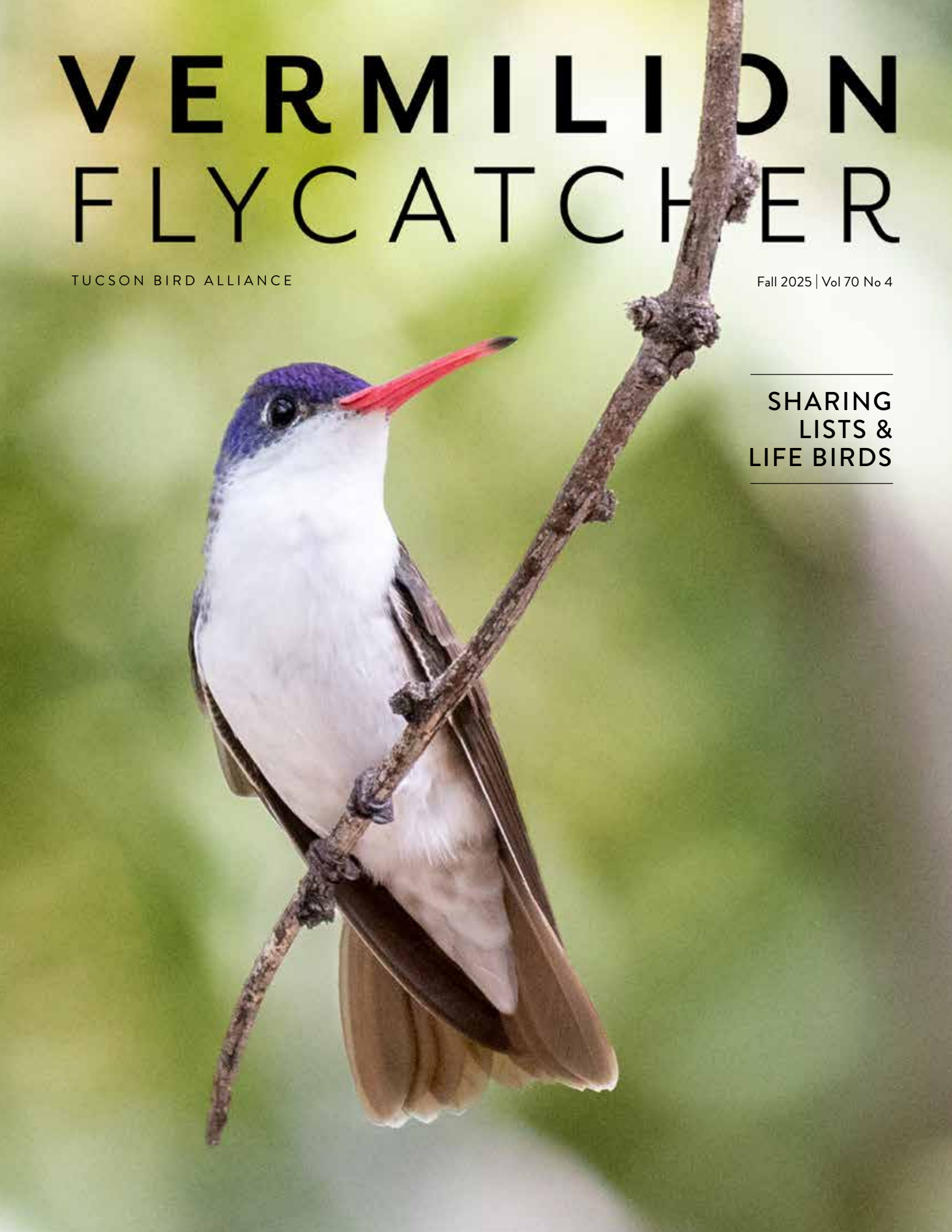
VERMILION FLYCATCHER

TUCSON BIRD ALLIANCE

Fall 2025 | Vol 70 No 4



SHARING LISTS & LIFE BIRDS

TUCSONBIRDS.ORG
Fall 2025 | Vol 70 No 4

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

TUCSON BIRD ALLIANCE
300 E University Blvd. #120, Tucson, AZ 85705
TEL 520-629-0510 · FAX 520-232-5477

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Matt Griffiths, *Editor-in-Chief*
Melina Lew, *Design*

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ON THE COVER
Violet-crowned Hummingbird by Dan Weisz. Dan is a native Tucsonan and retired educator who enjoys birding, being in nature, and taking photographs.

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Interested in being more involved with Tucson Bird Alliance?

Tucson Bird Alliance is expanding its Board of Directors this fall. Do you have a passion for our work and experience in accounting, finance, and fundraising? This volunteer position might be for you! Experience with nonprofit organizations is a plus.

Board members champion the organization and its mission by acting as ambassadors and engaging the community to expand members, partners, and connections. Board members provide advice, expertise, and assistance in developing, implementing, and leading the organization. All positions require 5–10 hours per month and the ability to attend events.

Contact Karen Howe, Board President, for more information at: KARENHOWEPDX@GMAIL.COM.

FOR THIS BIRDER, LISTS ARE NOT FOR THE BIRDS!

I function day to day by way of lists and spreadsheets. As an adult with ADHD, they are my lifeline, and my lure back to reality when my brain gets distracted by something sparkly. To-do lists, calendars, budgets, time blocks, shopping lists, lists of house projects—there are few things I don't have a list for. Birds are one of them.

If you keep a list, I won't yuck your yum, but I will hop on my soapbox on behalf of those of us who take a slightly different approach to observing birds. Gratefully, birding is my escape from lists. A magical place where there are no expectations of me, and where I reciprocate the sentiment. I am a passive birder, in that I let birds "happen" to me in their own time. Unless I'm out on a survey, I don't set a target species, I don't aim for a minimum number of species, and I never feel pressured, rushed, or like I missed out, even if someone else spotted a rarity earlier or later that day.

Make no mistake, many of us who embrace "slow birding" couldn't be more serious about our intense love for birds and desire to tell the world how amazing they are. Even more, about how amazing their habitats are, how tied birds are to certain ecosystems and specific plant species, and how incredibly cool that is!

Listers or not, we can all find common ground in our passion for bird conservation, and act together to protect the places and resources we collectively rely on to thrive.

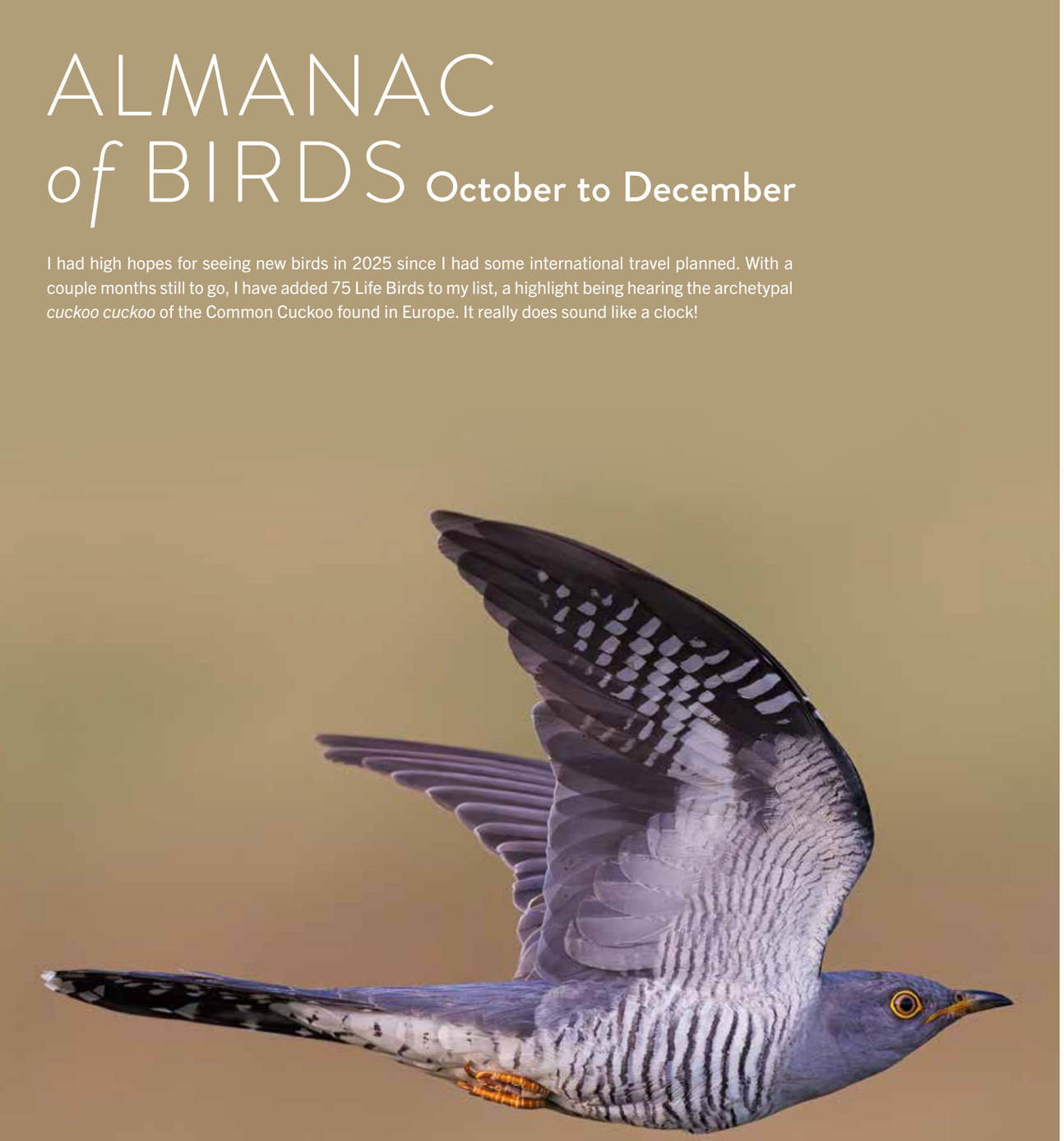
For the Birds,

Melissa Fratello
Executive Director
mfratello@tucsonbirds.org

Cactus Wren, Laura Stafford Covic

ALMANAC *of* BIRDS October to December

I had high hopes for seeing new birds in 2025 since I had some international travel planned. With a couple months still to go, I have added 75 Life Birds to my list, a highlight being hearing the archetypal *cuckoo cuckoo* of the Common Cuckoo found in Europe. It really does sound like a clock!



