

VERMILION FLYCATCHER

TUCSON AUDUBON

Summer 2024 | Vol 69 No 3

SPARK STORIES



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Tucson Audubon inspires people to enjoy and protect birds through recreation, education, conservation, and restoration of the environment upon which we all depend.

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ON THE COVER

Great Horned Owl by Mick Thompson. Mick is a volunteer photographer/videographer for the National Audubon Society and spends half the year in Tucson.

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A SERIES OF SPARKS

Greetings Friends,

An admission: I don't have a spark bird. Secretly, I sometimes stew in envy when I listen to people wax on about theirs—the Elegant Trogon, the Vermilion Flycatcher—the fine details of that first glance, the dappled light, the song floating through the cottonwood gallery. My “bird switch” just didn't flip that way.

What I do have, on the other hand, are a collection of vivid memories tying back to special people, places, and times in my life, that just happen to be centered on these birds:

Oriole: Yep, just “Oriole”. One of my strongest memories of my father, who passed away when I was 10, is of him excitedly pointing up to the big weeping willow in the yard and exclaiming, “Oriole!”. I had no idea what an oriole was (it was a Baltimore, most certainly, as we lived in Western New York, but who knows? Maybe I missed a rarity!), but because he was pleased, I was pleased. I have an affinity for the orioles and Icterids, and I'm sure this is why.

Common Grackle: I clearly remember the first time I paused to take in the details of a bird. Walking to school, I spotted a Common Grackle in the full light of the sun, ablaze in iridescent teal, eggplant purple, and silky black, piercing yellow eyes, strutting around on a neighbor's lawn. I was mesmerized, and remember thinking this just had to be some kind of magic bird! I was obsessed with all things unicorn and pegasus, and wanted everything to be a mythical creature. This was close enough.

Yellow Warbler: Anyone close to me knows birding came along later in my life, when my kiddo, Nick, started poking around in an old Peterson guide (he remains a big RTP fan to this day). The day he identified a Yellow Warbler along the Niagara River, at age six, I knew we were onto something, and, well, here I am!

Thinking back on this, I recognize just how much birds are a part of our lives, even when we're not paying attention, even before the spark ignites. How wonderful that when we do begin to take notice, they're everywhere, introducing an entire world of curiosities, endless challenges and possibilities, joy, community, and of course, a touch of sadness here and there, all while they just go about the business of surviving alongside us. It's pretty amazing.

Keep sharing your love of birds with those around you. You never know, they might think back on it 40 years later as one in a series of sparks.

For the Birds,

Melissa Fratello
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ALMANAC of BIRDS July to September



Matt Griffiths
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Summer Tanager, Greg Lavaty

I feel a little sad being left out of the “spark bird” club. Try as I might to manufacture a magical moment as a child when I first really saw a specific bird and was hooked for life, it just didn’t happen. However, I do have a “spark season” that led me to being the birder I am today. During this time I fell in love with the sounds of Summer Tanagers and Yellow Warblers, the desert southwest, and birds in general. I was surveying for birds in Grand Canyon National Park, and two species did hold special meaning for me: the Southwestern Willow Flycatcher and the Canyon Wren.

If it wasn’t for the Southwestern Willow Flycatcher, it’s very likely that I would not be in Arizona right now. In 2002, I left California to join a field crew surveying for this federally endangered subspecies in the western end of the Grand Canyon. I spent the summer listening for the buzzy *fitz-bew!* song of this *Empidonax* flycatcher—a song I never heard due to the deteriorating habitat caused by the continually dropping Colorado River water level. Our farthest field locations were deep in the canyon, a 40-mile boat trip from our dock on Lake Mead. This is a land of extremes—depending on the season, the ride could be freezing cold in the morning and oven hot on the ride home. And don’t even ask me about shifting sandbars and running the boats aground.

Although the Willow Flycatcher is common across the US, the Southwestern birds found in southern California, Arizona, western New Mexico, southwest Utah, and southern Nevada are threatened by cowbird nest parasitism and the loss and alteration of the riparian habitat they rely on. The subspecies was listed as endangered in 1995 and the total population in Arizona could now be only about 200 pairs.

The Willow Flycatcher is closely related to, and virtually indistinguishable from, the Alder Flycatcher of the east and Canada—the two were formerly known as the Traill’s Flycatcher until they were split as separate species in 1973. Like most *Empidonax* flycatchers, this species is difficult to identify in the field; your clues here are a whitish throat, a large and wide bill for an empid, entirely dull yellow-orange lower mandible, buffy wing-bars, and an indistinct or absent whitish eye-ring.

Willow Flycatchers are among the last flycatchers to migrate, arriving from southern Mexico and northern South America in late spring. In Arizona, the short breeding season is over by early July as young fledge about two weeks after hatching. Find Southwestern Willow Flycatchers in riparian

areas and especially along major rivers and creeks such as the Santa Cruz, San Pedro, and Sonoita and Cienega Creeks.

Beginning my birding journey as a field biologist in the Grand Canyon, I was forced by necessity to quickly become an “ear birder” and the first bird I learned to recognize by its song was the Canyon Wren. It was easy—it sings a unique, loud and clear series of rapid rising and slowly falling whistled notes that echo off the stony canyon walls. You don’t have a choice but to pay attention to the sound; actually seeing the tiny singer is another matter. This bird is built for nesting and foraging in the tight cracks and crevices of boulder piles and canyon cliffs, a land filled with nooks and crannies to hide in. The Canyon Wren has a long, decurved bill and flattened head to help in plucking spiders and other insects out of small spaces. To make this foraging even easier, its vertebral column is actually attached higher on the skull compared to most other birds.

It pays off to learn the sounds the Canyon Wren makes to aid in finding this beautiful bird of rich cinnamon and gray with a rusty banded tail, salt-and-pepper speckles, and a white throat that stands out like a spotlight. In addition to the conspicuous song, knowing the repeated veet veet calls (aka the police officer’s whistle!) will help locate birds in winter. And something I just learned: females have their own distinctive, buzzy version of the song and sometimes harmonize with males in a really cool duet!

Even though Canyon Wrens often live in wet canyons, they are not known to drink, getting the moisture they need from the insects they eat. They also share their rocky habitat with Rock Wrens and White-throated Swifts, and conflicts can arise. Rock Wrens are actively chased out of nesting territories, and swifts are known to dive bomb singing Canyon Wrens if seen. Look for these active little songsters in any rocky area of our Sky Island mountain ranges, and I hope you hear them as well!



Southwestern Willow Flycatcher, Tyler Pockette



Canyon Wren, Greg Lavaty

LOVE AFFAIR WITH A *ROADRUNNER*



Beep, Pinau Merlin



I was heading out to the patio with my juice to watch the morning unfold when I spotted the roadrunner standing there with a broken leg. He stood with his crest down and his tail dragging, looking bewildered and forlorn.

I'd recently moved to the house out in the desert and had seen the roadrunner several times as I walked around the area. We had a nodding acquaintance, but this was the first time I had seen him come to the patio.

I rushed inside to call a wildlife rehabilitator for help. She told me to bring him in and they would X-ray his leg, set it, and once healed, he could come back home good as new. Following her tips on how to catch him, I casually walked out with a laundry basket to drop over him. This was suspicious enough to cause him to hobble under some creosote bushes. I moved slowly, not looking directly at him but he quickly evaded me. I then tried to drop a possibly less frightening towel over him, but he retreated under a prickly pear and I ended up in the middle of the cactus. I had watched enough roadrunner and coyote cartoons as a kid to realize you can't catch a roadrunner very easily, even an injured one. I was also hurting and stressing him further by trying to capture him and making him fearful of me.

