



Gambel's Tales

The Newsletter of the Sonoran Audubon Society

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January 2002

BIRDING

THE AGUA FRIA NATIONAL MONUMENT

By Dwayne Fink

This is the first of what I hope will be a series describing the best birding spots within, or near, Sonoran Audubon Society territorial limits. Hopefully, others of you will rise to the task, and write most of them. I'm not at all enamored with the word "BIRDING" in the title. Birding as strictly a recreational term, like all the other ___ing words. I would prefer a word which denotes some responsibility, or even a neutral phrase like "BIRD HABITAT". Next time.

Sonoran Audubon Society territory is bordered on the South and North by two of the five new national monuments that former President Bill Clinton established in Arizona, under the authorization of the Congress-enacted Antiquities Act of 1906. On our southern border, and extending from near Buckeye to Casa Grande, is the Sonoran Desert National Monument. This writer has never set foot in that territory, but is intrigued by the touted claim that more than 200 bird species can be found there. Let me know if you have birded there. I'm sure our Field Trip Committee would like to know too.

On our chapter's northeastern border lies the new Agua Fria National Monument. It extends from Black Canyon City north to beyond Cordes Junction. Monument boundaries are I-17 on the west, Prescott National Forest on the north, Tonto National Forest on the east and a mix of Arizona state and private holdings on the south. Cordes Junction, Arcosanti and other holdings comprise the northwest corner. Agua Fria National Monument was Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land, and remains under their jurisdiction in its new monument status.

The primary reason for establishing this monument is to better protect its numerous archeological sites and associated artifacts, which have been raided down through the years. At least 450 prehistoric pueblo community sites have been located to date. At least four of these were major settlements. It is estimated that several thousand people lived there in the short

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At our next meeting....

Note Time Change

January 9, 2002 6:30 pm



**"The California Condor
Reintroduction Program"**

**by Bruce Palmer, Endangered Species Biologist
with USFWS**

The California Condor (*Gymnogyps californianus*) is North America's largest terrestrial bird, weighing up to 22 pounds with a wingspan of nine and a half feet. It can reach altitudes of 15,000 feet and may fly 140 miles a day in search of the carrion on which it feeds.

The California Condor originally ranged from southern British Columbia to Baja, and across the southern U.S. But with the decline of large mammals during the Ice Age, and more recently due to lead poisoning and shooting, their population has declined dramatically. In 1940, only 100 individuals were estimated to remain. By 1967, the condor was federally listed as an endangered species with only 50 individuals remaining. And when their population plummeted to only nine individuals in 1985, the decision was made to capture all condors in the wild and begin a captive breeding program to save the species. The last free-flying California Condor was captured in April of 1987.

Fortunately, California Condors breed well in captivity and by 1991 a sufficient number of California Condors had been produced to initiate a release program for the reestablishment of a wild population. Prior to the reintroduction of California Condors, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service tested and refined rearing techniques by carrying out experimental releases

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BIRDING THE AGUA FRIA

Continued

period that the area was occupied (ca. 1250 to 1450 A.D.).

The most renowned of the major settlements is Pueblo La Plata, which contained 120 to 150 rooms. During occupancy it was a massive two story rock structure overlooking Silver Creek several hundred feet below. Fetching water was major work. Wonder who got that task? It's now an impressive pile of rocks. If you want to see it, get yourself a map from BLM, and a 4-wheel drive vehicle - to drive the last 1.5 miles. When I went there last spring, the area was a sea of wild-flowers. Also saw antelope, birds - and cows. Yes, cows.

There are several places to access the monument, but the two easiest are the Badger Springs and Bloody Basin Road exits off I-17. Maps show that the Bloody Basin Road goes all the way to 7-Springs, if you're into masochism. There also are accesses at Black Canyon City and Cordes Junction, but both of these are through private land. You can take a car into Badger Springs, and a few miles along the Bloody Basin Rd. Other than that, it's 4-wheel drive only in the monument, and then only if the roads are dry. The place is not exactly visitor friendly, but then it wasn't preserved to be some recreational park.

There are birds in Agua Fria National Monument. I've birded the Badger Springs area several times, including leading trips there - which some of you were on. I've also birded the north end of the monument at Cordes Junction, and at Arcosanti which abuts the monument. All three of these places have permanent water, therefore attract a wide variety of birds in all seasons.

If you want to bird the Agua Fria National Monument, at Badger Springs, turn off I-17 at Exit 256. Go east on one of the several "roads". I tend to stay on one of those on the south side. About a mile in, you'll come to the parking lot, with a sign-in place. Birding is in the wash right in front of you. To the north is a grove of cottonwoods, which is a good place to start. Then move down stream. Eventually (about one mile) you'll get to the Agua Fria River. The Springs run year round, but not the river - at that point.

