

VERMILION FLYCATCHER

TUCSON BIRD ALLIANCE

Summer 2025 | Vol 70 No 3



COLORS
OF THE
SONORAN
DESERT



TUCSONBIRDS.ORG
Summer 2025 | Vol 70 No 3

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.

TUCSON BIRD ALLIANCE

300 E University Blvd. #120, Tucson, AZ 85705
TEL 520-629-0510 · FAX 520-232-5477

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Vermilion Flycatcher Production Team

Matt Griffiths, *Editor-in-Chief*

Melina Lew, *Design*

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ON THE COVER

Broad-billed Hummingbird by Mick Thompson. Mick is a volunteer photographer/videographer for the National Audubon Society and spends half the year in Tucson.

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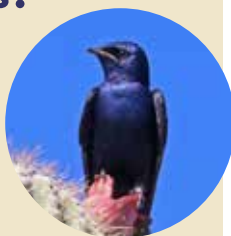
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Have You Seen Desert Purple Martins?

Tucson Bird Alliance and partners
are studying these birds that nest in
saguaro in summer

If you see Desert Purple Martins at a saguaro
please enter the sighting into the free
iNaturalist app, do an eBird checklist, or
share details by emailing Jennie at:
JMACFARLAND@TUCSONBIRDS.ORG.

Learn more about the project at:
TUCSONBIRDS.ORG/PURPLEMARTIN



Interested in being more involved with Tucson Bird Alliance?

Tucson Bird Alliance is looking to expand its Board of Directors membership this fall. Do you have a passion for our work and experience in accounting, finance, and fundraising? This volunteer position might be for you! Experience with nonprofit organizations is a plus.

Board members champion the organization and its mission by acting as ambassadors and engaging the community to expand members, partners, and connections. Board members provide advice, expertise, and assistance in developing, implementing, and leading the organization. All positions require 5–10 hours per month and the ability to attend events.

Contact Karen Howe, Board President, for more information at:
KARENHOWEPDX@GMAIL.COM.

SEASONS OF COLOR



Broad-billed Hummingbird on ocotillo, Ned Harris

The Sonoran Desert, I'm told, has five seasons: Fall, Winter, Spring, Foresummer Drought, and Summer Monsoon. What a gift to experience the drastic changes that monsoon brings with it, especially after enduring the punishing June temps, the perpetually parched skin and hair, and the very early and very late dog walks.

As much as I love monsoon season (I live for it, really), what I love most about life in the desert are what I like to think of as the micro-seasons. The synthesis of conditions allowing for our more ephemeral desert flora to bloom, or even just to sprout leaves. Ocotillo season, *Zinnia* season, *Oenothera* (primrose) season, *Penstemon* season, *Calochortus* (mariposa lily) season... and with each subtly shifting cycle, a new wave of color.

After a few years of observing the mind-bogglingly rich diversity of plant life and their adaptations here, I'm on a mission to fill every inch of my little city yard with native plants, trying my hand at fostering the full spectrum of

our desert seasons in my own backyard. Many a plant has seen its demise from my trial and error, but I'm doing a few things right, and the lizards, grasshoppers, butterflies, beetles, bees, and birds are moving right in.

In the face of an unrelenting outpouring of difficult, often gut-wrenching news and devastating blows to environmental policy, conservation, and climate science, planting native plants feels like an act of personal sovereignty, defiance, and care. And, on the most basic level, an act of self-indulgence, to just sit back and enjoy the incredible colors of the desert, even in the most difficult seasons.

For Birds and People,



Melissa Fratello
Executive Director
mfratello@tucsonbirds.org

ALMANAC of BIRDS July to September

Summer is a great time of year to go farther afield and explore the wonderful (and cooler!) Sky Island mountain ranges that surround Tucson. The Huachuca Mountains are one of the best. Their eastern flanks contain multiple canyons that have many world-class and well-known birding hotspots that make the drive well worth it. The Madrean oak and pine woodlands found in these drainages are home to many of the rare hummingbirds, warblers, and flycatchers that birders seek out. An added bonus: there's always a chance at seeing a beautiful Montezuma Quail!



Matt Griffiths
Communications Coordinator
mgriffiths@tucsonbirds.org



RAMSEY CANYON

The Ramsey Canyon Preserve, managed by The Nature Conservancy, contains a spring-fed stream beneath high canyon walls that provides the canyon with a moist and cool environment perfect for visiting on a hot summer day. Among the 14 species of hummingbirds recorded here are the regularly occurring Black-chinned, Broad-tailed, Rivoli's, Violet-crowned, and Blue-throated Mountain-gem. The lush sycamore-lined creek is home to Elegant Trogon, Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher, Painted Redstart, and other Southeast Arizona specialty birds. A Flame-colored Tanager was spotted there this spring. Leaving the valley floor, trails can be hiked into the high country to find Red-faced, Grace's, and Olive Warblers, Buff-breasted Flycatcher, and mega-rarities such as the Tufted Flycatcher and Aztec Thrush in years past. Be aware that the Preserve is closed on Tuesdays and Wednesdays and has a limited parking area and hours of operation. Cost is \$8 per person.



MILLER CANYON

Another deep and lush canyon, Miller has been the site of several historic Southeast Arizona and national bird sightings, including twice hosting the single day US record of 14 hummingbird species! From the end of the road, choose between hiking up or down canyon, into coniferous forest or oak woodlands, respectively. The usual birds of these habitats are found here, but walking into the higher elevation forests of sycamore, maple, and fir gives a better chance of seeing the current pair of Flame-colored Tanagers or possibly a Mexican Spotted Owl. In years past, super-rare Aztec Thrush and Eared Quetzal were found, and the ABA area's first accepted record of Brown-backed Solitaire occurred here. You can also walk into Beatty's Guest Ranch (\$5 per person or spend the night!) and view the feeders where Plain-capped Starthroat and White-eared, Lucifer, and Berylline Hummingbirds have been regular visitors over the years.

CARR CANYON

Moving southward, Carr Canyon offers the only road access to the high country of the Huachuca Mountains. Make a stop at the picnic area at the bottom to sample the birds of the classic oak habitat found there. Seeing Mexican Jay, Bridled Titmouse, Hepatic Tanager, and Acorn and Arizona Woodpeckers would be a great way to start the journey. Be aware, the road past the picnic ground is dirt, tight and twisty, and often in pretty bad shape, but passenger cars are usually able to handle it if driven slowly. It's worth it! The views are amazing and at the top you enter ponderosa pine forest at 7,400 ft. Spend some time wandering in the two campgrounds there with very good chances of finding Spotted Towhee, Yellow-eyed Junco, Painted Redstart, Greater Pewee, and the rare Buff-breasted Flycatcher. For a big adventure, there is hiking access to Ramsey Canyon from the end of the road.



ASH CANYON

The final major canyon on the east side of the Huachuca Mountains is Ash, and it contains the beloved Ash Canyon Bird Sanctuary. Founded as the Ash Canyon B&B by Mary Jo Ballator, it is now run and has been improved by the Southeastern Arizona Bird Observatory. The site has an incredible array of seed and hummingbird feeders that attract many Madrean oak species such as Scott's Oriole, Arizona Woodpecker, and Hepatic Tanager. It's a well-known and reliable location for Lucifer Hummingbird and also gets Rivoli's and Broad-tailed Hummingbirds, and an occasional Blue-throated Mountain-gem. And there have been rare birds in years past—a Plain-capped Starthroat spent a couple summers there and a Yellow Grosbeak stuck around for several days! Tucson Bird Alliance was involved in the restoration and improvement of the site by planting native species, installing a wildlife pond, and more. Please note the site has limited parking and is closed Thursday mornings for garden maintenance.

OPPOSITE: Montezuma Quail, Greg Lavaty; ABOVE: Flame-colored Tanager, Peggy Steffens; Lucifer Hummingbird, Francis Morgan

BIRDING *the* RAINBOW

Southeast Arizona has no shortage of superbly colored birds to behold, from the Red-faced Warbler to the Costa's Hummingbird. Journey with us over the rainbow for a sampling of some of these species, or if you're short on time, simply view the rainbow in the male Painted Bunting!



Greg Lavaty

PAINTED BUNTING



Walter Ballero C.



Lois Manowitz



Matthew Studebaker

VERMILION FLYCATCHER

Tucson Bird Alliance's "fire-headed" mascot, this bird is impossible to overlook—the perfect outreach tool and ambassador for our organization.

SUMMER TANAGER

The male Summer Tanager is the only completely red bird in North America. The species is known for feeding on bees and wasps—it's also called "bee bird."

