



Friends of the San Pedro River Roundup

Winter 2014

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Save the Date! The morning of April 26, FSPR will hold a Bioblitz (an inventory of the flora and fauna) at various locations in SPRNCA. Stay tuned for details in the coming weeks.

FSPR Lectures February & March 20

Join us on Thursday, February 20 at 7 pm at the Sierra Vista Ranger District Office, 4070 East Avenida Saracino, Hereford, for a lecture by Becky Orozco on the Chiracahua Apache. Then, on March 20, Steve Pawlowski, Water Sentinels Program Coordinator for the Grand Canyon Chapter of the Sierra Club, will discuss ecology and conservation of the San Pedro River; current threats; and the conservation work of the Sentinels within SPRNCA. Learn how to use citizen science, "hands-on" conservation, and advocacy to shape a more-sustainable future for one of the Southwest's most ecologically significant rivers.

Second Annual Wild & Scenic Film Festival March 13 & 14

The Friends have been invited to host our second Wild & Scenic Film Festival as part of the 12th annual event that showcases North America's premier collection of short films on the environment. We have selected 13 films for the evening program for adults that are relevant to many of the issues facing the Southwest. Some will make you smile, some may get you angry, others will have you amazed, but hopefully, all will motivate you to get involved.

This "friend-raising" event to boost membership is scheduled from 6 to 9 pm on Thursday, March 13 (repeating on Friday, March 14). Also, a Children's Program of 11 very short films is scheduled for Friday from 1 to 3 pm. All events will be held at the Central School Project in Old Bisbee (43 Howell Street). Tickets are only \$5 (kids under 16 are free!) and will be available at the door the day of the event for the first 90 attendees. Volunteers get in free; contact Ron Serviss at 432-6773 to help. For further information, visit the Friends' film festival web page: www.sanpedroriver.org/filmfest.

The film program is centered on water conservation and watershed protection themes. FSPR is proud to present its own video, "Return of Beaver to the River," as part of the program. We will also show a video called "Mining Patagonia" that was produced with the Patagonia Area Resource Alliance. We are fortunate to have the filmmakers of both these films—namely, Mike Foster and Michelle Gisser—on hand to discuss them and answer questions. The beaver video describes the history of this keystone species along the San Pedro, its extirpation in the early 20th century, its life history and benefits to habitat and other creatures, and successful efforts to reestablish this species in the past 15 years. The film about threats to Patagonia from prospective mining advocates for the protection of the watershed of Harshaw Creek and other drainages upon which the municipal water supply of Patagonia depends.

Executive Director's Report

By Robert Weissler

Fundraising

To date, pledges from Ron Beck's Carbon-Free Bicycle Big Year total \$4666 (see article, p. 6), while the combined total of mid-year, Big Year, and year-end appeals campaigns is \$9556. Ron's Big Year was reported in the latest Conservation Lands Foundation newsletter, the American Birding Association blog, and the *Sierra Vista Herald*—great publicity for the Friends, too! Meanwhile, the Brunckow cabin project (see article, p. 18) has received sponsorship through a bequest/grant of \$10,000, so the Friends have achieved the \$15K match of the Conservation Lands Foundation!

Advocacy & Outreach

The Friends submitted a letter to Vi Hillman recommending that the planning area boundary for the SPRNCA Resource Management Plan (RMP) be the entire watershed that impacts SPRNCA. Vi expressed her thanks for our input and for our role as partners with BLM as the RMP process moves forward. Once BLM nails down dates for presenting its "straw-man" alternatives, the Advocacy Committee will engage to review the initial set of alternatives and prepare suggestions for improving them.

Following a work session in December to address concerns, the Cochise County Planning & Zoning Commission approved a recommendation for adopting amended water conservation measures by the Board of Supervisors. The Supervisors will take up the issue for decision at a public hearing soon.

The US Fish and Wildlife Service has reopened the comment period (through February 24, 2014) for the proposed listing of the western distinct population of the Yellow-billed Cuckoo as "threatened." So, there's still time to submit comments.

BLM SPRNCA RMP

BLM has finalized its Scoping Report and will host public meetings and a field trip in February and March. These meetings offer a chance for the public to help develop a set of management alternatives for a new RMP for SPRNCA.

Local public meetings will be Saturday, February 22 and Saturday, March 22 from 9 am to noon at the BLM/Forest Service Building, 4070 South Avenida Saracino, Hereford. The SPRNCA field trip is scheduled for Saturday, March 1 from 9 am to 5 pm, meeting location to be determined.

Grants

In mid-December, the Friends applied for a \$2000 Every Day Event Grant from the National Environmental Education Foundation. Grants Subcommittee members collaborated to produce a compelling proposal that captures our special events, including Fairbank Day, San Pedro River Festival of Arts (see article, p. 3), Spring Survey (aka Bioblitz, see announcement, p. 1), and Earth Day Festival.

FSPR met with Borderlands Restoration principals Ron Pulliam and David Seibert to discuss wetland and riparian restoration and their experience with such projects. BLM's Jim Mahoney and Heather Swanson also attended. During a subsequent meeting, FSPR joined Borderlands Restoration and met with Fort Huachuca's hydrologist Justin Nixon to discuss restoration efforts on the Babocomari and its uplands on Fort Huachuca. Meanwhile, Laura Mackin presented another funding opportunity with the Tohono O'odham Nation. Its 12% Grant arose from the Proposition 202 requirement that 12% of gaming revenue be shared for public benefit. FSPR could apply for a grant to upgrade the San Pedro House solar power system, including batteries. The request for proposal goes out in late April, with the deadline for submission June 13.

These efforts will tie into an overarching grant strategy to identify funding sources that address the various needs of such projects.

FSPR Lecture Series

Scott Jones of the Conservation Lands Foundation spoke on January 16. He imparted information about National Conservation Lands, the system of lands managed by the BLM, and the mission of the Foundation to protect, restore, and expand these areas through education, advocacy, and partnerships. Scott described the history of the National Conservation Lands, as well as present and future challenges. He also highlighted some special places in this network, such as SPRNCA. He described the Friends Grassroots Network in which Friends groups share experiences and receive guidance from the Foundation to promote protection of these lands and ensure good stewardship.



