Presidents Message

Can’t See the Water for the Trees

We finally got some rain, glorious rain! Even the native plants suffering from this long drought seem to be breathing a sigh of relief. If COVID-19 cooperates and the vaccinations reach everyone, we’ll be able to host the Tour de Bird this coming November 6. And if we don’t have another horribly hot summer, the native habitats should be in great shape! Please put the tour on your calendar.

In order to keep its volunteers and participants safe, the Desert Rivers Board voted to suspend monthly bird walks, at least for the month of February. With vaccinations rolling out, we’ll be back in March. That’s important because the birdwalk program is our primary outreach to the community. We set up in a public place and offer to take families or small groups out to see birds. We reach people who haven’t really thought much about birds before, and we show them how exciting it can be to learn about our avian friends and their habitats. Then, we hope, they will start to care a little more about wildlife, and about the environment too. Bird walks are critical to achieving our mission.

The urban wetlands where we hold our bird walks are important not just to us, but to our communities and to the birds. In my last message I talked about the situation at Veterans Oasis Park – how the park has been so mismanaged for so long that some real problems have developed. I am encouraged that park officials seem to be willing to work on the issues, however it is disheartening that the work moves so slowly. Two of the basins have not been filled beyond the permanent water line in so long that 25-foot-tall trees and smaller bushes have grown where the water should be. All views to the water are blocked.

I did receive an explanation from the city about one of the basins: they cannot fill it because it floods the trail. It seems to me that there should be a solution to that problem. I’ve asked to meet with someone from maintenance or engineering, but they are having difficulty arranging that meeting. I work in government, so I understand how slowly things move sometimes, but I’m eager to see the park restored to its potential. Desert Rivers Audubon wants to plant trees at Veterans Oasis in honor of members that we have lost, but we don’t want to move forward until the maintenance issues are resolved. We want this to be a park where the community can go for a walk and actually see the birds!

If you have not already done so, please check out our successful Zoom speaker series. We will finish the season in April remotely, and will keep you posted on the line-up for next fall. Meantime, I’m enjoying the opportunity to see your faces!

Krys Hammers

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

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WINTER 2020

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Cover Photo - A common Arizona wintering bird - the White-crowned Sparrow
Of Fairy Dusters and Milkweed

Before I even bought my first binoculars, the Costa's Hummingbirds buzzing around our back yard caught my eye. That flash of iridescent purple crowning a fast-moving meatball of a body was enchantment. Anna's Hummingbirds frequented the yard, too, but recently the Costa's have been scarce, and I miss them. Turns out the reason could be landscaping.

Jerry Lang, whose story about the biology of Anna's and Costa's Hummingbirds is on page 7, reports that Anna's are quite comfortable with backyard feeders and exotic flowers, but Costa's favor native plants. It could be that the Costa's hummingbirds drifted away from my house after we removed that fairy duster.

We cannot overestimate the importance of native plants to wildlife and birds. On page 10 you'll find a story about native milkweed. Monarch butterflies, whose numbers in the west have plummeted over the past couple years, require milkweed for reproduction.

Experts tell us that the native varieties are best, because they are better adapted to our severe and shifting climate.

The critical importance of native plants is the reason we are hoping that the pandemic eases enough for Desert Rivers to stage our Tour de Bird garden event in the fall (November 6). Showing off home and business landscapes that feature native plants sends a convincing message to the public that we can make a difference for birds. Mark your calendar please!

Required Reading: Someday We Will Say, How Did We Let This Happen?

The new administration lost no time reconnecting our country to the Paris Climate Accords and is on course to restore the teeth yanked out of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act by the last administration (See the conservation column on page 4). But lest we get too complacent, two other reports remind us that the hour is late for many species.

In February, Phoenix public radio affiliate KJZZ reported that last summer's excessive heat and drought was fatal to many of our iconic cacti (story at https://bit.ly/2P7YHp). Over the summer saguaro cacti more than 100 years old died and crashed to the ground at the Desert Botanical Garden. A succession of overnight lows over 90 degrees "suffocated" the giants, said Kimberlie McCue, the garden's director of horticulture and conservation. "They photosynthesize at night, feeding themselves. Then the aerials, which are beneath the spines, open up like little suction cups and they absorb that moisture in," she explained. When the dry air fails to cool below 90 for days on end, the plants cannot function internally.

