

# VERMILION FLYCATCHER

TUCSON BIRD ALLIANCE

Spring 2025 | Vol 70 No 2

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SPRING INTO  
BIRDING!

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TUCSONBIRDS.ORG  
Spring 2025 | Vol 70 No 2

#### MISSION

Tucson Bird Alliance inspires people to enjoy and protect birds through recreation, education, conservation, and restoration of the environment upon which we all depend.

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#### ON THE COVER

Vermilion Flycatcher by Mick Thompson. Mick is a volunteer photographer/videographer for the National Audubon Society and spends half the year in Tucson.

# CONTENTS

- 02 Almanac of Birds
- 04 Becoming a Better Birder: Tips and Tricks
- 06 Let's Go Birding in Southeast Arizona!
- 10 CAUTION: Building Backyard Habitat Could Lead to Extreme Birding!
- 12 Are You a Birder?
- 13 Nature Shop
- 14 Getting Hooked on Birds, It Can Happen to You!
- 15 Habitat Steward Spotlight
- 16 Desert Purple Martins on the Move
- 18 Sweetwater Sightings
- 20 Paton Center for Hummingbirds
- 24 Habitat at Home
- 25 Volunteers
- 26 Birds + Community
- 29 The Final Chirp

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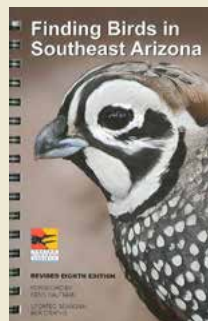
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# BIRDS NEED ACTION, NOT JUST OBSERVATION



What matters more: identifying this bird in your backyard or providing resources for it? Pyrrhuloxia in native hackberry, David Kreidler.

Greetings Friends,

I adore birds. I love blackbirds, corvids, woodpeckers, warblers, and nightjars—heck, even sparrows, gulls, and peeps. Their nesting and foraging behaviors fascinate me, and I delight in their tunes and antics. Their migration journeys leave me dumbfounded. Yet, silly as it seems, when someone identifies me as a “birder,” I don’t readily agree and find the term lacking in nuance.

What makes a birder a birder? At what stage of bird nerdery does one reach “serious birder” status? Is it the ability to identify embirds and sparrows to species, or a warbler by its chip? Traveling the world over in pursuit of an enviable life list? If you enjoy birds and care for their wellbeing, but don’t know a robin from a thrasher, are you a birder?

These loaded questions typically garner a spectrum of subjective responses, and to all of them, I say, “who cares?!”

Birds don’t depend on our ability to identify them, and they don’t particularly benefit from us gawking at them (they must think we’re pretty weird). But, their continued existence on our planet unequivocally depends on our understanding, and valuing, their place in our shared ecosystems, and the actions we take to ensure their survival.

If our goal is to protect birds and their habitats, rather than just observe them, we need to start broadening our perspectives of what it means to be a birder, recognize that birding comes in many flavors, and take all levels of birders seriously, because our level of bird ID ability has no bearing on our ability to contribute to bird conservation. Scientists dedicate their careers to avian research, or the protection of birds and their habitats, but aren’t necessarily “birders” in the classic sense. Gardeners build backyard habitat

to benefit wildlife they might not be able to identify. I’d argue that those folks contribute as much, if not more, to the birding community than those of us just watching birds for personal enjoyment.

If you’re reading this and wondering why I’m singling out birdwatching as a consumptive pastime, it’s because I want to see more birds around, and their collective future isn’t looking so bright at the moment. Development is destroying habitat at a breakneck pace. Bedrock environmental policy is being dismantled in our country. Bird flu, climate change, building strikes, feral cats, invasive plants, death pipes, light pollution, rodenticide... a horde of human-inflicted challenges. We made the mess, and we need to clean it up.

The more folks we welcome into the fold, the more people we can engage in planting native plants, pulling buffelgrass and stinknet, advocating for water conservation and environmental protections, reducing artificial light at night, and capping death pipes. Action is the antidote, as they say, and it can be immediately beneficial to the birds we love. No birding skills required!

And while we’re out taking action, perhaps we might take a little break for some birdwatching, whether we’re “birders” or not.

For birds and people,



Melissa Fratello  
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# ALMANAC of BIRDS April to June

If you're just getting into birding, spring in Southeast Arizona offers the kind of excitement that will seal the deal. People come from all over the country to experience the birds you might see in your own backyard! So why not start there? Sitting in your yard you might hear the jubilant songs of a Lucy's Warbler or Brown-crested Flycatcher, spot the "shining black robe" of a Phainopepla, or find a nest of young Cactus Wrens inside the spiny fortress of cholla you planted yourself. What a reward!

Even with all the excitement that may occur in your yard, you'll eventually want to branch out and see what else makes Southeast Arizona a famous birding hotspot. Where to start? Here are a few super cool spring birding experiences that will take your birding enthusiasm to new levels.



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## HUMMERS IN PATAGONIA

The number and diversity of hummingbirds really picks up in April, especially at Tucson Bird Alliance's Paton Center for Hummingbirds. There are few places in the US where it's possible to see 11 species of hummers in a day and be guaranteed to see a Violet-crowned Hummingbird. The Paton Center is it! Our staff and volunteers have put years of skilled work into creating a habitat haven for wildlife. It's a real treat to visit and sit back as birds of all types partake of the numerous feeders on site, just a few feet from your binoculars! Additionally, rare birds like Gray Hawk, Thick-billed Kingbird, and Mississippi Kite have nested nearby in recent years. If you need another reason to visit, we'll be holding monthly Habitat Ambassador volunteer days throughout 2025. Come contribute to this world-famous birding spot and improve habitat for the birds!



## TROGON SEARCH

Speaking of sounds, the barking songs of the Elegant Trogon have delighted and excited modern birders in the US since the 1970s when this special bird put the region on the birding map. While simply hearing owls at night might be very satisfying for most, hearing a trogon induces a "fight or sight" instinct in most birders. It's easy to see why—this beautiful, long-tailed, shimmering green and bright red bird looks like it dropped right out of the tropics. And it does, down from the northern flanks of the Sierra Madre Occidental in Mexico into the sycamore-lined canyons of Southeast Arizona's Sky Island mountain ranges. If you've never seen a trogon, Madera Canyon in the Santa Ritas, Cave Creek Canyon/South Fork in the Chiricahuas, and Ramsey Canyon in the Huachucas are the best locations to try. If you'd like to share in the awestruck moment of an Elegant Trogon sighting, join our trogon surveys in May. Volunteers are always needed.

OPPOSITE: Lucy's Warbler, Greg Lavaty; ABOVE: Violet-crowned Hummingbird, Mick Thompson; Olive Warbler, Matthew Studebaker

## NIGHT OWLS

There is nothing quite like standing in the forest or desert in the quiet night and hearing an owl call burst forth out of the ether. It's easy to imagine the indigenous peoples of the area also listening to the same primeval sounds. In some ways, not much has changed for thousands of years—a good dose of humility that so many of us could use right now. Pick a birding buddy and head out into the night and listen—Southeast Arizona is home to 13 species of owls! Locations on the desert floor with mature saguaros are good for Great Horned, Elf and Western Screech Owls. Head up a little higher to oak and pine habitat to find Whiskered Screech-Owl, and if you're lucky, the almost impossible to hear Flammulated Owl. A bonus at these sites is also hearing Common Poorwill and Mexican Whip-poor-will calls, both goosebump-inducing sounds. If none of your birding buddies want to brave the night, join us in May for our Elf Owl surveys. Volunteers are always welcome!



## SKY ISLAND WARBLERS

The wood warblers of the Americas are well known for being easy on the eyes, literally flying swatches of bright colors. While the eastern half of North America is the mecca for these sought-after species, the western US also lays claim to some stunning birds. Depending on the exact seasonal timing, areas on the top of Mt. Lemmon such as Incinerator Ridge and Bear Wallow show off an incredible and colorful warbler parade. The best time to go is during spring migration when you have the unique situation of seeing species that are more commonly found in Mexico such as Red-faced, Olive, and Grace's Warblers and Painted Redstart mix with many other western warblers. Take a walk along either of these gravel roads in April and May, and you'll likely find resident Black-throated Gray, Virginia's, and Yellow-rumped Warblers foraging alongside migrant species such as Wilson's, Townsend's, Hermit, and MacGillivray's Warblers. Throw in a bunch of other cool mountain birds and you have one easy and exciting birding experience!

# BECOMING A BETTER BIRDER: TIPS AND TRICKS

Birding celebrity and expert Kenn Kaufman offers a number of strategies for improving your familiarity with birds, but his top recommendation can be summarized as, “The four Ls: Look and Listen a Little Longer. Since birds are fun to watch and sound beautiful anyway, this should be the most enjoyable assignment ever. When you know the identity of a bird, that’s the moment to take an extra minute to study it some more.”

Whether you are a new birder, or been around the block a few years, here are some tips and tricks to get the most out of your birding experiences:



## Don't worry about identifying everything you see.

Birding should be first and foremost about enjoyment. Don't stress about which Empidonax that flycatcher is, just enjoy watching it catch bugs.



## Focus more on body shape and structure than color.

Tail, beak, wing, and head shapes tell us so much about the bird but often get lost in the sea of color. Gnatcatchers and Verdins are similarly colored, but check out that body shape!

