



Gambel's Tales

The Newsletter of the Sonoran Audubon Society

Volume 7 Issue 1

September 2005

IBA NEWS

By Josh Burns

Agua Fria National Monument IBA. In spite of the major fire which burned portions of the Monument we were able to complete counts on two of the July transects. We are working with BLM and the Friends of the Agua Fria National Monument to produce the Monument checklist based on the data collected by SAS during 2002-2004. The checklist will have a larger format with more related information.

Plans and Schedule. SAS is assuming responsibility for monitoring at two of the current IBAs – we will continue the AFNM work and begin monitoring six transects on the Gila River IBA which runs from Tres Rios to old Gillespie Dam. We may also add some special surveys such as point counts during nesting in lieu of some of the transects and surveys of grassland birds at the Monument.

The schedule of count periods and counts has changed slightly:

- 1 count in –January;
- 1– Late March/Early April (desert spring nesting);
- 1 to 2 - Late April thru May 21 (migration);
- 1 - Mid July (after monsoon rains or late summer nesting);
- 1 to 2 - Early September (migration).

We need to assemble regular crews for each of the transects, each crew should have a leader and several counters – a typical transect count requires a minimum of two but ideally three or more birders counting. Initially at least the crew leader should have received the IBA training with an ultimate goal of all participants trained. Six crews will be required for the Salt-Verde IBA and more counters are needed for the crews at the Monument.

The September fall monitoring period will begin about the
(Continued on Page 4)

At our next meeting.....

September 14, 2005

George Wall: “Commando Birding in Northern Peru”



Photo by Roger McNeill

“Commando Birding, what is that?” he said, when Roger McNeill asked him if he wanted to go to Northern Peru on a “Commando Birding” trip. Roger then explained to him that it would be a group of five people from different areas of the U.S. meeting in Peru. They would then take off into the desert, jungles and the Andes looking for birds. There was no definite itinerary. Roger further stated that it was a check-out trip to see if the area was worthwhile for future trips to be planned for by Ventures, Inc., a tour group out of Kansas City, MO.

This program is about that trip and the birds he saw and the experiences he had from August 30th to September 7th, 2003. Included is his search for the endangered
(Continued on Page 2)

(Continued from Page 1)

George Wall "Commando Birding in Northern Peru"

Marvelous Spatulatail hummingbird that is found in only one small area in Peru, his hunt for the endemic Peruvian Plantcutter, and his unusual fall and rescue on the deep jungle trail.

George Wall started birding in Alabama in March of 1997 at the young age of 60. His first trip was to Fort Morgan on the Gulf Coast to watch some bird banding and that hooked him. He soon joined the Hummingbird Society in Alabama and then made his backyard a sanctuary for birds. In 1999, he and his wife, Maria, moved to Arizona. Since then, he has birded in Costa Rica, Southern Peru, Northern Peru, Ecuador, the Galapagos Islands and numerous trips into Mexico.

He is currently the editor of this newsletter, on the board of the Sonoran Audubon Society, the leader of Birders' Anonymous in Sun City, on the trip planning committee for both groups and a docent guide for the Tres Rios Wetlands. He's also involved in the Christmas Bird Counts and IBA counts. He's currently planning a trip to New Zealand and possibly Madagascar in the near future.

What's Happening?

By your editor

Here is what has happened since the last newsletter in May.

At the May Sonoran Audubon Society board meeting, the nominating committee recommended Daniela Yellan to be appointed to the board to fill one of the vacancies. The Board unanimously approved this appointment.

The Sonoran Audubon Society doesn't meet during the months of June, July and August, but there were plenty of things going on. The Board met during those three months and did business as usual such as sending out letters and e-mails on important issues and discussing other ones.

One of the things discussed at the June board meeting was to submit a proposal for funding for Important Bird Area (IBA) monitoring. This was a cash match for equipment (\$600). At the August meeting, we were informed by Tice Supplee that it was approved.

Since the last newsletter, there have been 17 field trips to various areas including three-day trips to Springerville and San Diego.

On August 19th, the Eighth Annual Arizona Outdoor Hall

of Fame Induction Banquet was held at the Scottsdale Resort and Conference Center. The inductees were Senator Robert Cannell, Pete Cowgill, Anita MacFarlane, Mogollon Sporting Association and Marvin Robbins. The price was \$65 per person. The Sonoran Audubon Society filled a table and enjoyed the night's festivities that included door prizes, silent auctions, and, of course good food.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has published a proposal to remove the Cactus Ferruginous Pygmy-owl from the Threatened and Endangered Species List in response to a Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals opinion. There will possibly be a public hearing on this, but written comments can also be submitted to: http://cfpo_comments@fws.gov.