First Time on the San Pedro: Festival of Arts

By Éva Nagy, Event Chair

We're proud to announce a new special event this year: the San Pedro River Festival of Arts. It will be held Saturday, May 17, from 4 to 8 pm at San Pedro House. Area artists will display their drawings and paintings with the theme "Natural Beauty and Rich History along the San Pedro River."

Live music will entertain festival attendees and a children's art auction will be held to benefit art in our elementary schools and FSPR educational programs. *Plein air* painting will take place on the grounds all day. A Friends event is not complete without a walk, so we will lead two or three silent meditative walks (no birding or interpretation) from San Pedro House to the river. During these walks and throughout the festival, visitors will be encouraged to take photos or videos of their experience and submit them to us for a contest. A community art project is also on the day's activity list, where participants will receive a large puzzle piece to color. At the end of the day, the puzzle will be put together to reveal the picture that festival goers created.

If you'd like to be part of this inaugural event, please step forward. The following volunteer opportunities exist at this time:

- ☛ **Hosts/Hostesses** at entrance table (greet people; collect donations; direct people to activities; hand out program flyer; collect contact info)
- ☛ **Setup/Takedown Helpers** (assist with setting up and taking down tents and grids, tables and chairs, other equipment. Note: Takedown would be the next day, May 18)
- ☛ **Teacher Liaisons and Kids' Art Auction Organizers** (inform teachers of the auction and deadline to submit; collect art from schools; help set up the display and bidding sheets; announce results and match art with bidder; collect and record funds)
- ☛ **Guests' Attendant** (take care of artists, musicians, food vendor)
- ☛ **Docent after-hours inside SPH** (keep bookstore open; handle art and bookstore purchases)
- ☛ **Master Gardener(s)** (answer questions about the xeriscape garden)

The Huachuca Art Association is partnering with us to host this event. That group's experience with Art in the Park in Sierra Vista is invaluable as we feel our way through planning this brand-new event on the river. Thank you, HAA, for offering to help!

We invite you to spend an evening of relaxation and rejuvenation with us on May 17! Let your senses delight in art and music against the backdrop of the cottonwoods and the mountains.

BLM Acting Director Visits SPRNCA

By Ron Serviss

On February 4, Neil Kornze, the acting BLM National Director, visited San Pedro House as part of his fact-finding tour of Southeastern Arizona. Joining him were Arizona State Director Raymond Suazo and Gila District Manager Tim Shannon, plus a large group of other BLM national and state staff. They toured SPH and walked to the River to view a beaver dam.

At the end of the visit, Kornze surprised those in attendance by presenting the Friends with an award thanking us for our 10,000+ hours of volunteer service during FY 2013. Next time you're at San Pedro House, look for the plaque!



BLM's Neil Kornze and FSPR's Ron Stewart. Photo by Ron Serviss.

Arizona Archeology and Heritage Month

The month of March is celebrated as Arizona Archeology and Heritage Month. Heritage sites throughout the state offer special programs and events to educate the public about native and early European occupations. This year, FSPR will offer a hike to an historic destination in SPRNCA on each Saturday of the month. The schedule will be:

- ☛ March 1—Presidio Santa Cruz de Terrenate, led by docent Ron Serviss and guest speaker Dr. Deni Seymour. Ms. Seymour is an accepted expert on Terrenate and a published author on the prehistory and archeology of southeastern Arizona. Terrenate was a Sobaipuri Indian village site and Spanish Presidio.
- ☛ March 8—Murray Springs, led by docent Dwight Long. Murray Springs is the world-famous Clovis mammoth kill location, recently designated a National Historic site.
- ☛ March 15—Fairbank town site tour, led by docent Ron Stewart.
- ☛ March 22—South Fairbank tour, led by local historian and FSPR docent Richard Bauer.
- ☛ March 29—Clanton Ranch tour, led by docent Bette Ford.

All tours will start at the site at 9 am. Wear a hat and good walking shoes; bring sunscreen, water, and a snack. Allow at least 3 hours for each walk.

Our Dark Skies Position

At its January 8 Board Meeting, FSPR discussed a request from the Huachuca Astronomy Club to oppose the possible lifting of a long-standing prohibition on digital or LED signs by the City of Sierra Vista. Six days later, FSPR sent a letter to the mayor and City Council outlining the Friends' position on digital signs. The Friends went on record as being opposed to the use of digital signs in Cochise County, including Sierra Vista. "We believe that these signs will fundamentally alter the natural environment of the area, harming its scenic and aesthetic value and thus harming it as a tourist destination... Allowing the widespread use of illuminated, digitized signage will fundamentally harm the rural nature of the area and thus harm visitation. The bright, glaring nature of digital signs detracts from the rural, natural feel of our area." FSPR urged the City Council to maintain the prohibition on these signs, so that they do not become an eyesore that lights up the landscape day and night.



*(Above) Ron with some of the tour participants. (Right) The dam.
Photos by Sue Leskiw.*

A Dozen to the Dam

By Sue Leskiw

On Saturday, February 1, FSPR president Ron Serviss led a group of 10 adults and 2 children to view the new beaver dam south of the Hereford Bridge. The group stopped at several points along the way for Ron to relay information about the history of beaver on the river, the hydrologic value of beaver ponds, and the importance of maintaining water in the San Pedro for ecotourism.

The San Pedro once teemed with beavers, but by the end of the 1800s, nearly all of them were gone. In 1999, the BLM began reintroductions using “problem beavers” that were building dams where people didn’t want them, relocating 15 between 1999 and 2002. Today, there are just under 100 beavers on the San Pedro with about 30 dams. Ron told us we were not likely to see any beavers during the hike because they come out near dark. The family group that had constructed the new dam had seen their previous structure destroyed during the 2013 monsoons, so they rebuilt in a different location.

Beaver can reach 90 pounds in size, but most average around 45 pounds. That’s the same weight as the younger girl on the trip!

Ron reminded us that SPRNCA’s enabling legislation tied the condition of the San Pedro River to Fort Huachuca. All the water used in Cochise County comes from an underground aquifer. Although it is believed to contain several hundred years supply of water, if the top of the aquifer drops 30 feet, it will mean the death of the cottonwoods and the River. “You can see road signs in other areas of Arizona telling you that you are crossing a river, and all that’s there is wasteland,” said Ron.