## Learn through immersion.

Just like learning a new language, you learn best when you're in the thick of it. Go outside, pick your favorite hotspot, call it your “patch,” and bird it often, at least weekly to learn the rhythms of the birds.

## Use your ears as often as your eyes

Most of us are visual people, but experienced birders have learned that listening is better. Close your eyes, listen, and verbally describe what you hear. The free Merlin Bird ID app is a great aid for learning how to bird with your ears.

Don't worry about identifying every bird, Hammond's Flycatcher, Francis Morgan; Seeing a Vermilion Flycatcher with others is better, Mick Thompson; Listening to birds helps with ID, Pyrrhuloxia, Francis Morgan; Is it a dabbler or diver?, Bryan; Snowy Egret at Sweetwater Wetlands—come join a bird walk or workshop! Mick Thompson; Birding with others and in varying habitats makes you a better birder, Richard Fray





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## BRAND NEW TO BIRDING FIELD WORKSHOPS AT SWEETWATER WETLANDS Monthly, April–July

These field workshops are meant for those just getting into birding and eager to develop their skills and knowledge in the field. We'll cover topics like how to find birds, bird behavior, identifying birds by shape and voice, migration, guides, optics, and so much more. The entire workshop will be conducted outside while we are birding!

See details on page 26.



### Bird behavior can be super helpful in the identification process.

Does the duck dive like a scaup or tip its butt up like a wigeon? Flutter like a kinglet or scratch like a towhee? When you narrow your choices down, it's easier to figure out what you're looking at.

### Visit a wide array of habitats.

Grasslands, riparian, madrean-evergreen woodland, and an urban city park will all produce different species. To get the most out of birding you'll want to visit them all!

### Decent binoculars make a huge difference!

You don't need a lot of equipment, but binoculars really are game-changers. Our Nature Shop has good pairs starting around \$250. Looking for a good field guide as well? See new birder gear on page 13.

### Birding with others makes you a better birder.

"Iron sharpens iron" is the old saying and it holds true in the birdwatching realm. You'll not only grow in knowledge, but there's more joy when you watch a Vermilion Flycatcher with a birding buddy.

Ready to take the next step in your birding journey?  
Join one of our field trips or workshops at [TUCSONBIRDS.ORG/FIELDTRIPS](https://tucsonbirds.org/fieldtrips).

# LET'S GO BIRDING IN SOUTHEAST ARIZONA!

It's natural for new birders to start local and then branch out to see new birds. You likely know the birds in your yard or neighborhood park best—it's easier to spend time in these locations. When and if you're ready to venture out farther, it can be overwhelming to decide where to go and which birds to look for. Luckily, there are many resources available to the modern birder to help you along the way. Even more importantly for those of us who live in Southeast Arizona, our region is one of the best in the US in terms of bird diversity and number of intriguing and different bird watching locations. It's adventurous and difficult to go wrong!

There are many ways to learn about birding sites and birds being seen in the area. Specific social media sites, communication apps, and the eBird database are excellent sources of info on current bird sightings—sometimes up to the minute! For birding location details, we highly recommend our *Finding Birds in Southeast Arizona* book, the all-in-one

guide that's been used by thousands of birders since 1979. Locally, there is the Tucson Birding Trail map (printed or online at [TUCSONBIRDS.ORG/TUCSONBIRDINGTRAIL](http://TUCSONBIRDS.ORG/TUCSONBIRDINGTRAIL)), and the Arizona Birding Trail for when you are ready to travel farther ([ARIZONABIRDINGTRAIL.COM](http://ARIZONABIRDINGTRAIL.COM)).

That's still a lot of information—to narrow it down a bit, here are a few of our favorite sites in Southeast Arizona and what you can expect at each.

*Please scan the QR codes for the eBird hotspot, bird list, maps, and more.*



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## TUCSON AREA

### SWEETWATER WETLANDS / AGUA NUEVA

Sweetwater is probably the best-known and most-used birding site in Tucson. And for good reason—its year round water and surrounding habitat make it a magnet for birds and birders in all seasons. The 325 species found there and number of eBird checklists submitted place it fourth and first in Arizona, respectively. Along with the newly reopened Agua Nueva ponds across the road, you can expect to find abundant waterfowl, White-crowned Sparrows, Yellow-rumped Warblers, and much more in winter. In summer, the riparian habitat comes alive with Yellow Warblers, Tropical Kingbirds, and Hooded Orioles. Tucson Bird Alliance leads bird walks here every Wednesday year round.



American Coot  
David Kreidler

### REID PARK / HARDESTY POND



Vermilion Flycatcher  
Greg Lavaty

Reid Park is the largest urban park in Tucson and contains many different habitat types, including exotic plant species that draw in birds you might not normally see in the Sonoran Desert. A pond and large lake are havens for wintering ducks, and large, mature pine and eucalyptus trees may contain Great Horned Owl or Cooper's Hawk nests, or serve as winter foraging sites for Red Crossbills or rare East Coast warblers. Some years the palm trees are filled with Cedar Waxwings and American Robins when these species arrive to feed on the fruits. The vast fields are great places to find Vermilion Flycatchers and interesting winter sparrows. The marshy pond behind the Hardesty building is a hidden urban wetland where you can find Spotted Sandpiper, Black Phoebe, and waterthrushes.



## FORT LOWELL PARK



Belted Kingfisher  
Mick Thompson

Fort Lowell has a variety of locales and habitats that will keep you busy all morning. Try to peel yourself away from the adobe ruins long enough to visit the pond, and be on the lookout for a Belted Kingfisher. There are also cottonwoods along the former parade grounds and cavalry barracks, hackberry trees, huge eucalyptus trees with raptor nests, and a historic pecan orchard where you should check for flickers and woodpeckers, including Lewis's. A human-made stream leading to a pond under a couple of large cottonwoods is a dense habitat spot for many birds and is frequently where Eastern Bluebirds are found. Adjacent to the Rillito River and not too far from Mt. Lemmon, the park's water sources are a magnet for birds in transit and has hosted many rarities including a Couch's Kingbird.

## RIO VISTA NATURAL RESOURCE PARK

Rio Vista is a great example of a mostly recreated/remnant mesquite bosque (forest) along the Rillito River that comes alive in spring with the return of Lucy's Warblers, Bell's Vireos, and other summer residents. Being a large area of native habitat close to the river tends to draw in many migrant warblers such as Townsend's, Wilson's, and Black-throated Gray that are attracted to the insects found in the native velvet mesquite trees. It's also a pretty reliable spot for seeing Loggerhead Shrike in urban Tucson—not an easy feat! The mesquite and its associated desert mistletoe also make this an excellent location for Phainopepla, a bird that is heavily reliant on the parasitic plant's berries and nesting opportunities. Tucson Bird Alliance has been involved in habitat restoration on the site and has also installed nestboxes.



Phainopepla  
Francis Morgan

## SANTA CRUZ RIVER TUCSON

Tucson Water began releasing treated wastewater into the typically dry Santa Cruz River in June 2019 which created a revitalized birding spot. As part of the Santa Cruz River Heritage Project, water is released near West Silverlake Road and the resulting riparian vegetation is bringing birds back to this urban location. Only a short distance from downtown, it's now possible to once again find Wilson's Snipe, Marsh Wren, Black Phoebe, and other species associated with wetland habitats. It gives us a glimpse of what the river may have been like a hundred years ago. Other Birds such as Willow Flycatcher, Yellow-breasted Chat, and Song Sparrow are also now being seen thanks to the presence of water. The area is very easy to bird, either looking down from the Loop path or walking in the river corridor.



Black Phoebe  
Mick Thompson

## TUCSON BIRD ALLIANCE'S MASON CENTER



Costa's Hummingbird  
Mick Thompson

The Mason Center is a 20-acre preserve of saguaro/ironwood habitat where you can walk the desert and also enjoy the lush gardens and feeders that surround the main house. Gambel's Quail, Cactus Wren, Black-throated and Rufous-winged Sparrows, and other common desert denizens are found here. Most notably, Costa's Hummingbird is easily seen around the house, especially on the front porch! In summer, nesting Gila Woodpeckers abound and Gilded Flickers, Desert Purple Martins, and Brown-crested Flycatchers roam the neighborhood because of the close proximity to Arthur Pack Park across the street. Feel free to enter the house when staff are on-site to learn more about Tucson Bird Alliance's work.

## GET A LITTLE WILDER

### EL RIO PRESERVE



Green Heron  
Hemant Kishan

Located in the Town of Marana, El Rio is an area that was historically seasonally flooded if the Santa Cruz River overflowed its banks. Marana has now turned those occasional ephemeral ponds into a permanent lake that draws a great diversity of birds. The Preserve is a popular hotspot that brings in plentiful ducks and other waterfowl in winter and Green Heron, Common Yellowthroat, and other marsh birds to its vegetated edges. The lake is also situated right next to the northernmost peaks of the Tucson Mountains, which adds desert birds to the mix, such as Rock Wren, Black-throated Sparrow, and Gilded Flicker. The Tucson Bird Alliance's habitat restoration department has been involved with the Preserve from the beginning, helping to design and install pollinator gardens, and removing invasive plants.