You might also be on the lookout for draft legislation submitted by Richard Pombo, Republican of California and chairman of the House Resources Committee, that would take a wrecking ball to the Endangered Species Act by taking it off the books in the year 2015.

AUDUBON CELEBRATION

You're invited to a celebration and a weekend of fun that is being co-sponsored by the Arizona Audubon Council and Audubon Arizona. It will take place September 9-11, 2005, in Sierra Vista, AZ, at the Windemere Hotel.

There will be guest speakers, workshops, setting state issue priorities, and, of course, great birding.

Friday evening kick-off speaker will be Brock Evans, president of the Endangered Species Coalition in Washington, D.C., and a former National Audubon Society Government Relations VP.

There will be a Saturday night banquet with speaker Kenn Kaufman, well known ornithologist, author, tour leader, and birder extraordinaire.

During the weekend, there will be leadership training for Chapter leaders, such as fund raising, planning and implementing an education program, attracting new members, etc.

On Sunday, there will be a variety of field trips in one of Arizona's premier birding areas.

There may be still time for you to participate. Call the State Office in Phoenix (602-468-6470) to find out.

Book Review:

By Nancy Kroening

You want to read a good book? I just read “**The Big Year: A Tale of Man, Nature, and Fowl Obsession**” by Mark Obmascik. 2004. Free Press/Simon and Schuster, Inc. and it was hilarious. Here’s what it’s about.

Mark Obmascik, a Colorado newspaperman, reports the journeys of three obsessed birders from three walks of life: 1) Al Levantin, a wealthy CEO gentleman from Colorado, 2) Sandy Komito from New Jersey who grew up in the Bronx, but made it big in the chemical industry, and 3) Gregg Miller, a nuclear plant computer programmer, who kept running out of money (but not love of birding).

Some birders choose to make no lists. Others have life lists, state lists, backyard lists. Levantin, Komito, and Miller wanted a "Big Year" list. How many birds can you see in one year in the U.S. and Canada, not including Hawaii?

The Big Year is peppered with birding stories of Monterey and Bodega Bays, Minnesota, Attu (Alaska), Florida by canoe, snowcocks in Nevada, and rare sparrows. Elf owls in Madera Canyon and a spotted owl in Scheelite Canyon near Fort Huachuca Army Base are not too far from Phoenix.

Obmascik crafts a timeless set of journeys back and forth across the country. It's always interesting to read about "extreme birders" with extreme foibles. For those extremists, winning is the goal or are camaraderie and sharing also important elements of birding? Can the birds survive all this "attention?" The Big Year is an educational and entertaining gift to our sport that you don't want to miss.—Enjoy!

Join the National Audubon Society

New adult or family membership: \$20.00

Seniors and students: \$15.00

Renewal fee for seniors and students: \$15.00

These fees cover membership in the National Audubon Society and a subscription to Audubon magazine. An application form for National membership may be obtained from the chapter at the regular meeting or by contacting <chuckkan@mindspring.com>.

Each year all National members in the Sonoran Audubon chapter area receive the September *Gambel's Tales* that describes major chapter activities for the year. All monthly issues of *Gambel's Tales* may be obtained free from the chapter website <www.sonoranaudubon.org> or by mail for \$10.00 per year. If you wish to get the newsletter by mail or to be notified when a new issue is placed on the website, please contact chuckkan@mindspring.com or by mail to: Sonoran Audubon Society, P O Box 8068, Glendale, AZ 85312-8068

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The above sign was prepared by Jak Keyser, one of our talented members, and will be displayed at our meeting refreshment table: Thank you Trader Joe's

(Continued from Page 1)

IBA NEWS

time you receive this *Gambel's Tales* so if you want to participate in one of these projects please contact one of us ASAP: Josh Burns at josh_a_burns@yahoo.com, Dwayne Fink at edna.fink@asu.edu or Tice Supplee at tsupplee@audubon.org.

