



Sky Island Tours

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November 1, 2014

# The Sky Island News

Vol. 5 No. 11

November 2014

November marks a transitional month here in southern Arizona. Many of our summer breeding birds have headed south for the winter. Their ranks are replaced by our winter visitors- raptors, waterfowl, shorebirds, cranes, and sparrows. So the drama continues, but the cast of characters is somewhat different. Also, insect activity often takes a hit in November caused by the drop in temperatures, especially at night.

So, enjoy the cool weather! Take the opportunity that November presents and spend some time out in the field. You shouldn't have to worry about heat stroke or turning to dust because of dehydration!

Happy Thanksgiving to everyone!!

## November 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](http://www.SkyIslandTours.com) for rates and more information.

**Rabbitbrush Butterfly Trek. Tues., 11/4. 8AM-12:00PM. \$5/person. Call (520)-488-8551 or email (jeff@skyislandtours.com) to register.**



The bright yellow flowers of rabbitbrush signal the last reliable nectar source for butterflies before the onset of cold weather. As a result, it is a magnet for sulphurs, blues, hairstreaks, ladies, and skippers. On this trip we will visit a reliable patch of rabbitbrush along Harshaw Road, south of Patagonia. Bring water, snacks, binoculars, camera, and comfortable shoes. We will meet at the intersection of Sahuarita Road and State Route 83.

**San Rafael Birding. Wed., 11/19. 8AM-12:00PM. \$5/person. Call or email to register.**

The San Rafael Valley is a great birding site that is off the radar of many birders. It offers excellent semi-desert grassland habitat surrounded by oak woodland. On this trip, we will be on the lookout for White-tailed Kite, Northern Harrier, Horned Lark, and numerous sparrows, including Savannah, Vesper, Baird's, and others. Bring water, snacks, and the usual birding gear. We will meet at the intersection of Sahuarita Road and State Route 83.

## Pima County Classes and Trips

These trips are offered by the Pima County Department of Natural Resources, Parks, and Recreation. The trips listed below are those that I am leading. They are all free. Call (520)-615-7855 X3 for more information and to make 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. 8:30-10:00AM. \*\*\*Note Time Change\*\*\*** Agua Caliente Park (12325 E. Roger Rd.).

**Tucson Mountain Park Birding. Sat. 11/1. 8:00-10:00AM.** Ironwood Picnic Area (1548 S. Kinney Rd.). Led by John Higgins.



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**Birding Sweetwater Wetlands. Mon., 11/3. 8:30-10AM.** 2667 W. Sweetwater Dr.

**Honey Bee Canyon Birding Walk. Sat. 11/8 and Sat. 11/22. 8:00-10:00AM.** Honey Bee Canyon Park (13880 N. Rancho Vistoso Blvd. in Oro Valley). Led by Marjorie Flory and Mary Ellen Flynn.

**Canoa Ranch Birding Walk. Tues., 11/18. 8:30-10:00AM.** Historic Hacienda de la Canoa (5375 S. I-19 Frontage Rd. in Green Valley). *Reservations required.* Call 877-6004 or email [CanoaRanch@pima.gov](mailto:CanoaRanch@pima.gov) to register.

**Birding Roger Road Ponds. Tues., 11/25. 8:30-10:00AM.** (2600 W. Sweetwater Dr.) *Reservations Required.* Contact me or call 615-7855 to register.

**Cienega Birding. Sat., 11/29. 8:30-10AM.** 16000 E. Marsh Station Rd.

## October Classes

**Butterflies of Arizona Part 3: Brushfoots. Thurs., 11/6.** 6-8PM. Tucson Botanical Gardens (2150 N. Alvernon Way). Call 326-9686 X18 to register.

Did you know that Brush-Foots are named after their specialized front legs? The Brush-Foot family includes familiar butterflies like monarchs and ladies and such magical creatures as satyrs, fritillaries, and buckeyes. Join us for a look at this familiar and diverse group of butterflies.

**Amazing Arachnids. Fri., 11/7.** 10AM-12PM. Las Campanas (565 W. Bell Tower Dr. in Green Valley). Call 648-7669 to register.

Arachnids are the eight-legged creatures that include spiders, scorpions, daddy-long-legs and many other animals. Did you know that arachnids are the second most diverse group of land-dwelling invertebrates, only behind the insects? Unfortunately, many people irrationally fear these remarkable animals. This class will introduce students to these fascinating animals. We will also try to dispel people's fears and misperceptions about them. So join us for a fun, interesting look at our arachnid neighbors

**Raptors Part 1: Hawks, Eagles, and Allies. Mon., 11/10.** 10AM-12PM. Tucson Jewish Community Center (3800 E. River Rd.). Call 299-3000 to register.



