Presidents Message

Krys Hammers

Speak Up for the Birds!

Dear friends,

We hope you are taking measures to keep safe during this exhausting pandemic. We've been providing educational programming safely by adhering to our COVID-19 policy. We successfully moved our Speakers Series to Zoom, and our outdoor programs have continued under the safety rules. Please check our website for dates and times and join us!

Speaking of programs, our birdwalk guides are among the most informative and entertaining out there, and we are fortunate to have two public parks as classrooms. Gilbert Riparian Preserve is one of the best and most visited birding spots in the state. But the other—Veterans Oasis in Chandler—has deteriorated. Our mission to protect birds, wildlife and their habitats, obligates us to advocate for these parks, and right now, Veterans Oasis needs our help.

Almost 35 years ago, Gilbert made decision to reuse 100 percent of its effluent water. Effluent fills the ponds at the Riparian Preserve and as the water seeps down it is further purified—recharging the aquifer at the same time. This is a great thing in the desert. It keeps our water in Arizona and creates nutrient-rich habitat for waterfowl and shorebirds, creating and renewing a variety of different water levels from dry to mud-flats to deep water. Gilbert also offers some great viewing areas into each pond. Because of good management the system works beautifully. No wonder birders flock there, the same as birds.

It's a different story at Veterans Oasis Park. I teach classes at the Environmental Education Center there, and the staff is great to work with. But the park itself has been mismanaged for years. Many of the ponds have not been filled above the permanent water line in so long that reeds have filled in the area, obscuring views. The city built bird blinds, but 50 feet of vegetation now blocks sightlines.

Desert Rivers volunteers have done the hard labor of clearing the paths on several occasions. We were told that city maintenance crews would continue to keep them open, but when we return after summer break we find them overgrown again. This summer, Desert Rivers contributed comments during the city's parks planning process, but so far nothing has been done to improve the park.

We have been leading birdwalks at Veterans Oasis since the park first opened. Our attendance data shows that almost 200 people per season learn about birds on these walks—about a quarter of them children. But if we cannot see into the ponds to show them the birds, we may have to stop offering birdwalks there.

Our mission includes a promise to protect habitat. It is time that we raise our voices on behalf of Veterans Oasis Park. Will you speak up for the birds?
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Cover Photo: Eared Quetzal in Cave Creek Canyon, Cochise County by Mary McSparen, 14 June 2020. Eared Quetzal is casual to the mountains of Arizona. See page 3
Cover Story: Eared Quetzal Quest

Birders were electrified this summer with the appearance of the Eared Quetzal in southeastern Arizona. Before this summer, only 25 other sightings had been recorded here, most in the late 1980s and early 1990s. So, the faithful jumped in their cars and headed to the Chiricahua Mountains hoping to hear the quetzal’s squeal-chuck call and glimpse its red, green and blue plumage.

Mary McSparran was one of them; the stunning image she captured is our cover this issue. On June 13, the day after the first report, Mary hopped in her can and drove four hours to the spot where the quetzal was seen: Herb Martyr Campground at the head of Cave Creek Canyon near Portal, Arizona. She joined others in the search, but the bird proved elusive and she drove home. When news arrived that the bird was sighted in the same spot the next day, she climbed in her jeep and drove back.

"Many people who had arrived before me that morning had been rewarded with appearances, so I decided to scramble up a steep hill to see if he might be in that area," she recalls. "When I stood up, he was right in front of me on a low branch, right out in the open! I was so surprised that I was shaking, and I started to fall backwards. I have no idea how I managed to keep from falling down. I just stood there, looking at him."

"He looked right at me and must have decided I was OK. He started to preen his feathers, then looked around the other trees like he was looking for bugs. I managed to take a few photos, but really I was just enjoying the time that I had with him. It was totally worth 12 hours of driving to see and photograph this beautiful creature!"

Mary has been a bird watcher for three years, having caught the bug at Hassayampa River Preserve. She credits Interpretive Ranger Eric Hough with making her a birder and they have become close friends. She has also enjoyed birding field trips sponsored by Desert Rivers Audubon Society.

Indelible Sightings

I was eating my sandwich in the picnic area at Boyce Thompson Arboretum when a friend and I spotted a thrush. The shape of his body and beak said "thrush," but I had to open my app to get the rest: Hermit Thrush. I cannot remember ever before seeing a Hermit Thrush, and he wasn’t alone that day. At least a dozen worked the branches of the Chinese Pistache, a tree popular with many species while fruiting.