Gray Hawk  
Ned Harris

### TANQUE VERDE WASH

If you'd like to get into the wild right in the Tucson valley, the Tanque Verde Wash at Wentworth Road is a great place to do it. This is one of the last riparian forests in Tucson and the closest site to find Gray Hawk, Inca Dove, and a number of other specialty birds. The absolutely huge cottonwood and willow trees and often flowing water not only make for prime habitat but also give you an idea of what life was like along the waterways in Tucson many years ago. Spring and summer mornings are filled with the songs of Yellow Warbler, Summer Tanager, and Yellow-breasted Chat, while winter sees rare birds like Gray Catbird and Eastern warblers such as Black-and-White and Blackburnian. The weedy area near the road is also perfect habitat for winter finches and sparrows and summer buntings and grosbeaks. Be sure to check the small pond near the parking area too!

### SABINO CANYON / SAGUARO NATIONAL PARK

Sometimes you may want to get more hiking in with your birding, and these two locations are perfect for that with many trails to explore. Our Sonoran Desert species draw people here from around the world hoping to get views of Greater Roadrunner, Abert's Towhee, and Purple Martin in summer. While the East and West Districts of Saguaro National Park both offer miles of desert hiking, Sabino Canyon serves up the unique treat of a narrow riparian canyon with running water most times of the year. A particularly good walk is to take the paved road into the canyon and loop back on the trail to the dam area where the riparian habitat is especially dense and is a magnet for rare warblers and flycatchers.



Greater Roadrunner  
Mick Thompson

### MT. LEMMON



Red-faced Warbler  
Greg Lavaty

Perhaps the single-most important birding area near Tucson, Mt. Lemmon makes a perfect day for exploring nearly every habitat type in Southeast Arizona. These differing habitats contain scores of unique birds and most can be seen on short walks from your vehicle. Mt. Lemmon is a Sky Island mountain range, and it's said that driving the road to the top is like traveling from Mexico to Canada in 27 miles. It's a great comparison: Cactus Wrens in the morning, Arizona Woodpeckers for lunch, and Pygmy Nuthatches for happy hour! This drive is better though, Canada doesn't have the Red-faced Warblers and Yellow-eyed Juncos you can see at the top of this mountain. Spring and summer are the best times to go and great stops to make are Molino Basin, Bear Canyon, Rose Canyon Lake, Incinerator Ridge/Bear Wallow, and Summerhaven.

## FARTHER AFIELD

### MADERA CANYON

Southeast Arizona has no shortage of world famous birding locations, and Madera Canyon is near the top of that long list. Known as the closest place to Tucson to see an Elegant Trogon, its trails are well-worn by people from all over the US searching for this tropical beauty. In fact, the canyon's Santa Rita Lodge is not far behind the leader in eBird checklists for Arizona, Sweetwater Wetlands. The Lodge is a mandatory stop—with an impressive lineup of feeders and ample seating, it is the easiest place to get great looks at some species that are typically difficult to see such as Scott's Oriole, Varied Bunting, Hepatic Tanager, Arizona Woodpecker, and Rivoli's and Berylline Hummingbirds. The dense oak/pine/sycamore habitat of the canyon makes it a great location for studying more common birds like Mexican Jay, Dusky-capped Flycatcher, Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher, and occasionally, Northern Pygmy-Owl.



Hepatic Tanager  
Hemant Kishan



Elegant Trogon  
Frederick Mitchell, Jr.

### CHIRICAHUA MOUNTAINS

There's no better place to spend a long birding weekend in Southeast Arizona than the east side of the Chiricahua Mountains near Portal. Not only does the area boast national park-worthy scenery, but the variety of birds and other wildlife is amazing. There's a good reason why the American Museum of Natural History's Southwestern Research Station is located there—species diversity is off the charts. At the Station, be sure to visit the hummingbird feeders, a reliable spot for Blue-throated Mountain-gem, the largest hummingbird in the US. The South Fork of Cave Creek Canyon has been well known in the birding world since the 1970s as the place to look for Elegant Trogons. It doesn't disappoint—visit in May to hear this tropical bird's barking songs echoing off the canyon walls. In addition to regular sightings of Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher, Arizona Woodpecker, and Scott's Oriole, and a good chance of hearing a Montezuma Quail call, Cave Creek has hosted numerous rare birds over the years, including the mega exciting Eared Quetzal in 2020.

### TUCSON BIRD ALLIANCE'S PATON CENTER FOR HUMMINGBIRDS



Violet-crowned Hummingbird  
Wendy Miller

Tucson Bird Alliance took ownership of this famous birding location in 2014 and has since restored much of the surrounding gardens and expanded the property's footprint by acquiring neighboring parcels of land. Located in Patagonia along Sonoita Creek, the Center is a natural magnet for riparian birds such as Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Gray Hawk, Tropical Kingbird, and Song Sparrow. Close proximity to mesquite bosque and oak woodland brings in birds such as Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet, Hepatic Tanager, and Varied Bunting. The human-made ponds and water features and multitude of feeders, brush piles, and seating areas make bird watching at the Paton Center easy and relaxing. At any time of year, you're pretty much guaranteed to see a Violet-crowned Hummingbird, the species that put this house on the birding map. It's the most reliable place in the US to find one, just one of the 16 hummingbird species seen here!

### SANTA CRUZ RIVER IN TUBAC

A fun day trip from Tucson is a visit to the forests along the Santa Cruz River in Tubac. The area is easily accessible by a number of trailheads for the Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail that parallels the river. The old growth cottonwood and willow trees and nearly year-round water flow provide amazing habitat for a host of special birds. The trees are massive enough to support nesting Gray and Zone-tailed Hawks and also Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo. On spring and summer mornings, the dawn chorus of Summer Tanagers, Yellow-breasted Chats, Yellow Warblers, and others is almost loud enough to drown out the sounds of passing trains! This is also a reliable spot for breeding Tropical and Thick-billed Kingbirds, elusive Green Kingfishers, and rare Rose-throated Becards whose large hanging nests are a sight to behold. Other nearby locations include the restored lake and marsh habitat at Historic Canoa Ranch and the intact mesquite bosque at Santa Gertrudis Lane.



Green Kingfisher  
Hemant Kishan



# CAUTION: BUILDING BACKYARD HABITAT COULD LEAD TO EXTREME BIRDING!



If you're just beginning your birding journey and wondering where or how to start, take comfort knowing that you don't need to travel far or have a 4-wheel drive vehicle to see incredible birds. Your own backyard can serve as a classroom for birding, especially if you create native habitat that attracts a variety of wildlife.

There's a reason why the first level of our Habitat at Home program is named "Hummingbird". Why start with hummingbirds? They are bold, curious, and quick to find a

reliable food source. Unlike many birds that take time to discover new feeders, hummingbirds often appear within days—or even hours—of setting up a nectar feeder. Their flashy colors, fast-paced aerial acrobatics, and tiny yet feisty personalities make them endlessly entertaining. Plus, their consistent visits will give you the thrill of identifying individual birds and observing their behaviors up close. Attracting hummingbirds to your yard is simple, requires minimal resources and space, and provides quick results. More often than not, this first step sparks a passion for more advanced birding and habitat building.

## CREATING A HUMMINGBIRD-LEVEL HABITAT AT HOME

**Set up a hummingbird feeder. Our Nature Shop has a great selection!**

- 1. Make the Perfect Nectar** – Skip store-bought nectar and instead mix a simple homemade solution: four parts water to one part white sugar. Boil the water, stir in the sugar until dissolved, and let it cool before filling the feeder. No red dye needed!
- 2. Place It Strategically** – Hang the feeder in a shaded or partially shaded spot near flowers or natural cover. This makes the feeder more inviting and protects the nectar from spoiling quickly in the sun.
- 3. Keep It Clean** – Clean your feeder every few days, especially in warm weather, to prevent mold and bacteria growth.



### WANT HELP? HIRE US!

Our Habitat at Home Restoration Services team can design and install the sustainable native-plant landscape you desire!

- Custom native landscape design and installation
- Rainwater harvesting and water features
- Nestboxes and tortoise burrows
- Habitat maintenance and more
- NEW! Sign up for our Monthly Habitat Subscription Service

Find details at: [TUCSONBIRDS.ORG/RESTOSERVICESTO](https://tucsonbirds.org/restoservicesinfo)

### Plant a native tree for long-term benefits

While a hummingbird feeder is a quick way to bring birds to your yard, planting a single native tree can create a lasting impact that will expand your backyard birding experience. Native trees such as velvet mesquite (*Neltuma velutina*), desert ironwood (*Olneya tesota*), blue and foothills palo verde (*Parkinsonia florida*, *P. microphylla*), and desert willow (*Chilopsis linearis*) attract native insects, which in turn provide a crucial food source for many bird species (including hummingbirds!).

Additionally, trees create cooler microclimates beneath their canopies that provide lower temperatures and increased moisture, supporting a greater diversity of native plants. For example, Mexican honeysuckle (*Justicia spicigera*) thrives in the shade of a tree, creating additional habitat and food sources for birds. Over time, this layered habitat of trees and shrubs will support a wider variety of birds: thrashers and towhees foraging for ground-dwelling insects; hummingbirds, insect pollinators, and Verdins utilizing nectar from flowers; Lesser Goldfinches enjoying the seeds after the blooms fade.