Matt Griffiths
Communications Coordinator
mgriffiths@tucsonbirds.org

Even though I enjoy making bird lists and finding new birds, I wouldn't call myself a hardcore *lister*—I don't chase birds miles from home to add to a county or hotspot list, or even a Life Bird on the other side of the state. I am, however, a pretty serious lister when it comes to conservation projects and conducting bird surveys. The end of the year brings another Tucson Bird Count survey for me and a multitude of Christmas Bird Counts to choose from (see page 27). Birding and listing for these events feeds into databases helping track local bird populations. In this time of drought and warming climate, this information is crucial to ensuring we don't lose the birds we love.

The end of the year is also a great time to explore the lower desert habitats. You likely know about Sweetwater Wetlands, Saguaro National Park, the Santa Cruz River at Tubac, and other high profile birding locations in the region, but here are a few of my favorite lesser-known local sites.

TUCSON BIRD ALLIANCE'S MASON CENTER

Located on Hardy Road just off of Thornydale, the Mason Center is 20-acres of nearly pristine saguaro-ironwood tree habitat. Bird feeding and water stations, as well as pollinator and habitat gardens surround the facilities to support seasonal and year-round populations of wildlife, especially birds. The cooler months are a perfect time to stroll the roughly half mile trail and look for desert species such as Cactus Wren, Abert's Towhee, Gila Woodpecker, and Gambel's Quail. Sticking to the feeders around the house, you're very likely to see multiple Costa's Hummingbirds. Feel free to stop in and pick up a map and other educational materials. A staff member will likely be there during the week (Mon-Thurs, 8am–5pm) to say hello and answer questions. Open dawn to dusk, please park on Hardy Road and enter via the small gate to the west of the parking lot if visiting on a weekend.

ISABELLA LEE NATURAL PRESERVE

This Pima County preserve is located in a remnant mesquite bosque where the Tanque Verde and Agua Caliente Washes meet. This forest and riparian grassland, a very rare habitat type in the Tucson valley, is a maze of trails under the canopy of shady mesquite, willow, and hackberry interspersed with giant cottonwood and ash trees along the washes. Visit here and imagine a different time in Southeast Arizona when the sounds of Bewick's Wrens, Ladder-backed Woodpeckers, and Green-tailed Towhees were more common. Because of the high density of velvet mesquite, there's a good amount of desert mistletoe present. Mistletoe is a hemiparasite (it takes water and minerals from its host plant but also photosynthesizes on its own) and does not harm healthy plants. Phainopeplas really key in on desert mistletoe, feeding on the fruits and utilizing its dense clumps for nesting, making Isabella Lee a great place to see them!

ATTURBURY WASH IN LINCOLN PARK

This City of Tucson park showcases a desert riparian wash adjacent to classic Sonoran Desert scrub habitat. Nature trails crisscross the small mesquite/hackberry woods next to the wash and also the desert hillside—if you're comfortable with walking in soft sand, going down the wash is another option. Because of this habitat diversity, a wide range of birds can be seen, from Rufous-winged and Black-throated Sparrows to Broad-billed Hummingbirds and Vermilion Flycatchers. The park has a healthy population of Northern Cardinals, possibly due to the large amount of fruiting hackberry, especially at the northern end of the wash. Atturbury Wash in this section isn't far from the Pantano Wash, a major migratory corridor. During spring and fall, it is a magnet for migrating warblers—get your timing just right and you might find six or seven of these colorful species! Note, the lawn area of the park is now a dog park and going early on a weekday is recommended.

OPPOSITE: Common Cuckoo, Hari K. Patibanda
ABOVE: Costa's Hummingbird, Hemant Kishan; Phainopepla defending a mistletoe clump, Doris Evans; Northern Cardinal feeding on desert hackberry, Mick Thompson

Creating Life Stories Through Birds

Seeing a specific bird species for the first time is exciting—it's brand new to you! This thrill is worth chasing for most people, but since birds are unpredictable, you never know exactly when that Life Bird will show up. Try for a bird enough times without success and you'll be tempted to call it a Nemesis Bird. Don't despair, this is part of the fun! You don't believe me? Chasing birds can lead to great stories, whether or not you find what you want. Read on to see how bird experiences can enhance our lives.

The year 1982 was seminal in my birding life. After birding solo for 10 years, I finally learned of a thing called the Rare Bird Alert Hotline which one could call and then go and chase interesting birds—who knew? I called in March, and there was a rare bird reported in an abandoned quarry in Lancaster County, PA, so I set off from Washington DC to 'twitch' it. The location was easy to recognize. Cars with license plates from all over were parked alongside the road in the middle of Amish farm country. The birders were clustered at the edge of the quarry, peering at the opposite cliff in the gray gloom. And there sat a large raptor: a gray-morph Gyrfalcon! A Life Bird, and only one of a handful of experiences I've had with this, my favorite bird.

—Scott Crabtree

Gyrfalcon, Tyler Pockette

Tawny Frogmouth, Jennifer Van Boxel

From the very moment that I first saw a drawing of a Tawny Frogmouth in a book of Australian birds, I was captivated by these goofy muppet-like birds that are amazing chameleons. With their variegated brown-gray coloring, they have the perfect camouflage to blend in with the gum trees in their native environment. They have a tendency to sit very still, stretching their wide beaks up and out so that the birds themselves seem to be tree branches. I marveled at the Tawny Frogmouth when I saw one up close at an aviary, but I was completely unprepared for the first time I saw one in the wild. On a stroll through a residential neighborhood outside Brisbane, I paused to admire the very impressive carving of a Tawny Frogmouth on someone's mailbox… only to see the glint of an eye as the bird cracked its lids open just enough to check if I was a threat! It was an amazing experience to see the wild bird so close, one I'll always treasure.

—Jennifer Van Boxel

When our son moved to Tucson a few years ago, we were excited to visit and bird in areas that were as different from New England as it gets. Yes, we are lucky in some respects, the Atlantic Flyway allows us to see more than 25 species of warbler each migration season at many places such as Plum Island, in Newbury, MA. But was there really such a thing as a *Red-faced Warbler*? And what, we wondered, was a *Mt Lemmon* like? And on this mountain, we were told to find a place called Marshall Gulch. It all seemed like a fairy-tale. After finding said gulch, we so enjoyed our time there, and in addition to seeing Steller's Jay, Black-headed Grosbeak, and two species of flycatcher, we were indeed lucky enough to watch several Red-faced Warblers flitting about in the understory. What an incredible treat! What a remarkable Life Bird!

—Phil Bonasia

Red-faced Warbler, Phil Bonasia

Shorebirds and seabirds in the desert? It doesn't make sense, does it? However, when you think about the fact that many shorebirds migrate from the Arctic to South America and back every year, Arizona plays an important role. We have natural wetlands and artificial ones, and Tucson is only 140 miles from the Gulf of California, so seabirds here are not that unusual. I recently went up to the Milky Way Dairy near Gila Bend to look for a Curlew Sandpiper, a rare Eurasian vagrant. I missed it, but while there, an alert of a Brown Pelican came across the Arizona Rare Bird Alert Discord channel. I had been trying to manifest one in Pima County all summer. This bird was reported at another dairy along I-8 between Gila Bend and Dateland. Since Ajo is directly between the Gulf and I-8, I decided to go there to see if another young pelican had stopped short on its wanderings. Lo and behold, there it was, floating along pretty-as-you please. It couldn't have been a better end to a long Sunday drive.

—John Amoroso

Brown Pelican, John Amoroso

Why is the Vermilion Flycatcher my only tattoo? Shortly after arriving in Arizona in 1970, I participated in a Maricopa Audubon field trip. I noticed that the field trip leader was intently focused on something as she announced, "Vermilion." I quickly walked up to her. "No binoculars," I said. She handed me her binos and I gasped as the Vermilion Flycatcher exploded into view. That began my journey into passionate birdwatching.

That however, was not the reason for my tattoo. Fast forward 25 years and I was searching Southeast Arizona for land on which to build a B&B catering to the emerging birder community. A friend suggested I visit a site just north of Palominos near the San Pedro River and the newly designated San Pedro National Conservation Area. As I scanned the acreage, a lone, dried sunflower stock caught my attention. A bird was perched on its top, a Vermilion Flycatcher. Short version of this story, this bird became the logo bird for the B&B that investor friends and I built on that site. But that is still not the reason for my tattoo.

Following 9/11, we had to sell "Casa" as we lovingly called it. It broke my heart. Soon after, I visited a tattoo parlor, the pain of this event matched the pain in my heart. Every morning since, I am greeted in the mirror by that logo bird tattooed just above my heart. That is how the Vermillion Flycatcher became my only tattoo.

