The life and legacy of Gale Monson, the “father” of Arizona field ornithology, was the dominant theme of AZFO’s sixth annual state meeting in Lake Havasu City 26-28 October. From the opening remarks by AZFO president Troy Corman on Saturday morning to the closing of the Saturday evening program by Ken Rosenberg, more than 90 participants heard a dozen presentations, most of which paid tribute to Monson. The meeting opened with talks by recipients of Gale Monson Research Grants. These were followed by four presentations on projects within the lower Colorado River Valley (LCRV), an area where Monson spent a lot of time conducting field studies. Subjects treated were winter banding and population status of Willow Flycatcher, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, and other species.

Most of the afternoon session was devoted to several presentations directly related to Monson’s contributions to field ornithology. Gary Rosenberg, Janet Witzeman, David Griffin, and Richard Glinski described personal memories about Monson and the excellent example he set for young researchers he encountered.

Janet Witzeman opened the program at the Saturday night dinner by thanking Monson’s three daughters who were present for the family’s generous contributions to the AZFO research grants honoring their father. This included their recent donation of all the copies of the newly published Counting Birds with Gale Monson to AZFO for the grants. Thirty-seven copies of the book were sold at the meeting. The keynote speaker, Ken Rosenberg, from the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology and coauthor of Birds of the Lower Colorado River Valley, described changes in birdlife on the Colorado River over the past 50 years. He noted that the field work that he and others conducted along the river in the 1970s and ’80s was built upon the previous studies by Monson and was pleased that there are now young researchers continuing similar studies along the river.

Reports and updates were also presented on field expeditions and finances. Officers and Board of Directors for the next year were elected. Popular as usual, the used book sale and sale of AZFO logo items did a brisk business. Participants enjoyed the bird photo and audio ID contests and a raffle. Highly appreciated prizes included books provided by the Tucson Audubon Society bookstore and the Arizona Game and Fish Department.

We would like to thank DeeDee DeLorenzo and Lauren Harter for making the arrangements in Lake Havasu City and organizing the successful mini-field expeditions, John Arnett for moderating the meeting, and Janet Witzeman for organizing the Saturday evening program. The next annual meeting will be in Sierra Vista in October 2013.

For many more photos and details summarizing the meeting please visit: http://www.azfo.org/annual_meetings/2012/meeting_2012summary.html
SIXTH ANNUAL MEETING - MINI-FIELD EXPEDITIONS

By Lauren Harter

Two days of mini-field expeditions allowed meeting attendees to explore a few under-birded locations around Lake Havasu and vicinity. Although high winds caused the popular Friday afternoon pontoon pelagic to be canceled, 20 participants braved the weather to explore Lake Havasu from shore. Birders had the chance to study species, such as Herring Gull and Horned Grebe, that are otherwise rare in Arizona, and turned up a locally rare Gilded Flicker. Another group of about 30 met at the ’Ahakhav Tribal Preserve and split up to explore the plantings at this restoration area near Parker. A long list of notable sightings included a number of irruptive species, in particular a handful of Golden-crowned Kinglets and a White-throated Sparrow. After Friday’s afternoon expeditions, many participants stopped at Parker Dam to see the Black Scoter discovered earlier that day.

A total of about 45 participants participated in four expeditions on Sunday morning. A small group kayaked through the Topock Gorge, enjoying unique scenery and good numbers of birds in an area seldom visited by birders. Another group had the unique opportunity to explore “behind locked gates” on Havasu NWR. Besides a good variety of typical birds was a very rare LCRV Evening Grosbeak. Among the pines at Hualapai Mountain Park outside of Kingman, participants tallied many of the typical montane birds as well as a few Evening Grosbeaks, a Williamson’s and a Red-breasted Sapsucker, and two Pacific Wrens. The final group, which hiked up the Bill Williams River, documented more irruptive species to the lowlands, including a Red Crossbill, another species very rare in the LCRV. The highlight of this trip was a Northern Saw-whet Owl found roosting in a tamarisk patch, a life bird for many and one of only a handful of records for the LCRV.

For many more highlights and photos of the Mini-Field Expeditions please visit:
http://www.azfo.org/annual_meetings/2012/meeting_2012summary.html

FALL SEASONAL HIGHLIGHTS

By Troy Corman

Several irruptive species pushed through the Southwest and elsewhere across the U.S. this fall in above average numbers with numerous reports of Red-breasted Nuthatches, Pine Siskins, and even a scattering of Evening Grosbeaks and Red Crossbills making it into the desert regions. Lawrence’s Goldfinches also arrived in good numbers from the west. Several Winter Wrens (Eastern) were discovered and documented beginning in late October. Due to the recent split with Pacific Wren, the current seasonal status of both of these wrens in Arizona remains uncertain.

