

Sky Island Tours

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The Sky Island News

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November 2015

'I go to nature to be soothed and healed, and to have my senses put in order.'
John Burroughs

This month is basically the end of the insect season as cold weather moves in by the end of November. This month also heralds the true beginning of winter birding in southern Arizona. The focus of birders switches from hummingbirds, warblers, and trogons, to hawks, cranes, and sparrows. Get out there and enjoy what November has to offer!

I hope to see you in class or in the field! Oh, and 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 for rates and more information.

Fall Birding on Santa Gertrudis Lane. Wed., 11/18. 8:00AM-12:00PM. Cost is \$10/person. Call 488-8551 or email (jeff@skyislandtours.com) to register.



Santa Gertrudis Lane is a place that many of you have probably passed many times on I-19 and never knew it existed. This private road marks the southern boundary of Tumacacori National Historic Park, offering a variety of habitats, such as mesquite woodland, riparian forest, and pasture. With migration underway, there should be a lot of birds about, such as Gray Flycatcher, Cassin's Vireo, and several species of sparrows. Rufous-backed Robins have been reported here too! Bring water, snacks, bug repellent, sunscreen. We will meet in the Safeway Shopping Center parking lot north of the McDonald's lot (but not in the McDonald's parking lot) and carpool to Santa Gertrudis.

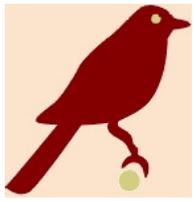
Annual Rabbitbrush Butterfly Trip. Sat., 11/7. 8:30AM-12:00PM. Cost is \$10/person. Call 488-8551 or email (jeff@skyislandtours.com) to register.

The yellow flowers of rabbitbrush are the last hurrah of nectar for fall butterflies before the onset of cold weather. This trip visits the rabbitbrush stands along Harshaw Road south of Patagonia. Among the expected species are Cloudless Sulphur, Great Purple Hairstreak, Common and Tropical Buckeyes, and more. Recently Silver-banded Hairstreak and Lyside Sulphurs have been seen in the area, too! Bring water, hat, snacks, sunscreen, and a camera. We will meet at the dirt parking area at the top of the eastbound Sonoita/Rt. 83 exit (#281) of I-10.

November Classes

Dragons and Damsels. Mon., 11/2. 10AM-12PM. Las Campanas (565 W. Bell Tower Dr. in Green Valley). Call 648-7669 to register.

Dragonflies and damselflies are amazing insects that are becoming increasingly popular with amateur naturalists, being just as colorful as birds and butterflies. This presentation will introduce students to these wonderful bugs, delving into the classification,



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identification, and diversity of dragonflies and damselflies in southern Arizona. Join us for a fun look at the dancers, bluets, darners, skimmers, and all of the other dragons that live in Arizona!



North American Mammals Part 3: Carnivores. Mon., 11/9. 10AM-12PM. Las Campanas (565 W. Bell Tower Dr., in Green Valley). Call 648-7669 to register.

In this installment of the North American Mammals series we investigate the varied members of the order Carnivora—the wild dogs, cats, bears, raccoons, weasels, and others. We will investigate why the name carnivore is somewhat of a misnomer for many members of the group. We will also explore the diversity and conservation of these magnificent mammals.

North American Mammals: Hoofed Mammals. Tues., 11/10. 6-8PM. Cochise College (901 N. Colombo Ave. in Sierra Vista). Call 515-5492 to register.

Check out the biology classification, and conservation of these familiar mammals. We look at the pronghorn, javelina, deer, elk, moose, wild sheep, and goats of North America. Many of our hoofed mammals are famous for their speed and grace. They are also North America's most popular game animals.

Ducks and Geese of Arizona. Mon., 11/16. 10AM-12PM. Las Campanas (565 W. Bell Tower Dr. in Green Valley). Call 648-7669 to register.

Most people do not think about ducks when they think about desert birds, but southern Arizona is the winter home for thousands of ducks! In this class, you will learn how to identify and classify these ducks and geese. Join us for a look at another type of 'snowbird.'

