



www.RedRockAudubon.org

The Rock Wren

The mission of Red Rock Audubon Society is to protect, restore, and improve natural ecosystems, focusing on birds and other wildlife, and to educate the public about our unique Nevada environment.

Red Rock Audubon Society
 P.O. Box 96691
 Las Vegas, NV 89193
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August 2011

Special dates of interest:

General Meetings:

Sep 12th: 6:30 pm
 Oct 10th: 6:30 pm
 Nov 14th: 6:30 pm
 Dec: No meeting

Field Trips:

Sep 10 - Mt. Charleston
 Sep 17 - Corn Creek
 Sep 22 - Tule Springs
 Sep 24 - Henderson BVP

Inside this issue:

President's Perch	3
Bird & Beetles	4
Membership News	4
Birding Brownies	5
Book Sales	5
Field Trip News	6
Nature in our Valley	8
Gulls in the Desert?	9
Nest Searcher	9
Photo Album	11
Join RRAS	12



RRAS General Meetings

The Red Rock Audubon Society General Meetings are held the 2nd Monday of the month, except June, July, August, and December. Social hour begins at 6:30pm, presentations begin at 7pm. It's free and open to the public. Join us for snacks, conversation, education, and great raffle prizes. Meetings are held at Nevada Energy, in the Wengert Room, at 6226 W. Sahara Ave.

Sept. 12th - Dragonflies and Damselflies in Southern Nevada

If you've been sneaking looks at large colorful dragonflies while birding (be honest!) here is an opportunity to learn about our local dragonflies and damselflies – and stop lying awake at night wondering about them.

Many of us know Bruce Lund does birds, but since about 2008 he drifted from birds, and immersed himself in field work on dragonflies and damselflies to become somewhat of a local expert.

If bug names like Comanche skimmer, American rubyspot, Gray Sanddragon and Vivid dancer raise your curiosity, you'll meet them plus many others in this program.

Bruce will bring field guides, specimens, and field tools for everyone to look over, and share stories of field techniques and experiences he's had while exploring for these fascinating aerial acrobats.



The family living in the artificial burrows at Gilcrease Orchard: Two Kids, Mom, and Dad.

Board Members

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Stay informed and don't miss out on any activities!

The Red Rock Audubon Society sends out reminders for meetings, activities, volunteer opportunities, and special events. Let us know your email address and we'll include you on our email news bulletins and the distribution of the email version of newsletters. You can opt-out at any time and we will never share or sell your email address.

Email us at info@redrockaudubon.org or visit www.RedRockAudubon.Org and click on "Add your name to our e-news list" link, or leave us a voice mail at 702-390-9890.



Do You FACEBOOK? Red Rock Audubon Society Does!

Facebook is a free social networking site where users create and customize their own profiles with photos, videos, and information about themselves. Each user has a "wall" where friends can post comments or pictures. This provides a simple way for friends to keep in touch and share pictures and news.

Red Rock Audubon Society has started a Facebook page. To visit us just enter this address into your web browser: <http://www.facebook.com/RedRockAudubonSociety> Be sure to "LIKE" us when you get there!

President's Perch

Submitted by: Bob Wilkin, RRAS President

It's that time again!! Fall migration is right around the corner!! I am looking forward to seeing how our migrants made out with this year's mating season. The burrowing owls in our artificial burrows seem to have raised more young this year. It could be a factor of the larger nesting chambers that we installed. Or it could be the unseasonably cool spring and early summer this year. I am not a monitor for the burrows, but I do check in on the one at Tule Springs that had 4 chicks this year. (I was told on my last visit that there were 5 chicks but I have not confirmed that). I saw six owls and photographed them during the July bird walk.

The bird walks that Red Rock Audubon Society provides our members and the public are conducted monthly at The Springs Preserve at 8:00 a.m. on the first Saturday of the month (except for June, July and August in which there is no walk). And at Floyd Lamb Park at Tule Springs on the third Saturday of each month starting at 8:00 a.m. in the fall and winter and at 7:00 a.m. June, July and August.