Arizona Game and Fish Department Grant. SAS has received a \$3,600 matching funds grant for 2005-2006 from the Arizona Bird Conservation Initiative to reimburse counters for their travel (probably at a rate of \$.405 per mile) and to purchase a few items of necessary equipment, such as radios and GPS units. The SAS match will consist of the time volunteers put in counting at the IBAs including travel. Details of the reimbursement procedures will be developed in the next few weeks.

Observing an Elf Owl Nest

By Helen Snyder, Portal, AZ

This is an update on happenings at an Elf Owl nest that continues from the May Newsletter. It has been modified just slightly to fit our format and space.



April 26, 2005—Egg #3 appeared today, laid at 1:12 p.m. after about 10 minutes of panting and ticking noises on the female's part. This was 74 hours after the last egg; so it looks like 3 days between eggs so far. The female spent the day preening madly around her belly, perhaps due to loss of feathers there for the brood patch. She eats some of the big downy plumes she extracts from herself.

I thought she'd started incubation for sure as she never left the floor of the nest all day to go to the entrance, even when an Ash-throated Flycatcher sang just outside, but tonight she was out of the box from dusk to 9:30 p.m. and the eggs were not being warmed. She's in there now being stuffed with moths by the male who arrives every few minutes.

April 29, 2005—The Elf Owls just laid their 4th egg. If 2003-04 years are an indication, this will be the last egg

(Continued on Page 5)

Workshop Notes

By Tom Lazzelle

Friends of the West Valley Recreation Corridor hosted a workshop to present design concepts of several government and non-government organizations for the New and Agua Fria Rivers.

On Saturday, April 30 I attended a River Corridor Design Workshop at Estrella Mountain Community College. The Maricopa Flood Control District led the efforts of the Agua Fria Watercourse Master Plan. This master plan for reusing gravel pits, trash dumps, ATV trails and shooting galleries for multi-use recreation was formally initiated in 1998 by community leaders and developers in the West Valley. Several agencies have made the effort to produce scale models and display them at open houses since then. One such open house was at the West Valley Art Museum in Sun City hosted by the Maricopa Association of Governments in 2001. Public comments presented there were developed for inclusion at the April workshop. The Sun City Art Gallery is located in the in the Agua Fria River channel, one of the rivers considered in the corridor.

The Master Plan for 32 miles of this corridor between Lake Pleasant and the Gila River would provide for groundwater recharge and flood control. The Plan would change the floodplain designation for more than 1600 acres of land along the way and allow for parks, ball fields, playgrounds, equestrian and hiking trails, wetlands, riparian zones and wildlife habitats.

The workshop began with an oral overview, illustrated by a slide show, presented by board members of the Friends. We then broke into table team groups to discuss and consider uses for 3 sites:

Site 1~ The Agua Fria River Channel at I-10 bridge adjacent to Avondale's Friendship Park. Perched water, steadily supplied by the I-10 Outfall Channel, has created a wetland that could be enhanced as an interpretive park.

Site 2~ The CEMEX sand and gravel site located north of Bell Road. Reclamation options could a park, reclaimed farm land, inert landfill regional retention basin, an ATV recreational use area, or a CAP recharge basin.

Site 3~ Chicken Dam Outfall is now an ATV area. The site is owned by the Flood Control District on the west side of the Agua Fria River. The outfall could be a trail-head or regional park with access to trails extending to Lake Pleasant and the Gila River.

The three teams then selected a person to present their ideas on charts to the team members at large. A brief discussion and recapitulation followed and then the meeting adjourned.

(Continued from Page 4)

Observing an Elf Owl Nest

and the clutch is probably complete. This egg was laid in mid-day again, making the interval 3 days between eggs for all four. It took 10 days to complete the clutch. I think she's now in full incubation mode, as she looks like a big fluffy peony sprawled all over the bottom of the nest box.

The female had been looking tidy when sitting upright over the eggs by day and was spending most of the night outside the box until the night of 28-29 April (Thurs.-Fri.) when she came back within an hour of leaving just after dusk. She had clearly been allowing the eggs to get very cold at night during her long nocturnal absences up to this point, only coming in at 3-4 a.m. for a quick check and to settle for a half an hour or so.

Yesterday and last night she seemed to be warming the eggs, steadily lying in an incubating posture instead of sitting up. She stayed in the box giving begging calls all night while the male fed her every few minutes by bringing insects to the nest box, stretching his head inside and sweeping the food item from left to right with closed eyes, while the female clambered up from below with an open mouth to grasp the goodie. It looks like it is done by feel, not sight, although the female's eyes are open with not even the nictitating membrane over her eye. The food exchange is fast and noisy - both birds are vocalizing, the male giving a high rapid peeping sound and the female her usual begging calls.

