

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear SAS Friends and Supporters:

“Did you ever see a roadrunner sitting on top of a tree?”

“I was never interested in birds until a hawk flew right over my head and landed on my fence.”

“Is that bird your pet?”

“I didn't know that birds of prey ate other birds – I thought they just ate mice.”

These are some of the great comments I heard at Sonoran Audubon's table at the Outdoor Arizona Expo on February 7<sup>th</sup>. The event was sponsored by the Sportsman's Club of Sun City West and SAS was one of about sixteen vendors.



Andrea Nesbitt brought her rehabilitated Merlin, which drew lots of attention to our table (*see photo at left*). She and Jim Consolloy were able to identify birds for several people who described what they'd seen, but didn't recognize. These ranged from a Great-tailed Grackle to a Bufflehead.

We used Jim's laptop to display our great new website and to have people sign up to receive our Constant Contact messages. The festival lasted four hours and approximately 150 people stopped by our table and/or picked up our literature. The most popular bookmark we gave out was “Pigeons Among Us.”

It was fun to answer people's questions and promote SAS to the public. We can always use volunteers at these events and we have three more festivals coming up in March and April. The Tres Rios Nature and Earth Festival will be on March 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m. Bob McCormick can still use help leading festival-goers on short bird walks or at the booth. Contact Bob if you are interested: [mcbobaz \[AT\] aol.com](mailto:mcbobaz@att.net)



Jim Consolloy answering questions at the SAS table during the Outdoor Arizona Expo

Speaking of volunteering, Tom Sloan from the Sportsman's Club of Sun City West told me his group is seeking a Birding Coordinator and wondered if SAS could help. If you're interested, please contact Tom at 623-203-2683.

On a sad note, I was sorry to hear from our local Wild Birds Unlimited owner, Victor Reece, that his store will close for good on March 31, 2015. I've been stopping in there the past five years since he opened and I'll miss visiting Victor and doing some shopping. Starting March 1<sup>st</sup>, Victor will be giving 25% off all non-food items (except optics) with progressively increasing discounts until the end of the month. Displays and fixtures are also for sale. Please stop by and pick up some bargains soon. The store is located at 75<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Bell Road, behind the Mimi's Restaurant and next to Café Zupa's. We wish Victor much success in his new ventures. If you have questions, give him a call at 623-773-3000.

Lastly, please join us on March 11<sup>th</sup> when our speaker will be Kathe Anderson explaining the ins and outs of Migration. Check our website calendar for the details on this and all our other great upcoming events, such as our Annual Picnic and silent auction on March 28<sup>th</sup>.

See you soon,

Haylie

[haylie.hewitt \[AT\] cox.net](mailto:haylie.hewitt@cox.net)

## **Biographies of the Nominees for Officers and Directors at Large of the Sonoran Audubon Society**

**The individuals below were nominated by the Nominating Committee**

**The election will be at the general meeting on Wednesday, April 8, 2015**

Victoria Johnson nominated for Director At Large. Victoria was born in Bridgeport, Connecticut, and developed a love for birds as a child where she was raised in a wooded lot near a nature center. Victoria currently works as a mental health evaluator for the SMI population in Maricopa County and has a Master's degree in counseling. An avid hiker and birder, Victoria is currently a member of the Sierra Club where she has worked on projects to prevent destruction of wildlife habitat especially as it affects endangered birds. When not hiking, birding or working, Victoria likes to spend time at home with her husband and four Persian *indoor* cats who like to watch local birds through the window.

Donna Smith nominated for Director At Large. Hi, my name is Donna Smith. I was born in Detroit, Michigan. From a young age my mother and father taught me about nature and birds. My parents would take me out in the yard and point out the birds and tell me the name of each one. I got my first bird guide when I was 8, The Golden Book of Birds, and I still have it.

I did volunteer work for the Howell Nature Center in Howell, Michigan, for many years. We took in injured animals and birds and it was a great learning experience for me. When my husband Ralph and I retired to Arizona fourteen years ago I joined Birders Anonymous and Sonoran Audubon Society. I was the Field Trip Committee Chair for SAS for four years and currently I do Important Bird Area bird counts at the Arlington Wildlife Area with Haylie Hewitt.

I would be happy to join the Board.

## The WRAN Report By Darnell Kirksey

WESTERN RIVERS DAY at the state legislature is coming up on March 11, 2015. As your Sonoran Audubon Society (SAS) representative to the Western Rivers Action Network (WRAN), I will attend along with Audubon Society leaders from around Arizona. WRAN is Audubon's multi-state grassroots effort to protect the western rivers. We will meet with state Representatives and Senators to let them know what our chapters and other organizations are doing to keep our rivers flowing. WRAN wants our legislators to know that we are their "go to" resource for information about water issues. We will also remind our legislators that the budget of the Arizona Department of Water Resources (ADWR, <http://www.azwater.gov/azdwr/>) has been cut, and that this action should be reversed. A fully-funded and effective ADWR is extremely important to ensure that Arizona has a sustainable water future.

We will give out packets of information with details of WRAN's mission: to keep the waters flowing in the Colorado, Verde, San Pedro, Salt, Gila, Agua Fria, Little Colorado, and Santa Cruz Rivers. These waters not only provide drinking water for tens of millions of people, they water the fields providing food for these millions. The waters of the Colorado River basin alone are responsible for billions of dollars in economic revenue - including tourism and recreation. The vast majority of birds that migrate through the intermountain west rely on these rivers - not to mention all the other wildlife and plants making up the web of life.