I personally conduct the bird walks at Tule Springs. I have been excited by the amount of nesting activity that we have been able to see this year. Besides the Burrowing Owls, we watched a Black-crowned Night Heron gather nesting materials while building a nest too deep in the reeds on pond one for us to see. We saw a Great Blue Heron nest and have young in the reeds where we were able to photograph the nest and watch the babies grow and fledge. In the May bird walk, we saw 3 Black-chinned Hummingbirds nesting. A Cooper's Hawk nested somewhere near or in the park because the two juveniles were present on the July bird walk and took particular exception to a Turkey Vulture who was sitting in a tree that they were using to perch in. They repeatedly screeched at him and landed close to him. Finally, one of the juvenile hawks attacked him and he moved to a nearby tree. They were not satisfied with their work so they landed just above him and began making threatening gestures again. The Turkey Vulture got tired of all the attention and flew away.

The Tule Springs walk coincides with the Farmer's Market in Floyd Lamb Park. I am able to shop for fresh fruits and vegetables after my morning walk. Another of our very successful Burrowing Owl artificial burrow placements is at Gilcrease Orchard. The burrows were placed in December and the owls took up residence in March. So I try to get by there after each bird walk to check in and again, pick fruit and vegetables!! I am seeing a pattern here...

Even in this trying economy, we have added more than a hundred people to our organization. We actually added many more than that but we lost several through relocation. Now more than ever, we need to increase our membership! Our organization has got to take the lead in bird conservation in southern Nevada. The money from Washington, DC will continue to be cut back as our law makers struggle to get the nation's debt under control. I applaud their efforts to become fiscally responsible, but we must be sure that the strides that have been made in conserving birds and their habitat are not lost.

It takes vigilance on our part. We need to watch the news, statements coming out of government agencies and activity in our own neighborhoods. We need to stay aware of what habitat destruction is taking place in the rush to "Green Energy". Solar energy programs are being "green lighted" all around us as we have an abundant number of days of sunshine during the year. With no one opposing them, the bureaucrats, will award tens of thousands of acres of precious wildlife habitat in the deserts of Nevada to companies that are targeting the stimulus/earmarked funds made available for "green energy". Our Burrowing Owls, Desert Tortoises, and countless other species will suffer from this land grab.



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Battle of the Birds and the Beetles

From The Las Vegas Wash Coordination Committee Aug 2011 Newsletter

The 2011 monitoring season for the endangered southwestern willow flycatcher has recently come to a close. Between May 15 and July 17, biologists monitored the small songbirds by surveying the project area a minimum of five times (broken into three survey periods).

The surveys incorporated the use of vocalization play-back to illicit a response from an individual willow flycatcher. Due to the impracticality of distinguishing the southwestern subspecies from more common willow flycatchers, any detections made in the Las Vegas Wash before June 25 were considered short-term migrants unless clear nesting behavior was observed.

This year's monitoring effort produced 16 detections, the second highest number in the history of the survey. One of those detections was made after June 25, becoming the third southwestern willow flycatcher detected at the Las Vegas Wash in the last five years; however, no corresponding nesting activity was observed. Because the southwestern willow flycatcher is an endangered species, the federal government requires that the annual surveys are included as part of the overall management activities of the Las Vegas Wash. These surveys are funded, in part, by a grant from the Bureau of Reclamation.



A southwestern willow flycatcher was captured and banded at the Las Vegas Wash in 2008.

A potential threat to the southwestern willow flycatcher is the tamarisk leaf beetle. Introduced to the Colorado River basin in 2004 as a biological control to defoliate non-native tamarisk trees, it was believed that the leaf beetle would be unable to survive south of Lake Powell, eliminating a negative impact on southwestern willow flycatcher populations. However, the beetles have managed to continue their southern migration and have recently been discovered near Lake Mead.

It is unknown how the defoliation of tamarisk by the beetles will affect southwestern willow flycatcher populations in the future. Biologists will continue to monitor the Wash to determine if the re-vegetation efforts of the Las Vegas Wash Coordination Committee, combined with the loss of tamarisk habitat in the surrounding area, will change the number of southwestern willow flycatcher detections.