NORTHERN CARDINAL

Superstars of the bird world, Northern Cardinals are the perfect mix of color, sound, and style. It's no wonder they are the state bird of seven states.



RS2 Photography



Tom Brown

BULLOCK'S ORIOLE

Vibrant orange, this species is known for its melodic songs and impressive hanging nests—woven with spider silk and plant fibers.

BLACK-HEADED GROSBEAK

Giant finches, these birds can feed on monarch butterflies and do so in 8-day cycles—the time it takes them to eliminate the toxins from their systems.



Hemant Kishan



Lois Manowitz



© bryanjsmith

YELLOW WARBLER

This is the most common warbler in the US, and it's difficult to miss—males are bright yellow with reddish breast streaks, and they tend to sing often.

LESSER GOLDFINCH

This local backyard bird is an accomplished mimic. Males incorporate snippets of the songs of many other species, including rock squirrel!

SCOTT'S ORIOLE

Sometimes called the Yucca Oriole, this species is closely associated with this plant where it feeds on flower nectar and uses the fibers for its nests that hang from live yucca leaves.



Hemant Kishan



David Vanderslice



Alexandra MaxKenzie



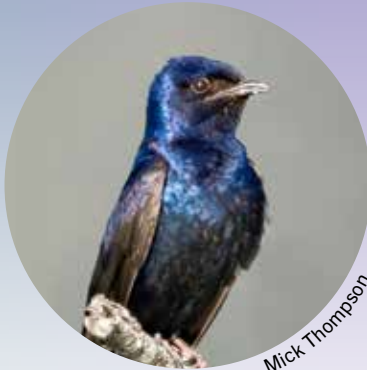
Dan Weisz



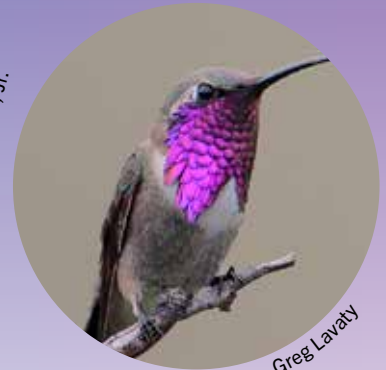
Shawn Cooper



Frederick Mitchell, Jr.



Mick Thompson



Greg Lavaty



Frederick Mitchell, Jr.

GREEN KINGFISHER

The little emerald beauty is a rare Southeast Arizona specialty bird that needs soft-sided, well vegetated banks in which to dig its burrow nest cavities.

BROAD-BILLED HUMMINGBIRD

One of the most spectacular hummingbirds in North America—a flying jewel!—this beautiful hummer is common in urban Tucson.

MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD

Found in Southeast Arizona in winter, this bluebird hunts insects kestrel-like from perches or while hovering, unlike most thrushes.

BLUE GROSBEAK

This vibrant blue bird uses its large, triangular bill to easily feed on large seeds and insects—preferring mantids, grasshoppers, and cicadas.

MEXICAN JAY

Flocks of this species are some of the most socially complex in the bird world. They rely heavily on stores of pine nuts and acorns, and a single bird might cache 7,000 acorns a year!

VIOLET-CROWNED HUMMINGBIRD

The reason for the Paton Center's existence, more people have first laid eyes on this species there than anywhere else on the planet.

PURPLE MARTIN

Our special desert subspecies of martin utilizes cavities in the very largest saguaro cactuses and its breeding is timed to take advantage of our summer rainy season.

LUCIFER HUMMINGBIRD

This tiny, sheartail hummingbird is found mostly in Chihuahuan desert canyons and hillsides where agave, ocotillo, sotol, and cacti dominate.

VARIED BUNTING

A mind-bending mix of shimmering colors, males are mostly a purple-reddish blue color with a red eye ring, throat, breast, and nape, and a tidy black mask.

The Colorful Feathers

From the iridescent flashes of hummingbirds to the soft earth tones of a Curve-billed Thrasher, the birds of Southeast Arizona show off a wide variety of colors. These captivating feather colors are a mix of biology, diet, physics, and evolutionary strategy and are created by two processes: pigments and structural coloration.

Pigments are chemical compounds that absorb certain wavelengths of light and reflect others, producing specific colors. Birds have three main types of pigments in their feathers: melanins, carotenoids, and porphyrins.

Melanin is the most common pigment in birds and is responsible for shades of black, brown, and gray. Melanins are produced by the bird's body and serve multiple functions: they color feathers, provide resistance to wear, and offer some protection from the sun's ultraviolet rays. The Montezuma Quail is an excellent example of how melanin is used to create intricate patterns and earthy camouflage, helping the birds blend into the forest floor, evading predators and birders' eyes!

Melanin also contributes to the durability of feathers. Birds like the Common Raven, which live in rugged environments such as mountain cliffs and desert scrub, benefit from melanin's strengthening properties. Their black feathers are not just for looks—they're built to last.

Carotenoids are responsible for reds, oranges, and yellows in bird plumage. Unlike melanins, birds cannot synthesize carotenoids themselves; they must obtain them from their food. Insects, berries, seeds, and other plant materials provide the raw ingredients for carotenoid-based coloration. The male Hepatic Tanager shows off warm reddish plumage derived from carotenoids in its insect-rich diet. Similarly, the male Vermilion Flycatcher's vibrant red color often reflects the bird's health and foraging success—making color a crucial trait for both of these species during breeding season.

Porphyrins are lesser-known pigments that can create reds, greens, and browns, and often fluoresce under ultraviolet light. These pigments are more fragile and tend to break down in sunlight, which is why they're often found in nocturnal or crepuscular birds. The Common Poorwill may carry porphyrin pigments that give subtle reddish hues, though these are often invisible to the human eye. When viewed under UV light, porphyrins can reveal hidden patterns useful in research and species identification.



Hepatic Tanager, Matthew Studebaker; Montezuma Quail, Hemant Kishan

s of Southeast Arizona



Painted Redstart, Shawn Cooper; Broad-billed Hummingbird, Mick Thompson;
Blue Grosbeak, Shawn Cooper

While pigments are responsible for many bird colors, some of the most striking hues—especially blues and iridescent shades—come not from chemicals but from microscopic structures in the feathers that manipulate light. This is structural coloration, and it's especially evident in the many hummingbirds of Southeast Arizona. The Broad-billed Hummingbird shimmers with metallic green and electric blue, colors not created by pigment but by light reflecting off nanostructures in the feather barbs. As the bird moves, the angle of light changes, and so does the color we see—a dazzling display of physics. These iridescent feathers play a major role in territorial disputes and courtship displays, catching sunlight in just the right way to impress mates or deter rivals. The Blue Grosbeak's rich, dark blue color also comes from the structure of the feathers which scatters short-wavelength blue light, while absorbing the rest. This creates the illusion of blue without any actual blue pigment.

The purpose of all this color is deeply rooted in evolution and ecology. Ground-nesting birds like the Gambel's Quail or Lesser Nighthawk rely on subdued, mottled colors to mirror the arid, rocky terrain and stay hidden from predators. Bright colors in species like the Painted Redstart or Elegant Trogon are used to impress potential mates and often reflect health and genetic fitness. Many brightly colored birds, especially males, also use their plumage as visual signals in defending their territories. For example, the flash of a hummingbird's gorget can be enough to send another male flying.

In a region where desert meets mountain and temperate meets tropical, it's only fitting that the birds of Southeast Arizona display their colors as vividly and uniquely as the landscape itself. Whether a hummingbird's throat catching sunlight or a camouflaged quail slipping through the grass, each feather tells a story of evolution, environment, and survival.



Matt Griffiths
Communications Coordinator
mgriffiths@tucsonbirds.org

ENTICING POLLINATORS WITH COLOR



Flowering plants reproduce through pollination. For pollination to occur, pollen grains from one flower must be carried to another flower of the same type. Since plants are relatively immobile, they require a little help for this to happen. It's estimated that some 75% of all plants require animals for pollination. Animal pollinators include birds (primarily hummingbirds), bats, and butterflies, moths, bees, and other insects. It's important to realize that flowers have evolved shapes, conspicuous colors, and enticing fragrances over millions of years in order to attract pollinators and to ensure reproductive survival. The reward for pollinators has always been food and nutrients.

Pollinators have their preferences. For example, flowers that attract butterflies tend to be brightly colored, have a sweet scent, are flat and easy to land on, and bloom during the day. Though not the most important plant pollinators, they are among the most conspicuous and beloved. Moth-pollinated blooms are nocturnal, often white, sometimes yellow, pink or greenish, and fragrant with long narrow tubes.

