



## MARCH-APRIL EDITION 2020

### Out on a Limb:

**Migrations** by Tom Jernigan (WMAS Chapter Vice President)

For several years Purple Martins have come to roost in an old pine snag on our property. We have enjoyed having them. Each morning around 8 am chirping sounds like a loud bird convention came to us from their tree house as they braced themselves before setting out to catch bugs in the air for themselves and their young. During the day their characteristic warbling chirps were heard as they swooped and swirled in the air above our house.

Alas, the pine snag blew down this past fall and we probably won't see them here anymore. We will miss them. They used to arrive from South America on April 17 and leave on their return journey on August 10. I don't know how they kept track of time.

A few weeks ago on a trail in Panama we were lucky to see a beautiful Quetzal land on a limb in clear view in front of us. It sat there and showed us its colors for several minutes. A companion bird, similar, but without the long tail feathers was nearby pecking out a hole in a tree branch. We assumed it was the female Quetzal.

Later, a birding guide that we met on the trail told us more about the Quetzal. The companion bird we saw was not the female he said, but a juvenile male. The Quetzals migrate from a higher elevation following the ripening of the little avocados that they eat. The males likely came down from about 8000 ft. elevation to the 5500 ft. level that we were on to hollow out potential nest holes for the females. Soon the females would follow and select a nesting site and the male that prepared it. The next summer season the birds would migrate back to higher elevations following the ripening mini avocados. You have to travel a little further than the White Mountains to see this migration.

Photo of a Quetzal by Tom Jernigan



**White Mountain Audubon Society (WMAS) 2020 Chapter Officers:**

President: Mary Ellen Bittorf	367-2462
Vice-President: Tom Jernigan	532-1510
Secretary: Liz Jernigan	532-1510
Treasurer: Chuck Bittorf	367-2462
Field Trips: Rob Bettaso	368-8481
Newsletter: Rob Bettaso	368-8481
Webmaster: Alan Vickers	
Membership: Mary Freemon	205-8597

**Board Members (2020):**

Mary Ellen Bittorf, Chuck Bittorf, Tom Jernigan, Liz Jernigan, Joan Patrick, Mary Freemon, Rob Bettaso, Mary Williams.

## CALENDAR

All monthly programs/meetings begin at 6:30 pm on the first Wednesday of the month (except in January and February). Please note that all upcoming meetings are at the Pinetop-Lakeside Town Council Chambers, 325 W. White Mountain Blvd until future notice.

You may call Mary Ellen Bittorf (928) 367-2462 or Liz Jernigan (928-532-1511) for more information on monthly meetings and special events. For information on field trips please direct your calls to Rob Bettaso (928-368-8481).

Please note: both our full 2020 monthly programs and our monthly field trips are currently under development. But this much we do know:

Programs:

**MARCH 4** Kristoffer Van Atten, local beekeeper, will be discussing the story of man and the bee, from prehistory to contemporary methods, perils, and pitfalls in harvesting the liquid gold.

**APRIL 1** Rob Bettaso will show slides from his 3 week trip to Patagonia (Argentina & Chile) this past Oct/Nov. The trip included a 5 day backpacking trip as well as numerous long day hikes in the National Parks and other protected lands of the region. The birds of the region will also be discussed. The presentation should take approximately 30 minutes plus a Q&A period.

**MAY 6** Mary Williams will tell us about the birding world's annual Global Big Day on May 9. We will look at the best spots in Navajo and Apache Counties to tally the most species on that day as well as year round. We also will be reminded of how to enter them on eBird. It should be especially interesting for those who have never used or seldom use this online program that not only makes us citizen scientists but also keeps track of our lists and helps us be better birders.

Field Trips:

**April 18 – Alchey National Fish Hatchery:** participants will meet at 7am at the Arizona Game and Fish Department parking lot (2878 E. White Mountain Blvd; Pinetop). From there we will caravan/carpool to the birding trails at the hatchery which is located on White Mountain Apache Reservation about 30 minutes from Pinetop.

### Tips for Beginning Birders (Part 4, Bird Vocalizations). by Rob Bettaso

Bird vocalization refers to both bird songs & calls. Songs are used primarily for courtship & territoriality (but I like to think that they are also sung for sheer joy). Calls are used for many reasons including warnings, keeping the flock together, socializing, parent-progeny bonding, mate bonding, distraction/deception, pain/distress, & contentment (I'm speculating on this last one, but it's hard not to hear a dove's cooing as an indicator of contentment).

For us, the birders (and/or the bird admirers) the vocalizations serve several vital purposes: helping to locate the bird, helping to identify the bird, helping to know if particular behaviors are occurring (e.g. mobbing, mating duets, etc), helping to wake us up in the morning, helping to put us in a good/better mood, etc.

The old timers learned the vocalizations by paying close attention to where the vocalization came from, then finding the bird, then noting what the vocalization reminded them of (using comparisons, mnemonics, phonic representations, musical notation, or just raw memorization). Modern technology has allowed us to record and playback bird vocalizations (beginning with tape & vinyl, then CD, and now digitally on smartphones etc).

Some folks have an aptitude for bird vocalization and can seemingly learn them with little effort. Others (myself included) need to hear most vocalizations over and over and still have a difficult time keeping them straight (e.g. a robin, black-headed grosbeak, and W. tanager all have somewhat similar sounding songs). My tip is to start locally and with only a target number of 3-5 species. Learn those till you know them with certainty prior to moving on to try and learn the next batch of 3-5. Create your own mnemonic or other recall trick to make the vocalization memorable to you.

