

THE AZFO 12th ANNUAL MEETING SUMMARY

26-28 October 2018; Ajo, AZ



Photo Credits (clockwise): Jennie MacFarland, Rich Glinski, Chris Rohrer and Richard Fray

Ornithologists and birders from around the state near and far gathered in Ajo, AZ at the Sonoran Desert Inn Conference Center (SDICC) on 26-28 October 2018 for the AZFO's 12th annual meeting. The desert was a blanket of green welcoming 92 members from not *only* around the state, but as far as Illinois. An interesting fact: According to the [Ajo weather homepage](#), this year is one of the wettest on record with 12.56 inches of rain.

A total of 89 AZFO members and guests took part in the Friday and Saturday expeditions, and workshops. The meeting kicked off with Friday field expeditions to Gila Bend/Paloma Ranch Area, Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument (OPCNM) - Alamo Canyon, OPCNM - Arch Canyon, and Quitobaquito Springs, Bud Walker Park, and the Ajo Sewage Ponds.



A Friday afternoon trip led by Troy Corman to the Gila Bend/Paloma Ranch area included 16 participants. Most of the participants had never birded this area prior so enjoyed the opportunity. While visiting the vast agricultural lands and several ponds, the team identified 56 species. Highlights included an unexpected pair of adult Greater White-fronted Geese at an irrigation runoff pond and two Black-bellied Plovers and a Dunlin at a rain

fill depression near a dairy. The plover is a rare fall transient through the area so was especially noteworthy.

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<https://ebird.org/view/checklist/S49474493>

<https://ebird.org/view/checklist/S49483766>

Eric Hough led a group of five through the lower portion of rugged, amazingly scenic Arch Canyon on the west side of the Ajo Mountains, then continuing farther up into the canyon where scrub-oak and Arizona rosewood thickets start to appear. The early October rains had made the place verdant with wildflowers and grasses, and the spring-like conditions were likely the reason why several Costa's Hummingbirds were already engaging in aerial displays and song. Highlights included a Red-naped Sapsucker, a Townsend's Solitaire, three American Robins, two Black-chinned Sparrows, two Fox Sparrows, over a dozen Dark-eyed Juncos including a female 'Slate-colored' bird, a Black-throated Gray Warbler, and two Townsend's Warblers.



*Photo credit,
Diane Drobka*



Photo credits: Eric Hough

<https://ebird.org/view/checklist/S49483645>



Photo credit: Jennie MacFarland and Richard Fray



Eleven participants and leader Ryan O'Donnell started up Alamo Canyon in Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument at 7:00 a.m. on Friday. Arch Canyon was unusually green, with many shrubs producing berries, thanks to the unusually wet early fall. The trip started up the trail to the old

corral, and the continued off trail up the canyon. Many of the less common birds observed were higher elevation or latitude species drawn in by the fruiting shrubs, including Townsend's Solitaire,

Hermit Thrush, American Robin, and Cedar Waxwing, the latter being the first record for this location in eBird. One Lawrence's Goldfinch was contributed from the ongoing irruption this fall. In total 42 species were observed.

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<https://ebird.org/view/checklist/S49472500>

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The Quitobaquito Springs trip was led by Chrissy Kondrat, with a special guest from OPCNM, Sean Britton. Sean shared to the group about current conservation efforts at this unique location along the border. Birding highlights included a good number of Black-throated Grays, two Sage Thrashers and a Wilson's Snipe. In addition, the group of 12 were fortunate to cross paths with Doug Danforth and Richard Bailowitz who located a 3rd U.S. record of a Baja bluet damselfly that morning.

<https://ebird.org/view/checklist/S49484935>

<https://ebird.org/view/checklist/S49484937>



Photo credit: above, Pierre Deviche; right, Chrissy Kondrat



Photo credit: Doug Jenness

The trip to Bud Walker Park and Ajo Sewage Ponds turned up many expected birds such as Vermilion Flycatcher and Yellow-rumped Warbler. The group did have lovely looks at Black-tailed Gnatcatcher and the sewage pond held a female Northern Pintail and excellent looks at a Greater Yellowlegs.

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<https://ebird.org/view/checklist/S49543079>

The Friday activities concluded with a social hour in the lovely garden area of the SDICC. A big thank you to [Borderland Brewery](#) for creating the first ever AZFO brew, the Great Horned Owl IPA.