Hummingbird flowers are diurnal, tubular in shape with vivid colors (red, pink, orange) and abundant nectar. Bees, the most important pollinators on earth, like day-flowering plants with landing platforms. They are especially fond of blue and yellow. The hairiness of bees is one reason they are so effective: pollen readily adheres to their hairy bodies. Flies (everyone's favorite) tend to like shallow, stinky, dark brown or purple flowers.

Nectar-feeding bats are some of our most evocative pollinators. They seek musky-scented, white/pale green flowers that are open during the nighttime hours. Two species are important pollinators in our area. Lesser Long-nosed and Mexican Long-tongued Bats migrate north from Mexico in spring, timing their migration to the flowering/fruiting of their major food plants—columnar cacti such as saguaros, organ pipes, and cardons. On their return journeys in fall, they depend on agave blooms. Pollen sticks easily to the bats' long muzzles and brush-tipped tongues.

It's clear that native plant species provide native pollinators with the food to which they are most adapted. Embrace the hues of the Desert Southwest and plant some of these colorful natives in your landscape. By doing so, you will encourage native pollinators, keep plant communities healthy and productive, and help maintain our unique sense of place.



Lynn Hassler
*Green Gardeners Volunteer Captain
Historic Y*

Solitary bee on Fendler's globe mallow, Ned Harris; OPPOSITE: All photos by Lynn Hassler except saguaro by Francis Morgan



ENGELMANN PRICKLY PEAR, *Opuntia engelmannii*: Vibrant cup-shaped yellow flowers delight cactus bees.



INDIGO BUSH, *Dalea pulchra*: Rose, purple and white blooms are popular with bees and other insects. An added bonus: serves as a larval food plant for southern dogface and Reakirt's blue butterflies.



SAGUARO, *Carnegiea gigantea*: White funnel-shaped flowers smelling like overripe melons open in late afternoon, attracting bats and moths at night, and birds (White-winged Doves in particular), bees, and other insects the next day.



OCOTILLO, *Fouquieria splendens*: Flame-colored blooms beckon hummingbirds, orioles, Verdins, finches, carpenter and solitary bees, as well as many other insects.



SACRED DATURA, *Datura wrightii*: Large, white, trumpet-shaped flowers that bloom at night and have a strong sweet fragrance and are popular with hawkmoths.



SOUTHWESTERN CORAL BEAN, *Erythrina flabelliformis*: Gaudy upright spikes of lipstick red flowers are a magnet for hummingbirds.



GOODDING VERBENA, *Glandularia gooddingii*: Mounding masses of clustered pink to lavender blooms open day and night, attracting butterflies and moths.



FISHHOOK BARREL CACTUS, *Ferocactus wislizeni*: Day-blooming cup-shaped flowers are in variable shades of orange and pollinated by cactus bees.



DESERT WILLOW, *Chilopsis linearis*: Pink flowers attract hummingbirds, Verdins, orioles, House Finches, and many pollinating insects. A food plant for rustic sphinx moth.



TUFTED EVENING PRIMROSE, *Oenothera caespitosa*: Although many insects may visit these night-blooming white flowers, sphinx moths are the primary pollinators.



YELLOW BELLS, *Tecoma stans*: Cascading clusters of brilliant, lemon-yellow flowers attract hummingbirds, bumblebees, and carpenter bees.



GREEN GRASSLANDS OF SUMMER

Southeast Arizona is blessed with areas of rolling grassland that are a vibrant green during summers with hearty monsoon rainfall and turn golden yellow in the winter. Both Las Cienegas Important Bird Area (IBA) and San Rafael Grasslands IBA are excellent examples of Chihuahuan Desert Grassland ecosystems that provide habitat for many species of birds. Many birders venture into these grasslands in winter to observe raptors, pipits, and the Chestnut-collared Longspur, North America's fastest declining bird species.

After more than ten years of Tucson Bird Alliance surveying these grassland IBAs, a pattern has emerged regarding summer rains and the presence of longspurs the following winter. It follows logic that years with average or higher monsoon rainfall will result in abundant grass seeds later in the year. Such years make for exciting winter birding with many species taking advantage of this food source and our mild winters. Grassland birds, as a group, are the fastest declining birds in North America, which makes such prolific years even more special to surveyors and birders.

Summer is a truly spectacular time in these grasslands when a robust monsoon is in the cards. Vast expanses of vibrant green grasses are dotted with summer wildflowers. Two summer nesting sparrow species, the Botteri's Sparrow and Cassin's Sparrow, fill the humid air with their dynamic songs. Cassin's Sparrow is particularly charming as it flutters up high in the air and "skylarks" while enthusiastically singing its sweet, piercing song. Both of these sparrows nest within thick sacaton grass clumps and feed their young insects, which are abundant during the monsoon rains.

In the grassland drainages along the foothills of adjacent Sky Island mountain ranges one can encounter Western Yellow-billed Cuckoos (aka the "rain crow") giving their resonant, knocking call, reminiscent of blocks of wood banging together. They travel from South America



to take advantage of this verdant period. These birds are listed as Threatened under the Endangered Species Act, making their relatively high abundance in Southeast Arizona even more significant. There are many other charismatic birds to be found in the grasslands during the summer months. Blue Grosbeaks and Varied Buntings sit up high in small mesquites and sing enthusiastically. Grasshopper Sparrows give their buzzing, insect-like calls while hiding in the grass.

If you haven't been to the grasslands of Southeast Arizona during the summer, try it this year and witness one of the most exciting and surprising birding experiences of this region. It really is monsoon magic out there!

Jennie MacFarland
Director of Bird Conservation
jmacfarland@tucsonaudubon.org



San Rafael in summer, Jennie MacFarland; Botteri's Sparrow, Matthew Studebaker



Northern Cardinal; Queen butterfly; Yellow-billed Cuckoo; Baby pears; Blue Grosbeak; Indigo Bunting; Violet-crowned Hummingbird. All photos by Tom Brown.

Tucson Bird Alliance
**Paton Center
 for Hummingbirds**



LOOKING FOR ROY G. BIV AT THE PATON CENTER

I can't say that I was a great student in school, but one thing that has always stuck with me was from a great science teacher who taught us about Roy G. Biv, or ROYGBIV. For those of you who skipped class that day, ROYGBIV stands for the visible colors in the spectrum, or rainbow. Everyday these amazing colors pop out at me when I am walking the Paton Center yard, in the Richard Grand Memorial Meadow, or out on one of the birding trails. Let's take them one by one!

R is for the color red, which is represented several ways, but none more vividly than the male Northern Cardinal.

O is for orange, and to me, nothing marks the beginning of summer like our first queen butterflies!

Y is for yellow. We have a lot to pick from here! Yellow Warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat, and Common Yellowthroat to name a few. But the one bird that always thrills me is the Yellow-billed Cuckoo. They have now arrived back for the summer nesting season.

G is for green. Birds that I have seen in the yard that fall in the green part of the spectrum are Orange-crowned Warbler, Violet-green Swallow, and even a rare Green Kingfisher! That being said, can there be anything greener than the first baby pears of the season? This year looks to be a bumper crop.

B is for blue, and this one is so easy. We have a big wave of Blue Grosbeaks coming through the yard right now, and I can't help but smile every time I see one!

I is for indigo. This one is a bit more difficult, but once or twice a year, we get a visit from an Indigo Bunting!

V is for violet. I didn't save this one for last, but it's just so appropriate. Our little rock star, the mascot of the Paton Center for Hummingbirds, the Violet-crowned Hummingbird is without a doubt a great way to finish our stroll over the rainbow.

On behalf of our incredible volunteers, and staff, I look forward to your next visit, and I hope you take a few minutes to see if you can find your own version of Roy G. Biv!



Tom Brown
 Site Manager
 Paton Center for Hummingbirds
 tbrown@tucsonbirds.org

BETLES OF SOUTHEAST ARIZONA

Beetles are the most diverse group of organisms on the planet with over 400,000 described species and new ones being added to that total on an almost daily basis. They are found in nearly all terrestrial and many freshwater habitats. Beetles feed on nearly all types of organic matter. They can be predators, pollinators, parasites, decomposers, scavengers, and fungivores. In short, if an animal can do it, there is probably a beetle doing it.

Beetles are placed in the order Coleoptera (Greek for 'sheath wing'). The forewings (called elytra) are hard or leathery and protect the membranous hindwings. The elytra are moved out of the way for flight, which is powered by the hindwings.