—Craig Anderson

Vermilion Flycatcher, Stephen Nelson

Life Birds are exciting, no doubt, but everyday experiences with birds can still be thrilling. The tussle between two Mourning Doves (symbols of peace!) near the feeder, a Northern Mockingbird mimicking a Killdeer or an American Kestrel to perfection, two Verdins chasing a Cactus Wren from their nesting site, the shaggy look of a juvenile Northern Cardinal making it hard to believe it will ever be as striking as its father. These are tiny life episodes that build your knowledge and understanding of birds. And as exciting as it is to see a Life Bird, especially one that has eluded you for years, it's equally satisfying to help others find their Life Birds. It's one of the reasons I'm a field guide, to feel again that wonder and thrill of a new species, to see the smiles, to hear the exclamations. Consider taking someone with you when you bird—you'll rediscover the magic of new birds all over again.

—Kathe Anderson

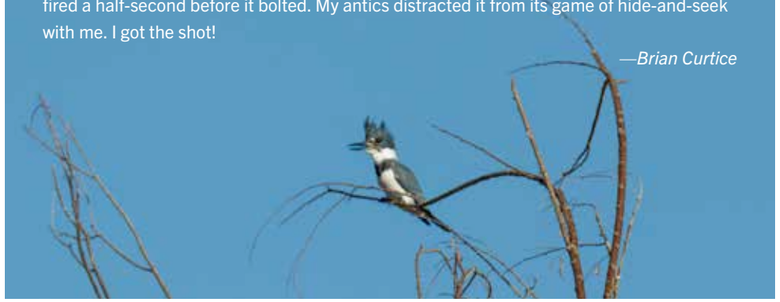
I had been coming to Southeast Arizona for nearly 10 years, my main interests being hummingbirds, warblers, and really anything new I am unable to see in central Oklahoma. I did fine in most areas, but could not get eyes on an Olive Warbler. Neck cramps aplenty from looking up in those tall trees! Finally, on my sixth trip up Mt. Lemmon at Rose Lake we saw a funny looking non-warbler bird with an entire bevy of other warblers. Going through the book and Merlin, I had an epiphany. Here it was, a female Olive Warbler was that "funny looking non-warbler" we were seeing! And it was not 70-80 feet up a tree, it was right at eye level! After looking around, we found a male Olive Warbler, again at nearly eye level.

—Hal A. Yocum & Betz Hacker

A beautiful Belted Kingfisher eluded my lens for hours. Not even spray-and-pray caught the shot I wanted. Fast, explosive, and with a mocking staccato laugh, it seemed to know the perfect moment to burst away. Swat a mosquito? Gone. Push through brush? Gone. My goal became singular: shoot it with my Canon. I noticed it lingered longest on a perch just past a bend above a small cliff. My plan? Lean out and blind fire! Bad idea with even worse execution. The ground gave way at full extension, and I plummeted, miraculously dangling three feet above the river via my backpack!

Having foolishly violated Rule One of desert work (bring a buddy), I was in trouble. My feet couldn't gain purchase. I was stuck. Violently wriggling my shoulders in an effort to extricate myself from the pack led to a quiet "snap," and down I went. Instinctively twisting in air to protect my "baby," I traded cracked ribs for a dry camera. On the way down, I somehow noticed the bird, unfazed as it watched the simian spectacle. Was that glee in its eyes? Soaking flat on my back, dazed but determined, I raised my trusty 400mm lens and fired a half-second before it bolted. My antics distracted it from its game of hide-and-seek with me. I got the shot!

—Brian Curtice



Belted Kingfisher, Brian Curtice

In April of this year, a male Lazuli Bunting in breeding plumage visited our yard. Every time my husband and I were outside and he said, "Look—there's a Lazuli Bunting!" the bird either flew off or moved to such dense foliage that by the time I got my binoculars in the vicinity of the bird, I couldn't see it. I got discouraged and stopped looking every time my husband pointed it out. Finally, though, I was able to "glass" this nemesis bird, getting a good look through my binoculars, and my husband was able to take some great photos that I used as reference for my art you see here.

—Paula Borchardt

Despite multiple trips to suitable habitat in northeastern India and northwestern Thailand, the Himalayan Cutia was my Asian nemesis bird for decades. There was a near miss in Chiang Mai, Thailand, in 2009, when a potential Himalayan Cutia flew to a tree which immediately became shrouded in dense fog. Six years later I finally saw the bird in Eagle Nest, Arunachal Pradesh, India. Since then, my Asian nemesis bird has been the White-bellied Heron, but seeing that bird is not going to happen because these old bones aren't up to the rigors of the quest. And, after numerous trips to Florida Canyon and Montosa Canyon here in Southeast Arizona, the Black-capped Gnatcatcher continues to be my North American nemesis bird.

—Julian P. Donahue

If you asked me a year ago whether birding would be a major part of my life, I would have been surprised to discover that nowadays I plan weekends and trips around seeing birds, especially if there is a chance to add a lifer to the list! My husband and I started birdwatching while searching for a shared-hobby, but it has now become an invaluable part of our lives. We lost our son unexpectedly last December, and birding has brought us peace as we navigate our journey through grief. We planned a trip to Costa Rica in May—a trip to honor him, with a focus on birding, as I feel his presence the most in nature. Researching birds in the area, I knew there would be many lifers, but one bird that stood out was the Motmot. I didn't care which species we saw; I just wanted to see at least one. May came, and arriving at the hotel early, we decided to walk around the property while waiting for check-in. As we walked across a bridge, we heard the double-hooting call that gives the motmot its name, turned, and spotted a beautiful Rufous Motmot sitting on a branch in the ravine. A gift from Elias.

—Christina Zarraga

Rufous Motmot, Christina Zarraga

Great Horned Owl, Dan Weisz

Though I've always loved birds—my mom never lets me forget that I am the one who taught her what ornithology is at age three—it wasn't until this past June in France, that I started actively birdwatching and recording sightings on my life list. Upon my return to Vail, AZ, I was excited to pay more attention to my own backyard birds. Specifically, I mentioned to each of my parents, separately, that I hoped to spot an owl. We hear owls more than we see them around my house, and are always instantly alerted to their presence by my 10-year-old chocolate lab, Luna, who, despite her hunting dog breeding, trembles in fright at their calls. Though an owl would scare Luna, I hoped one might pay us just a brief visit for the sake of my life list. I knew this goal was possible, but we typically only hear owls about two or three times per year, so I also knew patience would be necessary. However, only days later, my uneasy pooch notified us of a nocturnal visitor. I ran to my front yard and, as if manifested, a Great Horned Owl gazed down at me from the very top of our palo verde tree. My owl stayed just long enough for me to spot him with a flashlight, before vanishing soundlessly into the night, much to Luna's relief.

—Grace Meinema

Lawrence's Goldfinches, Olya Weekley

On a crisp January morning in 2019, I stepped into my yard on the northwest side of Tucson, coffee in hand and my dog at my side. Next to the patio, the thistle feeder buzzed with its usual goldfinches except one stood out. Mostly gray with a yellow belly and a bold black stripe from crown to chin. Could it be? I dashed for my binoculars. Sure enough, my very first Lawrence's Goldfinch—a lifer in my own backyard! The longer I watched, the more of them flew in, gathering in the orange tree where the feeder hung. They were not interested in it but seemed to enjoy the company of the other finches. To my delight, these Lawrence's Goldfinches kept returning year after year. For five winters, they brought their charm to my yard. What made their visits so remarkable is that Lawrence's Goldfinches are nomadic wanderers. Their winter flocks shift unpredictably across the Southwest so you cannot count on them showing up in the same place twice, which is why seeing them in my yard was such a gift. Finding such an unusual bird so close to home was more than just a lifer moment, it was pure backyard magic!

—Olya Weekley

Birdwatching can become a passion when done on a daily basis. It allows you to learn the habits, calls, and other details about a specific bird that walks into your life. An unusual Curve-billed Thrasher did come and stayed for almost three years. This Curve-billed was totally white! With some study we learned that the term for this is "leucistic," meaning loss of pigmentation except for the eyes. We knew she was a female because she built a nest in the cholla. Naming her "La Blanca" was natural because of her leucism. La Blanca had our attention and that of other birds as well. A Cactus Wren came often and performed the most unusual displays and poses for her. This "Inter-species Flirtation" was a regular habit and quite interesting to observe. Her song presence was also a joy. She taught us that respect for a different condition opens your mind and heart.

—Steve Piepmeier

La Blanca and her Cactus Wren friend, Steve Piepmeier

I don't count a bird as seen unless I photograph it. For years I only saw Brown Thrashers for a fraction of a second. My guide book and apps agreed, Brown Thrashers are "inconspicuous and usually hidden." In Kansas, Colorado, Minnesota, or the Dakotas, same result, no photo. Then last May I snuck up close to one in southern Colorado. It seemed to be busy impersonating a mockingbird impersonating a Song Sparrow. It allowed me to photograph until my arms got tired. Two weeks later, much to my surprise, a pair started visiting our St Paul, MN back yard daily. My nemesis era ended in a big way.

—Larry Hollar

Brown Thrasher, Larry Hollar

When my husband and I began our 2024 Big Year, we each had a most-hoped-for Life Bird. Ethan's was the Great Gray Owl, which we observed in Minnesota in January. We set out to find mine, the Elegant Trogon, at Cave Creek Ranch in Portal on March 29. As we had dipped on this species previously, I donned my Tucson Bird Alliance Elegant Trogon t-shirt, determined that this would be the day. At the ranch, we found good company among several others eagerly awaiting the trogon's visit to fruiting plants by the office porch. But minutes turned into hours and birders began to leave. Feeling dejected but holding onto hope, I continued to traverse the path, scanning in every direction. At one point, my eyes fell on the limb of a nearby tree and froze. There was the Elegant Trogon staring directly back at me! I was utterly wonder-struck. Once I recovered my senses, I whispered, "Trogon! Trogon!" as loudly as I dared, desperately hoping not to startle the bird. Fortunately, several others saw him before he took wing. Among them was Ethan. I was fortunate to tick dozens of lifers over the course of the year, but no experience tops my moments alone with the resplendent Elegant Trogon!