Looking like a voodoo doll, I limped back to the house to pull cactus spines, reconsider my strategy and make another call to the wildlife rehabilitator. Her advice was to feed him and he might heal on his own.

She stressed not feeding him hamburger, which lacks calcium and other minerals he needed and would lead to soft bones (rickets). If I had to use hamburger, she suggested adding kitty crunchies (for calcium) inside the hamburger balls, but frozen mice from the pet store would be better.

After a dash to the store, I went out on the patio armed with reinforced hamburger balls and gently tossed one to him. He was distraught and in pain and didn't even investigate it, but a Curve-billed Thrasher immediately devoured it. I kept throwing the balls which quickly attracted a melee of cardinals, thrashers, Cactus Wrens, and other birds competing for the treats. He finally caught on by watching them. Once he started taking the hamburger balls, I added a gently warmed mouse and he loved it. Our whole relationship changed and he became very trusting.

Beep, as I started to call him, began roosting under the bushes by my bedroom window at night. If I wasn't up in time for breakfast he would pound on the glass with his beak to wake me up. This worked quite well. I always sat with him, chatting while he ate and soon his crest popped up and his tail wagged side to side whenever he saw me. In time his leg healed but was still bent at an odd angle. When he seemed perkier, we went for short walks for exercise and so I could assess his recovery. While we walked, Beep occasionally caught insects and one day surprised an unwary lizard! His crest was proudly held up high. I was jubilant and more optimistic that he would be able to survive on his own. He continued getting his mice each day since he was a young roadrunner and still healing and growing.

Beep continued to recover and even began to join me on my daily run. We jogged along slowly until we came to the end of his territory, where he would wait under the mesquite tree no matter how long I was gone. When he spotted me, his tail wagged enthusiastically and then we jogged back to the house. We spent much of our days together. I brought my writing work outside and he took to sitting on the arm of my lawn chair as we discussed daily events: the cardinals were sitting on eggs, a queen butterfly flitted on the milkweed, etc. The days were filled with his antics and my laughter.

One spring morning Beep was off busy with errands of his own when I heard a roadrunner's soft cooing mating call. There was Beep, up in the mesquite tree calling the mating song and holding last summer's ratty old mesquite bean pod as an engagement gift! A female came by to inspect him. I watched enchanted as he glided down to the ground and performed his courtship dance, bowing and cooing and showing off his beautiful orange and blue eyeshadow. I was so proud of him, but the female dismissed him, perhaps because of his deformed leg or the ratty mesquite pod. Beep immediately realized he needed a better gift; next time he called and a female came by, he rushed over and pounded on the window asking for a mouse. I was anxious to help this romance along, so quickly provided one. He showed off his best dance moves and offered the mouse, but was rejected again. Beep was irrepressible and repeatedly tried with enthusiasm, but his hopes were dashed each time. I would sit with him and commiserate, my heart breaking for him. He had such a sunny disposition and was making the best of what he had, but I worried that he might not find a mate.

One day Beep banged on the window and I got him his mouse but I didn't see any female roadrunner around. Instead he danced and cooed for me, presenting the mouse back to me as an engagement gift! I sat down on the ground hard, stunned at his proposal of "marriage." Tears streamed down my face. I loved him desperately, but I had to say no. Roadrunners mate for life and live 10 years or more and I wasn't sure it would work out between us. I didn't know how long I would stay at this house and I couldn't take him with me if I left. I was devastated at disappointing him.

I had always hoped Beep would have a good life as a wild roadrunner, with a lifelong mate, raising a family each year. Eventually he did find a mate of his own tribe and they raised one little roadster.

Beep's greatest gift was his love, but he also taught me to perceive the world through an animal's eyes and started me on the path of learning bird and animal language.

Tucson Audubon does not provide bird rehab services. If you have an injured animal, please contact Tucson Wildlife Center: 520-290-9453.

Pinau Merlin is a nationally known speaker, naturalist, and writer. She is the author of several books and over 80 articles about the wildlife, natural history, and ecology of the Desert Southwest.



IGNITING A PASSION

Do you have a “spark bird?” Did an event or person ignite a love of birds in you? The reasons people discover birds and the enjoyment of watching them are as varied as the diversity of birds in the world. Enjoy this fun sample of spark stories and find more at [TUCSONAUDUBON.ORG/SPARK](https://tucsonaudubon.org/spark).



In high school in the 1950s I got hooked on birding by experiencing the spring warbler migration in Southwestern Ohio (Dayton) where I grew up. For three consecutive years, I spent a long weekend with adult Dayton Audubon birders in early May birding along the south shore of Lake Erie (many years prior to the construction of the Magee Marsh Boardwalk). On one of those trips, I experienced a warbler “fallout” where 20-plus species of brightly colored warblers were in the shrubs and on the ground rather than in the forest canopy. After this experience, my high school birding buddy and I monitored the arrival dates of warblers at several parks around Dayton and presented that info on a poster at a Science Fair. We won First Place in Biology among the eight high schools competing. A fallout on April 30, 2012, at Ft. Zachary State Park (Key West) stands well above the magnitude of any other fallout I have witnessed. The eBird checklist for that day included 500 Ovenbirds, 700 Black-and-White Warblers, 1,500 Common Yellowthroats, 3000 American Redstarts, 600 Cape May Warblers, 1500 Blackpool Warblers, 5000 Black-throated Blue Warblers, and 1000 Palm Warblers! The birding passion for warblers and fallouts that began in my youth has lasted a lifetime. —*Jim Gessaman*



I've always loved the outdoors, but didn't pay much attention to birds. Then, I saw the movie “The Big Year.” Although mostly a comedy, it had poignant moments where an appreciation and love for birds was evident. After that, curiosity led me to go on my first birding field trip. It was then that I saw my “spark bird.” Amongst the greenery of a mesquite tree, a solitary bird glowed red like a shiny ornament. It was a male Vermilion Flycatcher in all its glory. I've lived in Tucson most of my life but never noticed these beauties. After seeing that bird, I knew I was hooked. I shared news of my new found passion with my mom. I recommended she watch “The Big Year.” After watching it, she too was inspired. We knew we had found our new calling in life, a mother and daughter birding duo! That was almost 15 years ago and we still go out birding often—a love for birds was ignited in both of us. It opened a door to a world we hadn't taken the time to notice before. Above all, birding has given both of us the gift of invaluable time spent together.

—*Christina Stark*



In 2008, on a warm Austin morning, I stepped into my backyard, looking to enjoy a quiet moment before my day started. As I looked around, a burst of color caught my eye. Perched on the fence was a bird with a blue head, red chest, and green back, its feathers gleaming like a living rainbow. My heart skipped a beat. No way this exotic creature was from around here. It had to be someone's escaped pet, right? I stood there, totally mesmerized and in awe, watching this stunning bird. I didn't know much about the local birds, but I knew I'd never seen anything like this before. After the bird flew away, I couldn't stop thinking about it. Later that day, I described the bird to a friend, and to my surprise, they told me it was a Painted Bunting, one of the many incredible birds who call Central Texas home. Suddenly, my backyard felt like a secret garden full of wonders waiting to be discovered. That Painted Bunting became my spark bird, the one that kickstarted my love for bird watching. Now, every morning, I step into my backyard here in Tucson with eager eyes, hoping to spot more of nature's hidden gems, forever grateful for that little bird that changed everything.