The two main reasons for writing this article are to interest you in birding the new Agua Fria National Monument, and to enlist some of you in gathering flora/fauna information on the Monument. The Sonoran Audubon Board, at the last retreat, decided to concentrate our chapter's Conservation efforts this year on the Agua Fria National Monument.

We have contacted both the BLM and Arcosanti, offering volunteer service within our capabilities. They both have expressed a need for Bird Check Lists, and, eventually, lists

of butterflies and flowers. We are now in the process of compiling bird lists for each place.

You can get involved, particularly on the Monument, by helping us compile a list of identified birds. We are working out the details of how to proceed. BLM has indicated that they will assist us by advising us about high-potential areas, and by giving us access to remote areas.

You will be getting details on how Sonoran Audubon will proceed at forthcoming meetings, and through the newsletter. If you want to be involved in this fun and worthwhile task, please contact me - preferably by phone (480.967.9202).

As an aside, I figured that the BLM web site would be the best place for finding information on the Monument in order to write this article. Not so! I discovered that the entire Dept. of Interior has been disconnected from the Internet Services, as of 5 Dec 2001. The Order, an explanation of which can be obtained off the web, gives no clue for this drastic action. I will be writing my congresspersons about the matter. You may want to do likewise.

The Paradise Bakery and Café and Trader Joe's located in Metro Center donate refreshments for our monthly meetings. When you shop at either the Paradise Bakery and Café or at Trader Joe's please let them know how much we appreciate their donations of their wonderful products.



The refreshment sign and our entrance sign were created and designed by Jak Keyser, one of our very talented members.

A message from your president...

I noticed by looking through the last several newsletters that I spent a lot of time talking about our problems of the expense of mailing out the newsletters. When National cut down our share of the dues we aren't able to cover the cost of mailing out the newsletters. The board decide to charge an \$8.00 fee to those members who wanted to have the newsletters mailed to them.

We mailed out flyers to those members receiving the newsletters by mail and almost all the responses included a check for \$8.00 or an e-mail address. The problem was that many members didn't respond. We have to assume that those members don't want to have the newsletter mailed to them.

I feel now that my audience for the newsletter is much smaller then it was and somehow I feel a little sad. It would be so nice if one or several of our members would donate enough money to cover the cost of mailing out the newsletters. Another problem is that every month we have about 20 or 30 new members and it's necessary not only to welcome them to our chapter but explain to them the necessity of collecting more money from them if they want the newsletter mailed to them.

Another problem are the people who change their address for the summer. If you would like to stay with our chapter with the new address please ask me for a form to fill out.

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using Andean Condors, a similar species. Reintroduction of California condors to the wild began on January 14, 1992, when two-captive-reared juveniles were released along with two juvenile Andean Condors into the Sespe Condor Sanctuary in Ventura County, California. Since then, releases have occurred in several other locations in the western U.S. History was made December 12, 1996 when six endangered California Condors were released on the Vermilion Cliffs to fly free in Arizona's skies. It had been more than 70 years since the giant birds were last seen in this state.

Bruce Palmer is an Endangered Species Biologist with the USFWS, where he has worked for over eight years. Past assignments include acting as special detail to the regional office to complete the requirements for the National Environmental Policy Act to translocate wolves into New Mexico. He is currently involved with the California Condor Reintroduction Program. Mr. Palmer received his undergraduate degree at Elmhurst College in Illinois, and did graduate studies at Northern Arizona University. Mr. Palmer is also an SAS board member.

Christmas Bird Counts

By Chuck Kangas

I've just finished the last of five Christmas Bird Counts (CBC) for this year. Having a new hip allowed me to do that many. I realize that there are a number of you who don't know what a Christmas Bird Count is so I'll fill you in a little.

CBC are made up of 15 mile diameter (7 1/2 mile radius) circles in an area that will produce the most species. Therefore most of them are in areas that include some water that will have ducks and shorebirds on them. I think it's understandable that for such a large area it's nearly impossible to get enough participants to thoroughly comb the circle. The assigned task is to count every bird seen from sunrise to sunset. Every Christmas Count that I've participated in there is always a struggle to try to finish the assigned part of the circle.

The National Audubon Society sends out handouts to the CBC compilers and I will paraphrase from this years handout. This years CBC will have over 50,000 participants from all 50 states, every Canadian province and parts of Central and South America, the West Indies, and several Pacific Islands, in what is expected to be 1,800 plus individual counts. Last year over 54 million individual birds were counted representing 2485 species.