A couple weeks later I was making my way up the Old Baldy Trail in Madera Canyon. I spotted movement in the brush, and when I focused my binoculars, I said “Hermit Thrush!” That bird is indelibly locked in my mind, thanks to the memory of my lunch hour at Boyce.

I’ve always marveled at the sports fan’s ability to recall plays from games decades in the past. How can they remember details so fine, so long ago?

I think I finally understand. I can tell you where I was the first time I saw a Loggerhead Shrike. We had just stepped out of the visitor’s center at the Very Large Array – a radio telescope installation 50 miles west of Socorro, New Mexico. I saw his wickedly hooked beak and black mask and I knew I would never forget him, or where we met. Much later I saw a member of his tribe fly into a mesquite tree with a lizard in his beak. He impaled the critter on a thorn, tore off a bite, then delivered the rest to a nest nearby.Butcher bird indeed.

The same is true for the Scarlet Tanager. I photographed one with a beak full of fruit on the branch of a mulberry tree in High Island, Texas. Or the Green-tailed Towhee I surprised under a bush in a wash on South Mountain during migration. Or the Vermillion Fly-catcher that toyed with the autofocus on my camera as he moved around a tree near Arivaca Lake in Southern Arizona. Maybe it’s the element of surprise that makes these memories indelible. What sightings have been unforgettable to you?

Zooming Together to Learn

As I write, Desert Rivers Audubon Society has staged three Speaker Series programs using the online platform Zoom. We’re happy to report that our attendance has been good – equal to or better than our regular in-person programs! We are reaching people who have never attended one of our in-person meetings, and we’re hoping that many of them will become active members! We are looking forward to some interesting speakers in the coming months. See page 11 for the schedule.

If you have not yet attended one of our Zoom programs, it’s simple to get started. Access our registration form from the link under Monthly Speaker Series on our home page and indicate which programs you would like to attend. We will send the Zoom link to your email account, and we’ll remind you when the program is coming up. Another easy way to keep up to date is to subscribe to the Desert Rivers Audubon e-newsletter. Each email includes the link to the Zoom sign up form – no copying and pasting involved! Both links are on our homepage: DesertRiversAudubon.org.

Calling All Kids!

Join our club for kids and learn about birds, other wildlife and nature! Contact Anne Koch at atredray@gmail.com

Keeping Those Wheels Turning!

The Desert Rivers Audubon Society mobile bookstore is a familiar sight at meetings and at our monthly family birdwalks. This fall, the Discount Tire store at Baseline and Country Club Roads donated new tires for the trailer, assuring that volunteers John Krick and Annette Broderick arrive safely with our books, tee shirts and binoculars.

Thank you, Discount Tire!
Conservation News – Pandemic Edition

Many families have been spending much more time at home than they are used to spending. We hunker down and hide from human interaction, hoping that it allows us to hide from the virus, or more accurately, viral transmission, spending much more time in front of screens. Streaming videos, nonstop gaming, surfing the Internet, binge-watching TV shows, it all cuts us off from nature.

You can go for a walk outside, and in most neighborhoods, you can avoid interaction with humans. But have you tried going for a walk in the Riparian Preserve? It is prima facie evidence that great minds think alike, and a lot of them are at the preserve. So, how do you get a quick nature fix? Online wildlife cameras! Here is my humble attempt at what to stream to get your wildlife fix.

Let’s start local, meaning here in Arizona. The Arizona Game & Fish Department maintains a few wildlife cameras. Here is a link to the page that will connect you to all of them: https://www.azgfd.com/wildlife/viewing/webcamlist/. The Sandhill Crane Cam & the Bald Eagle Cam are both good ones to view. Now is a great time for the cranes; this spring will be the best for the eagles. There are also Great-horned Owls, Desert Pupfish, and bats.

Have you ever visited the Lonely Planet? It is a great site to dream about places you would really like to visit. Although these aren’t bird cams, who can resist brown bears, sea otters, giraffes, sharks and gorillas? Hey, every so often we have to give the mammals their due. It can’t be ornithology all the time! Here’s the link to the Lonely Planet best of wildlife cams: https://www.lonelyplanet.com/articles/best-wildlife-web-cams.

