

Gambel's Tales

The Newsletter of the Sonoran Audubon Society

Volume 10 Issue 6

February, 2009

At our next meeting.... Wednesday, February 11, 2009 at 7 p.m.

Moez Ali: Birds of Kenya

We had scheduled Moez last year at this time, but due to a mix-up it was postponed. We are glad that we now have him back on our schedule.

Moez Ali was born and raised in Nairobi, Kenya and has always been very interested in birds and wildlife. He earned his Bachelor of Science degree in Biology from Martin College in Pulaski, TN.

He is an avid and experienced birder, active member and field trip leader for the Tucson Audubon Society and always enthusiastic about any birding travels and adventures. He came to southeastern AZ in the summer of 2003 to work with nesting Red-faced Warblers and other Montane forest birds. He was immediately drawn to the fascinating Sonoran Desert and very intriguing Sky Island mountain ranges abundant with diverse bird and plant life.

Some of the projects he has worked on include nest predators of groundnesting forest passerines in southeastern Arizona; effects of fire on Montane forest birds in southeastern Arizona; effects of clutch size in the cost of reproduction in birds; and the influence of perennial pools on the abundance, diversity and reproductive success of breeding birds in riparian woodlands in southeastern Arizona.



Moez Ali

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What's Happening in our Chapter? By Your Editor, George Wall

The Sonoran Audubon Society board meeting convened at 7 p.m. on December 3, 2008. The attendees were Bob McCormick, Carol Schooler, Eleanor Campbell, Chuck Richards, Rich Schooler, Andrée Tarby, and George Wall. Tice Supplee was present as a guest.

After review and approval of last month's minutes, the committee reports were made.

Committee Reports:

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What's Happening in our Chapter?

- **A. Membership:** At the time of this meeting, there were 583 members and 105 current friends.
- **B. Field Trips:** No changes at this time.
- **C. Programs:** No changes in schedule. The new equipment will be used for the first time at the meeting on January 14, 2009.
- **D. Education:** The family bird walks have been slow for the past two times. Hopefully, the January bird walk scheduled for January 10, 2009, will be better.
- **E. Finance:** Profit and Loss Detail and Balance Sheet submitted June through December 2008 were accepted into the record.
- **F. Conservation:** Watch List Bird flyer completed; 200 will be printed; 50-60 bird photos have been submitted to Bob for the Photo Contest. ESA rule change, opposed by SAS and others, was done by the Bush Administration despite negative input.

Other: Upper Agua Watershed Partnership Report (Karen and Tice): SAS is keeping an eye peeled for potential collaborative projects that protect the Agua Fria Watershed and the river. Three potential partners include Friends of the Agua Fria National Monument, the Agua Fria Open Space Alliance and the AZ Riparian Council which is pioneering their protocol for vegetative surveying on the Agua Fria.

Horseshoe Ranch Update: The plan is for Game and Fish to purchase in the property in the second quarter of 2009. Karen LaFrance attended a recent meeting on behalf of SAS which could have a role. AZ Antelope Foundation and AZ Elk Society are two potential partners.

The Tres Rios Nature Festival was discussed. There was \$118,000 budgeted last year; this year \$24,000. A sign up sheet requesting help will be passed around at the membership meeting.

AAC Conservation Summit Feb. 28: Bob will review former minutes and put SAS' issues into the requested survey form.

Focus Bird List (George): George has combined the bookmark and checklist idea. A copy will be put on the web page and also some printed to pass out.

<u>General Membership Meeting:</u> Over 50 people including several guests showed up to watch the program on Australia. It was a great turn out and much appreciated.

Winter\Spring 2009 Field Trips

REQUIREMENT: On all trips, **YOU MUST** make reservations by calling the leader. The leader can then give updated information as to the meeting place, times, etc. Also, some trips are limited in size.

Saturday, February 7, 2009 Lake Pleasant Pipeline Trail Leader: Dan Bohlmann 602-938-8244 dansbohlmann@prodigy.net

Lake Pleasant has some nice trails that wander through the desert landscape and down to the water. This is a chance for a nice walk, pleasant scenery and some desert and water birds.

Difficulty: 1 Morning trip only.

