk to birds and other small wildlife. When seeking a place to nest, hibernate, or roost inside of a pipe, small animals can become trapped. Unable to climb the smooth surface of the pipe or spread their wings, they die a slow, agonizing death. Cavity nesting birds are the most likely victims but lizards, snakes, small mammals, and insects are all at risk.

Determining the true extent of bird and animal fatalities caused by open pipes is challenging since they are hidden until the pipes are removed. A striking example of the magnitude of this issue occurred in 2009 when Audubon California dismantled a 20-foot-tall pipe from an abandoned irrigation system that had been in place for 50 years. To their shock, they discovered hundreds of animals, including kestrels, flickers, bluebirds, and fence lizards. Until then, the existence of this particular death trap was unknown.

Tucson Audubon is proud to announce that with a generous grant from Arizona Sportsmen for Wildlife Conservation, we are raising public awareness about this issue and taking steps to address it in Southeast Arizona. A ongoing project is in partnership with the Desert Fence Buster (DFB) collaborative which includes partner organizations from Arizona Game and Fish, Arizona Wildlife Federation, BKW Farms, Bureau of Reclamation, City of Tucson, Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection, Friends of Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge, Friends of Ironwood Forest, Mule Deer Foundation, Pima County, and Saguaro National Park. Members share a common goal of improving landscape connectivity for wildlife through the removal of old fence lines that are no longer being used. After barbed wire is taken down, Tucson Audubon staff and volunteers cap the remaining anchor pipes to prevent any future deaths. Within the last year we capped 500 open pipes in Arizona.

Aluminum screen, pipe clamp, and a layer of cement will prevent anything from getting in this pipe, Olya Weekley; Kathy and Mike Ellwood capping pipes at DFB event 2024, Olya Weekley; A bird, lizard, and rodent found inside a pipe, Olya Weekley; Olya Weekley capping a pipe, James Avramis; Volunteer capping day at Catalina Regional Park March 2024; Birds found in a single open pipe, Pima County.

Open pipes serve a variety of purposes, from functioning as fence posts and gate anchors to signposts or markers for boundaries and mining claims. Even vent and irrigation pipes, when left uncovered, pose a threat. Once you know what to look for, you can spot death pipes everywhere. As birders, we often venture into wilderness areas, making us valuable allies in locating and reporting these hazards. By increasing our vigilance, we can help protect the animals around us. If you encounter an open vertical pipe, please report it on our website using the online form at tucsonaudubon.org/deathpipes. All we need are a few details about the pipe's location and dimensions. If you have a photo, please include it. We also kindly ask that you temporarily cap the pipe with readily available objects to ensure animal safety while we contact the landowner for permission to cap permanently.

Several methods exist to cap open pipes that do not serve ventilation or irrigation functions. If you come across one and wish to temporarily cap it, you can place a large rock or branch snugly inside the pipe. For those addressing the issue on their property, and seeking a more permanent solution, options include using aluminum caps, cement, or complete removal of the pipe. The possibilities are endless, but ensure the cap is secure, durable, and not easily movable by wind or animals. For ventilation or irrigation pipes, specialized screens and caps are available.

Death pipes are an easily overlooked but important threat to tackle. By increasing awareness and actively locating and capping death pipes, we can prevent these unnecessary deaths for years to come. With the support of organizations like Arizona Sportsmen for Wildlife Conservation and individuals like you, we can make a difference!

More information can be found at TUCSONAUDUBON.ORG/DEATHPIPES.

Olya Weekley
Applied Conservation Project Manager
oweeekley@tucsonaudubon.org



Don't Let the Arizona Corporation Commission Fly Under Your Radar



Williamson's Sapsucker, a species that could be extirpated from Arizona due to climate change, ©bryanjsmith

One of my go-to resources for understanding the complexities of the climate crisis, including solutions, is the *Volts* podcast by longtime climate-and-energy journalist David Roberts. *Volts* coverage ranges from deep dives into clean-energy technology to the policies and politics of the clean-energy transition. And one of the recurring topics is the public energy sector: the power companies that supply electricity and natural gas to fuel our homes, businesses, industries, and more.

Mention power companies, and most people think of rates (the monthly energy bill) and service (power outages). *Volts* listeners, though, also associate the industry with irresponsibility, greed, and duplicity, and an urgent need for reform if we're to successfully fight climate change.

Power companies are state-granted monopolies, immune to competition. Most are privately owned, with a fiduciary duty to their shareholders to maximize profits. They're regulated by public utility commissions (PUC's) largely invisible to the general public. They increase their profits by capital expenditures (building things), on which they receive a guaranteed rate of return on investment (set by the PUC), and rate hikes (subject to PUC approval), rather than energy efficiency, affordability, or reliability, much less reductions in carbon-emissions.¹ Designed in the early 20th century to enable rapid electrification of the US, this structure has now led to power companies becoming a major obstacle to fighting climate change.