They are characterized further by chewing mouthparts and complete metamorphosis—four stages in the life cycle (egg, larva, pupa, adult). Beetle larvae are varied in shape, but are often referred to as grubs. Like adult beetles, larvae are varied in habits and diet.

Beetles are everywhere. They can be found by day on flowers, foliage, and bare ground. They can be found under rocks, logs, and other objects. Some live in ponds and streams. Yet others are nocturnal and are attracted to lights at night.

While many beetles are somberly clad in brown and black, others are stunningly beautiful. Jewel scarabs, jewel beetles, and pleasing fungus beetles are just some coleopterans that are named for their brilliant colors. As in birds, some beetle colors derive from pigments and others are structural. The metallic markings of jewel scarabs are structural. As in hummingbirds and some other birds, the iridescent colors of beetles are the result of the structure of the upper layer of the exoskeleton. The flame reds and oranges of some net-winged beetles are pigment-derived, as are the greens and yellows of leaf beetles.

The bewildering diversity of beetles can be overwhelming to new fans. Fortunately, two-thirds of beetle species are classified in only eight families. These include: ground and tiger (*Carabidae*), rove (*Staphylinidae*), dung and scarab (*Scarabaeidae*), longhorn (*Cerambycidae*), jewel (*Buprestidae*), leaf (*Chrysomelidae*), darkling (*Tenebrionidae*), and weevil (*Curculionidae*) families.



Jeff Babson is bananas about nature, operates Sky Island Tours, and is Wildlife Viewing Program Specialist for Pima County Department of Conservation Lands and Resources.



Grant's Hercules beetle, Seth Ausubel. This impressive beetle uses its horn in battles for females. Adults feed on the branches of velvet ash and larvae feed on rotting wood, especially that of sycamores.



GLORIOUS SCARAB

Body length 1.2 in.

This beetle certainly lives up to its name! Adults feed on junipers and larvae develop on decaying hardwoods. Adults are active during the monsoon season and are readily attracted to lights.



BEYER'S JEWEL SCARAB

Body length 1 in

Adults of this stunning beetle feed on oaks. Like Glorious Scarab, this species is found during the monsoon and is readily attracted to lights. Both species can be found in places like Madera Canyon in the Santa Rita Mountains.



MESQUITE GIRDLER

Body length 0.75 in.

Mated females chew around a branch, girdling it. She then lays eggs in the soon to be dead wood, providing food and shelter for her young. The presence of a dead branch on a green mesquite often signals the work of these beetles. Late summer is the best time to find these longhorns.



PALO VERDE ROOT BORER

Body length 3.5 in.

One of the largest beetles in southern Arizona, this species can spend up to four years in the larval stage, feeding underground on the roots of palo verde and other trees. Adults are active in the summer months. They are harmless, but can deliver a bite if handled improperly.



IRON CROSS BLISTER BEETLE

Body length 0.8 in.

The dazzling colors of this species are a warning signal to potential predators that they are chemically protected. The protection comes from a substance called cantharidin, which is not only highly toxic, but is a blistering agent as well. These beetles are responsible for the fatal poisoning of livestock.



FERNANDEZ'S NET-WINGED BEETLE

Body length 0.75 in.

The orange and black coloration of this beetle warns of its toxicity. Net-winged beetles are one group with leathery forewings. Adults live only a week or two. They can be spotted, sometimes in large numbers, at flowers during the summer months.



FIERY SEARCHER

Body length 1.4 in.

This beautiful insect is a member of the Carabidae, a family of mostly predatory beetles. They are fast runners capable of catching prey with quick bursts of speed. It is primarily nocturnal but can be seen occasionally during the day. It's also called the Caterpillar Hunter.



GLITTERING TIGER BEETLE

Body length 0.5 in.

Tiger beetles are fast running hunters that favor open spaces, like shorelines, dunes, and pastures. Most are diurnal and are often brilliantly metallic in coloration. The white bands, spots, and streaks are called maculations and their pattern is important for identification.



WEBB'S BLUE-FOOTED BUPRESTID

Body length 1 in.

Buprestids are day-active, wary beetles that are quick to take flight when disturbed. This species is a northern representative of an otherwise tropical group. Adults can be found in oak woodlands and riparian areas.



WESTERN SCULPTURED PINE BORER

Body length 1.3 in.

One of the largest jewel beetles in southern Arizona, this species is remarkably well camouflaged when perched on a ponderosa pine trunk. The brown elytra are marked with metallic bands. When taking flight they emit a loud buzz.



FIGEATER BEETLE

Body Length 1.25 in.

A common sight during the day in the summer, adults of this beetle can be found at flowers, fruit, and sap flows of trees and shrubs. The larvae, often called white grubs, develop in the soil and feed on decaying organic matter. Also called Green Fig Beetle.



CONVERGENT LADY BEETLE

Body Length 0.3 in.

Lady beetles are famous for consuming aphids and other insect pests. Many 'ladybugs' can be identified by counting the number of spots on the elytra, but most species show variation in this character. Convergent Lady Beetle forms large aggregations in the mountains during the heat of summer.

FLOWERS OF THE SONORAN DESERT



LEFT TO RIGHT, TOP TO BOTTOM: Ocotillo; Rambling milkweed; Lupine; Brittlebush; Prickly poppy; Coulter hibiscus; Mariposa lily; Desert willow; Desert star; Desert mallow; Owl clover; Larkspur; Mariposa lily; Chia, Desert zinnia; Chain fruit cholla. All photos by Doris Evans

PREVENTING THE “SONORAN-GETI” WITH SIMULATED HERBIVORY

Non-native invasive grasses are creating wildfire risks that our Sonoran Desert ecosystem has not evolved with. When fires move through the desert, very few natives survive, and the time for natural regeneration could span several generations, if ever. These invasive grasses—buffelgrass, fountain grass, and yellow bluestem—evolved with heavy grazing pressure and fire cycles that allow them to outcompete native plants after being burned. Our desert animals don’t eat these non-natives because they are unpalatable, leading to large areas of waist-high grasses that intensify fire risks for our region. In our effort to prevent the conversion of our desert into the “Sonoran-GETI” where African grasses have replaced our saguaro forest, we are implementing a “Simulated Herbivory” approach to managing large populations of buffelgrass and fountain grass where wildland and urban areas interface.

Simulated herbivory is a fun name, but it’s just our way of saying we are weed-whacking the grasses down to a height of two inches, similar to what would happen if wildebeests and zebras were grazing on them. Buffel and fountain grass have well-developed roots loaded with energy for vigorous regrowth 2–4 weeks after cutting or grazing. You may have seen this



cutting and regrowth occur on a roadside near you; it’s part of what motivated us to implement this idea into our integrated pest management approach for managing large populations of non-native grasses. Once the grasses start growing, we follow up with herbicide applications to the crown of the plant.

We always strive to find a better solution for managing plants, and the simulated herbivory strategy has many benefits that motivated us to use it. Spraying grasses with herbicide is only effective when the plant is green and growing—the timing of which is now difficult to rely on due to unpredictable rainfall. Typically, winter and summer rains allow for sufficient green up, when the bulk of our spraying work occurs in the backcountry. Our current drought conditions motivated us to use the simulated herbivory strategy during this past winter and spring. We started cutting down four foot tall grasses along the roadsides near Sunrise and Craycroft in February, and without rain, we had new growth occurring in March. Our crews went out and sprayed those plants using 10% of the herbicide that would have been needed to treat large plants, and we had a much higher treatment success!

Simulated herbivory increases the opportunity to manage these invasive plants throughout the year, instantly lessens the fire risk that tall dry grasses present, dramatically reduces the amount of herbicide needed to treat each plant, and increases the likelihood of a successful treatment. It’s an effective strategy that we are introducing throughout the region as a best practice for managing non-native grasses in our community and the Sonoran Desert.

Tony Figueroa
Director of Invasive Plant Management
tfigueroa@tucsonbirds.org



Fountain grass before treatment and after, Tony Figueroa.



SELINA BARAJAS: BRINGING NATU



Field crew member Dan Lehman lays rock around a rainwater basin. This helps to prevent erosion.



From left: Megan Ewbank (project lead), Kari Hackney (Director of Habitat Stewardship), Stephanie Kopplin (landscape architect), and Selina Barajas, Andre Rocha.

