



OCTOBER EDITION 2023

Out on a Limb by Rob Bettaso (WMAS Board Member): The Aural World of Birding

The days are shorter now so I have to wait a couple of hours before it is light enough to walk out my front door and go birding. Occasionally I will spend some of that waiting period watching old TV Westerns. Somehow, I had missed seeing *Gunsmoke* back in its original airings or during its never-ending syndication as “re-runs;” but, happily, I have recently discovered it. I only watch episodes from its earlier seasons when the shows ran 30 minutes, were in black and white, and still had Dennis Weaver in the cast (playing the character “Chester”).

What caught my attention right away watching *Gunsmoke*, was that many of the scenes were filmed off the studio lot and out in the countryside (probably somewhere just outside of 1950’s Hollywood and not actually in Kansas, where the show was set). Today, *Gunsmoke*’s background sounds (wind, coyotes, birds, etc) seem authentic and perhaps even spontaneous. Among the birds I’ve noticed vocalizing in the background are meadowlarks, House Finches, mockingbirds, & various corvids.

The aural world of birds is every bit as interesting & exciting as is the visual. Because I have never had a “smart phone,” I don’t have the capacity to use automated bird vocalization ID tools (the Cornell University software “Merlin” being the best known example). Many (most?) of the folks who join me on my 3rd and 4th Saturday bird walks every month use Merlin; though some only take furtive peeks at it while other tend to forget they even have it at their disposal.

I’ve recently begun asking field trip participants to keep an eye on their Merlin app so that we can all benefit from knowing which birds we might be hearing (especially for those times where nobody in our group has a clue as to which species is vocalizing). Merlin is not infallible, but it does seem to be very much worth using, at least as a preliminary guide.

My other request of participants is that they please do not shout out the species name that Merlin has offered, but rather, quietly catch the attention of me and/or the group (a hand slowly raised high is one good way) and then quietly tell us what Merlin has suggested. Hopefully, by doing things this way, we won’t frighten off the singer/caller, and we will be able to track him/her down so that we all can help in making a positive identification as to the species.

So far, it seems that Merlin is doing an admirable job of alerting on (and tentatively identifying) various birds, which means, that nobody today need resort to the methods used by the old-time ornithologists, who sometimes did their bird identifications with the assistance of a shotgun (a bird in the hand, being

much easier to ID than one flitting in a bush). I like to think that our NOT using birdshot would appeal to Chester, Matt Dillon, Miss Kitty and the other inhabitants of Dodge City.

White Mountain Audubon Society (WMAS) 2023 Chapter Officers:

President: Mary Williams 480-235-1792
Vice-President: Tom Jernigan 928-892-3004
Secretary: Liz Jernigan 928-245-8633
Treasurer: Tom Jernigan 928-892-3004
Field Trips: Rob Bettaso 928-368-8481
Newsletter: Rob Bettaso 928-368-8481
Membership: Susie Walker 480-205-6119
Webmaster: Alan Vickers

2023 Board Members:

Mary Williams, Tom Jernigan, Liz Jernigan, Mary Freemon, Susie Walker, Gerry Hodge, Carol Axford, & Rob Bettaso.



President’s Corner by Mary Williams:

Have you had a Funky Experience? If you know to what I am referring, you might be asking ‘Do birds belong in cages?’ My answer as a birder and bird lover is ‘Yes, some do.’

I recently won an opportunity at the White Mountain Nature Center’s Raptor Free-Flight Show. My ‘Funky Experience’ enabled me to come into the raptor facility enclosure with Certified Professional Trainers and rehabbers, John Glitsos and Balinda Strosnider. As you can tell by the photos below, I totally enjoyed getting up close and personal with the magnificent resident birds in one of their daily 3:00 training, feeding and informational presentations at this community and tourist attraction in Pinetop-Lakeside. (More than 4,800 people have attended programs thus far in 2023.)

Holding the Eurasian Eagle Owl, Funky, on my gloved arm made it possible to really appreciate the beautiful and attentive intelligence in his eyes, his interesting and intricate feather patterns, and his intimidating talons. His six-foot-wingspan flight over my head – as well as the rapid darting flight of the colorful small Aplomado Falcon Astro – was breathtaking. Windy too.

Seven birds have found homes at the Nature Center. Yes, they’re caged. However, they are not able to be released into the wild – either because they could not be totally rehabilitated from injuries or because they were raised in captivity. And they certainly look happy flying every day and having a very reliable food source from people who care for them and respect them, using a choice-based, positive reinforcement training program that relies on their natural behaviors. They’re ambassadors.

It is an established scientific fact that our wild bird populations have declined by the billions in the past few decades. When considering ways to help stop the decline, I’m reminded of a statement on the

Nature Center website: 'Nothing inspires conservation action and appreciation of the nature around us more than experiencing it first hand with an expert at your side.'

My hope is that the 4800+ people who attend the Free Flight programs will develop a greater awareness and enjoyment of wild birds and work toward the goals of organizations such as the Nature Center and White Mountain Audubon to help conserve their habitats and save them from the other reasons for their decline.