Beaver dams help control the flow in the River. Water ponded behind such structures can seep into the banks, where it’s stored and available to cottonwoods. When flow is lower, the stored water can seep back in to the channel and keep the San Pedro flowing.

“It doesn’t matter if you can’t tell a penguin from an ostrich, you still know that tourists who come to see the birds and other creatures are very important to the local economy,” offered Ron. The River is a big reason that Cochise County hosts so many butterflies and mammals.

After pointing out the dam, Ron showed the hikers where large trees had been felled by beaver. We could inspect the teethmarks where the thin cambium layer had been stripped for food.

Thanks Ron, for filling in for an ill Tom Wood, who was scheduled to lead the trip. It was an informative walk on a beautiful winter day.



Ron Beck. Photo by Tom Leskiw.

Ron Beck's Green, Carbon-Free Big Year in Cochise County

By Tom & Sue Leskiw

Tom's Introduction: In late 2012, I learned of Ron Beck's plans for doing a Carbon-free (solely on foot or bike) Cochise County Big Year in 2013. Although birders from out of the area may not know the exact location of our county in southeastern Arizona, they are certainly familiar with the famous birding locations contained within its borders: the Chiricahua and Huachuca Mountains, including Ramsey Canyon; the San Pedro River; Sulphur Springs Valley; Whitewater Draw; Willcox Playa, etc.

Ron has been birding since he was a teenager in southern California, where he searched for rarities in the early '70s with Jon Dunn. He and his wife Janet Cunningham moved to Hereford in Cochise County in 2011, following his retirement.

I've always considered a Carbon-free Big Year a noble undertaking. However, any thoughts of personally doing one were swiftly preempted with the rationale, "Sure, it's great... for 20- or 30-somethings." Then, I found out that Ron's the same age as I am: 59. For this reason, Ron's accomplishment looms large and serves as an inspiration for the rest of us.

My wife Sue and I sat down to interview Ron on December 19. When my participation in four Christmas Bird Counts threatened to derail the interview transcription process, Sue stepped up and completed the task from her notes, for which I am most grateful.

TOM: I'm curious if there was a watershed moment that convinced you to undertake this quest, or was it the culmination of several experiences or observations? Could you share your thoughts on why you felt compelled to do this?

RON: It was a culmination of things. I'd spent 30 years birding by bicycle in Los Angeles. Then, I read an article in the July 2012 issue of *Birding* about "Green" County Big Days that also mentioned the Green County Big Year record of 318 species in San Luis Obispo, California by Jim Royer. I was riding with the "Downhill to Breakfast Club" in Cochise County, Arizona and brought up the idea of doing a Big Year here. Two fellow riders were County Supervisor Pat Call and Robert Weissler, who is executive director of the nonprofit Friends of the San Pedro River (FSPR), whose mission is the conservation and restoration of the River through advocacy, education, interpretation, and field work. Pat suggested doing a Big Year as a fundraiser for FSPR. A Bicycling Big Year combines two of my favorite pastimes. The hardest part was figuring out how many birds to shoot for. There also wasn't much planning time, as it was November 2012 when I decided to go ahead.

TOM: Nearly lost in the discussion about reducing one's carbon footprint when doing a Carbon-free Big Year is that motorized vehicles buffer us from the extremes of weather. Southeastern Arizona is no stranger to extreme weather: heat and cold; wind, thunder-, snow-, and dust storms; monsoonal rain and hail. Could you share with us one or more stories of birding this past year that involved extreme weather, including the season, target species for the day... and if the weather made you question your year's quest?

RON: I was lucky to skirt bad weather most of the time. The only weather impediment was wind. It seems that every time I had a great birding day, it would be followed by strong headwinds on the ride home. It didn't seem to matter what direction I was traveling. I was always riding into the wind! There was some cold, too. For example, I got up at 5:30 a.m. on December 15 to follow up on reports of two birds I needed: Green Kingfisher and Least Bittern. FSPR river walk participants had spotted them along the San Pedro River the previous day. It was well below freezing when I reached the River and spent a fruitless day looking for these species. In fact, Green Kingfisher [the signature bird embroidered on FSPR baseball caps and T-shirts] was a nemesis bird for my Big Year. I chased every one of the four reported

making at least six different exhaustive trips. Another nemesis species was Rose-breasted Grosbeak; I missed 3 reported in spring and 2 in fall at people's feeders.

TOM: Could you share your thoughts regarding the fundraising aspect of your year-long effort?

RON: FSPR needed to raise \$15,000 to win a matching grant from the Conservation Lands Foundation. Two thirds of that sum had to be from people who had never before donated to the nonprofit. People can sponsor my effort by pledging either a flat amount or pay on a per-bird basis, from 25 cents to \$1. I believe that I've raised somewhere around \$4500 so far. I am kicking in \$2 per species tallied, because I believe in FSPR's mission and wanted to give money in addition to my physical effort. I've been told this is FSPR's largest fundraiser ever. When friends come to visit, I take them to the River, then ask them for support.

TOM: Hindsight being 20-20, what would you have done differently?

RON: Because I was literally winging it on the fundraising, I made mistakes. There needed to be more contacting of local businesses, to grease the wheels ahead of time, and I only decided to do the Big Year in November 2012. One other shortcoming was that I only had two types of bike the first half of the year: a mountain bike with knobby tires for unpaved roads and a road bike with skinny tires for pavement. In June, during a visit to Colorado, I bought a touring bike with in-between width tires, to make that transition from asphalt to dirt. Having a touring bike would have made it easier to do more overnight trips to Willcox or Benson, which likely would have yielded five or six more shorebird species. Also, I took very few photos and I didn't do a blog or weekly email updates about my travels.

TOM: One of the benefits of spending so much time in the field in pursuit of birds is the opportunity to observe other kinds of wildlife or unique or rarely seen avian behavior. Could you share an experience along these lines?

RON: This was an easy year for field interactions: I didn't run into javelina, Mojave rattlers, or drug smugglers/illegals crossing the border. The non-avian highlight was climbing Carr Peak with Bruce Berman and seeing a twin-spotted rattlesnake. People can spend their whole lives looking for this tiny high-elevation reptile. Another time, I was hiking Huachuca Canyon with my wife and came upon a mama black bear with her cub. We were only 50 or 60 feet away. The bears stood up, grunted, and looked at us before ambling off. I also ran across several sauntering bobcats during my Big Year.