—Ingrid Whitaker

My son and his best friend were thick as thieves and racking up 8th grade detentions. A hike up a mountain, I figured, might give their craniums a ¼-turn clockwise. June departure, 0400, destination Mt. Wrightston. Our family hiking tradition? Hunt for trogons. My mom had a bird book, but also a barking dog and no binoculars—our trogon count over 40 years? Zero. I played Elegant Trogon calls in the car and told the boys, "Today is our destiny."

"Sounds like an XXXX," they laughed (censored for 8th grade puerility).

In the creek bed we heard an XXXX, maybe, but it was still dark. We started our hike and climbed past unidentified Painted Redstarts and Red-faced Warblers (we weren't birders, yet). The boys fell into their banter, which seemed to propel them.

"I won't even go to college. I'll work in cafés and travel Europe."

"How will you get around?"

"Motorcycle."

"No kids?"

"I'll probably adopt a baby."

"And just clip it to the back of your motorcycle?"

At the summit's edge, they leaned over into the cool wind as unidentified Violet-green Swallows dived around them. When we reached the bottom, exhausted, we saw a woman—perhaps an oracle—sitting on the ground with binoculars in frontof a sycamore.

"You guys wanna see a trogon?"

—Brent Barber

Elegant Trogon, Ethan Whitaker

BIRDING BY BIKE: A DIFFERENT PATH TO ENJOYING BIRDS

Birds seen by bike: Baltimore Oriole, Canada Warbler, Northern Waterthrush

I discovered the joys of birding in college and remained a dedicated birder through graduate school, beginning a teaching career and starting a family. Eventually, the demands of family and work life redirected me into interests more easily shoe-horned into my shrinking free time. I never packed up the binoculars completely, but it's safe to say they didn't see as much daylight again until I took up cycling in 2010.

Cycling brought me back to birding in a big way and added a new spin on the highs and lows embedded into the Life Bird/Nemesis Bird experience. It gave me a different way to look at birds and the birding experience. Often accompanied by my husband, Chuck Williamson, I started carrying binoculars everywhere on bike rides and it wasn't long until the "bike list" became an obsession. Every new "bike bird" is much like adding a new Life Bird.

Tucson's great network of pedestrian/cycling paths makes it remarkably easy to get to many hotspots and some areas that few birders visit. I've definitely burned many calories chasing rarities on and off the bike path: Pine Warbler, Elegant Tern, Prothonotary Warbler, Blue-headed Vireo, Harris's Sparrow, and some genuine Life Birds: Couch's Kingbird, Canada Warbler, and Blackburnian Warbler.

Orange-crowned Warbler on my bike tire!

Raptors are always easy to spot while riding. My highlights include numerous falcons, a migrating Short-tailed Hawk along the Rillito River on a September morning, a Mississippi Kite soaring over Pantano Wash on an April commute home from work, and a young Common Black Hawk resting in the willows along the Santa Cruz River.

There are fundamental conflicts with combining birding and cycling, and the outings require compromises: fewer miles than regular rides, fewer species than car birding, earlier starts, and longer time commitments to allow for bike travel. On occasion, I find myself pedaling madly to get somewhere before it's too hot or before the bird disappears. On a day I decided to ride to Tanque Verde Wash, Chuck phoned to say he was watching two Roseate Spoonbills at Lakeside Park, 12 miles the opposite direction. I'm usually not very fast on the bike, but that day my speed was undoubtedly fueled by anticipation and adrenaline.

As in all birding, not every quest is equally rewarding and the payoff isn't guaranteed. When birding by bike, sometimes the task can be quite demanding. We once rode up Madera Canyon to look for a rare White-throated Thrush. In a car, ascending 1,500 feet is inconsequential, but that road is not easy on a bike! Fortunately, our efforts paid off and we got great looks at the thrush, a new bike bird and US bird for me.

As for nemesis birds, the Slate-throated Redstart has eluded me on the bike thus far. After a fruitless attempt to see one on Mt. Lemmon, I persuaded my long-suffering spouse to try for one in Pinery Canyon in the Chiricahua Mountains. The dirt road up and over Onion Saddle is rough, steep, hot, and quite the challenge for steel touring bikes. Alas, it was too late in the day and we missed it despite our efforts.

I've now tallied 368 species in Arizona with my bike. This list is just one idea to start a new birding endeavor or reinvigorate your birding life. Come up with your own and discover a new way of enjoying birds!

Sharon Goldwasser

All photos by the author.

After first visiting Southeast Arizona in 1976, Sharon's love of the region's natural history moved her to return to pursue graduate studies, to become a science educator, and to share her knowledge as a guide on tours for Road Scholar and Naturalist Journeys.

GETTING TO KNOW ARTHUR PACK PARK

For a lot of people, watching birds inevitably leads to making lists of the birds you've seen. You might first keep a Life list of all the birds you've seen. A backyard list is a fun next step and could lead you down the slippery slope of hotspot, county, state, year, and all manner of lists, including the bizarre "birds I saw poop" list. In any case, adding birds to lists creates a fun new dimension to your birding experience and contributes to scientific data collection when entered into eBird.

In November 2011, I discovered Arthur Pack Regional Park. I was to spend my first full winter season in the area and had joined the AZ/NM listserv for rare birds. On November 10, a Clark's Grebe was reported there. I had never seen one, so I traveled the two miles to see it. Life Bird on my first visit to the park! Later that week, I found a Sharp-shinned Hawk which became #167 for this eBird hotspot.

Almost 2,100 checklists later, I have recorded 226 species at the park, many of which were only seen once. Along the way and over 15 years, I have learned the habitats and the seasons of this 500 acre Pima County park. The obvious features are the three ponds. Pima County has very little riparian habitat, so any place with water can have surprises. The vegetation around the ponds is constantly changing. As the reeds close in, some species decline. American Coots once numbered up to 400. They liked the easy access to the grasses, now blocked. Currently there are fewer than 20 around. But this past spring, three Virginia Rails and four Soras were comfortable in those same reeds until late May when the water levels fell.

One pond has bass in it. I watched a Double-crested Cormorant catch, subdue, and swallow one. I took photos; 40 snapshots in nine seconds. The cormorant tossed the bass to align it for swallowing. In nine seconds it became a bulge in the throat.

In addition to the ponds, the park has prime Sonoran Desert habitat that is home to Greater Roadrunner, Gambel's Quail, Black-throated Sparrow, and many more birds. Last year for the first time, I found a Great Horned Owl nest. The year before, one Cooper's Hawk fledged from the same nest. I watched it for months until two owlets fledged around the 15th of June. Sadly, the nest site was torn away by a severe monsoon storm this summer. Several mesquites were uprooted as well, and there are now several brush piles for the ground foragers—again the habitat altered.

Another interesting nesting bird at the park is the *Hesperia* or Desert subspecies of the Purple Martin. I have observed seven saguaro nest sites over the past six seasons. I'm sure there are more.

It is exciting to see the seasonal changes in bird species, especially during migration. Who will drop in next? At the end of August, a Prairie Warbler, typically an East Coast bird, became the Hotspot's 250th species. Another recent surprise on my 2,097th eBird checklist: my 227th species for the park, a Forster's Tern.

Pick a favorite spot and get out and birdwatch! Monitoring a specific area over time, such as Arthur Pack Park, is a great way to learn "your" local birds and observe seasonal and abrupt changes, and creating lists is a great motivation!

Arthur Pack Park, Matt Griffiths; Double-crested Cormorant with the bass, John R. Williams

The owlets on the 12th. The righthand bird was smaller; it was about a week between seeing the first and the second. Typical biology in large birds is that they hatch sequentially. John R. Williams

Forster's Tern, species 227, John R. Williams

WHO WAS ARTHUR PACK AND WHY WAS THIS PARK NAMED FOR HIM? He was recognized for Meritorious Service with the Parks and Recreation Commission, 1953–1973. During his tenure, he secured the property for multi-use, including the golf course, ball fields, playground, dog park, and also 4.7 miles of trails. Have you ever birded at Lakeside Park in east Tucson? He also secured that property. Colossal Cave? He helped protect that. Tucson Mountain Park too. And the crown jewel, he co-partnered the founding of The Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum.

ACCESS: Arthur Pack Park is located just north of Tucson Bird Alliance's Mason Center. Walking trails can be accessed from Hardy Road or the trailhead parking on Overton Road, where the large golf course pond can be viewed. See the bird list at the QR code below.

John R. Williams is a retired technical forester and naturalist and fulltime resident of Tucson since 2019.

LISTING RESOURCES

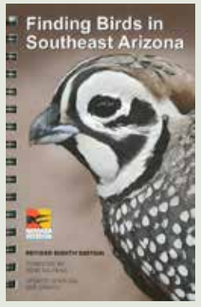
HOW DO YOU DECIDE ON A BIRDING LOCATION AND FIND BIRDS FOR ALL YOUR LISTS? LUCKY FOR MODERN BIRDERS THERE ARE MANY RESOURCES TO HELP YOU.

eBird Your first and best resource for researching where to find birds is at EBIRD.ORG. Used by people around the world, eBird will show you where birds are being seen, almost in real-time. Find new places to bird and keep track of your sightings—the data gathered is used by scientists doing bird research. And yes, when you submit checklists of the birds you've seen, eBird will generate lists for you—hotspot, state, life lists, you name it, even lists you haven't thought of yet! Also developed by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, the Merlin Bird ID app is a great resource that will identify birds for you, by sound or photograph!

Tucson Bird Alliance field trips: We offer birding trips every week and throughout the entire year. Explore new locations and areas across Southeast Arizona, meet fellow birders, and grow your skills! Find trips at TUCSONBIRDS.ORG/FIELD-TRIPS.