Selina Barajas wears many hats: business-owner, program manager at the non-profit Mountain Mamas, mother of Sofia Luna and Mia Sol, and candidate for Tucson City Councilor in Ward 5. Recently she partnered with Tucson Bird Alliance (TBA) to begin her newest venture as habitat steward in her great-grandparents', grandparents', and mother's hometown of the City of South Tucson. With generous funding from Mrs. Meyer's Clean Day and KidsGardening, Selina and TBA created a lush community habitat garden at Luna y Sol Cafe (opening later this year).

The City of South Tucson is an independent municipality nestled within the southside of Tucson. This "pueblo within a city" bears a history of disinvestment and has faced deeply-rooted systemic injustices. Due to extremely low tree canopy and high hardscape coverage, South Tucson faces the highest average temperatures within the greater Tucson metro area. As such, there are few outside gathering spaces within South Tucson. To address these historic inequities and advance a vision of community health and wellness for South Tucson residents, Selina came to TBA with her dream of creating the Luna y Sol Community Habitat Garden.



Selina and her husband Abraham had recently purchased the building at 137 W 29th St. This plot once housed the mobile home which served as South Tucson's public library. After the library moved to the South

Tucson municipal building, the site featured locally-owned businesses for the next 50 years, including the Ray and Sons tire shop and Balloon Land. Now Selina is opening the Luna y Sol cafe—the first sit-down coffee shop in South Tucson—in one part of the 3,800 square foot building, with a multi-use community space in the rest. However, the building sits on a large plot of barren land that got Selina's gears turning. Why couldn't this empty space become usable greenspace for her neighbors?

Together, Selina and TBA applied for the Lots of Compassion grant to transform the site into a beautiful garden. Our project was one of only 10 selected by the funders across the nation. Landscape architect Stephanie Kopplin helped bring Selina's vision to life by designing a space full of rainwater basins and native plants. The TBA restoration crew painstakingly excavated the planting basins through layers of asphalt, concrete, and caliche. We planted chuparosa (*Justicia californica*) and Fremont wolfberry (*Lycium fremontii*) to draw in the Broad-billed Hummingbirds, desert marigold (*Baileya multiradiata*) to feed Lesser Goldfinches, and Arizona milkweed (*Asclepias angustifolia*) to support the monarch butterfly migration.

Inside the coffee shop, Selina will have a tool lending library and a bilingual habitat maintenance guide so her neighbors can create their own native plant gardens at home. The habitat garden will be free to enter during business hours. She also isn't done with the garden yet. She envisions raised garden beds filled with medicinal herbs and heritage food plants that the community can forage from, and shade and comfortable lounge seating so South Tucson's elders can relax and enjoy the birdsong. Selina is choosing to invest directly into the soil to create the future she wants for her daughters, her neighbors, and her local birds.

RE AND COMMUNITY TOGETHER



The South Tucson community gathers at the habitat for an Open House in April 2025, Andre Rocha.



Tucson Bird Alliance's Habitat on Wheels trailer at the Open House.



Giving out pollinator plants and resources so South Tucson residents can start their own habitats.

“At Luna y Sol, our vision is to create a space that nurtures connection, with the land, with each other, and with ourselves. Rooted in South Tucson, we’re inspired by our ancestors, the knowledge they carried, and the strength of our community. This land holds stories from generations past; gifts we’re honoring and passing on to the present and future. This habitat is a living, breathing project grounded in community and transformation.” —Selina Barajas

Creating urban habitat connectivity is a collaborative effort that is strengthened by increased participation. Working together, we can create wildlife corridors throughout our cities so our native bees, birds, and butterflies can flourish. Urban habitat benefits our communities too. Greenspace not only reduces local temperatures and makes cities more climate resilient, it also has proven mental health benefits for residents. Selina's approach of bringing together nature and community is a wonderful example of how we can build habitat and encourage others to do the same.

Megan Ewbank
Community Habitats Program Manager
mewbank@tucsonbirds.org



CAP THE TRAPS— TUCSON PARK NOW SAFER FOR WILDLIFE

The Tucson Bird Alliance swooped into Fort Lowell Park this spring to eliminate an invisible threat to its abundant wildlife. Uncapped metal fence posts in the park posed hidden dangers to cavity nesting birds, reptiles, and small mammals seeking shelter or a place to nest.

So-called “death pipes” are unfortunately everywhere. The hazard arises when the tops of fence posts, gate anchors, signposts, boundary markers, or other pipes are left uncovered.

“Once a creature gets inside, they can’t climb out of the slick pipes and face a slow and tragic death,” said Olya Weekley, Tucson Bird Alliance Applied Conservation Program Manager. “The danger is entirely preventable, simply by capping the opening.”

The Friends of Fort Lowell Park, a volunteer group which works to keep the park clean for visitors and safe for wildlife, pitched in to fund the materials to seal the park’s “death pipes.”

“Tucson Bird Alliance brought new eyes to our park and saw things we had not seen before,” said Sheila Bowden, Founder of the Friends of Fort Lowell Park. “The park draws birds and other wildlife with its water, shade and open space, and we had no idea this was a threat.”

Weekley inventoried 174 uncapped fence posts along the perimeter fence of the 65-acre urban park. Most just needed metal caps popped on with three taps of a hammer, while other larger openings required a mesh top or quick cement fix. But the first step at each post was to lower a small camera down into the dark depths of the open pipe to see inside.

“What we usually find is heartbreaking—deteriorated remains of woodpeckers, lizards, and rodents,” Weekley said. “But as I fed the camera into one of the posts, I saw that two spiny lizards were trapped down below the opening, sitting atop debris. At first, I feared both were dead. But then, one opened his eyes and began scratching at the smooth pipe walls, desperate to escape. I lowered a small stick into the pipe, and the



Olya Weekley, Applied Conservation Program Manager, uses cement to seal an older fence post with an opening too large for a standard-size metal cap.



A camera scope lowered into an open fence post revealed a live lizard trapped inside. The crew was able to extricate it.

lizard instinctively grabbed hold. In an instant, he climbed to freedom and darted up the trunk of a nearby tree. It was a powerful moment.”

Volunteers cheered the lizard’s escape amid a chorus of Lark and White-crowned Sparrows, Lucy’s and Yellow-rumped Warblers, Vermilion Flycatchers, and Verdins.

In just four hours, a small crew with ladders, hammers, caps, and a bucket of freshly stirred cement was able to seal all the open posts in Fort Lowell Park.

“At the end of the day, doing something small like capping a pipe is a big thing. Our structures have consequences that we so often don’t think about,” said Nicole Marking, a University of Arizona junior studying wildlife conservation and management who is interning with the Tucson Bird Alliance. “It’s a real trap. These creatures are just trying to find shelter and end up dying.”

Among its many recreational facilities, Fort Lowell Park is also known for its canopy of mature trees and the birds they attract. Friends of Fort Lowell Park volunteers work to sustain the area around the park’s pond as an urban wildlife oasis in partnership with Tucson Parks and Recreation and Tucson Bird Alliance.

“A portion of the shoreline is set aside behind native shrubbery and ocotillo fencing to offer shelter for the ducks, water birds, and turtles, while the rest of the shoreline is open to visitors who want to sit on benches, bird, or just enjoy the peacefulness,” said Bowden, who began rounding up volunteers in 2009 to found the friends group.

Tucson Bird Alliance’s Project Death Pipes is made possible through the financial support of the Arizona Sportsmen for Wildlife Conservation License Plate Fund. Since 2021, the program has sealed 1,270 pipe openings across Southeast Arizona.

“I am deeply grateful to the Friends of Fort Lowell Park for their generosity and commitment to making this urban oasis safer for wildlife,” Weekley said. “Because of their support, and the dedication of everyone involved, we are proving that small actions can have a huge impact.”

If you’re interested in learning how to spot and seal death pipes on your property or wish to report open pipes on public lands, please visit: TUCSONBIRDS.ORG/DEATHPIPES.

Ann Bond
*Friends of Fort Lowell Park
Volunteer*



ONCE A CREATURE GETS INSIDE, THEY CAN’T CLIMB OUT OF THE SLICK PIPES AND FACE A SLOW AND TRAGIC DEATH. THE DANGER IS ENTIRELY PREVENTABLE, SIMPLY BY CAPPING THE OPENING.



Olya Weekley discusses the dangers of uncapped metal posts with Sheila Bowden, Founder of the Friends of Fort Lowell Park, and Nicole Marking, University of Arizona junior and Tucson Bird Alliance intern.



Nicole Marking shows how easy it is to tap inexpensive metal caps on open fence posts, eliminating their danger to wildlife.

