

Upcoming Events

John Arnett, SAS Editor

The changing of the years is a busy time for everyone. Why not take a break from the hustle and bustle and join Sonoran Audubon for an upcoming field trip or meeting? Plus, we have set a date for the popular spring-time Annual Picnic at Horseshoe Ranch. Below is a summary of SAS events happening in the months ahead. Please visit the interactive Calendar at our new website (www.sonoranaudubon.org) for more details.

Meetings

Continuing with our recent theme of presentations about birds and wildlife of Africa, join us on December 10 to hear Shannon Perry, a SAS Friend, talk about birds of Uganda. Occasionally, SAS gives a member an opportunity to give a presentation; join us on January 14, 2015, for Vera Markham's photos and stories.

Want to learn how your Audubon chapter operates, or how you can contribute your time and skills to SAS? Join us at a Board meeting where SAS Friends are always welcome. The next two meetings will be on December 3 and January 6, starting at 7pm at the WVUU church.

Field Trips

SAS birding trips accommodate birders of all skill levels and interests.

Our monthly bird walks at Estrella Mountain Regional Park and other nearby locations are a great way for you to meet other birders, learn about birds and their habitats, and hone your birding skills. Explore Estrella Mountain park with Joe Ford on December 13 and January 10, beginning at 8am. Joe will also give presentations about Arizona's geology at Estrella Mountain and Cave Creek Regional Parks on December 13 and 20, respectively.

SAS also travels to some of the best birding spots locally and regionally. Highlights include Tres Rios with guest guide Bill Grossi on December 6, Santa Cruz Flats on January 11, Arlington Valley on January 31, 2015, plus a busy schedule in February and March.

Annual Picnic

Mark your calendar! Our Annual Picnic will be on Saturday, March 28, at Horseshoe Ranch nestled within the Agua Fria National Monument north of Black Canyon City. Join us for a fun day of birding, pleasant scenery, and great food.

We hope to see you soon!

Sonoran Audubon's Planning Session: A Summary

By Karen LaFrance, SAS Consultant

Sonoran Audubon's Annual Planning Session took place on Saturday, November 1, 2014 at the Hassayampa River Preserve in Wickenburg.

After some birding by most attendees, the first order of business was celebrating the past year at Sonoran Audubon. Included in the list were: good speakers at monthly meetings; a new e-newsletter, with John Arnett as the Editor; Joe Ford's reaching out to families with bird walks at Estrella, White Tanks, Cave Creek regional parks; Constant Contact up and running; the Girl Scouts bird badge/wildlife badge by SAS' Tim Cullison at North Mountain Visitor Center getting more popular; another good year of the Tres Rios Nature Festival; the bookmarks published, the bird checklist revised and republished, and the West Valley Birding Brochure completed and making money for SAS; the New Website Redesign; helping Audubon Arizona to start up San Pedro River Days in Winkelman; Darnell Kirksey's involvement in the Western Rivers Action Network (WRAN); electing excellent new Board members; another great Picnic!; Christmas Bird Counts; and Important Bird Area (IBA) monitoring.

Planning exercises are designed to sort out the real priority interests of the Chapter from the usual long list of important ideas. We also try to determine strategic goals, for example, "how far along on this or that project can the Chapter realistically get in this upcoming year?" SAS agreed in prior years to forge ahead with its own version of the National Audubon Society's "Building Bird Friendly Communities" initiative. So, participants worked on two general areas:

1. Building a Bird Friendly Community through Education initiatives: Using the Conservation & Education Committee; using the Field Trip Committee; various trip and education leaders and yes "we are excited" to do some of this this year! Any educational outreach helps to create a Bird Friendly Community.

2. Building a Bird Friendly Community with a Focus on Arizona Birds in Decline, taking baby steps toward the greater goal and making sure we know WHAT a Bird Friendly Community is as we set our goals.

After lunch and before everyone got too tired, two groups discussed ideas which emerged in earlier discussions, particularly some first steps needed:

A. "A POSSIBLE PROJECT? GLENDALE RECHARGE PONDS' BIRD-WATCHER FRIENDLY IMPROVEMENTS"

B. "GETTING YOUNG PEOPLE INVOLVED WITH BIRDING AND SAS"

Next Steps: The Education and Conservation Committee has been asked to refine several initiatives from the Board retreat, then spearhead next steps on these ideas, working with other SAS committees, outside entities and the SAS Board of Directors, when appropriate, for decision-making.

The re-invigorated Education and Conservation Committee will be meeting every second Thursday of each month at 1 PM. For location of the December meeting, please contact Karen LaFrance, SAS Consultant, at [klaf40 \[at\] gmail.com](mailto:klaf40@gmail.com). Anyone from SAS with an interest is welcome to join this Committee!

Attending the Planning Session were: SAS Membership Database Manager Tom Lazzelle, Andree' Tarby, Birding Trips Chair Dan Bohlmann, Jerry Theis, Newsletter Editor and Chair of Ad Hoc Website Redesign Group John Arnett, SAS WRAN Representative Darnell Kirksey, Secretary of the Board Gail Bliss, SAS Treasurer Jim Consolloy, SAS President Haylie Hewitt, Trip Leader Donna Smith, SAS members Fran Baughman, Joyce Anastasi, and Dan Jacob, and Consultant Karen LaFrance (Facilitating and Notes).

