

TRIP REPORT December 5, 2015 Gila River Indian Community Winter Bird Count



On Saturday December 5th, The Gila River Indian Community held their 17th annual Winter Bird count. The count is separated into seven different areas with Sonoran Audubon usually helping out with Areas 6 & 7 which are on the west side of the Reservation. Andre Tarby and I volunteered for Area 7. This just happens to be the area with the Bald Eagle Nests (“Ba” in the Native language). Our Indian community guides were Janet Travis and Arriquippa (Tudor) Montague.

The meeting place was at the new school on 83rd Ave just south of Baseline Road. While waiting, a school bus pulls up. Yes, we have 12 grade school students and 6 adults! A short drive north puts us at the Eagle site. There are two large dead Cottonwood trees with huge nests in them. One nest is nearing completion while the other is from previous years. It is amazing to watch as the eagles bring huge pieces for the nests. Other birds such as Grackles and Egrets don’t seem to fear the eagles as the nest trees are filled with them. The eagles frequently fly between the trees and chase each other.

A short walk puts us at the Pee Posh Wetlands which have been constructed in the last few years. This area will soon be a beautiful riparian area but while we were there, the birds were limited to a few Coots, a Belted Kingfisher and dozens of White-crowned Sparrow. It is here

that one of the 6th graders decides that it is up to him to be in charge of the spotting scope. From here on, he makes sure that the scope is set up and focused on anything of interest.

The next stop on the walk was a pond with 400 Northern Shovelers. After scoping the pond, the students slowly walked forward and settled down to watch the explosion of wings as the Shovelers left the pond in mass. Half returned to the pond while the other half circled overhead.

On the way back to the bus, a Greater Roadrunner, three White Pelicans, 30-40 Great Egrets, Great Blue Herons, and a Loggerhead Shrike were observed. Back at the bus, we watched one of the eagles shredding a rabbit.

Our student with the scope was heard to say that this was the best field trip ever! We now all headed to the Huhugam Heritage center for lunch and the ceremonies. The dancing started with a costumed group and was followed by a line dance where anyone could participate.

If you are not doing anything next year on the first Saturday in December, you might just want to try this!

Bob McCormick