All who work with the educational ambassador bird program are volunteers. The food bill is more than \$1800/month. (They can't use just any old dead mouse or rat, you know, since they may have been poisoned and would poison the raptors.) A new facility, with special outdoor 'choice' cages for each of the birds and a large outdoor as well as indoor free flight enclosure, will open there in late October. I plan to check it out with a \$50 donation so that I can again get up close and personal with those marvelous birds. (Although the daily sessions are free, the very smart American Crow, Azul, loves to collect dollar bills – after she says 'hi,' chuckles and imitates a Harris Hawk!) Will you too check it out? Wishing you good birding and many blessings, Mary



Photo by Ron Miller



Photo by Susie Walker

Mary also has the following field trips and on-going classes to announce:

October 5: Sipe White Mountain Wildlife Area. Meet to carpool/convoy at 6:30 at the Nature Center or at 7:30 at the gravel lot to the north behind the Circle K at the intersection of Hwys 260/60/190/181 in

Eagar. Or be at the parking area at the Sipe Visitor Center around 8:30 to meet those who will bird along the 5-mile gravel road down to it. Bring lunch.

November 2: White Mountain Nature Center. 7:00.

December 7: Woodland Lake Park. 7:30. Meet at the athletic field parking area. (Weather permitting.)



Becker Lake 2023 Photos by Fely Earl

Let's Go Birding! with the White Mountain Audubon Society

PowerPoint Presentations by Mary Williams, President

Round Valley Public Library

Fridays 3:00 – 4:30

August 25, September 22, October 27, 2024: April, May, June, July, August, September, October



Becker Lake 2023 Photos by Jerry Earl

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WMAS OCTOBER CALENDAR:

For 2023 we expect that **all monthly programs** will continue to start at **6:30 pm on the first Wednesday of the month (except in January, February & March when there are no meetings)**. The programs are free and open to all. You may call **Liz Jernigan (928-532-1511)** for more information on monthly programs and special events. Monthly meetings are **held at the White Mountain Nature Center, 425 Woodland Road, Pinetop-Lakeside.**



October 4th: Gerry & Terry Hodge, who are avid travelers, will give a presentation on the birds of several different countries and touring options for finding birds. Their presentation begins at 6:30PM at the White Mountain Nature Center.

The Regular Monthly WMAS Birding Field Trip: Monthly bird watching field trips on the **3rd Sat of every month**, alternating between Rob Bettaso & Jon Orona. If you're interested in attending, feel free to give me a call and leave a message so that I can return your call to give you the details for the upcoming trip. The **next outing is Oct 21**. Also, on the **fourth Sat of each month** I lead a "Fitness Birding" outing that combines slightly strenuous activities (longer hikes, bicycling, paddling, X/C skiing) with birding. The next **Fitness Birding trip will be Oct 28**. Feel free to give me a call if you're interested (Rob: 928-368-8481).

MOST RECENT 3rd & 4th SATURDAY FIELD TRIPS (Rob Bettaso):

For our 3rd Saturday outing, 6 bird-watchers enjoyed a walk in the E. Lane area (aka: A/S Fire Escape Rd). We started off along a trail, eventually hiked to Buck Springs Pond, & then returned along the dirt road. The late summer weather was ideal and we saw and/or heard ~30 species of birds including 4 types of warblers plus some common and uncommon bark birds (2 types of nuthatches, 3 woodpecker species, & a creeper). At one point, when we were watching a large & busily feeding flock of Yellow-rumped Warblers, a Sharp-shinned Hawk swooped down and nabbed an unwary warbler and made a meal of him on a near-by branch.

Only 1 trooper joined me for "Fitness Birding" – fellow Board member, Gerry Hodge. Beginning at 4PM, we meandered up Porter Ck and rock-hopped over the berm to the western shore of Scott's Reservoir. We saw only a few bird species but at one point, spying a misfit species swimming in the center of a flock of mallards far, far across the reservoir, we pondered its identity. At first, Gerry (with his high quality Swarovski binoculars) suggested a gull and I agreed that the mystery bird seemed big enough to be a large tern or a small gull; but then he wondered if it was a phalarope, which I doubted due to size and behavior; at last he ventured that it was an avocet and I concurred that it appeared to have the appropriate coloration (nonbreeding black and white). Suddenly, the bird took wing and flew directly toward us and eventually we could tell that it was, indeed, an avocet. It peeped at us as it landed in shallow water very close by and then proceeded to wade in the shallows and act like a proper shorebird.

3rd Sat Field Trip photos below by **Gaston Porterie** (Left: Ruby-crowned Kinglet; Right: Yellow-rumped Warbler).



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. Dues are for the year in which they are paid and not good for 12 months following payment (unless you pay in January).

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.

And remember, you can 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 from anyone who might want to accept the fun challenges of filling a Board position! **We are especially keen to recruit diverse candidates to be a part of WMAS, including more people below the age of 60 (so that we can plan for our Chapter's future) and also more people that are representative of the various demographic groups found in the White Mountains. And remember, you can be on the Board without being an Officer – in fact, you can even just attend a Board meeting as a guest. Please feel free to join us (call Rob: 928-368-8481).**

BONUS PHOTOS (The "Tiger of the Sky" aka: Great-horned Owl; Photo by Carol Axford)



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 and visit our website.

White Mountain Audubon Society is dedicated to the enjoyment of birds and other wildlife by providing environmental leadership and awareness through fellowship, education, community involvement, and conservation programs in the White Mountains and surrounding areas.