WRAN is involved in many projects that support its mission. Members in New Mexico are working with conservation and state groups to stop the New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission's plan to dam the Gila River. A dam on the Gila would impact wildlife, recreation and tourism at huge cost for debatable benefits. Also, WRAN groups are helping with the initiative that allowed the Colorado River to flow to the sea in the Gulf of California in the spring of 2014.



The Salt River in central Arizona (John Arnett)

In Arizona, Karen LaFrance has been active in the Upper Agua Fria Watershed Partnership, a group working to protect the Agua Fria River watershed. The Partnership is currently working with Arizona Department of Transportation to try to reverse the drying of Big Bug Creek and related springs that occurred when the new interchange at I-17 and Cordes Junction was built. Karen and the group are also working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Arizona Game and Fish Department to protect riparian habitat for birds - including the federally threatened "Western" Yellow-billed Cuckoo - on the Agua Fria National Monument. Your SAS chapter is directly involved in this work through the Agua Fria Important Bird Area where our volunteers have been monitoring bird populations for years.

SAS is also helping with the Conserve To Enhance (C2E) project. This is a plan developed at the University of Arizona that hopefully will help save water and fund environmental work in participating cities. Tucson is having some success with C2E. Karen LaFrance and I attended a planning session on February 21<sup>st</sup>, and a C2E launch with Audubon will take place in April and May.

WRAN provides many opportunities for educating yourself about water issues. You can join a series of noontime webinars that concern many issues of interest to Audubon members. There are also training/workshop sessions held around the state where you can learn more about WRAN's many activities. I implore you to go to <http://az.audubon.org/western-rivers-action-network-O> . WRAN can also be found on Facebook.

Please join WRAN and get involved in the struggle to keep our rivers free flowing.

## Crombec and Boomslang by Jerry Theis

In September 2014 on my Rockjumper Birding Tour of South Africa, we were traveling from Wakkerstroom to Hluhluwe when we stopped at Ilala Weaver for lunch. Naturally, after ordering from the menu, we began birding the local trees and bushes. Immediately a small bird flew past us and disappeared into a dense bush.

Fortunately we were able to coax the small bird into view and it was a Long-billed (Cape) Crombec, resembling our nuthatches in North America. The Long-billed Crombec, *Sylvietta rufescens*, is an African warbler, common in fynbos (a biome characterized by endemic heath and *Protea* plants), open woodland, savannah and dry *Acacia* scrub. It breeds in southern Africa from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Zambia, and Tanzania southwards to South Africa.

The Long-billed Crombec is a small (12 cm), nearly tailless bird. Its upperparts are brownish-gray to blueish-gray with underparts cinnamon to cinnamon buff. The whitish breast shades into the buff belly. The eyebrow is whitish to pale tawny, contrasting with a dark eye-stripe. The long, slightly curved bill is blackish. The sexes are similar. The call is a variable series of trilled notes. The crombec's nest is a large hanging bag (purse-like) of grasses, spider webs, and plant fibers, attached to the lower limbs of a tree. This territorial species is monogamous, pairing for life. Crombecs forage restlessly and methodically from the bottom to the top of bushes for insects, fruit, nectar, and seeds; either alone, in pairs, in family groups, or in mixed-species flocks. They move between trees with a bouncy flight.

Long-billed Crombec. Photo: Alan Manson



Fynbos habitat of South Africa. Photo: Abu Shawka

There are seven subspecies of *S. rufescens*, differing mainly in the shades of gray and brown on their upper parts and shades of buff and rufous on their underparts. Their population size is believed to be large; therefore, the species bears a status of least concern.

After we finally finished lunch, a woman approached me and, sensing that we were nature lovers, asked if we wanted to see a large snake. After a resounding "YES" from our group, she led us to her plant nursery across the

parking lot from the restaurant. She had noticed a snake skin on the ground and, looking up, had spotted a snake, a boomslang, high up in one of her trees. We were all thrilled to see one of South Africa's most poisonous snakes, at a safe distance of course. Boomslang means "tree snake" in Afrikaans and Dutch. The average adult boomslang is 4-6 feet in length and has an egg-shaped head with exceptionally large eyes. Males, such as we saw, are camouflaged in light

green color with black or blue scale edges while females are brown in color. Boomslangs are native to and restricted to sub-Saharan Africa. This species is oviparous (egg-laying), depositing up to 30 eggs in hollow tree trunks or rotting logs. Hatchlings are dangerously venomous by the time they reach a length of 18 inches and a girth as thick as an adult human's pinkie finger. Boomslangs are diurnal and almost exclusively arboreal. They are reclusive and will flee from anything too large to eat. Their diet includes lizards, frogs, and occasionally small mammals, birds, and eggs from nesting birds, all of which they swallow whole.

Many members of the family *Colubridae*, of which the boomslang is one, are harmless to humans because of small venom glands and inefficient fangs, but not the boomslang! It has a highly potent venom, delivered through large fangs. The venom is a hemotoxin, causing bleeding as well as headaches, nausea, sleepiness, and mental disorders. The venom is slow to act, often leading victims to underestimate the seriousness of the bite. The boomslang strikes quickly and without warning. Because of its nature, it has been featured in Harry Potter books, Agatha Christie's Death in the Clouds, Stephen King's Everything's Eventual, and in the TV series "Quincy, M.E."



Boomslang <http://sabile.co.za/blog/?p=919>

My chicken sandwich at lunch was satisfying but not nearly as satisfying as seeing an up-close Long-billed Crombec. We had good but not extremely up-close views of the boomslang, unlike Karl Schmidt. In 1957 this well-known herpetologist died after being bitten by a juvenile boomslang which he doubted could produce a fatal dose so he didn't administer antivenom. He was wrong!!