As a riparian corridor in an urban area, the Las Vegas Wash is an important ecological resource for Southern Nevada. The Wash provides habitat to about 300 fish and wildlife species and more than 200 species of upland, riparian and wetland plants, and serves as a source of return flow credits to the Colorado River at Lake Mead. Visit <http://www.lvwash.org> for more information.

Membership Report 2010-2011

Submitted by: Carol Sweet, Membership Chair

Membership in the Red Rock Audubon Society increased this past year by 80 members from 958 to 1038. This was gratifying considering the difficult economic times. The National Audubon Society provides us with monthly membership updates since they handle all renewals and transfers. We typically added about 20 members a month, but lost members in August, April, and June.

We welcome all new members and encourage you to come to our meetings and field trips. If you are unable to attend, please visit our website at www.redrockaudubon.org and learn about local birding and conservation activities.

We also want to thank the 20 members and friends who donated a total of \$870 to Red Rock Audubon this year! These funds are used to pay expenses related to meetings, field trips, and publications. Thank you for your support.

We look forward to another successful year in 2011-2012.

Bird Ladies and Brownies Bird Watch

Submitted by: Marilyn Mackett

Rita Schageter and Marilyn Mackett were again invited to provide bird walks at Floyd Lamb/Tule Springs Park by Axa Aguilar, Camp Services Manager for the Girl Scouts of So. Nevada. Despite the harsh cold March winds, Rita and Marilyn led Brownie groups and troop leaders on Saturday morning, March 19th, and saw many of the Park's beautiful birds.

The following species were seen (without binoculars): Double-crested Cormorant, Great Blue Heron (on nests), Brewer's Blackbird, American Pipit, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Black Phoebe, Great-tailed Grackle, Pied-billed Grebe, American Kestrel, American Coot, Canada Goose, Mallard, Great Egret, and the ever present Peacocks.

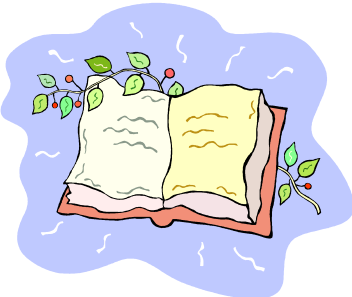
Rita dissected Great Horned Owl pellets for the Brownies who were very interested in the findings of skulls and bones. The Bird Ladies (as named by the Brownies) also pointed out the Sycamore trees and bird nests. RRAS looks forward to more educational events with the Girl Scouts of So. Nevada.



RRAS Book Sale Scheduled For October Meeting

Submitted by: Marilyn Mackett

Recently, William Haven donated over 50 birding and nature books, DVDs and CDs to RRAS. This treasure will provide a core inventory for another Fall Book Sale. However, the more the merrier, so gather up your used nature books and donate them to RRAS for the sale. You can bring your gently used books to the September or the October general meeting.



Len Warren, Education Chair, and I will divide them by price and place them on tables of \$1.00 and under, \$2.00 to \$5.00, and a table for those over \$5.00. Proceeds from the sale will be deposited in the RRAS general account.

For any questions or if you need a pick-up for your books, give me a call at (702) 256-8970 or e-mail me at mjmackett@cox.net.

We welcome all raffle item donations, and will hold the raffle at all other General Meetings. As usual our members also enjoy any refreshments you donate.

President's Perch ... continued

Wind turbines are another good idea with devastating consequences to our wildlife. Bats are killed by the turbines. Raptors migrating through the area are killed by the turbines. And the numbers are significant enough to warrant our alarm!

The time is now to talk to your neighbors and get them involved in our organization!! We need members and we need activity and participation from our current members. Just like our bodies when we don't get enough exercise, our organization can become flabby and weak. We need an exercise!! We need an event that is uniquely ours to bring attention to our organization and to an issue that we HAVE ALREADY WON!! Let's take a victory lap!!! I am planning a day to pull up mine claim markers! The date is November 5th (which is the first Saturday after the new law takes effect). We are working with the Nevada Department of Wildlife to get the exact locations where we will be pulling these wildlife death traps out of the ground!!

