

Upcoming Events

John Arnett, SAS Editor

The beginning of the year is a busy time for SAS and, as we approach spring, a busy time of year for birders. Upcoming SAS events include nominating and voting on the Board of Directors, the annual picnic and silent auction at Horseshoe Ranch, and a full slate of field trips and monthly programs. Plus, the amateur and professional birding/bird surveying community will want to start preparing for the many late-winter and springtime bird monitoring projects. Read below for more details about some upcoming events, and please visit our interactive online Calendar www.sonoranaudubon.org to learn about more events and happenings not described below.

Board of Directors Nominations and Vote

You may nominate yourself to serve on the SAS Board by contacting Nominating Committee Chair Andrea Nesbitt (andreanes [at] cox.net) as soon as possible. A term lasts 2 years and begins in June; additional terms may be served. Board members are encouraged to participate at Board meetings the first Wednesday of each month (typically 11 per year), and attend monthly programs and other SAS events. To learn more, you are welcome to attend a Board meeting and see in person how the Board operates, or **CLICK HERE** (<http://sonoranaudubon.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Bylaws.pdf>) to read the SAS Bylaws.

Annual Picnic and Donations Requested on February 11

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 weather (hopefully), and good food.

We will hold a silent auction at the picnic. Our previous silent auction was a much-appreciated fundraiser for the chapter. We are seeking donated items from you to include in the auction, and we prefer items related to birds, birding, or nature in general. Please do not use this as an opportunity to clean out the dusty corners of your garage and unload that awful gift you never used.

If you have items to donate, please give them to John Arnett or Jerry Theis at the monthly meeting on February 11.

Meetings

Join us on February 11 for Martha Maxon's presentation about Roadrunners, one of the desert's most charismatic and iconic birds. Kathe Anderson visits SAS on March 11 for what should be a lively evening about the phenomenon of Migration.

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 February 4 and March 4, starting at 7pm at the West Valley Unitarian Universalist Church.

Field Trips

SAS birding trips accommodate birders of all skill levels and interests. Click [HERE](http://sonoranaudubon.org/field-trips/) (<http://sonoranaudubon.org/field-trips/>) to learn the general guidelines for participating in a SAS birding trip, and click [HERE](http://sonoranaudubon.org/eventsactivities/) (<http://sonoranaudubon.org/eventsactivities/>) to view the full Calendar of upcoming trips.

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 February 14 and March 14, beginning at 8am. Joe will also have bird walks and presentations at White Tanks Mountain and Cave Creek Regional Parks on February 21 and 28, respectively.

SAS also travels to some of the best birding spots locally and regionally. Upcoming highlights include trips to Catalina State Park near Tucson on Friday, February 13, Lake Pleasant Pipeline Trail on Friday February 27, and Florida Canyon in the Santa Rita Mountains south of Tucson on Friday, March 6.

Tres Rios Nature and Earth Festival, March 7-8

SAS will be offering birding walks and will have a booth at this annual festival, and we are seeking volunteers to promote Sonoran Audubon to the public. If you can help, contact Bob McCormick [mcbobaz \[at\] aol.com](mailto:mcbobaz@aol.com).

Bird Surveys

- On Saturday, February 7, please join other SAS members for the annual Winter Bird Count at the Gila River Indian Community. Contact Althea Walker to sign up [althea.walker \[at\] gric.nsn.us](mailto:althea.walker@gric.nsn.us)
- SAS always needs experienced birders to help conduct surveys at two Important Bird Areas - Agua Fria National Monument, and the Lower Salt and Gila River Ecosystem. If you read the article about yellow-billed cuckoos in this month's newsletter, then you'll know that volunteers are welcomed for that survey effort as well. Please contact Bob McCormick [mcbobaz \[at\] aol.com](mailto:mcbobaz@aol.com) for more information.
- The 18th annual Great Backyard Bird Count is February 13-16, 2015. Visit gbbc.birdcount.org to learn more and to register.
- Arizona Field Ornithologists (AZFO) is organizing a Peach-faced Lovebird count on Saturday, February 21, 2015. It's already been 5 years since the last lovebird count! Please see http://www.azfo.org/pfLoveBird/pfloMain_2015.html

- The Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) is one of North America's longest-running and most important continental-scale bird monitoring programs. Several BBS routes in Arizona are available and volunteers are needed. For more information contact Troy Corman TCorman [at] azgfd.gov
- The North American Migration Count (NAMC) happens the second Saturday of May; this year it will be on May 9. The main NAMC webpage is remarkably boring and uninformative <http://community.gorge.net/birding/namcstasz.htm> Instead, please visit the NAMC webpage hosted at the AZFO site, and then contact the coordinator of the county where you would like to participate <http://www.azfo.org/namc/aznamc.html>

Have a fun, safe, and birdy Spring!