TOM: Where I live, behind the Redwood Curtain in northwestern California, makes it very difficult to chase state rarities. For instance, the southeastern part of the state is about 800 miles away. For this reason, I keep a state list, but I'm quite casual about it. Where do you live relative to the geographical center of Cochise County?

RON: The geographic center of the county is about 40 miles northeast, as the crow flies, from my house in Hereford.

TOM: What was the furthest spot that you traveled to and how did you get there?

RON: That would be Cave Creek in the Chiricahuas. It was 157 miles one way (370 miles round-trip, including side trips) and required riding 20 miles of dirt road over Onion Saddle. On the way, I suffered massive leg cramps about 10 miles out of Willcox that caused me to spend 2 nights in a hotel there. I camped out 4 nights in Cave Creek. So, the total August trek there and back took 8 days and 7 nights. I saw Black-bellied Plover and Black Tern in the Willcox playa and Juniper Titmouse [at Walker House in Paradise], Mexican Chickadee, and Short-Tailed Hawk in the mountains. I never had anyone accompany me on these long trips.

TOM: Can you estimate how many noteworthy birds found in the county by others during 2013 eluded you owing to their remote location?

RON: As of today [December 19], I have seen 301 species in Cochise County during 2013, whereas the eBird tally is 356. It didn't make sense to go after short-duration sightings (e.g., reports of migrants that



Ron's bike at Onion Saddle.

would likely not linger very long at water features) or remote ones. For example, to visit Guadalupe Canyon—a 3-hour turnaround for cars—would have taken me 3 days by bike and involved riding 45 miles on a dirt road. I've never been a big chaser, but prefer to find my own birds.

TOM: One of the more enjoyable projects I've ever worked on was 5 years of fieldwork in support of the "Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Humboldt County California," where we confirmed the breeding of several new species. Did you have a similar experience or find what was thought to be a new breeding location for a species within Cochise County? Which species?

RON: Since a breeding bird atlas has already been published for the State of Arizona, and Cochise is one of the most heavily birded counties, I didn't expect to find anything new. I did observe two Rufous-winged Sparrows singing by Casa de San Pedro [a bed-and-breakfast in Hereford], but couldn't get back in there during the monsoons. There are only a couple of breeding records for the species in our county.

TOM: In my home California county of Humboldt, I'm among those who avidly keep a county list, currently at 426. I'm indebted to those who have helped me along the way. However, the aspect of listing that I'm paying increasing attention to these days is my personal found list. There's an electric moment that accompanies discovery, one that certainly plays a big part in why we bird. Have you kept a separate list of those species you personally found in 2013?

RON: I found 290 species myself and chased only 11. Sometimes, I found things by car, then returned on my bike. A bird I found but couldn't count was Snowy Egret. One day in December, I had ridden 12 miles along the San Pedro, finding nothing new. Halfway through, I had to crash through 7-foot-high Johnson grass where the BLM hadn't mowed the path. I called my wife and asked her to pick me up so we'd have time to make it to a bocce party. On the car ride home, a Snowy Egret flew over the road—at the least expected time of the year—and I couldn't count it because I wasn't on my bike! Incidentally, the last two species that I added to my list were Common Merganser (#300) and Common Goldeneye (#301). Funny that both have "Common" in their names, but they certainly weren't for my list!

TOM: A familiar refrain among birders is youth's lack of interest in birding. Because your Big Year has raised the profile of birding, especially in southeastern Arizona, I was wondering if your project has been able to build bridges that encourage greater participation by young birders, who incidentally may be more up to the energy requirements of long-distance bicycling?

RON: Although I hang with younger cyclists, they don't seem to be interested in birds. I'm upfront about being a birder, but I don't want to force others to participate. I wish that I had more solutions to offer about how to better acquaint youth with the joys of birding.

TOM: How many flat tires did you get on your bikes during 2013?

RON: Twenty-one total: 3 on my mountain bike and 18 during the first 1000 miles on my touring bike. I was averaging a flat a week riding along the San Pedro and running over mesquite thorns. I carried lots of patches and 2 spare tires when I traveled. But after I switched to tubeless tires with no-leak sealant, I didn't get any more flats. I didn't have any bad crashes or instances where I fell off my bike.

TOM: Do you have any idea of the miles traveled this past year?

RON: To date, I've ridden 3067 miles, with every trip starting at Point A, my home in Hereford. About 10-15 percent of that was on dirt, the rest on asphalt. On top of that, I hiked between 500 and 600 miles. I spent 108 days doing the Big Year. I was out of the area about 4 months of the year.

TOM: Some people consider using public transportation to be "Green" birding. What are your thoughts?

RON: In my opinion, "Green" means "Carbon-free." I don't consider traveling by public transportation to be part of a "Green Big Year." I'd create a different category for it called "Public Transit Big Year." Personally, I like to keep the definition pure: what I've achieved has been done via human-powered transportation only—by bike or on foot, using no fossil fuel.

TOM: Did you have an experience this past year that stood out above all the rest? It doesn't have to be about birds per se; it might be storm-light over the Dragoon Mountains, inquisitive coatimundis, or ...?

RON: Finding the Sinaloa Wren on August 3 in Huachuca Canyon on Fort Huachuca. It was an adrenaline rush to spot a moulting, tail-less juvenile bird in the picnic area, then spend the next 2 hours in knots of confusion, trying to confirm my initial ID. I'd never seen a young bird so hard to identify. I was finally convinced by its ratchet call and song. My wife got a sound recording with her phone, and other people shot video and still pictures. Spotting a mega-rarity gave me a 2-week high. Finding a pair of Rufous-capped Warblers in Miller Canyon in October would have to be another highlight of my Big Year.

TOM: What are your plans for 2014?

RON: I'm definitely taking 2014 off, but may do another Bicycling Big Year in the future. I came close to the record of 318, set in the coastal county of San Luis Obispo, California. The neatest thing about doing this is finding out my shortcomings, fine-tuning any future strategies that would allow me to surpass the current record.

