

Habitat Happenings

SAVING BIRDS THRU HABITAT NEWSLETTER

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The Little Bat That Makes Tequila

by Kay Charter

Why, you might reasonably ask, is a story about a bat the lead for a bird conservation publication? The answer is that Saving Birds Thru Habitat is a serious conservation organization dedicated to saving habitat for the birds we love. And when we save various habitats for birds, we save them for every other creature that shares those same habitats. The reverse is also true: save habitat for other declining wildlife and we save habitat for birds. One species, the Lesser Long-nosed Bat, declined to such a degree that it was listed as endangered in 1988. Habitat loss was one of the problems facing this little flying mammal, whose natural range includes much of Pima County, Arizona (think Tucson).

The Lesser Long-nosed Bat does not, of course, actually make tequila. It performs the essential task of pollinating blue agave – agave azul – the sole source of tequila.

Happily the little bat now stands at the brink of delisting. In his February 20th piece

about it in The Nature Conservancy's *Cool Green Science*, Ted Williams quotes Arizona field supervisor, Steve Spangle: "This has been an international team effort involving citizen scientists in Pima County, tequila producers in Mexico, biologists in both the U.S. and Mexico, non-governmental organizations and federal and state agencies, all

did not know: these bats have historically visited hummingbird feeders in Tucson and the adjacent town of Marana.

After an agave failure, residents noticed a decline in the bats visiting their nectar feeders. Their help (as "citizen scientists") came in the form of collecting data about those bats to aid resource managers in their efforts.

The significance of saving this cute little animal can hardly be overstated for

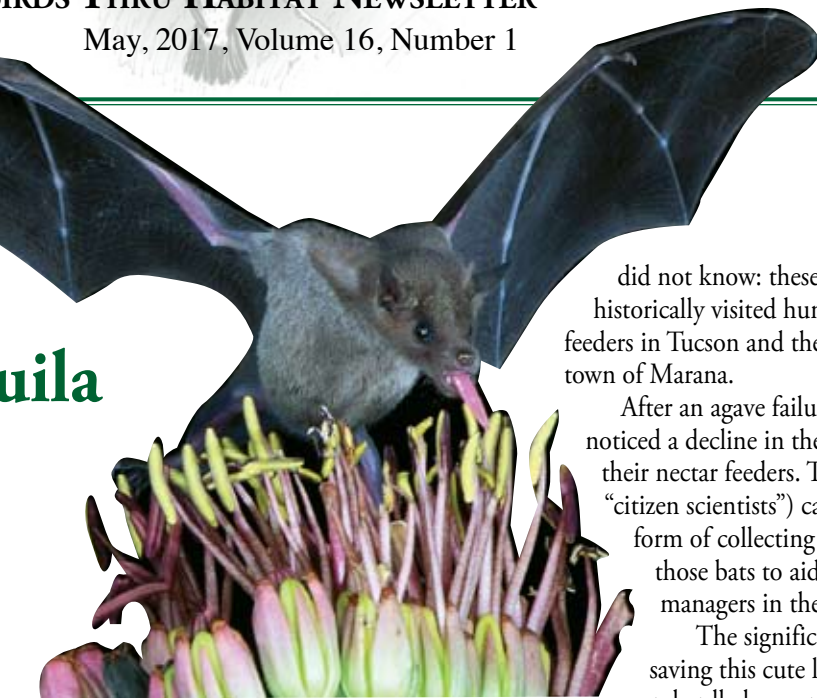
margarita lovers. It is more important for those of us who love birds. Efforts to save the bat also preserves habitat for many desert avian species, including various doves, owls, hummingbirds, flycatchers, woodpeckers, swallows, wrens, warblers, orioles, the spectacularly beautiful Harris's Hawk and that most popular feathered denizen of the desert – the Greater Roadrunner.

Pima County's involvement in the bat recovery is part of its award-winning Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan, which protects and preserves desert flora.

Thanks to Saving Birds supporter Ted Williams for help with photos.

Bat on agave: Credit Bruce D. Taubert, Courtesy of Bat Conservation International and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Lesser long-nosed bat at a hummingbird feeder in Tucson. Credit Dr. Theodore Fleming



pulling together under the organizing banner of the Endangered Species Act."