Most of the food items are moths, identified as such by their fuzzy wings and the occasional glint of eye shine during the moth's last seconds in the outside world. There may have been a few crane flies in the mix, and there was one larger item that took some chomping before she swallowed it, but nothing looked as large as any of the possible vertebrates like a small snake or baby lizard.

June 11, 2005—Lots have happened since my last update on the Elf Owl. There were 4 young initially, but the youngest chick died about 10 days ago, and the adult male vanished about a week ago. The female had a slow time of it alone at first but her feeding rates have gotten better and she brought in 55 prey items in the first hour night before last, almost one a minute, as good a rate as her mate had managed. The male last appeared on the tape at 3:30 a.m. to feed his mate who was brooding the chicks in the nest, after which he left and she came up to the entrance and sat there giving 10 minutes of alarm calls, as though she'd seen something. She began to feed the chicks and that morning as it got light she didn't return to the nest box to brood the young during the day, and it was a long wait till night-fall to see if she had

deserted - but no, she started arriving with food as soon as it got dark, and has taken over fully as a single mom.

The runt was 3 days younger than his sibs and couldn't keep up with its 3 older nest mates when food came in. Chow generally goes to the nearest mouth, and a runt's chances of making it aren't good unless food is so abundant that everyone else gets full, lies down and stops eating. An older chick will eat 15% or more of its body weight before it stops accepting food. The runt's demise may have been hastened by a double whammy of a load of blood-sucking fly maggots I discovered in the nest bottom under the chicks. I suspected something was chewing on them, as they were constantly giving pain-chatters, preening and scuttling all over the nest bottom. After I scooped out the bottom litter and replaced it, they had several days of peace until a second infestation of larvae appeared and these too were removed. Tonight's check of the nest litter shows no new maggots. The dark quiet flies that slip into the nest must be the source of the blood-sucking larvae. Some of the maggots have gone to the USDA for identification, and others have pupated and have begun to hatch. When I removed all the bottom material I counted 120 of these maggots, amounting to a heaping tablespoon full, from barely visible to the size of a cooked grain of rice.

Early on before egg laying, the female Elf Owl had spent considerable energy digging and flipping the nest material a foot or more into the air, over and over. She would then settle down and nibble through it, biting on this and that. Was it an effort to bring pupae to the surface and crunch them? What is most interesting is that now the young are occasionally doing the identical digging behavior too, lying flat on their bellies and kicking the duff up in the air with one foot and then the other like kids at the beach. There were no maggots present when I first saw them do this.

In the last few days they've grown feathers enough to be able to thermo regulate, and have turned into pretty brown creatures with big bright slow-blinking eyes that stare up at the camera, and entrance, awaiting prey. When one chick gets a food item, the other two never try to take it away, even if the food item is something large like a katydid or walking stick that the other two can feel bumping into them as it's being folded, subdued and consumed, a process that can take several minutes. The non-eating chicks just sit, sway, and give their begging calls which sound like distant surf... or (less romantically) much more like a couple of librarians giving repetitive, insistent SHHH! ...SHHH!...SHHH! sounds.

The oldest chick is in his 24th day today and just made it up to the nest-box entrance and his first look at the world beyond his four walls. Fledging may be upon us in a matter of days.

(This article will be concluded next month)

Fall/Winter 2005 Field Trips

All field trips are open to anyone who has an interest in nature. This especially includes members of the Maricopa Audubon Society and Birders' Anonymous. The Maricopa Audubon Society has its own website and its list of field trips at www.maricopaaudubon.org and I feel sure we'd be welcome on their trips. Birders' Anonymous trips are included below along with the SAS field trips and are denoted by an asterisk (*).

Saturday, September 17, 2005

Prescott Woods and Lakes

Leader: Eleanor Campbell 623-977-7639

ercamp@juno.com

Explore Watson Woods Conservation Area where Blue Grosbeaks nest. Survey the lakes of Prescott's uniquely beautiful Granite Dells. Check the pines of the national forest for Pygmy Nuthatch, Band-tailed Pigeon and woodpeckers. Near Granite Mountain find flycatchers and Peregrine Falcon. It's possible to see the Bald Eagle which has been nesting at Lynx Lake.