—*Donito Burgess*

FOR BIRDS



In a previous life, I spent my summers sailing the Salish Sea, the inland waters of Washington State and British Columbia. One of the limitations of that lifestyle is the inability to get any walking exercise. The further north you travel into the wilderness of NW British Columbia, the denser the vegetation becomes. One day, I rowed to shore and luckily found the remnants of an old logging road. Although it was abandoned decades before, I was able to walk inland a whole quarter of a mile! As I reached my limit of bushwhacking, out of the corner of my eye flew a large object that almost grazed my head. It landed on a low tree branch about 50 feet away. We engaged in a staring contest for the next 20 minutes before he got bored with me and flew off. Not being a birder, I only knew it was an owl. Turns out my new-found friend was a Great Gray Owl. To this day, whenever I find myself several days from civilization, I always know I will not be alone. —Gerry Hodge

After learning about the “spark bird” concept it took me years to realize that I did indeed have one, the Elephant Bird. No one in my family is a birder or even outdoorsy at all; I lived in densely urban Phoenix and I didn’t even know that there was such a thing as a “birdwatcher” until I was in middle school. My first introduction to the fascinating world of birds was through books from my school library. The Life book on birds was a particular favorite of mine and I checked it out often. There was a particular diagram showing an Elephant Bird’s relative size to a human and the bird was much larger! I was so intrigued by this that I checked out lots more books about birds and the natural world and loved watching PBS documentaries on birds of all kinds. My spark bird turned out to be a huge bird that went extinct 1000 years ago. —Jennie MacFarland



Thirty years ago, my friend Sam from Minnesota wanted to come for a visit and he asked me to take him birding. At that point, I had never looked at a bird or a leaf or a blade of grass. When he arrived, we headed out, and of course I had no idea what we were doing. At one location, he said, “Stop.” He told me to look on the stump at the side of the road. I asked him what it was, and he said, “Use your binoculars.” I finally focused in and again asked him what it was, and he said, “A kestrel.” And I asked, “What’s a kestrel?” And he said, “A small hawk.”

And so I watched this kestrel eating a little mouse, and I thought, this bird is just like us. It has to eat and avoid predators and find a place to sleep and be with a family. So Sam and I unwrapped our peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, and we smiled, and I started looking at birds.

—Charles “Carlos” Oldham



Fifth Grade, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. We were starting a bird unit and were to choose a bird and give a report. I chose the Baltimore Oriole. I had never seen one. My parents were wonderful at sharing my interests, so my dad and I visited the county parks and we looked for birds. They bought me a set of four little bird books: *The Red (also Yellow, Green, Blue) Book of Birds*. Each time I saw a new bird I would make a checkmark on that page. And one day, there it was! A beautiful Baltimore Oriole. I was beyond excited and my interest in birds was sparked. I moved to Tucson as a young teacher and here was a whole new world of birds waiting for me. I graduated from my dad’s old binoculars and my little books to shelves of books and high end binocs. It has been a lifelong interest and spurred me on to a fascination in all forms of natural history. Today, a lifetime later, I enjoy photographing them (one photo made the cover of the *Vermilion Flycatcher*), wrote the *Birding Curriculum Guide*, and always incorporate birds into my nature walks and presentations. Today my dad’s old binoculars sit on a shelf along with my set of four little bird books. Thanks to one Baltimore Oriole. —Doris Evans



My grandmother started taking me bird-watching when I was 12 and I have been hooked ever since. I still remember the first time I saw a breeding male Wood Duck with her at the Little Red Schoolhouse Nature Center in suburban Chicagoland. Every time I see a Wood Duck, I think of my grandmother and am grateful she introduced me to birding.

—Laurel Salvador



My spark bird is the Elegant Trogon. It happened in July of 2020 on a weekend getaway to the Santa Rita Lodge. I enjoyed the hummingbirds at the feeders and a birder showed me the location of an Elegant Trogon nest down at the Madera Picnic area. On Monday morning, I walked down with my camera in hand only to find a lovely family of five having a picnic breakfast at the picnic table that was closest to the sycamore tree with the nest. Patience is not my forte, but I hung around and looked at other birds and the family left on a hike. Not only did my patience pay off, but I was rewarded with the Elegant Trogon coming to the ground and eating a large caterpillar. I got great photos of the bird and I was hooked. Luckily for me, Tucson Audubon was hosting a monthly Zoom class on where to go birding each month. While many people experienced cabin fever during COVID, I went to every place Luke Safford suggested, learned about eBird Hotspots and was out in nature five-days a week. The Elegant Trogon and Tucson Audubon got me addicted to birding and what a fabulous addiction it is!

—Peggy Steffens



I've long enjoyed hiking, and I took a casual interest in the woodpeckers and blue jays in my local forest when I lived in New Jersey. However, I did not become a birder until I stepped off a plane in Central Australia in 2017 and saw my first Galah. These pink and gray cockatoos, with white crests that they extend on alert, comically waddle around on the ground chomping away at grasses and seeds. Uneducated about birds, I'd always imagined that cockatoos and parrots were inhabitants of humid jungles, and here I was, in a hot, dry environment (much like Tucson's) surrounded by them! It was a lightning flash moment in which I realized there was so much more to birds—and so much more bird diversity—than I had ever expected. The very next day, when I got my library card, the first book I checked out was Pizzey & Knight's *Birds of Australia*, and I was off! I'm pleased to say that my fascination with birds has remained since moving back to the United States, where I have found the birds of the Sonoran Desert and Sky Islands to be just as novel and fun to get to know.

—Jennifer Van Boxel



When I started drawing Raven, he came to see me, perching on the blue wood railing of my front porch, watching me as I drew his kin. If he couldn't find me, he would make a sound like gargling gravel and dance on the corrugated tin roof covering the back stairs. I'd come out and he'd cock his head to get a good look. Even with the lapis-colored jays giving him a noisy what-for—fearing Raven might well steal their babies—that bird never missed a day for three weeks.

In the beginning, I had no idea that my spirit guide had found me. Some people go on vision quests, hiking up a mountain, isolating themselves for days in hopes that their spirit animal will show. I didn't do that—my animal did everything short of crossing his wings, tapping his foot impatiently, and saying, "Hey babe, when are you coming to New Mexico? We have work to do!"

Raven presented himself to me and became my Spirit Totem, my messenger and guide. Along our journey, Raven introduced me to his friends and enemies, supporters and detractors, animals and humans, and spurred me to create the ongoing Art of Paying Attention illustrated radio series.

Raven brought me to Tucson, when my illustrated essays, *Listening to Raven*, won the 2013 Tucson Festival of Books Literary Award for Non-fiction. Getting to know a wild creature is akin to starting a genealogy chart—an opportunity to map an intricate network of the universe.

—Beth Surdut



The very first time I remember really noticing a bird was when I was about 10. I had awful insomnia as a child and would climb onto the roof of my house to watch the sunrise (I know, I know, but this was the 90s!) As I sat there one summer morning, a large black and white bird I had never seen before landed within three feet of me. His sharp red eye viewed me with a cautious curiosity, as I had been doing with the skyline moments before. We acknowledged each other's need for the moment and then off he went. I now believe I was looking at a Black-crowned Night Heron, but trying to identify him in bird books at the library opened my mind to the HUGE variety of wildlife around the Tucson area. These days, I get the immense pleasure of sharing birding with my young daughter; her favorite birds are the Mourning Doves that nest by our door each year. —Casey Richard



In the late 90s, while eating at a bayside restaurant in St. Pete Beach, Florida, we spotted a large black and white bird on the rocks outside the window. It looked like it was carrying a Carrot. On closer inspection, we saw that was its bill! We had never seen anything like it. We went immediately to a bookstore to purchase a field guide and discovered we had seen our first American Oystercatcher. Soon afterwards, we found out about the Great Florida Birding Trail, and we started visiting every location we could. When we started checking, other states also had birding and wildlife trails. It became a passion to go birdwatching in as many new locations as we could from that point on. My Life List crossed the 600 mark on our recent trip to Arizona this year.