It is time to exercise our organization, if you wish to volunteer, contact me via email at rjwilkin@cox.net or through our website. If we have a lot of participation we will have two or three teams going out. Enjoy the fall migration!!



We Need Leaders!

If you love field trips, would like to help on a field trip, or have a special place that you like to bird and want to share it with other members - then give Je Anne Branca a call at (702) 451-6843.

There are many birding locations nearby, give Je Anne a call today to let her know where you're interested in going. Check our website for a list of regional birding spots, their descriptions, maps, and bird checklists.

- Clark County Wetlands Park
- Red Springs & Red Rock Canyon
- Sunset Park
- Spring Mountain Ranch State Park
- Ash Meadows
- Audubon Sanctuary

You also can volunteer to share your love and interest of birding with others by leading a field trip.

If you're not ready to lead a trip, then volunteer to be a co-leader to help out with handling the scope, looking up birds in the guide book, and making sure the group doesn't get lost.

Field trip leaders and co-leaders do not have to be an expert in bird ID - they just need to have enthusiasm for learning and birding with others.

Please call Je Anne Branca at (702) 451-6843 for more information or to volunteer.

South East Arizona 03/22/11

Submitted by: Je Anne Branca, Field Trip Chair

On Tuesday, March 22nd, we met at 6:00 am for the drive to Tucson. Our group included Cecilia Pinkal, Taner Pinkal (Rita's sister and nephew from Oregon), Mary Hirsch, Carol Sweet, Rita Schlageter, and Je Anne Branca. The first stop was the Hassayampa River Rest Area where we heard and saw our first Gray Hawk (who had not read the book as it was way too far north). The next one we saw was in Patagonia area. We also had a Harris Hawk our first day. We birded Catalina State Park, ended the day with 57 species.

Wednesday we were off to Sweetwater Wetlands and Mount Lemon for the Yellow-eyed Junco, which several were seen and we ended our day with 45 species. Thursday we visited Madera Canyon, Lake Pena Blanca to see the 2 Least Grebes, and Lake Patagonia, then stayed in Patagonia at the old hotel (that was different). After birding Patton's (birding was great but the cats roaming the yard were not good) we drove to Sierra Vista.

Friday we birded Fort Huachuca, where a Northern Pygmy-Owl called and flew by so fast most of us did not get to see it. San Pedro House gave us some nice close up looks at some of the birds. Just before dusk, we started looking for the Scaled Quail, finally found a covey of about 30 after driving for almost an hour. We ended the day with 72 species.

Saturday it was time to drive back to Vegas, we ended the trip with 125 species. Carol saw the most lifer's 49, followed by Cecilia and Taner seeing 28 lifer's, Mary saw 7 lifer's and of course Rita and I saw none, but had a great time just birding. We could almost call this the Red Bird trip as we saw more Pyrrhuloxia, Northern Cardinals, and Vermilion Flycatchers on this trip than we have ever seen before.

Pahrnagat National Wildlife Refuge 05/14/11

Submitted by: Je Anne Branca, Field Trip Chair

May 14th, Saturday we met at the Silver Nugget in North Las Vegas for our drive to Pahrnagat for International Bird Migratory Day. We met other birders at the Upper Lake. and split into 3 groups. Bob Wilkins lead the camera group, who were able to get some great shots of some of the birds and wildlife. Rita Schlageter and I split up the rest of the group and off we went. The new Visitor Service Coordinator, Sierra Willoughby joined us on our birding trip. We were very glad to meet him and look forward to working with him on other projects. Probably our best bird was the Yellow-billed Loon seen as we were driving out. We had 6 species of flycatchers. We ended the trip 64 species for the day and had a good time.

Field Trip Schedule

By Je Anne Branca, Field Trip Chair

September 10th, Saturday - Mount Charleston

Meet at McDonald's at the corner of US95, Durango, and Farm Roads. We will car pool up the mountain. Wear comfortable shoes, bring water and snacks. Leader: Christiana Manville, for reservations please call 702-672-1411. 7:00 am - ?

September 17th, Saturday - Corn Creek Field Station, DNWR

Meet at Corn Creek. Wear comfortable shoes, bring water and snacks. Leader: Tracy Kipke, for reservations please call 702-290-8556. 7:00 am - ?