If space is limited, consider adding nectar-rich native plants to your yard or balcony. These provide a reliable nectar source without the need for refilling or cleaning feeders. Native plants that do well in containers with a bit of shade include red justicia (*Justicia candicans*), autumn sage (*Salvia greggii*), and various species of penstemon.

Once you start attracting hummingbirds, it's only a matter of time before you're hooked! Many birders get their start by watching hummingbirds and then expand their interest to other backyard species. After all, once you've marveled at a hummingbird's hovering flight and daring chases, you'll naturally start noticing and creating safe urban habitat for the other feathered friends that visit your yard. You may find yourself starting to identify species by call, keeping a life list, or even traveling to see new and rare birds—extreme birding!

### JOIN HABITAT AT HOME TODAY

Do you already have a feeder set up and native trees and shrubs in your yard, or need additional resources to complete your hummingbird-friendly space? Join the Habitat at Home program and receive your official certification yard sign and curated resources to guide you along the way. Register online at [TUCSONBIRDS.ORG/HABITAT](https://tucsonbirds.org/habitat).



Kim Matsushino  
Habitat at Home Coordinator  
[kmatsushino@tucsonbirds.org](mailto:kmatsushino@tucsonbirds.org)

Habitat patches at Carol and Randy Smith's yard, Kim Matsushino; Costa's Hummingbird, Mick Thompson; Verdin, Alison Lang



# ARE YOU A BIRDER?



Feminist Bird Club, Tucson Chapter, Jennie Duberstein

If I asked, “What makes someone a great birder?” how would you respond? Perhaps you think of someone who has a large number on their life list? Possibly you picture a person who can identify many birds by sight and sound? Or maybe someone who leads birding field trips and tours? I subscribe to Kenn Kaufman’s perspective of what makes someone a great birder. To paraphrase his words, the act of birding is something we do for enjoyment—if you enjoy it, you are a good birder. If you REALLY enjoy it, you are a great birder.

That’s it. If you enjoy looking at or listening to birds, you are not only already a birder, but you are a good one. And if you really enjoy it, you are a great birder. It doesn’t take anything more than that.



Feminist Bird Club, Tucson Chapter, Jennie Duberstein

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many people turned to birds and nature as solace, as a means of connection with the world around us, and just for general enjoyment, and have continued to do so. In fact, a recent study by the US Fish and Wildlife Service estimated that over 96,000,000 American adults engaged in birding in some way in 2022—that is 1/3 of the US population!

In late 2021, as we were starting to tentatively gather in outdoor spaces again, I was fortunate to be part of the team that founded the Tucson Chapter of the Feminist Bird Club ([INSTAGRAM.COM/FBC.TUCSON](https://www.instagram.com/fbc.tucson)) which serves to make birding and the outdoors more inclusive and affirming to people who may not have safe access to it. We began offering monthly “Second Sunday” outings at different locations in the greater Tucson area.

There are many things that make our Second Sunday Outings different than your standard birding field trip, but the most obvious to me is who attends—people who have not felt welcomed or safe in other birding spaces, and people who are too shy about their “beginning” birding skills to join a field trip led by an official bird club. We always have at least a

few people who are formally birding for the very first time, and the vast majority of participants have been interested in birds for less than two years. I start our outings by asking, “Who here is a birder?” A few people tentatively raise their hands, looking around shyly, as if someone might challenge them. Most of the group remains still, hands at their sides. I follow up by asking, “Who here likes looking at or listening to birds?” All hands raise. “Who REALLY likes looking at birds?” All hands remain raised. You can see where this is going. Everyone is, of course, shocked to learn that not only are they already birders, they are already GREAT birders, even if they have never been on a field trip or used binoculars and don’t know how to identify a single species.

We tend to think of “birding” as going into the field with expensive gear like binoculars, spotting scopes, and cameras, and traveling to see brightly-colored birds in distant lands. And that absolutely is one way that birding happens. But birding can also be looking out your window at White-winged Doves. It can be waiting at the bus stop and enjoying the busy, small birds moving about in a nearby mesquite tree, even if you can’t identify them. It can be walking your dog in the park and enjoying the ducks swimming in the water. The simple fact is that just by enjoying birds, you are engaging in the act of birding.

Thinking back to a 1/3 of Americans birding, I’d guess that many of them do not have fancy equipment, don’t have thousands of species on their life lists, and don’t participate in birding tours. But they maintain bird feeders in their yards, plant gardens to benefit birds and other wildlife, vote in support of people and policies that support conservation, and generally enjoy looking at and listening to birds wherever they encounter them. This does not make them any less “great” than someone with 6,000 species on their life list. It just highlights the wonderfully different ways in which someone can be a birder.



Jennie Duberstein is a wildlife biologist and conservation social scientist who builds partnerships for bird and habitat conservation across the United States and northwest Mexico. She has also worked with young birders for many years, helping to connect them with opportunities and each other. A past member of the Tucson Bird Alliance Board of Directors, Jennie has lived in Southeast Arizona since 2001.



# TUCSON BIRD ALLIANCE NATURE SHOP

## NATURE SHOP

300 E University Blvd #120, Tucson 85705 (corner of University & 5th Ave)

520-629-0510

Wednesday–Friday: 10 am–4 pm; Saturday: 10 am–2 pm

Visit us in-store or online at: [TUCSONBIRDS.ORG/SHOP](http://TUCSONBIRDS.ORG/SHOP)

There's never any sales tax since we're a non-profit. All purchases support our mission to protect birds and their habitat.

## GEAR FOR BUDDING BIRDERS

So, you want to be a birder? Maybe you've just watched *The Big Year* or went on one of our weekly walks at Sweetwater Wetlands and found yourself enraptured by the dozens of bird species you never knew existed. No matter what brought you here, The Nature Shop has you covered. While birding only requires observation and a thirst for discovery, these tools might help you identify and enjoy more species.



### *Birds of the Southwest* by Stan Tekiela

\$10.00

Arranged with color-coded tabs, this pocket-sized guide will help you ID some of the Southwest's most common birds.



### *Finding Birds in Southeast Arizona*

\$24.95

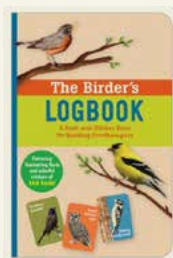
Our guide features 150 birding locations in Southeast Arizona, with maps and hints from local, experienced birders. You'll see more birds with this book!



### Mr. Bird Suet Cage

\$5.00

This simple, affordable suet cage can be filled with seed or suet cakes and will attract a variety of songbirds.



### *The Birder's Logbook*

\$5.00

If you have a young, beginning birder in your life, this interactive logbook might be just the thing to get them started.



### Vortex Diamondback HD

\$159.00–\$279.00

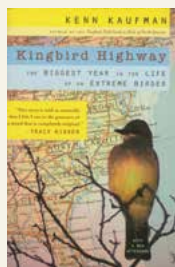
It can be difficult to find binoculars striking a good balance of price and quality. We recommend Vortex's Diamondback HD line—come to the shop and try out a pair!



### Elastic Binocular Harness

\$14.00

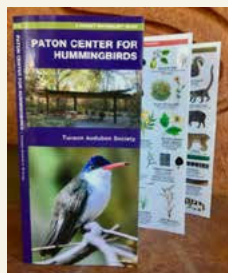
This harness will evenly distribute the weight of your binos to minimize fatigue in your neck and shoulders!



### *Kingbird Highway* by Kenn Kauffman

\$22.00

Colorful and lyrical, any level of birder can enjoy Kenn's memoir about his journey across the US in search of birds.



### Paton Center for Hummingbirds Foldout Guide

\$7.95

This foldout guide features not only the common birds, but also the common wildlife and plants in the area.

# GETTING HOOKED ON BIRDS, IT CAN HAPPEN TO YOU!

Diana Rosenblum  
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Crested Caracara, Nick Pulcinella



I've always loved being outdoors, and self-identified as an environmentalist back in my middle school days. As a casual backyard birder, I knew many of the Tucson regulars, but very few species within the vast diversity of Southeast Arizona. It wasn't until I joined Tucson Bird Alliance as a college intern that I fell in love with birds, and the people who introduced me to them. Several staff members and volunteers opened my eyes to the world of birds and birding; I soon found myself looking at telephone wires for hawks, visiting the San Rafael Valley for the first time to see a whole new slew of grassland habitat dwellers, making 15 stops on the drive up Mt. Lemmon to bird watch rather than marathon to the top. Being surrounded by passionate birders, it was easy (and encouraged) to interrupt my coworkers during the workday to ask what cool, new-to-me bird was stopping for a drink at the Mason Center or calling from the ironwoods. Additionally, a kind volunteer group, the Birdettes, took me under their wings and got me out birding on the weekends too. I was hooked!

Thanks to this incredible, patient, and avid community of bird appreciators and conservationists, I've now been working at Tucson Bird Alliance for ten years. Every day I strive to do my part by championing our membership program and connecting others to enjoy and protect birds and the environment upon which we all depend. By becoming a member, anyone who has an interest in these wonderful creatures and their habitats can quickly learn more! Information comes in many forms, from our weekly email, highlighting a different bird each week and sharing opportunities to see them, to the quarterly *Vermilion Flycatcher* magazine (yes, this very

one!) chock-full of information about our local scene, to field trips and events for new and experienced bird enthusiasts alike. Plus, members receive a discount at our Nature Shop, which is curated for any and all types of birders and nature enthusiasts!