—Alan and Alice Collier



Hello. I'm Holly. And, um, I'm a Birder. I used to just be a casual "Birdwatcher," now I'm a fully addicted Birder. This condition runs in the family. My grandma loved birds. My parents were nature enthusiasts, and later became full-blown Birders, so I grew up identifying the birds in our backyard or along hiking trails. But then I inherited my mother's good binoculars after she passed away and I could now get on birds quickly and see them well. Quality Optics was the first step in my descent

from casual Bird Watcher to Birder. The second step? "Chasing" birds. My boss had spotted a Yellow-billed Cuckoo, a bird I had never seen or even knew was possible in our area. My ego found this unacceptable, and it had to be corrected! I set out on my first "Chase," and quickly found a pair! What a high! They were glorious, and oh those cackling calls! The clinching step of my descent into Birder was "Listing" in eBird. eBird made it easy to chase other new birds, and simple to list them. The enablers at eBird told me entering lists is "good for the birds." Soon I'd spiraled into an endless loop of Chasing and Listing, the defining behavioral traits of a Birder. And thus I have fallen into the same behavioral trap as my parents. The high from the next Chase awaits. The List will never be long enough. My family will have to endure this affliction the remainder of my life. Don't ask me to quit, because I don't think I can. —Holly Kleindienst



In 1968, my girlfriend and I skipped school and went out on the Mississippi River in NE Missouri. We were in a slough and a Whooping Crane flew over and filled the sky in this narrow place. We were hooked.

—Nancy Abrams

Salvador: Wood Duck, Mick Thompson; Steffens: Elegant Trogon, Peggy Steffens; Van Boxel: Galah, ©bryanjsmith; Surdut: Raven illustration; Richard: Black-crowned Night Heron, David Kreidler; Collier: American Oystercatcher, Hemant Kishan; Kleindienst: Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Peter Brannon; Abrams: Whooping Crane, Peter Brannon

SOUTHEAST ARIZONA BIRDING FESTIVAL

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TUCSONAUDUBON.ORG/FESTIVAL

Held at the DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel at Reid Park

Join us this August as we celebrate the diversity of bird life in Southeast Arizona. There are still many open field trips, workshops, and presentations – don't miss out! Here are a few highlights you might be interested in:

- Bird photography workshops with representatives from Tamron, FujiFilm, OM, and Hunt's Photo.
- Learn about the "River of Raptors" in Veracruz, how Tucson is becoming an Urban Bird Treaty City, or Arizona's pygmy owls at one of our many free presentations included with festival registration.
- "Festival Celebrations" in the Nature Expo where we'll do daily giveaways, have free appetizers, and a cash bar. Wednesday 4–6pm, Thursday & Friday 4:30–5:30pm, and Saturday 3:30–5:30pm.

Featured Guests include:



Renowned birder, writer, editor, illustrator, and former Tucson resident, Kenn Kaufman. Kenn will do a book signing on Friday afternoon and there's still room on Saturday to join him for his talk "Principles and Pitfalls of Field Identification."



Catherine Hamilton, an incredible artist and passionate birder. Catherine is also the US ambassador for Birding for Zeiss Sports Optics and you won't want to miss her inspirational talk, "How to Draw a Sparrow" on Friday, 4–5pm.



Woodpecker specialist Steve Shunk. Join Steve on Thursday from 4–5pm and learn about woodpeckers and their fascinating anatomy during his specialized talk.

Pyrrhuloxia, Matthew Studebaker



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PATON CENTER RENOVATIONS IN PROGRESS!



Violet-crowned Hummingbird, Peggy Steffens; Paton House, Tom Brown; New Parcel Trail, Tom Brown

At long last, after a thorough assessment of the structure, flood risk, and visitor feedback, Tucson Audubon is moving forward with a renovation of the Paton house, and construction of—drumroll, please—a fully accessible, solar-powered restroom facility! Coming to this decision has been quite a journey, and we’re confident that this path is the correct one.

Demolition and new construction vs renovation: A few years back, Tucson Audubon had engaged with a local architecture and design firm to produce a design for a brand new building on the Paton property, with the intent of demolishing the existing home. That option came with a hefty price tag, upwards of \$2 million, forcing us to pause and rethink our plans.

After re-engaging a committee of long-time supporters, volunteers, staff, and board, we sought guidance from local architectural firm Vint & Associates. Bob Vint has a stellar reputation throughout the region, with extensive experience in historic preservation, and an affinity for the Paton Center. Working in partnership with Justin Turner and Julia Fonseca, local hydrologists with equally impressive depth of knowledge and experience, they assessed the feasibility of restoring the Paton house and constructing a separate restroom facility to accommodate our high volume of visitors.

To our relief and delight, it has been determined that the property is structurally sound. To that end, the committee has endorsed moving forward with renovations that will meet the needs of staff and volunteers while maintaining the sense of place that visitors—including the feathered variety—have come to know and love. We are so pleased to maintain the “backyard feel” of the Paton house, honoring the legacy of Marion and Wally Paton, who for more than three decades welcomed visitors from far and wide to gawk at the birds that frequented their yard.

Welcoming visitors with a “Grand” entrance: Tucson Audubon’s Habitat at Home program encourages residents to create spaces that provide valuable habitat and forage for birds, butterflies, and other wildlife. What better example than the Richard Grand Memorial Meadow? With our newly configured parking area and entrance, visitors will now be greeted by the meadow and its pollinator denizens as they enter the property, and will have an opportunity to learn more about the meadow’s namesake through improved signage.

Increasing habitat connectivity with an expanded footprint: In 2019, Tucson Audubon purchased a five-acre parcel, connecting the Paton Center with The Nature Conservancy’s Patagonia-Sonoita Creek Preserve, at that time riddled with invasive Johnson grass and vinca vine. It now hosts a series of walking trails, giant sacaton grass stands, and a new generation of Fremont cottonwoods, courtesy of our talented restoration team.

Timeline: Restrooms and the new parking area, to be located along Blue Haven Road on our new parcel, are expected to be complete by the end of the year, as well as the replacement of the Paton house roof. Interior renovations will be conducted throughout 2025 and into 2026, when we expect the project to be complete.

Our ability to steward and uphold the legacy of the Paton family rests solely on our dedicated supporters, and for that, we and the Violet-crowned Hummingbirds are deeply grateful.

Melissa Fratello
Executive Director
mfratello@tucsonaudubon.org



SUMMER BIRD SMORGASBORD

We recently had our first good lightning storm of season, a precursor of what we hope to be a nice, wet monsoon season. While there were a few sprinkles, no real measurable amount of rain fell. The event still got me thinking about all the amazing birds that will soon be visiting the Paton Center for Hummingbirds, arriving just about the same time as the rains.

No story on this topic would be complete without mentioning our visiting “Rain Crow,” the Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo. It has that nickname due to a habit of frequently calling just before a rain storm and in response to lightning. We usually see the first Yellow-billed Cuckoos in June, when they migrate into the riparian areas of Southeast Arizona. Listen for their distinctive call, which I refer to as a chugging sound, *ka, ka, ka, ka, kowlp, kowlp, kowlp, kowlp*. Hearing this call will help you locate this very secretive bird.