We bird lovers have long known that fossil-fuel companies spent decades, and billions of dollars, sowing doubts and spreading misinformation about climate change. But few of us knew that power companies were major partners in these climate-denying covert operations.² To give just one example: In 1991, a fossil-fuel-and-utility front group called Informed Citizens for the Environment (also Information Council for the Environment) piloted a PR campaign in Fargo, ND, Bowling Green, KY, and Flagstaff, AZ, with ads that featured taglines such as these:

- The most serious problem with catastrophic global warming is—it may not be true.
- Doomsday is canceled. Again.
- Who told you the earth was warming... Chicken Little?³

That last ad went on to say:

Chicken Little's hysteria about the sky falling was based on a fact that got blown out of proportion.

It's the same with global warming. There's no hard evidence it is occurring. In fact, evidence the Earth is warming is weak. Proof that carbon dioxide has been the primary cause is non-existent. Climate models cannot accurately predict far-future global change. And the underlying physics of climatic change are still wide open to debate.

If you care about the earth, but don't want your imagination to run away with you, make sure you get the facts.

The facts, of course, were the opposite of what the ads asserted, and the organizations behind the campaign—including the public-utility trade group Edison Electric Institute (EII)—knew it. Their aim, explicitly stated in internal documents, was to “reposition global warming as theory (not fact).”⁴

Power companies’ duplicity continues today, albeit with a new twist: greenwashing. As expressed by the Center for Biological Diversity, “major electric utilities are... actively preventing [the clean-energy] transition by pouring millions of dollars into efforts to maintain a positive, pro-renewable energy public image, while continuing to rely heavily on fossil fuels and funding anti-renewable energy efforts.”⁵ EII is still a lead player, and both Arizona Public Service and Tucson Electric Power, through their parent companies, are still paying members.

But the situation is even worse. As David Roberts puts it:

[I]t’s not just that your utility is out lobbying against your interests. And it’s not just that you are a captive customer of that company and cannot get away from it, even if you disagree with its positions. It is also... that the money you are being forced to give the company is being used for that lobbying.⁶

The key to fixing this situation is the public utility commissions (PUC’s) that regulate power companies but are largely invisible to the general public. In Arizona, that means the Arizona Corporation Commission (AZCC): five commissioners serving staggered, four-year terms, elected in statewide races. The AZCC is supposed to serve the people of Arizona. But instead, like many other PUC’s, the AZCC often caters to power companies at the expense of the public, and seems determined to impede the transition from fossil fuels to clean energy—especially solar.

These patterns were repeated last February when the AZCC approved Arizona Public Service’s request to raise rates. As Sierra Club’s Amy Dominguez explains, “A substantial portion of APS’s rate increase is due to the Company’s spending on high-cost, dirty fossil fuels, including its outdated coal-fired power plants,... even though much cheaper, clean energy alternatives are available.” At that same meeting, the AZCC rejected APS’s proposal for funding to support communities affected by coal-plant closures; approved APS’s proposal “to charge ratepayers for tens of millions of dollars in spending on large new fossil fuel generation projects between rate cases without adequate scrutiny or stakeholder input;” and, “in a last-minute, surprise move,... imposed a new charge on rooftop solar customers that would force those customers to pay more... [a charge] not proposed by APS and... never discussed during the Commission hearings on APS’s proposals.”⁷ That new charge adds to extra charges solar customers are already required to pay.

What does all this have to do with birds? As National Audubon’s *Survival by Degrees* laid out so powerfully, two-thirds of North American birds—389 species!—are at increasing risk of extinction from global temperature rise if we continue on our current trajectory.⁸ And with record high temperatures set year after year, and weather patterns turning ever more unpredictable, climate change is already impacting Arizona’s birds, wildlife, and people.



Bridled Titmouse, another Arizona species endangered by climate change, Francis Morgan

What can we birders do to get the AZCC to serve us, the public, instead of the power companies and their shareholders? Two crucial ways are to *stay informed* and to *speak up*. I recommend listening to the *Volts* Podcast and reading the relevant chapters of *The Big Fix: 7 Practical Steps to Save Our Planet* to understand the overall issues, as well as specific challenges and solutions. For Arizona in particular, sign up for alerts from Tucson Audubon (TUCSONAUDUBON.ORG/E-NEWS) and our climate- and energy-focused allies such as the Sierra Club’s Grand Canyon Chapter. Then sign up at AZCC.GOV to receive “Notices/Agendas” from the AZCC. And then, even if it’s out of your comfort zone, start submitting comments on cases before the AZCC (on their website, click on “Cases and Open Meetings” and you’ll see links to the Event Calendar, as well as ways to submit comments).

The stakes for birds—and for people—have never been higher. But we ordinary birders, nature-lovers, environmentalists, and conservationists can play a vital role in making sure the AZCC and the power companies stop greenwashing and start fighting climate change for real. There’s power in our voices and our numbers. Let’s use it!

Together we can make a difference!