TUCSON BIRD ALLIANCE

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AUGUST 6-10, 2025

SEE THE SCHEDULE AND REGISTER AT: [TUCSONBIRDS.ORG/FESTIVAL](https://tucsonbirds.org/festival)

Held at the DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel at Reid Park

Don't miss out! The Southeast Arizona Birding Festival offers expert-guided birding and wildlife trips, photography and bird-ID workshops, free (with registration) nature presentations, exhibitors, and activities. Check the festival site for openings.

Be sure to drop by the Nature Expo at the festival venue, the DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel at Reid Park, and check out over 50 different vendors, including: Summit Hut, Western National Parks Association, Drawing 10,000 Birds, and more. It's free to everyone, no registration required!

Nature Expo hours and highlights:

Wednesday, August 6 Nature Expo Open 4-6pm

- 4:30-6pm—"Opening Party" sponsored by Vortex Optics
Free Appetizers & Enjoy a free drink courtesy of Vortex Optics! Raffle Drawings for Prizes

Thursday, August 7 Nature Expo Open 12-5:30pm

- 4:30-5:30pm—Festival Celebration sponsored by BWD
Win a copy of BWD's new book, *Bird Watching for Dummies*; Free Appetizers & Cash Bar; Raffle Drawings for Prizes

Friday, August 8 Nature Expo Open 12-5:30pm

- 4:30-5:30pm—Festival Celebration sponsored by Sabrewing Nature Tours; David Lindo book signing; Raffle Drawings for Prizes; Free Appetizers & Cash Bar

Saturday, August 9 Nature Expo Open 10am-5:30pm

- 10:00am-1:00pm—Reid Park Zoo with Live Animals!
- 10:00am-5:00pm—Arizona Game & Fish with Live Raptors!
- 3:30-5:30pm—Festival Celebration; Raffle Drawings for Prizes; Free Appetizers & Cash Bar



Elegant Trogon, Roger van Gelder

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Adam Cayton-Holland
@ 191 Toole
 Friday, August 8, 8pm
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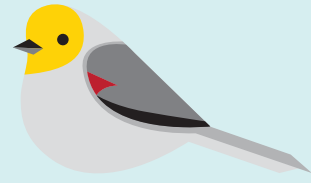
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The image was edited with Generative AI.



Tucson Bird Alliance Birdathon 2025



Inspiring Support for the Birds of Southeast Arizona

It was our most successful and fun Tucson Bird Alliance Birdathon ever! Kudos to all involved—the dedication and creativity of every participant is truly inspiring. Thanks to the birders, their supporters, our sponsors, and most of all, the birds! We are grateful to you for making this another amazing Birdathon.

\$134,380

DOLLARS RAISED

43

TEAMS

117

PARTICIPANTS

726

DONATIONS RECEIVED

CATEGORY WINNERS

Brand New to Birdathon: New Bird, Hoo Dis (Christina Zarraga & Adam Colbert)

Birdathon Beyond AZ: Borneo Birdzilla (Diane Drobka, Craig Wilcox & Kale Van Shaar)

Big Day (Traditional): Wrenegades (Tim Helentjaris, Sara Pike, Chris Rohrer, Jennie MacFarland & Matt Griffiths)

Best Bucks for Birds: SaddleBrooke Ranch Cuckoos (Jim Hoagland, Laurie McCoy, Deb & Gary Sandin, Nancy & Ben Eisenstein, Claire & Gerry Tietje, Sheree & Rick Gillaspie, Tim DeJonghe, Carrie Gelsey & Michelle Jennings)

Grand Champion: Birdies, Bogeys, and Eagles (Dan Weisz, Deb Vath, Jenise Porter, Deanna MacPhail, Danny Gin, Michele & Reuben Weisz)

SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR BIRDATHON PRIZE SPONSORS!

Hop Shop

Casa de San Pedro

Erica Freese

Yume Japanese Gardens

Bawker Bawker Cider House

Coronet—Restaurant, Cafe, and Nightjar bar

Your True Name

Tucson Bird Alliance Nature Shop

Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum

Charron Vineyards



Time Flies When You're Having Fun; The KingBirders; Cooper's Hawk, Dan Weisz of Birdies, Bogeys, and Eagles

BIRDING THROUGH EXPERT EYES



When it comes to nature, it's often easy to overlook what's in your own backyard until you see it with fresh eyes... or hear it with fresh ears! That's certainly been the case for some residents and team members at Splendido who have been taking part in field trips on our property led by the extremely knowledgeable Donito Burgess from the Tucson Bird Alliance. Situated on 35 acres in Oro Valley, our Life Plan Community paid particular attention to preserving native trees and desert plants during construction, and those efforts have made our surroundings a welcoming area for many species. As Donito pointed out to participants on a February walk, mother birds like the familiarity of vegetation that has a history in an area. Their generational knowledge allows them to better navigate a landscape in search of the best spots to build nests and find food.

Insights like these make for an enlightening experience for both novice and veteran birders, whether they benefit from Donito's bird behavior expertise or his skill recognizing a call before making a visual identification. Looking through his eyes, we spotted a tiny hummingbird nest and learned how they use spider webs as a building material because the elasticity allows the nest to expand as the chicks grow.

Splendido resident Clive Probert didn't consider himself a birder before joining some outings on our property, but says he's now much more aware of birds when he's strolling the community or hiking with friends. He likes the group aspect of the field trips, including learning from others and having more eyes on the skies. In February, the group spotted 16 species, including a Cooper's Hawk, a variety of hummingbirds, several Cactus Wrens, and quite a few lovely House Finches.

Splendido is proud to support the Tucson Bird Alliance and host periodic field trips that culminate with breakfast and socializing. We welcome you to experience our community and our birds at a future event!



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:
Birders at Splendido; Great Horned Owl fledglings on the property; Lesser Goldfinch; House Finch; Costa's Hummingbird; Cactus Wren; Vermilion Flycatcher. All photos courtesy Splendido.

Nancy Boyle
*Splendido Community
Relations Manager*



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Visit SplendidoTucson.com for floor plans, videos, and more.

SPRING RARITIES, BABY BIRDS, AND WORKSHOPS



This was a great spring for rare birds at Sweetwater Wetlands! A Grace's Warbler found by Scott Olmstead was only the second record for the hotspot. This denizen of mountain pine forests definitely looked out of place in a mesquite! An Eastern Kingbird found by Mark Stevenson the very next day was only the fourth record for the wetlands and it stuck around for a few days. A Spotted Towhee I found on May 9 was present at least a week—perhaps it will return to spend the winter at Sweetwater as this species has before. Northern Waterthrush is fairly regular in both spring and fall migration at Sweetwater, but it's always a treat to see this tail bobbing warbler like the one that skulked around the first two weeks of May. Least Bitterns arrived in late March and they will likely be around most of the summer. Last year the bitterns were last detected in July, but this was almost certainly due to a massive wind storm that knocked trees down and flattened cattails across the wetlands.



If you visited Sweetwater last summer you'll likely notice just how different it is this year. In May 2024, the east basin was covered in a dense layer of water lettuce, and eventually Tucson Water had to drain most of the basin to kill off this invasive plant. The west basin was full of tall dead cattails, and while some birds like Least Bitterns did breed there, it was near impossible to view any of them. Most breeding water birds left the wetlands for summer, a single gallinule chick and a duckling were the only signs of any breeding success. In contrast, this year several species have successfully fledged young. Water birds that have been seen with offspring at Sweetwater this year include: Mallard, Pied-billed Grebe, American Coot, Common Gallinule, and Killdeer. Other birds raising families at the wetlands this season have included Red-tailed and Cooper's Hawks, Gila and Ladder-backed Woodpeckers, Verdin, Vermilion Flycatcher, Bell's Vireo, and Lucy's and Yellow Warblers. This breeding success is a great testament to the health of the wetlands and the great work Tucson Water and Tucson Bird Alliance have done maintaining habitat for birds!



I have been leading two educational workshops each month at Sweetwater: one geared toward new birders and another with a rotating seasonal theme. These workshops are a great opportunity to learn more about birds at one of the best birding hotspots in Arizona. There is a Brand New to Birding workshop on July 26 and a Monsoon Birding workshop on July 27. I hope to see you at Sweetwater for a workshop, a Southeast Arizona Birding Festival trip, or just out birding!



Alex Patia
Sweetwater Wetlands Coordinator
apatia@tucsonbirds.org



A Mallard with eight ducklings is one of many breeding successes at Sweetwater this summer! A male Costa's Hummingbird displaying, an uncommon visitor at Sweetwater. A western diamondback rattlesnake slowly works its way across a trail. Pied-billed Grebe chick. All photos by Alex Patia.