Furthermore, every dollar of membership fees goes into supporting the vital work Tucson Bird Alliance does across Southeast Arizona. In these uncertain times, it means so much to have people from all over the country, and beyond, giving to our local organization and standing behind our mission to inspire people to enjoy and protect birds. Our strength in numbers allows us to have a loud voice when it comes to environmental protections for our region, influencing city and county-level decisions that affect our communities and wildlife, while also doing grassroots efforts, literally, through programs such as Habitat at Home, and our invasive plant removal and restoration work. This good work only happens thanks to you, our members and supporters. We so appreciate you joining, renewing, and gifting memberships to others, so we can stand united for birds and their habitats right here in Southeast Arizona. Thank you for being an important part of this growing flock.

**Become a member today at [TUCSONBIRDS.ORG/JOIN](https://tucsonbirds.org/join).**



# CAROL BROWN: LET NATURE LEAD THE WAY



A super bloom of wildflowers in Carol's yard, Carol Brown.



Carol Brown, Megan Ewbank

Members of Tucson Bird Alliance's Habitat at Home program are leading the movement to rewild residential lots throughout Southeast Arizona. It's easy to spot a Habitat at Home yard; the dense and diverse habitat patches are a stark contrast to the gravel-covered and sparsely planted neighboring yards. With a little place-based knowledge of the plant and wildlife diversity the region supports, homeowners are able to replicate the habitat that exists in the region, without significant water usage, for the benefit of birds. Carol Brown is one such Habitat at Home member creating a wildlife haven in midtown Tucson and pushing the boundaries for urban habitat.

In a neighborhood full of well-manicured yards, Carol's yard certainly stands out. Habitat at Home members approach their habitat in different ways, most having small, designated areas allowed to be wild. Carol's approach is to let nature reclaim her yard, but with a little human help. After planting native trees and a diverse plant palette focused on climate resiliency, she now encourages her yard to continue to evolve by allowing native plant volunteers to stay. Each seedling is identified using apps such as iNaturalist or Arizona Wildflowers. If the plant is not easily identifiable, it is allowed to stay until it flowers and can be accurately identified. Non-native species are monitored for and immediately removed throughout the yard. The yard continues to evolve, season to season and from year to year. The annual buckwheats phase out and are replaced by perennials, such as penstemons and brittlebush. The native annual seedbank expands every year, leading to urban super blooms of California poppies. During winter months, White-crowned Sparrows and Lesser Goldfinches forage on the abundance of seeds while pollinators safely overwinter as dead plant material is left until the spring.

Carol's yard was featured during the Urban Habitats tour as part of the 2024 Southeast Arizona Bird Festival. The tour had frequent pauses as participants tried to identify butterflies or take photos of birds visiting the yard. The tour leaders also shared some secrets for Habitat at Home success: how to identify microhabitats and plant them appropriately, which plants are favored by the variety of species that visit her yard, and what plant species her adopted desert tortoise enjoys feeding on the most. Carol frequently spends time in her front yard, where passersby compliment the yard or comment on a specific plant. Not only has she created a model yard for habitat, but she regularly provides education on the process to those interested and shares successes and failures, both important to embrace.

Residential habitat is a collective movement that benefits from increased participation, leading to habitat corridors better-suited to meet the foraging needs of birds and pollinators. Different species are limited by the range that they can travel, with some native bees restricted to 50 feet or less for foraging. Creating high value urban habitat requires that we not only create habitat patches in our yard, but that we also encourage our neighbors to do the same. Carol's approach is an easy way to make an impact: let nature lead the way, help where you can, and share your experience with your neighbors.

Kari Hackney  
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# DESERT PURPLE MARTIN



Female Desert Purple Martin outfitted with a Lotek satellite tracker device, Richard Fray



Tagging a Purple Martin in Brazil, Joe Siegrist, PMCA

Humans have always been intrigued by the mysterious movements of migratory birds. Ancient cultures had many explanations for why some bird species disappeared seasonally. Some thought they hibernated, others thought they transformed into different species. As we learned more, it became clear that many birds undertook journeys, some extraordinarily long, to take advantage of seasonal abundance. Once colder weather begins to set in, migratory species head back to the eternal summer near the equator. We've understood the basic logistics of migration for some time, but even with our better understanding of the natural world, mysteries remain.

Like many insect-eaters, Desert Purple Martins are long-distance migrants, but the exact details of their route and where they winter has remained unknown. Research on Eastern Purple Martins has established that they spend the winter months in the Amazon Basin of Brazil. However, the saguaro-nesting desert subspecies exhibit very different behavior on the nesting grounds in the Sonoran Desert, so we suspected their migration patterns and choice of wintering location may also be different. That was mere speculation until last year, when Tucson Bird Alliance and our partners successfully deployed Lotek satellite migration tags on several Desert Purple Martins to track their migration movements in real time.

Recent advancements in research technology are astounding. Devices to record and share the locations of birds are getting progressively smaller and lighter. Working closely with the Purple Martin Conservation Association (PMCA) and a graduate student from Northern Arizona

University, we began using technology to unravel the martins' migration patterns. During the summer of 2022, we attached GPS trackers to eight Desert Purple Martins. These trackers record location daily, but the bird has to be recaptured the following year to retrieve the data, an extreme disadvantage. Amazingly, two of the males fitted with GPS trackers returned to the exact same saguaro capture site in 2023, and after many mornings of trying, we successfully recaptured one very wary martin. The resulting data showed that Desert Purple Martins do indeed winter in Brazil, but much further east than the Eastern Purple Martins.



Map of data reported from all eight Lotek satellite tracker devices.

# TINS ON THE MOVE



Desert Purple Martins gather along telephone wires parallel to the San Pedro River near Mammoth, AZ. Nets are positioned to catch birds as they swoop toward a nearby pond to bathe and drink.



Desert Purple Martins, Keith Shallcross

By 2024, more advanced satellite tags were small enough to attach to Desert Purple Martins. Although this new technology is pricey, approximately \$2,000 per device, the upgrade comes with the advantage of data being instantly available as the bird travels, removing the need to recapture the bird. With the help of a generous donor, we purchased eight devices and tagged three martins. The first was a young male north of Tucson, near the San Pedro River. The other two were nesting females in the Sahuarita area. Then the fun began as we watched these three Desert Purple Martins begin their journeys south.

Early into migration, the device on one female stopped reporting in Sonora, Mexico. We consulted the manufacturer, and based on error messages, their opinion was that the martin had managed to yank the antenna out of the device. The second female got quite far on her migration through Central America but stopped sending signals in Colombia. From the map data it appears that she had trouble getting over or around the northern extent of the Andes Mountains.

The young male tracked north around the Andes Mountains, and then continued his journey south, through the heart of the Amazon Basin. The detail is so fine that we can even tell that he followed the Amazon River east for a while, before continuing southeast toward the Atlantic Coast. This intrepid male made it all the way to what we now know is the main wintering area of Desert Purple Martins, in eastern Brazil. He spent several weeks near the Sobradinho Reservoir along the São Francisco River in the state of Bahia and then continued northeast to spend a few weeks near Serra do Teixeira National Park. Using Google Street View,

we got a sense of the general habitat, which seemed quite tropical but more arid than the rainforest of the Amazon Basin. This is very interesting considering they nest in the Sonoran Desert—it makes sense that their wintering grounds would be drier than that of the Eastern Purple Martins.

This winter, Joe Siegrist from PMCA took the remaining five trackers down to Brazil. With help from local biologists, he located a large evening roost and was quickly able to catch the needed birds—all trackers have now been deployed! These birds are likely to be the other western subspecies, known as Forest Purple Martins, that nest in northern Arizona and the Pacific Northwest. Unfortunately, one stopped working after a few weeks, and then, disappointingly, our male Desert Purple Martin's device also stopped sending data. However, there are still four active tags and we're excited to start watching them head north soon.

Through the continued generosity of our amazing supporter, Melodee Thorweger, we will once again work with PMCA this summer to put Lotek satellite tags onto eight more Desert Purple Martins to get a full migration cycle mapped. We should be able to catch all of the birds we need now that we know the exact location of a large evening roost in Sahuarita. Stay tuned for updates!



Jennie MacFarland,  
*Bird Conservation Biologist*  
jmacfarland@tucsonbirds.org



# LOOKING BACK AT BIRDS AND



As the temps begin to rise, it's no surprise that the first signs of spring have been showing up at Sweetwater Wetlands. The cottonwoods and willows are now covered in blossoms attracting pollinators and the songbirds who love to eat them! Reptiles have been emerging from winter hibernation a tad early with the warmer days. I have seen zebra-tailed, ornate tree, and desert spiny lizards on warm afternoons in late February. I have already seen a desert kingsnake and western diamondback rattlesnake this spring at the Wetlands, so remember to watch where you step and stay on the trails!