Did you know that southern Arizona is the winter home of thousands of hawks and eagles? This class will discuss not only where to find hawks during the winter but many also other interesting aspects of their lives. Do you have trouble separating a Swainson's hawk from a red-tail? Join us to investigate the tricky identification challenges hawks and eagles present and take a close look at the classification, lifestyles and conservation of these iconic birds.

**Arizona Ducks Study Tour. Wed., 11/12.** 8AM-5PM. Pima Community College (401 N. Bonita Ave.). Visit [www.pima.edu](http://www.pima.edu) for registration information.

Most people do not think about ducks when they think about desert birds, but southern Arizona is the winter home for thousands of ducks and geese! This tour begins with a classroom introduction to

these waterfowl; followed by a van tour of three prime duck spots (Sweetwater Wetlands, Amado pond, and Rio Rico wetlands) enjoying and identifying these snowbirds. Information: Bring a sack lunch drinking water, binoculars, comfortable shoes, camera and field guide. Some walking on graded paths and generally flat ground



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**Hummingbirds: Flying Jewels. Thurs., 11/13.** 6-8PM. Cochise College (901 N. Colombo Ave. in Sierra Vista). Call 515-5492 to register.

Hummingbirds generate awe and fascination for many people. Their glittering colors, unparalleled flying abilities, and interesting behaviors make them one of southern Arizona's main birding attractions. Using color slides and audio recordings, you will learn the identification of hummingbirds and basic aspects of their biology. You will also find out how create a garden that can attract these remarkable birds to your yard.

**Roadrunners, Woodpeckers, Trogons, and More. Fri., 11/14.** 10AM-12PM. Las Campanas (565 W. Belltower Dr. in Green Valley). Call 648-7669 to register.

Roadrunners, woodpeckers, quail and doves are the focus of this class, as we discuss the classification, identification and ecology of these birds. Ever wonder why woodpeckers don't get headaches? Or, which dove is important to healthy saguaro populations? What bird put southern Arizona on the birding map? This class will answer these questions and many more. Join us for a look at some of our most visible and familiar desert birds

**Raptors Part 2: Falcons and Vultures. Mon., 11/17.** 10AM-12PM. Tucson Jewish Community Center (3800 E. River Rd.). Call 299-3000 to register.

Falcons are the jet fighters of the bird world. Caracaras are relatives of falcons that are similar in some ways to vultures. Why are falcons and caracaras placed in the same family? How fast can falcons fly? How come vultures don't get sick when they eat dead things? We answer these questions and learn about the classification, identification, and conservation of these fascinating birds.

**Butterflies of Arizona Part 4: Skippers. Thurs., 11/20.** 6-8PM. Tucson Botanical Gardens (2150 N. Alvernon Way). Call 326-9686 X18 to register.



Fast flying dynamos, skippers present serious identification challenges to butterfly watchers. This class will help you explore these fascinating butterflies and clear their many identification hurdles.

**Bird Classification. Fri., 11/21.** 10AM-12PM. Canoa Hills (3660 S. Camino del Sol in Green Valley). Call 625-6200 to register.

This class, the second installment in the Bird Biology series, tackles the taxonomy and systematics of birds. In short, how birds are classified. Did you ever wonder why bird names are constantly changing? Or why the order of birds as they appear in field guides is never static? This class will show you the science behind these changes.

**Raptors Part 3: Owls. Mon., 11/24.** 10AM-12PM. Tucson Jewish Community Center (3800 E. River Rd.) Call 299-3000 to register.

Owls have captivated the imagination of mankind for centuries, symbolizing everything from evil and death to wisdom and protection. In this class we delve into the classification, biology, and conservation of these nocturnal birds. Can't tell a Whiskered Screech-Owl from a Western Screech-owl? We also learn the identification of owls by sight and sound.

## In The Binoculars

This section highlights events that are on the horizon.



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## Southeastern Arizona Butterfly Association Events

The November meeting spotlights Sue Feyrer, longtime docent and butterfly enthusiast at Tohono Chul Park. Sue's presentation, "The Journey: Butterfly Enthusiast to Butterfly Book", documents her adventures from Tohono Chul docent to writing a book on the park's butterflies and the plants they depend on. Meetings are held at the Tucson Botanical Gardens. It is free and open to the public. This month's meeting is on Tuesday, 10/21 and begins at 7:00PM.

