The fifth annual AZFO state meeting in Phoenix 21-23 October drew more than 70 participants and registered important achievements the organization has made the past year. Pierre Deviche announced the first two Gale Monson Research Grants (see below). Troy Corman reported that in January and February over 19 teams participated in a survey of Mountain Plovers in the state. He projected that surveys would be conducted again in 2012. Financial assistance has been provided by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. John Yerger and John Arnett urged participants to follow up an AZFO field expedition to survey wintering Gray Vireos last February with another one 3-4 December.

In his keynote address at Saturday night’s dinner, Richard Glnski, editor of Raptors of Arizona, framed his discussion of the current status of hawks in Arizona as a tribute to the field work and data collection that the AZFO is doing. He also encouraged us to use our field activities as opportunities to get kids outdoors.

During the Saturday session participants enjoyed presentations on the expanding Gray Hawk populations on the San Pedro River, Mexican Duck distribution and identification, Bald Eagle management, survey methods in detecting thrashers, and the effects of the Spring 2011 Pickett fire on avian life. In addition to these talks participants recessed to view and ask questions about six poster presentations on Rufous-winged and Cassin’s Sparrows, Abert’s Towhee, Golden Eagle, and bird monitoring expeditions to Mexico. Kurt Radamaker updated us on the recent decisions from the Arizona Bird Committee. He announced that the Arizona state list now stands at 550 species.

Reports and updates were also presented on field expeditions, seasonal reports and database, website, publications, and finances. Officers and Board of Directors for 2012 were elected.

Popular as usual, the used book sale and sale of logo items did a brisk business. An added item was an attractive edition of the AZFO’s Field Checklist of Birds of Arizona. Participants enjoyed the bird photo and audio ID contests and a first-time raffle raised $203. The books donated as prizes by the Tucson Audubon Society bookstore were highly appreciated.

The mini-field expeditions were all well organized by Phoenix area birders and drew 18 participants on Friday afternoon and 33 participants on Sunday morning. The total of 105 species included several late and rare migrants.
SUMMER AND FALL SEASONAL HIGHLIGHTS

By Troy Corman

With continued drought conditions, excessive heat, and massive landscape-altering fires, summer 2011 will not be forgotten anytime soon. Although the many fires and subsequent closures kept many birders from some favorite areas, the season was not without its highlights. Some exceptional lost vagrant migrants from the East were discovered and included an Empire Gulch MOURNING WARBLER (Pima Co.) and at Willow Tank near Portal, a handsome CANADA WARBLER (Cochise Co.). Likely from the West Coast of Mexico came LAUGHING GULL at CIBOLA NWR (La Paz Co.) and in Pima Co. a HEERMANN’S GULL in Tucson and an ELEGANT TERN near Green Valley. Of course summer highlights typically include a few vagrants from Mexico’s interior and a wonderful selection was discovered in the southeast corner of the state. It started out with a cooperative FAN-TAILED WARBLER in late May in Madera Canyon (Santa Cruz Co.) and increased in June with such colorful birds as STREAK-BACKED ORIOLE, several YELLOW GROSBEAKS, and RUFIOUS-BACKED ROBINS. By July a good assortment of hummingbirds were noted, including a PLAIN-CAPPED STARThROAT in lower Miller Canyon, Huachuca Mtns. Slightly further north, one of the most unexpected early July discoveries was a third state record of TUFTED FLYCATCHER at the Boyce Thompson Arboretum (Pinal Co.).

Possibly related to extreme drought conditions this summer in the southern Great Plains region of the U.S., several species arrived in Arizona earlier and/or in unprecedented numbers and locations. In se. AZ, PAINTED BUNTING reports began a month early (late June) with exceptional numbers noted through much of July. Then singing CASSIN’S SPARROWS were found in many new locations and in numbers across all five of the northern AZ counties. This was followed by above normal number of migrant DICKCISSELS throughout much of the state.

Typically casual visitors to Arizona, at least three adult PURPLE GALLINULES were detected during the summer and early fall season with one each in Maricopa, Pinal, and Santa Cruz counties. Fall shorebird migration was highlighted with almost unprecedented numbers of SHORT-BILLED DOWITCHERS being detected across the state, plus such rarities as a RED KNOT at Willcox (Cochise Co.) and a first Mohave Co. record of BUFF-BREASTED SANDPIPER. Typically casual in the fall in the state, a minimum of six ORCHARD ORIOLES were reported from late August through September with records in Navajo (1), Cochise (1), Santa Cruz (3) and Maricopa (1) counties.

Finally those wonderful lost “Eastern” Warblers that we hope to encounter during our fall outings made it on many a birder’s lists. These were highlighted by not one, but two CAPE MAY WARBLERS, a species that was last documented in the state in 1998. The first of these was at Pena Blanca Lake, Santa Cruz Co. which turned out to be a rare warbler hotspot producing PALM, BLUE-WINGED, and GOLDEN-WINGED WARBLERS.