Things That Make You Say 'Ouch'. Thurs., 11/19. 6-8PM. Tucson Botanical Gardens (2150 N. Alvernon Way). Call 326-9686 X18 to register.



Southern Arizona is home to many things that can sting, bite, poke, or otherwise irritate, including rattlesnakes, black widows, scorpions, and chiggers. Furthermore, it seems every plant in has thorns or spines. Jeff Babson, of Sky Island Tours, explores the defense mechanisms utilized by plants and animals adapted to survive in a desert environment.

Shorebirds. Mon., 11/30. 10AM-12PM. Las Campanas (565 W. Bell Tower Dr. in Green Valley). Call 648-7669 to register.

Shorebirds are an amazing group of birds, famous for undertaking some of the longest migrations known in birds. These birds, found along coasts, lake shores and other open habitats, present some difficult identification challenges to birders. This class will explore the great diversity of shorebirds, highlighting their classification and identification.

Pima County Classes and Trips

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

Online reservations and a \$5.00 fee are required for all Pima County Natural Resources Programs unless indicated otherwise. Visit www.pima.gov/nrpr to create a profile, register, and pay program fees.



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Wake Up With the Birds. Every Thurs. (except Thanksgiving, 11/26). 8:30-10:00AM. Agua Caliente Park (12325 E. Roger Rd.). *NOTE TIME CHANGE*****

Birding Sweetwater Wetlands. Wed., 11/10. 8:30-10:30AM. (2667 W. Sweetwater Dr.). No reservations or fee required for Sweetwater Wetlands programs.

Birding the Santa Cruz River. Tues., 11/17. 8:30-10:30AM. Meet at Wheeler Taft Abbett Library (7800 N. Schisler Dr.).

Cienega Creek Birding. Mon., 11/23. 8:30-10:30AM. (16000 E. Marsh Station Rd.).

A Night with the Stars. Fri., 11/20. 6:00-8:00PM. Agua Caliente Park (12325 E. Roger Rd.). Free. Reservations not required.

Monthly Meetings

This section highlights the month's meetings of local organizations that may be of interest.

Tucson Herpetological Society Monthly Meeting (11/11).

My friend Randy Babb of the Arizona Game and Fish Department presents this month's talk entitled '*Herpetological Surveys in Vietnam.*' Randy has made several trips to Vietnam, a poorly known country biologically, which he documents in what I am sure will be an informative and entertaining presentation. Meetings are held at the Ward 3 Office (1510 E. Grant Rd.) begin 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.

Arizona Native Plant Society, Tucson Chapter Meeting (11/11).

This month's presentation had not been announced as the *News* was published. Meetings are held at the Ward 6 Office (3202 East 1st Street, south of Speedway Boulevard and east of Country Club Road.) and begin at 7:00PM.

The Arizona Native Plant Society is a non-profit organization dedicated to Arizona's native plants. AZNPS hosts monthly meetings, field trips, workshops, and other activities to promote awareness and conservation of the state's flora. AZNPS publishes a biannual newsletter, *The Plant Press*. Visit their website <http://www.aznps.com/> for more information.

Southeast Arizona Butterfly Association Meeting (11/17).

Larry Fellows is the speaker this month with his presentation 'The Ice Age and the Western Giant Swallowtail: A Geologic Perspective.' Larry is the retired former Director of the Arizona Geological Survey and State Geologist. Meetings are held in the Education Room of the Tucson Botanical Gardens (2150 N. Alvernon Way), with social time at 6:30 with the meeting starting at 7:00PM.

The local chapter of the North American Butterfly Association, SEABA advocates for butterflies and their habitats through conservation, education, and recreation through monthly meetings and frequent field trips.

Tucson Amateur Astronomy Association Meeting (11/6).