Note, especially, that part about "citizen scientists in Pima County." Helping the lesser long-nosed bat was just one of the very cool things this county has done for the planet. Not surprisingly, a significant contribution was habitat improvement. But Ted's article also informs us of something we

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From the Executive Director's Desk

by Kay Charter

Late in the afternoon of August 20 last year, noted writer (and staunch Saving Birds supporter) Doug Tallamy presented a short program for our annual fundraiser. During the presentation, he shared the results of an informal survey

he had done of street trees in Portland, Oregon. He discovered that 91.5 percent were non-native. As a result, there was a dearth of birds: Jays, robins and crows were all he found along that city's streets. He included a list of 20 bird species that would be present if indigenous (native to the area) trees like western white oak and Pacific madrone had been used instead of horticultural varieties from other parts of the world. Included in that list were chickadees, nuthatches and kinglets as well as Varied Thrush and the colorful Western Tanager.

Last year, Portland was chosen as one of America's greenest cities; thus Doug's statistics about street trees was alarming. We would all imagine that one of the greenest cities would have native trees with lots of birds. Even more alarming is that Portland is not unique; street trees in most cities are nearly all non-native.

With numbers like that, it's no wonder we are losing our birds. His survey reinforced the importance of native plants to birds and other native wildlife. It is important, however, to keep in mind that municipalities don't use non-native trees to disrupt a natural balance, but rather because horticultural plantings are popular. It is the way we landscape our own properties. How can we expect our cities to do a better job of using native trees, shrubs and flowers if we don't do so in our own landscapes?

This was disheartening for me, especially as I have dedicated more than two decades of my life to bird conservation. I generally have a positive outlook and faith in the future. But envisioning

cities across the country filled with alien trees with few birds was depressing.

Then I began to research Tucson – or, more accurately, Pima County, and I was thrilled to discover a community that values its native ecosystems.

I have been going to Tucson for decades, and have always been impressed by the bird life there. But Doug's presentation made me wonder what the difference was between that county and all the others in the country? My research led me to an extraordinary tale of a community that so values its natural ecology that it created a management plan to save vegetation that would otherwise be lost to development. I was heartened and inspired by their efforts.

Their wonderful work moved us to create a Certificate of Exceptional Merit for Pima County. Then, during my trip west in March, I was privileged to present this award to the Board of Commissioners on behalf of our organization. After my presentation, staff members who carry out the work of the Conservation Plan informed me that the award had raised awareness among these newly elected officials, which will help the staff get the support they need to continue.

In order to share this remarkable story, this spring issue of our biannual newsletter is dedicated to the work that Pima County is doing, and the results achieved through their work. It is my hope that other counties will be inspired to follow suit. Happily, Leelanau County, where I live, is already heading down that path.



Letter From Our Board President

by Linda Ketterer

It is an exciting time of year when we are all looking for every bit of evidence that Spring is on its way – whether the absence of juncos, the sighting of a bird gathering nesting material, migrants spotted at the feed-

er, the courtship displays of turkeys, or the detectable increase in the hours of sunlight and temperatures. The re-awakening of spring each year is always a marvelous celebration! Make sure that you get outside to enjoy it! We are busy at SBTH making plans for a number of great activities and events for the summer season. This newsletter will provide you details about field days and workshops at which you can enhance your knowledge and understanding of our environment and things that you can do to help preserve and protect it. Experts from around the state and the country will be here to teach us all. Mark your calendars for these special events!

We are especially proud of the exposure that SBTH has

received of late through the Certification Program for municipalities and the ongoing work with community planners to encourage the use of native plants in public spaces. I know that you will enjoy reading about the recognition by SBTH of Pima County, AZ and Pima's commitment to the use of native plants throughout the county. They serve as a true model for all communities and evidence of how much of an impact every person can make in helping create habitat.

Enjoy the Spring wherever you are!

Linda Ketterer
SBTH Board of Directors President

"I am only one, But still I am one. I cannot do everything, But still I can do something; And because I cannot do everything I will not refuse to do the something that I can do." – Edward Everett

Pics of Prickly Park

One of the most amazing efforts that grew out of the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan was the establishment of Pima County Native Plants Nursery where rescued cacti, palo verde trees and other desert flora are removed from properties undergoing development and put in the ground until new homes are found. These plants ultimately become part of urban streetscapes, riparian hiking and biking trails and part of county park landscapes.