Okay, okay, I know my audience, so here is your bird fix, courtesy of my new friend Scott at Bird Watching HQ 2020. He has constructed a website using WordPress and compiled links to eighty-six wildlife webcams. And all the links work! Here is the link to the top ten feeder sites from around the world: https://birdwatchingh-
Eastern Warblers in the West

Article and photos: Jim Burns

After I managed to capture good images of four smashing eastern warblers during this fall’s migration season, I got to thinking about the old song and dance that birders here in Arizona have a plethora of great hummingbird species (15) to the East’s one, but our eastern friends enjoy a similar advantage in warbler species. But do they really? I did a little research through my personal records, and it left me with an interesting question over and above which half of the country has better birds.

Not counting Olive Warbler and Yellow-breasted Chat, the taxonomic anomalies in the warbler tribe, there are 51 regularly occurring warblers in North America, 31 in the East, 13 in the West, and 7 found in both. In our 40 years in Arizona I have seen 25 of those eastern warblers here, in state, 26 if I hadn’t whiffed 5(!) times on the Black-throated Green in Scottsdale’s Northsight Park this spring. That’s surely a much higher percentage than the number of western hummers I would have seen in half a lifetime east of the Mississippi.

My eastern warbler sightings in Arizona range all over the board from 7 Chestnut-sideds, one in the bush right outside our computer room window, to one of each of such totally unexpected vagrants as Blue-winged, Golden-winged, and Cape May. The most fascinating thing is for some of these eastern vagrants my photographs in Arizona are the best I’ve gotten of the species, despite several photo trips east of the Mississippi to legendary migration hotspots and breeding grounds there.

This begs the question, of course, why? Parts of the answer are obvious. I’ve had fires on the pavement and boots on the ground here for 40 years: there are more and more birders out looking, especially now during this pandemic, and optical equipment, reporting, and recording technology has gotten way better over the years. Yes, I know birds have wings and don’t study the maps and routes in the guide books, but there may also be more in play.

A perusal of the distribution maps of many eastern warblers, some of which have already been reported in Maricopa County this fall (Cape May, Magnolia, Blackburnian, Chestnut-sided, Palm, Canada) tells us, though they may be “eastern” in the lower forty-eight, they actually breed westward farther north across Canada into that country’s prairie provinces and northern Rockies. These species’ “normal” migratory route is mostly down the east side of the Rockies, but some show up yearly as transients and overwintering sojourners in coastal California.

This fall for sure, and probably for the past decade, if you were an “eastern” warbler, the chances were good that you had one of three possible outcomes to your southward migration, the most fraught and physically taxing event of your avian life: you made it; you were forced by fire and its toll on the insect population to leave before your fat reserves built up and you died en route (for example, New Mexico in 2020); you became totally disoriented by smoke inhalation and ash cloud, blundered off your evolutionary path and crashed in Arizona.

Since southward migration began in July in this environmentally cataclysmic year of fire but no rain, besides the six species mentioned above, Ovenbird, both waterthrushes, Blue-winged, Black-and-white, Prothonotary, Black-throated Blue, Tennessee, Kentucky, Hooded, American Redstart, Northern Parula, and Blackpoll Warblers have all been reported somewhere in Arizona. That’s an amazing 19 species, over half of all the warblers generally considered “eastern.”

Transient, vagrants, outliers, call them what you will, but these unexpected and seemingly out of place warblers always attract those amongst us who keep lists and the newly initiated seeking fresh spark birds. This is a good thing. It grows our game, which can only increase the numbers of the environmentally aware. Indeed, one weekend morning the crowd discreetly following the first fall male Palm Warbler on his sunrise breakfast rounds at Gilbert Riparian Area was so large I bailed out because, although almost all were masked up, maintaining responsible social distancing became difficult.

All the warbler images accompanying this article were taken in Arizona, and all represent my best image of the individual species. With these eastern Warblers in the west comes this conundrum: We are delighted to see them, and seek them out actually, because of their beauty and rarity, but was 2020 "just a good year" as a couple of Arizona’s experts have told me, or should we increasingly recognize them as possible harbingers of the existential issues of our own species’ overpopulation and reliance on fossil fuels? This is food for thought and fuel for environmental activism.
As dinosaurs, birds have an ancient and complex family tree. Over the past several decades, scientists have obtained new insights into the evolutionary relationships of birds. This has been made possible with the power of genomic mapping and super computing coupled with an explosion of new fossil discoveries.