For more details about these and other noteworthy photo-documented observations, please visit: http://www.azfo.org/gallery/1main/photos_recent.html
AZFO WEBSITE ASSISTANCE NEEDED

By Edwin Juarez
Our AZFO website provides a wealth of useful information to members and the birding community at large. Maintaining and updating most pages (i.e., adding/removing text and links) is a fairly easy task that I’m able to handle with my limited web development skills. However, periodically it becomes necessary to make more complex changes (editing or adding dynamic elements, such as frames, drop down menus, PayPal functionalities) to a page or section, which requires greater expertise. If you have web development experience and would like to volunteer to assist with a particular need as it arises, please let me know. Ideally I would like to identify two or three individuals who I could contact for help or as a resource when there is a need to address a more complex task. Volunteering would not involve taking on major projects, but rather with helping with specific tasks I may need assistance with. If you would like to help, please contact Edwin Juarez (juarez_edwin@yahoo.com)

GALE MONSON RESEARCH GRANT AWARDS

By Pierre Deviche
The results of the first competition for the Gale Monson Research Grant were announced during the fifth annual meetings. Applications were evaluated and scored by several independent reviewers and awards (each $1000) were made to Kristen Dillon (University of Arizona) for her project titled “Ecological Causes of Elevation Gradients in Clutch Size of Red-faced Warblers” and to Carl Lundblad (also at the University of Arizona) for his project titled “Ecological Correlates of Altitudinal Migratory Tendency in Yellow-eyed Juncos”. We wish Kristen and Carl luck and success with their research and look forward to hearing of their results.

SUBMIT YOUR SIGHTINGS

By Lauren Harter
The fall and winter seasons are full of opportunities for AZFO members to get out in the field. While participating in activities such as AZFO Field Expeditions, Christmas Bird Counts, Project FeederWatch, or just out birding, you may find bird species considered rare in the state of Arizona. Sightings of the rarest of these (Review Species) are reviewed and compiled by the Arizona Bird Committee (ABC).
By submitting your documentation of rare birds to the ABC, you can contribute to the permanent record of birds in Arizona. The ABC’s published reports contain a wealth of valuable information about the status of rare birds in the state, and all submitted documentation is archived for future reference. None of this can happen without the participation of birders, so the next time you see an Arizona Review Species or any species well outside its expected range or season, consider submitting photographs, recordings, or written documentation to the Arizona Bird Committee.
To learn more about the ABC, see a list of Review Species, read past reports, or submit your documentation, visit http://www.azfo.org/gallery/1main/WhatIsABC.html

ARIZONA BIRDS ONLINE

By Pierre Deviche
One important function of AZFO is our publication, Arizona Birds Online, consisting of articles related to all aspects of the state’s avifauna including its distribution, identification, behavior, migration, ecology, etc. The latest contribution to the journal consists of an article by Kurt Radamaker and Troy Corman that describes the history, breeding status, and distribution of the Rosy-faced (previously Peach-faced) Lovebird in the Phoenix area – see http://www.azfo.org/journal/Rosy-facedLovebird2011.html.

We welcome new contributions to the AZFO online journal and encourage you to contact Pierre Deviche, journal editor (deviche@asu.edu), or any board member to discuss your ideas. Remember that you don’t have to be a professional writer or scientist to write a manuscript that will be of interest to the birding community! Also bear in mind that we at AZFO are happy not only to discuss your suggestions for new manuscripts, but also to help you find documentation such as published articles, maps, and pictures, that you may need, revise initial drafts of your work, etc. All it takes to get going is a good idea followed with an email or phone call!
eBIRD WORKSHOP ANNOUNCEMENT – 24 MARCH 2012

By Troy Corman

You’ve probably been hearing a lot lately about eBird (www.ebird.org), the website and online birding tool that is changing the face of modern birding. eBird is an internet-based checklist program built for birders by birders and whose goal is to harness the power of both birding and science. It allows you to keep track of your bird records online and share them with the birding community while making them available for science and conservation efforts. eBird allows birders to post sightings, keep life lists, and manage their personal records. Jointly sponsored by AZFO and Tucson Audubon Society, this workshop will teach you what eBird is and why it’s important that you contribute, show you what it can do for you as a birder, and teach you how to get started. Join eBird Project Leader Brian Sullivan for a look at this remarkable tool, and get empowered to make your observations count!

The workshop will take place in the Tucson area and the exact location will be announced when available. A small fee will likely be charged to assist in deferring Mr. Sullivan’s travel costs.

UPCOMING AZFO FIELD EXPEDITIONS AND SURVEYS

By John Yerger

13-16 Jan – Statewide Coordinated Mountain Plover Survey:
As part of a southwestern U.S. wide effort, AZFO is sponsoring these surveys in Arizona for a second year. Areas to be surveyed will be in La Paz, Yuma, Maricopa, Pinal and Cochise counties. Individuals or teams will be assigned to areas which can be surveyed on any one of the four days noted above. Funding for mileage reimbursement will be available from the USFWS. Coordinator: Troy Corman (aplomado@cox.net)

21 Jan – Phoenix Area Aquatic Bird Survey:
(www.azfo.org/namc/IndexphoenixUrban.html) Seventh annual survey of all aquatic birds in the greater Phoenix area. Coordinator: Troy Corman (tcorman@azgfd.gov)

21 Jan – Santa Cruz Flats Raptor Count:
(www.azfo.org/namc/IndexphoenixUrban.html) Seventh annual survey of all winter raptors using the Santa Cruz Flats area in Western Pinal County. Coordinator: Doug Jenness (D_Jenness@hotmail.com)

4-5 Feb - Le Conte’s Thrasher surveys (Mohave County):
This Field Expedition will target the fuzzy edges of the known range of Le Conte’s Thrashers in northwestern Arizona. Since this portion of the species’ range is rarely visited by birders, we don’t know much about its abundance and distribution. We hope to add to our knowledge by fanning out to likely areas at the time of year when the birds often sing vigorously. Leaders: Lauren Harter (lbharter@gmail.com) and David Vander Plyum (scre@aol.com)

18-19 Feb – Mountain Plover Survey Follow-up:
Following the outcome of the surveys that are conducted in January (see above), a follow-up survey will be conducted to those area where Mountain Plovers were detected. Coordinator: Troy Corman (aplomado@cox.net)

Please visit http://www.azfo.org/events/custom/eventslist.html for more details for these and additional scheduled events.