I belong to a discussion group on the Internet called Bird Chat. It consists of birders around the world. Lately, there has been a thread (messages on the same subject) on the value of the CBC. The general consensus has been that although the counts aren't completely scientific they are, on the whole, valuable. As one of the birders said: "There are many reasons for the counts, and the data collected on early winter distribution and densities in the North American region is a powerful tool in monitoring the health of individual species populations as well as the overall health of the habitant and environment at large, on which these species depend".

My earliest CBC was the 1974 count in Phoenix. My wife and I stayed with Bob and Ann Bradley. We were living in Tucson, Arizona at the time. I think Bob and Bix Demaree were co compilers at the time. Later I moved to Glendale and Bob and I became close friends and went on many counts throughout the years. I was assigned an area along the Salt River with Smitty (Robert Smith) of Sierras Vistas. Smitty was known across the country and was an excellent birder with a keen sense of sound. I was a novice birder and was frustrated by Smitty counting off the birds by sound. I learned that on a CBC the birds can be counted by either sound or sight. I, of course wanted to see all the birds. Smitty was patient with me and taught me a lot about bird identification. He passed away several years ago. I miss him.

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Christmas Bird Counts

Continued

I had a number of life birds on that Phoenix count since I was a novice birder. The day after the count Bob Bradley took me to the old Phoenix Sewage ponds to see still another life bird—a Ruff ! The Ruff had been around for a while and stayed for the count. I believe it was a first state record.

Since that early Phoenix count I have been on many, many counts both in Arizona , Colorado and also Mexico Throughout the years Bob Bradley accompanied me on many of the counts. I don't think I've missed a year when I didn't go on a count from that early Phoenix one. I've made lasting friendships with people from across the country.

SAS Web Site: www.sonoranaudubon.org

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Join Sonoran Audubon Society.....

New Adult or Family membership: \$20.00

Seniors and Students: \$15.00

Renewal fee for Students and Seniors: \$15.00

Mailed Newsletter subscription : \$8.00

Membership includes National Audubon magazine and electronic Chapter Newsletter. Make check payable to National Audubon Society (for newsletter subscription, make check payable to Sonoran Audubon Society). Include address, email and telephone number. Mail to:

Sonoran Audubon Society

P. O. Box 8068

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The Tres Rios Christmas Bird Count certainly had the endorsement of the weather gods. No one could have requisitioned a more perfect winter day for birding. The morning hours were cold, necessitating layers of insulation and gloves, but the day warmed under sunny skies to T-shirt temperatures. The new, or newly revived count got off to a great start this year. Sponsored by the Sonoran Audubon it was spearheaded largely by the efforts of Daniela Yellan, the compiler, Josh Burns, and Troy Corman. The teams in the field counted a total of 150 plus species. I was part of Mike Rupp's team, which consisted of myself, Mike, Hank Vanderpol, Sierena Brownlee and Mike Foley. We had 72 species in our area, which included the lakes at Estrella Mountain Ranch, part of the Gila River shoreline, and surrounding desert.

An informal poll Mike took amongst team members before meeting Wednesday morning indicated low to no interest in starting in the predawn hours in order to do some owling. Nevertheless, the owls gave us the gift of a sighting or two during daylight hours. We flushed a Burrowing Owl and a Barn Owl to add to our species count.

The variety of birding expertise amongst team members always keeps things interesting. One member, Hank Vanderpol, was from British Columbia, vacationing here for the winter. He found out about the counts and is joining in a number of them while here. A retired director of a Child Protection Agency in Canada, he said he birded regularly to restore his sanity. He must have needed lots of restoration over his years of service, because he was an excellent birder. His personal goal was to find a Roadrunner. We saw tracks in the sands of several washes we strolled, but no birds. Finally, just as he was about to quit for the day, we spotted his Roadrunner for him.

Another member, Sirena Brownlee, is a biologist who had once done a study on Burrowing Owls. She was the one to ID the individual we saw so briefly, fleeing away, giving us not much more to see than a tawny rear-end. She then scouted out its burrow and showed us some pellets that contained rodent bones, proof positive a Burrowing Owl resided there. Some pellets contained large numbers of ants. These she speculated were Horned lizard droppings. She told us that Burrowing Owls will often scatter scat from other critters around the entrance of their burrows to disguise the identity of the occupant. Fascinating!

Mike Rupp had an aerial photograph of our region and had scouted out the area well before hand.