Now imagine you are sitting comfortably watching the Paton feeders and suddenly a flash of blue appears, and a male Blue Grosbeak flies in to help itself to a meal of sunflower seeds. Another one of our summer visitors, the Blue Grosbeak will join its Black-headed cousin who has already arrived and will be around until the fall. Speaking of grosbeaks, there are two more members of that family that could make brief appearances. The occasional Rose-breasted has visited throughout the summer, and an ultra-rare Yellow Grosbeak showed up last year on June 3.

Being the Paton Center for “Hummingbirds,” here are some species we can expect to see in summer. The star attraction here is without doubt, the Violet-crowned Hummingbird. The “day-glow” white belly, violet crown, and red bill make this hummingbird a real stunner. We are fortunate to be able to show off this species to our guests year round. The Broad-billed Hummingbird is another nearly year round bird, as is the Anna’s Hummingbird, although in much lower numbers during the summer, as most have migrated to the north. It is fairly common to see the Black-chinned Hummingbirds all summer, and the Costa’s Hummingbird is a frequent visitor (we even have a female nesting in the yard right now!). Calliope and Lucifer Hummingbirds are both occasional to the yard, and usually appear after the nesting season is done. Broad-tailed Hummingbirds pass through on migration but are spotted often during those parts of the year. The Rufous Hummingbird is also a common migrant, which often spends a few days bulking up on our hummingbird food in preparation for its long journey. We always get excited when we are able to spot either a Berylline or Rivoli’s Hummingbird. Every year we get a few of each, but rarely do they stay for more than a few days. The least common of our hummingbird species are the Plain-capped Starthroat and the Blue-throated Mountain Gem—both could make summer appearances.

This is just a very small sample of the incredible birds that make the Paton Center for Hummingbirds their homes during monsoon season. On behalf of myself, our staff and incredible group of volunteers, we look forward to your next visit. I’m sure we’ll have some fun birds for you to enjoy!

Tom Brown
Site Manager, Paton Center for Hummingbirds
tbrown@tucsonaudubon.org



TOP: Lucifer Hummingbird; THIS ROW: Black-headed Grosbeak; Blue Grosbeak; Yellow-billed Cuckoo; Calliope Hummingbird. All photos by Tom Brown

RARE BIRDS AT THE WETLANDS IN 2024, SO FAR!



Alex Patia
Sweetwater Wetlands Coordinator
apatia@tucsonaudubon.org



This has been quite the year for rare birds at Sweetwater Wetlands! It started off with a wintering **Northern Parula** that was first seen on October 30, 2023 and was last seen April 23. As the Sweetwater Wetlands Coordinator, a lot of my job is getting to interact with the public at Arizona's 4th birdiest hotspot*. Over the spring I had the pleasure of sharing the parula with many visitors who came to look for it, by far the most popular bird at Sweetwater so far in 2024! It wasn't long after the parula departed that a new bird celebrity appeared on April 28 and lingered until May 12, an **Arizona Woodpecker**. This represented one of only a few records for this species away from Sky Island Madrean pine-oak woodlands and a first for Sweetwater. Some birds that are common around Tucson can be locally rare at Sweetwater where desert scrub habitat is limited. One such bird was a female **Northern Cardinal** that showed up April 21 and stayed through May 4. On April 20, I saw a **Least Bittern** which not only stayed but bred and fledged young (reported by Steve Nord on May 21) that, as of June 13, were still being seen. Seeing these secretive marsh birds requires a fair bit of time, patience, or just luck. More often, their "chuckling" calls can be heard from deep within the cattails. On June 1, a male **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** was found and disappeared for three days before I re-found it on our weekly Wednesday morning bird walk June 5. This was the 5th record for Sweetwater but the first since 2011! Most recently, I found a male **Indigo Bunting** singing on June 14 that was still around at the time of writing this on June 17. I hope to see you out at Sweetwater Wetlands and I will happily help you spot the latest rare bird!

If you've been out birding at Sweetwater Wetlands this spring, there's a good chance you've met Tucson Audubon staff member Alex Patia! Alex started as the Sweetwater Wetlands Coordinator back in February. Since then, he has been leading the weekly Wednesday morning bird walks, greeting visitors, and looking for ways to improve habitat for birds and accessibility for humans at Sweetwater. Alex comes from an environmental education background and loves to share his knowledge of birds with groups of all ages. If you find Alex out on the trails at Sweetwater, ask him about what birds have been seen lately!

*On eBird, Sweetwater Wetlands is #4 among Arizona's hotspots when ranked by species reported at 323, just one species behind Gilbert Water Ranch! However, when ranked by checklists submitted, Sweetwater Wetlands is #1 in AZ with 34,693 checklists!

All photos by Alex Patia:
Northern Cardinal, Least Bittern, Arizona Woodpecker, Northern Parula, Indigo Bunting,

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BUILDING A CULTURE OF CARE FOR THE SANTA CRUZ RIVER

It is with great excitement that i share with you a recap of Tucson Audubon's Santa Cruz River Days of Connection held Saturday, April 20. First, a massive shoutout to our volunteers and partners, Patrick McKenna and Barrio Hollywood, Pima County caretakers of the River Park, Chilako Tacos, ViriViriBombBomb, TWELVOTWO, The Wilderness Society, Tucson Clean & Beautiful, Sonoran Institute, Universalist Unitarian Church, Staff of Ward 1, and Santa Cruz River Valley National Heritage Area. For anyone i accidentally left off the list, know that i hold immense gratitude for your labor and commitment.

This event would not have been possible without the support and funding from two champions of our work, National Audubon's Audubon in Action grant and Vitalyst Health Foundation's Spark grant. Vitalyst's mission is to connect, support, and inform efforts to improve the health of individuals and communities in Arizona. This event was truly a reflection of what it looks like to combine their mission with ours and National Audubon's.

It was quite the day for a labor of love. We had approximately 180 participants who picked up **roughly 6,000 lbs of garbage** from the Santa Cruz! That was *just* in the section adjacent to Barrio Hollywood, from Saint Mary's to Speedway. Hats off and much love for our volunteers, interns, community members, and organizers who worked in the near 90-degree weather.

My co-lead, Applied Conservation Project Manager Olya Weekley and i spent many hours dedicated to creating a productive, fun, and inspiring trash clean-up and community gathering. We were supported by Community Engagement Manager Donito Burgess who did an amazing job leading a large group of birders before the clean-up and Volunteer & Engagement Coordinator Alexis Stark who greeted and registered folks—both helped set the tone for a successful and welcoming event.

Thanks to our grants, Tucson Audubon was able to pay vendors to give out free food and drinks to participants. It also allowed us to have dj's to pump the jams and keep folks inspired while picking up trash! Providing free food and music is an essential aspect of culture and community building. We want folks to be joyfully willing to contribute to mobilizing and taking action and want to come back for the next one!

The implications of these trash clean-ups go well beyond collecting garbage, enjoying tacos de carne asada with aguas frescas, and enjoying some of the best dj's in Tucson. While having a good time is a priority, our grander intention is to collectively build a culture of active care for our beloved river and by extension, the life it supports. The land and our animal relatives know it has seen better days.

After Grace Lee Boggs, the time on the clock is now. *Now* is the time to reconcile our relationship with the river, the land, and the past. Further, it is time for environmental NGOs to bridge the gap between our organizations, as land managers and implementers of top-down funded programming, and communities of people deemed "underserved," "underrepresented," and "under resourced."

Thank you for reading and may we continue to collaborate in protecting our desert and Her living beings.

isaiah kortright
Community Organizing Coordinator
ikortright@tucsonaudubon.org



Scan the QR code to see a video of our efforts!