Discord/AZ/NM Listserv/Rare Bird Alert: These online resources are lists and forums where other birders in the region report rare and interesting birds seen. From weekly sightings to up-to-the-minute finds, you'll know where the birds are! Learn more at TUCSONBIRDS.ORG/RARE-BIRD-ALERT.

Tucson Birding Trail/Arizona Birding Trail: Discover birding locations right here in Tucson and across Arizona. Pick up a printed Tucson Birding Trail map at our Nature Shop and find the Arizona Birding Trail at ARIZONABIRDINGTRAIL.COM.



Finding Birds in Southeast Arizona: The definitive resource for local birding information since 1979, this guide will help you plan excursions and provide detailed info on birding locations and the local birds. Find it at TUCSONBIRDSTORE.ORG.

COLLECTING BIRD CONSERVATION DATA IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Jennie MacFarland
Director of Bird Conservation
jmacfarland@tucsonaudubon.org

TOP: Purple Martin, Leslie Leathers; Elegant Trogon survey, Sue Carnahan

The advent of eBird ushered in a whole new era of bird data and avian research. Not only did users like you and me have an easy way to keep track of birds seen and checklists at every hotspot we had ever been to, but ornithologists now had a new and always-growing database of bird sightings to tap into for all kinds of research projects. Birders around the world instantly became "community scientists" with personal bird sightings becoming important data. Tucson Bird Alliance (TBA) utilizes eBird data for most of its bird conservation projects including Arizona Important Bird Areas (IBA) work, the Tucson Bird Count, and species-specific studies on the Desert Purple Martin, Elegant Trogon, Chestnut-collared Longspur, and more.

When I first started at TBA in 2010, the walls of the bird conservation office were lined with filing cabinets. When my boss and mentor, Scott Wilbor, first gave me tasks as a new employee, they almost always involved data entry or data verification using paper data forms. Everything we did involved filling out, reading, and archiving lots of paper documents. It seemed entirely logical to use and keep paper records just in case something unforeseeable happened to the digital data. Even though I continue to hoard paper datasheets of our most important projects, I have also embraced the digital data collection revolution of the last decade.

I joined eBird pretty early in the game in 2009, but found it difficult to use and quickly lost interest. Then, in 2012, I was blown away by its logistical improvements and hugely useful tools for viewing data. From that point on, the TBA conservation department used eBird data frequently to target survey efforts within Arizona's 48 designated IBAs. With the avalanche of data that began to pour into eBird, we made accurate species lists for each IBA and learned where the birds of conservation concern were detected, guiding our goals and activities. However, there were some issues with completely integrating our Arizona IBA data. Our data forms captured survey details that the eBird system couldn't accommodate. However, it was perfect for collecting data from less formal birder efforts, and we successfully encouraged birders to do eBird lists while birding within IBAs. The large amount of data generated within eBird was a huge asset to our IBA nomination work beginning in 2015. We still use it to monitor populations of target species within IBAs, such as our popular Elegant Trogon surveys each May. Birders can report Elegant Trogons they encounter in Southeast Arizona and we add these sightings to what was found in formal surveys. It's enormously helpful, especially during years with unusual conditions.

Elegant Trogon seen on a survey, Andy Moore; Desert Purple Martin, Mike Henry

While eBird doesn't fully interface with our IBA data, it is compatible with the Tucson Bird Count (TBC). Even though the TBC urban bird count began in 2001, predating the 2002 founding of eBird, the five minute point count setup links smoothly with eBird. The potential to use eBird as a primary data collection method for the TBC seemed so perfect that I reached out to eBird for advice on setting up data collection with our volunteer counters. They were enormously helpful, and in December 2018, under a unique eBird account for the TBC, we created a "historic list" for each of the 900+ survey locations and shared them with the bird counters. I had a lot of help from our amazing technology volunteer, Jay Bhangoo, who worked out how to integrate the eBird data back into our original TBC Access database. Most of our counters now use the eBird data entry option, and nearly 5,000 point counts have been done for the TBC in this way. This integration has been a total success!

iNaturalist is another excellent technology innovation, and our Desert Purple Martin work has benefited from its popularity. As Desert Purple Martins nest in saguaro cavities during July and August, they can fly under the radar for many birders. However, other outdoor enthusiasts sometimes encounter them in the Sonoran Desert during the summer months. If one snaps a photo of an interesting animal or plant, and uploads it to iNaturalist, the software will try to identify it, and document the exact location the photo was taken. The resulting iNaturalist data for Purple Martins, from birders and non-birders alike, has helped us add many specific nesting and roosting locations to our larger project.

Technology has been changing our world at a breathtaking pace. Some of these innovations for collecting data about birds and the natural world by community scientists have been a boon to research and conservation. Even though I still have a few filing cabinets of data that I will probably never part with, I do fully embrace these new digital tools, and will continue to use them for current and future projects.

Elf Owl survey, Kathleen LaRose

NEMESIS PLANTS OF SOUTHEAST ARIZONA

Plant people make lists, too! I have plants that reside in my mental map, and I return to them year after year to admire them. The following list is different; these are the plants I would love to never see again in the region, or this continent—nemesis plants of the Sonoran Desert.

Tony Figueroa
Director of Invasive Plant Management
tfigueroa@tucsonbirds.org

1.

BUFFELGRASS (*Cenchrus ciliaris*) is one of the most infamous species of our region. This native of Kenya has been slowly spreading like a cancer on the landscape since 1944. Buffelgrass can outperform our native plants and eventually replace them in the landscape. It's not palatable to our native grazers, which leads to dense populations. All it needs is a spark to ignite the desert and fully wipe out the native vegetation in a catastrophic fire. Flame lengths fueled by this grass can reach 25 feet high and kill mature saguaros.

2.

FOUNTAIN GRASS (*Cenchrus setaceus*) is at the top of my list for common landscaping atrocities that I see in neighborhoods throughout Tucson. Fountain grass is a cousin of buffelgrass and has all of the same hazardous concerns. To make matters worse, it is slowly spreading in your community, on roadsides, and in washes, as seeds from the host plant, which may be in your front yard, spread. This species was one of the primary fuels in the recent wildfires in Malibu and Hawaii.

3.

STINKNET (*Oncosiphon pilulifer*) is the most recent arrival and one of the most aggressively spreading invasive species in the southwestern United States. The first detection in Tucson occurred during the spring of 2015. The Tucson Bird Alliance is a leader in the community, informing the public about the threat that this plant poses to our spring wildflowers and wildlife that depend on them annually. We created a website to track the spread and get the community involved with an easy-to-use mapping tool that helps guide land managers. Watch for this plant January through May. Learn more and help us track stinknet infestations at STINKNET.ORG.

Photos by Tony Figueroa

LIFE BIRDS AT THE PATON CENTER—TAKE YOUR PICK!

Life Birds, the holy grail of birding! For any birder, new to the obsession, or decades in, a Life Bird is something to be celebrated. The Paton Center for Hummingbirds most likely looms large in many people's life lists, especially for one bird in particular. Being located so close to Mexico, many of the Center's birds that become Life Birds for visitors are primarily found south of the border. The ultimate example is our own mascot, the Violet-crowned Hummingbird. Seen in the yard virtually every day, it has become something of a legend and is the reason why the Paton Center exists. Countless people from all over the US, in fact the entire world, have visited with the intent of adding this stunning hummingbird to their life lists. It's practically guaranteed, the only place in the US that can make this claim.

While there is no question that the Violet-crowned Hummingbird is responsible for the greatest number of Lifers seen at the Paton Center, it's not the only sought-after bird found there. There are 264 species on the eBird hotspot list after all! Another bird that gets a lot of attention from bird watchers seeking that next Life Bird is the locally nesting Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo. This striking bird with clean white underparts and amazingly-patterned tail has nested near or on the property in recent years, making the odds of seeing, or at least hearing one, very good. Sometimes called the Rain Crow due to its arrival in the area just before monsoon rains begin, it also has a tendency to start calling prior to a storm and in response to the sound of thunder.

Another mostly Mexican species, the Thick-billed Kingbird seems to be the next most popular Life Bird at the Paton Center. It has also nested nearby and is a fairly common species during the summer breeding season. The best thing about the Thick-billed Kingbird is that it's very vocal early in the morning, and later in the day it tends to perch in a very easy spot to be viewed—you can experience this bird no matter when you come! Many days I will train the spotting scope on the kingbird sitting on its favorite branch at the top of a tree for our guests to watch for minutes on end.

No matter if it is one of these three exciting birds, or another of our nearly 50 species a day seen at the Paton Center for Hummingbirds, we look forward to your next visit and hope that we can help you celebrate your next great Life Bird!

Tucson Bird Alliance
Paton Center for Hummingbirds

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

Violet-crowned Hummingbird
Yellow-billed Cuckoo
Thick-billed Kingbird
All photos by Tom Brown.

CAROLYN SMITH: DIVING RIGHT IN

Carolyn propagates young plants in the Paton Center misting bench

Starting your habitat stewardship journey in the Sonoran Desert can be overwhelming. For Carolyn Smith, it began with an email to Tucson Bird Alliance's (TBA) Habitat at Home Program. Like many, she was struggling to create a thriving landscape for wildlife after relocating to the region from the East Coast. She hired TBA to draft a habitat plan for her property and then invited staff out a year later to see her efforts. That day I learned two things about Carolyn: she's not afraid to dive right in and she is a nurturer.

Carolyn's efforts were a huge success and her yard was teeming with birds and butterflies. The conservation organizations in Southeast Arizona provided endless avenues for her continued learning. What started as an interest in supporting birds quickly evolved into learning about native plants, pollinators, ecology, and more. From Spadefoot Nursery, an ethos was instilled that plants deserve the same level of responsibility as caring for any other living being—Carolyn researches every plant that she works with. She stayed in touch with TBA staff, emailing plant ID questions and scheduling yard visits. As her knowledge expanded, so did her desire to give back to the conservation community in which she had become a part of. The Paton Center for Hummingbirds had grown with a newly acquired parcel and she jumped on the opportunity to help care for the habitat as a regular volunteer.