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The Tres Rios Christmas Bird Count

Continued

He was our expert on where to go and how to get there and had done the paperwork necessary to get us passes from the Association at Estrella Mountain Ranch which allowed us to legally bird the area. In addition to those passes, we also needed to have a resident escorting us in our travels. Mike's friend, Heather Mees, deserves special thanks and recognition for being the resident non-birder of our team whose presence granted us the right to count birds in her neighborhood. She was patient, polite, and mostly silent about how certifiable she thought we were for being outdoors in the frosty dawn with binoculars and frozen noses.

A great day with interesting folks, great birds plus delicious food as a finale, what more could you ask of a Christmas Bird Count?

January, 2002 Field Trips

Sonoran Audubon strongly encourages carpooling on all outings!

Please organize your own carpool, consolidate vehicles at meeting places, and/or contact leaders for carpooling assistance.

Field Trips are rated in difficulty levels one, the easiest, to five, the most difficult. It is recommended that passengers reimburse drivers at an agreed rate.

REMINDERS: Don't forget water, sunscreen, hats and insect repellent. Wear neutral colors. Avoid bright colors. Wear sturdy walking shoes.

Tuesday, January 15 Thunderbird Paseo

Leader: Eleanor Campbell 623-977 7639
ercamp@juno.com

Enjoy a leisurely morning of birding with fellow birders from Birders Anonymous. Expect a range of species from shorebirds such as common snipe, to raptors such as Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel and Peregrine Falcon, and field birds such as American Pipit, Horned Lark, and various sparrow species. Morning only. Difficulty 1.

Meeting time and place: 8AM in the Rollerplex parking lot on 75th Avenue just south of Bell Road.

Friday, January 18 to Monday January 21, Bosque del Apache, Socorro, New Mexico.

Leader: Bob Bradley

Local Contact: Daniela Yellan 602 942-7791
dyellan@aol.com

There is nothing quite like experiencing this amazing place! There are thousands of Sand-hill Cranes, Snow Geese, Canada Geese, and many other species of birds and other critters in this national wildlife refuge near Socorro. We will drive to Socorro on Friday, spend Saturday at Bosque, and Sunday morning at birding sites near Socorro, Sunday afternoon at Water Canyon and environs to look for birds like Clark's Nutcracker, Townsend's Solitaire, Montezuma's Quail and Red Crossbills (if we're lucky). Another option for Sunday is to look for the Rosy Finches in the Sandia Peaks near Albuquerque. Monday we'll leave to return to Phoenix. Difficulty 2. Bring warm clothing. Contact Daniela for reservations and carpooling details. Limit 15

Sunday, January 27 Sweetwater Wastewater Treatment Plant

Leader: Daniela Yellan 602 942-7791
dyeallan@aol.com

An easy ride on I-10 from Phoenix we will spend part of the day at these wetlands near Tucson which have been designed with birders and other wildlife enthusiasts in mind. Depending on time and what else appears on the bird alert, we may check the ponds at Arizona City, stop at the Sod farms to look for the Mountain Plover, or visit other nearby places. Bring Lunch. Difficulty 1

Limit: 4 vehicles. Contact leader for meeting time and place, and carpooling arrangements.

Save These Dates

February 15-18

Salton Sea area in Southern California.

Leader: Chuck Kangas. 623-931-6677
chuckkan@mindspring.com

A haven for wintering birds, this trip should yield numerous species, including ducks, herons, various shorebirds, gulls, white pelicans and other species.

Any other future field trip suggestions? Give Daniela a call. She's also always looking for field trip leaders. Why don't you share some of your favorite birding spots with her.

Calendar of Monthly Meetings...

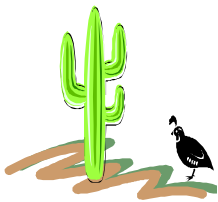
**Location: Auditorium, Glendale Public Library, 5959 West Brown Street
(one block south of Peoria Ave. & 59th Ave. intersection)**

Time: 6:30 p.m.

January 9, 2002	Bruce Palmer, Endangered Species Biologist with the USFWS, on "The California Condor Reintroduction Program"
Feb 13, 2002	Troy Corman, Neotropical Migratory Birds Coordinator at AZGFD on "The Arizona Breeding Bird Atlas What We Discovered and Where We Go From Here"
Mar 13, 2002	Karen Schedler, with the AZGFD Education Department on "The Bats of Arizona"
Apr 10, 2002	Fiona Goodson, Environmental Consultant on "Cactus Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl"
May 8, 2002	Kate Litteral of the Mesa Southwest Museum on "Arizona Dinosaurs A to Z"

Other Dates of Interest:

Jan 2, 6:45 p.m. Board Meeting at Glendale Library. All SAS members welcome. (contact Chuck Kangas)



Sonoran Audubon Society

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