If you are interested in donating to the fundraiser, more information can be found at www.sanpedroriver.org/fsprhome.shtml or www.facebook.com/fspraz.

[Note: This interview first appeared on the American Birding Association's blog and then in the *Sierra Vista Herald* newspaper.]

Epilog

On January 5, FSPR held a Donor Appreciation Party for those who pledged to Ron's Big Year. Over 20 people gathered at the Hereford home of Robert & Liza Weissler to eat, drink, and chat. The Friends would like to thank Sue Leskiw for designing and sending out the invitations, keeping track of responses, and making or buying the refreshments. Liza Weissler also contributed home-made goodies to the party and, with Robert, served as a gracious host.



*Ron's Rufous-capped Warbler,
seen in Hunter Canyon.*

2013 Ramsey Canyon Christmas Bird Count Results

By Ted Mouras, Former Compiler

The 2013 Ramsey Canyon Christmas Bird Count (RCCBC) was held on Saturday, December 21. The final tally was 147 species.

Despite strong winds, sleet, snow, and light rain in the canyons and breezy conditions in the valley, we still managed a respectable 147 species. Total bird numbers were down to 11,315, but this was likely due to the weather. We had 11 unusual species (reported by the RCCBC in 10 or fewer of our last 37 counts). These included Great Egret, Green Heron, Harris's Hawk, Harlan's Hawk, Ruddy Ground-dove, Broad-billed Hummingbird, Black-chinned Hummingbird, Barn Swallow, Hepatic Tanager, Clay-colored Sparrow, and Swamp Sparrow. We also had 5 species that matched previous record-high numbers (Great Egret, Green Heron, Harris's Hawk, Broad-tailed Hummingbird, Rufous Hummingbird).

Last year, we were hard-pressed to find Hermit Thrush and American Robin, but this year made up for that due to the presence of a good crop of madrone berries in the canyons. We did well with owl, hummingbird, and flycatcher species and numbers, and picked up all three species of nuthatch. One area in which we excelled was number of participants, with an all-time record of 104, including 66 in the field as part of 21 teams and 38 watching feeders and yards.

My thanks to everyone who has supported this count over the past 15 years, during which I've been the compiler. **The 2013 RCCBC was my last one as compiler**, so Huachuca Audubon Society is looking for someone else to step up and continue our tradition as one of the leading non-coastal counts in North America.

Appleton-Whittell Christmas Bird Count Summary

By Robert Weissler, Compiler

The 8th annual Appleton-Whittell Christmas Bird Count (AWCBC) took place on Saturday, January 4, 2014. The count total was 106 species, while 4,582 individual birds were recorded.

The weather was mild, if overcast, so it was easy to assume that the birding would be easy. However, bird activity was decidedly quiet, so the total of individuals seen was relatively low. Nevertheless, there were some excellent birds encountered during the count. Among the most significant is what is likely only the third record of Sinaloa Wren in the US. This wren has been regular near the mouth of Huachuca Canyon since last summer. It is seen mostly between the entrance gate and the first culvert/bridge. In that same canyon, a Pacific Wren continued in the wet vegetation beyond the picnic area at the turnaround spot roughly 2 miles up the canyon. If these were not enough, down the road a half mile from the canyon at the intersection of Christy and Smith was a Pine Warbler, a vagrant bird normally found during the breeding season in the eastern US.

Other interesting birds on count day included Rough-legged Hawk, which has been reported for weeks in the Sonoita Valley near Elgin. A Long-eared Owl was a good find on the Audubon Research Ranch. Meanwhile, Hepatic Tanager and Painted Redstart were found near the Sinaloa Wren at the mouth of Huachuca Canyon. Count week birds included Ferruginous Hawk and Chestnut-collared Longspur. Among the tough grassland sparrows, Grasshopper, Cassin's and Botteri's Sparrow made the tally this time, but Baird's was a miss once again.

Among the other misses—compared to prior years—were Anna's Hummingbird (we need more feeder watchers for this count!), Elegant Trogon, Gambel's Quail, teals, Rock Pigeon, Hairy Woodpecker, Steller's Jay, Marsh Wren, Starling, Common Yellowthroat, Black-chinned Sparrow, Lark Bunting, and Yellow-eyed Junco.

Visit <http://birds.audubon.org/christmas-bird-count> for details on any Audubon Christmas Bird Count.

Trees by the Upper San Pedro River in the 19th Century

By Gerald R Noonan, PhD

This article uses historical documents and photos to examine what early explorers and Anglo-American settlers found in the way of trees along the river in the 19th century. (“abs.” in citations denotes the absolute page number in a PDF file, counting all pages.)

At the International Border

In August 1854, Major Emory, Commissioner and Chief Astronomer Gadsden Purchase Commission, visited the San Pedro River at the International border. His report (Emory, 1857a) included a sketch (Fig.1) made from a terrace to the east of the river at the International Border. Emory wrote (1857a, p. 99-100, 148-149 abs.) that “... At this point approaching from the east, the traveler comes within a mile of the river before any indications of a stream are apparent. Its bed is marked by trees and bushes...”

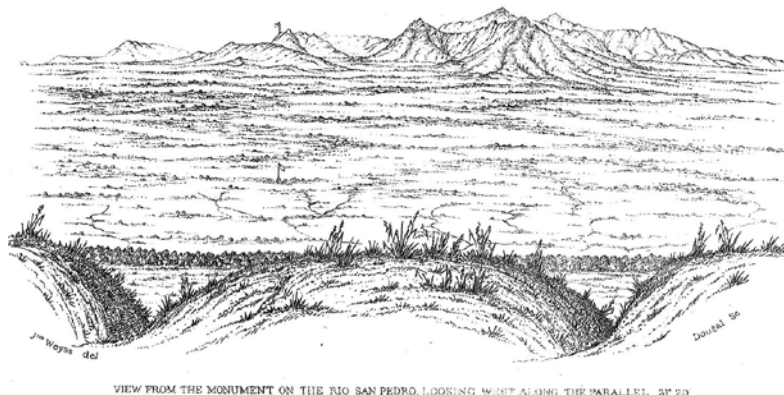
The sketch depicted tall vegetation along the river. Emory did not discuss species composition, spacing of the taller vegetation, or how far along the river it extended. Given the prevalence of mesquite along the outer margins of the riparian zone (subject of forthcoming article); much of the taller vegetation probably was mesquite. Emory (1857b, p. 18, 30 abs.) said of the San Pedro River Valley and other high elevation valleys near the International Border, “These upland valleys are only sparsely wooded by occasional cotton-wood or walnut trees. As we approach the mountains, however, the timber growth becomes more abundant, and the lower ridges are occupied by extensive groves of oak, which, on the higher points, are associated with pine and cedar.”

