



Sky Island Tours

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The Sky Island News

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April 2015

April is the month that spring really gets going. Bird migration is in full swing, the insect season ramps up, and any chance for a frost is long gone. So get out there and enjoy the show!

Thank you to everyone who attended last month's field trips! I was humbled by the great turnouts for all of them. It was a pleasure and a privilege to be out in the field with all of you! Thank you again.

Read on!

April Field Trips

I also do private field trips for birds, butterflies, dragonflies, and general natural history. Give me a call (520)-488-8551 or visit www.SkyIslandTours.com for rates and more information.

Mt. Lemmon Butterflies. Wed., 4/29. 9AM-12PM. \$10/person. Call (488-8551) or email (jeff@skyislandtours.com) to register.

As spring warms the mountains, we will journey to different locations on Mt. Lemmon in search of butterflies. Some of the hoped for species are Black Swallowtail, Mexican Yellow, Red-spotted Admiral, Pacuvius Duskywing, among others. We will meet at the McDonald's on the northeast corner of Catalina Highway and Tanque Verde Road and carpool to Molino Basin.

Huachuca Canyon Birding. Wed., 4/22. 8AM-1PM. \$10/person. Call (488-8551) or email (jeff@skyislandtours.com) to register.

I want to make another run at birding Huachuca Canyon this month. On this trip, our targets will include Montezuma Quail, Sinaloa Wren, migrating warblers, and, with any luck, Elegant Trogon. Also, we should see more migrants passing through than we did in March. We will meet at the dirt parking area on the southwest side of the I-10 exit for Sonoita and Patagonia (exit # 281). We will carpool to the fort from there. Due to military regulations, **this trip is only open to U.S. citizens**. It is a good idea to have proper identification, in case the military police ask for it. I have never had a problem getting on the fort, but it helps to be prepared.

Pima County Classes and Trips

These trips are offered by the Pima County Department of Natural Resources, Parks, and Recreation. They are all free. Call (520)-615-7855 X3 for more information. Please note that some trips require reservations. For descriptions of these trips and other programs offered by the Environmental Education Division, visit <http://www.pima.gov/nrpr/educ/enviro.htm>.

Wake Up With the Birds. Every Thurs. 8:00-9:30AM. Agua Caliente Park (12325 E. Roger Rd.).

Tucson Mountain Park Birding. Sat. 4/4. 8:00-10:00AM. Ironwood Picnic Area (1548 S. Kinney Rd.).
Leader is John Higgins.

Santa Cruz River Birding Walk. Sat., 4/4. 8:00-10:00AM. Meet at Wheeler Taft Abbett Sr. Branch Library, 7800 N. Schisler Dr. Part of the Living River/Tucson River of Words day.

Outdoor Family Days: Night Bugs of the Sonoran Desert. Sat., 4/11. 7:30-9:00PM. Desert Discovery Center (7798 W. Gates Pass Rd.).

Birding Sweetwater Wetlands. Tues., 4/14. 8:00-10:00AM. 2667 W. Sweetwater Dr.



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Cienega Creek Birding. Tues., 4/21. 8:00-10:00AM. 16000 E. Marsh Station Rd.
Evening Owl Walk. Sat., 4/25. 7:00-9:00PM. Ironwood Picnic Area (1548 S. Kinney Rd.).
Dragonflies and Damselflies. Tues., 4/28. 9:00-11:00AM. Agua Caliente Park. (12325 E. Roger Rd.).

April Classes

Marvelous Moths. Wed., 4/1. 10AM-12PM. Las Campanas (565 W. Bell Tower Dr. in Green Valley). Call 648-7669 to register.



Moths are an extraordinarily successful group of insects, yet they are also one of the least appreciated. There are far more moths than butterflies. Many moths rival butterflies in their brilliant colors. Some of them are active during the day, like butterflies. Moths are important pollinators of many desert plants. In this class, we explore the moths - their classification, identification and biology. Join us for a view into the fantastic night-shift world of moths.

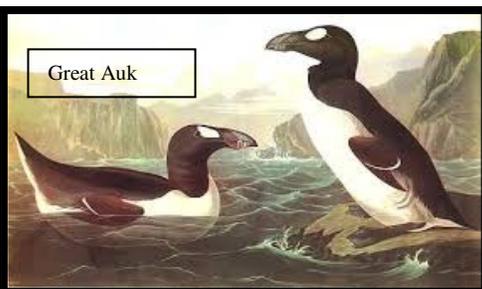
Songbirds Part 1: Flycatchers to Kinglets. Thurs., 4/2. Tucson Botanical Gardens (2150 N. Alvernon Way). Call 326-9686 X18 to register.

In the first installment of the Songbirds Series, we will look at flycatchers, vireos, jays, wrens and several other groups of birds. We will discuss the classification and identification of these birds, using slides and audio recordings. Do you know what separates the flycatchers from all of our other songbirds? This class will tell you. Join us for the first part of our journey through the songbirds, the most diverse groups on birds on Earth.