The Bender Spring Public Use Area of the Barry M. Goldwater Range East in southwestern Arizona, August 2014. Photo: John Arnett

**CONSERVE TO ENHANCE:
Encouraging Less Water Usage and Saving Stream-Side Habitats
By Karen LaFrance**

Conserve to Enhance (or “C2E” as it is affectionately called by its proponents) is a new method to encourage families and businesses to use less water—a very important effort we all must make in our desert environment. C2E does not just ask folks to conserve water or buy low-flow toilets. C2E creatively translates water savings into a rationale for giving money to conservation. AND, through C2E, the contributed money goes to river and stream-side habitat restoration projects in local communities.

Sounds too good to be true, right? Well, the University of Arizona and several non-governmental organizations in Tucson have actually piloted C2E for four years. Without fanfare and a big publicity campaign, they are already raising about \$12,000 per year which is used for watercourse and habitat enhancement projects. The website at www.conservetoenhance.org is very interesting and chronicles these projects. You can find out how C2E is working in several communities, how to contribute, how raised monies are granted to projects and who benefits from the funds raised.

Sonoran Audubon is active in the Western Rivers Action Network (WRAN) which advocates for water conservation throughout several Western states. You may already participate in or get news from WRAN and, for that, Darnell Kirksey from the Education & Conservation Committee thanks you (<http://conservation.audubon.org/western-rivers-action-network>). Support for C2E has emerged from conversations among WRAN's participants who have wanted to do something tangible in their communities to reduce water usage.

After a presentation by Fred Haggerson, intern with Audubon Arizona, the SAS Board asked me to look carefully into C2E and what it might mean for SAS's conservation efforts. As a result, I attended a day-long planning session with other Arizona Audubon chapter representatives, Audubon Arizona, and a facilitator/C2E expert from University of Arizona named Brittany Xiu.

This session was “right up my alley” so to speak. For many years, I worked in private sector community economic development, leading various non-profit groups wanting to improve their neighborhoods. My work required advocacy and collaboration on a large scale with a Capital “C” so that all interests participated and eventually would benefit. C2E will be an effort on a similar scale.

So, please, go to the website and get acquainted with this very, very interesting idea and how it is already benefiting communities in our state. If you have a strong interest in C2E, please contact me directly at klaf40@gmail.com and stay tuned to your Gambel's Tales enewsletter for occasional updates on C2E.

Conserving Cuckoos and Arizona's Ribbons of Life By Bettina Bickel

The morning air is cool as rain from a monsoon shower drips from the thick canopy of cottonwood trees and falls into a shallow stream. “Ka, ka, ka, ka, ka, kowlp, kowlp” rings out from a digital music player, and two birders silently watch and listen for a response. Suddenly, a Yellow-billed Cuckoo appears at the edge of the forest canopy, peering out to see who has so loudly barged into its territory. It is a lucky sighting for the birders, as these shy, secretive and rare birds are more frequently heard than seen. After enjoying the sighting, the citizen scientist birders record detailed notes, including a GPS point, and move on to the next survey location.

For several years, cuckoo surveys like this have been conducted at the Agua Fria National Monument, an Important Bird Area where SAS volunteers annually monitor bird populations. The surveys have been organized by Audubon Arizona and Bureau of Land Management, with help from a network of volunteers including several SAS members.



Bob McCormick conducts a cuckoo survey at the Agua Fria National Monument. Photo: Tim Flood

Information collected during these surveys is shared with USFWS, who listed the western distinct population segment (DPS) of Yellow-billed Cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus occidentalis*) as Threatened under the Endangered Species Act in 2014. This listing action may help save not only the cuckoo, but also some of Arizona's remaining riparian areas and the many other species, including humans, that depend on them.

Cuckoo Ecology

Western Yellow-billed Cuckoos over-winter in South America and return to the southwest so that nesting coincides with monsoon rains and the abundance of insect prey. Survey data show that they arrive in Arizona in mid-June, nest in early July, and begin their southward migration in late August.

Cuckoos are unique in their ability to eat toxic, hairy and spiny caterpillars, including tent caterpillars. The cuckoos' nest is a stick platform on a horizontal branch where usually two or three eggs are laid. The relatively large eggs allow for rapid development and the young hatch after about ten days. The altricial young are eating whole insects by their second day, and at only one week of age are already out of the nest crawling along tree limbs.

In the southwestern U.S., cuckoos are riparian obligates, requiring healthy cottonwood-willow riparian gallery forest habitat. These riparian areas are “ribbons of life” that support a remarkably high diversity of bird species, in addition to the cuckoo. A majority of Arizona’s other vertebrate species also depend on riparian areas during at least part of their life cycles.