Meet at the Bell Recreation Center parking lot on Hutton Drive near Boswell in Sun City to leave at 8:00 a.m. There is an entrance fee of \$5 per car.

Friday – Sunday, February 20-22, 2009 Yuma and the Salton Sea with Henry Detwiler Coordinator: Chuck Richards 623-594-6554 <u>crichards15@cox.net</u>

The limit of 15 people for the trip has been reached. There is a **waiting list.**

Saturday-Sunday, March 7-9, 2009 Tres Rios Nature Festival See Separate article on page 5.

Thursday, March 19, 2009 Boyce Thompson Arboretum Leader: George Wall 623-875-7057 gwall5@cox.net

This location near Superior is an excellent birding area that has all types of trees and fauna. It also has permanent running water that is attracting more and more varieties of birds. Usually you'll see 40-50 species.

Difficulty: 1 Bring a lunch.

Meet at the Bell Recreation Center parking lot on Hutton Drive near Boswell in Sun City to leave at 6 a.m. There is an entrance fee of \$7.50 per person.

Thursday, March 26, 2009 B&M/P.I.R. (where Tres Rios Festival was held) Leader: Rich Schooler 623-930-8904 rashooler@cox.net

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Winter/Spring 2009 Field Trips

This is a trip designed to look for rails, bitterns and soras. We'll be getting there just about daylight in order to call these reed dwellers out into the open.

Difficulty: 1 Morning trip only.

Meet at the Burger King just off of 101 on Thunderbird to leave at 5:30 a.m. or meet at the site at 6:00 a.m.

Saturday, April 4, 2009 Madera Canyon

Leader: Richard Kaiser 602 276-3312

rkaiserinaz@aol.com

Situated in the Coronado National Forest in southern Arizona, this is one of the nation's top birding areas. The habitat varies from the grasslands of Florida Canyon to a heavily wooded area above the 5,000 foot level. We will be looking for birds from parking areas at the famous Proctor Road, Bog Springs and Santa Rita Lodge feeders. Species we will look for include Painted Redstart, Arizona Woodpecker, Yellow-eyed Junco, Ash-throated Flycatcher, and Elegant Trogon.

Difficulty: 1 Bring a lunch.

Meet at the McDonald's Restaurant in Green Valley at the Continental Road exit off of I-19.at 7:00 a.m. Call the leader to confirm participation and knowledge of meeting place and time. This trip might be extended into Sunday morning.

Wednesday, April 15, 2009 Page Springs Leader: Rich Schooler 623-930-8904 rashooler@cox.net

Page Springs is a fish hatchery where water also attracts many birds. There are also Arizona Sycamore and cottonwoods surrounding the water. Bridled Titmouse is a resident and Common Black Hawks nest regularly. There is a birding trail that is a part of the Page Springs Important Bird Area.

Difficulty: 1 Bring a Lunch.

Meet at McDonald's just off of I-17 in Carefree to leave at 6:00 a.m.

Saturday, April 25, 2009 Yarnell Park and Area Leader: Eleanor Campbell 623 977-7639 ercamp@juno.com

Exploration of the park and side streets in tiny Yarnell in the Weaver Mountains at 4,700 ft. north of Wickenburg should reveal a variety of resident, migratory and summer nesting birds. The park has woods, a stream and a ravine where Summer Tanager, Black-headed Grosbeak, Phainopepla and Juniper Titmouse have been seen. The Acorn Woodpecker is a resident. There could be Bullock's Oriole and warblers searching the wooded habitat for food.

Difficulty: 1 Morning only, but plan to eat in a popular local restaurant.

Meet at Bell Recreation Center, corner of Hutton Dr. and Boswell Blvd, in Sun City to leave at 6:30 a.m. OR at Wickenburg Community Center at 7:30 a.m. (Take Rte. 60 northwest to Wickenburg. Cross the bridge over the Hassayampa River and immediately turn right onto the street that takes you to the large white building and parking lot.)