James Bell crossed the San Pedro River several times on September 6, 1854 slightly south of the International Boundary (Bell, 1932, p. 306; Hanchett, 2002, p. 226, 229-230). He reported, “The valley through which the San Pedro passes is a desirable location for ranches. The hills on either side are covered with timber huge loose stones and a good quality of grass; some portions of these hills are very pretty and contain little tree hidden nooks...The rock here is conglomerate, soil of good quality, timber of cotton wood and oak.”

In the early 1890s the United States and Mexico agreed to resurvey the International Boundary, locate and rebuild old monument markers, and install new markers as necessary. These efforts resulted in publications with information about habitats in the southern portion of the San Pedro River Valley in 1892-3.

Barlow et al. (1898, p. 19, 116 abs.) wrote that “The San Pedro River, in the vicinity of the boundary line, is ordinarily a stream of about 15 feet in width and 6 or 8 inches in depth, fringed with a fine growth of cottonwood and willow....” He did not describe the trees as forming a forest.

Fig. 1. View from International Border Monument on the Rio San Pedro, looking West along parallel 31° 20'. Plate 29 from Emory 1857a.



Edgar Alexander Mearns provided the most-detailed historical report about the Upper San Pedro River Valley in the 19th century. He headed a biological survey section, with assistance from approximately eight other people at various times and another approximately 13 soldiers (Mearns, 1907, p. 2-7, 25-30 abs.; p. 101, 142 abs.). Modern names for trees Mearns listed near Monument 98 are Arizona walnut, Arizona sycamore, swamp willow, catclaw acacia, whitethorn acacia, yewleaf willow, honey mesquite, Fremont cottonwood, boxelder, netleaf hackberry, western soapberry, Mexican mulberry, velvet ash, and desert willow. Mearns stated that the most common of these were willow, ash, boxelder, cottonwood, and mesquite. Many of the trees in 1892-93 clearly were species other than the now-dominant cottonwoods and Goodding's willows. There is no reason to believe that the trees Emory reported had a different species composition than those Mearns listed.

The trees along the San Pedro River near the International Boundary were discontinuous in their distribution. An 1893 photograph in Mearns (Fig. 2) displayed Border Monument 98 with the San Pedro River in the background. The foreground showed a minor tributary that flowed into the San Pedro River. The river was visible in the background and had bushes and scattered trees. Plate 42a in Turner et al. (2003, p. 124) showed an 1891 view from just west of the San Pedro River and facing southeastward into Mexico. In the extreme right-hand portion of the background there were a few trees or bushes along the San Pedro River.

Palominas-Hereford Area

The Mormon Battalion reached the San Pedro River on December 9, 1846 by following Greenbush Draw to it, at a point approximately 3 km southwest of current-day Hereford (Talbot, 2002, p. 38). The commander of the Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Philip St. George Cooke, became anxious that he had taken the wrong route when he did not see an expected forest of trees marking the presence of a river (Cooke, 1849, p. 36, 57 abs.). "My anxiety became very great, and I pushed in at a fast gait to the guides, and after ascending a hill saw a valley indeed, but no other appearance of a stream than a few ash trees in the midst; but they, with the numerous cattle paths, gave every promise of water. On we pushed, and finally, when twenty paces off, I saw a fine bold stream. There was the San Pedro we had so long and anxiously pursued." Sergeant Daniel Tyler reported that that the San Pedro River there had "but little timber..." (Tyler, 1881, p. 218, 227 abs.). Captain Henry Standage recorded, "Wood scarce principally Hackberry" (Standage and Golder, 1928, p. 191). Private Guy M. Keysor wrote (Standage and Golder, 1928, p. 193), "The land on each side of the Pedro river bottom is a dense thicket of bramble bush, mostly musket [mesquite], with which millions of acres are covered." Turner et al. (2003, p. 296) concluded that the report of millions of acres of mesquite was hugely inflated.



Fig. 2. Mon. No. 98. May-Oct. 20, 1893. Plate X, Fig. 2 in Mearns, 1907. View to W. from Mon. on W. side San Pedro River. Water behind Mon. flows to San Pedro River. Arrow A-terrace that Emory (1857a) sketch showed E. of river. Arrow B-San Pedro River.

Charleston area

The Mormon Battalion on December 10, 1846 marched northward along the western side of the San Pedro River and encamped on a point overlooking Graveyard Gulch (Talbot, 1992, p. 38). The campsite then was 300-400 yards from the river; the river later changed course to be much closer to the point. Maps show the location as slightly north of where Charleston Road now crosses the river. Cooke (1849, p. 37, 58 abs.) recorded that the river “has walnut timber on it (the nuts are the size of a “pig-nut.”)” Henry Standage wrote (Standage and Golder, 1928, p. 191-192) for the December 10 encampment, “Black walnut Timber here.” He reported for December 11, “Plenty of bear signs under the Black walnut trees; some deer.” “Black walnut” is part of one of the common names (“Arizona black walnut”) for *Juglans major*, typically called “Arizona walnut” (Pavek, 1993). Makings (2006, p. 53) reported this tree as now only occasionally present in SPRNCA. The presence of Arizona walnut by the river on December 10, 1846 and possibly elsewhere northward of that on December 11 showed that some stretches of the river then had trees other than the now dominant Fremont cottonwoods and Goodding’s willows.

Rose (2013, p. 53, p. 163) quoted testimony from the 1889 Hill versus Herrick water rights lawsuit. An attorney asked a settler if there were places along the banks of the river where willows “stood pretty high in places” in the area just south of Charleston where the river goes between a narrow channel. Upton replied that there were places with tall willows. Rose (2013, p. 53) noted that cottonwood trees were conspicuous by their absence during this testimony.