Conditions are dire for freshwater fish, too. A study released in February by 16 conservation groups reports that one-third of all freshwater fish now face extinction. In the report's foreword, Dr. John Hutton, executive director of the World Wildlife Foundation writes: "Our freshwater fishes are in terrible trouble. Migratory populations have fallen by three-quarters in the last 50 years. During the same period, populations of larger species -- the so-called 'megafish' -- have crashed by a staggering 94 per cent. Nearly a third of all freshwater fish species are threatened by extinction -- and for 80 extinct species it's already too late."

Read the full report here: https://bit.ly/3q3HKWC

Man Caves and She Shacks

Verdins, those tiny birds with bright yellow heads who fit through tree branches rhythmically cheeping, are the Bird of the Month on the Audubon Arizona web site. Tice Supplee, director of bird conservation says she attracted them to her yard by planting a native tree -- a Blue Palo Verde. Verdins soon scoped it out and started building a nest. But Verdins are not satisfied with a single nest. They build a rooky one where the female will lay eggs and raise the kids, while the male hangs out in another nest. Is it a decoy to detract attention from the brood? A shelter from the cold and wind? Or is it a man cave? See Supplee's story at https://az.audubon.org/news/-bird-month-verdin

Continued on page 13.
If you were paying attention during the turbulent period between the election and the inauguration, you know that the Trump administration attempted to implement a long list of anti-environmental policies and regulations. But someone from the incoming Biden team was taking notes.

The afternoon that Joseph R. Biden was inaugurated the 46th President of the United States, he fulfilled a campaign promise to rejoin the Paris Climate Agreement and reestablished the Office of Science and Technology Policy. He also ordered the review of a raft of actions of the past four years — especially the last four months — including many impacting the environment and wildlife. The list includes EPA regulations and procedures blunted by President Trump, oil and gas leases in the arctic coastal plain, a definition of “Waters of the United States” that opened fragile lands to developers, weakened energy conservation standards, measures affecting the protection of plants and animals in danger of extinction, and rules changes that blunted the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, and much more. How much more? Several dozen actions just in the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of the Interior are set to be reviewed.

One week later, on January 27th, he signed an executive order that “takes bold steps to combat the climate crisis both at home and throughout the world.” That same day he signed an executive order that directs federal agencies to make evidence-based decisions guided by the best available science and data. After having survived four years where facts and scientific data were replaced by alternative facts and conspiracy theories, a return to the scientific method and rational decision making will be deeply appreciated.

You can find out more at whitehouse.gov/briefing-room.

If we throw a party every time one of these relics from the Trump Administration gets stripped out of law, policy, and the federal register, we won’t be able to get our own work done. At least that is my hope. All I can say is I’m glad that Tucson Rep. Raúl Grijalva is the chair of the House Natural Resources Committee and former Congresswoman Deb Haaland will be the first Indigenous person to serve as Secretary of the Interior. We have good people in place to oversee our environment.

And a late addition: The White House announced that the environmental impact assessment authorizing the land exchange for Oak Flats has been set aside and the whole process is being reviewed.

Now let’s just hope it rains this summer and that I see you in the field soon.
The Small and the Mighty - Anna's Hummingbird

Even if you bird in the Phoenix area only briefly, chances are you've seen Anna's hummingbirds (Calypte anna) perched high on a bare branch or feeding on chuparosa or other available blooming plants. Males of these 4 inch birds have an iridescent red crown and gorget. Perched males often sing a buzzy, scratchy song while turning their heads from side to side flashing their iridescence at other hummingbirds. Anna's males are the only North American hummingbirds with a red crown. Females have similar but much more muted markings.

During late fall through winter, the less-abundant Costas's hummingbird (Calypte costae) makes its breeding season appearance in the Phoenix area. Males of this diminutive 3.5 inch hummingbird have a dark crown with a gorget resembling a handlebar mustache that flashes iridescent purple in sunlight. Females are similar to males but without the dark marks on the head. Both sexes have a greenish back and flanks with a white belly.

The historic ranges of both Anna's and Costa's were largely confined to Baja Mexico and southern California. Costa's have minimally expanded their range in recent decades into the Sonoran Desert of Arizona and portions of the Mojave Desert. Anna's have extended their breeding and year-round range into southwestern Arizona where they are now year-round residents. Anna's have also drastically increased their range northward along the U.S. Pacific coast overwintering as far north as southern Canada with some summer reports from southern Alaska. They have the northernmost range of any hummingbird.