FAMILY BIRD WALKS AT ESTRELLA

Sponsored by the Sonoran Audubon Society

Estrella Mountain Park is located on the south side the Gila River in Goodyear at Bullard Avenue and Vineyard Road. This riparian area consists of exposed shorelines, mature trees, the occasional marsh surrounded by desert scrub hillsides and in the park itself, many mesquite, palms and other trees. This diverse habitat lures an impressive variety of birds.

There is a \$6.00 per vehicle charge for entering the park; however, the bird walks and loaner binoculars are otherwise free of charge. Dress warmly at this time of year.

SATURDAYS: These walks are held the second Saturday of each month. The next walk will be on Saturday, February 14, 2009. Meet at the new visitor's center parking lot at 8:00 a.m. There will be live raptors for viewing. The walk will last approximately 2 hours. For further information, contact Rich Schooler at 623-930-8904, raschooler@cox.net.



Excellent Turn-out Photo by George Wall

There was an excellent turn-out at the January bird walk. Twelve people showed up to participate including three children. 27 species of birds were seen including a Rednaped Sapsucker, a pair of Red-tailed Hawks, a Harrier Hawk and a pair of Blue-gray Gnatcatchers.

SUNDAYS: These walks are held the fourth Sunday of each month. The next walk will be on Sunday, February 22, 2009, at 8:00 a.m. Follow the signs to the dirt parking lot on the east side of the park. For further information contact Bob McCormick at 602-373-2952, mcbobaz@aol.com or Andrée Tarby at atarby@cox.net.

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GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT

Bird and nature fans throughout North America are invited to join tens of thousands of everyday bird-watchers for the 12th annual Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC), February 13-16, 2009.

A joint project of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society, this free event is an opportunity for families, students, and people of all ages to discover the wonders of nature in backyards, schoolyards, and local parks, and, at the same time, make an important contribution to conservation.

"Anyone who can identify even a few species can contribute to the body of knowledge that is used to inform conservation efforts to protect birds and biodiversity," said Audubon Education Vice-President, Judy Braus.

Volunteers take part by counting birds for at least 15 minutes on one or more days of the event and reporting their sightings online at www.birdcount.org. The data help researchers understand bird population trends across the continent, information that is critical for effective conservation. In 2008, participants submitted more than 85,000 checklists, a new record.

"The GBBC has become a vital link in the arsenal of continent wide bird-monitoring projects," said Cornell Lab of Ornithology director John Fitzpatrick. "With more than a decade of data now in hand, the GBBC has documented striking changes in late-winter bird distributions."

Participants submit thousands of digital images for the GBBC photo contest each year. Last year's winners are now posted on the web site. Participants are also invited to upload their bird videos to YouTube tagged "GBBC." Some of them will be featured on the GBBC web site. All participants will be entered in a drawing to win dozens of birding items, including stuffed birds, clocks, books, and feeders.

Businesses, schools, nature clubs, Scout troops, and other community organizations interested in the GBBC can contact the Cornell Lab of Ornithology at (800) 843-2473 (outside the U.S., call (607) 254-2473), or Audubon at citizen-science@audubon.org or (215) 355-9588, Ext 16.

Focus Birds

We are continuing our effort to make you aware of the ten birds we are focusing on this year. The January newsletter focused on the Verdin. This month it is the Cactus Wren. Please read the article by Bettina Bickel on the following page. As conservationists and bird lovers, we need to be aware of what is happening in our area and in the world around us.

Photo contest

The Sonoran Audubon Society in conjunction with our new focus on Arizona's Common Birds in Decline has started a photo contest. Winners' photos will be used in the brochures, postcards, and bookmarks that we will be producing over the next few months. All photos submitted will be used in power-point presentations before our general meetings.

The birds: Phainopepla, Verdin, Cactus Wren, Yuma Clapper Rail, Gilded Flicker, Elf Owl, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Costa's Hummingbird, Burrowing Owl and Black-throated Sparrow.

Rules are simple: Please try to limit the photo size to 1 Meg. Photos that have to be scanned may have a reduction in image quality. Please respect all local, state, and federal laws in obtaining your photos.

The board will select all winning photos. There is a potential of three winners for each bird. If you desire your photo to be left as is, please let us know, otherwise, we reserve the right to crop the photo to fit the media selected.