The most widely accepted hypothesis concerning bird evolution is the BMT (bird, manipulator, theropod) hypothesis. Theropods were a large group of bipedal dinosaurs that included the maniraptors. Maniraptors had long arms and three-fingered hands and were feathered. They first appeared in the Jurassic Period. Maniraptors are the only dinosaurs known to have had flight capabilities.

Bird-like characteristics slowly evolved throughout theropod evolution during the Mesozoic. Some of these changes documented in the fossil record include: progressive tooth loss with corresponding beak and gizzard development, increased feather complexity, bipedal knee-based locomotion, cranial changes associated with increased visual acuity, development of a furcula (wishbone) for flight muscle attachment, and a flow-through respiratory system with air sacs. General body size also continued to decrease.

Researchers have found theropod nests with eggs indicating a move away from the reptilian behavior of burying eggs in the ground. Nesting and evidence of brooding behavior along with increasing feather complexity and other fossil cues indicate some theropods were endothermic (warm-blooded).

Flight apparently evolved along several different theropod lines. Microraptor, one genus of theropod dinosaurs, apparently was "four-winged," with feathered legs as well as feathered wings and a fan-like tail. Microraptors and other similar species were more gliders rather than fliers. Scientists continue to explore and debate the advantages and disadvantages of gliding and primitive flight behavior in terms of capturing prey, escaping from predators, and reproduction.

One key evolutionary change in the transition from theropod-like dinosaurs to modern birds was the development of a short tail composed of a fused vertebra and a pygostyle. Theropods, including the well-known Archaeopteryx, had an elongated tail, which served as a counterbalance in early bipedal dinosaurs. As the evolution of modern birds progressed during the Cretaceous, the elongated tails of earlier theropods shortened as caudal (tail) vertebrae fused ending in a triangular pygostyle. The tail feathers attached to the pygostyle are important in modern birds for controlling flight, especially during takeoff and landing.
Survivors

There is no consensus on how a small group of modern bird ancestors survived the Cretaceous-Paleogene Extinction Event when an asteroid collided with Earth 66 million years ago, wiping out all other dinosaurs. Their relatively small size may have helped birds exploit whatever ecological niches remained after 75 percent of life on Earth was destroyed. One scientific hypothesis is that all arboreal bird species may have perished since there was massive forest destruction. In this case, flight may have re-evolved from ground-feeding species that survived.

The bird species that did survive the mass extinction event underwent very rapid evolution adapting to new ecological niches during the following 15 million years. The rapid divergent and convergent evolution has made determination of genetic relationships difficult. Birds are now one of the most diverse vertebrate groups with approximately 10,500 species worldwide.

Over the past decade, there has been a massive scientific effort to determine avian family ties. The Avian Phylogenomics Consortium is a global effort involving over 200 collaborators investigating the genetic basis of bird speciation. To date, the complete genomes (about 14,000 genes per species) of 48 species have been mapped representing all major branches of modern birds. Among some of the research areas addressed in this study are gene expression related to avian vocal learning (it evolved at least twice), structures and roles of sex chromosomes, and timing of the past explosion in bird species diversity.

These genetic studies are rearranging the bird family tree and revealing new, and sometimes surprising, relationships. For example, there have been at least three independent origins of water birds resulting from convergent evolution. Grebes are most closely related to flamingos and pigeons. Penguins, pelicans, and ibises are closely related. The common ancestor of core land birds, including songbirds, was a predator related to the giant terror birds, Phorusrhacids, of South America. Other findings include: hummingbirds’ close relationship to swifts and nightjars; falcons’ closer relationship to songbirds than to hawks; vultures, owls, and eagles; plovers and cranes are close kin; and the closest relatives of doves are Mesites (small almost flightless birds in Madagascar, and Sandgrouse (ground-dwelling birds of arid and semi-arid areas of Africa and Asia).

Genetic adaptability to changing ecological conditions has enabled birds not only to survive through the ages but has resulted in them being one of the most successful vertebrate animal groups on Earth. Theirs has been a fascinating journey and one that now faces yet another challenge to survival in what has been called the Sixth Extinction. Recent studies published by Audubon indicate that nearly 400 North American bird species are at risk of extinction due to global temperature rise.

Unlike an asteroid striking the earth, we have potential control over this ongoing climate threat to survival of life on Earth. The question is whether we will take meaningful action before it’s too late for the birds and for us.
Birding During the Covid-19 Pandemic

Kathe Anderson

At the beginning of the pandemic, I repeatedly referred to CORVID-19, the Corvids being the bird family that includes crows, ravens, jays and magpies. While I’m not the only birder to make this error, I had to make a conscious effort to correct myself.