Of the two species, Costa's have a stronger affinity for their natural habitats of desert scrub and coastal chaparral. Although Costa's use a wide variety of nectar sources, they favor chuparosa, fairy duster, and ocoillio in the Sonoran desert. While and black sage, tree tobacco, and red penstemon are important nectar sources in California. Like most hummingbirds, Costa's depend on a variety of small insects and spiders for protein. These prey are either hawked in the air or plucked from vegetation, spider webs, etc. Costa's will come to feeders, but less so than Anna's and other species. Researchers found that Costa's abundance drops near urban areas and the birds avoid large irrigated fields.
Anna’s and Costa’s Hummingbirds

While Anna’s hummingbirds feed on much the same nectar plants as do Costa’s where their ranges overlap, Anna’s also frequently use long-blooming currants, gooseberries, and manzanitas in their coastal and more northerly range. In portions of California, Anna’s are one of the few native species to exploit the nectar of introduced and invasive blue gum eucalyptus trees. These winter-blooming trees thrive from San Diego north along the California coast to Humboldt County. Blue gum trees may have helped Anna’s bridge the distance between their more historic southern range and the current northern limits of their range. However, there may be a price to pay for obtaining blue gum nectar. Birders report that Anna’s and other nectar-feeding birds often become covered with blue gum’s sticky, tar-like residue in its nectar, which may weaken or even kill the birds.

Anna’s are more attracted to backyard feeders and exotic flowers in urban areas than are Costa’s. Better adaptation to increased human presence has benefited Anna’s ability to overwinter farther north. Additionally, like most hummingbirds, Anna’s exhibit a state of highly reduced metabolism called torpor during cold nights. This radical slowing of metabolism reduces energy requirements and literally keeps the birds from staring to death overnight. These tiny birds with no down can survive cold by ingesting up to 16 times their body weight in food (much of it from feeders) during the day then dropping their body temperature from 104°F to 48°F, reducing respiration from 245 breaths per minute to 50, and slowing their heart rate from 1,260 per minute to 50.

Costa’s vagrants have been seen as far north as Canada, but the birds have not established a permanent presence in these areas like Anna’s. Costa’s greater hesitancy to remain in urbanized areas and to feed on exotic, introduced nectar sources may make a difference. Also, Anna’s are more aggressive than Costa’s and defend feeders needed to overwinter in the north. The territoriality of Anna’s remaining in place during winter may also exclude other annual migrant species arriving in the spring.

Jerry Lang

Males of both species are deadbeats, leaving females with the sole responsibility of nesting and rearing young. There is no pair bonding and apparently both sexes can have multiple mates during breeding season.

Costa’s and Anna’s nest construction is similar with females using plant fibers, small leaves, lichens, and other materials woven together with spider web silk to make 1–2 inch diameter nests.

Anna’s may have 2-3 broods per season while Costa’s have 1–2 broods. Developmental time is roughly the same in both species.

Researchers in California have documented hybrids of Anna’s and Costa’s, which in some cases, were temporarily classified as new species. These hybrids exhibited a mix of parental characteristics. It is unknown (but probably unlikely) that hybrids successfully breed.

Long-term population trends for Anna’s are positive with an estimated 2 percent increase in population from 1966-2014. The total population of Anna’s is around 5 million. The success and range extension of Anna’s over recent decades seems to be attributed to their better ability to exploit changing human-induced changes to their habitat.

Costa’s populations decreased approximately 1 percent per year from 1968-2015. Their current population is estimated at 3.4 million. Costa’s are classified as a species of continental concern mainly because of their limited range and the impacts of development, invasive species and climate change on preferred habitat. Competition with the more highly adaptive Anna’s may also play a role in Costa’s population declines.

Neither Anna’s nor Costa’s are long-range migratory species. After late fall through early spring breeding in the Sonoran Desert, Costa’s move to milder coastal areas for late spring and summer where flowers are more abundant. Anna’s don’t migrate to the extent of Costa’s and are more reliant on a steady supply of nectar from urban gardens and feeders.