Submit photos with your name to mcbobaz@aol.com (or mail to Bob McCormick P.O. Box 674 Laveen AZ 85339) with the words **Photo Contest** in the heading. Deadline is April 31st 2009.

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Arizona's State Bird Disappearing? By Bettina Bickel

Ed Abbey referred to the Cactus Wren as "a small bird with a big mouth and a song like the sound of a rusty adding machine." Others have likened their low-pitched repetitive "song" to the sound of a car engine that refuses to start. I recite these descriptions with a fond chortle of my own, as the Cactus Wren is a bold and inquisitive character whose song is the quintessential sound of the Sonoran desert. Indeed, the Cactus Wren is our state bird.

Cactus Wrens are permanent residents of the Sonoran desert. Pairs stay together year-round and may mate for life. Their nest is a globular mass of sticks and grass with an inner chamber lined with fur, feathers, and other soft materials. The favored site for the nest is tucked in the protective arms of a cholla cactus. Nestlings fledge after three weeks, and the family group usually stays together until the next fall. Cactus Wrens are primarily insectivorous, but supplement their diets with seeds and an occasional lizard.

Unfortunately, population data on our state bird show a decline of 49% since 1967. According to Tice Supplee, this decline may be explained by loss of native desert habitat to agriculture and urban development. Replacing lawns with desert landscaping that includes thorny native trees and cactus can help Cactus Wren populations in developed areas, but the fiercely spiny cholla preferred by nesting Cactus Wrens does not seem to be a popular landscaping plant.

Fortunately, Cactus Wrens remain fairly common in undeveloped Sonoran desert habitat. Protecting Cactus Wrens ultimately means protecting the Sonoran desert from threats such as continued urban sprawl.

State trust land reform remains vital for protecting important habitat from more sprawl in the Sonoran desert and throughout Arizona. Conservation groups have identified parcels of state trust land that are ideal for conservation, including lands that are needed for the expansion and completion of desert parks and preserves in the Phoenix area. Unless the outdated system of state trust land management is changed, these lands will be sold by auction to the highest bidder.

To keep our state bird and its wonderful song common in Arizona, plant native and support state trust land reform!



Baby Cactus Wrens—Photo by Joy Dolhancyk

(More photos on next page)

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CACTUS WRENS





Photo by Dave Bixler

Photo by Vera Markham

"Pete Dunne's Essential Field Guide Companion" Book Review by Eleanor Campbell

As the author, Pete Dunne, says up front in his introduction, "This is NOT a field guide." It's a comprehensive resource chock-full of facts and observations designed to help viewers identify birds.

Most birders use birds' basic field marks in plumage for identification. Pete suggests a broader approach using overall size and shape, overall colors or patterns, and behavior; i.e. an overall general impression as clues to identification. There are no illustrations, but extensive comparisons with similar species. Each bird is described by Status and Distribution including breeding sites, Habitats, Cohabitants (other birds in its environment), Movement and Migration, Description including size, shape and unique body features, Behavior including feeding habits, Flight patterns and Vocalizations. The written descriptions are so specific, the bird seems to appear.

Pete Dunne, a respected birder and speaker, has written many books as well as articles for birding magazines and "The New York Times." He is Vice President of New Jersey Audubon and director of its Cape May Bird Observatory. He has tapped other researchers to contribute their knowledge and review his writings.

Birders of all levels of experience will find a wealth of information in this compendium to enhance their birding skills. There couldn't be a better resource on the lives of birds and companion to a field guide.

TRES RIOS NATURE & EARTH FESTIVAL

Save Saturday-Sunday, March 7-8, 2009, for the Tres Rios Nature and Earth Festival. Everyone had a great time last year and this year should be no exception.

On the Nature Talks Stage, there will be programs running from 9:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. each day.

There will also be hikes, bird watching tours, fishing clinics, canoe excursions, live birds and lots of entertainment including the Back Porch Bandits, a band that is based here in Phoenix.

To make this all happen timely and without any hitches, **volunteers are needed.** The Sonoran Audubon Society needs volunteers to staff our booth and to lead short bird walks. Shifts are 9-12 and 12-4 both Saturday March 7th and Sunday March 8th. The Festival also needs many volunteers to cover parking, signage, etc. Please contact Bob McCormick 602-237-3951 or mcbobaz@aol.com if you would like to volunteer.