Winter rarities at the Wetlands included three Inca Doves, Cassin's Kingbird, Hutton's Vireo, Western Bluebirds, and the occasional flyover Lawrence's Goldfinches. The real rarity star this winter was an often-confiding, immature Chestnut-sided Warbler—hundreds of birders were able to see this rare visitor that normally winters in Central America. While not flagged as rare, a Harris's Hawk that showed up in late December was a pleasant surprise. This species was only reported a few times in 2024, and this individual was practically posing on the telephone poles at the park entrance several days this winter! A Loggerhead Shrike I spotted on February 5 was unexpected as this common desert resident is seen at Sweetwater only a couple times a year.

In February, Applied Conservation Program Manager, Olya Weekly, and I checked on the status of all the nestboxes at Sweetwater and installed several new ones. We replaced two of our 14 Lucy's Warbler boxes and put up three new flycatcher boxes and the first two American Kestrel/ Western Screech-Owl boxes at Sweetwater! The flycatcher boxes will hopefully attract Ash-throated and/or Brown-crested Flycatchers, both of which nested at Sweetwater in 2024. All of these nestboxes are available in our Nature Shop, and spring is a great time to get them up for cavity nesters seeking a safe place to lay their eggs.

For the remainder of 2025, I will be leading two educational workshops each month at Sweetwater. There will be Brand New to Birding workshops for anyone just getting into birds and looking to learn some basic identification skills. The other monthly workshops will feature either a seasonal theme, or a specific family of birds we will identify. These include: Shorebirds of Sweetwater, Breeding Bird Behavior, Summer Secrets at Sweetwater, and Monsoon Birding. See page 26 for more info.

Tucson Bird Alliance habitat crews will continue restoration projects at Sweetwater this year. This work will include removal of invasive plants like African sumac and salt cedar that can out-compete our native trees. If you've walked around the northwest corner of Sweetwater this winter, you may have noticed some new native plants along the path. Back in December, our restoration crew planted agave, cholla, mesquite, acacia,

Northern Shovelers were present in good numbers this winter but will soon head north along with most of our waterfowl; A Great Horned Owl was resting right at the entrance to Sweetwater one day this winter. This owl is hopefully on a nest somewhere now! The resident female bobcat at Sweetwater taking a mid day nap under mesquite.



# LOOKING FORWARD TO 2025

and even a young saguaro in this drier slope bordering the wetlands. Increased native plant diversity here will help increase bird diversity, especially for desert species that are lacking at Sweetwater.

We are also looking to increase school field trip programs at Sweetwater in 2025. Our first school program of the year was in February as 35 high school students visited the wetlands and used binoculars for the first time. One student was especially excited about birding saying, "This is cool, I never thought watching birds would be so fun! It's also really relaxing, like I'm not stressed at all being out here." To me that sums up so much of the appeal of birding, especially in stressful times. Birding allows us to be present and appreciate beauty while out immersed in nature.

If you are interested in helping with Sweetwater field trips, please reach out to Volunteer Coordinator Alexis Stark at [ASTARK@TUCSONBIRDS.ORG](mailto:ASTARK@TUCSONBIRDS.ORG). If you are a teacher (or know one) interested in organizing a field trip to Sweetwater Wetlands, please email me at [APATIA@TUCSONBIRDS.ORG](mailto:APATIA@TUCSONBIRDS.ORG).



A pair of Hooded Mergansers visited one glorious day this winter; A couple Black-crowned Night-Herons have been roosting by day at Sweetwater. Usually they are well concealed in the willows but this immature heron is out in the open occasionally.



Alex Patia  
Sweetwater Wetlands Coordinator  
[apatia@tucsonbirds.org](mailto:apatia@tucsonbirds.org)



A Cactus Wren on one of the few chollas at Sweetwater; Our restoration crews are planting more cactus to support our desert species; Hanging a nestbox in the wetlands, Olya Weekley; A female Costa's Hummingbird in a rare moment of stillness. All photos by Alex Patia unless noted otherwise.



# TRANSFORMING HABITAT AT THE PATON CENTER AND BEYOND

The Paton Center for Hummingbirds has been buzzing with activity lately. In addition to the spring migration of birds and snowbirds alike, and our ongoing infrastructure improvements, Tucson Bird Alliance's Restoration Crew and Invasive Plants Strike Team have been chugging along on grounds improvements and other exciting new projects.

Our New Parcel behind the Paton house has been transformed from what it was two years ago—primarily a Johnsongrass and vinca forest—into a usable and enjoyable space for humans and wildlife alike. Our new half-mile loop trail has attracted birders, recreators, javelina, turkeys, and deer. New viewing areas, complete with concrete benches, provide opportunities for rest and observation, overlooking three spots along Sonoita Creek and a sacaton planting area. Our Restoration Crew (Rodd, Dan, Ivy, and Nick) is also constructing new shade structures that will be dotted around the New Parcel, some over benches and some standalone. Be on the lookout for a trail extension constructed in collaboration with the Dirtbags of Patagonia, the community volunteer group who built our existing Cuckoo Corridor and New Parcel trails.

The start of 2025 marked the end of two major two-year grants that funded habitat restoration work at the Paton Center and which provided the catalyst to restart our habitat volunteer program. Volunteers provided vital help in managing Johnsongrass throughout 2023–2024 in support of these projects. Since Johnsongrass is a persistent issue, and since we have so valued the community building opportunities these events have provided, we are continuing and expanding the program in 2025. The Paton Center Habitat Ambassadors will meet twice a month in cooler months and once a month in the summer to help not only with Johnsongrass management, but also with trail maintenance, irrigation work, meadow improvements, and grounds maintenance. We have already been hard at work in 2025 staying on top of emerging Johnsongrass, vinca, and horehound in the new parcel.

Volunteers are also supporting a new and very exciting US Forest Service Community Wildfire Defense Grant that our Forestry Program received to help monitor fire risk and control fuel load in Santa Cruz County over the next five years. All of our field staff have been active on this project and we are excited about the wildfire resilience impacts it will have on the ecosystems and communities of the greater Patagonia area.

Like many organizations at this time, we have been impacted by recent hits to federal funding. While this threatens the work we do broadly, it has also inspired us to hone in and focus on the tangible things we can do right now. We have found strength and resilience in the continued support from our volunteers, partners, funders, and members of our staff—many people have taken comfort in getting their hands dirty at the Paton Center. We hope you can join us soon in whatever capacity, whether it be for birding, volunteering, or observing Tom Brown running around managing septic installs. In any case, thanks for your support!

Join us in volunteering at [TUCSONBIRDS.ORG/VOLUNTEER](https://TUCSONBIRDS.ORG/VOLUNTEER) or by scanning this QR code.



Cally Wilken  
Watershed Restoration Program Manager  
[cwilken@tucsonbirds.org](mailto:cwilken@tucsonbirds.org)



Volunteer habitat ambassadors in the new parcel, Alexis Stark;  
Planting in the Cuckoo Corridor, Ivy Ilkay;  
Restoration crew with newly installed bench, Cally Wilken

Tucson Bird Alliance  
**Paton Center  
for Hummingbirds**



# WINTER WORK AND CELEBRITY BIRDS IN PATAGONIA



It's been a very busy spring here at the Paton Center for Hummingbirds. We have broken ground on our new septic system for the house, casita, and the two yet-to-be-built public restrooms near the new Birding Trail, and installed a new roof. The crew and I have been excavating in the backyard, looking for water pipes since there are no plans or paperwork for the site—everything we dig up has been quite the mystery!

Despite the noise from our equipment, Violet-crowned, Anna's, and Broad-billed Hummingbirds have been plentiful. In addition, we have migrants such as Rufous and Broad-tailed Hummingbirds making appearances. Lazuli Buntings and Eastern and Western Bluebirds are coming for drinks every morning, and the Fox and White-throated Sparrows that spent the winter are still showing up in the brush piles in the backyard.

I would be remiss not to mention the new celebrity bird that showed up this winter: an American Woodcock! Hundreds of bird-loving folks have shown up to see this second ever Arizona record bird just down the road from the Paton Center at the "cut bank" spot. The American Woodcock is

slightly larger than our more common and very similar Wilson's Snipe, has a very orange-buffy belly and breast, and is exceptionally secretive in its normal range east of the Mississippi.

Also this winter, we have had students from the University of Arizona using mist nets to capture birds and check them for ticks. Every caught bird also gets a leg band as part of the tracking system. It is quite common now for one of our guests to spot a bird flashing a little bling on its leg—pretty cool! White-crowned Sparrows, Canyon and Abert's Towhees, Northern Cardinals, Curve-billed Thrashers, and even our lone Fox Sparrow have been banded and seen in the yard recently.

On behalf of myself, our amazing crew, and some of the best volunteers ever, we welcome you to visit the Paton Center for Hummingbirds.

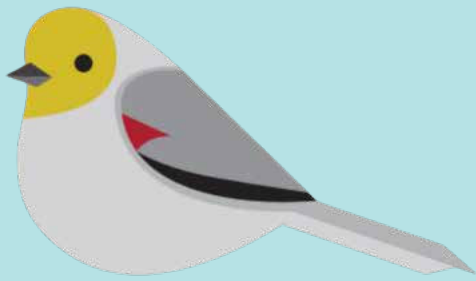
Tom Brown  
Site Manager  
Paton Center for Hummingbirds  
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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: American Woodcock; Curve-billed Thrasher with band; Fox Sparrow; White-crowned Sparrow, photos by Tom Brown; Western Bluebird, David Kreidler; Rufous Hummingbird, Mick Thompson



# Tucson Bird Alliance



## BIRDATHON 2025

**APRIL 1–30**

**Birdathon is happening now,  
create your team today!**

**THE 2025 BIRDATHON** is your chance to enjoy birds while raising critical funds to support the mission of Tucson Bird Alliance. It's fun and easy to participate—visit [TUCSONBIRDS.ORG/BIRDATHON](https://tucsonbirds.org/birdathon) to get started or contact Diana Rosenblum at [drosenblum@tucsonbirds.org](mailto:drosenblum@tucsonbirds.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**, including Big Day, Grand Champions, and more!