Males of both species sing on their territories although Anna’s have a more complex repertoire. Male breeding displays are similar with both species involving hovering in front of females to show off their gorgets and spectacular diving displays. These male diving displays involve climbing to about 130 ft. and then making circular loops ending in a power dive. Males of both species create a squeak or chirp at the bottom of their dives using their tail feathers, which vibrate when the birds reach peak speed of about 50 mph.
Bathing (in) Beauty  
Jim Burns

The river is lovely this time of the year, rid at last of the rafts of drunken revelers, their noise and their trash. Resplendent with the russets and golds of the streamside tamarisks and willows, it runs shallow and smooth, silent save for a few small riffles where a Solitary Sandpiper and several Greater Yellowlegs ply their trade, searching for aquatic insects. The winter sunrise paints a perfect canvas of glistening water wending its way down pewter gravel bars toward the bright illumination of Red Mountain.

Upstream I watch Great Blue Heron negotiations over a foraging territory. From somewhere downstream comes the rattle of a Belted Kingfisher. This is the season when wildlife reclaim its riparian domain, and my target this picture postcard desert morning is Bobcat, though I’d gladly settle for Coyote or one of the resident Bald Eagles. I watch Song Sparrows pluck larval caddisfly casings from the shallows, and a flock of Western Bluebirds has found the berries on a Mistletoe bunch. Every winter day is different here, none without surprise, none bereft of natural wonder and beauty.

My eye catches movement across the river in a twisted tangle of mesquite roots overhanging the water where a previous flood has created a curbank. A small movement. The opposite side is perhaps thirty yards away, but the rising sun is directly behind me so the tangle is well lit. I raise the binoculars and watch, expecting something to pop out into full view, sparrows, an overwintering warbler, or perhaps a Bewick’s Wren, birds too small to photograph well at this distance, but nothing moves.

My eyes follow along the shoreline. There is a Black Phoebe flycatching on rocks fifty yards upstream, out of range for my lens. My eyes wander back to the tangle. Still I see nothing. I glance at my watch, daydreaming about the time I chanced upon a juvenile Peregrine bathing in the river at almost this exact spot. Apparently the water level here and the size of the river rocks make pools just right for a raptor but unsuitably deep for the smaller birds that love to bathe in puddles and rainpools.

I am in plain sight of anything that may come to the water’s edge to drink or bathe across from me but, eschewing a blind to have more freedom of movement, I am sitting on a large rock at the very edge of the river’s flow, hunkered down behind the camera, the tripod breaking up my outline. It has been fully half an hour since I first espied something in the tangle. Just as I begin to consider going upriver to another spot, I see movement again. Big movement this time. Disbelieving because so much time has passed, I look through the camera. A hawk has dropped out of the mesquite and is sitting in the water! It is an accipiter. It is staring right at me.

No less an experienced and accomplished birder/photographer than our local Cindy Marple has stated publicly that “Coop and Sharpie is a pairing I struggle with.” Me too Cindy, but this is one large accipiter. As I pray the bird will actually bathe without being spooked by any small movement I make behind the camera, I decide I’ll wait to label it until I see more diagnostic features.

It proves a long wait. The bird is a juvenile, judging by its light iris and the beautiful vertical rufous streaking on the underparts, and it sits in the river motionless, occasionally looking my way, for half an hour. “Bathe, dammit,” I think to myself as my legs begin cramping up and then, as if on cue, my prayer is answered. It proceeds to give me the full show, nearly ten minutes worth, as it dunk, splashes, flaps, and walls, nictitating membrane often drawn shut, water spraying everywhere. I have been privileged to watch accipiters bathe several times, but this is the most thorough and prolonged I’ve ever witnessed.

Finally the hawk rises from the river, water dripping in a steady stream, and perches on a tamarisk branch, still bankside and within range of my lens, and I witness something I’ve never seen before. It fully spreads the dorsal surface of its wings and tail to the sun, just as we’ve all seen Turkey Vultures and cormorants do, to dry out its feathers. A perusal of the literature confirms that raptors do this, but it is a first for me.

After sunning for ten minutes, adjusting its position periodically for optimal sun angle, the hawk begins to preen. Wings, tail, breast, flanks, no feather left ignored. The view which finally convinces me to call this a Cooper comes when the underside of the tail is fanned as it plucks at the fluffy white undertail coverts and I see that the terminal band of light feathers is as wide as the dark band above it. Since I’m struck with the thought it is one of the largest accipiters I’ve ever seen, I’ve labeled it “Cooper’s Hawk, juvenile.”

My watch says the elapsed time, from when I first saw movement as the hawk slipped surreptitiously down to the river until it flew from its preening perch, has been three hours. I can only attribute this individual’s extreme initial caution at getting in the water and its lengthy, meticulous grooming routine to its young age. And I smile to myself thinking only a teenage girl could possibly spend this much time on her toilette.