David Robinson
 Director of Advocacy & Education
[drobinson@tucsonaudubon.org](mailto:d Robinson@tucsonaudubon.org)



Sign up for our advocacy email list at: TUCSONAUDUBON.ORG/E-NEWS.
 View footnotes at: TUCSONAUDUBON.ORG/FOOTNOTES.

BEGINNING BIRDWATCHER SHOPPING GUIDE

Here's a selection of curated items to help beginning birdwatchers get a head start on their favorite new hobby.

Identifying birds is a big part of bird watching, and it's also a lot of fun to learn! Use these resources to get more familiar with the birds in your backyard or nearest birding hotspot. Pair either of these choices with the free Merlin app for an even deeper learning experience!



All About Birds: Southwest
\$18



Weatherproof Folding ID Guides
\$8–10

Which binoculars are best for you? It depends.

Optics come in different powers and a wide range of price points (\$150–\$3,000+!), so it's easy to feel overwhelmed with your options. Factors like weight, warranties, and how they feel in your hand all matter when buying your first (or last) pair of binoculars.

Visit us at the Nature Shop for expert advice and to test drive a pair in person! Try out some of our favorites, like the Zeiss Terra ED, Vortex Diamondback, or this Kowa featured here.



Kowa BDII 8x42
Member Price \$450

Having a better understanding of the vegetation and habitats that surround us can provide context and another frame of reference when searching for and identifying birds. Learning about plants can improve your birdwatching!



Sibley's Tree Identification Flashcards
\$20

The Arizona sun can be brutal. Protect yourself while outside enjoying the birds!



Royal Robbins Bug Barrier Sun Hat
\$48

Naked Bee Honey Blossom SPF30
\$16

Everything listed here and much more can be found at [Tucson Audubon's Nature Shop!](#)

Spring and Summer Hours
Wednesday–Friday: 10am–4pm
Saturday: 10am–2pm

Always available online at:
TUCSONAUDUBONNATURESHOP.COM



TUCSON AUDUBON **BIRDATHON** 2024

APRIL 1–30

THE 2024 BIRDATHON is your chance to enjoy birds while raising critical funds to support the mission of Tucson Audubon. It's fun and easy to participate—visit TUCSONAUDUBON.ORG/BIRDATHON to get started or contact Erica Freese at efreese@tucsonaudubon.org.

WHO? You! Absolutely anybody can participate in this tradition begun in 1987. You can: Form Your Own Team or Donate to a Team

WHEN? April 1–30. You make the call: Take 24 hours, half a day, a week, or the whole month!

WHERE? Take your birding anywhere on the planet!

PRIZES? Yes! We're continuing our **COMPETITION CATEGORIES** and all Birdathoners will receive a prize for participating!

WHY? Birdathon is a great way to have fun with friends and family, spotting birds while helping with this community fundraiser to support Tucson Audubon.

EVENTS

Saturday, April 13, 7pm

TUCSON AUDUBON NIGHT AT THE
ROADRUNNERS HOCKEY GAME

All proceeds go to Birdathon!

Wednesday, May 15, 5pm

BIRDATHON WRAP UP PARTY AT
THREE CANYON BEER AND WINE GARDEN

Join us as we celebrate another successful Birdathon and award prizes!

TUCSONAUDUBON.ORG/BIRDATHON



Bridled Titmouse, Matthew Studebaker

TRAILBLAZING WORK AT THE PATON CENTER



The Dirtbags of Patagonia trail crew constructed a new trail at the Paton Center for Hummingbirds in February. This trail addition, yet to be formally named, is a triangle loop through half of the new five acre parcel directly adjacent to the southwest side of the Paton house. Once the trail is officially opened this spring, it will allow visitors to access the area for birding, nature walks, and for viewing Tucson Audubon's ongoing restoration work. Thanks to the hard work and dedication of almost 20 Dirtbags volunteers, the Paton Center can add yet another birding opportunity to its repertoire.

The trail also helps Tucson Audubon field crews more easily access the area for restoration work. Irrigation lines were installed throughout the parcel last winter in preparation for the upcoming planting season. This involved digging around 750 feet of trenches to bury two main PVC irrigation lines and attaching above ground flexible polyline every five feet or so to cover most of the work site. This system will directly water over 1000 new native plants that will support birds and other wildlife.

In addition to installing irrigation, our field crews also planted roughly 600 giant sacaton grasses (*Sporobolus wrightii*). Some of these "splits," as we call them, were separated from plants in the Paton Center's Cuckoo Corridor and others were from the Nature Conservancy's (TNC) land along Sonoita Creek. TNC generously donated full adult plants, which not only made it easier for our crews to harvest splits, but also gave us 250 "new" plants. Most of these were planted directly on the banks of Sonoita Creek in our restoration site to serve as erosion control after the removal of invasive johnsongrass.

Our habitat restoration work will continue throughout 2024 and we are excited to have the infrastructure in place as we head into the planting season. We couldn't do this work without our wonderful partners: the Dirtbags of Patagonia trail crew, TNC, Borderlands Restoration, Nighthawk Natives, and a team of dedicated volunteers who have been instrumental in helping us tackle the Johnsongrass problem this winter and spring. If you'd like to follow along with our progress, look for updates in Tucson Audubon newsletters and social media. If you're able, come see our work for yourself and pay a visit to the Paton Center for Hummingbirds!