An approximately 1880 photograph showed that the San Pedro River opposite Charleston had but a single cottonwood tree (Noonan, 2013, p. 71.)

Junction of Babocomari and San Pedro rivers, Fairbank Area

Figure 23A in Noonan (2013) showed that there was a treeless cienega at the junction of these two rivers until the 1890s or early 20th century.

Contention City Area

Contention City was on the banks of the San Pedro River at N31.769° W-110.202° (GNIS, 2013), about 3 miles north of route 82 (Google earth). The anthropologist A.F. Bandelier briefly described conditions in the spring of 1884 (Bandelier, 1892, p. 478, 501 abs.), "Contention lies seventeen miles south of Benson by the road. Bleak levels spread out west of it to the foot of the wooded Sierra Huachuca. The aspect of the landscape is monotonous, though the plain is grassy." Conspicuously absent is any mention of trees along the river. An 1882 photo in Bahre (1991, p. 68) looked northeast down the San Pedro River from a terrace above the Contention Mill. In the right background was a row of what appeared to be six cottonwood trees. Two additional trees were north of this row.

St. David Area

In early September 1851, John R. Bartlett led a border survey party that crossed from the Sulfur Springs Valley west into the San Pedro Valley, north of the Dragoon Mountains, and probably following Dragoon Wash (Davis, 2001, p. 66). Such a route would have placed his party in the St. David region at the coordinates Bartlett measured by the San Pedro River. Bartlett reported (1854 p. 377-378, 422-423 abs.), "We looked in vain for a line of trees or of luxuriant vegetation to mark the course of the San Pedro, and began to fear that we might have still another mountain ridge and another plain to cross before reaching it, when all of the sudden we found ourselves upon its banks." Subsequent notes by him during a southward march along the river made no mention of tree-like plants except for mesquite.

Turner et al. (2003, Plate 58a-c, p. 156-157) provided an approximately 1890 photo (N31.8589° W-110.2236°) that looked due north. The river was not discernible in the background, but cottonwoods marked it in a 1962 photo (Plate 58b).

A circa 1880 photograph of the Apache Powder Area showed a bleak landscape with the riverbanks lacking trees. A subsequent 2003 photograph showed a dense stand of cottonwoods and willows along the river (Noonan, 2013, Fig. 24, p. 75).

St. David to Benson

Anthropologist A.F. Bandelier described conditions in the spring of 1884 from St. David to Benson (Bandelier, 1892, p. 477-478, 500-501 abs.). The only tree-like plants that he mentioned were mesquite.

Benson Region

Lieutenant John G. Parke led a survey of the 32nd parallel for a proposed railroad route (Davis, 2001, p. 108-109). He reached the San Pedro River in the Benson area on February 25, 1854 and reported (Parke, 1855, p. 9, 646 abs.), "The banks are devoid of timber, or any sign indicating the course or even the existence of a stream, to an observer but a short distance removed."

William L. Ormsby took the Butterfield Overland Stage from St. Louis to San Francisco in 1858. Part of the route went westward from Dragoon Springs and crossed the San Pedro River in the Benson area. He recorded (Ormsby, 1942, p. 84-85), "... we wheeled into the valley of the San Pedro. Our road led a few miles north in this valley—in which there is not, that we could see, a respectably sized tree—and finally crossed the stream."

Lieutenant Colonel Eyre crossed the San Pedro River in the Benson area on June 22, 1862 and reported (Eyre, 1862, p. 121, 142 abs.), "...wood very scarce." In his *Handbook to Arizona*, Hinton noted (1878, p. 236, 275 abs.) that travelers spoke of the Benson river crossing as "sandy barren and destitute of timber. The river banks have not a shrub growing upon them, and you come right upon the deep, swift, muddy little stream without being aware of your approach."

Records of an 1889 water rights lawsuit documented the existence of a large cienega extending along the river from modern-day Benson to Tres Alamos before 1889 and becoming smaller afterwards (ADWR, 2009, Table 3.1, p. 67 abs.; Turner et al., 2003, p. 27, 296). The presence of the cienega explained the absence of trees that people noted in the Benson region.

Greenbrush Draw to Benson Region

None of the journals kept by members of the Mormon Battalion mentioned cottonwoods or Goodding's willows from where the Battalion first reached the river at Greenbrush Draw to where it left the river slightly northwest of the Benson area. In contrast, Cooke mentioned cottonwoods more than 15 times in other regions.

Conclusion

Extensive forests were absent from the Upper San Pedro River during the 19th century. The species composition of the scattered riparian trees was different; Fremont cottonwood and Goodding's willow were not the dominant species of riparian trees. A subsequent article will discuss why riparian trees were different in distribution and species composition in the 19th century.

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Plans for Brunckow's Cabin Restoration

FSPR is proud to announce receipt of a \$10,000 grant, in the form of a bequest from the estate of former Sierra Vista resident and SPRNCA volunteer Joe Patz. The money will be used to restore and interpret the Brunckow's Cabin historical site. The cabin was built in the 1850s by Frederick Brunckow, a German mining engineer who was an early explorer of Arizona. It is one of the oldest American period structures in the state. Joe's bequest will be used to preserve the ruins of the cabin, which is located on the eastern edge of SPRNCA.

Leaders Needed for EOP Bird Walks

The weekly Sunday morning bird walks at the Sierra Vista Environmental Operations Park (EOP) need additional birders to lead these walks. These walks take about 3 hours. You do not need to be a birding "expert," since most of the people who attend know quite a lot about birds and only want the ability to get inside the EOP fence. The main duties are to get people to sign the waiver form, unlock and lock the gates, make sure people stay on the paths, and create a bird list for the tour. Training is minimal and will be provided at your convenience. Contact Dutch Nagle at 378-7229 or dutchpat@cox.net if you can help.

Another Reason to Visit San Pedro House

The Friends of the San Pedro River Dedication Walkway is located on the west side of San Pedro House between the flag pole and the amphitheater. FSPR offers the public an opportunity to have their name, a business name, or the name of a friend or loved one engraved on one of the bricks. Adding a brick to this Walkway is an easy way for you to permanently honor friends, family members, loved ones and other special people while also supporting your public lands. It's a wonderful way to say "thank you" to someone who loves the outdoors, perhaps a friend who has moved away or a neighbor who has helped you out in an emergency.