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

Never done a Birdathon or want new ideas to make your Birdathon the best yet? Watch the video workshop!



**SUPPORT A BIRDATHON  
TEAM TODAY!**

**WEDNESDAY, MAY 20, 5:30 PM**

### **BIRDATHON WRAP UP PARTY at Three Canyon Beer and Wine Garden**

Celebrate another successful Birdathon! Enjoy food and drink while we share Birdathon stories and hand out prizes.

**[TUCSONBIRDS.ORG/BIRDATHON](https://tucsonbirds.org/birdathon)**



Verdin, David Kreidler

# SOUTHEAST ARIZONA BIRDING FESTIVAL

HOSTED BY TUCSON BIRD ALLIANCE

Join us this August as we celebrate the diversity of bird life in Southeast Arizona and inspire each other to deepen our commitment to the birds and places we love. You'll have the opportunity to join in a myriad of events, including:

- Specialized field trips designed to find the most sought after birds of the Sky Islands and Sonoran Desert.
- Bird photography workshops and opportunities to borrow the latest gear from our camera and optic 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:



David Lindo, a broadcaster, writer, speaker, educator, and bird tour leader, best known as "The Urban Birder." Join David on a bird outing, or attend the culmination banquet on Saturday evening for a festive evening and his talk, *A World of Urban Birds*.



Adam Cayton-Holland, a national touring comic who has appeared on Conan, WTF, The Late Late Show, and many others, and who is also a birder! His show at 191 Toole on Friday will be a "can't miss" event!



Tiffany Kersten, who completed a Lower 48 States Big Year in 2021 with the goal of 700 species and is committed to raising awareness of women's safety in the outdoors. Her talk on Thursday, *Birdie Big Year: Elevating Women Birders*, is an inspirational message for us all.

## AUGUST 6-10, 2025

Registration opens Tuesday, April 29  
SEE THE SCHEDULE AND REGISTER AT  
[TUCSONBIRDS.ORG/FESTIVAL](https://TUCSONBIRDS.ORG/FESTIVAL)

Held at the DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel at Reid Park

PRESENTED BY

ZEISS



Elegant Trogon, Roger van Gelder



# BEST PLANTS FOR A BUDDING BIRD GARDEN

If you're a new birder, perhaps you're also just starting your own bird garden. What plants might give you the most birds for your buck? Different birds have different dining preferences. Hummingbirds, orioles, and Verdins fancy nectar. Quail, doves, cardinals, finches, and sparrows enjoy seed. Thrashers, mockingbirds, and Phainopeplas delight in fruits and berries. So when planning your bird garden, it's important to provide plants that offer up these various options. Here are my top choices for each.



## NECTAR

The hands-down favorite for hummingbirds, Verdins, butterflies, and a plethora of pollinating insects is the Baja fairy duster (*Calliandra californica*). Plants grow slowly to 5' tall and wide, providing good cover in addition to stunning flowers. Scarlet, tassel-like blooms are magnets for hummers, and the leaves are feasted upon by the caterpillars of Ceraunus Blue and Marine Blue butterflies. Plant in full sun, or silhouette against a warm wall, and you may be rewarded with year-round blooms. No pruning necessary unless damaged by frost.



## SEEDS

You can't beat brittlebush (*Encelia farinosa*) for seed. These native shrubs with silvery green leaves produce prolific yellow, daisy-like flowers. Flowers are followed by copious amounts of seed, providing fodder for many critters. It's wise to not deadhead. Leaving the dried flower heads (with seeds) intact ensures food for your birds and small mammals, and also allows for re-seeding and future generations of plants. Plants grow moderately fast, mounding to 3–4' high and wide. Mass several together for a glorious spring show.



## FRUIT

Fruits of the native Engelmann prickly pear (*Opuntia engelmannii*) are devoured by birds, mammals, and lizards. Plants form spreading mounds 3–10' high and 8' wide. Flashy yellow flowers attract many pollinators and are followed by green 2–3" long fruits that ripen to red in late summer. Fleshy and filled with seeds, the ripened fruits provide moisture and nutrition to many creatures—from doves, woodpeckers, thrashers, finches, cardinals, and hummers to ground squirrels, rabbits, lizards, coyotes, and javelina. These plants make interesting accents in the landscape and can function as barriers; however, beware of planting too close to paths or patios as their spines are wicked.



Lynn Hassler  
Green Gardeners Volunteer Captain  
Historic Y



Fairy duster; Brittlebush; Prickly Pear, photos by Lynn Hassler

# GUIDING NEW BIRDERS: HOW VOLUNTEERS HELP YOU TAKE FLIGHT

At Tucson Bird Alliance, our dedicated volunteers play a vital role in welcoming new bird watchers and fostering a love for birds and conservation.

**Nature Shop Volunteers** provide visitors with guidance on local hotspots and bird-friendly practices. They also help new birders find resources and useful gear such as field guides, binoculars, and bird feeders. Additionally, our wonderful library—a great resource for new and experienced bird watchers alike—is maintained through the hard work of our volunteers.

**Paton Center Birding Ambassadors** are invaluable to those eager to learn about hummingbirds and the unique birdlife of Patagonia. Our passionate volunteers share identification tips, naturalist insights, and conservation knowledge. They often inspire visitors to become members or take action to protect birds.

**Outreach Team Volunteers** bring birding to the community by running information tables at festivals, school STEM events, and public gatherings. Their hard work is instrumental in introducing new people to our field trip opportunities and conservation projects such as bird-safe buildings, urban habitat restoration, and bird monitoring surveys.

**Field Trip Leaders** make bird watching accessible and fun by leading free bird walks at hotspots all over Southeast Arizona. These volunteers create engaging outdoor experiences, helping participants connect with birds and nature firsthand.

We are incredibly grateful for all of our volunteers, who work both behind the scenes and in public-facing roles. Their passion and dedication continue to inspire people to enjoy and protect birds and their habitats.

If you are interested in participating in any of these wonderful volunteer groups, contact me at [ASTARK@TUCSONBIRDS.ORG](mailto:ASTARK@TUCSONBIRDS.ORG).



Alexis Stark  
Volunteer & Engagement Coordinator  
[astark@tucsonbirds.org](mailto:astark@tucsonbirds.org)



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Paton Center Birding Ambassador volunteers Jill Johnson, Donna Bazzo, and Carolyn Smith at the Paton Center BBQ; Volunteer field trip leaders at the Southeast Arizona Birding Festival; Outreach volunteers Linda and Kirt Stitt at Wings Over Willcox; Paton Center Birding Ambassadors Carolyn Smith and JoAnn Smith; Nature Shop volunteer Sherry Massie and Alexis Stark at Tubac Hawk Watch





Find details and registration for events and workshops  
 at [TUCSONBIRDS.ORG/EVENTS](https://TUCSONBIRDS.ORG/EVENTS) and for field trips  
 at [TUCSONBIRDS.ORG/FIELDTRIPS](https://TUCSONBIRDS.ORG/FIELDTRIPS).

April 1–14

**SPRING NATIVE PLANT SALE**

(ONLINE at [TUCSONBIRDSTORE.ORG](https://TUCSONBIRDSTORE.ORG))

Order your plants online and pick up at the Nature Shop April 18 & 19.

Saturday, April 26, Field Workshops

**BRAND NEW TO BIRDING AT SWEETWATER WETLANDS**

with Alex Patia

Also offered May 3, June 14, and July 26

\$35/member; \$50/non-member

This field workshop is meant for those of you just getting into birding and eager to develop your skills and knowledge. We'll do a short walk around the wetlands and cover how to find birds, bird behavior, identifying birds by shape and voice, migration, optics, field guides, and so much more. The entire workshop will be conducted while we are birding. Limited to 10 participants.

May 1 & 3, In-person Workshop and Field Trip

**IT'S ALL IN THE FAMILY: BIRDING BY EAR 101** with Homer Hansen

\$125/member, \$175/non-member

Join local bird expert Homer Hansen for this 2-part ID workshop focusing on bird song! This introductory workshop goes beyond using apps for identification and will introduce you to the basic framework for learning the voices of our master singers.

Sunday, May 11, Field Trip

**EVENING AT CALIFORNIA GULCH FOR BUFF-COLLARED**

**NIGHTJARS** with Tim Helentjaris

Registration fee: \$35/member, \$50/non-member

Visit this legendary birding spot just miles from the border to look for Five-striped Sparrow, Least Grebe, and Buff-collared Nightjar. We'll do some late day birding, have a picnic dinner while we wait for it to get dark, and see what night birds we can cajole but particularly target the nightjar. Limited to 11 participants.