Photo credit: Chris Rohrer



Photo credits: Chrissy Kondrat



Above, Tim Tibbitts; Photo credit: Doug Jenness

The Saturday sessions and banquet were held in the Quigley Auditorium at the SDICC. Carol Beardmore, AZFO president, welcomed a total of 92 attendees and introduced Richard Glinski and Tim Tibbitts as the meeting moderators. Richard and Tim did a phenomenal job as keepers of time and introducing the many talented speakers - with occasional entertaining banter between the two. Troy Corman described the Gale Monson Research Grant Program and announced the three grant recipients for 2018: Nick Beauregard, Kevin Clark and Ruby Hammond. Our first two speaker to kick off the meeting were 2017 Monson Grant recipients. The first was Kerrie Anne Loyd who shared

her work on "*Conservation of Western Burrowing Owls in an Urban/Suburban Desert Landscape.*" Next up was Eamon Harrity, who described the use of transmitters on Ridgway's Rails in Yuma, to determine whether solar power stations are a threat to migrating rails. Lauren Harter, Arizona Bird Committee chair, presented an update of recent ABC decisions. Arizona is now officially home or a migration stop for 562 native or established introduced bird species. Lauren then introduced this year's [youth scholarship recipient](#), Stephanie Gastelum from Yuma. Stephanie, a junior at Northern Arizona University, has recently become interested in birding via Arizona Game & Fish Department, Christmas Bird Counts,



Eamon Harrity, 2017 Gale Monson Grant Recipient; Photo credit: Doug Jenness

and Prescott Audubon Society. Three past Youth Scholarship recipients attended: Melissa Folsom (2017), Sydney Smith (2017), and Caleb Strand (2016). AZFO Youth Scholarships are sponsored by [Maricopa Audubon Society](#) and [Prescott Audubon Society](#).



Photo credit: Chrissy Kondrat

After the first break, Eric Hough presented the annual report on AZFO field expeditions. The morning session wrapped up with Shannon McNeil discussing *"From Thorny Chaco Winters To Summer Love Triangles: A Year in the Life of a Cuckoo."* Followed by a short business meeting update. Cathy Wise reported that there are currently 124 AZFO members, and Diana Herron gave the financial report. The final two items of business to be addressed and voted on were amendments to the bylaw's by Doug Jenness and proposed nominees for officers and board members presented by Carol Beardmore. The addition of two board members was voted on and accepted by members. Elected to board positions were Kerrie Anne Loyd, Edwin Juarez, and Chrissy Kondrat. Jennie MacFarland was voted in for a second term as AZFO vice-president. Diana Herron was officially voted in as treasurer – Diana was appointed as acting treasurer in February 2018.

David Vander Pluym discussed the identification and ranges of the subspecies of Cackling Goose, particularly the Aleutian subspecies, which is being reported more frequently in Arizona. Chris McCreedy urged participants to help augment the scope and value of eBird data by seeking out and birding under birded locations. Carol Beardmore described how the large quantity of eBird data that continues to be gathered can be used to analyze the vulnerability of species and help develop conservation plans.



Photo credit: Doug Jenness

Three posters were displayed in the meeting hall: *"Results of Yellow-billed Cuckoo Surveys Along the Upper San Pedro River: Evidence of Breeding Behavior in Mesquite Bosque"* by Stephanie Cobbold and Laura Stewart; *"Seasonal Movements of Crested Caracaras In Arizona – Preliminary Data"* by Doug Jenness, Richard Glinski and Joan Morrison; and *"Movement Patterns, Survivorship, and Home Range Size of LeConte's Thrasher on The Barry M. Goldwater Range"* by Chrissy Kondrat and Shawn Lowery. Caleb Strand took the prize for the audio quiz, which was well prepared and presented by Scott Olmstead. In addition, Caleb Strand placed first in the photo quiz prepared by David Vander Pluym and Lauren Harter. For his winnings, he took home one of AZFO's annual meeting shirts. Who will take him on for 2019? Approximately \$2000 was raised between the meeting activities, used and new

books table (Seventeen *Field Checklists of the Birds of Arizona* and five copies of *Counting Birds with Gale Monson* were sold), raffle, silent auction and the AZFO beer sales for the weekend.



Following afternoon presentations, a social hour was held in the garden of the SCICC. At the evening banquet we presented the first ever AZFO Achievement Award to Janet Witzeman. Congratulations Janet, well deserved for your contributions to Arizona birding!

We were delighted to introduce this year's evening keynote, Nathan Pieplow, also sponsored by Maricopa Audubon Society. Nathan's talk both educated and captivated the audience, providing insights into the evolutionary relationship between families of passerine birds.

*Left: Janet Witzeman;
photo credit, Rich Glinski*

Two workshops were held on Sunday: Becoming an Expert Listener Workshop conducted by Nathan Pieplow and the Gull ID Workshop in Puerto Penasco, MX with David Vander Pluym and Lauren Harter.

Participants in Nathan's workshop enjoyed an intriguing insight into the sounds of the bird world, followed by a classroom session exploring the use of new skills. Nathan Pieplow's Sound Workshop was attended by about 30 people. He gave us a lexicon for describing bird sounds and many examples. We then went outside and tested our new knowledge. Next, he opened it up to all sorts of questions from the participants. Questions such as, telling the difference between Cordilleran and Pacific-slope flycatchers both by ear and spectrogram. And how did he find all the bird sounds for his 2 books. As a reminder: Nathan's Peterson's Guide to Bird Sounds of Eastern North America is available now and his Western Guide is scheduled for an April 2, 2019 release date.