Keep in mind that there are geographical differences between some vocalizations (i.e. a spotted towhee may make one vocalization in Michigan, but a significantly different one here in Arizona). Like people, birds have dialects, accents, and even different sounds for the same purpose. Also keep in mind that birds make sounds that are not related to their vocal chords (e.g. wing whirs, feather ruffling, vibrating membranes, foot scraping, bill clacking, winnowing, etc).

Last comment: the use of play-back of bird vocalizations to attract (and/or reveal) birds in the field is highly controversial, as some conservationists and ornithologists think that it can do harm to individual birds and possibly to populations and even species. My advice is to minimize the use of play-back and NOT to use it at all during critical times of the year (mating/nesting/rearing young) or in areas of high birder visitation. If you think you are the only person who is going to be using a vocalization play-back and therefore what harm can it do, well, you are fooling yourself. I also think you are more likely to remember a bird vocalization if you put in the effort to actually find the bird you hear vocalizing (and it is a very rewarding experience to “bag” a bird by doing the hard work of deep listening, stalking, observing, and using your own brain to associate the newly identified vocalization with a known sound, phrase, idiom, or cadence).

## **Something to Consider from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology**

7 Simple Ways to Help Birds (the 7 point list below is a repeat/refresher from last Newsletter but further below we focus, for the first time, on item number 2):

- 1. Make Windows Safer, Day and Night

Simple adjustments to your windows can save birds' lives.

- 2. Keep Cats Indoors

Indoor cats live longer, healthier lives. Outdoor cats kill more birds than any other non-native threat.

- 3. Reduce Lawn by Planting Native Species

The U.S. has 63 million acres of lawn. That's a huge potential for supporting wildlife.

- 4. Avoid Pesticides

Look for organic food choices and cut out some of the 1 billion pounds of pesticides used in the U.S. each year.

- 5. Drink Coffee That's Good for Birds

Shade-grown coffees are delicious, economically beneficial to farmers, and help more than 42 species of North American songbirds.

- 6. Protect Our Planet From Plastics

91% of plastics are not recycled, and they take 400 years to degrade.

- 7. Watch Birds, Share What You See

Bird watchers are one of science's most vital sources of data on how the ecological world is faring.

## Seven Simple Actions to Help Birds (Second in a Series)



Keep your cat indoors and save cats and birds. Photo by [Gadio Sevilla](#) via Creative Commons.

### 2. Keep Cats Indoors

The challenge: Cats are estimated to kill more than 2.6 billion birds annually in the U.S. and Canada ([source](#)). This is the #1 human-caused reason for the loss of birds, aside from habitat loss.

The cause: Cats can make great pets, but more than 110 million feral and pet cats now roam in the United States and Canada ([source 1](#), [source 2](#)). These nonnative predators instinctively hunt and kill birds even when well fed.

A solution that's good for cats and birds: Save birds and keep cats healthy by keeping cats indoors or creating an outdoor "catio." You can also train your cat to walk on a leash.

Take it further: Speak out about the impacts of feral cat colonies in your neighborhood and on public lands. Unowned cats' lives may be as short as two years because of disease and hardship, and they are responsible for more than two-thirds of birds killed by cats in the United States. ([source 1](#), [source 2](#)).

## UPDATES & REMINDERS:

Have you paid your annual membership dues? If not, a friendly reminder that WMAS relies on membership dues for such important Chapter actions as our annual Scholarship Awards to White Mountain area graduating seniors who have expressed an interest in pursuing a career in natural history, conservation, and other related fields. Thank you for helping us to continue to make such programs a regular part of our Chapter mission. Note that the Donation form is at the end of every Newsletter.

Also, if you are not a member of the National Audubon Society, we encourage all Chapter members to join the national organization. Information on joining the national organization is easy as you only need to type "National Audubon Society" into your internet search engine to obtain the simple instructions for joining.

At our December meeting we opened the floor to nominations for 2020 Officer and Board member positions for the Chapter. Amongst those in attendance, no nominations were offered, nor had any nominations been made in advance of the meeting. So, the new Board/Officers are as they were in the previous year with the exception of the addition of Mary Williams to the Board. That said, you should always feel free to offer your assistance to the Board. For that matter, there are some on the Board who are interested in moving on from the Board to focus on other aspects of their lives, so, we are always interested in hearing about anyone who might want to accept the fun challenges of filling a Board or Officer position!

### **Some Other Recent Bird Sightings From Around Our Region:**

Earliest Spring is in the air and first migrants are beginning to move into our area while others are merely passing through. Things can change rapidly at this time of year, so keep an eye out for new arrivals, departures, and passers-through.

P.S. While "e-bird" is generally the most efficient way for our members to learn of bird sightings in our area, you can also feel free to give me a call if you are looking for a particular species or are trying to follow-up on birds that you have heard have recently been reported in the our area (Rob: 928-368-8481 and please leave a message so that I can return your call).

## Membership/Donation Form

White Mountain Audubon Society chapter membership dues are: Individual \$15 or Family \$25 per year. Please renew your membership every January. Your tax-deductible membership supports our on-going programs and activities, as well as future new projects. Your membership and donations do make a difference!

MEMBERSHIP \_\_\_\_\_ DONATION \_\_\_\_\_

Individual \_\_\_\_\_ Family \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Send this form and your dues or donation to: White Mountain Audubon Society; P.O. Box 3043; Pinetop, AZ 85935 You may use this form for either your Membership renewal or a Donation to WMAS. Please designate above which you are doing. Thank you very much for your support of White Mountain Audubon Society! LIKE US ON FACEBOOK.

**White Mountain Audubon Society**  
**P. O. Box 3043**