Difficulty: 1 Morning only, but plan to eat lunch at one of Prescott's fine restaurants.

Meet at Bell Recreation Center parking lot, near Hutton & Boswell in Sun City to **LEAVE AT 6 a.m. You need to call the leader to register** and at that time, you can ask for another meeting place farther west if needed.

Wednesday, September 21, 2005

Box Bar-Tonto National Forest

Leaders: Chuck and Loretta Richards 623-594-6554

carichards@nowonline.net

Box Bar is an area along the floodplain of the Verde River just northeast of Rio Verde. There are cottonwoods, willows and tamarisk along the banks of the river. We should see fall migration warblers, tanagers and sparrows as well as some water birds. We will be walking up and back on level ground about a total of two miles over sand and some river rock. Last fall, Daniela Yellan spotted a Black-throated Blue Warbler and a Black-throated Green Warbler in this area. This area is in the Tonto National Forest and has a \$4 fee per vehicle.

Difficulty: 2 Morning only.

Meet at 6:30 a.m. at the parking lot at the Bell Recreation Center near the corner of Hutton and Boswell. Those who want to meet at Box Bar can call the leader for directions.

Friday, September 30, 2005

Camp Verde

Leader: Carolyn Modeen 623-972-6273

ctmodeen@juno.com

In Camp Verde we will bird along Salt Mine Rd. that follows the Verde River. We will return to Camp Verde and go to the campground on W. Clear Creek. After birding, we will eat our picnic lunch there. We hope to see Ring-necked Pheasant, Common Black Hawk and the common birds of the Verde Valley.

Difficulty: 1

We will meet at 6am at Bell Rec. Center parking lot at (Hutton& Boswell) in Sun City or meet at McDonald's on Carefree Hwy. and I-17 at around 6:30. Bring lunch.

Saturday, October 8, 2005

Jackie Meck Lake

Leader: Chuck Kangas 623-931-6677

chuckkan@mindspring.com

Explore this rich habitat at the confluence of the Agua Fria and Gila Rivers near Estrella Mountain Park. The 'lake' is part of the Buckeye Water District Conservation Area. There is a Great Blue Heron rookery and a Great Horned Owl was spotted on the field trip in the past.

Difficulty: 1 Morning only

Meet at the Sun Bowl parking lot on 107th Ave. just south of Peoria Ave. in Sun City to leave at 7:00 a.m.

Thursday, October 13, 2005

Page Springs Area

Leader: John Delventhal

Contact: Chuck Richards 623-594-6554

carichards@nowonline.net

John is the former Vice President of Sonoran Audubon and now resides in Cornville which is North of Cottonwood on Oak Creek. We'll be birding around the Page Springs Hatchery in the morning. Picnic tables will be available for those who wish to bring a lunch. After lunch, those who wish can bird Montezuma's Well. We will meet behind Denny's at the corner of I-17 and Bell Rd (SW corner) and will be leaving at 6:00 a.m. There is ample room to park excess cars. We will need to hold the group to 20, so please register with the contact person.

Difficulty 1 with the exception of walking down at Montezuma which is optional.

Thursday, October 27, 2005

Badger Springs

Leader: George Wall 623-875-7057

wallaby@worldnet.att.net

Badger Springs is a part of the Agua Fria National Monument with a variety of habitats there including a desert

(Continued on Page 7)

(Continued from page 6)

Fall/Winter 2005 Field Trips

and mesquite area, a cottonwoods stand, and a trail leading down to the Agua Fria River where you'll also find some petroglyphs on the cliffs. The river runs all year long at this location. A variety of birds has been seen here like Rock Wrens, gnatcatchers and tanagers. There have also been Yellow-billed Cuckoos nesting at one time or another. This is a morning trip only.

Difficulty: 1-1 1/2 Walking down the river bed in sand and some rocks.

Meet at the Bell Recreation Center parking lot, SW corner of Boswell and Hutton Dr in Sun City to leave at 7 a.m. Call leader for alternate meeting place, directions and details.

Thursday, November 10, 2005
McCormick Ranch Lake & Pavilion Ponds
Leader Richard Fogle 623-584-3922
rpfogle@yahoo.com

McCormick Ranch is in North Scottsdale and has several lakes and ponds with grassy areas and trees in which to look for birds. The same holds true for the Pavilion Ponds. There are always wintering ducks scurrying around in the water. Last year at approximately the same time, 40 species of birds were seen.

