



JANUARY - FEBRUARY EDITION 2019

Out on a Limb with your President:

The year 2018 is now behind us and the year 2019 is upon us. I think it is safe to say that in 2019 we may be privileged to see a few new birds in our area that we haven't seen before. Climate change can cause this or other factors can also be involved. I'd like to give some thought to the birds I have seen here in both 2018 and early 2019. These include the lady who called about "2 large brown birds" in her backyard that turned out to be peacocks. There was also the call about the "beautiful ghost hummingbird" that was coming to a feeder in Show Low. I believe this little hummingbird was a leucistic black-chinned hummingbird. For a while we had a couple of brown creepers in our yard as well as one, possibly two, red-naped sapsuckers. Recently, during the 2019 Christmas Bird Count, Sue Sitko reported sighting four male wood ducks in one of our lakes. With the snow I have seen numerous crows, ravens, Steller's jays, hairy, acorn and occasional downy woodpeckers, flickers, nuthatches, Cassin's finches, juncos in large numbers and the list goes on. During the summer months we are treated to the beautiful colors of the western bluebird, black-headed grosbeak, western tanager, lesser goldfinch, Steller's jays and this list goes on. I think I can safely say that watching birds in the White Mountains is a year around enjoyable past time. With my diminished vision I am learning to enjoy even more, their calls and their beautiful songs. I encourage all individuals to be aware of the wonderful sights and sounds of nature.

I've always like John Denver, he had a beautiful voice and his songs still have meaning. Here is an example of one of his beautiful songs:

The Flower that Shattered the Stone

The Earth is our mother just turning around
With her trees in the forest and roots underground
Our father above us who's high is the wind
Paint us a rainbow without any end

As the river runs freely the mountain does rise
Let me touch with my fingers and see with my eyes
In the hearts of the children of pure love still roams
Like a bright star in heaven that lights our way home
Like the flower that shattered the stone

Sparrows find freedom beholding the Sun
In the engine and beauty we're all joined in one
I reach out before me and look to the sky

As the river runs freely the mountain does rise
Let me touch with my fingers and see with my eyes
In the hearts of the children of pure love still roams
Lie a bright star in heaven that lights our way home
Like the flower that shattered the stone
Like a bright star in heaven then lights our way home
Like the flower that shattered the stone

All of My Memories - the John Denver collection RCA Records
Songwriters: Joe Henry, John Jarvis

Enjoy birding.... MaryEllen

CALENDAR

All monthly meetings begin at 6:30 pm. Please note that all upcoming meetings are at the White Mountain Nature Center, 425 S. Woodland Lake Rd. (Lakeside) until future notice.

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

2019 Monthly Meetings: TBD (currently under development)

2019 Tentative Field Trip Schedule:

Monthly Bird Walks - geared for bird lovers of all skill levels and all ages. Hiking conditions variable but suitable for participants in reasonably good health interested in walks ranging from 1-3 miles. All welcome; no pets please. Bring binoculars, field guide, and appropriate apparel, gear, snacks and water for outdoor walking in the White Mountains area during the April through October time frame. For further information call Rob at 368-8481.

April 20th – Alchesay 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.

May 18th - Pintail Lake: participants will meet at 7am at the Pintail Lake parking area which is signed on Highway 77 a few miles North of Highway 60 (between Show Low and Taylor; east side of 77). Marsh birds and open water birds should be easily observed; especially for those with spotting scopes. Vantage points from boardwalk viewing areas.

June ? (TBA) - White Mountain Nature Center: participants will meet at 7am at the White Mountain Nature Center (425 S. Woodland Road, Pinetop-Lakeside). Bird varieties abound in the diverse habitats of the Nature Center and adjacent Woodland Lake Park grounds (natural terrain trails).

July 20th - Silver Creek State Fish Hatchery: participants will meet at 7am at the public parking area of Silver Ck Trout Hatchery located at the end of a short dirt road (Hatchery Way) east of Bourdon Ranch Road. Habitats include riparian, juniper-scrub, and open fields. No formal trails but easy and open strolling.

August 17th – Williams Creek 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 20 minutes from Pinetop.

September 21st - Sheep's Crossing Area: participants will meet at 7am near the bridge that crosses the West Fork of the Little Colorado River (WF-LCR) on the Apache Sitgreaves N.F. Take the turn off of Hwy 260 (heading south) that goes towards Sunrise (Highway 273) but stop at the LCR.

October 19th - Old Hatchery Trail: participants will meet at 7am at the Arizona Game and Fish Department parking lot (2878 E. White Mountain Blvd; Pinetop). This mixed woodland, riparian trail is less than a 2 mile roundtrip stroll along Billy Ck. It is a natural terrain trail and is moderately hilly in certain places.

Low Cost Tips for Beginning Birders (Part 2, The Field Guide). By Rob Bettaso

In the beginning was the Good Book. I'm naturally referring to A Field Guide to the Birds, by Roger Tory Peterson. And in that beginning, sometime way back in the 1930s, that was your only option for bird guides, and even then, it only covered the eastern half of the U.S.

Peterson is the original, the definitive, and the most influential field guide series ever; and has been followed by scores of imitators. As you might have guessed, I'm heavily biased towards the Peterson guides, owning every edition of his Western Bird Guide, except the first. But I have used many of the non-Peterson guides and in this, our 2nd part of Low Cost Tips for Beginning Birders, I will share some thoughts on several of the various options currently available.

Naturally, whatever guide you use will very much be a matter of personal preference. But let's remember one thing, if a book is to call itself a "field guide" it must at least adhere to one, all important feature: reasonable **portability**.