I can’t help but marvel, as I leave, at how different this scene must have looked six months ago at high water during the height of summer, overrun by the heathen hordes who congregate here devoid of the knowledge and appreciation for what this desert river meant to the original human inhabitants and the creatures with whom they respectfully shared it. Winter is surely the season to revel in its solitude and beauty.
For me, Christmas Bird Counts are merely another excuse to go birding with friends and explore different areas of Arizona. The community-science aspect of submitting accurate bird counts is simply a bonus for a day of adventure.

This year, Jane joined me for the Dudleyville Count, about 45 minutes south of Superior. The team leader, Jennifer, wanted us in Winkelman at 7am. Really? What self-respecting songbird gets up before dawn to start foraging in sub-freezing weather? Hardly any. But Jennifer was right: to cover our assigned area thoroughly, we needed to start early.

With map in hand, Jane and I started at the promising golf course “pond” with hoped-for blackbirds eager to leave the reeds and begin their day. However, the pond was dry this year, the reeds were desiccated, and only three Brewer’s Blackbirds perched above us on a telephone pole before flying away.

We walked east from the pond along a dirt road skirting the golf course and adjacent to desert habitat that reminded Jane of a barren, strangely lifeless scene from a Kurt Vonnegut novel. While we weren’t aware of toxic waste, it may have been ASARCO (a large copper mining and refining company) property. It hosted almost no birds.

On the golf course side of the road, a small raptor perched near the ground and I immediately tagged it as a kestrel. Eventually, as it flew and perched, flew and perched – and daylight illuminated it more clearly – it morphed into a Merlin! We wanted just one more good look to confirm, and of course, at that point, it disappeared entirely.

Walking north from the pond, we followed a road that paralleled a deteriorating water pipe along a shrubby ditch. Leaks in the pipe created tiny grottos of ice and attracted a few Abert’s Towhees and Song Sparrows. We heard Gila Woodpeckers and White-crowned Sparrows. The temperature edged above freezing, but the birding was slow.

Kathe Anderson

About 10:30am, we moved to the other area of our territory – the town of Winkelman. We parked near one house where birds were fed, struggling to count accurately, as waves of Great-tailed Grackles, Brewer’s Blackbirds, European Starlings and Eurasian Collared-Doves poked about in the yard, retreated, perched nearby, and returned. A couple of handfuls of sparrows and finches joined in the fray.

One highlight of the count was the Winkelman cemetery, a well-kept, if bleakly landscaped, assortment of crosses, shrines, monuments, collections and eye-popping silk flowers everywhere! A Say’s Phoebe kept us company, along with a few more White-crowned and House Sparrows, but mostly we were sidetracked by the fascinating grave markers and decorations. Only a few trees dot the cemetery and its immediate surroundings. One tree harbored an elusive Ladder-back Woodpecker, which finally revealed itself.

When we met Jennifer and Maribeth for lunch at Winkelman Park, we traded stories from the morning. They helped us add Western Bluebirds and Lark Sparrows to our personal lists, and we helped them add a Vermilion Flycatcher to their count. Jane and I headed home, our adventure done. Jennifer and Maribeth continued to count. Later, Jennifer reported that she returned to the golf course pond at dusk and photographed hundreds of Brewer’s Blackbirds perched along the lines attached to the telephone pole. Go figure!
Hope for the Monarch Butterfly: Your Garden

Hope came to Desert Rivers Audubon member Kathryn Elsaesser as she was touring family members around her Ahwatukee garden a few years ago. It arrived in the form of a second-stage monarch caterpillar. Elsaesser, who has been fascinated with insects and plants throughout her life, took the caterpillar under her wing. It grew, formed a chrysalis, and finally emerged a healthy butterfly. She named it Hope.

Watching the miraculous evolution of Hope changed Elsaesser’s thinking about her garden. Today, about six varieties of native milkweed are mixed among her other native plantings, making her home a small butterfly sanctuary.

Birders are enthusiastic about backyard feeders, but we can expand our impact on wildlife by paying more attention to the plants in our yards as well. For monarchs, milkweed is essential to survival, but development, pesticide use and a poor understanding of milkweed’s place in a healthy ecosystem means much less milkweed is available to butterflies who need it for nectar and breeding.