September 22nd, Thursday - Tule Springs / Floyd Lamb Park

Good for beginners and seniors. Easy walking. Bring lunch, snacks and water. FEE AREA \$6.00 per car. Leader: Rita Schlageter, for reservations and meeting please call 702-382-3327. 8:00 am – Noon

September 24th, Saturday - Henderson Bird Viewing Preserve

Come see all the improvement that have been made at the Preserve. Shore bird migration should be good. Easy walking, wear comfortable shoes, bring water, sunscreen, and hat. Leader: Je Anne Branca, for reservations please call 702-451-6843. 7:00 am – 9:00 am

Bird Walk Schedule

RRAS will lead bird walks at **Tule Springs/Floyd Lamb Park** the third Saturday of each month, corresponding with the Floyd Lamb Park Farmer's Market (10 am to 2 pm). Entrance to the park is free the day of the Farmer's Market.

Tule Springs/Floyd Lamb Park is home to a wide variety of native and migratory birds. Walks last about 2 hours and are geared toward beginners and casual walkers. Meet at the last parking lot in the group picnic area. Bring water, snacks, and a friend.

Dates: Aug. 20th: 7:00 - 9:00 am

Dates: Sep. 17th, Oct. 15th, Nov. 19th, Dec. 17th: 8:00-10:00 am

Starting September 3rd, for the 2011-2012 season, RRAS will again be leading our free Birds at the **Las Vegas Springs Preserve** walks the first Saturday of each month Sept-May. Come join us, meet fellow birders, make new friends, and see many of the birds common to the Las Vegas Valley – you never know what you'll see!

This easy walk, lead by a volunteer of the Red Rock Audubon Society, is held from 8:00 - 9:30 am on the first Saturday of every month, except June through August.

It's free to go into the Gardens and Trails at the Las Vegas Springs Preserve. The Preserve is located at 333 S. Valley View Blvd (between US 95 and Alta Drive) in Las Vegas, NV. Call Springs Preserve Adult Education at (702) 822-7786 for reservations.

2011 Dates: 09/03, 10/01, 11/05, 12/03

2012 Dates: 01/07, 02/04, 03/03, 04/07, 05/05



Lesser Goldfinch

Nature in Our Valley - The Roadrunner

Submitted by: Bruce Lund

It's hard to think of another bird more widely recognized and beloved in the American southwest than the Roadrunner, and we are indeed fortunate to have this bird throughout the Muddy River Valley. I haven't done a study to prove it, but over the dozen years I've been birding in our Valley, my impression is that this bird has been steadily increasing in numbers. For years, it was a great treat to get a glimpse of one bird every few weeks; now it's not unusual for me to see a couple or more birds every week – and it is still a treat!

As Valley residents who see roadrunners regularly, it may come as a surprise that we are pretty much at the northern edge of the roadrunner range, and Nevada residents farther north hardly see this bird. Over many years there have been few and far between observations of individuals as far north as Mineral and White Pine counties. But these represent long distance wanderers into the Great Basin, far from the Mojave Desert in which they thrive.

While roadrunners are generally described as residents of desert scrublands, the Nevada Breeding Bird Survey from 1997 – 2000 found this bird is most often associated with river corridors – like here in the Muddy River and along the Virgin and Colorado Rivers. Yet, just to show how adaptable this bird actually is, the Survey found that roadrunners are more likely to occur in urban areas like Sunset Park and many residential areas in Las Vegas than in surrounding desert. That makes sense because desert landscaping means drip-irrigated plants which provide homes for insects, lizards and other small critters which are yummy morsels for our friend. Plus I've heard of instances where roadrunners have become accomplished moochers, getting fed by hand from adoring homeowners.



Roadrunners establish and defend territories and I saw this first hand when one started battling its own reflection in a window of our house. The window extended down to within a foot of the ground and one spring day Flo and I were mystified to hear a knocking from a room with no doors. Peering around the corner, we watched a roadrunner bashing its beak against the window. From the bird's point of view, every time it threatened and attacked the other bird in order to get it out of its territory, the other bird did the same thing. This went off and on for days and I never will know if the poor bird just gave up or somehow figured out that its reflection was not a threat.