Of course, one person's "portable" can be another's "anchor around the neck." For me, my guide needs to fit in the back pocket of a standard pair of jeans. Personally, I simply don't want to carry it in my hands since the most urgent need for hands is in wielding one's binos. Nor do I want to have to remove a pack and dig through it to find my guide (this was especially true when I was first learning; as nearly every bird was new to me and had to be looked up).

Second, a guide should contain **photos and/or illustrations** depicting the **birds of the area** where you will do most of your birding (e.g. eastern, western, or a regional portion of the U.S.). There are even some state by state guides. Regardless of the geographic coverage of your guide, you should supplement it with a local checklist of the birds in the area you plan to explore (here in the White Mountains area we have a very useful checklist for the birds of the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest).

Another vital component of your guide would include the **physical features** of any given bird that aid in identification (arrows pointing to key features in the bird photos or illustrations, aka: "field marks"). In

addition to the field marks there should be text describing a bird's appearance and comparing/contrasting it with "**similar species.**"

Also, a visual or text description of which types of **habitat** the bird is most typically found in is also essential (remember though, birds fly and many species can be almost anywhere at any time). Somewhat related is a bird's **range**, which is the geographic area in which a bird typically occurs (text and/or maps are used to describe a bird's range, including whether a bird is found there during winter, summer, during migration (spring & fall), or year-round).

Also, a bird's **vocalizations** (songs and calls) are a vast and important realm of identification that will be addressed separately in our next part of this series (the March-April WMAS Newsletter). We will then wrap up our discussion of Field Guides by including on-line or app options.

In the meantime: check your library; Amazon & other on-line catalogs; guides used by friends and family; and other sources (e.g. the White Mountains Nature Center), so that you can get a feel for the different types of guides that are available. A short list of widely available hardcopy guides would include not only Peterson but also the following: The Golden Guides; National Geographic; Sibley; National Audubon Society; Stokes Guides; National Wildlife Federation; American Birding Association; Kaufmann Guides; Cornell University; various regional, state and local guides; etc.

Winter Birding at Petrified Forest National Park. By Sue Sitko

The winter sun barely peeked out above the horizon in the high desert grasslands of Petrified Forest National Park (PEFO) when biologist Pat Lopez held her GPS unit, pointed east, and said "this way!" Rob Bettaso, Pat, and I gave our hats one more tug over our ears, tightened our scarves over our chins, squinted into the sun, took a selfie, and hiked cross-country over hilly mounds of grass and hard-pan dirt sprinkled with charcs of petrified wood. Off to find a re-bar sticking out of the ground marking Point 1 of ten in our first Avian Point Count transect.

Pat, a biology teacher at Northland Pioneer Community College, had taken a sabbatical this fall and selected assisting the PEFO ecologist in a variety of tasks, from organizing decades of files documenting park ecology to conducting the necessary ongoing research projects that create those files. Bird surveys are one of these ongoing assessments, intended to detect overall population trends and changes to resources of interest at the park. The park conducts bird surveys in both the breeding season (late spring into early summer) and in winter, as there are distinct differences in overall species composition in these two time periods.

Pat contacted Rob and myself to help on these surveys, as they benefit from having multiple eyes seeking out bird movements in the grass, shrubs, rocks, and the occasional tree. At every point, a two-minute waiting period (to let birds re-settle after the commotion of people interrupting their routine) preceded the formal timed eight-minute count. Each bird is tallied by species, type of observance, and location in proximity to the center point on a transect form. After this count, we repeat the procedure at nine more points, spread 250 meters apart along a randomly-placed transect. Our goal was to conduct four transects, each taking approximately 3.5 hours. All transect results were tallied into the PEFO files and entered online at eBird (ebird.org).

We didn't complain about spending four winter mornings poking around backcountry areas of PEFO. Yes, it was cold! Yes, it was early! And yes, the birding was, shall we say, slower than anticipated. We

had some flashes of excitement as sage sparrows congregated at the tops of shrubs, facing the sun and trying to warm up (just like us), or when horned larks whistled as they flew by. Even a perky rock wren made an appearance, as did northern harrier, American kestrel, and a few other species. We didn't mind because no matter what, a day of birding is still better than, well, most any other day. We knew how lucky we were to stand amidst a 250-million-year-old landscape that includes the subtle beauty of petrified wood, a few early crocodylian bones, and the quiet, emerging warmth of the high desert sun.

What do YOU think was our most common bird? The answer can be found by solving this issue's Bird Riddle.

A Birder's Riddle. By Rob Bettaso

(Note: the answer to the riddle in our last issue was the Steller's Jay)

Oh give me that home,
Where prairie bison used to roam.
Also deserts & tundra & sandy dunes,
These habitats suit my gregarious platoons.

Upon the dirt we'll mostly feed,
We'll eat many bugs and different seeds.
Nesting too, is on the ground,
But seek my eggs, they shan't easily be found.

We run, we walk, we do not hop,
We'll soar so high, our ears will pop.
Flocks will fly with a tinkling song,
Also, our high-pitched "tsee-ee" is quite prolonged.

Ventrum white, dorsum brown,
Face black & yellow, a buffy crown.
Upon said crown, if you're really close,
El Diablo, we resemble most.

Overhead, we're mostly pale,
All except, our jet black tail.
Most striking of all,
Our long hind claw.

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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!

Photos by Sue Sitko of Bird Monitoring at Petrified Forest, N.P.



White Mountain Audubon Society

P. O. Box 3043