Like most folks, I’ve made lots of other “corrections” to adjust to birding under these different pandemic times. Here’s my current MO:

Field Trips:
All my planned field trips from mid-March through June were cancelled – my choice or not! It didn’t take long to realize that those new gaps on my calendar represented lost opportunities to see lots of birds during migration – and, importantly, lost time spent with some of my favorite people - birders!

So, I started planning again – to bird with only one person or one couple at a time. To minimize the carbon footprint of birding, I invited a few folks to share “my” wash (see page 9, Summer 2020) – a rather wild drainage area within walking distance of my home. Then I offered bird walks to local parks and hotspots. Most recently, with those who are equally cautious and comfortable with carpools, I’ve headed to Payson, Prescott and Gobe.

Those who have birded with me in the past know that I donate any gas money given to me for field trips to the organization sponsoring the trip. But without trip sponsors, I corrected the model. If my birding companion wants to donate money, I double it up to $25, and offer a variety of conservation organizations as recipients for the contributions. Doubling it came easy – I’m not spending much other money these days, and plenty of conservation institutions can use our help!

In addition to Desert Rivers Audubon, of course, the Peregrine Fund, American Bird Conservancy and Nature Conservancy, and others, have all received funds. After the last donations went out, the total contributions exceeded $750 thanks to the generosity of birding buddies! Thank you so much!

Your part: You don’t have to be a field trip leader to bird and make donations to conservation organizations. What if, every time you went birding, you put $3 in a jar and considered that a donation to an organization working hard to help preserve the habitat you like to explore? And consider asking your birding companions to do the same.

Classes:
I’ve been teaching birding classes for years at nature festivals, through the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI), and more recently, for the Desert Botanical Garden and elsewhere. As the pandemic started, the cancellations to teach in-person classes mounted – except for those organizations that pivoted almost seamlessly to online presentations.

Continued on page 13
Why Worry About Distant Habitats?

By Arizona State University
Research Professor David Pearson

Tropical rain forests are so far from Arizona they are almost mythical. We think of flocks of colorful birds, steaming undergrowth, bouquets of orchids, man-eating fish, leaping monkeys, and native people, some of whom may be headhunters. These impressions are great to watch on Animal Planet, but most of us in the developed world feel little direct connection with these strange and distant forests. However, the truth is every one of us has touched a rainforest today.

The next time you go to the grocery store, look carefully at the ingredients and products you are buying. Fruits like bananas and oranges; vegetables like okra; nuts like cashews and peanuts; beverages like coffee and tea; oils like coconut; flavorings like black pepper; cocoa, sugar and vanilla; and protein like chicken all came originally from tropical forests. In addition, beautiful wood like mahogany and teak, as well as rubber, varnish, ingredients in soaps and shampoos also come from tropical trees.

Many tropical forest plants evolved chemical defenses against the insects that would eat their leaves. These active chemicals often have, by coincidence, physiological effects on us. Think of aspirin, caffeine, digitalis, and quinine. Perhaps a third or more of western medicines had their origins as plant defense chemicals, and most of these have been from tropical forests. They include chemicals to treat rheumatism, diabetes, muscle tension, malaria, heart conditions, skin diseases, arthritis, glaucoma and many other diseases. Despite our obvious dependence on tropical rainforests, nearly half of these forests have been destroyed in the last 75 years. Every time a forest patch is destroyed it is likely that a yet undiscovered medicine for uterine cancer or a food that could raise the quality of life for millions of people is lost forever.

What can we do to protect this source of vital commodities when we live so far away? One immediate action is to consider what you buy. Harvesting products like pineapple, sugar, black tea and black pepper destroys entire forests because to grow they need full sunlight in large clearings. On the other hand, products like vanilla, chocolate and shade-grown coffee can be harvested with little or no destruction because the forest doesn't have to be cut down for them to grow.

How you choose to consume affects rain forests. Do it carefully. Let the manager of the grocery store or furniture store know what you will and will not buy, and why. Parents, take your kids on a field trip to the grocery store to search for hints of the tropical rain forest. Kids, teach your parents that what they do now will impact your world when you are a parent.