Included in Prickly Park is Saguaroheenge, an arrangement of rescued giant saguaros. One of those saguaros is playing host to nesting Gila Woodpeckers and another to nesting Mourning Doves. The very lucky Great Horned Owl pictured here was discovered impaled upside down on a smaller cactus one morning by a couple of volunteers. The owl was taken to a rehabber and, once healed from its injuries, released again into Prickly Park where it is presumably dining on the native rodents there. The last photo shows nursery manager, Jessie Byrd, pointing out ladybugs on pineleaf milkweed planted for monarchs. The native ladybugs are dining on unwanted aphids.



Jessie took Kay Charter and her stepdaughter Shelley DeBlois on a tour of the nursery grounds when Kay was in Tucson in March. The nursery encompasses roughly ten acres, most of which is occupied by the rescued plants in Prickly Park. But a two-acre section is used to grow out new plants from seeds. While she was there, Kay presented Jessie with a Certified Bird Habitat sign, which Jessie managed to position in front of a potted cactus in the hoop house. Look closely – a mother Mourning Dove is sitting on a nest behind the cactus.

Pima County Native Plants Nursery is located in the heart of a busy commercial/residential area, but it is filled with birds and other wildlife, including rattlesnakes – which also feed on rodents. It is the perfect example of the way native plants support birds, even in a small area surrounded by development.



Pima is a County That Could – and Did!




On March 7, our Executive Director Kay Charter presented the Pima County, Arizona Board of Directors with an Award of Exceptional Merit for maintaining habitat that supports a thriving bird population in the metro Tucson area. During her presentation, Kay cited the County's ongoing effort to preserve large swaths of native vegetation under the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan (SDCP), the County's formal road map for balancing the conservation and protection of cultural and natural resource heritage with efforts to maintain an economically vigorous and fiscally responsible community. She called the SDCP "nothing short of remarkable."

When she presented the award, she told the Board and the audience that the Plan's emphasis on rescuing native plants and fighting the spread of invasive plant species, such as buffelgrass, were major criteria for honoring the County with the award. Native plants, and the insects they host, are essential to a robust bird population.

"As a longtime winter visitor to Pima County, and as a serious

bird conservationist, I can attest to the fact that the efforts made here because of your SDCP have had a significant positive impact on bird populations here," she said. "I have traveled widely around the country and know of no other densely populated urban area that can boast as many beautiful native birds as this one."

The Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan proves that efforts to protect and preserve native plants, and the birds they support, are not contrary to maintaining a healthy local economy.

Since the presentation, Pima County has embarked on a new program to save birds. They are searching for, and covering, exposed vertical pipes in the ground. These pipes are hazardous to birds that either fall into them, or are seeking cavity nesting space. Once inside, they cannot open their wings to fly out, and smooth sides make climbing out impossible. This effort will save many birds from slow deaths. Millions of these uncapped pipes occur across the west, where they were used as markers for mining claims. 

Great Horned Owl: Remarkable Sighting!

by Kathleen Snedeker

Something big and dark caught my eye; I thought with a rush that I was witnessing my first Florida bobcat. But no! Better yet: it was an incredible, enormous owl! It was on top of a sand mound, fifty feet away, focused on something under its feet. I grabbed my camera; snap snap snap. The big tufted-eared head turned and the round yellow eyes looked straight at me. Time stopped, awareness flowed between us. Then the enormous wings, spanning five feet, spread soundlessly, lifting this great bird of prey, and from its hooked black beak trailed the victim — a black, eight foot long snake.




After quickly ID-ing the bird in my reference books (shocked to see it can be over two feet tall), I ran to the nest I'd been watching down the path, hoping to follow up on the feast, but of course, it dined elsewhere. This abandoned eagle's nest had been lately used by Great Horned Owls, known by locals who said two owlets had left

the nest only a couple weeks ago. I had deduced the nest had been vacated until next season, but had to check again. My heart, after I stopped long enough to be aware, was still pounding, hard.



The double thrill was that I had caught the memory on my camera, and could study the photos to identify the snake. I sent the pics to friends; Kay Charter helped ID the snake as a common and harmless, non-venomous Eastern Indigo Snake. It is the longest snake in the U.S. I had just seen the largest common owl take the longest common owl take the longest snake in the country.

Information on the internet can be mind-opening. I searched the beautiful snake and watched a clip of an Indigo attacking - and consuming alive - a hatchling (invasive) Python as large as itself. And I learned that the greatest threat to this harmless-to-humans non-venomous snake is — who can't guess? No surprise, it is us, we humans. 