Some of the rarest observations of the fall season came early with up to three UPLAND SANDPIPPERS in mid-August near San Simon (Cochise Co.). A “mini-surge” of ROSEATE SPOONBILLS graced the state.
October and November is a good period to expect a few of the rarer waterfowl, gulls, and loons to appear in Arizona. All three scoter species were detected with a handful of SURF SCOTERS scattered around the state and the much rarer BLACK SCOTER in Lakeside (Navajo Co.) and below Parker Dam in late October. A WHITE-WINGED SCOTER was near the Bill Williams River delta in mid-November (both La Paz Co.). Lone LONG-TAILED DUCKS also found their way to Benson (Coconino Co.) and below Glen Canyon Dam (Coconino Co.). A HEERMANN’S GULL was found on Lake Havasu (Mohave/La Paz Cos.) in November and a RED-THROATED LOON spent some time near the Bill Williams River delta (La Paz Co.).

One of the rarest passerines discovered this fall was a surprisingly cooperative PHILADELPHIA VIREO which remained for several days at Pena Blanca Lake (Santa Cruz Co.), allowing many to add it to their state list. Other noteworthy finds from south of the border included two RUFOUS-CAPPED WARBLER in Miller Canyon, Huachuca Mountains (Cochise Co.) and at least three RUFOUS-BACKED ROBINS with two in Cochise Co. and the other in Sahuarita (Pima Co.).

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

APPRECIATION TO VOLUNTEERS WORKING ON DATA TRANSFER PROJECT

By Doug Jenness

Five volunteers have begun or are about to begin work on transferring data from the seasonal reports to the AZFO database. They are focusing on the South-Central, Yavapai, Coconino, and White Mountains regions. The AZFO database, with its searchable tools, is an invaluable resource for researchers and becomes more valuable as time goes on. Currently, much of the data for the seasonal reports is gathered from other sources, and it will greatly enhance the usefulness of the database if we can enter all the noteworthy observations into it. To this end regional coordinators have been helping to find volunteers who would like to assist with this project. We especially need help for the Southeast, Mohave, and Southwest regions. All that is needed is a little time and access to a computer. If you would like to help please contact one of the regional coordinators listed on the website or Doug Jenness (d_jenness@hotmail.com). Special thanks to Walter Thurber, Barbara Meding, Tom Lewis, Melanie Herring, and Bea Cooley for volunteering to help.

A 242-page tribute book to Gale has recently been published (only 200 copies) with all proceeds going to the Gale Monson Research Grants.

$34.45 including shipping

To purchase a copy Please email Janet Witzeman jlwitzeman@aol.com.

For details about Gale Monson Research Grant Program visit http://www.azfo.org/grants/grants.html

For photos and wonderful written tributes to Gale visit http://www.azfo.org/Gale_Monson/GaleMonsonTributes.html
It's that time again – we're all gearing up for our favorite Christmas Bird Counts! But did you know that CBCs are now free? The National Audubon Society has eliminated the $5 participation fee formerly required for each count.

See a list of Arizona CBCs here: http://azfo.org/CBC/cbc2012_2013.html

Sponsored Counts - Both on 19 January 2013
We have two different counts scheduled and both are in need of volunteers. Both help monitor population trends. Details for both these counts can be found at http://www.azfo.org/namc/censusData.html

1) Santa Cruz Flats Raptor Count: this takes place in the large agricultural area between Marana and Casa Grande. Several teams are needed to do a driving survey, keeping track of all raptors identified. Contact Doug Jenness (d_jenness@hotmail.com).

2) Greater Phoenix Area Waterbird Census: this is a thorough search of urban water bodies in the greater Phoenix area. Many sites are not often visited by birders or covered by CBC circles. Contact Troy Corman (tcorman@azgfd.gov).

Field Expeditions 2013
Detailed announcements will be sent to AZFO members about one month in advance of each Field Expedition. Here are brief summaries – mark your calendars now!
(TBD = To Be Determined)

23-24 March: Crested Caracara numbers have been increasing in recent winters in the Santa Cruz Flats. Typically this species does not wander far from its nesting grounds, even in the winter, which begs the question: are Caracaras nesting here? This expedition will be an attempt to document a northward expansion of their nesting range.
Leaders: Doug Jenness and Rich Glinski

27-28 April: Bendire’s Thrasher surveys west of Wikieup in an effort to find enough nesting pairs (minimum of 10) to designate the area an Important Bird Area (IBA) at the State and Global levels.
Leader: John Arnett and/or John Yerger

Late May or June: (TBD) Teams to obtain White Mountain Apache tribal recreational permits and conduct Breeding Bird Atlas-style surveys on different topographic maps to help fill in the unknowns of the Atlas.
Leader: Troy Corman