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Beetles By George Wall

I've written a lot of articles on birds, but I thought some of you might be interested in another area - insects, specifically beetles.

Did you know that they are older than dinosaurs and have more species that any other insect? There are about 300,000 species of beetles in the world and many more that haven't even been discovered? If we didn't have the birds to keep them in check, we'd probably be overrun with beetles.

I take pictures of most anything that moves or I think is pretty or interesting - birds, butterflies, flowers, snakes, spiders, etc. This article covers just two types of beetles - the Blister and Tiger Beetle.



Iron Cross Blister Beetle - Photo by George Wall

The beetle pictured above is quite common in Arizona and one of the prettier ones. Even though pretty, it can put some nice large blisters on the unsuspecting person who might try and pick it up. This beetle contains the irritating compound cantharadin that can cause skin blisters or severe to fatal poisoning if ingested and has even fatally poisoned horses

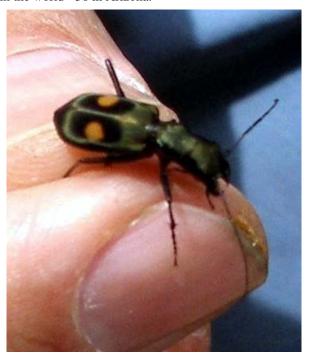
There are over 2,500 species of Blister Beetles - 200 in the United States.

Another type of beetle that can be pretty but also ferocious is the tiger beetle. Dr. David L. Pearson of Arizona State University is an expert on tiger beetles. I took this picture of him holding a Pseudoxycheila angustata Tiger Beetle in the Andes Mountains of Ecuador where it is

endemic.

Some tiger beetles can run up to 5 miles per hour. For its size it could technically be considered the fastest of all land creatures. Their diet consists of ants, termites and other insects. Their main predator of course is birds.

There are approximately 2,300 species of Tiger Beetles in the world - 36 in Arizona.



Tiger Beetle - Photo by George Wall



White-striped Tiger Beetle - Photo by Bob Witzeman

Bob Witzeman, a member of the Maricopa Audubon Society, is also interested in Tiger Beetles as well as birds and he provided the photo shown above.

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EVENTS IN AND AROUND THE VALLEY Birders' Anonymous

Birders' Anonymous, a group of bird-watchers, has their next meeting on Friday, February 20, 2009, starting at 10 a.m. at the Church of the Palms on the corner of Boswell and 103rd Ave. in Sun City.

The program for this month will be presented by Pat Mathiesen who will share her art with us. Nature is her inspiration and this will be featured in her presentation.

The next field trip of Birders' Anonymous will be on February 28, 2009, to the Arlington area, led by Donna Smith.

For further information about Birders' Anonymous contact Marshall Esty at 623-977-1637 or at mne@juno.com

Rio Salado Habitat Restoration Project

There are two programs this month aimed at beginning birders. One is on February 14, 2009, Birding 101 Course Number 52962 and one is on February 28, 2009, Beginners Bird Walk Course Number 52829.

You need to make your reservation in advance by visiting http://phoenix.gov/PARKS and click on Classes and Programs and enter the course number. You can also call 602-262-6863 and leave a voice mail. Note: All of the courses above including the bird walk have a cost of \$5 for adults, \$1 for youths and seniors.

Desert Botanical Garden

Every Monday and the second Saturday of each month, there is a bird walk starting at 8:00 a.m.

Desert Botanical Garden entrance fees of \$15.00 (\$13.50 seniors) apply unless you're a DBG member. Membership is \$55 a year.

See their website at www.dbg.org for further information.

Hassayampa River Preserve

On Thursday, February 19, 2009, there is a special birding trip to the Prescott Highlands Center. Kathe Anderson will be leading this trip. A carpool will be leaving at 6:30 a.m. from the Hassayampa River Preserve. Reservations are required for this event.

There is an Interpretive Nature Walk on Saturday, February 28, 2009, from 8:30-10 a.m. This is an easy walk along the trails to catch sight of migratory and resident birds as well as other wildlife.