CULTIVATING COLOR: GROWING BEAUTY AT THE HISTORIC Y



The Historic Y garden located in the front yard at Tucson Bird Alliance's Nature Shop is a living canvas of color, filled with the vibrant reds of chuparosa and fairy duster, the golden blooms of Mexican sunflower, the fiery orange of globemallow, and the soft pink blossoms of desert willow. Nestled among the flowering natives are hardy succulents and other desert-adapted plants that attract birds, pollinators, and passersby alike. Behind the flourishing landscape are two dedicated Green Gardener volunteers who bring expertise, energy, and care to this urban oasis: Lynn Hassler and Sarah Cox.

Lynn Hassler has been at the heart of the garden's transformation for over a decade. A longtime Tucson Bird Alliance volunteer, Lynn first became involved with the organization in 1987 and served on the board of directors. In 2012, she joined forces with fellow gardener Cynthia Pruett to revive the garden that was overgrown with non-native Bermuda grass at the time. She brings with her a wealth of experience from 14 years at Tucson Botanical Gardens where she held roles ranging from Nursery Manager to Director of Horticulture. In addition to tending the garden, Lynn shares her knowledge widely, as an author of several books on birds and gardening, a contributor to the *Vermilion Flycatcher* (see page 8), and a long-time columnist for *Birdwatcher's Digest*.

Sarah Cox joined the Historic Y garden team about a year and a half ago. With a growing interest in native plants and a green thumb she's been cultivating at home, Sarah quickly became an essential part of the Wednesday morning gardening crew. Her consistent care, enthusiasm, and willingness to learn have helped keep the garden thriving through every season. Whether pruning, planting, or simply appreciating the blooms, Sarah brings a thoughtful presence to the space and a shared dedication to its continued beauty.

Together, Lynn and Sarah are helping create a garden that not only supports local wildlife, but also brings joy and color to the community. The Historic Y garden stands as a testament to their efforts, which combines native flora, expert care, and volunteer passion.



Alexis Stark
Volunteer & Engagement Coordinator
astark@tucsonbirds.org



CLOCKWISE FROM UPPER LEFT: Fairy duster, globemallow, Mexican sunflower, desert willow, and much more add touches of native color to the Nature Shop front yard at the Historic Y. Photos by Alexis Stark.

Totally Spain Solar Eclipse

BIRDS, CULTURE & AN AMAZING CELESTIAL EVENT



Chamois © Wild Media • Eurasian Hoopoe © Super Phn • Great Bustard © Javier E. Pozo • European Bee-eater © Logo Logic

On August 12, 2026, a total solar eclipse of the sun will occur over a swath of northern Spain. We have planned a fabulous tour around this celestial phenomenon, and our base in the historic city of León lies right in the narrow band of totality. Excellent accommodations in historic four-star hotels, outstanding regional cuisine, and birding combined with astronomical viewings and visits to historic sites make this tour a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. On the day of the eclipse, we will gather outside León in the private confines of Bodegas Vitalis winery, reserved exclusively for VENT.

Our superb team of leaders includes Barry Lyon, Brian Gibbons, Rick Wright, Virgilio Beltrán Jordá, and expert local guides. Rob Broeren, an expert astronomer and skilled communicator, will deliver informative presentations on advances in the general field of astronomy and on the mechanics of the solar eclipse. He will be our guide for sessions with a solar telescope and will provide interpretation throughout the eclipse.

Those who wish will be birding for part of every day at sites ranging from Madrid's Casa de Campo to the dry steppe surrounding León and the sheer mountainsides and lush coastal wetlands of Asturias. We will be hoping for encounters with many of the peninsula's special birds, among them Great Bustard, European Bee-eater, Eurasian Hoopoe, Common Kingfisher, Egyptian Vulture, Spotless Starling, Iberian Green Woodpecker, Iberian Gray Shrike, and Iberian Chiffchaff. Mammals are more difficult to see, but the mountains of Asturias offer reasonable chances at Chamois or Western Spanish Ibex.

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TOURS**

Totally Spain Solar Eclipse • August 8-17, 2026

Leaders: Barry Lyon, Brian Gibbons, Rick Wright, Virgilio Beltrán Jordá, and special guest Rob Broeren
Price: \$9895 from Madrid (ends in Oviedo)

Limit: 42



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Find details and registration for events and workshops
 at TUCSONBIRDS.ORG/EVENTS and for field trips
 at TUCSONBIRDS.ORG/FIELDTRIPS.

Saturday, July 26, Field Workshop

BRAND NEW TO BIRDING

at Sweetwater Wetlands with Alex Patia

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

This field workshop is meant for those of you just getting into birding. We'll cover topics like how to use binoculars, finding birds, identifying birds by sight and sound, bird behavior, birding apps, and using field guides. The entire workshop will be conducted outside on a short walk around the wetlands. Binoculars and field guides are available if needed—bring a journal and pencil for some field sketching! Limited to 10 participants.

Sunday, July 27, Field Workshop

ADVANCED BIRDING SERIES: MONSOON BIRDING

at Sweetwater Wetlands with Alex Patia

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

During the monsoon's second spring some of our breeding birds will nest again. It is also the beginning of fall migration, with some early migrants like shorebirds starting to pass though heading south. The combination of both breeding bird behavior and migration makes this a great time of year to visit Sweetwater Wetlands and see something unexpected. Limited to 12 participants.

August 21 & 23, Workshop and Field Trip

IT'S ALL IN THE FAMILY: FLYCATCHER ID WORKSHOP

with Homer Hansen

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

Ready to leap into the identification of *Empidonax* and *Myiarchus* flycatchers? Join local bird expert Homer Hansen for this two-part workshop that introduces you to the diverse Tyrannidae family and highlights the ways to separate the kingbirds, pewees, empids, and other flycatchers of Southeast Arizona. The workshop will focus on structural and plumage characteristics with a brief introduction to vocalizations for a few of the species.

September 11 & 13, Workshop and Field Trip

IT'S ALL IN THE FAMILY: SHOREBIRD ID WORKSHOP

with Homer Hansen

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

Epic migrations. Spectacular congregations. Astonishing diversity of sizes and forms. Our shorebirds are all this and more. Learn about shorebirds and their natural history and unravel the mysteries of their molt as a prelude to identification in the field using characteristics such as behavior, size, shape, and plumage.

Tuesday, August 19, Field Trip

GUINDANI CANYON TRAIL/WHETSTONE MOUNTAINS

with Tim Helentjaris

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

Explore a nice transition zone of Chihuahuan Desert and oak-juniper habitats hoping to see the results of a good monsoon. The canyon has held interesting rarities such as Lucifer Hummingbird, Five-striped Sparrow, and Rufous-capped Warbler in the past. Who knows what we'll find this year?

Monday, September 22 & 29

FIELD TRIP LEADER TRAINING

Are you passionate about bird watching and sharing your love for nature?

Join Tucson Bird Alliance as a Volunteer Field Trip Leader and help inspire others!

Thursday, September 25, Field Trip

WILLCOX LAKES SHOREBIRD MIGRATION

with Tim Helentjaris

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

This time period represents peak shorebird occurrence for this site and we'll take the occasion to carefully study and talk about their identification. Bringing spotting scopes will be very helpful.

Tuesday, October 14, Field Trip

EXPLORING COCHISE STRONGHOLD/DRAGOON MOUNTAINS

with Tim Helentjaris

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

We'll be exploring these beautiful, rocky uplands for their birdlife while walking on roads and trails.

Thursday, September 4, Virtual Presentation

LET'S GO TO THE ZOO: A GUIDE TO WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHY

with Ken Hubbard, Sponsored by Hunt's Photo & Video

Join Tamron photographer Ken Hubbard as he demonstrates how to capture the best wildlife images while at a zoo. Ken will take you through the entire creative process, from doing prior research to looking for the best light while you're on location. If you love wildlife photography and are looking to improve your images, be sure to attend and get ready to schedule your next trip to the zoo!

Friday, September 19, In-person Social Event

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 Bird Alliance!