People often ask me if roadrunners can fly. They most certainly can and I have a number of photos of individuals in shrubs and even more than 40 feet up in the tops of trees. However, their preferred form of locomotion is running over the ground and they do this very well. Their peak speed has been estimated from 15 – 20 mph, which is impressive enough for a two foot long bird, half of which is tail. Perhaps even more amazing is that they can move this fast through dense shrubs, using that long tail to balance and change direction on a dime which they need to do to catch lizards, snakes, scorpions, insects, and even mice and small birds that are the staples of their diet.

People also ask me what sounds, if any, roadrunners make. It's become a cliché, but when I'm out in the field with groups, I've come to expect almost everyone to call out "beep, beep" upon seeing a roadrunner, this being the result of those popular Coyote and Roadrunner cartoons. Let it be clearly stated here that while this bird has a fair repertoire of calls, "beep, beep" is NOT one of them. The most common call I recognize is its lovely courting song that I've come to expect around the last week of February as a slow series of about six soft coos – roughly like common Mourning Dove coos - that become quieter and quieter until the last one is hard to hear.

On occasion I've seen roadrunners perched on posts or ground with their back feathers raised up. Interestingly, the skin of roadrunners is darkly pigmented and even though they live in a warm desert environment, exposing the dark skin to the sun in this way is thought to be an adaptation to help these birds get warmed up, especially on cool mornings.

So, enjoy those roadrunners. They are truly fascinating fellow residents of our Valley.

Gulls in the Desert?

Submitted by: Margie Klein

Look up - it's a bird, it's a plane, it's a ... seagull? In the desert? What are seagulls doing in the desert? The first thing a wildlife biologist would say is that they are gulls, not seagulls. So proximity to the ocean or lack of it has nothing to do with them being in southern Nevada. In fact, gulls do live here and throughout the state, because habitat is available.

It's true that these birds are more common near the ocean, but they occur all over the North American continent. Most people have heard the story of how gulls came to the valleys around the Great Salt Lake in Utah in 1848 and consumed the hordes of Mormon-crickets that were destroying the pioneers' crops. These were a species named California gulls, which were and are native to the Great Salt Lake area. Though it sounds peculiar, the California gull is the state bird of Utah.



Although there are not large numbers of gulls in southern Nevada, they do come inland to capitalize on urban development, taking advantage of man-made lakes, restaurants, parking lots, and landfills. Usually they appear in flocks, but occasionally a lone gull may "blow in with a storm."

NDOW supervisory wildlife diversity biologist Cris Tomlinson stated, "Contrary to popular opinion, gulls are smart and watch for opportunities to snatch humans' leftover food."

In the Las Vegas area, gulls are attracted to the Las Vegas wash and the Colorado River, as well as man-made ponds and dumps. They have adapted to consuming trash as a food source.

According to Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW) habitat biologist Tracy Kipke, "California gulls and ring-billed gulls are the most common in southern Nevada. They are permanent residents. Western gulls are not seen as much, and the herring gull is a migrant." It's most likely that the gull you see at Nevada's lakes and ponds is the California gull. California gulls are omnivorous and eat insects, mollusks, fish, small animals, and of course, garbage. An interesting fact about these gulls is that they can live about 20 years.

Gulls may seem more like urban pests, due to their propensity for garbage. However, it's important to note that gulls are wildlife species that are protected by the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act, as well as by Nevada state law. These laws make it illegal to kill, capture or possess these birds without special permits issued by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and by NDOW. However, it is not illegal to deter migratory birds that are neither endangered nor threatened if they are destroying property.

Gulls are not without their use. Gulls can be an aid to the fisherman in finding fish boils. Gulls often flock to a boil to feed upon shad that are on the surface trying to escape the feeding stripers.