Carolyn's impact on the Paton Center's habitat has been significant. While grant funding will partially cover upfront invasive species treatment and revegetation, funding is rarely available for the plant establishment period, an often overlooked aspect that is critical for project success. Her time spent digging up Johnsongrass rhizomes, weeding around newly installed plants, and making irrigation repairs contributes to the success of habitat restoration projects in the Cuckoo Corridor and Grayhawk Loop. Always interested in expanding her knowledge and skillset, Carolyn volunteered to grow plants for Habitat on Wheels, TBA's mobile habitat program that delivers free native plants to underserved communities. After attending a plant propagation class at Borderlands Restoration's Native Plant Nursery, she became a regular volunteer for the organization, helping in the nursery and learning seed preparation and plant propagation techniques. She now leads plant grow-out efforts for the Paton Center using a misting bench, a self-contained plant propagation work space with automated irrigation.

While the habitat improvements at Paton are visible, behind the scenes Carolyn has been growing a community of habitat stewards. The new plants swarming with queen butterflies certainly help build excitement and interest in volunteering to restore habitat. She creates a welcoming space with hugs, homemade baked goods, shared learning, and birding breaks. She might just inspire you to dive right in.

Kari Hackney
Director of Habitat Stewardship
khackney@tucsonbirds.org

PINELEAF MILKWEED

ASCLEPIAS LINARIA

Pineleaf milkweed flowers and fruit pod, Lynn Hassler

When Matt Griffiths (our illustrious Editor-in-Chief) told me about this issue's theme, he jokingly asked if I had a nemesis plant. I wasn't sure if he thought the concept was funny or whether the idea that someone like me who has successfully (more or less) gardened here for over 35 years might have encountered a botanical adversary. Well, in fact, I have—a species that I have planted more times than I can remember and have failed to keep alive—and it is *Asclepias linaria*, or pineleaf milkweed.

As with every garden, mine hosts many microhabitats—spots with different soil composition, drainage, and light orientations. I have tried growing this milkweed in many different places to no avail. Why do I keep on trying? This Arizona native sports dark evergreen foliage with needle-like leaves densely packed in rows. At three feet high and wide, it is workable in smaller landscapes like mine. Leaves and stems provide larval food for both monarch and queen butterflies, as well as the crimson-bodied lichen moth (*Lerina incarnata*). As with other milkweeds, the plants contain a milky latex sap loaded with chemicals that make them unpalatable to most herbivorous animals.

Pineleaf milkweed has a long blooming period (March to November). Flowers arise from pinkish buds and form attractive white clusters 2" across. Nectar is prized by butterflies and many other pollinating insects including honeybees, carpenter bees, bumble bees, wasps, beetles, and moths. Birds, of course, take advantage of the visiting insects. Fruits are smooth, shiny, inflated pods 2" long and 1" wide, turning from pale green to tan. When fruits mature, they split and release seed, each encased in fluffy white hairs that float away in the wind. In addition to their wildlife value, plants are heat and drought tolerant, low to moderate water users, cold hardy to the mid-20s, and grow moderately fast.

Since plants generally grow on rocky slopes at higher elevations, I think I have had a tendency to overwater them, basically rotting out the roots. Well-drained soil is a must—they will probably die in heavy clay. Recently, I was hiking with Cynthia Pruett (garden captain at the Mason Center) in Molino Basin (a good place to see plants in habitat) when we came upon my nemesis. It was thriving on a sunny slope with no water in sight. It turns out that Cynthia has also had difficulties growing this plant, which made me feel a lot better because she's a gardener extraordinaire in her own right. After much discussion, we both resolved to try again!

Lynn Hassler
Green Gardeners Volunteer Captain
Historic Y

MOUNTAIN BIRDS AND SWAMP HENS COME TO SWEETWATER!

Despite little rain this monsoon season, or perhaps because of it, unusual birds have been consistently seen at Sweetwater Wetlands. Easily the best bird was, not one, but two Purple Gallinules! This tropical swamphen has shown up at Sweetwater four times before, always appearing in July and staying about a month. One or two pop up as vagrants in Arizona most years. For most of July, these two marsh chickens were seen together courting and copulating. They were hardly seen or heard in August, but it's possible they nested at Sweetwater. Least Bittern breeding success was confirmed for the second time here with a down-covered juvenile lingering into September.

Several high elevation species have been showing up at Sweetwater recently. A Band-tailed Pigeon in July was an unexpected one day wonder found by James Leone while a White-breasted Nuthatch found by Steve Nord has lingered for over a month! Two Acorn Woodpeckers were also seen recently, but neither stayed, likely due to the lack of oaks. Woodhouse's Scrub-Jays have been popping up all over Tucson this fall and one was seen at Sweetwater on seven different days, possibly representing different birds. Some species arrived in large numbers, perhaps most exciting was a flock of Yellow-headed Blackbirds that continued to grow. With so many great birds showing up, autumn migration is off to a great start!

CATTAIL BURNING AT SWEETWATER

Tucson Water and Tucson Fire Department have set a date for the annual cattail burning: **Tuesday, November 4. The wetlands will be closed that day and for two days after** (to allow Tucson Water trucks to completely put out the fire and allow smoke to clear). During this time, Sweetwater Drive will also be closed to allow emergency vehicle access. Only the east basin will be burned this year since it is more overgrown with cattails and also has a resurgence of invasive water lettuce. In the weeks leading up to the burn, the water level will be lowered in both basins and machinery will be used to clear cattails around trees, similar to the great preparation done by Tucson Water in the west basin last year. This prep work will ensure a safer burn and preserve trees both living and dead for wildlife habitat. The basin will be refilled following the burn, just in time to provide open water for our returning winter waterfowl.

UPCOMING PROGRAMS AT SWEETWATER

We are continuing to offer educational workshops twice a month at Sweetwater Wetlands. Here are some upcoming events.

- Saturday, November 15, Brand New to Birding Field Workshop
- Sunday, November 16, Advanced Birding Series: Welcome Back Winter Waterfowl!

To register for these workshops and see other upcoming programs visit: TUCSONBIRDS.ORG/FIELD-TRIPS.

Alex Patia
Sweetwater Wetlands Coordinator
apatia@tucsonbirds.org

Northern Waterthrush, Ruddy Duck, Roseate Skimmer, bobcat kitten!, Alex Patia; one of the Purple Gallinules, Marcel Fouch

SOUTHEAST ARIZONA BIRDING FESTIVAL

Thanks to everyone who participated in the annual Southeast Arizona Birding Festival, especially to those of you who volunteered to help make it happen! Every year it seems to grow, and this year proved to be the biggest and best festival yet with almost 1,000 registrants. We had many bird highlights including nesting American Goshawks, a Least Grebe at El Rio Preserve (it's still there!), and 12 species of hummingbirds.

The Family Birding Day continues to grow with the partnership of the US Fish & Wildlife Service, along with Western National Parks Association, which provided valuable support. We had well over 100 kids in attendance this year. Also exciting was the addition of the Festival Comedy Show at 191 Toole, headlined by Denver birder and comedian, Adam Cayton-Holland, where we had over 150 in attendance.

We are already planning and stoked for next year, August 12–16, 2026, and we hope you will join us again (or for the first time!) to celebrate the birds and birding community of Southeast Arizona.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: Field trip leaders; Birding in the Atascosa Mountains, Jennie MacFarland; Rufous Hummingbird, Mitchell Lapides; Family Birding Day; Least Grebe, Peggy Steffens

MEET OUR VOLUNTEERS!

One of the key things that makes the Tucson Bird Alliance (TBA) community so special is the amazing variety of people who give their time and energy towards protecting birds and their habitats. We want to share a little bit about some of our volunteers and why they love working with us. Whether they've spent a lifetime observing wildlife or are just beginning their birding adventures, every individual adds something special to make our organization thrive.

Q: Tell us about your experience as a volunteer at Tucson Bird Alliance:

A: "I have especially appreciated opportunities to build and broaden my skills made possible by TBA and its experts: Tucson Bird Count, field trip leader training, bird banding training and practice, as well as attending field trips led by TBA's terrific volunteer guides. TBA has been my "gateway" to becoming a more capable and confident volunteer birder and naturalist, so now I have extended my passion from birding as a personal hobby to volunteering for activities that enable me to educate and engage with other adults to help them enjoy and appreciate our area's birds." —**Laura Couchman, volunteer of 3 years**

Q: What skills or expertise do you bring to Tucson Bird Alliance that you think contributes to our conservation goals?

A: "I am retired from a career in Architecture/Commercial Interior Design and have been an artist my entire adult life. I am passionate about birds and creating/preserving healthy habitat for them here in the desert. I enjoy meeting people and discussing the important efforts TBA makes on behalf of birds and the environment." —**Kathleen Benyak, volunteer of 4 years**

Q: Tell us about your passion for conservation or your experience as a volunteer at Tucson Bird Alliance:

A: "I have a passion for the natural history of the Southwest—birds, mammals, amphibians, reptiles, fishes, invertebrates, and plants—and the conservation of all those things. So my field trips typically involve multi-tasking and sharing my knowledge of the many living things we find. I love the borderlands and I've led multi-day trips for TBA to Rancho El Aribabi, Sonora. I would like to take people south of the border again, perhaps Rancho Los Fresnos, Rancho Esmeralda, or Cajon Bonito." —**James Rorabaugh, volunteer of 15 years**

Q: What are your goals with Tucson Bird Alliance?