Cally Wilken
Mitigation Program Manager
cwilken@tucsonaudubon.org



Dirtbags of Patagonia trail crew, all photos by Ivy Illkay



Tucson Audubon field staff Nick Miller, installing irrigation lines in the new parcel



Digging out Johnsongrass and planting giant sacaton along Sonoita Creek

ARIZONA BIRDING TRAIL WEBSITE IS LIVE AND NEEDS YOUR FEEDBACK!

We are excited to announce that the Arizona Birding Trail website is up and running after several years of hard work and lots of input from partners. This is the first time a state-wide birding trail has been put together for Arizona, one of the best birding states in the US. The website profiles over 300 birding sites throughout Arizona, organized into "trails," which are clusters of sites. Check out the trail for yourself at ARIZONABIRDINGTRAIL.COM.

The target audience for this site is visiting birders, as well as local beginners. We focused on the most obvious places to send visitors, as well as birding sites near areas that many tourists visit, such as the Grand Canyon. Currently, the website is an internally reviewed draft, so we are asking for help from local birders to check out the site, give it a test run, and review the details before we promote it nationally.

Please share any feedback or suggestions you may have on our survey form at TINYURL.COM/AZBTSURVEY. The form also has a place to submit photos if you have a better birding site photo than the one currently online. To keep everything straight, we are asking that you submit one survey entry per location. The form also has space at the end for general comments.

Special thanks to all of our partners that did so much to shape the vision and goals of this project over several years: Arizona Game and Fish, National Park Service, Arizona State Parks and Trails, National Audubon Society, Sonoran Joint Venture, Pima County, Pinal County, Maricopa County, and Coconino County. I would also like to thank a few individuals who pioneered this project and kept it moving in the early days: Charles Hofer, Craig Anderson, Tice Supplee, and Laura Bolyard. I'd also like to thank Marcia Lambert, who tracked down much of the information presented on the site with help from the Pima County Naturalists, land managers, and many birders. The beautiful website itself was built by CryBaby Design.

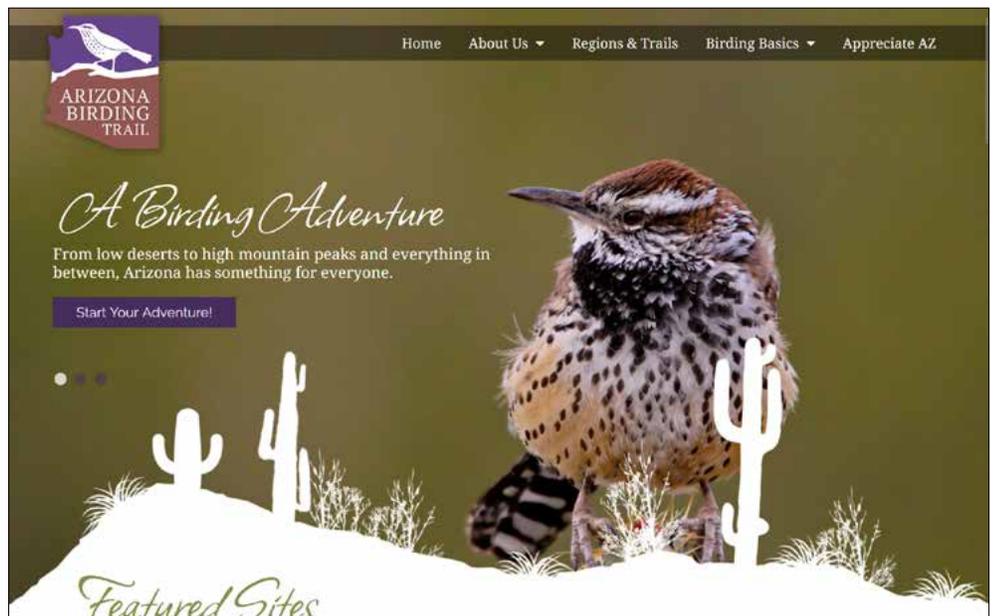
We could not have completed this project without two grants awarded by Arizona State Parks and Trails and the Arizona Department of Tourism. Thank you so much!



Jennie MacFarland,
Bird Conservation Biologist
jmacfarland@tucsonaudubon.org



Marcia Lambert demonstrating the Arizona Birding Trail website at the Southeast Birding Festival



ROLLING OUT HABITAT ON WHEELS

Three years ago, the idea of a native plant food truck popped into my head during a late-night shower brainstorming session. Instead of serving food, this truck would be stocked with free native plants to make native gardening convenient, accessible, and widespread. This inspiration likely stemmed from fond memories of tagging along on my grandparents' Meals on Wheels route, where we delivered meals to those in need. Similarly, I envisioned a service focusing on underserved communities that lack sufficient infrastructure to combat urban heat and are disproportionately more vulnerable to it.