This month's SEABA field trip is Sunday, November 2<sup>nd</sup>, from 8:15AM-2PM. The destination is the rabbitbrush along Harshaw Road, south of Patagonia. Meet in the Fry's parking lot at Rita and Houghton Roads at 8 or the Patagonia Butterfly Garden at 9:15 and Continental Road at 8:00AM. The approximate return time is 2:00PM. The leaders are Bill and Mary Adams. For more information, contact Bill Adams (520-574-6578 or [Adams542@cox.net](mailto:Adams542@cox.net)) to reserve your spot. As with all SEABA trips, a \$5.00 donation per person to SEABA is greatly appreciated.

## Tucson Herpetological Society Monthly Meeting

The November THS meeting features Dr. Jim Jarchow, veterinarian at Orange Grove Hospital and consulting veterinarian for the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum and Reid Park Zoo. Dr. Jarchow's talk is entitled "The Perils our Native Herps Face Sharing Their Habitat With Us Humans." This month's 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.

## Southwest Wings Spring Fling

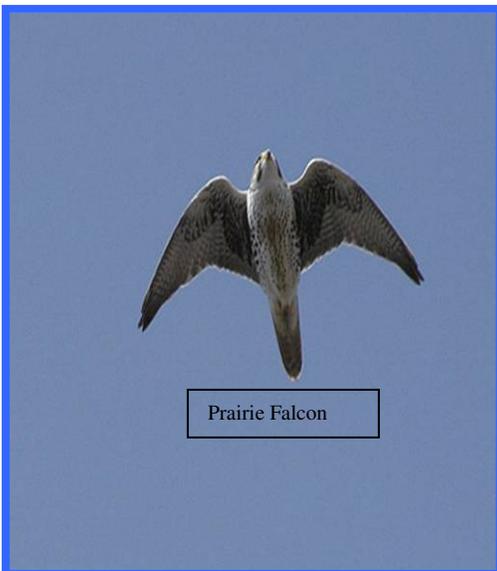
\*\*\*Registration is now open\*\*\*

The 2015 Southwest Wings Spring Fling is scheduled for May 6-9 at Cochise College in Sierra Vista. Registration for this great event has just opened. The Spring Fling offers field trips, but no free programs, vendors, banquet, or keynote speaker (which are featured in the main festival in early August). Visit [www.swwings.org](http://www.swwings.org) for more information. I hope to see you there!

## Birding Arivaca Cienega

Last month's birding trip to Arivaca Cienega produced a nice mixture of birds- we had a few summer breeders still hanging around, some early arriving winter visitors, and some permanent residents. The whole enchilada!

Arivaca Cienega, part of Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge, has long been a noteworthy birding site in southern Arizona. Unfortunately, it is showing the effects of our prolonged drought. There was not much water to be seen. Yet, it still lived up to its reputation.



We had a very nice raptor display, Turkey Vulture, Cooper's Hawk, Harris' Hawk (soaring with the vultures), American Kestrel, and Prairie Falcon. The Prairie Falcon put on a nice show, flying right past us, allowing a good look at the long tail, and long, pointed wings that readily distinguish most falcons from most hawks. We also observed Loggerhead Shrike which, based on its lifestyle, is an honorary raptor!

Flycatchers were another prominent group for the trip. We had Cassin's Kingbird and Western Kingbird in the same tree, allowing comparison between these two similar species. Vermilion Flycatcher, Black and Say's Phoebe, and Western Wood-Pewee were also seen. The two kingbirds and the pewee will soon head south for the winter, along with a large percentage of the Vermilion population. The phoebes are here all year.

Sparrows also had a good showing. We detected a couple of good-sized flocks (~25 birds) of White-crowned Sparrow, both adults and immatures. These birds are the initial surge in what will soon be a flood of this southern Arizona wintering species. Other sparrows seen on the trip included Chipping, Vesper, Lincoln's, and Green-tailed Towhee.



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In addition to the birds, some good butterflies were also at the cienega, including the first Monarchs that I have seen this year in Arizona. We also had Pipevine Swallowtail, Cloudless Sulphur, Mexican Yellow, Western Pygmy-Blue, and Gulf Fritillary, to name a few.