INVITE BIRDS INTO YOUR “MESSY JUNGLES”

In 1973 I was living in a tiny cottage in Palo Alto, California. What I liked most about my abode was that it couldn't be seen from the street because a labyrinth of shrubbery (much of it dead and in need of some hard pruning) provided a privacy screen. A new love interest had appeared in my life at that time, and he began pointing out and naming some of my yard birds. I didn't pay too much attention at first, but then one day, as we were relaxing behind my dense tangles of vegetation, he showed me a bird that changed my life forever.

It was the sound that we noticed first: not a lively song or scramble of notes, but a distinct rustling in the leaves. In addition to the swishing sounds, leaves seemed to be flying out in all directions. The perpetrator was on the ground and seemed to be rather shy, never venturing far from the safety of a large shrub. It was difficult to get a good look but we waited patiently until the bird finally revealed itself. It was incredibly handsome: medium sized, hooded in black with a light-colored belly and rusty red sides. Its dark wings were accented with speckles of

white. The topper for me was the eyes—the color of rubies. Captivated, we watched the bird as it hopped forward and backward continuously in the leaf litter, no doubt stirring up all kinds of tasty treats. It was a Rufous-sided Towhee (since renamed Spotted Towhee).

So that was the moment when I began to watch birds. It was also my very first lesson about habitat: cluttered “jungles” in the garden are good. It doesn't pay to be overly concerned about neatness because birds enjoy a messy garden; the more vegetation, the safer they feel. Leave shrubs in their natural shapes so that branches remain low to the ground. Allow leaf litter to accumulate as it provides a fine mulch, reduces evaporation, helps to conserve moisture, and regulates soil temperature.

Although not really a desert dweller, Spotted Towhee has visited my Tucson garden on several occasions, and I expect it's because my landscape is not exactly on the tidy side.

Lynn Hassler
Green Gardeners Volunteer Captain
Historic Y



Spotted Towhee, Mick Thompson



TUCSON AUDUBON SOCIETY

BIRDS & COMMUNITY

Find upcoming events and register at:
TUCSONAUDUBON.ORG/NEWS-EVENTS

July 26, 6 pm, In-person Social Event
BIRDS 'N' BINGO at Bawker Bawker Cider House
 Put your bird ID knowledge to the test, compete to win sweet birdy prizes, and sip some of the best cider in town with your friends from Tucson Audubon! Note that bingo will start promptly at 6:30. This event is free to join, but plan to bring money for drinks/food.

August 1, 11am, Virtual Event
BIRDING NEAR YOU with Alex Eisengart, Presented by Hunt's Photo
 Join Alex Eisengart as he covers all the basics of birding near you, including how to find locations to bird, when to hit them (season and time of day), what to bring on your local travels, and a personalized breakdown of birding that's actually near you!



August 22 & 24
IT'S ALL IN THE FAMILY: FLYCATCHER ID WORKSHOP
 Ready to leap into the identification of Empidonax and Myiarchus flycatchers? Join local bird expert Homer Hanson for this two-part ID field and classroom workshop where you'll be introduced to the diverse Tyrannidae family of flycatchers. It will highlight the ways to separate the kingbirds, pewees, empids, and other flycatchers of Southeast Arizona and will focus on structural and plumage characteristics with a brief introduction to vocalizations for a few of the species. Participants are expected to attend both field and classroom workshops for a holistic experience.

September 5, 11am, Virtual Event
THE TRUE NATURE OF THE CLIMATE CRISIS with Zach Brown, PhD
 Why has humanity failed for a generation to take meaningful action on climate change? Join climate scientist Zach Brown to explore the barriers to climate action and learn the real tools the climate movement is using to overcome these barriers and end the fossil fuel era. Zach empowers climate concerned citizens to move beyond reusable shopping bags and make real change.

Help Us Locate Desert Purple Martins

The Desert Purple Martin, a subspecies of Purple Martin, has recently returned to prime Sonoran Desert habitat. They spent the winter in Brazil and have completed their long journey to Southern Arizona and Northwest Mexico to nest in saguaro and cardon cacti.

We need your help to find saguaros they are nesting in and gathering at night. During June and early July, Desert Purple Martins will be in their "saguaro guarding" phase. They hang out at their chosen nesting saguaro during the morning and evening and defend it from other birds who may want to nest in their chosen cavity. You might see them entering nesting holes, but they are likely not nesting yet. Most pairs will have laid eggs by mid-July and will spend most of the day at their nesting saguaro. Hopefully the monsoon will be in full swing by late July into August and parents will be busily feeding chicks at the saguaro all day.

If you see Purple Martins at or near a saguaro, please let us know! We have found over 200 nesting saguaros since 2020 and finding more helps us fill in knowledge gaps for this understudied species.

If you find one of their nesting saguaros while out in Sonoran Desert habitat, please note its location by taking a photo and submitting it to iNaturalist or making a stationary eBird list near the saguaro's location. We pull data from both of these sources. You can also report the saguaro directly to us by visiting TUCSONAUDUBON.ORG/PURPLEMARTIN. Thank you!



House Finch, Mick Thompson; Desert Purple Martin in saguaro nest cavity, Grigory Heaton

ORIOLE INSPIRATION IN THE NATURE SHOP

Orioles are “spark birds” for many people. It’s difficult to resist their vibrant colors and beautiful songs! Thank your neighborhood oriole today with this citrus-inspired collection at the Tucson Audubon Nature Shop.

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It was another successful and fun Tucson Audubon Birdathon! Kudos to all involved—the dedication and creativity of every participant is truly inspiring. Thanks to the birders, their supporters, our sponsors, and most of all, the birds! We are grateful to you for making this another amazing Birdathon.

CATEGORY WINNERS

- Brand New to Birdathon:** MIA went Birding (Moriah Lambert)
- Birdathon Beyond AZ:** Eclipse Plumage (Diane Drobka & Craig Wilcox)
- Big Day (Traditional):** Wrenegades (Sara Pike, Tim Helentjaris, Chris Rohrer, Matt Griffiths, Jennie MacFarland)
- Best Bucks for Birds:** SaddleBrooke Ranch Cuckoos (Jim Hoagland, Jim Bradford, Laurie McCoy, Deb Sandin, Karen Vanderwall, Tim DeJonghe, Nancy & Ben Eisenstein, Sheree & Rick Gillaspie, Claire & Gerry Tietje)
- Grand Champion:** Photopepla (Peggy Steffens)

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- Tucson Audubon Nature Shop
- Wild Birds Unlimited



Wrenegades; Lazuli Buntings, Peggy Steffens; Egyptian Goose, Diane Drobka and Craig Wilcox

BEYOND THE BEAK: TUCSON AUDUBON'S INTERACTIVE EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Educational outreach is a cornerstone of Tucson Audubon's mission to *inspire people to enjoy and protect birds*. Through engaging and informative activities, we aim to inspire individuals of all ages to become stewards of the environment. Our educational programs not only highlight the incredible biodiversity in and around Tucson but also emphasize the critical roles various species play in maintaining healthy ecosystems.

One of our standout educational activities is "Nature's Clean-up Crew," which focuses on the often misunderstood Turkey Vulture. Turkey Vultures are nature's waste managers, providing essential ecosystem services by consuming carrion, which helps prevent the spread of disease. During this activity, participants learn about the biology and behavior of these fascinating birds and their vital role in the environment. By dispelling myths and highlighting their ecological importance, we aim to foster a greater appreciation for Turkey Vultures and encourage conservation efforts to protect these indispensable creatures.