GIFTS IN HONOR OR MEMORY OF

In memory of Adele Benter from Karen Zadkovic

In honor of Alexia Bivings from Barbara Bickel, Carol & Don Eagle, and Debbie Reed

In honor of Andrew Core from Tommy Lancione

In memory of Anne MacFarland from Katie MacFarland and Drake MacFarland

In memory of Babaganouj James Hernández from Francisca James Hernandez

In memory of Bernardine Weigand from Kim Casola

In memory of Blake Britton from Sheilah Britton

In memory of Carol Ingram from Devon Yeager

In memory of Carolyn Harley from Elaine Wychreschuk

To Cathy Stamm from Jill & Andy Bland

In memory of Claire Fitzgerald from Glenn Howe and Nancy Howe

To Claire Howe Fitzgerald from Joan Patton

In honor of Deb Sandin from Sandy Jessop

In honor of Deb Vath from Jill & Fred Vath

To Don Malmberg from Mary Yonek

In honor of Donito Burgess from Peter Spiegel

In honor of Donna & Marc & Linton from Dean Linton

In honor of Eli & Charlie Sullivan from Candice Sullivan

To Elias Francis from Christina Zarraga & Adam Colbert

In memory of Emily Menzie from Keith Menzie

In memory of Genevieve Hawxwell from The Lubin Foundation

In memory of Greg Horne from Barb Wuehrmann

In memory of Harold Goldberg from Scott Goldberg

In memory of Hazel & Herb Judd from Cheri McConnell & Mike Judd

In memory of Imojean Wilcox from Wade Wilcox

In memory of James Abutzenweiser from Sarah & Chuck Klingenstein

In honor of Jay Snowdon from Tricia Ford

In honor of Jim Hoagland from Dale Farland

In memory of Joan Zukoski from Pamela Eaton

To John Dawson from Julee Dawson

In memory of Kenneth Higgins from Maria Astaire

In honor of Laurie McCoy from Cathy Kauffman

In memory of Lena Coppock from Carly Manning

In honor of Linda Davies & Michael Repko from Heather & Michael Stark

In honor of Mary Black from Caitlin Hall

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

In memory of Matt Baccary from Kevin Buck

In honor of Nancy Hand from Claire West

In honor of Ned Harris from Marge & Ben Kesler

To Rich Mclellan from Judy Mclellan

In memory of Rico Guerrero from Epifanio Guerrero

To Ruth & Walt Hileman from Karen & Gilbert Matsushino

In memory of Ruth Pucylouski from John Shields

To Ruth Webster from Jane Barnes

In honor of Samuel Gates from Nicole Harris

In honor of Sheree & Rick Gillaspie from Ron Steintal, Tess Densmore, and Debi & Dan Vodvarka

To Stacy Dinkel from Christina Zarraga & Adam Colbert

In memory of Teddy Jansen from Sarah Lemoine

In honor of Terry Decarolis from Barbara Lowe

In memory of the Kukolskys from Wendelin Guentner

In honor of Virginia Rose from Anne Vogt

In memory of Wayne Collins from Ellen Blackstone



Pyrrhuloxia, Mick Thompson

2024 ANNUAL REPORT

TUCSON BIRD ALLIANCE

Find the full report at
tucsonbirds.org/2024report

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

4,359 people
joined us for **308 field trips**

**23,178 Nature
Shop visitors**
engaged online & in-person

2,057 people
attended **34 engagement events**
online & in-person

**1,601 donors &
3,433 members**
made our work possible

487 volunteers
amassed **9,792 hours** worth
the equivalent of **\$327,929**



SOUTHEAST ARIZONA BIRDING FESTIVAL

- **902 registrants** - a record!
- **43 states & 10 countries** represented
- **151 field trips & 227 bird species**
- **26 workshops & presentations**
- **112 volunteers**
- **1,850 visitors** at the Nature Expo

URBAN HABITAT STEWARDSHIP

90 basins & 3 pocket parks
managed for the City of Tucson to increase
water harvesting & urban vegetation

773 native plants
sold at plant sales from a collection of over **30 species** of native perennials, shrubs, & trees

We capped off one of our most successful & longest-running (**20 years!**) restoration efforts, the **North Simpson Farm Restoration Project**, along the Santa Cruz River in Marana

Luna y Sol Cafe City of South Tucson

- Community habitat garden
- Co-hosted MLK days of service event & built over **50 beehives**
- Finalized plans for **8 rainwater harvesting basins & 200 native plants** for 2025

56 new members
joined our Habitat at Home Program

Santa Cruz River Day of Connection

In partnership with many great organizations, **180 participants** removed **6,000 pounds of trash** from the river in a single day!

PATON CENTER FOR HUMMINGBIRDS



We began restoration on the Paton House, including installing a new HVAC system, windows, doors and a new roof. We also finalized plans for two permanent, ADA-accessible bathrooms and a new parking area.

19 volunteer events

to manage invasive Johnsongrass & plant native plants

50 US states & 26 countries

recorded in the visitors' log

1 new nature trail

built with help from the Dirtbags of Patagonia

300 cottonwoods

grown & planted onsite & on the neighboring TNC Patagonia-Sonoita Creek Preserve

1,800 native plants

planted in the Cuckoo Corridor & new parcel

INVASIVE PLANT MANAGEMENT & RESTORATION

6,800 saguaros

planted, supporting a new generation of this iconic cactus



6 stories

produced by AZ Public Media's "Arizona Illustrated" covered our invasive plant program & five common invasive plants in Tucson

~1,000 acres

of buffelgrass treated

Awarded a Certificate of
Appreciation from the
US Forest Service

"For continuous dedication and
valuable public service for the
Coronado National Forest."

616 acres

of stinknet manually removed &
chemically treated

stinknet.org

grew as a resource hub & reporting tool to
control the spread of this invasive plant

BIRD CONSERVATION

Bird Surveys

- Documented **119 Elegant Trogons**
- Documented **133 Elf Owls** in Saguaro National Park & Tucson Mountain Park
- Arizona Important Bird Areas Program recorded **5,725 hours** from **244 volunteers**
- **13th year** of winter grassland surveys for Chestnut-collared Longspur
- Surveyed Yellow-billed Cuckoos along Sonoita Creek

556 pipes

capped, saving the lives of an estimated **13,000 small animals** who would have been trapped

839 kits

for window strike prevention distributed to the public free of charge

896 nestboxes

distributed for native birds throughout Southeast Arizona

The **Arizona Birding Trail** website was completed with the help of many partners across the state.

arizonabirdingtrail.com

Desert Purple Martin Project

- Identified **212 nesting saguaros** in Southeast Arizona
- Attached **9 satellite migration trackers** to **3 purple martins** in Arizona & **6** in Brazil
- Discovered a major roosting site of **thousands of martins** in a Sahuarita pecan grove



THANK YOU!

I hope this annual report reinvigorates you, our supporters, and provides a moment to celebrate all we have accomplished together. Too often, it can feel like we are not doing enough, not keeping up with the multitude of threats to our environment, not making a dent. And yet, in this report we are reminded that we have, in fact, made a difference. These are not just numbers on a page, they are people we have interacted with and inspired, birds and other wildlife we have saved, acres of vital habitat we have protected, and data we have collected to influence future impactful decisions.

Thank you to Tucson Bird Alliance staff members and Board of Directors. Thank you to our members, volunteers, and donors. Thank you to our community partners. And thank you to every person trying to make a difference for the birds and habitats of Southeast Arizona and beyond.



With gratitude,

Erica Freese
Director of Development
& Communications

Make a difference by
donating to Tucson Bird
Alliance today!

Visit tucsonbirds.org/donate
or scan the QR code.





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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

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



Birds of Arizona Field Guide by Stan Tekiela

\$16.95

Birding in the Southwest can be overwhelming with so many species to identify! Tekiela makes it easy by organizing 151 species by color. See a yellow bird? Flip to the yellow section of the guide and find out what it is!



The Sibley Birds Coloring Field Journal

by David Allen Sibley

\$19.95

Sibley's artwork has been renowned for decades. Now you can add your own pop of color to his highly detailed and accurate bird drawings. Another great way to learn your bird species by color!



Bird the Rainbow Vinyl Sticker by Laurel Mundy

\$6.00

Mundy's colorful work captures a lovely collection of birds and showcases their diverse coloration. Decorate your laptops, water bottles, cars, and more!



Assorted Seeds by The Native Seed Company

\$2.10/500mg packet

The Sonoran Desert is colorful thanks to its sunsets, diverse array of bird species, and its wildflowers! The Native Seed Company offers a selection of colorful, native plants to delight your garden.



Hummingbirds of the United States Poster

\$14.00

Painted in 1989 by John P. O'Neill, this vivid poster showcases the variety of colorful hummingbirds found in the US.



Tucson Bird Alliance Water Bottle

by Susan E. Libby

\$17.50

Our desert is vibrant and lush, and many of our local artists love it for that reason. Libby is known for her vivid use of color to depict our local flora and fauna, and this stainless steel water bottle is a gorgeous example!