Journey North, a citizen science organization, recently reported that the population of monarch butterflies in Mexico’s wintering sites decreased by 26 percent in winter 2020-21 over last winter. The Xerces Society reported that the number of monarchs wintering along the California coast has dropped to 2,000, a 99.9 percent decline since the 1980s. The Southwest Monarch Study is now compiling data that document the decline in Arizona. In 2016, Elsaesser saw 40 to 50 monarchs in her garden. Last year she saw just four adults and no eggs or caterpillars.

Including milkweed in your garden design will make a difference. Ranging in size from one to almost four feet, milkweed adds texture and color to your yard.

These native milkweed varieties are growing well in Elsaesser’s yard:

- **Desert (Rush) Milkweed (Asclepias subulata)** has slender gray-green stems that grow like a bouquet up to four feet tall. It loves sun and high heat and requires very little water.
- **Arizona Milkweed (Asclepias angustifolia)** is most often found in the southern part of our state but does well in a garden. It likes a little protection from afternoon sun and does better with some water.
- **Butterfly Weed (Asclepias tuberosa)** has glossy green leaves and orange/yellow blooms rich in nectar and pollen. Butterflies, hummingbirds and bees love it.
- **Narrow Leaf Milkweed (Asclepias fascicularis)** sends up stems with slim pointed leaves growing in a whorl around the stalk. Crowning the stems are lavender or lavender-tinted white blooms. It is considered the single most important milkweed for monarchs in California and grows well here.

Elsaesser warns that milkweed plants sold in commercial garden centers are often treated with pesticides and herbicides that kill monarchs. Generally, it’s better to buy from a certified organic grower. The Desert Botanical Garden and Boyce Thompson Arboretum are also excellent sources.

For Arizona-specific monarch information and to become involved in monarch tagging and other citizen science projects, go to the Southwest Monarch Study website at swmonarchs.org or to facebook.com/SouthwestMonarchStudy.
Monthly Zoom Speaker Series

Our season wraps up on April 13 with Margaret Dyekman, author of Backyard Birding in Northern Arizona. Free registration is available at desertriversaudubon.org. The program begins at 7 p.m. If you missed a speaker, you may find recordings of the November through March programs at desertriversaudubon.org/programs-events-archive.

Watch the Desert Rivers Audubon email newsletter for the announcement of our 2020-21 season.

Field Trips and Monthly Family Bird Walks

This season has been one for the record books. Desert Rivers Audubon Society has adjusted its outdoor programming as the public health emergency has evolved. Updates appear at desertriversaudubon.org for information and in our email newsletter.

All field trips and overnight excursions have been cancelled for the season. Meanwhile, Field Trip Director Rob Baldwin is sharing tips on places to go birding, by yourself or with folks who are part of your bubble of family members and close friends. Email him at Birding-Outings@outlook.com to get on his list. Tips will also appear in email newsletter.

Family bird walks in the parks were suspended in February but reopened in March. The board will discuss whether to remain open in April at its March meeting.

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.

Leadership

We are delighted to introduce the following new members of our board of directors. If you are interested in volunteering, helping out a project or stepping up to leadership, let us know! Email us at desertriversaudubon@gmail.com

Alexis Stark, Education Director

NAU graduate Lexi Stark took an ornithology class as part of her biology degree, and soon after started carrying her binoculars with her everywhere. "I enjoy sharing my passion with everyone around me, and I am excited to be able to do that as the Education Director," she says.

Ameya Thatte, Student Representative, Arizona State University.

Ameya Thatte is an engineering student at ASU. "I have been drawn to birds since I was too young to remember and began birding through the kids’ club at Desert Rivers in 2009 when I was eight years old," he said.

Jake Thompson, Membership Committee

Jake majored in sustainability at ASU, studying how to best preserve ecosystems and their inhabitants for future generations. His appreciation for wildlife grew during a summer spent on Kodiak Island in Alaska. "I’ve been birding religiously for just over 3 years now,” he says.

Get our Desert Rivers Audubon Society email newsletter!

Sign up at desertriversaudubon.org.
Black Scoter (Melanitta nigra), Glen Canyon NRA-Lake Powell, Coconino County. This Black Scoter was photographed by Roy Morris on 04 January 2021. Black Scoter is a casual to rare winter visitor to Arizona, with numbers of records along the Colorado River, as well as on large lakes in the state, increasing in recent years. Notable sighting as this represents only the second record for Glen Canyon NRA and the first CBC record. Also observed and photographed, remarkably, with both Surf and White-winged Scoter.