A: "To help others get as excited about birding as I am and to get more people to notice the amazing birds that are all around us in Southern Arizona. When they pay attention, hopefully they will care about protecting the birds, wildlife, and the environment." —**Peggy Steffens, volunteer of 4 years**

Q: What are your passions and goals with Tucson Bird Alliance?

A: "I love the work being done at the Paton Center for Hummingbirds to restore the habitat along Sonoita Creek riparian area. In today's environment, birds and bird habitats need protection and it is rewarding for me to do that work and help others understand the need for these protections." —**Wayne Smith, volunteer of 2 years**

WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR DEDICATED VOLUNTEERS?
SEE ADDITIONAL Q&As AT **TUCSONBIRDS.ORG/MEETVOLUNTEERS.**

INTERESTED IN BECOMING A TUCSON BIRD ALLIANCE VOLUNTEER?
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Laura Couchman, Kathleen Benyak, James Rorabaugh, Peggy Steffens, Wayne Smith

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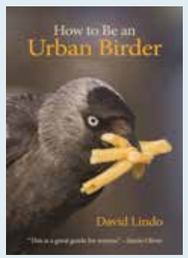
Checklist of Birds of Southeast Arizona
$1.50

Now that you've read all about listing and the different ways to do it, you might be fiending to get your hands on a list yourself! TBA has this excellent checklist of local birds, printed on cardstock.

Tucson Bird Alliance Logo T-shirt
$25.00

Printed on organic cotton in collaboration with The Gloo Factory, this light and breezy t-shirt is a great way to show support for Tucson Bird Alliance—in comfort!



How to Be an Urban Birder
$18.95

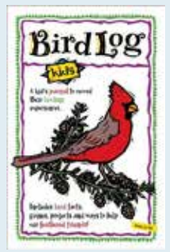
If you find yourself stuck in the city, don't worry! David Lindo's guide, *How to be an Urban Birder*, has all the tricks and tips you'll need to keep birding, whether you're in London or Tucson! Birds are everywhere and Lindo will help you find where they cohabitate with us in cities.

Starlings: The Curious Odyssey of a Most Hated Bird
$24.95

Has there ever been a more hated bird than the European Starling? Mike Stark answers this question and details the history of this curious bird and its impact on humans.

2026 Audubon Songbirds Calendar
$17.99

The Audubon Songbirds calendar is back, just in time for the New Year! Delight your morning with a new bird every single day. This extra large calendar is a wonderful way to track and learn your birds!



Bird Log for Kids
$10.00

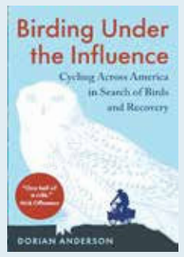
Many adult birders find themselves wishing they'd kept track of the species they've seen throughout their childhoods. This logbook is an excellent tool to encourage your kids to take notes about the birds in their environment!

Tucson Bird Alliance
Vermilion Flycatcher Kids Shirt
$20.00

Our classic Vermilion Flycatcher tee is back in the shop and now available in kids' sizes! It's never too early to learn about birding, and it's never too soon to wear your first bird shirt. Printed in the USA by Atlas Screenprinting on cotton.

The Southwest Native Plant Primer
$24.99

As the Southwest grows in population, so does our need for water. *The Southwest Native Plant Primer* is an awesome guide that will teach you how to sustain 235 plant species that thrive in our arid region. It's suitable for gardeners of any skill level.



Birding Under the Influence
$24.95

Some people call listing an "unhealthy obsession." Dorian Anderson might call it one of the best decisions of his life! *Birding Under the Influence* is Anderson's memoir about his journey from a neuroscience researcher with substance abuse issues to completing a big bird year on a bicycle.

Montezuma Quail Trivet
$40.00

Montezuma Quail are seen on more wishlists than they are in person. If you want to enjoy their gorgeous, intricate, harlequin faces all year long, we have just the decorative trivet for you. Locally made by Carly Quinn studios in collaboration with Wil Taylor!

4oz Seed Mixes
by The Native Seed Company
$12.50

One of the best ways to bird is to bring the birds to you, and what bird can resist a garden full of native vegetation? The Native Seed Company produces high quality seed mixes, perfect for your Sonoran Desert gardening goals!

Oriole Picnic Table Feeder
$22.00

Feeding birds with seed and nectar is wonderful, but have you ever tried oranges? This feeder attracts not only orioles, but also mockingbirds, tanagers, grosbeaks, woodpeckers, and more! Your backyard birding list is sure to grow.

Gambel's Quail Field Bag
$34.00

It can be tough juggling binoculars, field guides, water bottles, checklists, and phones while birding. Thankfully this field bag by Women of the Cloud Forest is designed for this exact purpose.

Embroidered Cap by EcoWear
$16.00

Designed by Tell Hicks, the Nature Shop has dozens of caps to choose from, featuring birds, reptiles, and flora. These rustic hats are sure to make any nature lover's day! Check them out online or in-store.

TUCSON BIRD ALLIANCE

BIRDS & COMMUNITY

Find details and registration for events and workshops at TUCSONBIRDS.ORG/EVENTS and for field trips at TUCSONBIRDS.ORG/FIELDTRIPS.

October, Date TBD
FALL NATIVE PLANT SALE
Stay tuned for details!

Sunday, October 12, 6–8pm
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 Tucson Bird Alliance!

Saturday, October 25, 9am
SANTA CRUZ RIVER PARK CLEAN UP in Barrio Hollywood
Connect to the Santa Cruz River and foster stewardship through education and trash removal. This event is in partnership with Unitarian Universalists Baja 4, Sonoran Institute, Tucson Clean and Beautiful, Tucson Bird Alliance, and The Wilderness Society. There will be music, food trucks, & more!

Sunday, October 26, Field Trip
PATAGONIA-SONOITA CREEK PRESERVE with Donito Burgess
$35/Members, $50/Nonmembers
This Nature Conservancy property and trail system provides access to a mixed habitat of riparian area, mesquite bosque, and grassland. Highlights may include Gray Hawk, Wild Turkey, Vermilion Flycatcher, Inca Dove, or a visiting Violet-crowned Hummingbird. Limited to 8 participants. Trail fees apply.

Tuesday, November 13, Virtual Event
ADVENTURES IN CHILE with Luke Safford
Join Luke as he shares stories and pictures of his recent Tucson Bird Alliance trip to Chile with Sabrewing Nature Tours. Will he get seasick while looking for albatrosses, petrels, and shearwaters? How amazing will it be to see the colony of King Penguins in Useless Bay? What is birding like in the Andes Mountains? These questions will be answered through the stories of the participants and might whet your appetite for a Chilean excursion of your own.

Friday, November 14, Field Trip
PATAGONIA LAKE STATE PARK with Luke Safford
$35/member, $50/non-member
Patagonia Lake is one of the best places in Arizona to bird and offers a good selection of waterfowl, raptors, and songbirds. We'll hit the "Birding Trail," the campground, lake, and end with a steep walk down to the dam/spillway area to look for loons, gulls, and mergansers. Limited to 10 participants.

Saturday, November 15, Field Workshop
BRAND NEW TO BIRDING FIELD WORKSHOP
At Sweetwater Wetlands with Alex Patia
$35 for members/ $50 for non-members

Sunday, November 16, Field Workshop
ADVANCED BIRDING SERIES: WELCOME BACK WINTER WATERFOWL!
At Sweetwater Wetlands with Alex Patia
$35 for members/ $50 for non-members

Monday, November 17, 6–8:30pm
PAINTING & VINO PRESENTS ART FOR BIRDS in Support of Tucson Bird Alliance
Eat, sip, and paint for a cause at Bawker Bawker Cider! This will be a creative, fun-filled evening of painting, socializing, and fundraising for Tucson Bird Alliance.

Thursday, November 20, 3–5pm
WINTER ROOST HOLIDAY PARTY at the Mason Center
Celebrate another year with Tucson Bird Alliance at our annual membership potluck!

Tuesday, December 2, Virtual Event
TODD NETTELHORST, Presented by Hunt's Photo & Video
Step beyond the freeze and explore the breathtaking beauty of motion blur in bird, wildlife, and nature photography. This dynamic presentation reveals how movement can become a powerful storytelling tool—capturing the grace of a soaring bird, the rhythm of a rushing stream, or the energy of a wind-swept landscape. Featuring real-world examples and practical tips, this session is perfect for photographers ready to elevate their nature work with emotion, artistry, and story-driven blur.

Friday, December 5, Field Trip
WHITEWATER DRAW with Luke Safford
$35/member, $50/non-member
An oasis in the middle of the Chihuahuan desert grassland, Whitewater Draw is known for its amazing numbers of wintering Sandhill Cranes (10,000+), waterfowl (Snow Goose, Northern Pintail, possible Ross's Goose) and raptors (Northern Harrier, Ferruginous Hawk, possible Bald Eagle). We'll also bird Coffman Road for Scaled Quail, raptors, thrashers, and sparrows. Limited to 12 participants.

Thursday, December 11, Virtual Event
WHERE TO GO BIRDING THIS WINTER with Luke Safford
Trying to figure out a new birding hotspot to check out this winter? Join Luke as he explores prime Southeast Arizona birding locations and gives you the info to maximize your experiences.

Tucson Bird Alliance would like to give a big thank you to Sharon Arkin of Bed and Bagels of Tucson, a bird- and birder-friendly B&B. Her generous donation allowed us to purchase a spotting scope to use on field trips. Thank you, Sharon!

In 2026, Victor Emanuel Nature Tours will turn 50! We're planning a big event in our home state of Texas, in one of America's greatest birding areas, the Upper Texas Coast. Throughout the month of April, few other regions of the country offer such splendid birding combined with easy access to diverse locations. Go birding with a host of our tour leaders, enjoy guest speakers, attend book signings, sample Swarovski optics, and catch up with friends from previous tours. Reserve your space now, as this event is selling out!

VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS

www.ventbird.com ■ 800.328.VENT ■ 512.328.5221 ■ info@ventbird.com

APRIL 19-24, 2026

Our 50th Anniversary

American Oystercatcher © Brian E. Kushner • Yellow Warbler © John L. Absher • Roseate Spoonbills © Bonnie Taylor Barry • CST 2049958-50

Celebration Speakers

Jennifer Ackerman, best-selling author of *What an Owl Knows* and other ornithology books, and contributing writer to *Scientific American, National Geographic,* and *The New York Times*

Kenn Kaufman, author, naturalist, conservationist, artist, and one of the world's best-known bird experts; author of *The Birds That Audubon Missed* and other bird and natural history books; and originator and editor of the *Kaufman Field Guide* series

Scott Weidensaul, ornithologist and author of more than 30 books on natural history, including *A World on the Wing: The Global Odyssey of Migratory Birds*

Ed Yong, British-American science journalist, Pulitzer Prize winner, and author of the *New York Times* best-seller *An Immense World*

50th Anniversary Celebration
April 19-24, 2026
Limit: 112

Jasper / East Texas Pre-trip
April 16-19
Limit: 14

Galveston / Coastal Extension
April 24-27
Limit: 14

Find Rosemary Mosco's fun new book *The Birding Dictionary* in the Tucson Bird Alliance Nature Shop!

BIRD NEWS DELIVERED TO YOUR INBOX!

Southeast Arizona is a bird-busy place. Hear about the latest sightings and events and get to know our local birds with Tucson Bird Alliance's weekly updates.

Sign up today at **TUCSONBIRDS.ORG/ENEWS**

Did you know that Tucson Bird Alliance is an independent chapter of National Audubon?

What does that mean?

We are an independent 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. Our goals often overlap with National Audubon but we have local priorities and separate finances.

How can I support Tucson Bird Alliance?

There are many ways to give and **all financial support stays in Southeast Arizona!** We've provided our organization's information below.

Legal Name: Tucson Audubon Society (DBA Tucson Bird Alliance)
Mailing Address:
Tucson Bird Alliance
PO Box 91770
Tucson, AZ, 85752
Phone: (520) 629-0510
Tax ID#: 86-6053779

For more info, visit **tucsonbirds.org/donate** or email efreese@tucsonbirds.org.

Ways to Give

- Donor-Advised Funds
- Planned Giving
- Stocks, Bonds & Mutual Funds
- IRAs & More!

westgate GARDEN DESIGN

Designing Habitat at Home Landscapes Since 2016

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Charlene Westgate
charlene@westgategardendesign.com
(520) 829-0399

The National Audubon Society has conducted Christmas bird counts since 1900. Volunteers from across North America and beyond take to the field during one calendar day between December 14 and January 5 to record every bird species and individual bird encountered within a designated 15-mile diameter circle. These records now comprise an extensive ornithological database that enables monitoring of winter bird populations and the overall health of the environment.

All skill levels welcome! Help is needed on all of these counts, so find one (or more) that interests you and contact the compiler to join a team. **Check TUCSONBIRDS.ORG/CBC for the latest on count dates and compilers.**

TUCSON AND SOUTHEAST ARIZONA COUNTS

TUCSON VALLEY
The Tucson Valley Christmas Bird Count will celebrate its 54th year on Tuesday, December 16, 2025!

SANTA CATALINA MOUNTAINS
The count circle encompasses Tanque Verde Creek, Summerhaven, Sabino and Ventana Canyons, and Redington Pass.

AVRA VALLEY
PATAGONIA
SAFFORD
NOGALES
ST. DAVID
ATASCOSA HIGHLANDS
RAMSEY CANYON
BUENOS-AIRES NWR
GREEN VALLEY–MADERA CANYON
PORTAL
DUDLEYVILLE
APPLETON-WHITTELL
AJO-CABEZA PRIETA
LUKEVILLE
ORGAN PIPE CACTUS NM

ADDITIONAL ARIZONA COUNTS

SALT-VERDE RIVERS
PRESCOTT
HAVASU NWR
GILA RIVER
BILL WILLIAMS RIVER NWR
SEDONA
HASSAYAMPA RIVER
JEROME
GRAND CANYON
CHINO VALLEY
PHOENIX-TRES RIOS
SUPERIOR
PHOENIX METRO
CAREFREE
FLAGSTAFF-MOUNT ELDEN
TIMBER MESA
CAMP VERDE
PAYSON
LAKE PLEASANT
MORMON LAKE
TONTO NM-ROOSEVELT LAKE
GLEN CANYON
MARTINEZ LAKE-YUMA
WILLOW BEACH

Join Us at the Winter Roost Holiday Party!

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 3–5 PM

Mason Center for Ironwood Preservation and Environmental Education
3835 W Hardy Rd, Tucson, AZ 85742

Come celebrate another year with Tucson Bird Alliance at our annual membership potluck. Please bring your favorite, small dish to share and a notecard with ingredients.

Bring cash if you wish to participate in our 50/50 raffle, with a good chance to win half the pot!

Let's enjoy an afternoon of friendship, conversation, and good food!

Watch for details coming soon.

GIFTS IN HONOR OR MEMORY OF

In memory of Al Larson, the “Bluebird Man,” from Debbie Wiggins

In memory of Alexandra Labenz from Janet Funk, Sondra Myers, and Aggie & Bart Turecki

In memory of Anne Jansen from Donna Harvey & Jennifer Krhovsky

In memory of Barbara Bailey Wellner from Carolyn Rich

In memory of Ben Tuttle from Sheri & Turner Martin

In memory of Bernice Burgess from Don Burgess

In memory of Bill Stocku from Carol & Jack Padalino

In memory of Billy Joe Case from Martha Powers & Larry Gomberg

In honor of Brian Gibbons from Caroline Jones

In memory of Carma & Harvey Ragan from Daryl Ragan

In memory of Carolyn Honer from Ann Beeghly

In memory of Charlene Shaklee Pease from Margery & Roger Pease

In memory of Cisco Allison from Andrew Allison

In memory of David Garibotti from Carrie Garibotti

In honor of Donna & David Litton from Karen Brown

In memory of Doris Johnson from Jeff Johnson

In memory of Helena Helton from Linda Fratello

In memory of Holly Keppel from Joseph Ciaramitaro

In memory of Jay Bogiatto from Haley Mirts

In memory of Jeanne & Ray Turner from Linda & Justin Turner

In honor of Jim Hoagland from Stephanie Kapolnek

In honor of Jim Levy from Ricardo Small

To John Dawson from Julee Dawson

To Judy Miller & Frank Tamsen from Connie Frank

In memory of Judy Storry from Kim Beckwith

In honor of Kyle Donovan from Rebecca Biasell

In memory of Leigh Fox Fletcher from Marleigh Fletcher

In memory of Marc Miller from Barbara Hansen

In memory of Ramie “the Raimster” Fisher from Marcella Caldwell

In memory of Robert Milby from Bevin Alison LyBarger

In honor of Roy Loewenstein from Alana Stubbs & Roy Loewenstein

In honor of Sandra Leigh Damon from Phil Damon

In memory of Teddy Sen from Sonia Sen

In memory of Wayne Collins from Ellen Blackstone

Osprey, BN Singh

In keeping with this issue’s theme, read through this list and see how many ways you are a supporter of Tucson Bird Alliance and our mission. We have the first one already checked off for you!

TUCSON BIRD ALLIANCE SUPPORTER CHECKLIST

- [x] Read the *Vermilion Flycatcher*
- [ ] Become a Tucson Bird Alliance member
- [ ] Give monthly or annually
- [ ] Be a Vermilion Legacy Society member by including us in your estate planning
- [ ] Visit the Paton Center for Hummingbirds, 477 Pennsylvania Ave, Patagonia
- [ ] Visit the Mason Center, 3835 W Hardy Rd, Tucson
- [ ] Visit the Nature Shop in-person or online: 300 E University Blvd. #120, Tucson; TUCSONBIRDS.ORG/SHOP
- [ ] Plant native plants
- [ ] Put up a nestbox
- [ ] Remove invasive plants
- [ ] Put out water for critters
- [ ] Don’t use rat poison
- [ ] Keep your cats indoors or on a leash
- [ ] Volunteer with us
- [ ] Attend an event or class
- [ ] Go on a birding field trip
- [ ] Install window decals to prevent bird strikes
- [ ] Cap or report a vertical open “death pipe”
- [ ] Join the Habitat at Home program
- [ ] Hire us to design, install, and maintain native-plant landscape
- [ ] Hire us for invasive plant mapping and treatment
- [ ] Participate in the Tucson Bird Count or another bird survey
- [ ] Sign up for Action Alerts to speak up for birds
- [ ] Participate in Birdathon, our annual peer-to-peer fundraising campaign
- [ ] Attend the Southeast Arizona Birding Festival
- [ ] Sign up for the weekly eblast
- [ ] Follow us on social media: @TUCSONBIRDALLIANCE

Thank you all for your continued support and commitment to creating an environment where birds and people can thrive.

With gratitude,

Erica Freese
Director of Development & Communications
efreese@tucsonbirds.org

Put up a Lucy’s Warbler nestbox, Paula Redinger; Plant native plants; Cap death pipes; Install window decals; Provide water for wildlife, Erica Freese; Go on a birding trip, Steve Valasek

Tucson Bird Alliance

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Become a Tucson Bird Alliance Member!

Starting at $40

Visit:
tucsonbirds.org/membership
or scan.

Lucy's Warbler,
Joan Gellatly

New membership benefit!

Members now receive **10% off binoculars & scopes** from the Nature Shop. Plus, we ship anywhere in the US!