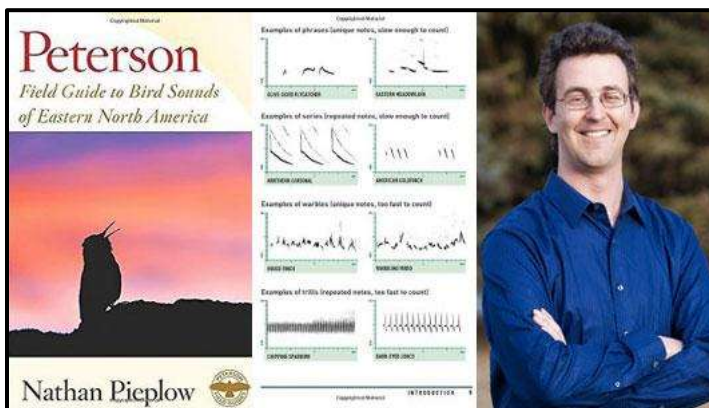


Photo credits: allaboutbirds.org

The farther-flung expedition on Sunday was a gull workshop in Puerto Peñasco, just across the border in Mexico, on the coast of the Sea of Cortez. Even though it's only about 60 miles from the border, the avifauna of Puerto Peñasco is drastically different from anywhere in Arizona thanks to its coastline. This makes it the perfect place to study gulls and shorebirds, including both regular Arizona species and rarities to our state. The team of 31 birders led by Lauren Harter and David Vander Pluym started our morning birding the area around the harbor and a nearby beach (Playa Hermosa). From here, they had a view of a variety of nearshore birds taking advantage of fishing boats coming in for the morning and cleaning their catches on or near the shore. Farther out at sea, they studied loafing and gliding Brown



Photo credits: Chris Rohrer

Boobies and Magnificent Frigatebirds, while on the shore, they got to work with gulls. Most of the attention went to Ring-billed and California gulls, the most common species in Arizona, and thus the most important to study. Also plentiful were Heermann's and Yellow-footed gulls, the latter having been recorded only once in Arizona, but overdue for another visit. With close views of these four species available, the group discussed topics of gull ID such as aging and plumage cycles, what to look for on a mystery gull, and some of the similar species that could occur. After a delicious and filling lunch of fish tacos, Puerto Peñasco style, the group enjoyed a shady break in the nearby Plaza del Camaronero, peeking through the large fig trees for migrants and roosting Black-crowned Night-Herons. Then they ventured out again, this time to Bahía la Cholla west of Puerto Peñasco. The tide was high and some of the flocks were close, including some amazing shorebird diversity! The mudflats were dotted with Wilson's Plovers, while the larger shorebird flocks included Surfbirds, Red Knots, Short-billed Dowitchers, and Dunlin. Many of the group enjoyed good views of Large-billed Savannah Sparrows, while others were treated to a close fly-by Blue-footed Booby. More distantly over the mudflats, we spotted American Oystercatchers and Reddish Egrets. Overall it was a successful trip, with a nice sampling of the birds of the northern Sea of Cortez and plenty of opportunity to study species that rarely (or have yet to) occur in Arizona!

Photo credits: Lauren Harter



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A big thank you to **Maricopa Audubon** for supporting our keynote; **Prescott Audubon and Maricopa Audubon** the support on the Youth Scholarships; and to all who participated. The annual meeting was coordinated by Chrissy Kondrat. The expedition leaders were Troy Corman, Ryan O'Donnell, Eric Hough, Jennie MacFarland, Richard Fray, and Chrissy Kondrat. Workshops were led by Nathan Pieplow, Lauren Harter, and David Vander Pluym. The annual meeting shirt artwork was done by Sydney Smith, a 2017 Youth Scholarship recipient.



Photo above: Sydney Smith and Rich Glinski; photo credit, Chrissy Kondrat

We look forward to seeing you at the next annual meeting in **Flagstaff, 20-22 September 2019!** Don't forget to check out [FaceBook](#) and the [AZFO website](#) for upcoming events and news!



Thank You!



Representing 8 different states!



Representing 24 AZ cities/towns!

Boulder, CO; Tempe, IN; Moscow, ID; Corrales, NM; Edmonds, WA; and Woodlands, WA. In AZ: Ajo, Arivaca, Benson, Chandler, Flagstaff, Gilbert, Green Valley, Lake Havasu City, Marana, Mesa, Phoenix, Pima, Prescott, Rio Rico, Scottsdale, Sedona, Sierra Vista, Sonotia, Sun Lakes, Tempe, Tucson, Wittmann, Wickenburg and Yuma.