



THE GOLDFINCH



A CHAPTER OF THE MARYLAND ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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A TROGON LAUGHING - ARIZONA TRIP REPORT (PART I)

BY DARIUS ECKER

From July 25, 1997 through August 2, 1997 my wife Paula and I, and Jeff and Elayne Metter visited southeast Arizona for a week of birding. We had a very successful trip as we tallied 158 species. The Metter's saw over 40 life birds, and even though Paula and I had visited Arizona several times before we each managed to pick up a few new birds. Paula completed a major goal in tallying her 500th North American life bird. Other special birds to note were lots of Western Tanagers (over 15 for the trip), Gray Hawk, Harris' Hawk, Berylline Hummingbird, Elegant Trogon and a surprise Lilac-crowned Parrot.

July 25 Friday - Arrived in Phoenix and picked up our rental Chevy Blazer and headed for Tucson. Checked into "The Lodge on the Desert" on Alvernon Way. The Metter's found several life birds in the parking lot. This was a very "birder friendly" place, and the rooms and the courtyard were beautiful. At Sabino Canyon in the evening we saw Greater Roadrunner, Verdin, and both Nighthawks as the sun set.

July 26 Saturday - Spent the day birding Mt. Lemmon. At Molino Basin we saw Hooded Oriole, Rufous-crowned Sparrow, Bewick's Wren and Hepatic Tanager. At Bear Canyon Picnic Area we found Grace's and Black-throated Gray Warbler, and I saw an Olive Warbler. Plumbeous Vireo, Pygmy Nuthatch, Yellow-eyed Junco and Spotted Towhee were also present. Further up we saw Steller's Jay and a Peregrine Falcon overhead being harassed by Violet-green Swallows. We ate at Mt. Lemmon Cafe, where the pie was great. At the ski lift we had an Olive-sided Flycatcher perched on a high dead branch. After supper in Tucson, we walked to Arroyo Chico where we saw Gambel's Quail (both adults and chicks) and an adult Harris' Hawk perched high in a tree. Everyone agreed the Harris' Hawk was the best bird of the day.

July 27 Sunday - On the way to the Desert Museum we found Violet-green Swallow, Pyrrhuloxia and Black-tailed Gnatcatcher in Tucson Mountain Park. The museum was great, as always and we enjoyed the aviaries. After leaving the museum, we tried for Crissal Thrasher at the San Xavier Mission, but missed. As we neared Madera Canyon, we had a mystery bird fly across the road in front of us. A black and white toned bird with a black tail and a white terminal tail band. It was such a quick look. I thought later that Lark Bunting was the most likely possibility, but we'll never

know for sure. We arrived at Santa Rita Lodge in the pouring rain, which only lasted for about 20 minutes. The cabins were nice, and we immediately began watching wet Broad-billed Hummingbirds as we unpacked. We found Western Tanager and Strickland's Woodpecker across the road. As night began to fall a group gathered to watch for an Elf Owl at the telephone pole next to one of the cabins. A tour group leader pointed out the Elf Owl as it began to call, and everyone got a brief look. The Elf Owl was Paula's 500th life bird. The group disbursed, and we went to bed.

July 28 Monday - The next morning we hiked to Josephine's Saddle. We saw lots of Black-throated Gray Warblers and a Strickland's Woodpecker feeding on agave on the way down. Exhausted from the hike, we lounged around and watched hummingbirds for the rest of the day. Alas, the reported Plain-capped Starthroat failed to show up.

July 29 Tuesday - As we left Santa Rita Lodge, we stopped off at Florida Wash. We saw both Rufous-crowned and Rufous-winged Sparrows, Summer Tanager, Bullock's Oriole, and got some quick glances at Varied Bunting. Botteri's Sparrows were singing. At Kino Springs we saw White-crowned Sparrows, Yellow Warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat, American Coot, and a perched Gray Hawk at the first pond. After a stop at the Pro Shop to obtain permission, we proceeded to walk around the second pond. Here we found Tropical and Cassin's Kingbirds, Vermilion Flycatcher, Lark Sparrow, Ruddy Duck, and Great Blue Heron. The ladies bought hats, and some drinks at the Pro Shop, and we headed for the Patagonia Roadside Rest stop. At the rest area, next to the cliffs we got great looks at