How Did Pima County Get So Smart?




We know the number one reason we are losing so many members of our wildlife communities, - birds, butterflies, bees, bats and others - is habitat loss. This loss takes place across the country, not just as land is plowed under or paved over, but also in our yards as we replace native oaks with Bradford pears and milkweeds with daffodils. Then we install acres of grass around our modern homes. In doing so, we have swapped insect-supporting native plants with virtually sterile plants from other parts of the globe.

To a significant extent, Pima County has not experienced the same degree of habitat degradation as virtually all other urban areas in the nation. With its spectacular giant saguaros, its centuries old ironwood trees, its wealth of bird life and its strange residents (like the Gila monster), the Sonoran Desert is arguably the most beautiful desert in our country. It is also the one most embraced by its residents, a fact attested to by the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan, put in place in 2001. However, the regional appreciation for this arid, but beautiful ecosystem precedes the Plan by more than seven decades. Serious conservation efforts began in 1929 with the establishment of 20,000-acre Tucson Mountain Park, which lies a few miles west of the city. From that time on, the county added parkland, with considerable help from the State and Federal Governments. Four years after Tucson Mountain Park was established, the Federal Government set aside Saguaro National Monument – now a

National Park of more than 90,000 acres. There are also five district areas of the 1,800,000-acre Coronado National Forest, and the 5,500-acre Catalina State Park. Add to that a number of county and city parks.

These measures would have been difficult to put in place if it had not been for the support of the general population, including the residents of the City of Tucson, who clearly have a strong sense of place. Protecting and preserving the unique plants that have covered the county for thousands of years are important to the people of Pima. The fact that their desert conservation plan was put in place at a time when the area was under intense developmental pressure is a testament to the love residents have for the ecosystem surrounding them.

When Doug Tallamy learned about this remarkable countywide effort, he said, “I wish every county in the U. S. would follow Pima’s lead. What a superb role model!”

We couldn’t agree more, and it is our hope that other communities will follow Pima’s lead to protect and preserve their respective native ecosystems. Our own Leelanau County has expressed great interest, and has ordered up plant surveys on two properties: The campus at the Government Center and Veronica Valley – where habitat improvements are already underway. 

Saving Birds Thru Habitat gratefully accepts gifts in honor or in memory of others. When making such a donation, please let us know who should be informed of your gift.

- Yes! I want to support Saving Birds Thru Habitat with a _____ Membership _____ Renewal at the following level:**
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Questions? Please call (231) 271-3738 or email:
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SBTH • P.O. Box 288 • Omena, MI 49674 **Thank You!**

Saving Birds 2017 Calendar of Events

Call 231-271-3738 for more information.

All events will be held at our nature center, 5020 North Putnam, Omena unless otherwise noted.

Saturday, May 13, 10AM-Noon: "How is Pima County Saving its Birds?"

Pima County, Arizona is not losing its birds in the same way as the rest of the country. What have the residents of that area done differently? Hike follows. \$10.00

Saturday, May 20, 9AM: Saving Birds Hosts the New Grand Traverse Chapter of Wild Ones

Enjoy a PowerPoint program about native plants and their importance to our bird populations. Includes a hike on Charter Sanctuary by Kay Charter.

Sunday, May 28, 9AM – 3PM: Backyard Bird Habitat All Day Workshop with Michigan Audubon in Lansing

Begins with presentation by Kay Charter, continues with review of our Educational Materials and ends with a trip to Wildtype Nursery.

Thursday, June 1, 9AM – 10AM: Batty Over



Bats

Folklore and superstition throughout the ages have given bats a bad name. If you enjoy eating a banana or sipping a margarita, thank those bats. Which one is a clown? Goes fishing? Holds a world record?

Solve some of the mysteries of these amazing masters of

the sky with Bobbie Poor, Conservancy docent, and Kay Charter, Executive Director of Saving Birds thru Habitat. A short walk through the native plants garden will follow this indoor program. Please register with the Leelanau Conservancy for this program.



Friday, June 9, 4-6PM: What You Don't Know About the Birds and the Bees: Fundraiser for ShareCare.

We have heard and read a great deal about the decline of bees and loss of butterflies. Why is that

happening? What can we – as individuals – do about it?