Cuckoo Conservation

Habitat loss is the primary cause of the decline in the cuckoo population, which was once abundant and locally common in Arizona. Because Arizona has lost approximately 90% of its original riparian habitat to human activities, the cuckoo is now absent from areas where it was once common, including large stretches of the lower Gila, lower Salt, and lower Colorado Rivers. Dams, water diversion, and urban/agricultural development have rendered these once vibrant riparian areas mostly lifeless. In spite of this, Arizona still has the largest population of cuckoos in the western U.S.

Important stretches of precious riparian habitat in Arizona remain along the Agua Fria, San Pedro, and Verde Rivers, Sonoita Creek, and Tonto Creek above Roosevelt Lake. Unfortunately, these areas are vulnerable to habitat degradation. Groundwater pumping and aquifer depletion threaten the base flows of the Verde and San Pedro. If poorly managed, grazing cattle can alter vegetation and eliminate cottonwood and willow reproduction by eating and trampling seedlings, as well as by compacting soils. Tamarisk invasion replaces an ecologically complex cottonwood-willow forest with a monotonous and impoverished system that is much less likely to be used by cuckoos.

Fortunately, many of these areas are included in the USFWS’s proposal to designate Critical Habitat for the cuckoo. Perhaps the recent listing of the cuckoo will be an important step toward protecting Arizona’s “ribbons of life.”



A Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo strikes a handsome pose in the riparian forest canopy. Photo: Caleb Strand



Little Ash Creek offers some of the best cuckoo habitat in the Agua Fria National Monument. Photo: Steven Prager

Note: Yellow-billed Cuckoo surveys will continue at the Agua Fria National Monument this summer to collect data that will help guide management of cuckoo habitat. Participants must be prepared for pre-dawn meeting times, intense midsummer heat and humidity, and rough terrain. Rewards include sightings of some of the 80-plus bird species seen so far on surveys, plus occasional sightings of other fascinating wildlife from Gila monsters to bobcats. Please contact Bob McCormick mcbobaz@aol.com or Tim Flood tjflood@att.net if you’d like to participate.

Birding Field Trip Leaders' Workshops
February 7 and 21, 2015
By Karen LaFrance

DID YOU KNOW THAT YOU DO NOT HAVE TO BE AN "EXPERT" BIRDER TO BE AN EXCELLENT BIRDING FIELD TRIP LEADER?

Sonoran Audubon Society, Desert Rivers Audubon and Maricopa Audubon have teamed up to offer two workshops dedicated to leading birding field trips. Audubon Arizona is participating too, hosting the February workshops from 2 to 4 PM each Saturday at the Nina Mason Pulliam Audubon Center, 3131 S. Central in Phoenix.

So, who are these workshops intended for? Should I attend? What would I get out of going? These are the questions you might be asking yourself.

First, these workshops are intended for people who already take people on birding field trips AND for people who go on such trips and may consider becoming a trip leader. The first workshop, on February 7th from 2-4 PM is "geared towards experienced leaders," says Kathe Anderson, a member of the planning group. The second workshop is geared to "newbies." However, Kathe adds: "Because we believe that we can learn a lot from each other, everyone is welcome at one or both workshops to provide input on what makes a great field trip and to learn techniques that make field trips successful."

Second, as Auduboners, birding in the field is likely one of our life-long passions. Showing others about birds, their habitats, identification and behavior is FUN, FUN, FUN don't you think? So, yes, you should attend because these workshops, too, will be FUN. You might even have a little time "in the field."

Finally, at these workshops you will meet other trip leaders from around the Phoenix Metro area and beyond. Many take birding trips not only around Arizona and the West but around the world—like Dave Pearson, for example. The planning group hopes you may find people who can mentor you as you venture into leading trips OR folks that YOU yourself can mentor in one way or another or team up with for birding adventures.

If you want more information, you can talk to Dan Bohlmann, SAS Field Trip Committee Chair, and SASers Barb Meding and Kathe Anderson who are helping to plan these workshops. You can contact me, your scribe Karen LaFrance, at klaf40@gmail.com.

To register for the workshop(s), you are asked to email Lois Lorenz from Desert Rivers Audubon (DRA) at LoisLorenz347@cox.net. Because there will be refreshments, Lois requests that you contact her at least 3 days prior to each workshop— by February 4th for February 7th and by February 18th for February 21st. These workshops are a project of DRA which received a National Audubon Collaborative Grant to assist with costs. Sonoran Audubon's Board enthusiastically supports this effort and hopes that many of you will attend!