— David Pearson is a Research Professor at the School of Life Sciences at Arizona State University. His research focuses on the interaction of ecology, conservation, ecotourism and education to develop methods that promote sustainable use of biodiversity.
Desert Rivers Audubon Activities

Monthly Speaker Series

December 8 – Honeybees and Beekeeping – Cahit Ozturk. Honeybee populations are declining by 30-40 percent per year. The loss of these important pollinators threatens human food supplies and the plants that insects and birds depend upon to survive. Cahit Ozturk, who manages the ASU Bee Lab at the university’s Polytechnic Campus in Mesa, teaches classes on beekeeping. In this talk you will learn about the threats to bee populations and how you can help them.

January 12 – Developing Homes for Burrowing Owls – Greg Clark. The first artificial underground habitats for Burrowing Owls were built in 1993 by the founders of Wild At Heart. Greg Clark joined the Phoenix wildlife rescue organization in 2001 and has served as its Burrowing Owl habitat coordinator ever since. Clark expanded its rescue and relocation procedures and today this award-winning program continues to construct burrows throughout the state. Desert Rivers Audubon and Wild At Heart partnered to create the habitat at Zanjero Park in Gilbert that is scheduled to be relocated this winter.

February 9 – Liberty Wildlife - Anne Peyton and Claudia Kirschner. The annual Liberty Wildlife presentation has always been a high point of our Monthly Speaker Series. This year Liberty cannot offer a nose-to-beak experience, but this presentation promises to be special! Because the Zoom program broadcasts directly from the Liberty Wildlife campus, Education Volunteers Anne Peyton and Claudia Kirschner will be able to show us animals that do not travel to shows. Liberty Wildlife treats more than 9,000 animals per year with the goal of returning them to the wild.

March 9 – The Urban Forest. Representative of the urban forestry program in the Arizona Department of Forestry and Fire Management will discuss tree care for birds and other wildlife in Arizona. Topics include the importance of our urban and community forests to wildlife, reducing impacts to wildlife during tree care, and how to create wildlife habitat in your backyard/community.

Join Us in the Field!

COVID-19 Policy enforced at all activities

Participating in a Desert Rivers Audubon Society field trip is a great way to expand your knowledge of birds, including field markings, behaviors and habitats. Along the way you are also sure to make new friends: both feathered and human!

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, guided field trips and overnight excursions have been suspended. Depending on public health conditions, we hope to resume some of these activities in coming months, governed by our COVID-19 policy.

Meantime, Field Trip Director Rob Baldwin continues to organize Pop-Up Birdwalks. These informal events get you into the field with other birders where participants share their knowledge. Groups meet at a promising location, then pool expertise to find birds. Participants are encouraged to drive themselves, as carpooling is not officially sanctioned by Desert Rivers. Temperatures are taken, masks are required, and social distancing is observed. If you would like to receive email notifications of these trips contact Rob at Birding-Outings@outlook.com.

Monthly Family Birdwalks

Desert Rivers Audubon offers free Family Birdwalks led by our expert members in area preserves and parks. Join us on the third Saturday of the month, October – March, at the Riparian Preserve at Water Ranch in Gilbert, one of the top birding destinations in Arizona. Or, come to Veterans Oasis Park in Chandler on the first Saturday of the month, November – April. The first walks step off at 8 a.m., with the last one going out at 11. We provide kids’ activities but bring binoculars if you have them; a limited number of binoculars will be available.

Desert Rivers Audubon COVID-19 Policy

Due to the continuing public health emergency, Desert Rivers Audubon Society activities will be conducted under the following rules of engagement, which are based on the recommendations of the Centers for Disease Control and the Arizona Department of Public Health. The Monthly Speaker Series will be presented on Zoom for the 2020-21 season. The series is free as always, but you must register to get the Zoom link. The COVID-19 Policy will be enforced at all activities. At every step of the way we will adjust according to the latest and best public health guidance. A link to our COVID-19 Policy is available at desertriversaudubon.org. In summary, here are the ground rules:

Temperatures will be taken at every event.
Masks will be required, and social distancing enforced.
A mask will be provided if the guest does not have one.
A participant not wearing a mask will be asked to leave.
Gloves will be provided for handling books or money.
Hand sanitizer will be available at all events.
Sanitizing wipes will be used on items that are touched.
Notable Arizona Sightings

From the Az Field Ornithologists Photo Documentation Page. Complete listing can be seen at www.azfo.org

Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (Calidris acuminata), Spot Road Farm, Yuma County. This Sharp-tailed Sandpiper was discovered and photographed by Henry Detwiler, then photographed by Gary Rosenberg and Derik Bowen on 29 October 2020. This will represent a seventh Arizona record, and a first for Yuma County.