Saturday, June 24: Workshop, 8:30 – 3:30:



The day begins with photographer Sheen Watkins sharing her knowledge about how to take great photos of birds and other wildlife. Then Dr. Dave Ewert, recently retired from The Nature Conservancy, picks up the reins to talk about how you can help migrating birds in your yard. Landscape designer Brian Zimmerman then shows us how to design a beautiful native plants garden. Hikes by Sheen, Dave Ewert, Brian Zimmerman, Brian Allen, Dave Dister and others. **\$50.00 each including lunch.** Each participant will receive

our educational packet, filled with helpful information about bird and butterfly conservation.

Saturday, July 8, 10AM – 11AM: Will I Ever See Bald Eagles Over My Property?

\$10.00 for adults, kids free. We often get calls from people who have sighted eagles on or near their property. They ask if they should call the DNR or someone else to notify them of the sighting. There is actually an "eagle counter" for our Lower Peninsula. His name is Jerry Weinrich, and he counts eagle nests every spring by flying over the entire area and GPS-ing the locations of every nest. Join us to learn more about the status of eagles in our state, and find out what Jerry believes their future is. With wildlife biologist and eagle expert Jerry Weinrich.

Saturday, July 22, 10:30AM – Noon: Dragonflies and Damselflies for kids with Dave Dister.

Adults - \$10.00; Kids free. Bring your kids or grandkids to go out with Dave in search of dragonflies. When we find them, the kids will be able to hold one.

Saturday, Aug. 26, 9AM: Join U.S. Forest Service International Migratory Species Coordinator Dr. Greg butcher for a hike on Charter Sanctuary.

\$10.00 for adults, kids free. Greg is an expert on migrating birds, and he will point out why Charter Sanctuary attracts colorful tropical species like Baltimore Oriole and Indigo Bunting.

Saturday, Aug. 26, 5-7PM: Greg Butcher

Evening fundraiser with silent auction. \$35.00. Seize this opportunity to ask the expert on bird migration any question you have about how, why and where migrants travel. He will also present a PowerPoint program about his work across the continent, and will share his view on why Saving Birds is important to that work. Wine and hearty hors d'oeuvres will be served.



Big Wind? Giant Beaver? Crazy Man With a Chain Saw?

It was actually closest to the latter. People driving up Tatch Road toward Putnam Road in Omena, Michigan, might reasonably wonder what happened to this wooded corner of Charter Sanctuary – especially as this is just the beginning of the apparent destruction.

When Jim and Kay Charter first purchased their 47-acre tract of mixed habitats, they never dreamed they would one day clear-cut any part of it. But included in the Charters' long-term management plan is to periodically cut mature aspen trees in four different sections of woods. Cuts like this encourage the new growth preferred by early successional forest birds such as Indigo Buntings and Golden-winged Warblers. The felled aspens will not be moved, but will remain in place as they break down, providing habit for small mammals, reptiles and insects. Next year, young aspen starts will begin to fill the forest openings where the old trees once stood. Then they will spread across that meadow expanding the early successional habitat the Sanctuary has lost as its trees have matured. 🦋

Sandia Wetlands Dragonfly Pond



Photo by Lou Weinacht

Workers pictured here are planning an additional pond at the Sandia Wetlands project, this one to attract dragonflies. Six years ago, Don and Ellen Weinacht restored seven acres of bone-dry desert to its original wetland state to benefit shorebirds, waders and waterfowl on their ranch in Balmorhea, Texas. Saving Birds was the inspiration for the project and continues to be a partner as it moves forward. The wetland attracts hundreds of birds. The Weinachts



Twelve-spotted skimmer is just one species that will utilize the Sandia Wetlands dragonfly pond. Photo by Jeff Kingery.

have generously opened it to the public and have added a covered picnic area and photo blind for visitors. It is a definite stop on the Texas Birding Trails Map; a remarkable achievement in just six years. In the photo, volunteers Dave Ewert, Chris Wilson and Gary Martin discuss the new pond.

If you have plans to travel west on Interstate 10, make it a point to stop at the wetlands, just off the freeway on County Road 313. 🦋



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The mission of Saving Birds Thru Habitat is to protect, enhance, and restore habitat for North American birds, and to educate people of all ages about this important mission and how to achieve it. Our goal is to improve habitat for migrating birds one backyard at a time.



Many thanks to Four Season Nursery and Brian Zimmerman and Associates for guidance and assistance for our multi-year garden improvement project. Four Season Nursery has a wide selection of native plants for your garden.