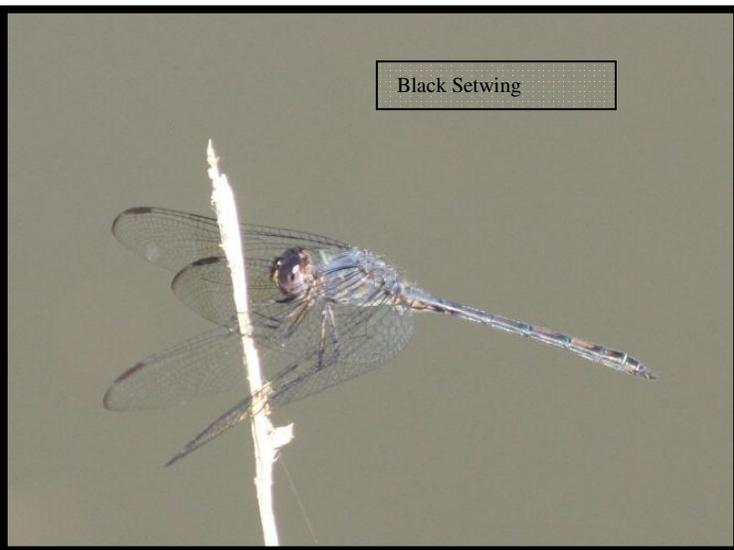
All in all, it was a very enjoyable morning with a great group. I thank everyone that came out!

## Butterflies and Dragonflies at Pena Blanca

On a wonderful late October morning, I was joined by an enthusiastic group of insect-lovers for our journey to Pena Blanca Lake, a hotspot for dragonflies and butterflies. With binoculars and cameras in hand, we set out from the parking lot for the old boat ramp. The first butterfly we saw was a Dorantes Longtail, a member of the skipper family (Hesperiidae). This was a nice sighting, as the species is considered to be a regular stray to our area from Mexico. In the last couple of years records of Dorantes Longtail have been more frequent in southern Arizona. This year seems to be continuing the trend- it was the most common butterfly of the trip! (See more about this species in the Butterfly Profile column in this issue).

As shutters clicked on the longtail, we spied a Dainty Sulphur. This small, pale yellow member of the Pieridae is regarded by some lepidopterists to belong to a subfamily all of its own. Despite its abundance, this butterfly is often overlooked by its small size and its habit of flying just above the ground. Other members of the family seen on the trip included Tailed Orange, Mexican Yellow, Southern Dogface, and Cloudless Sulphur.

Flowers attracted Queens and American Lady, in addition to the longtail and Dainty Sulphur. However nectar was not the only enticement for butterflies on this day. We saw other species at damp soil, including Marine Blue, Reakirt's Blue, and White/Common Checkered-Skipper (the two cannot be distinguished without microscopic examination). Overall, the group detected 16 species of butterflies.



Likewise, dragonflies and damselflies put on a good show on this morning. One of the first dragons we saw was a Variegated Meadowhawk, a member of the skimmer family with northern affinities. Later on we saw females of this species laying eggs in the lake. A bit later we saw a Great Spreadwing, the largest damsel in North America, a species with beautiful blue eyes and a pale blue tip to the abdomen. We also saw forktails, small damselflies that have several species pairs that are difficult to identify. In this trip, we saw Western and Pacific Forktails. Also on the day's list were Desert Firetails, little red beauties that are quite distinctive when in flight but are easy to miss as they rest in shoreline vegetation.

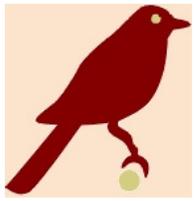
For dragonflies, we picked up Common Green Darner, Flame Skimmer, Black Setwing, and Mexican Amberwing, to name a few. We had especially good looks at male and female amberwings, illustrating that many odonates are like birds in that the sexes look different.

For the morning we had ten species of odonate. We also had good birds and many grasshoppers. The grasshoppers were so plentiful and beautiful that they are screaming for a field trip of their own!

I want to thank everyone who came out for a fun morning looking at bugs! It was a pleasure to be out there with you!

## Book Review

**National Geographic Complete Birds of North America. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition.** Edited by Jonathan Alderfer.