Varied Bunting. Our hearts quickened as we saw a Western Wood-Pewee cling from the Becard nest, but we soon returned to a Becard-less reality. After lunch we visited the Paton's. We marveled at Violet-crowned Hummingbirds, a single male Costa's, Rufous, a single male Allen's, Black-chinned, and a few Anna's. A cable TV crew was filming a documentary on birding while we were there. A second try for the Becard was also fruitless. We arrived at Ramsey Canyon in time to catch a brief look at the Berylline Hummingbird, and a trio of young Cooper's Hawks on the nest just below the preserve entrance. Our cabin was very comfortable, and we watched a male Blue-throated Hummingbird guard the feeder out back. A male Calliope Hummingbird and a male White-eared Hummingbird visited the Ramsey Canyon B&B's feeders. As evening approached, we headed for the San Pedro House and Kingfisher Pond. At the river we saw Abert's Towhee, Eastern Meadowlark, Common Ground Dove, Vermilion Flycatcher and Common Moorhen. We found a male Green Kingfisher at the pond, but he was less than cooperative. After about 30 minutes we finally got him to sit still and got good views using the scope. As we left, Lesser Nighthawks flew over the pond.

July 30 Wednesday - We got up early, and arrived at the Patagonia Roadside Rest at 7:00 AM. Again, we saw no trace of Rose-throated Becard. We did see Summer Tanager, a nice adult Gray Hawk, Black Vulture, Phainopepla by the numbers, a female Bronzed Cowbird and Thick-billed Kingbird. The surprise bird of the morning was a Lilac-crowned Parrot. Although most likely an escapee, it was a beautiful bird to see. Spent the afternoon back at Ramsey Canyon. I went back for an encore of Berylline Hummingbird. After a mere 75 minute wait I was rewarded with a close, extended look of 6 seconds or so. Found Scaled Quail along lower Ramsey Canyon Road. Two trips to the Sierra Vista Sewage Ponds left us with still no shorebirds but we did find a Zonetailed Hawk in with some Turkey Vultures. I found a female Lazuli Bunting, and another visiting birder pointed out a Lark Sparrow. A single White-faced Ibis flew by.

Part II of this trip report will appear in the March-April 1998 issue of the Goldfinch. Join us then, to find out why the trogon was laughing.

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WHAT THE HELL'S GOING ON? THAT'S ALL WE WANT TO KNOW!

BY GRAZINA AND MIKE MCCLURE

Saturday, July 12, 1997, was a warm windless day with a temperature of 89°F and a relative humidity of about 50%. We were in the house and, by chance, looked out the front window and saw two birds on the ground about one foot apart. They were about 100 feet away on dry pine needles that had dropped over the years from a white pine tree. This 3x6 foot patch of needles, on a gentle uphill slope, was in full sun. However, something looked funny! Binoculars quickly confirmed that one bird was an American Robin, the other a Blue Jay. Both birds had their right wings and tail feathers opened wide, were lying on their left sides such that their bodies (head to tail axis) were perpendicular to the sun. Our first thought was that they were injured. But why two different species and why so close together?

Suddenly, the Blue Jay rolled on to its belly and opened its left wing in addition to the already opened right wing and tail. It held this position for about 15 seconds, then folded its wings and tail, preened its breast briefly, flew to the white pine, and perched. It stayed in the tree for about 1 minute and then flew out of sight. The Robin was still during the time leading up to the Blue Jay's departure from the tree, at which time, the Robin rolled to its belly, opened its left wing as well, and stayed in this position for about 30 seconds. Then it stood on its feet, closed its wings and tail, walked/hopped to the other side of the tree (about 8 feet away), and then out of sight.

We were discussing at length the sequence that had just transpired, agreeing that

this is just one of those bizarre things that birders observe once in a life time. Then, we saw a Blue Jay flying from the woods. It landed on the patch of pine needles, opened both wings and tail, held this position for about 5 seconds, closed its left wing, and rolled to its left side. The immediate thought was that this had to be the same Blue Jay that we were just watching. Right? Then a second, third, and fourth Blue Jay arrived separated by about 15 seconds. Each landed and performed the arrival sequence; opened wings and tail, closed left wing, and rolled to left side with their bodies perpendicular to the sun. Picture it! Four Blue Jays lying on the pine needles about 1 foot apart. They remained this way for sometime, and then individually with about 15 seconds separation, performed the departure sequence; rolled to their belly, opened their left wing, held this position briefly, stood up closing wings and tail, and flew out of sight.