Recently, we unveiled another exciting educational activity at Parker Canyon Lake: "Birds 'n' Beaks." This interactive program is designed to educate participants about the diverse adaptations of birds, with a special focus on their beaks. Through hands-on demonstrations and activities, participants explore how different beak shapes and sizes are perfectly adapted to various feeding strategies and habitats. This program not only highlights the incredible diversity of bird species but also provides insights into the evolutionary processes that shape our natural world. By connecting participants with the fascinating lives of birds, "Birds 'n' Beaks" aims to inspire a sense of wonder and a commitment to protecting avian habitats.

As part of our ongoing commitment to education, Tucson Audubon continuously develops new and engaging activities. We understand that fostering a love for nature requires innovative approaches that can captivate and educate diverse audiences. Our future programs will continue to blend fun and learning, making nature accessible and exciting for everyone. Whether through interactive exhibits, field trips, or hands-on workshops, our goal is to create memorable experiences that deepen understanding and appreciation of the natural world.

To expand our reach and enhance our educational efforts, we are in the process of forming an "Educational Outreach" team. This team will play a crucial role in developing and delivering our educational programs to a broader audience. By bringing together educators, naturalists, and volunteers with a passion for environmental education, we aim to create a dynamic team capable of inspiring the next generation of nature enthusiasts and conservationists. This initiative will allow us to extend our impact, reaching more schools, community groups, and individuals throughout Tucson and beyond. If you are interested in becoming a part of our Educational Outreach team, please contact me or Volunteer Coordinator Alexis Stark (astark@tucsonaudubon.org). By fostering a deeper connection to the environment, Tucson Audubon hopes to inspire lasting stewardship and a collective effort to protect the incredible biodiversity that surrounds us.

Donito Burgess
Community Engagement Manager
dburgess@tucsonaudubon.org



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Youth birding, Bea Mendivil; Birds 'n' Beaks activity, Donito Burgess; Nature's Clean-up Crew activity, Bea Mendivil; Engaging youth at Sweetwater Wetlands, Bea Mendivil

CULTIVATING CONSERVATION IN THE SONORAN DESERT



Gila Woodpecker family in a saguaro nest cavity, Mick Thompson; Saguaro planting group, Alexis Stark; Planting a young saguaro, Deirdre Rosenberg

What sets the Sonoran Desert apart? Many highlight its remarkable biodiversity, while others specifically mention the iconic saguaro cactus, which plays a crucial role in the desert ecosystem by providing habitat and sustenance for numerous avian species such as White-winged Doves, Western Screech-Owls, and Purple Martins. Unfortunately, some of these saguaros face challenges from invasive grasses, urban sprawl, and the effects of climate change and drought. Yet, amid these concerns, there emerges a growing chorus of dedication and passion for nature that resonates throughout this unique landscape. It's Tucson Audubon's Saguaro Planting initiative, which has brought together dedicated volunteers and passionate staff who help orchestrate wonderful saguaro planting events.

During these events, volunteers flock from all corners of Arizona, driven by a shared mission: to nurture the desert ecosystem they call home and preserve its breathtaking beauty. Under the guidance of Aya Pickett (Restoration Project Manager) and Megan Ewbank (Urban Habitats Project Manager), volunteers dedicate their time to help plant four-inch-tall saguaros, generously provided by local nurseries, under nurse plants. For this project, Aya and Megan select prime locations for the new plants, ensuring the seedlings are shielded from the desert's harsh elements until they can stand on their own.

At a recent planting event held in February, a remarkable milestone was achieved: volunteers and staff banded together to plant over 400 saguaros in just one day. Such an accomplishment speaks volumes to the unwavering dedication and tireless efforts of all involved. As these unique cacti take root in the desert soil, they not only symbolize the commitment

of these volunteers but also represent a beacon of hope for the delicate ecosystem they inhabit.

Among the many bird species reliant on saguaros for sustenance and shelter is the Gila Woodpecker, a cherished symbol of the desert. Without the saguaro, the Gila Woodpecker would be deprived of its ability to make cavities for nesting, which in turn become sanctuaries for countless other desert dwellers. To bird watchers, the Gila Woodpecker is more than just a species—it's a "Spark Bird," a symbol of fascination and inspiration that ignites a lifelong passion for birding. And so, the planting of saguaros speaks to the importance of habitat restoration and protecting our native birds that we all enjoy so much.

As we reflect on the collective achievements of each and every volunteer that helped make these events possible, let us pause to extend our heartfelt gratitude for their impactful contributions. Thanks to the dedicated staff and volunteers involved, we are establishing a new generation of saguaros in their natural habitat, ensuring the desert's beauty continues to thrive for generations to come!

Learn more about the Saguaro Planting initiative at:
TUCSONAUDUBON.ORG/SAGUARO.

Alexis Stark
Volunteer & Engagement Coordinator
astark@tucsonaudubon.org



WOO HOOT!

BIRDY NEWS BITES WORTH CELEBRATING

MESQUITE BOSQUE RESTORATION AT TUMACACORI NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK!



Tucson Audubon's Invasive Plant and Habitat Restoration Programs are joining forces at Tumacacori National Historical Park to speed up the park's natural succession into a mesquite bosque. Current restoration efforts are focused on a 36 acre abandoned

agricultural field that has evidence of agricultural use dating back 4,000 years. Common regional invasive species have become established in the park, including Bermuda grass, buffelgrass, and Johnsongrass. Restoration efforts will focus on the treatment of these species, followed by revegetation through seeding and planting. Once the most abundant riparian plant community in the region, mesquite bosques have severely declined. Restoring this habitat will strengthen migratory corridors along the Santa Cruz River as these forests are extremely productive for wildlife, especially birds. Crews kicked off the project this June with fence removal to improve wildlife connectivity throughout the site.



Bewick's Wren, a common resident of mesquite bosque habitat, Greg Lavaty; Dismantling fence lines at Tumacacori, Kari Hackney

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WHAT'S IN A NAME?



Hooded Oriole, Rick Williams

On May 6th, the Board of Directors of Tucson Audubon, with resounding support and urging from our dedicated staff, voted to enter into the process of changing our organization's name, bidding farewell to the familiar but fraught Audubon moniker. This was driven by the desire to shed a name that no longer represents our values, and no longer resonates with new generations of birders like it once did.

ARE WE ABANDONING WHAT MAKES US RECOGNIZABLE?

Those already in the fold of conservation know the Audubon name well and the birding community it represents. John J. Audubon's book, *Birds of America*, sparked fascination and curiosity in its readers. I, too, came to know the name Audubon as synonymous with birds, though not until my mid-30s, when I discovered birding through my son. I then joined the Audubon network, and served on the Board of Buffalo Audubon for nearly eight years before serving as their Executive Director.

It is hard for some to believe, but the name Audubon, outside of the conservation space, does not ring bells for the many Tucsonans. Our staff experience this regularly, when they have to expound on what we do after telling people they work for Tucson Audubon and are greeted by blank stares or "what's that?".

Beyond that, to state that the Audubon name is responsible for Tucson Audubon's gravitas in this region, that it is his name that established our reputation as a force for conservation, that it is his name that draws tens of thousands to the Paton Center for Hummingbirds, is insulting to the work of our staff, board, and volunteers. It is to their hard work, and the birds and biodiversity of our region that we owe our success. Our work will continue to be valued and recognized as we carry on doing what we do best—inspiring people through education, engagement, and conservation.

IS THIS JUST PERFORMATIVE VIRTUE SIGNALING?