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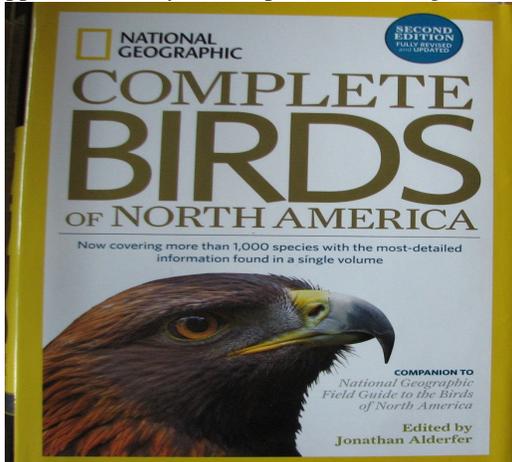
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A few months ago, I saw a pre-publication offer for this book. I immediately placed my order and waited in anticipation for its appearance at my doorstep. I was looking forward to this edition because I have used its predecessor extensively over the years preparing classes, studying up for field trips, and numerous other uses.



Alas, a lot has changed in the birding world in the eight years since the original was published. The birds haven't changed much, but our classification of them has gone through many changes. The new guide has all of these changes through August of 2013. Thus, longspurs are in their own family (Calcariidae), falcons are moved to a position following woodpeckers, and Sagebrush and Bell's Sparrows are regarded as distinct species. This is the proverbial tip of the iceberg in terms of the changes incorporated in this edition. Also included are the numerous vagrants to our shores that have occurred since the first edition.

The new edition covers over 1,000 species, including 44 not covered in the earlier work. According to the back cover, more than 800 maps have been updated and 600 new illustrations have been added (out of a total of 4,000!) here. This is truly a powerhouse of a resource for North American birders!

This is not a field guide. It is a substantial book- 744 pages and 4.5 pounds. Not exactly something you want to carry around in your pack for the day out in the field. However, that is about the only negative comment I can make about this magnificent book.

If you are a birder, you will want to this volume to your library. You will not regret it!

## Butterfly Profile: Dorantes Longtail

As many readers of this newsletter know, I am a big fan of skippers. A large family of mostly brown, orange, black, and white butterflies that offer numerous identification challenges to the butterflyer. Fall is the time of year that southern Arizona butterfly aficionados occasionally find the subject of this month's column, Dorantes Longtail (*Urbanus dorantes*).

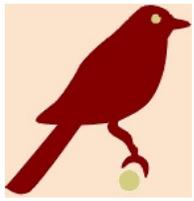
Ten species in the genus *Urbanus* are found in North America, all of them restricted to the extreme southern tier of states, mostly in Arizona, Texas, and Florida. The Dorantes Longtail is one of the more widespread members of the group in the U.S. (only the Long-tailed Skipper (*U. proteus*) has a broader distribution on this continent. In recent years, Dorantes Longtails have been increasing in southern Arizona. On last month's Pena Blanca trip we saw several individuals and they can be expected on this month's rabbitbrush trip.



Dorantes Longtails are fairly large for skippers. They are brown with dark bands on the hindwing. The forewing submarginal band is broken near the wingtip. The namesake tails often are lacking due to wear, so beware of tailless 'longtails.' The forewings also possess hyaline spots.

Records of this skipper span from July to early December. They are often termed monsoon 'influx' species in lepidopterist parlance, following the moisture north from Mexico. Dorantes Longtails are avid flower visitors and seem just at home at mud. The larval food plants are legumes (Fabaceae), including tick-trefoils (*Desmodium*), beans (*Phaseolus*), and others. The exact food plants that the species utilizes in Arizona are unknown.

Dorantes Longtail was described by the German entomologist Caspar Stoll in 1790. The type locality



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is 'Suriname', although this may be in error, as many specimens collected in South America were attributed Suriname but were actually collected elsewhere. The quotation marks around the location are taxonomic shorthand that the location is equivocal.

If you check out desert broom or rabbitbrush this time of year will often turn up a few Dorantes Longtail. Good luck if you go looking for this wonderful butterfly.

## Did you know...?

that a silent killer is attacking grasshoppers? This time of year it is possible to see numerous grasshoppers at the top of stems, their mandibles biting into the plant in a death grip. This grisly spectacle is the result of a fungal infection caused by *Entomophaga grylli*. The genus name of the fungus is quite apt, as it means 'insect eater.' The grasshopper ingests the fungal spores during the course of its normal feeding. The fungus develops inside its unwitting host. As the infection spreads, the fungus produces a change in behavior of the grasshopper. The grasshopper climbs to the top of a stem before succumbing to the pathogen. I find it quite remarkable that the fungus coerces the insect to do this! The higher elevation of the dead grasshopper allows the fungal spores to spread farther than they would if the grasshopper were at ground level. And the cycle continues. Grisly? Perhaps, but yet another example of the intricate workings of Nature.