A Day in the Life of a Nest Searcher

Submitted by: Len Warren, Education Chair

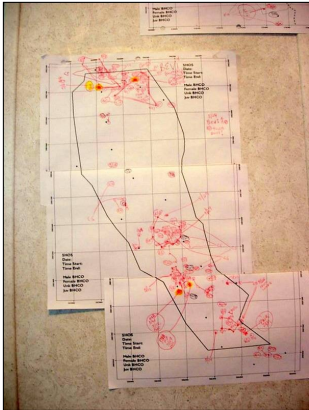
April 2011 began the 7th consecutive year of PRBO's (Point Reyes Bird Observatory's) Amargosa Songbird Project. The Amargosa River, often called the "Hide and Seek River", disappearing and reappearing from Beatty, NV to Badwater in Death Valley, well below sea level. The Amargosa riparian landscape and vegetation supports an amazing array of birdlife. Chris McCreedy heads up PRBO's Sonoran and Mojave Desert projects. Since 2005, he's tracked songbird nesting success, species diversity, and related vegetation data for over 30 species of birds. In the spring of 2009, I was hired by "McCreedy" and drove from Maine to Shoshone, CA for my very first bird job as a nest searcher.

Our day begins quite early. We're expected to be on the study plot within ½ hour of sunrise, preferably ½ hour before sunrise. There are two separate study areas each over 1000 acres. The goal of the job is to map the territories, search for, locate and monitor the nests of all known pairs of birds on each study area.

To find the nests of songbirds, one must "isolate a pair", and become familiar with their territory boundaries, narrow down possible locations, and hopefully find the nest itself. To become a good nest searcher required me to gain many new skills, and to relinquish some of my hard earned birding skills and instincts while on the job.. I had to learn to totally focus for long periods of time

...continued from page 8 **A Day in the Life of a Nest Searcher**

on one pair of birds, practically ignore migrants, and in many cases to even ignore the male of a pair in order to focus only on the female. Each bird species, as we know, has key field marks for identification. Similarly each has key behaviors and call notes that may divulge nest location. The first nest I ever found was of a Phainopepla. I learned directly from Alicia Yong, from PRBO, how to determine a proper distance to observe a pair from. I learned to choose a hiding spot, and sit motionless while watching the adult birds would fly-catch, return to the nest area, delivering insects to nestlings. I was hooked!



Since finding that first Phainopepla nest, I've now spent three field seasons searching for nests of Amargosa songbirds. From April 1st through July 31st, I walk the desert; follow birds deep into thick cover, and sit motionless, hoping for the next clue. I've accepted many challenges in life, none so far as challenging as attempting to find "all the nests" of "all the pairs." So far I have found many nests of many species, and I've become so familiar with certain desert riparian birds that I can often find nests by the sounds alone. This can literally be done with your eyes closed. Yet, in three years, I've never even come close to finding them all. Some common species can be the most difficult. Yellow-breasted Chats, Blue Grosbeaks, and Song Sparrows are among my nemesis's. The Amargosa/Death Valley habitat is pretty tough terrain. Honey and Screwbean Mesquite are the dominant tree. Neither are very accommodating to systematic searches. Territory mapping, however, can be much more thorough. By recording the singing, counter-singing, fight locations, and other behaviors, we can effectively count the number of pairs of each species on each study plot. As an example, this

season's Yellow Breasted Chat count for the Amargosa Canyon study plot is 12 territories. I was able to find and monitor 3 different chat nests, therefore providing a representative selection of nest data, and an accurate count of breeding territories. Evidence of nesting success, such as seeing a family group on it's territory or fledglings begging and being fed in the territory is recorded and locations noted and plotted on an individual map for each species.

Most nesting birds are extremely secretive about their nest location. Male birds sing to advertise for females and to delineate their territory. Counter-singing and fighting between neighboring rival males are important indicators. Repeated use of "high perch" singing posts, and chasing away of same species males also means business for breeding males. "Chip calls" and "answer back" calls, pre-courtship displays, courtship displays, mate feeding, solicitation postures by females, copulation, nest material carries, "close to the nest" calls, scolding calls, food carries, and wing-beat sounds, all must be carefully noted.

Once the nest is found, it's then monitored for egg count, nestling count, Brown-headed Cowbird parasitism, and success of fledglings. Often nests suffer predation. Desert nest predators include Common Raven, Greater Roadrunner, Northern Shrikes, Cactus Wrens, Scrub Jays, hawks, owls, snakes, lizards, rodents, coyotes, and more. Generally a nest is considered successful if one or more young fledge.