The Introductory Presentation, 'TAAA Star Parties,' will be given by TAAA members Jim Knoll and Bill Lofquist. The Invited Lecture, by University of Arizona PhD candidate Melissa Halford, is 'Looking for Variations in the Stellar Initial Mass Function.' I really have no idea what that means but, if you like astronomy, check it out. The Introductory Presentation begins at 6:30PM and the Invited Lecture follows at 7:30PM. TAAA meetings are held on the U of A campus at the Steward Observatory Lecture Hall.

From the group's website, 'TAAA members enjoy exploring, observing, and learning about the objects in our solar system and beyond. We want to share our experience with you. From beginner to professional astronomer, with a telescope or without one, we invite you to join us in this exciting and rewarding endeavor.' Visit <http://tucsonastronomy.org/> for more information.



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Poling's Giant-Skipper Pursuit Trip Report

A crystal clear fall morning greeted the butterfly enthusiasts who joined me on a search for a late-flying uncommon butterfly, Poling's Giant-Skipper. Molino Basin is a great place to find this insect, as the slopes are covered in shindagger, the caterpillar food plant.



Heading out from the parking lot, we quickly spied Pipevine Swallowtail and Southern Dogface. Crossing Catalina Highway, we added a Common/White Checkered-Skipper (the two can only be differentiated by dissection). It was very nice to see the stream flowing from the recent rains. If El Nino does come to fruition, as is forecast, perhaps water will flow well into the spring.

After crossing the stream, we began climbing the north-facing slopes that are home to our target. We soon added Orange Sulphur, Tailed Orange, Dainty Sulphur, Reakirt's Blue, Texan Crescent, American Snout, and American Lady. But no Poling's. We did enjoy some nice birds as a consolation prize- Black-chinned, White-crowned, and Chipping Sparrows, Spotted Towhee, Hermit Thrush, Costa's Hummingbird, and more.

We did enjoy the wonderful southern Arizona fall weather, but were somewhat disappointed about not seeing our target. About halfway down, I noticed a butterfly perched on the stem of a verbena. Poling's! Yes! We got it. We had good views for about 30 seconds before it moved on. It was nice to introduce folks to Otho C. Poling's namesake, as it is a special Arizona insect.

Thank you to all who joined me!

Butterfly Profile: West Coast Lady

Southern Arizona is home to three species of Lady (*Vanessa*), four if you include the distinctive Red Admiral (*V. atalanta*). One of them is one of the most widespread and common butterflies in the world. This is the Painted Lady (*V. cardui*), sometimes known by the alternative name the Cosmopolitan, a very appropriate moniker for a species found around the world. The second Lady is the American (*V. virginiensis*), found from coast to coast in North America.

The third species is the subject of this month's profile, the West Coast Lady (*V. annabella*). The heart of the species' range is, as the name would suggest, the Pacific coast region into southern Arizona. The haunts of this butterfly extend to the western Great Plains. Of the Ladies in southern Arizona, this is least common.



The best field mark to separate this species from the other Ladies is the squared off tip to the forewings. Other useful characters for identification are the last pale bar on the forewing above is orange in West Coast (white in the others) and the row of submarginal spots on the forewing above are separated and blue-centered. In the other species the spots are either connected or lack (usually) blue centers.

The caterpillar foodplants for West Coast Lady are mallows (Malvaceae). Adults regularly visit flowers for nectar and will visit mud. West Coast Ladies are on the wing throughout the year in southern Arizona, but I find them most often during the cooler months. The stands of rabbitbrush along Harshaw Road are a good place to look for this species in November.



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Did you know?

... that a recent study has enabled biologists to show the complete family tree of birds for the first time? A team led by Emily Moriarty Lemmon of Florida State University has shown that birds are the only living descendants of dinosaurs and that they diverged quite rapidly following the extinction of their cousins. The study proves that nightjars are close relatives of hummingbirds, owls are cousins of hornbills and toucans, and falcons are close to parrots and songbirds. The paper, published in the journal *Nature*, also indicates that nearly all water birds, including pelicans, penguins, and gulls, share a common ancestor. I guess this means that birders need to prepare for more rearrangements in their field guide!