After some time, two Blue Jays landed about 20 seconds apart, and performed the arrival sequence. After about 1 minute, one Blue Jay performed the departure sequence and, shortly later, the other.

Curiosity overwhelmed us. We walked to the needle patch, and from our knees, looked for anything that might provide an explanation for this activity. What we found was a 1 inch layer of thoroughly dry needles. There were no signs of insect activity, nor any signs that the birds had made a depression in the needles. Parting the needles down to the previous years decayed needle bed revealed nothing

to the unaided eye. We returned to the house.

Shortly thereafter, a Blue Jay landed and performed the arrival sequence, followed by the landing of a male Northern Cardinal, who performed the arrival sequence. So now there is one Blue Jay and one Cardinal. After some time the Blue Jay performed the departure sequence leaving the Cardinal. But wait. Then a female and male House Finch arrived almost simultaneously, and performed the arrival sequence for a total of three birds. Some time passes, the Cardinal performed the departure sequence, the House Finches remained, and then, each Finch performed the departure sequence.

At this point, shade was encroaching on the patch of pine needles. All of this had transpired between 4:00 and 5:15 pm. The final "observed simultaneously" count was one Robin, one Cardinal, two Finches, and four Blue Jays, for a total of eight birds and four species.

Every birder, at sometime, will observe an Anhinga sunning with opened wings/tail prior to preening and re-oiling its feathers, or birds taking dust baths to smother parasites. More rare is the account in a book by E. W. Teale of birds landing on ant hills presumably using the formic acid released by an ant's sting to control parasites. Neither parasite control nor feather drying appears to be the reason for this activity. Were they sunning? What? We are totally flummoxed, clueless, and without a cogent explanation for what has transpired. And hence, "What the Hell's Going On? That's All We Want to Know!"

CELEBRATE OUR 25TH ANNIVERSARY AT ANNUAL POTLUCK DINNER SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 1998 BY MARY-JO BETTS

This is one year you will not want to miss our annual potluck dinner scheduled to be held on Saturday, February 28, 1998. To celebrate the bird club's 25th anniversary, there will be special surprises, gifts and memorabilia in addition to our regular festivities. Also, please be sure to note the directions below since this event is scheduled to be held at the Owen Brown Community Center, which is a different location than previous years. Club members and their guests are invited to share the fun, food, and program. Bring a salad, main dish, vegetable or dessert. The club furnishes the beverages, social hour snacks, rolls, and eating utensils. You **MUST** reserve in advance so we can arrange for the proper amount of condiments and beverages. Sign up at the January or February meeting or call **Mary-Jo Betts at 301-596-5858 by February 25, 1998**. You will need to specify the number of attendees and what food you are bringing. If you can't cook, adjustments can be made.

If you want to participate in the slide presentation, bring a dozen nature slides. (If you bring more, they will be shown if time

allows.)

Social hour starts at 6:30 pm and dinner starts at 7:00 pm. Mark dishes and any accompanying serving utensils with your name so we can return them to you. Let Mary-Jo know if you would like to help in any way or come early to help set up.

Directions: The Owen Brown Community Center is located on the east side of Columbia at 6800 Cradlerock Way, off Broken Land Parkway from Route 29. There is ample parking available.

1998 MOS ANNUAL CONFERENCE ANNOUNCED

The 1998 MOS Annual Conference will be held at the Wisp Ski Resort in Garrett County, the weekend of May 15-17. The timing and location of this conference will allow birders to take advantage of the peak spring migration flights. There will be many exciting activities and field trips planned by the conference committee. Detailed information will be mailed to you early in 1998.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

The Howard County Bird Club's activities and events are staffed solely by volunteers. Currently, the club is desperately in need of volunteers to perform some very important functions.

A volunteer is needed to assume responsibility for setup, coordination of daily coverage, and dismantling of the booth at the Howard County Fair. If a volunteer is not found, the bird club will not be represented at this important yearly event. If you are interested, please call **Paula and Darius Ecker at 410-312-9165**.

A volunteer is also needed to fill the bird feeders at the Howard County Central Library. Many people go to the Howard County Central Library, and this is a perfect opportunity to attract someone's attention to the wonderful world of bird watching and feeding. If you are interested, please call **Don and Martha Waugh at 410-381-8841**.