Brood parasitism by Brown-headed Cowbirds, i.e., laying of cowbird eggs in songbird nests, is a major factor in nesting success/failure ratio. Cowbird eggs in songbird nests hatch earlier and Cowbird nestlings grow faster, and usually out-compete songbird nestlings. Part of each day is spent on Cowbird Trapping, and control.

- The following species nests have been monitored by the Amargosa Canyon Songbird Project:

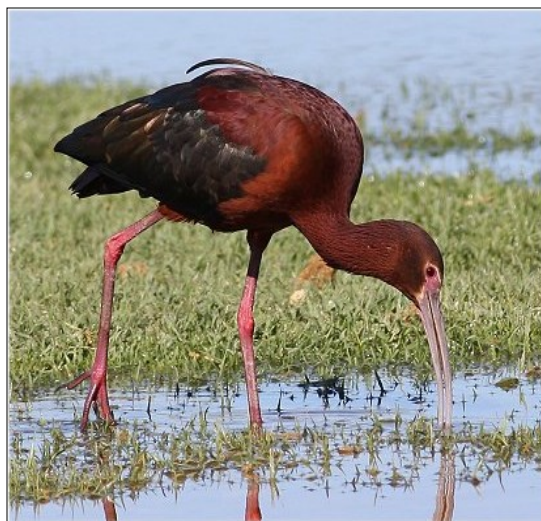
American Kestrel, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Bell's Vireo, Bewick's Wren, Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Blue Grosbeak, Brown-crested Flycatcher, Common Raven, Common Yellowthroat, Costa's Hummingbird, Crissal Thrasher, Gambel's Quail, Green Heron, House Finch, Indigo Bunting, Hooded Oriole, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Lesser Goldfinch, Long-eared Owl, Lucy's Warbler, Mourning Dove, Rough-winged Swallow, Phainopepla, Rock-Wren, Red-tailed Hawk, Red-winged Blackbird, Say's Phoebe, Song Sparrow, Verdin, Virginia Rail, Western Kingbird, Yellow-breasted Chat, Yellow Warbler

Our project's season winds down with vegetation surveys for each nest found during the breeding season. Each nest site, and subsequently random sites, are surveyed for quality, quantity, diversity, and of vegetation. Not easy work but still, I think, the world's greatest job.



Common Yellowthroat, 2 days old
Photo by Len Warren

Photo Album



1. Members of the S.E. Arizona field trip enjoying their lunch. Photo by Carol Sweet.
2. Red-tailed Hawk at Ash Meadows. Photo by Cyndi Souza.
3. Great Blue Heron with Gopher breakfast at Tule Springs/Floyd Lamb Park. Photo by M. Kammerer.
4. Burrowing Owl at Tule Springs/Floyd Lamb Park. Photo by M. Kammerer.
5. White-faced Ibis in Las Vegas. Photo by M. Kammerer.
6. Hooded Oriole in a Las Vegas backyard. Photo by Mitch LaFortune.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION / DONATION FORM

We invite your membership in the National Audubon Society and the Red Rock Audubon Society. To join, please complete and mail this form with payment to Red Rock Audubon Society, Attn. Membership Dept., P.O. Box 96691, Las Vegas NV 89193. Please make checks payable to Red Rock Audubon Society.

National Audubon Society Membership:

\$20 Introductory Membership for Individual or Family (1yr). Members receive Audubon Magazine, the Rock Wren newsletter, and membership in RRAS.

Donations to Red Rock Audubon Society: (Please select one)

Ruby-Crowned Kinglet \$10 Crissal Thrasher \$50 Golden Eagle \$500 or more
 Mountain Bluebird \$20 American Avocet \$100

Gifts to the RRAS Permanent Endowment Fund: helps insure the future viability of RRAS.

Any gift is greatly appreciated. Make check payable to RRAS Endowment Fund \$ _____

Subscription to printed Rock Wren newsletter Only: Rock Wren \$10.

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