The bricks are offered in 3 different categories:

- ☛ 10" x 10" with up to 6 lines of 15 characters each for \$100.
- ☛ 10" x 15" with up to 6 lines of 15 characters each for \$200.
- ☛ 10" x 15" with up to 6 lines of 15 characters each plus a 4" x 4" graphic for \$300.

The portion of the amount given for the commemorative brick above \$35 is considered a contribution, so check with your tax advisor to verify that it is tax deductible. The proceeds of this endeavor will be used to support our stewardship of the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area.

We have already placed several complimentary bricks in the sidewalk for those who have had a significant impact in supporting our goal to protect our beautiful conservation area. Those who have been so honored are:

- ☛ Friends who were especially important in the establishment of SPRNCA;
- ☛ Original FSPR Board members;
- ☛ Volunteers who have contributed over 2000 hours of service;
- ☛ People or businesses that have made significant donations to the Friends;
- ☛ And last--but definitely not least--Constant Vaughn Hopkins, who was not only a FSPR member and volunteer, but a major benefactor as well.

Stop by and see if anyone among your friends or neighbors is commemorated here.

Commemorative brick applications are available at San Pedro House Bookstore and from our website, www.sanpedroriver.org, or call our office at (520) 459-2555 and we will mail a form to you.

Operations Update

The FSPR Operations Committee was created in October. Its mission is to assume responsibility for daily operation of Friends' facilities and events. It is chaired by FSPR vice-president Ron Stewart, with members Sally Rosén, Éva Nagy, Renell Stewart, Tom Clancy, Alice Garrett, and Laura Mackin. The committee is currently planning for this year's walks and the four major events we will stage. If you are interested in joining this committee, contact Ron Stewart at quiburi@icloud.com.

Members, November 2013-January 2014

Bob Blanchard, Dave & Cathy Bly, Bonnie Bosworth, Kelton & Hedy Burbank*, Richard Carlsen & Victor Acedo*, Christi & Ken Charters, Clay & Sue Cook, Mary Anne Crismore*, Joel Fago, Paulett Foster & Fred Baer*, Roger Funk & Douglas Noffsinger, Ryoko Gill, Uda & Charles Gordon, Richard Grannemann*, Sally Hammond*, Mark Hansen, Marilyn Henley & Steve Johnson, Jack & Marty Jackson*, Sandy & Rock Kousek, Patrick Ledger, Tom & Sue Leskiw, DeForest, Cecilia & Isla Lewis, Ralph Lewis & Judith Cooper*, Larry & LuDel Livingstone*, Debbi Madson*, Anne Morris & David Steed, Scetta Moss*, David & Catherine Newell, Gary Noonan, Al & Dee Puff, Brian Reid*, John Rose, Carolyn Santucci*, Joan & Robert Spiczka*, Bob & Jane Strain, William Swanson*, Paul & Arlene Van Belle, Sandra West*, Robert White

* = New member

Events Calendar, February-April

[SPH = San Pedro House; FSH = Fairbank School House;
HAS = Huachuca Audubon Society;
SABO = Southeastern Arizona Bird Observatory]

SPH Open as Visitor Center (Daily), 9:30 AM-4:30 pm

FSH Open as a Visitor Center (Friday-Sunday),
9:30 AM-4:30 pm

Understanding the River Interpretive Walks

Every Saturday at SPH

- ☞ 9 am—February 1, 8, 15, 22
- ☞ 9 am—March 1, 8, 15, 22, 29
- ☞ 8 am—April 5, 12, 19, 26

FSPR Bird Walks

NEW! Now Every Wednesday & Fourth Saturday
at SPH

- ☞ 8 am—February 5, 12, 19, 22, 26
- ☞ 8 am—March 5, 12, 19, 22, 26, 29
- ☞ 7 am—April 2, 9, 16, 23, 26, 30

FSPR/HAS/SABO Bird Walks

Every Sunday at Sierra Vista Environmental
Operations Park (EOP)

- ☞ 8 am—February 2, 9, 16, 23
- ☞ 8 am—March 2, 9, 16, 23, 30
- ☞ 7 am—April 6, 13, 20, 27

Special Events

- ☞ February 1 (Sat), 1 pm—Beaver Dam Hike
- ☞ February 8 (Sat), 1 pm—Murray Springs History Walk
- ☞ February 20 (Thu), 7 pm—Lecture by Perrie Barnes, topic to be determined (see article, p. 1)
- ☞ February 22 (Sat), 1 pm—Members-Only Walk to Hereford Townsite
- ☞ March 1 (Sat), 9 am—Terrenate History Walk
- ☞ March 8 (Sat), 9 am—Murray Springs History Walk
- ☞ March 13-14 (Thu-Fri), 6 pm—Film Festival (see article, p. 1)
- ☞ March 15 (Sat), 9 am—Fairbank History Walk

☞ March 20 (Thu), 7 pm—Lecture on Saving the San Pedro River by Steve Pawlowski (see article, p. 1)

☞ March 22 (Sat), 9 am—South Fairbank History Walk

☞ March 29 (Sat), 9 am—Clanton Ranch History Walk

☞ April 17 (Thu), 7 pm—Lecture on San Pedro River Towns by Doug Hocking

☞ April 19 (Sat), 8 am—Millville History Walk

☞ April 19 (Sat), 8 am—Fairbank Railroads Walk

☞ April 26 (Sat), all day—SPRNC A Bioblitz (see announcement, p. 1)



Contact List

- President—Ron Serviss
- Vice-President—Ron Stewart
- Treasurer—Renell Stewart
- Directors—Tom Clancy, Éva Nagy, Steve Ogle, Sally Rosén, Tom Wood
- Docent Activities—Tom Clancy, Ron Stewart
- Education—John Rose, Sandy Kunzer
- Membership—Lori Kovash
- Communications Coordinator—Éva Nagy
- Newsletter Editor—Sue Leskiw
- Executive Director—Robert Weissler
- Bookstore Manager—Laura Mackin
- Bookkeeper—Pam Collins

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Friends of the San Pedro River (FSPR) is a nonprofit, volunteer organization dedicated to the conservation of the River and the health of its ecosystems through advocacy, educational programs, and interpretive events.