Please consider taking responsibility for one of these functions. It's a fun way to meet your fellow bird enthusiasts.

CALENDAR OF PROGRAMS AND FIELD TRIPS

Programs are held at Longfellow Elementary School, 5470 Hesperus Dr., Columbia. Meeting is cancelled if schools are closed for any reason. Hospitality session at 7:30 pm. Meeting/program begins at 8:00 pm. Club bookstore opens at 7:30 pm.

- January 8, Thursday "Cinnamon Buns and Cinnamon-rumped Trogons," by Hank Kaestner. Join the travels of a birding spice-buyer in Indonesia.
- February 12, Thursday "Saw-whet Owl Migration: What We Know and Don't Know," by David Brinker. A Wildlife Biologist for the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, David will share with us his research on Saw-whet Owl migration.
- March 12, Thursday Program TBA. Mark your calendar. Chan Robbins returns as speaker on the 25th anniversary of his first program for the Howard County Bird Club. **DON'T MISS THIS ONE !!!!!**

Field trips meet as described for each trip. Carpooling is encouraged; riders share the cost of gas and tolls. Dress for the field trip with stout, reasonably waterproof footwear and layers of clothes. Trips do not always follow paths. NO pets. Leaders may cancel due to inclement weather or fewer than three participants. FOR INFORMATION, CALL BONNIE OTT, at 410-461-3361.

- January 1, Thursday **Start Your New Year List** - Meet at 8:30 am at the Broken Land Parkway parking lot at Lake Elkhorn. Leaders: Darius and Paula Ecker. Join Darius and Paula on this half-day trip touring Howard County to start off our new year lists in style. Call leaders at 410-312-9165 for more information.
- January 24, Saturday **Patuxent Wildlife Visitor Center** - Meet at 9:30 am at the Route 32 and Broken Land Parkway park and ride (car parking) to carpool to the visitor center. Leaders: Darius and Paula Ecker. Join us in our second annual excursion to this warm indoor spot to spend a cold winter morning. Last year we had beautiful views of a pair of Bald Eagles. Call leaders at 410-312-9165 for more information.
- February 7, Saturday **Midwinter Count** - See details below.
- February 14, Saturday **Gulls at Alpha Ridge Landfill** - Meet at 9:30 am at the Route 108 and 29 park and ride to carpool to the landfill. Leader: Nancy Magnusson. Be prepared for lots of mud, cold, and standing on a trash heap to sort through a billion gulls searching for the one Lesser Black-backed, Iceland, or Glaucous. Call Bonnie for more information.
- February 28, Saturday **Annual Pot Luck Dinner** - See details on page 2 of this newsletter.
- February 28, Saturday **Deadline for Submission of 1997 Annual Lists** - See details below.
- May 15-17, Friday-Sunday **Maryland Ornithological Society 1998 Annual Conference** - Mark your calendar. Details will be mailed to you by MOS.

Board of Directors meetings are held the fourth Thursday of the month at 7:30 pm, unless otherwise noted, at the home of the board member listed. If directions are required, please call the hosting board member.

- January 22, Thursday ^{Mad Banks} Shiras Guion, 8007 Martown Road, Laurel, MD 20723, phone 301-490-0444.
- February 26, Thursday Dave Harvey, 302 Chelsea Court, Sykesville, MD 21784, phone 410-795-3117.

MARCH - APRIL 1998 NEWSLETTER MATERIAL IS DUE JANUARY 23, 1998. Anyone is welcome to contribute articles or ideas which you think will be of interest to other birders. Call or mail to Paula and Darius Ecker, 9270 Crazyquilt Court, Columbia, MD 21045, phone 410-312-9165 or e-mail to Paulae2156@aol.com. Also, please visit the club's site on the World Wide Web at <http://www.abs.net/~dariuse.birding.html>.

HOWARD COUNTY ANNUAL LISTS DUE FEBRUARY 28, 1998

A list of all the birds seen in the county during the 1997 calendar year is being compiled for the 19th consecutive year. Did we break any records this year? Only you can help us decide. Assemble your sightings for the year (even if the list was compiled in your neighborhood or your yard) and mail to Jane Costren, 6324 Sandchain Road, Columbia MD 21045 by February 28, 1998. The length of the list isn't important, because your list may contain the bird that will make 1997 a year for the record books.