Trumpeter Swan (Cygnus buccinator), Queen Valley Golf Course Pond, Pinal County. This Trumpeter Swan was photographed by Mark Ochs on 01 January 2021, and subsequently by Pierre Deviche on 16 January. Apparently first record of species for Pinal County.

Lesser Black-backed Gull (Larus fuscus), Glendale Recharge Ponds, Maricopa County. This Lesser Black-backed Gull was photographed by Pierre Deviche on 31 October 2020. Rare at any time in AZ but previously recorded at same location. There are eleven accepted records for the state with about five others pending. This species is increasing with the first state record occurring in 2006, and nearly annual records in the past five years.

Glossy Ibis (Plegadis falcinellus), Vicksburg, La Paz County. This Glossy Ibis was found by Kav McCoough and Caleb Strand on 26 September 2020. Casual to rare, but apparently increasing visitor to Arizona, with still fewer than about 20 records for the state.

Long-tailed Duck Clangula hyemalis, Patagonia Lake State Park, Santa Cruz County. A Long-tailed Duck was discovered on 15 December by others, and photographed by Tony Battiste on 19 December 2020. Very rare to casual winter visitor to AZ, especially rare this far south near the Mexican border.

Field Sparrow (Spizella pusilla), Whitewater Draw, Cochise County. This Field Sparrow was discovered by Susan Rogers and Bob Behrstock, and photographed by Susan Rogers on 20 November 2020, and also photographed by Chris Rohrer on 21 November. Field sparrow is a casual fall and winter visitor to the state. There have been eleven previous records for the state.

Black-throated Blue Warbler (Setophaga caerulescens) Tres Rios WRF, Pima County. This Black-throated Blue Warbler was photographed by Andrew Core on 12 November 2020. It was first seen on 11/9 or 11/10 by Al Vasquez, and identified by Brian Walsh on 11/1/20. Black-throated Blue Warbler is a very rare but regular transient in the state, mostly in fall.

Broad-winged Hawk (Buteo platypterus), Visitor Center, Cave Creek Canyon, Cochise County. This Broad-winged Hawk was photographed by Steve Wolfe on 02 November 2020. Broad-winged Hawk is a rare transient in the state - regular at hawk-watching sites at the Grand Canyon, but much rarer elsewhere in the state. This November record is very late for Arizona.

Common Crane (Grus grus), Cochise Lake in Willcox, Cochise County. This Common Crane was discovered at Willcox mixed in with Sandhill Cranes in the afternoon of 27 November, and photographed by Diane Drobla, Gary Rosenberg, and Chris Benesh on 28 November 2020. This represents a second Arizona record; the previous Arizona record was the summering bird at Mormon Lake that has returned 2 of the last 3 summers.

California Purple Finch (Haemorhous purpureus californicus), Flagstaff, AZ, Coconino County. This California Purple Finch was photographed by Jason Wilder on 20 October 2020. The is the second occurrence of Purple Finch in Coconino County in Fall 2020.
**Birds Around Town**

Rob Baldwin, our field trip director, goes birding with his camera virtually every day. He captured this Osprey while birding at Veterans Oasis Park on January 30. Another day, he spotted this female Common Merganser on a lake he passes daily during his morning walk. We say there’s nothing common about her!

What have you seen lately?

Watch for Rob’s tips on great places to see birds in our email newsletter. Sign up for the newsletter at desert-riversaudubon.org. Drop Rob a line at birdingoutings@outlook.com to get on his email list.

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**Winter Bird Count, the Movie**

The Gila River Indian Community (GRIC) Winter Bird count went forward this year, despite COVID-19 restrictions. Sponsored by the GRIC Department of Environmental Quality, the count was held virtually on WEBEX in February.

In past years, Audubon members participated in person, traveling to count sites with teams led by members of the community. This year, participants watched from home on their computers. “I think they did an excellent job continuing this traditional activity in spite of the limitations posed by the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Theona Vyvial, membership director for Desert Rivers Audubon Society. You can catch it at https://bit.ly/38dR97Y

ASU Professor David Pearson, who has worked with the community to survey its bird populations, and Woodrow Crumbo, wildlife program manager at the community’s Department of Environmental Quality, were video recorded counting birds at various sites. Later in the presentation, Robert Johnson, Hu胡gam Heritage Center language specialist, spoke about the different species, their native and common names, the cultural aspects and their calls.