For those into bird banding and want to help set up the

nets, etc., the dates are Saturday, February 7, 2009. and Saturday 28, 2009, starting at 7:00 a.m. **However**, you must contact Anne Leight at ALeight@syntellect.com at least two days beforehand.

Entrance fees are \$5, TNC members \$3 and children 12 and under are free. For information call 928 684-2772 or e-mail www.bmccollum@tnc.org.

Boyce Thompson Arboretum

There will be guided bird walks February 7, 8, 21 and 22 from 8:30—11:00 a.m. led by Rich Ditch and Cindy West on the 7th; David Pearson and Troy Corman on February 8th; Pierre Deviche on February 21st; Cynthia Donald and Pete Mourton on February 22nd.

Boyce Thompson Arboretum is now in their winter schedule from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. except during special programs. Admission of \$7.50 for adults, \$3 ages 5-12.

For driving directions or other details, call 520-689-2811 or visit their internet website at http://arboretum.ag.arizona.edu/.

Festivals

Saturday-Sunday, March 7-8, 2009 Tres Rios Nature Festival

See the article on Page 6.

13th Annual San Diego Birding Festival—March 5-8, 2009, at the Marina Village.

The keynote speaker will be David Sibley. He will also lead a trip. http://www.sandiegoaudubon.org/birdfest.htm

Saturday, March 28, 2009, Glendale Green Festival at the Glendale Library/Xeriscape Demonstration Garden.

The Sonoran Audubon Society will have a table.

Saturday, April 11, 2009, NatureFest at the Hassayampa River Preserve in Wickenburg.

The Sonoran Audubon Society will have a table.

Yuma Birding & Nature Festival April 15-19, 2009

Where the Colorado River meets the Sonoran Desert, there's a rare mix of habitats and wildlife watching opportunities. Festival features trips into Mexico, to Salton Sea in California, and more. We're on the Colorado River flyway, nearly 400 species of birds live or visit here each year.

Contact: Yuma Visitor's Bureau, 202 South First Avenue, Suite 202, Yuma, AZ 85364 800-293-0071

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Join the Sonoran Audubon Society

This can be done in two ways: become a friend of the Sonoran Audubon Society or join the National Audubon Society. The difference is as a "friend" all the money goes to our chapter. As a National member, you still become a member of our chapter, but only a percentage of the money goes to our chapter; however, you get the National Audubon Society Magazine. Some people choose to do both. See our website for the applicable forms.

New adult or family membership: \$20.00

Seniors and students: \$15.00

Renewal fee for seniors and students: \$15.00

All monthly issues of Gambel's Tales may be obtained chapter website from t h e <www.sonoranaudubon.org> or by mail for \$10.00 per year. If you wish to get the newsletter by mail or to be notified when a new issue is placed on the website, please contact chuckkan@mindspring.com or by mail to: Sonoran Audubon Society, PO Box 8068, Glendale, AZ 85312-8068.

SAS Web Site: www.sonoranaudubon.org

Arizona Audubon Web Site: www.az.audubon.org

Desert Rivers Audubon Web Site: www.desertriversaudubon.org Maricopa Audubon Web Site: www.maricopaaudubon.org







Sonoran Audubon Society Officers, Board Members and Committee Contacts:

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mcbobaz@aol.com

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treerunner@yahoo.com

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Field Trips: Donna Smith 623-556-9535

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Hospitality: Diana Barnum 623-215-3400 didibar@cox.net

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Newsletter: George Wall 623-875-7057 gwall5@cox.net

Conservation: Tina Bickel bbickel08@gmail.com





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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. for socializing and 7 p.m. for the start of the meeting and program

February 11, 2009—Moez Ali: Birds of Kenya March 11, 2009—Amy & Tim Leu: Feathered Hearts April 8, 2009—Tim Cullison—Kittlitz's Murrelet with Alaska Wildlife May 13, 2009—Speaker from the Arizona Riparian Council

Other Dates of Interest: February 4, 2009 7 p.m. Board Meeting at Glendale Library in upstairs board meeting room – all SAS members welcome.



Sonoran Audubon Society P.O. Box 8068 Glendale, AZ 85312-8068

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