Fast forward three years, and, after a lot of hard work, I'm thrilled to announce the launch of Habitat at Home's latest project: Habitat on Wheels, or *Hábitat Rodante*. Funded through a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and generous donor support, and made possible by uber-talented and dedicated local businesses and artists, the Mobile Unit is ready to embark on its great adventure. The project aims to bring community conservation to non-traditional and underserved communities in Southeast Arizona, providing equitable and widespread access to native plants and the resources needed to create safe urban habitats for birds.

Over the summer, I was fortunate to have three amazing Tucson Audubon volunteers take on the challenge of cultivating hardy native plants to be distributed via the Mobile Unit. Despite the brutal summer heat making it nearly impossible to grow anything from seed—let alone keep seedlings alive—these volunteers persisted. They gave up space inside their homes for growing and cared for the plants as if they were their own. Needless to say, the plants boarding the Mobile Unit are special and sown with love. They will be a critical first step in helping communities cool their neighborhoods and provide habitat for birds and pollinators.

But Habitat on Wheels isn't stopping there. The project is also about building and strengthening community ties, creating educational opportunities, and bringing families closer to nature. We'll organize free urban bird walks, and birdwatching kits will be available for checkout at local libraries. These efforts aim to make the beauty and benefits of birds and nature accessible to everyone, while contributing to safer and greener urban spaces for our feathered friends.

In essence, Habitat on Wheels is more than just a project; it's a journey toward creating a more connected, resilient, and nature-friendly community in Tucson and Southeast Arizona.

For more information about the Habitat on Wheels project and how you can contribute to its goals, please visit TUCSONAUDUBON.ORG/HABITATONWHEELS or email habitat@tucsonaudubon.org.

Kim Matsushino
Habitat at Home Coordinator
kmatsushino@tucsonaudubon.org



Native plants grown by Tucson Audubon Volunteers for Habitat on Wheels, Stephanie Kopplin



The Mobile Unit on its first outing at Luna Y Sol during the MLK Days of Service Event where we made over 40 native bee nesting blocks with United Way volunteers.



The Mobile Unit in action at Hawk Watch 2024, Jennie MacFarland

VELVET MESQUITE

SCIENTIFIC NAME: *Prosopis velutina*

FAMILY: Fabaceae (Bean/Pea)

NATIVE RANGE: Along washes, in valleys, and on desert plains, 1000–5000'; Southern Arizona and Sonora, Mexico

WILDLIFE VALUE: Offers shade, cover, and nesting sites for many birds; flowers a favorite of bees and other insects; seeds eaten by birds and mammals; larval food plant for the Leda Ministreak butterfly



Velvet mesquite flowers, Ned Harris



Velvet mesquite, Jennie MacFarland

Lynn Hassler
Green Gardeners Volunteer Captain
Historic Y



Velvet mesquite is a graceful, wide-spreading, large shrub or tree. Near watercourses plants can reach a height of 20' with a spread of 30'. On rocky slopes or dry plains a more typical size is 10' high x 15' wide. In spring, and sometimes again in late summer, 3" long yellow catkin flowers droop from branches. Blooms are followed by tan-colored seedpods 5" long and ½" wide.

Use mesquites for summer shade, privacy screens, or windbreaks. They require ample space and are unsuitable for narrow areas or close to structures. Don't plant near leaky pipes, sewers or septic tanks because the roots (which extend widely and deeply to 60'!) can be invasive. A plus is that mesquite roots produce nitrogen-fixing nodules that contribute to our nitrogen-deficient soil. Deep regular watering promotes growth, but plants do tolerate drought. They are cold hardy to 5 degrees. Be sure to plant in full sun.

Keep in mind that mesquites can be messy. They are winter deciduous, and falling leaflets can be pesky near patios and walkways. Catkins produce litter in spring, and seedpod droppage in summer requires lots of cleanup. Dripping dark fluid from pruning cuts or wounds may stain patio surfaces.

Prune mesquites respectfully. Notice how they grow in natural habitats. Resist the urge to cut lower branches, leaving them multi-trunked. It's their gnarly twisting branching pattern that makes them so picturesque, and wildlife is more likely to be attracted if left unpruned.

Dense mesquite stands are called bosques (forests) and provide exceptional habitat for a host of wildlife. Many birds seek their shelter for nesting. Lucy's Warblers place their nests in hollows in the mesquite or under loose bark. Flowers are pollinated mainly by bees and are favored by other insects as well. Birds dine on the insects, including a number of resident and migrating warbler species. Plants also provide a start in life for the delicate, fast-flying Leda Ministreak butterfly; its larvae feed on flowers and leaves alike. Many desert animals eat the delicious seed pods; they are a large part of coyote diets in late summer and fall. Planting a velvet mesquite is one of the most important things you can do for the benefit of all wildlife in your yard.