Hoping next year birders and community members will be back in the field together!

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**Kids’ Stuff For All of Us**

The story inside our back cover every month often starts with a question. In this issue it is, “What are those charming little red-chested birds fitting back and forth on the birdfeeder?” Author Kathleen McCoy uses this sort of scene-setting to pique reader interest in her subject.

McCoy’s stories ground our regular feature, Young Birders. Desert Rivers Audubon strives to develop the next generation of bird watchers and biological scientists with programs for kids. In addition to McCoy’s features, we conduct free public bird walks open to families and children in two local parks and offer a Young Birders club.

But McCoy sees her audience as anyone with a budding interest in birds — young or not so young. “As a new birder, I found myself fascinated and overwhelmed with all things bird,” she explains. “Being out in the field with long-time birders sparked my interest even more, but I felt like I was in Birding 202 before I had finished Birding 101.” I wished that I had started birding as a child, so in a real sense I decided to create a ‘back to the future moment’ for me.

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**Are You Ready for Festivals?**

We are! Here is what we know so far about festival season. Mark your calendar and watch the website for latest news. The public health situation will determine many of the details. Let’s hope COVID will allow us to fly free this summer.

**Verde Valley Birding and Nature Festival** — April 22-25
Registration opened March 1 for this festival, which is virtual and in-person this year because of the public health situation. Sign up for expert online presentations and size-limited in-person guided tours. https://verderiver.org/birding-festival/


**Southwest Wings** — Spring Fling. May 5-8 and August Festival, August 4-7. The spring Fling will be virtual this year, and plans are still under development for the summer event. Watch the website for more. https://www.swwings.org/main-festival
The House Finch

(Haemorhous mexicanus o Fringílido Mexicano)

Kathleen McCoy

What are those charming little red-chested birds flitting back and forth on the birdfeeder or nesting in the hanging flower baskets? If you said the House Finch you are correct. With a cheerful warbling song, House Finches are very social birds with a bouncy flight style.

House Finches nest in varied places. Their nests are found in trees and on cactus and rock ledges. In urban areas, they also nest in or on buildings, streetlamps and hanging planters. Sometimes they will use abandoned nests of other birds. A House Finch's nest is the shape of a small cup, only three to seven inches wide and two inches deep. The nest consists of fine stems, leaves, roctlets, thin twigs, string, wool, and feathers, with similar, but finer materials for the lining.

The House Finch is native to the western United States and Mexico. Because of its color and cheerful song, a small number of caged House Finches were released in New York in 1940. The House Finch is now found in all areas of the United States.

The male's face, chest and round head can range in color from orange to red. The female is a plain brown bird with heavily streaked white chest. House Finches range in size from 5.5 to 5.7 inches with a wingspan 10 inches. These small-bodied finches have large stubby bills, indistinct eyebrows, and short wings. By comparison, the shallow notched tail seems long.

Highly social birds, finches are usually found in flocks which can range in size from a few up to several hundred, outside of breeding season. They often perch on power lines or the highest point of a tree.

House Finches almost exclusively eat plant materials which they find in their native habitats of deserts, grassland, chaparral, and open woods. They feed mainly on the ground, feeders, fruiting trees or weed stalks. Wild foods include thistle, mustard seed and many other species. In orchards, House Finches eat many types of soft fruit and berries. They often visit the plentiful feeders in urban settings, where they eat black oil sunflower seeds, millet and milo. Sitting still, they crush seeds with rapid bites.
Thank you

Our winter appeal was our most successful in years! Your gifts will be used to bring great nature and wildlife programming to experienced birders and the public. Donate at desertriversaudubon.org/giving-support

How to Join Desert Rivers

Membership in Desert Rivers Audubon Society helps support our chapter’s outreach activities and operating costs. Annual membership entitles you to our quarterly magazine, priority status for field trips and events, and discounts on products and services. See desertriversaudubon.org/membership.

- Students/Senior (65+) $25
- Individual $30
- Senior Couples $40
- Family $50
- Corporate $300+

The National Audubon Society and local Audubon chapters are separate entities. All Desert Rivers Audubon dues are dedicated to local programs. You may hold concurrent memberships in National Audubon and any number of local chapters. If you are a National Audubon member, you may assist this chapter by designating Desert Rivers (Chapter B08) as your assigned chapter by emailing audubon@emailcustomerservice.com.