Difficulty: 1 Morning only.

Meet at the Bell Recreation Center parking lot (Hutton Drive near Boswell) in Sun City to leave at 7:00 a.m. or call the leader for alternate meeting place.

Saturday, November 19, 2005
Red Rock Road & Pecan Grove
Leader: Donna Smith 623-556-9535
rms15247@cs.com

The pecan grove, along the lower Santa Cruz River, is known as a fall migrant trap and anything may be possible. Birds that have been seen there include Lewis's Woodpecker, Vermillion Flycatcher, thrashers, doves, Pyrrhuloxia and Burrowing Owls along the road.

Difficulty: 1

We will meet at the Sun Bowl parking lot on 107th Ave. just south of Peoria Ave. in Sun City at 7am. and at the Denny's at the corner of I-10 and Litchfield Rd. at approximately 7:30 a.m. Bring a lunch.

Monday-Thursday, Nov 28-Dec 1, 2005
Bosque del Apache, New Mexico
Leaders: Richard Fogle 623-584-3922
rpfogle@yahoo.com & **Donna Smith 623-556-9535**
rms15247@cs.com

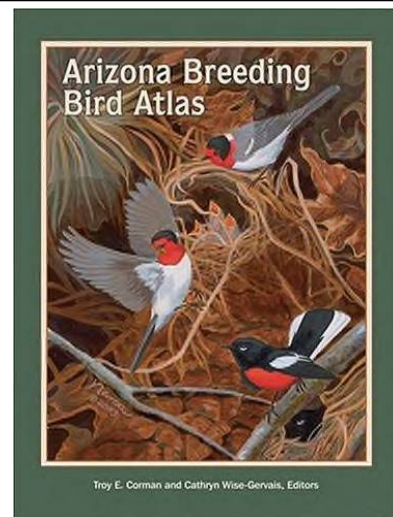
This is a national wildlife refuge where you'll be able to see thousands of Sandhill Cranes and Snow Geese with a few Ross' Geese thrown in to compare at close range. There are always lots waterfowl and raptors at this marvelous place. If things go right, a trip to Albuquerque will be made in order to see the 3 different Rosy-Finches at Sandia Peak. More information on this trip will be in the next issue of the newsletter.

Tuesday, December 6, 2005
Tres Rios: Hayfield & Cobblestone areas
Leader: George Wall
wallaby@worldnet.att.net

You're always going to see a lot of birds at these two areas right next to each other. At an earlier outing in August of this year, 43 species were seen including the Least Bittern, Sora, and lots of Green Herons. This time of the year, there should be several ducks on the ponds.

Difficulty: 1 – easy flat walking trails

Leave at 7:30 a.m. from the Sun Bowl parking lot (107th Ave just south of Peoria in Sun City); so be there a few minutes early for car-pooling.



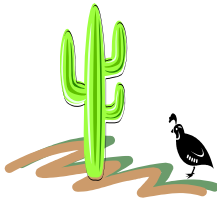
The **Arizona Breeding Bird Atlas** may be purchased from Amazon.com or the Arizona Game and Fish Department. Local bookstores can order copies. Co-editor Troy Corman will be on hand to sign your copy on October 12. If you wish to buy a copy on October 12th, contact Daniela Yellan at danielay11@earthlink.net. Cost is \$45.00 (somewhat cheaper at Amazon.com).

Calendar of Monthly Meetings...

**Location: Auditorium, Glendale Public Library, 5959 West Brown Street
(one block south of Peoria Ave. & 59th Ave. intersection) Time: 6:30 p.m.**

September 14, 2005	George Wall: "Commando Birding in Northern Peru"
October 12, 2005	Troy Corman, Arizona Game & Fish avian biologist, Arizona Game & Fish Department: "Arizona Breeding Bird Atlas: The Project, Book and Future"
November 9, 2005	Jorge Canaca, Wildlife Specialist, Bald Eagle biologist, Arizona Game & Fish Department: "The Management of the Southwestern Bald Eagle in Arizona"
December 14, 2005	David Pearson, Ph.D. Arizona State University: "Why are there more bird species some places than others?"

Other Dates of Interest: Sep 7th at 6:45 p.m. Board Meeting at Glendale Library in the small meeting room. All SAS members welcome.



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Glendale, AZ 85312-8068**