TUCSON YOUTH MAKING STRIDES IN CONSERVATION

The Tucson community has kicked off the New Year on a positive note, with students displaying their dedication to conservation through hands-on projects centered around bird migration and the Lucy's Warbler. From kindergarten to high school, students have embraced the importance of protecting local wildlife, leading to the installation of over 300 nestboxes across various locations, including schools, parks, and their own backyards.

This remarkable achievement underscores the power of education and community involvement in fostering a deeper understanding of environmental issues and inspiring actionable solutions. By actively participating in the creation of nestboxes, students not only learn about the migratory patterns of birds, but also take tangible steps to support their habitats. The success of this initiative can be attributed to several factors: dedicated educators incorporating experiential learning into the curriculum, collaborative partnerships with local conservation organizations, and enthusiastic student participation.

Additionally, the valuable work that Olya Weekley, Applied Conservation Project Manager, has put into the Lucy's Warbler project has significantly contributed to the initiative's success. Olya's expertise and dedication have been instrumental in implementing conservation strategies focused on preserving the habitat of the Lucy's Warbler. By working closely with our education department, Olya has facilitated a deeper understanding of conservation needs, and the role our community plays in fulfilling our mission to enjoy and protect birds.

The Lucy's Warbler is one of only two cavity-nesting warbler species in the United States. By providing suitable nesting sites, students are directly contributing to the conservation of this species and enhancing biodiversity in their local ecosystems. Moreover, the project serves as a valuable opportunity for students to engage with scientific research and contribute to ongoing monitoring efforts.

Beyond the ecological impact, the project has profound educational benefits, nurturing a sense of stewardship and environmental awareness in youth. By participating in conservation initiatives, students develop empathy towards wildlife and gain a deeper appreciation for the interconnectedness of ecosystems.

As Tucson continues to face environmental pressures such as habitat loss and climate change, initiatives such as this serve as beacons of hope, demonstrating the positive impact that grassroots conservation efforts can have on local ecosystems. By empowering youth to take an active role in environmental stewardship, communities can build a more sustainable future for generations to come.

Bea Mendivil
Education Coordinator
bmendivil@tucsonaudubon.org



Students learning about and constructing nestboxes for the Lucy's Warbler, Bea Mendivil

MEET SOME OF OUR VOLUNTEERS!

Each one of our volunteers contributes a distinct blend of skills and knowledge, enriching our collective efforts to support avian conservation and appreciation. Let's get to know some of these people! From seasoned birdwatchers to fledgling enthusiasts, every volunteer helps make Tucson Audubon the wonderful and impactful organization it is. Thank you!



Where are you from and how did you fall in love with bird watching and/or conservation? Flutists are often asked to depict birds in our work—from the bird character in Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf* and Stravinsky's *Rossignol (Nightingale)*, to an entire aviary in Saint-Saëns' *Carnival of the Animals*. So it should come as no surprise that it was the vocal capabilities of birds that first caught my attention. In fact, it was the oft-maligned starling that first taught me that birds have stunning vocabularies.

—PAULA REDINGER,
VOLUNTEER OF 7 YEARS



What do you like to do in your free time?

As a retiree, my time is mostly free, and it's generally focused on, you guessed it, birds! As I tell many, 'my birding ears are always on!' I do focus a lot of my studies on bird vocalizations, and how to record them. Through the use of iNaturalist, I'm moving beyond just birds to exploring the Odonates (dragonflies and damselflies), other insects, and the challenging non-vascular plants.

—SCOTT CRABTREE,
VOLUNTEER OF 6 YEARS



What does it mean to be a volunteer with Tucson Audubon? It means that I can assist in furthering people's access to and appreciation of the wonders of birding in Southeast Arizona.

—LOIS MANOWITZ,
VOLUNTEER OF 18 YEARS



What has been your favorite volunteer experience with Tucson Audubon?

When a brand new birder shows up on one of my trips and falls in love with birding.

—KAREN HOWE,
VOLUNTEER OF 2.5 YEARS



What are your passions and goals with Tucson Audubon or in the field of conservation? I love to share my fascination of birds and preserving their environments with anyone who asks, and working in the Nature Shop is a wonderful way to have those interactions with people, both in person and on the phone. Also, assisting with bird surveys allows me to add to our overall knowledge of Southeast Arizona's bird populations.

NANCY BENT,
VOLUNTEER OF 11 YEARS



What is your favorite bird and why?

I tell people that my "hook" bird was the Loggerhead Shrike. The niche of being a songbird and an effective predator is brilliant. However, Tucson Audubon's own Matt Griffiths gave the best description of a shrike's appearance: "Looks like a mockingbird that joined a motorcycle gang."

—MARK HENGESBAUGH,
VOLUNTEER OF 15 YEARS



Alexis Stark
Volunteer & Engagement Coordinator
astark@tucsonaudubon.org

Learn more about these and other volunteers at
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FIND UPCOMING EVENTS AND REGISTER AT:
[TUCSONAUDUBON.ORG/NEWS-EVENTS](https://tucsonaudubon.org/news-events)

Thursday, April 11, 11am–12pm, Virtual Event
BIRD PHOTOGRAPHY WITH THE CANON EOS R SYSTEM
with John Stoilov
Join Canon Technical Rep John Stoilov as he presents a visual walkthrough of menus and settings to optimize your Canon EOS R system camera for bird photography. This will not be recorded, so join us live.