The Camaropteras and Eremomelas of South Africa
By Dr. Jerry Theis, SAS Director-at-Large

What is a Camaroptera? How about an Eremomela? Could they be unusual insects, reptiles, or even antelopes? Could they even be menu items from the local diner? I encountered both of these on a recent three-week Rockjumper Tours trip to South Africa where I learned they are small, skulking birds, difficult to see but easy to hear.

Both Camaropteras and Eremomelas are unobtrusive resident breeding bird species in Africa south of the Sahara. There are two species of Camaropteras, Grey-backed and Green-backed, the latter of which we viewed on four separate occasions. These birds are either in the *Cisticolidae* or the Old World Warbler family *Sylviidae* (depending on which source you visit) and are typically found in dense cover. They bind large leaves together low in a bush and build a grass nest within the leaves. The Green-backed Camaroptera has green upperparts, olive wings, and whitish-grey underparts. It prefers montane, riparian and lowland forests. Its song is a crisp *twik, twik, twik*. Camaropteras resemble wrens, often cocking their tails, and spend most of their time within a few meters of the ground. With this species of bird, we never experienced “warbler-neck!”



Green-backed Camaroptera by louisdup, www.birdforum.net

South Africa has four species of Eremomelas, of which we saw Yellow-bellied and Burnt-necked. They are currently in Family *Sylviidae*, although some taxonomists also place them in the *Cisticolidae* family. The Yellow-bellied Eremomela is a bird of open woodland, savannah,



Yellow bellied Eremomela by Volker Sthamer, www.birdforum.net

and dry scrub. It is a small bird (10 cm) with grey upperparts, becoming darker and more olive on the wings and tail. The gray breast shades into the lemon-yellow belly. The bill is blackish, connecting with a blackish stripe through the black eye. The Burnt-necked Eremomela has a striking white eye and a small rusty throat band. This species forages in small groups in the medium canopy, often in mixed-species flocks, feeding on insects on the outer twigs of trees and shrubs. Its song is a high-pitched *tchee, tchee, tchee*.

Both Camaroptera and Eremomela are elegant names for such drab, warbler-like skulking species. If you think these names are difficult to pronounce, try wrapping your tongue around Boubou, Brubru, and Bokmakierie! They are also South African birds, but larger and much more colorful; possibly material for future articles?

Sonoran Audubon and the Upper Agua Fria River

By Karen LaFrance

Sonoran Audubon Society keeps a watchful eye on the Upper Agua Fria River, a threatened river north of Phoenix. This river starts on Glassford Hill in Prescott Valley, goes south all the way through Yavapai County to the Lake Pleasant Impoundment in Maricopa County. The main river and tributaries actually flow—at high water times. The river winds picturesquely and sometimes leisurely through the Agua Fria National Monument and past Horseshoe Ranch. Downstream through Black Canyon City it is an obvious, wide, flood-scoured channel. In Lake Pleasant it mixes with other water to provide potable drinking water to much of the West Phoenix area.

SAS' Important Bird Area (IBA) along the Upper Agua Fria River is where the endangered Western Yellow-Billed Cuckoo and other passerines nest each year. The main IBA transect is along the river south of the Horseshoe Ranch ford on Bloody Basin Road. Our chapter is very interested in maintaining the quantity and quality of water in the river that supports the native habitat attracting these birds.

To that end, the chapter joined with others several years ago at the Upper Agua Fria Watershed Partnership (“UAFWP”). Formed at Arcosanti, located near Cordes Junction in Yavapai County, as its name implies, UAFWP is a group of persons and entities concerned for the health of the entire Upper Agua Fria River. Arcosanti is actually situated on the Upper Agua Fria River; its visitors probably do not know, when they look out east from that famous human habitat, that they are viewing a typical Arizona riparian corridor with huge tall trees and lots of birds.

Unfortunately, despite its beautiful vistas and breathtaking photo ops, the Upper Agua Fria River is not healthy. The river's very low “normal” flows are interspersed with increasingly damaging flood events threatening people and property, but also threatening the health of the bird and wildlife habitat in the Agua Fria National Monument and its environs. The most recent crisis is the drying up of the Big Bug Creek that flows from Prescott into the river. A mere five years ago, this tributary maintained a better water table for trees and semi-permanent “tanks” for use by wildlife in the dry seasons—but no longer. The UAFWP, along with concerned ranchers in the area, is working on this issue.

As SAS' Consultant, one of my tasks is to attend the monthly meetings of the UAFWP where I help Mary Hoadley from Arcosanti, who chairs the group, to guide discussion on these important issues. I also keep all the notes of these meetings. Please watch for more on this important conservation initiative and on a very interesting project about replanting trees in the Upper Agua Fria River that hold in moisture thus helping to prevent destructive high water events.