13TH ANNUAL MIDWINTER BIRD COUNT

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 1998

Circle Saturday, February 7, 1998, on your calendar as the day to help with the Howard County Midwinter Count. Observers are needed in the field or watching feeders. You can choose to count for any portion of the day or all day. Contact Jo Solem 301-725-5037 to volunteer.

Marta and Don Waugh have again graciously offered to host the evening meal and the tally. Call them at 410-381-8841 to reserve space and choose a food to bring.

SUCCESSFUL SEED SALE BY EILEEN CLEGG

Again this fall the Bird Club had a wonderfully successful seed sale. Thanks to Mary-Jo Betts, Marty Chestern, John and Andrew Clegg, David Farmer, Jeff Friedhoffer, Christina Glorioso, Shiras Guion, Carol Newman, Ann Marie Raterman, Kurt Schwarz, Chuck Stirat, Tom Strikwerda, Don Trovinger, Mark Wallace, Maria Wilke and Helen Zelchner. Most of all, a special thanks goes out to everyone who purchased seed. Your generous purchase will enable the club to make much-needed monetary donations to a variety of worthwhile conservation efforts. Again, thank you and I hope to see you at next fall's seed sale.

HOWARD COUNTY BIRD CLUB

Chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society

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CONSERVATION COLUMN BY BOB SOLEM

One of the concerns of Maryland birders has been the health of the horseshoe crab on Chesapeake Bay, food for migrating shorebirds. The press release below from the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission addresses the topic:

States Commit to Regional Fishery Management Plan for Horseshoe Crab

On November 17, 1997, the States of Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, and Virginia agreed to commit the necessary resources to develop a fishery management plan (FMP) for the horseshoe crab (*Limulus polyphemus*) through the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. Concern for the horseshoe crab resource has grown in recent years due to increased harvest levels and the impacts of these harvest levels on the horseshoe crab population and other species dependent on the horseshoe crabs such as shorebirds that migrate through Delaware Bay each spring.

The States committed staff and planning funds to complete the FMP by October 1998. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service also committed to working with the states and the Commission in providing staff and scientific support to the FMP development process.

The plan process will begin with a stock assessment of horseshoe crabs which will ad-

dress appropriate harvest levels to sustain both the horseshoe crab resource and shorebird populations dependent on horseshoe crab eggs during the spring migration. *The draft FMP is scheduled to be available in early June, with public hearings in June and July, and final plan approval slated for October 1998.* The States of Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, and Virginia have already taken significant steps in protecting horseshoe crabs and will continue to strengthen these conservation measures when the FMP is completed.

Education about the connection between neotropical migrants and the Chesapeake Bay is another important item. The American Bird Conservancy (ABC) newsletter *Bird Calls* for November, 1997 has good news about that:

Birds And The Bay

A new curriculum related to bird conservation has been developed for use in Maryland schools. "Birds and the Bay" is based on the notion that habitat restoration projects targeted to neotropical migrants will also aid the recovery of the Chesapeake Bay ecosystem. Originally conceived by American Bird Conservancy's Gerald Winegrad, this project has been developed for use in Maryland schools by Don Messersmith, an active member of the Policy Council of ABC and of the Maryland Ornitho-

logical Society. Several six-hour workshops for teachers, naturalists, and others have been conducted and more are scheduled. The workshop's centerpiece is an interdisciplinary manual, *One Bird - Two Habitats*, that has been modified for use in Maryland. Emphasis is placed on the habitat requirements of migratory birds. This manual and other activities are demonstrated in the workshops, then given to participants for their own use. Workshops and materials are free to participants. Funding comes from the Chesapeake Bay Trust, Maryland Ornithological Society - Anne Arundel County Chapter, and the Maryland State Department of Education. It is c-sponsored by the American Bird Conservancy and the University of Maryland. Contact: Dr. Don Messersmith, <dm88@UMAIL.UMD.EDU>.

NEWSLETTER SPECIAL

Eileen Clegg has a few bags of seed still available for sale after the fall seed sale. They are available on a first come, first served basis. She has six 25 pound bags of sunflower chips for \$15.00 each, two bags of peanut hearts and one bag of thistle for \$5.00 each. If you would like to purchase any of this seed, call her at 410-730-4362.