Friday, April 12 & Saturday, April 13
SPRING PLANT FEST! at the Mason Center
It's not just a plant sale! The Tucson Audubon Native Plant Sale is going big this spring. In addition to the sale, we're celebrating Habitat at Home with bird walks, garden tours, kids' activities, nestbox building, and more!

Saturday, April 13, 7pm
TUCSON AUDUBON'S ROADRUNNER HOCKEY NIGHT!
Join Tucson Audubon staff at the Tucson Roadrunners hockey game to help celebrate Birdathon. This will be a fun night of hockey—Come chill with us! \$20 per ticket, all proceeds benefit Birdathon.

Wednesday, April 17, 10am–12pm
PATON CENTER HABITAT RESTORATION
Help us restore habitat for birds! Volunteers will help pull and remove invasive Johnsongrass and other problem species near the Paton house with some opportunities for planting native grasses.

Saturday, April 20, 9am–12pm
SANTA CRUZ RIVER CLEAN-UP
Connect with your river. Help us clean it up! In partnership with Unitarian Universalist Church of Tucson, Sonoran Institute, and Tucson Clean and Beautiful. At the Santa Cruz River Park, Barrio Hollywood. Optional bird walk at 7:30 am.

Tuesday, April 23, 11am–12pm, Virtual Event
BIRDING THE CALENDAR: WHERE TO GO BIRDING IN MAY
with Luke Safford
The month of May signals the return of some of our favorite birds like Varied Bunting and Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher. Join us to find out some interesting places to enjoy these birds and other Southeast Arizona specialties.

Friday, April 26, 6pm
BIRDS 'N' BINGO AT BAWKER BAWKER CIDER HOUSE
Put your bird ID knowledge to the test, compete to win sweet birdy prizes, and sip some of the best cider in town with your friends from Tucson Audubon! Free to attend with a \$5 donation encouraged. Bring money for drinks/food.

Monday, April 29, 7–8pm, Virtual Event
BIRDS 'N' BEER with Luke Safford
Enjoy your favorite drink and virtually connect with your Tucson Audubon friends.

Tuesday, May 14, 11am–12pm, Virtual Event
BIRDING THE CALENDAR: WHERE TO GO BIRDING IN JUNE
with Luke Safford
The month of June is HOT, but that doesn't mean the birding is cold—it can be a great month to get out. Join us to find out how to beat the heat and see some cool birds.

Wednesday, May 15, 5pm, In-person Social Event
BIRDATHON WRAP UP PARTY at Three Canyon Beer and Wine Garden
Join your friends from Tucson Audubon as we celebrate another successful Birdathon! Enjoy a drink and food while we share Birdathon stories and award prizes. This event is free to join, but bring money for drinks/food.

Mid-May (Location and Time TBD)
BIRD TRIVIA NIGHT
Come and test your knowledge on a wide range of bird topics. Form a team or join one on the spot. Prizes will be awarded to the top-scoring teams, and bragging rights for the victors! Don't miss out on an evening of fun, camaraderie, and a chance to showcase your bird trivia prowess.

Thursday, June 6, 11am–12pm, Virtual Event
BIRD PHOTOGRAPHY BASICS AND GEAR SELECTION WITH OM SYSTEM with Mike Amico
Join OM System Rep Mike Amico in this class about bird photography basics, camera accessories, and OM gear selection. If you don't own an OM System camera, that's ok, many of these tips will work for any brand of camera.

Monday, June 24, 7–8pm, Virtual Event
BIRDS 'N' BEER with Luke Safford
Enjoy your favorite drink and virtually connect with your Tucson Audubon friends.

Tuesday, June 25, 11am–12pm, Virtual Event
BIRDING THE CALENDAR: WHERE TO GO BIRDING IN JULY
with Luke Safford
It might sound weird, but fall migration actually kicks off in July, and not only that, the monsoon season motivates birds and birders to get active. Join us to find out where to go on your next adventure.

WOO HOOT!

BIRDY NEWS BITES WORTH CELEBRATING

HAWK WATCH EVENT SOARS TO NEW HEIGHTS

The Tubac Hawk Watch season got a big jolt this year as Tucson Audubon and the Tubac Nature Center hosted a five-day hawk celebration that included booths, optics companies, kids' activities, and much more. Over 900 people attended and were treated to birding walks along the Santa Cruz River, great birdy merchandise for sale, the Habitat on Wheels mobile unit, and optics demos and sales from our partners at Kowa, Swarovski, Vortex, and Zeiss. Of course, the birds were the stars of the show with at least 400 Common Black Hawks and over 2500 raptors being tallied (count ongoing)! A big shout-out to Janel Miller who organized this successful event that will no doubt continue to grow in the years to come!