In all honesty, when National Audubon first entered into deliberations over its name change, my position was that changing it without making equally meaningful strides to be more inclusive was meaningless and empty. Through discussions and deeper reflection, I realized that the name is inherently harmful to engaging with the very communities missing from our table, and that it carries so much weight as a first impression. A name change alone is not enough, but it is a critical step forward. I encourage readers to watch a recent speech made by Christian Cooper at the San Diego Birding Festival, where he explains this much more powerfully than I possibly can (search, "Nat Talk: The Future of Birding with Christian Cooper").

"He was a man of his time" does not fly. He wasn't just a slave owner, he was an active proponent of eugenics and the continuation of slavery, and desecrated the graves of indigenous peoples in pursuit of proving them less than human. To pretend this was the only viewpoint held during this time is dishonest and dismissive of the abolitionist movement, and the dangers of eugenicist thought. To boot, Audubon was far from a conservationist; he was a talented artist (who shot every bird he drew or painted) and businessman.

Birding has been a space held overwhelmingly by white people with time, money, and preconceived notions about what it means to be a birder. That demographic is shifting. We see it in the hundreds of birding groups forming around the country—In Color Birding Club, Black Birders Week, Feminist Bird Club, and Queer Birders Network to name a few. We're seeing a focus on accessibility, and the establishment of organizations like Birdability. It is time to be honest with ourselves: Would these groups be taking the time to organize and hold their own events if they found that the Audubon network was already serving them and felt welcome?

WHAT WE KNOW FROM OTHER CHAPTERS:

We have the benefit of learning from other chapters and are enormously grateful for their generosity in sharing data, experiences, unvarnished opinions and feedback. Their costs have ranged from as little as \$5,000 to over \$100,000, depending on what level of rebranding they did. Tucson Audubon expects to be on the lower end, especially since we are preserving its visual branding—we love our Vermilion Flycatcher!

The chapters who completed a name change show a net gain in members, and chapters with a membership-led structure (which Tucson Audubon does not have) have had their members vote in favor of a name change by a wide margin. We've seen a similar trend in responses with the majority being in favor.

Stay tuned as we move forward in our name selection process, with an announcement made by January 2025 if not sooner. Many chapters—most recently New York City, but also Oregon (formerly Portland Audubon), Chicago, Golden Gate, Wisconsin (both Northeast and Southern), Grand Prairie, Central New Mexico, and counting—have adopted "Bird Alliance" as a fitting name that demonstrates exactly what they do and stand for, with no barriers to inclusion.

We are here because we love birds and want to protect the habitats they need to thrive. We want to share the myriad learning opportunities, discoveries, and health benefits that birding brings with as many people as possible. We want to create spaces where people of all backgrounds, abilities, and identities feel safe and welcome. Our mission is to inspire people—all people—to enjoy and protect birds. It does not serve us to cling to a name that has no direct association with our work and is in opposition of our values. We are not erasing history; we are learning from it and moving forward with a better understanding and a better name.

Melissa Fratello
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2023 ANNUAL REPORT

CELEBRATING OUR 75 YEAR ANNIVERSARY!

Find the full report at tucsonaudubon.org/2023report

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

50 virtual and in-person events → **3,575** attendees

321 field trips → **3,900+** attendees

SOUTHEAST ARIZONA BIRDING FESTIVAL

- 770 registrants from 36 states and 7 countries
- 136 field trips
- 26 workshops & presentations
- 15 scholarships awarded

267 volunteers

9,000+ hours logged

\$286,693 worth of work

Thank you, volunteers!



24,617 Nature Shop visitors engaged online and in-person

TOTAL INDIVIDUAL GIVING: \$885,319

3,153 TUCSON AUDUBON MEMBERS

ADVOCACY

4 BIRDING & CANVASSING EVENTS TO GET OUT THE VOTE

Highlight: Played key role in organizing opposition in Rio Rico to proposed rezoning along the Santa Cruz River. Resulted in the withdrawal of the proposal and protection of 3,550 acres of biodiverse land.

YOUTH EDUCATION

2,801 YOUTH + 1,574 ADULTS ENGAGED

Highlight: Solidified a meaningful partnership with the Arizona Trail Association's Youth Ambassador Program, which aims to empower youth and promote environmental stewardship, outdoor education, and the preservation of the Sonoran Desert.

COMMUNITY CONSERVATION

Through a multitude of ways we are encouraging and showing people how they can protect birds and other native species. One of the most accessible and rewarding ways is through creating and enhancing habitat in urban areas.



379
window strike prevention kits distributed to the public for free

208
open vertical pipes capped, increasing awareness + saving innumerable wildlife

95
newly registered Lucy's Warbler nestbox owners

DESERT PURPLE MARTIN NESTBOX DESIGN CHALLENGE

- 22 designs submitted
- Replicated 25 sets of the top 3 performing nestboxes
- Now it's up to the birds to tell us which one they like!

PATON CENTER FOR HUMMINGBIRDS



20,000+
visitors from all over the world!

Established renovation plans for the Paton House and new accessible restrooms

Haikubox installed (bird call ID device)
160
birds recorded



500
Fremont cottonwood seedlings collected and growing at Paton nursery

7
new garden plots for Montezuma Quail food

30+ acres
of invasive plants treated

25
native trees planted &

3
meadows created where invasive Siberian elm was removed



PROTECTING CRITICAL HABITAT IN SOUTHEAST ARIZONA

Corazon sin Fuego Project Completed!

27 acres

of Salt Cedar removed

50 acres

of invasive grasses
treated

6,500 lbs

of Arundo removed from
riparian areas around
Tucson to create fire
breaks

800+

saguaro
seedlings
planted

1,600

infestation
points recorded
to monitor and
treat stinknet

Thousands of acres
surveyed &

150+ acres

actively treated for
invasive plants
throughout
Southeast Arizona



HERE'S TO THE NEXT 75 YEARS!

I hope you enjoyed the snapshot of our amazing 2023 accomplishments and that it makes you proud to support Tucson Audubon as we celebrate our 75 year anniversary!

While in human years this is certainly notable, we must think more expansively. In saguaro years, we would only now be growing our first arms and would need up to another 75 years to become the iconic behemoths that support the many birds and other desert animals we love. This longer timeline is how our organization must think, plan, and execute our work if we are going to continue making lasting positive impacts in Southeast Arizona.

Please donate to our Summer Appeal to get us going on the next 75 years! Thank you!

Erica Freese

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MAKE AN IMPACT

**DONATE TODAY TO
SUSTAIN THIS VITAL WORK!**

To donate and learn about all
the ways you can support
Tucson Audubon, please visit:
tucsonaudubon.org/donate

or

scan the QR code!



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NEW MEMBERSHIP PRICING BEGINS

New membership pricing began July 1, 2024.

Our membership levels were last changed in 2016. After careful consideration and comparisons with similar non-profits, we decided it was time to update them.



BENEFITS

- ✓ Support Tucson Audubon's mission to enjoy & protect birds and their habitats
- ✓ Subscription to quarterly *Vermilion Flycatcher* magazine
- ✓ 10% off most purchases at the Nature Shop, 20% off birdseed
- ✓ Early access to field trips and member-only events



SCAN TO
LEARN MORE!

tucsonaudubon.org/membership

NEW LEVELS



LUCY'S WARBLER
\$50 (\$40 INTRODUCTORY)
Individual



ELF OWL
\$75
Family (2 adults + kids)



AMERICAN KESTREL
\$150*



DESERT PURPLE MARTIN
\$300*



ELEGANT TROGON
\$600+*

*Family benefits