Canada Warbler (Cardel-lina canadensis), Brandi Fenton Park, Tucson, Pima County. This Canada Warbler was discovered by Scott Olmstead on 21 October 2020, and photographed by him on 23 October. This is the third Canada Warbler found in Arizona this fall, before which there were only 13 accepted records for the state. This is the fourth record for Pima County.

Ruddy Ground-Dove (Colum-bina talpacoti), Meteor Crater RV Park, Coconino County. This Ruddy Ground-Dove was photographed by Jason Wilder on 19 October 2020. Found by Brian Johnson earlier on the same day. This is the third documented record from Coconino County. This has been an extraordinary fall for Ruddy Ground-Dove in Arizona, with no fewer than 50 individuals found statewide (so far).

Lesser Black-backed Gull (Larus fuscus), Walnut Canyon Lakes, Coconino County. This Lesser Black-backed Gull was photographed by David Stejskal on 15 October 2020. If accepted, this would represent the 16th record for Arizona.

Cape May Warbler (Setophaga tigrina), Private residence in Dove Valley (Surprise, AZ), Maricopa County. This Cape May Warbler was photographed by Chrissy Kondrat-Smith on 30 September 2020. An adult male Cape May Warbler was discovered by Julie Price McCall foraging on hummingbird and jelly feeders at her home on 28 September 2020. Known to be an accidental vagrant last seen in 29 May 2018 in Arizona. This is the third record for Maricopa County.

Black-throated Green Warbler (Setophaga virens), White Tail Canyon, Chiricahua Mountains, Cochise County. This Black-throated Green Warbler was photographed by Rick Taylor on 15 October 2020. Black-throated Green Warbler is a very rare to casual transient, and has occasionally overwintered in the state.

Blackburnian Warbler (Seto-phaga fusca), Gilbert Water Ranch, Maricopa County. This Blackburnian Warbler was discovered and photographed by Tyler Loomis on 29 September 2020.

Black-throated Blue Warbler (Setophaga caerulescens), Chiricahua National Monument Visitor Center, Cochise County. This Black-throated Blue Warbler was photographed by Suzanne Moody on 16 October 2020 and by Chris Rohrer on 18 October 2020. The bird remained at this location through 20 October 2020.

Eared Quetzal (Euptilotis neoxenus), Cave Creek Canyon between Sunny Flat CG & SW Research Station, Cochise County. This Eared Quetzal was photographed by Diane Drooka on 28 September 2020, and was still present as of 21 October, when Steve Wolfe photographed the birds.

American Golden-Plover (Pluvialis dominica), Milkyway Dairy, Pinal County. This American Golden-Plover was photographed by Keith Kamper on 24 September 2020 and Gary Rosenberg on 27 September 2020. Casual migrant in Arizona.
Covid Birding - Continued from page 9

Would I teach by Zoom, some administrators asked? Well, why not? Because I’m a tech dinosaur (trilobite, actually), that’s why. But it was an excuse to expand my skill set, even though my “pivot” was more like a flailing, off-balance swivel. I have plenty to learn, but I realize that I can get help and rise to the occasion, if in a hesitant way. The four classes I have yet to teach in the next few months look less daunting now that I have a few under my belt.

The other half of teaching is, of course, learning. The pandemic has revealed lots of online resources — many recommended to me by other birders. I have more time to take advantage of webinars, presentations and discussions hosted by Tucson Audubon Society, Boyce Thompson Arboretum, Road Scholar, Wilcside Nature Tours, OLLI, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, and others. Many of these resources are free, and if you miss the date of the presentation, several are recorded and available through the organizations’ websites.

I even took Cornell’s online class, for a fee, on Bird Behavior, a topic with endless opportunities to practice as close as your feeder or nearest park. While I couldn’t accurately describe bird behavior in the videos presented as part of the class, without unnecessary anthropomorphism, I flunked labeling the behavior correctly as aggressive, submissive, defensive, or social. There are at least two fringe benefits of taking a fee-based Cornell class: first, you can take it over and over — good thing! Obviously, I need to polish my skills! Second, you have free access to Cornell’s World of Birds — an encyclopedic compilation of bird research that’s been done on about 6,000 of the world’s current estimate of 10,000+ species. Since free access lasts only three months, I’ve looked up dozens of common, exotic and foreign birds — what a wealth of information!