Friday, May 16, Field Trip

**PEPPERSAUCE CANYON** with Luke Safford

\$35/member, \$50/non-member

A fairly under-birded canyon on the north side of the Catalinas, Peppersauce offers great habitat for a number of mid-elevation birds including Acorn Woodpecker, Mexican Jay, Bridled Titmouse, Scott's Oriole, and possibly Montezuma quail! Limited to 10 participants.

Tuesday, May 20, In-person Social Event

**BIRDATHON WRAP UP PARTY**

See details on page 22.

Saturday, May 24

**ADVANCED BIRDING SERIES: BIRD BREEDING BEHAVIOR**

with Alex Patia

Monday, June 9, Field Trip

**EVENING IN MADERA CANYON WITH NIGHT-OWLING**

with Tim Helentjaris

Registration fee: \$35/member, \$50/non-member

We're going to dodge the summer heat, do some late afternoon birding, enjoy a picnic dinner, then work our way up the canyon stopping at different locations to look for night birds. Limited to 11 participants.

Tuesday, June 10, Virtual Presentation

**BEST PLACES TO GO BIRDING THIS SUMMER** with Luke Safford

Although it is hot, the summer season can offer some of the best birding of the whole year. We'll explore new areas to escape the heat and see some fun birds!

Friday, June 20, In-person Social Event

**BIRDS 'N' BINGO** at Bawker Bawker Cider House

Saturday, June 21

**ADVANCED BIRDING SERIES: SUMMER SECRETS** with Alex Patia

Tuesday, June 24, Virtual Presentation

**PHOTOGRAPHY FOR CONSERVATION**

with Soren Goldsmith, Presented by Hunt's Photo & Video

In this session, conservation photographer Soren Goldsmith will share his journey and expertise in using photography to protect ecosystems and inspire action. This webinar will equip you with the tools and inspiration to tell compelling photo stories that drive conservation efforts.

June 27–29, Field Trip

**INDULGENT BIRDING!** With Kathe Anderson

This is a three-day adventure focusing on birds in the mornings and evenings with afternoons free to relax at our lodging at Casa de San Pedro or explore the many natural and cultural resources of the area. We'll visit the Paton Center for Hummingbirds, Ramsey Canyon, and Ash Canyon. Hummingbird banding is planned for Friday.

Saturday, June 28, Field Trip

**WEST SLOPES OF THE CHIRICAHUAS EXPEDITION**

with Luke Safford

\$50/member, \$100/non-member

This will be a full-day field trip to make the most of our time in the wild Chiricahua Mountains, leaving Tucson at 4 am and arriving back around 6 pm. We'll explore Turkey Creek, including Johnny Ringo's gravesite, Sycamore Campground, the old Crescent-chested Warbler stakeout hotspot, and more. On the way back we'll stop in Willcox at Cochise Lake and add to our bird species list.

Saturday, July 19

**ADVANCED BIRDING SERIES: MONSOON BIRDING**

with Alex Patia



Investment Protection • Life Care • Bountiful Amenities

be  
yourself



## AN APPROACH TO SENIOR LIVING SO UNEXPECTED, IT'S TURNING HEADS

Just when you thought you had senior living all figured out, discover why Splendido stands out from the crowd. Well-appointed homes and services to suit your style—all in a dynamic Life Plan Community that's uniquely designed with the future in mind, so you can live life with confidence.

*We're proud to sponsor the Tucson Bird Alliance!*

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Oro Valley



Visit [SplendidoTucson.com](https://SplendidoTucson.com) for floor plans, videos, and more.



# WOO HOOT!

## BIRDY NEWS BITES WORTH CELEBRATING

### CELEBRATING CYNTHIA PRUETT!

The first time I met Cynthia Pruett, she was leading a volunteer trail maintenance crew at the Mason Center. She helped move rocks to widen the trail and showed us how to prune mesquites and chollas encroaching on the path. At 87, she was strong, full of knowledge and ideas, and now three years later she's still all of those things.

Cynthia has been a member of the Audubon Society most of her life. She served on the Board of Directors in Fairfax, VA, for six years before retiring to Tucson in 2007. Her last term with the Tucson Bird Alliance Board just ended after nine years, four of which she was Board President. She has also been a long-time member of the National Audubon Society Board.

Cynthia has taken on more volunteer roles with our chapter than most people, serving as a birding trip leader, event coordinator, fundraiser, and ambassador. Shortly after joining the chapter, she launched beginner bird classes, organized field trips

to observe Sandhill Cranes and wintering raptors, and oversaw the Mason Center Ironwood Festival for several years.

Her most significant contributions have been with the Paton and Mason Centers. Cynthia played a key role in negotiating the transfer of the Paton's house and property to our organization and was a major donor to make this possible. She has taken a stewardship role for the Mason Center, where she organizes the volunteer garden crew, designs and plants native gardens, and seeks funds for maintenance projects. The garden is vibrant with blooming plants and birds, serving as a tribute to her efforts.

Although she has completed her Board service, she isn't going anywhere—except for a few upcoming international nature and birding trips. She will continue to be a Tucson Bird Alliance ambassador, fundraiser, and an inspiration for living well and sharing generously with the local community. Thank you, Cynthia!



Cynthia Pruett, Milly Lierman



Karen Howe  
Tucson Bird Alliance  
Board President

## GIFTS IN HONOR OR MEMORY OF

In memory of Barb Jackson from Linda Comerci

In memory of Ben Tuttle from Turner Martin

In memory of Betty & Decker Orr from Elizabeth Orr

In honor of Betty Bengtson from Matthew Bengtson

In memory of Betty Berenson from Heather Borman

In memory of Carol Froning from Billie & Don Froning

In memory of Claire Thomas from Craig Thomas

In memory of David Taylor from Joan Donnelly

In memory of Dot & Joe Betenato from Lynn Kalert

In honor of Ewan & Alder Cantor from Amy & Howard Cantor

In memory of Helen Seng from Joe Seng

In memory of Imojean Wilcox from Wade Wilcox

In memory of Jeannie W. from Aaron Watler

In memory of Jerry Weintraub from Holli Horak

In honor of Jim Hoagland from Barbara Nicolich, Gordon Moro, Janet Kukulinsky, and Laurie McCoy & Thomas Campbell

In memory of Jo & Sammy & Northway from Laura Bolyard

In memory of Joanne Rodgers from Bill Rodgers

To John Dawson from Julee Dawson

In honor of John Schaefer from Randall Kliman

In honor of Kathy Jacobs from Christy & Gene and the El Jardin Garden Club

In memory of Kelaine Nick from Colleen Kokubun

To Mark Peterson from Arleen Peterson

In memory of Mary Lou Grimm from Liza Strub & Chuck Coxe

In honor of Meagan Bethel from Kathleen Bethel

To Michael Joyal from Cindy Joyal

In honor of Rob Rutledge from Reta & Rob Rutledge

In memory of Sam Phillips from Irene & William Barg

In memory of Steve Suffecool from Roxanne Suffecool

In memory of Teddy Jansen from Sarah Lemoine

In honor of Terry Tempest Williams from Joanne Dornan & David Taylor

In memory of Wayne Collins from Ellen Blackstone



Painted Redstart, Shawn Cooper



Throughout this issue, I hope we have sparked joy and made you excited to become a better birder. Our organization's mission though is to inspire you to not only enjoy birds but to protect them as well. To truly safeguard birds and their habitats, we need action. One of the most impactful ways you can help is by donating to Tucson Bird Alliance.

You might wonder if your contribution is enough or if it will make a real difference. The answer is simple: every gift, no matter the size, plays a crucial role in protecting birds. Our efforts rely on collective support. Just as each new bird sighting strengthens a birder's confidence and passion, every donation adds up to meaningful actions that protect birds and their habitats.

Your support funds habitat restoration, research, and engagement programs. It enables us to address urgent threats like climate change, habitat loss, and declining bird populations.

So, if you've found joy in these pages, and are looking forward to being a better birder, we ask that you also take part in protecting birds and their habitats. Trust that your contribution, no matter the size, will make a difference for the lives of birds in Southeast Arizona.

Please use the enclosed remit envelope to send cash/checks, or visit:  
[TUCSONBIRDS.ORG/DONATE](https://tucsonbirds.org/donate).

Thank you,  
Erica Freese

*P.S. Consider passing this magazine along to someone who is a new/potential birder! Or consider giving them a Gift Membership using the QR code below. The more people we reach, the more of an impact we have.*



Erica Freese  
Director of Development & Communications  
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# BRING MORE BIRDS AND WILDLIFE TO YOUR YARD!

## Habitat at Home Restoration Services: your go-to team for an ideal naturescape



Let Tucson Bird Alliance's Habitat at Home Restoration Team help you with:

- Custom native landscape design and installation
- Rainwater harvesting and water features
- Nestboxes and tortoise burrows
- Habitat maintenance and more!



### **NEW! Sign up for our Habitat Subscription Service**

After an initial planning session, you'll receive four native plants and a two-hour visit for hands-on care, guidance, and planting—every month! Let us help you cultivate a sustainable, vibrant habitat—one step at a time.

To start the conversation or to sign up, please see: [TUCSONBIRDS.ORG/RESTOSERVICESTO](http://TUCSONBIRDS.ORG/RESTOSERVICESTO)

*All proceeds directly support our programs and mission to protect and enhance local habitats.*