Hawk Watch crowd, Richard Fray; Common Black Hawk, Pete Baum; Tucson Audubon Nature Shop table, Matt Griffiths

GIFTS IN HONOR OR MEMORY OF

In honor of Andrew Core from Tommy Lancione

In memory of Barbara Ho from Jane Hood

In honor of Canny Clark from Susan Clark

In honor of Chuck Folinus from Tanya De Angelis

In memory of Clark Blake from Gretchen & Stan Carrick

In memory of Collin Forbes from Cheryl Schrader-Gerken & Wil Gerken

In honor of Holly Rankin from Nancy Jacques & David Wegner

In honor of Jennie MacFarland from Mary Hillmon

In honor of Joanne Amoroso from John, Amy, & Marco Amoroso

In honor of John Schaefer from Randall Kliman

In honor of Keira & Faith Bivens from Rodger Bivens

In honor of Linda McNulty from Deborah Sliz

In honor of Marcia & Ty Tingley from Will Lidwell

In memory of Mary Caldwell from Jane Hood

In honor of Meagan Bethel from Kathleen Bethel

In honor of Nyleen & David Roszel from Peggy & John Smith

In honor of Pat & Dick Carlson from Sharon Atwell

In memory of Rex Johnson from Judy Johnson

In honor of Ruby Mogan from Megan Mogan

In honor of Stephanie Franquemont from Thomas Ryon

In honor of Suzy & Eric Dhruv from Kathy Ben & Scott Wilbor

In memory of Terrie Merritt from Veronica Mecko



Verdin, Axel Elfner

OWL ALONE OR WITH YOUR FLOCK, MAKE BIRDATHON YOUR OWN

As I pass my two year mark with Tucson Audubon and head into my third Birdathon, I'm taking a moment to reflect on my Birdathon experiences and why I now look forward to it every year.

Within the first week of working at Tucson Audubon I heard coworkers going on excitedly about this thing called "Birdathon." They were talking about how 30+ teams participate and it's a "choose your own adventure" event; I could join a team, create my own, do it for a day or the entire month—the options were endless and overwhelming. I am a social person, but in true introverted fashion, I decided to go the route of creating my own team called, "Owl By Myself."

As a fledgling birder and photographer at the time, my challenge was to photograph as many bird species as I could within the 30-day period. Photography was the best way for me to learn birds since it gave me a chance to go back and look at them in detail. Both years I've gotten lifers (a bird you see for the first time) during Birdathon. The first year it was the Northern Parula at Sweetwater Wetlands, and last year it was a Virginia's Warbler up on Mount Lemmon and Black-bellied Whistling Ducks at the Amado Sewage Treatment Pond. Oh the places we go to bird!

Other exciting moments I've had during Birdathon include finding a roadrunner nest at Sabino Canyon when the parents were trading off, seeing a Cactus Wren feed its four chicks, and a Curve-billed Thrasher alerting me to the presence of a coachwhip snake. A highlight that will

happen every year and never get old is seeing the quail chick puffballs at Tucson Audubon's Mason Center.

Tucson Audubon is a wonderful place to work for a bird nerd and nature lover like me. Although I have fun birding with friends or coworkers, I find I enjoy it most owl by myself. It is almost a form of meditation—the walking, slowing down, listening, and overall heightened awareness of my surroundings is grounding. When the element of my camera is added in, I must also still my breath and movements. This culmination of things leads me to experience some wonderful moments in nature that I know I would otherwise miss.

This Birdathon, I'm looking forward to maybe another lifer or two, hopefully getting a few photos in focus, but, most importantly, having an excuse to get outside and go birding!

However it is that you like to bird, or support us in our work to protect birds and their habitats, I hope you can find a way to make Birdathon a meaningful experience if you so wish. It's not too late to make or join a team, or donate to your favorite Birdathon team(s) by going to: TUCSONAUDUBON.ORG/BIRDATHON or by scanning the QR code below.



Erica Freese
Director of Development & Communications
efreese@tucsonaudubon.org



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Coachwhip snake; Cactus Wren at nest; Gambel's Quail puffballs at the Mason Center; White-breasted Nuthatch, Erica Freese

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Membership Update!

New membership pricing will begin July 1, 2024.

Our membership levels were last changed in 2016. After careful consideration and comparisons with similar non-profits, we decided it was time to update them.

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tucsonaudubon.org/membership



BENEFITS

- ✓ Support Tucson Audubon's mission to enjoy & protect birds and their habitats
- ✓ Subscription to quarterly *Vermilion Flycatcher* magazine
- ✓ 10% off all purchases at the Nature Shop, 20% off birdseed
- ✓ Early access to field trips and membership-only events

NEW LEVELS



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\$50 (\$40 INTRODUCTORY)
Individual



ELF OWL
\$75
Family (2 adults + kids)



AMERICAN KESTREL
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DESERT PURPLE MARTIN
\$300*



ELEGANT TROGON
\$600*

*Family benefits