Songbirds Part 3: Sparrows to Goldfinches. Mon., 4/6. 10AM-12PM. Tucson Jewish Community Center (3800 E. River Rd.). Call 299-3000 to register.

Close the final chapter of the Songbirds Series spotlighting sparrows, cardinals, buntings, orioles, blackbirds, and goldfinches. Like the other classes in the series, we will investigate the classification and identification of these birds using sight and sound. These birds include some of our gaudiest, as well as some of our most difficult to identify (especially sparrows).

Ghost Birds. Thurs., 4/9. 6-8PM. Cochise College (901 N. Colombo Ave. in SierraVista). Call 515-5492 to register.



Passenger Pigeon, Carolina Parakeet and Great Auk are North American birds that have disappeared forever. This class explores the sad legacy of the loss of these and other birds. We will also look at some of our birds that have become endangered and the efforts being taken to prevent them from sinking into oblivion. The news isn't all bad - there have been some success stories. Join us for a look at America's lost and imperiled bird life.

Sensational Serpents. Fri., 4/10. 10AM-12PM. Las Campanas (565 W. Bell Tower Dr. in Green Valley). Call 648-7669 to register.

Snakes suffer from a severe public relations problem. They are feared and reviled by many people around the world. In this class, we'll meet some of these wonderful creatures in person and discuss many of the 47 species of serpent that can be found in Arizona. Did you know that we have a boa that lives in our state? We will also look at rattlesnakes and how to avoid being bitten by one.



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Lizards, Lizards, Lizards. Fri., 4/17. 10AM-12PM. West Social Center (1111 S. Via Arcoiris.). Call 625-0288 to register.



The Sonoran Desert is home to a wide variety of reptiles. This class will look at some of the more conspicuous reptiles, the lizards. Lizards are often active during the day, exhibit interesting behaviors, and some are quite colorful. Why do so many lizards do push-ups? How do some lizards easily lose their tails when a predator threatens? Join us and find out!

Songbirds Part 2: Thrushes to Tanagers. Thurs., 4/23. Tucson Botanical Gardens (2150 N. Alvernon Way). Call 326-9686 X18 to register.

In the second part of the Songbirds series, we focus on thrushes, thrashers, pipits, warblers, and other families. What the heck is a pipit? You get the answer in this class! Join us as we continue our tour through the wonderful world of songbirds!

Arizona's Amphibians. Fri., 4/24. 10AM-12PM. Las Campanas (565 W. Bell Tower Dr. in Green Valley). Call 648-7669 to register.

Most people do not often associate the desert with amphibians. After all, these animals require an ample supply of water to survive. Yet Arizona is surprisingly rich in amphibians, many of which take advantage of summer rains for an opportunity to breed. This class explores the salamanders, frogs and toads of Arizona. We will investigate the classification, identification, vocalizations and biology of these remarkable animals. Join us for a fun look at our amphibian neighbors!

In The Binoculars

This section highlights events that are on the horizon.

Tucson Herpetological Society Monthly Meeting (4/8).

Boyd Poynter, Conservation Manager at the Johnson Center of the Phoenix Zoo, presents "Global Turtle Crisis: Stopping Extinction." The meeting is at the Ward 3 Office (1510 E. Grant Rd.) and begins at 7:15PM.

The Tucson Herpetological Society is a great local organization 'dedicated to the conservation, education, and research of the reptiles and amphibians of Arizona and Mexico.' THS also publishes the bimonthly newsletter, *The Sonoran Herpetologist*. Visit <http://tucsonherpsociety.org/> for more information.

Southeastern Arizona Butterfly Association Events

This month's speaker, Priscilla Brodtkin, presents "The Mata Atlantica: Following in Darwin's Footsteps." Meetings are held at the Tucson Botanical Gardens. They are free and open to the public. This month's meeting is on Tuesday (4/21) and begins at 7:00PM. There are two SEABA field trips this month: Photography Workshop (4/1) and Pena Blanca Lake (4/12). See the SEABA website for details.

The Southeast Arizona Butterfly Association (SEABA) is a local chapter of the North American Butterfly Association (NABA). SEABA holds monthly meetings from September- May and conducts field trips to many of the best areas in southern Arizona to find butterflies. Visit <http://www.naba.org/chapters/nabasa/index.html> for more information.

Santa Cruz Nature and Heritage Festival

This festival highlights the rich natural and cultural history of southern Arizona and Sonora, Mexico. The festival offers an array of tours (birding, cultural, historical, and more), presentations, and workshops. It is also the only festival in southern Arizona that offers a birding trip into Sonora! For more information and to register, visit <http://natureandheritage.org/>.



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Tucson Bird and Wildlife Festival *Online registration is open*****

The 2015 edition of this great festival is August 12-16, once again headquartered at the Riverpark Inn. Online registration for the festival is now open. Most of the field trips for this event sell out, so reserve your spot now to make sure that you get on the trips that you want. The keynote speakers are Rick Wright and Paul Baicich. Visit www.tucsonaudubon.org for more information. I look forward to seeing you there!