Your part:

Explore and expand your horizons! If you have a device and access to the internet, consider yourself lucky — and equipped to travel, even if just virtually, through realms of biology and natural history, here and worldwide. It’s easy to feel infected with cabin fever, especially given the unrelenting and ineliminable heat of this record-breaking past summer. But you can escape — and learn — and dream — via the internet.

Activism:

Since I have more time, I’m actually reading most of the email that comes in from various conservation groups, correcting, at least currently, my habit of glossing over everything that’s not a personal message. More importantly, when the email says: Take Action Now, I do! For a long time, I hesitated to add my name to petitions or send emails to members of Congress or government leaders via the web. I can’t articulate why I was concerned, but I’ve gotten over that; having done it dozens of times without any adverse effect that I can discern. Once you have responded to one organization, your name and address information is auto-filled, and making yourself heard takes about 20 seconds. Sure, it’s a form letter (unless you want to change it, which I do when I mention that I’m a voter, for example) — but what if all 46,000,000 birders in the United States sent form letters? Do you think that would get some attention? You bet it would!

Here are a couple of recent requests that I thought were worth 20 seconds:

From the National Wildlife Federation Action Fund Team: Help protect Alexander Archipelago wolves and other wildlife that make their home in the Tongass National Forest, by sending a message to Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue to keep roadless protections in America’s largest forest: Protect Wolves from Clearcut Logging in the Tongass National Forest.

From the National Audubon Society: Let the Environmental Protection Agency know that you oppose the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers’ recent permitting of a massive mine in the heart of Alaska’s Bristol Bay, one of the most important places on Earth for birds and salmon: https://act.audubon.org/a/stop-toxic-pebble-mine-destroying-alaskas-bristol-bay?ms=emshare_1y

Your part: There is an unlimited number of good causes to which to lend your name and support. With the speed of the internet, your reach is vast and instantaneous. I encourage you to shed your hesitation, make yourself heard, and encourage others to do the same for all the causes that you support. It’s a small part of a participatory democracy, but an important one. Silence, especially now, is not an option.
Yellow-rumped Warblers
(Setophaga coronate)

Kathleen McCoy

In the summer, they can be found in mountain coniferous forest, especially Ponderosa Pine. They breed in several areas throughout Arizona, but not in Maricopa County. The Yellow-rumped Warbler is represented by the Audubon found in the west and the Myrtle found in the eastern part of North America. The Audubon, not the Myrtle, is common in Arizona during migration and winter.

Have you ever seen a tiny bird with a big yellow patch on the hind end? If so, you were seeing a Yellow-rumped Warbler, sometimes called a "butter butt."

The coloration of these little birds varies depending upon the time of year and whether it is male or female. Though their color palette is subdued in winter, in spring the plumage of Yellow-rumped Warblers is strikingly vivid with yellow feathers on the flanks, throat and crown of the head. Adult males sport a gray head, back, wings and tail, with an extensive amount of white in the wing patch and tail. Throat color of females varies from light to bright yellow; juveniles tend to be more of a pale brown color. The good news is that the yellow rump is present in all variations! If you get close enough to these busy birds, you might also notice the broken eye-ring.

These active birds have a body length of only about 5.5" – 6" with a wingspan of 9.25". Although they often cling to the bark surface of coniferous trees looking for hidden insects, their small size also lends itself to flitting out from branches to catch insects in midair. Yellow-rumped Warblers typically forage in the outer tree canopies at middle heights and on the ground. They eat caterpillars, wasps, grasshoppers, gnats, aphids, beetles, and many other insects and spiders. Males tend to forage higher than females during the breeding season. In winter, they usually forage in flocks calling frequently to one another.

No insects? In winter they switch to berries from bushes and shrubs hovering over the fruit. Some favorites are berries of bayberry, juniper, wax myrtle, and poison ivy.

With their fall arrival in North America, Yellow-rumped Warblers are impressive in sheer numbers. Yellow-rumped Warblers are everywhere in season and may be seen anywhere in the county during migration in winter, from low to high elevations in most habitats. In fact, Yellow-rumped Warblers are the most plentiful wintering warblers in southeast Arizona. Conspicuous in many areas, Yellow-rumped Warblers are common winter birds in the Sonoran Desert, mostly in riparian habitats, near lakes and in irrigated farmland and urban gardens.
Desert Rivers Audubon Society

Educating and inspiring our community to protect and preserve birds, wildlife, and their habitats.

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- Corporate $300

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