National Moth Week

The 4th annual National Moth Week will take place July 18-26, 2015. Look for events to celebrate the beauty and diversity of moths, the incredibly diverse and beautiful, nocturnal (mostly!) cousins of butterflies. I will be scheduling moth nights for Sky Island Tours and Pima County Natural Resources in honor of NMW. Moth fever- Catch it!

Spring Raptor Migration Trip Report

Ronald Morriss Park in Tubac has become a favorite spot for hawk watchers during March in recent years. So, Sky Island Tours made its annual pilgrimage to the park to join the festivities and to watch the spectacle. We had a beautiful morning to do so- crystal clear skies with none of the winds that had been hammering southern Arizona over the previous few days.



Right after getting out of the cars we spotted a Zone-tailed Hawk soaring north along the Santa Cruz River. A nice start! We soon spied an American Kestrel doing its best imitation of the ornament at the top of a Christmas tree. Shortly we witnessed the beginning of the Common Black Hawk show. The first five of the day's black hawks soared by, giving really nice views of this distinctive, and sought-after, raptor. They were soon joined by more- in a short period of time we had tallied over 20 of them!

While admiring the black hawks, we saw the first Gray Hawk of the day, soaring with some Turkey Vultures. A bit later we detected a kettle of Black Vultures to the south that had at least 24 birds. We soon had our eyes on Red-tailed and Cooper's Hawk, adding some familiarity to the proceedings.

In all we tallied 22 Common Black-Hawks, four Zone-tailed Hawks, three Gray Hawks, three Red-tailed Hawks, two Cooper's Hawks, about six Turkey Vultures, 26 Black Vultures, and a single American Kestrel.

Thank you to everyone who joined me!

Madera Canyon Butterfly Trip Report

A truly spectacular spring day greeted an enthusiastic group of butterflyers as we headed into Madera Canyon for a morning of observing our target insects. Our first stop was Proctor Road, where Madera Creek was flowing (providing mud) and many spring annuals were in flower (providing nectar). We soon found many Tiny Checkerspots and Texan Crescents, which would prove to be the two most numerous species of the day. Mixed in with the Tinys were a few Elada Checkerspots, a look-alike species that differs in being a bit darker overall and lacking the pale band at the leading edge of the forewing. Mingling among the crescents and checkerspots were Bordered Patches, a species known for the variability of the colors of the upper wings. We were able to see a good cross-section of that variability at Proctor Road. We also observed Pipevine Swallowtail, Checkered White, Western Azure, Sagebrush Checkerspot, Funereal Duskywing, Golden-headed Scallopwing, and other species.

We then headed up the canyon to the Mt. Wrightson Picnic Area. The main attractant here was the mud along Madera Creek. In the coolness among the oaks, we were joined by several Short-tailed Skippers, imbibing salts from the mud. We also enjoyed Two-tailed Swallowtails, Arizona's state butterfly, soaring over our heads. The higher elevation proved to be a bit slow, however.

Overall, it was a fun trip and we saw some great butterflies. A big 'Thank You' to all who attended!



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Butterfly Profile: Texan Crescent

One of the most frequently seen butterflies on last month's Madera Canyon butterfly walk was Texan Crescent (*Anthanassa texana*). This species flies throughout the year in southern Arizona, avidly visiting flowers for nectar. Members of the Nymphalidae, Texan Crescents are readily identified by the indentation below the tip of the forewing, reddish-orange base to the wings, and white spot bands. Populations in the southeastern U.S. are brighter orange and have larger white spots than those that occur in Arizona. There are several similar species that occur in the U.S. only in south Texas and Florida. In these areas, caution is urged when trying to identify members of *Anthanassa*.



Texan Crescent caterpillar's feed on members of the Acanthaceae, including *Dicliptera*, *Justicia*, *Ruellia*, and others. The larvae are brownish or blackish with tufts of black setae on the thoracic and abdominal segments. There is a buffy stripe below the spiracles of the abdomen and a white stripe along the side of the abdomen. Like some other nymphalids, the larvae of Texan Crescent are gregarious in their early stages but become solitary as they develop.

The species was described in 1863 by the eminent American lepidopterist William Henry Edwards from specimens collected, not surprisingly, in Texas, (New Braunfels, to be exact).

Did you know...?

... that recent research has shown that male damselflies quickly assess their opponent's strengths and abilities before entering in a battle? Male damsels often establish territories and defend them against other males. Work by two independent teams, one in Brazil, the other in Germany, has shown that males look at opponents wings and base their battle strategy on what they see. More transparent wings and those with larger red spots at the bases indicate a stronger opponent. The battle strategies are either to wear an opponent down in a test of stamina or dazzle them with aerial maneuvers that their rival may not be able to duplicate. And I thought that they were just flying around!