Summer Photo Quiz Clues
by Jim Burns

THIS ISSUE’S CLUE—
Those of you following Arizona bird reports on birdwg05 last fall
should have seen this one coming. All three of these photos
were taken at Boyce-Thompson Arboretum State Park.

A) good photo, easy bird
B) good photo, difficult bird
C) bad photo, easy bird
Photo Quiz Answers
by Jim Burns

C—Good photo, difficult bird
Were this quiz in color and our quiz bird's tail not partially in shadow, this would not be a particularly hard bird to identify. The thin, straight bill, the icy stare rendered by the proportionately large eye on the relatively plain face, the just-popped-erect posture, and the speckled breast pattern tell us immediately this is one of our spotted thrushes. In fact, those same field marks say the same thing about our third quiz bird too. There are six possibilities. Let's eliminate Bicknell's, based on geography, and see if we can sort out the remaining five.

Our quiz bird has a thin, petite jizz. It shows no face pattern other than its distinct eyeing and a thin, dark malar stripe. Its spots are bold and dark against a white background, at least on the chest, but they are not crisp. They run together forming streaks, continue down the flanks becoming indistinct, and fade out against a background which could be gray or brown but is decidedly darker than our bird's white chest.

Wood Thrush is a spotted thrush, but it belongs to the genus Hylocichla. It is the biggest of our spotted thrushes, its larger size usually apparent because of its relatively plump body and proportionately large head which often appears peaked because this species raises its crown feathers when agitated. Woodies have bold white lores and eyeing, distinctive horizontal black and white streaking on the ear coverts, and crisp, almost perfectly circular spotting that extends down the flanks, all the way on a clean white background, but stops at the lower belly. This description does not fit our second bird, so let's explore the four remaining species which, in addition to Bicknell's, belong to the genus Catharus.

Separating the Catharus thrushes without benefit of color is going to be an exercise in oversimplification. It will grate on the purists, but remember that the purpose of this quiz is not to make you an identification expert but to give you some starting points, some building blocks, and for this genus of structurally identical species, we're going to have to do it with plumage features.

Veery shows an indistinct eyeing and a very weak malar stripe. Its spots are weak and light against a Buffy background which is decidedly darker than its white belly. It has gray flanks but its spots do not extend down into the flank area. This is not a Veery. Veery is possible but not expected in fall migration in Arizona. It has nested locally in the White Mountains in the past, but not recently. If you see a Veery in Arizona, the Arizona Bird Committee wants documentation.

Swainson's Thrush typically displays the strongest face pattern of the Catharus congeners. It will show a warm and distinctly Buffy eyeing and lateral area which gives the species a pronounced "spectacled" appearance. It has dark spotting which runs together to form streaking against a warm, Buffy background which fades to off-white on the belly. Based mainly on our quiz bird's rather plain face, this is not a Swainson's. Swainson's nests locally in the White Mountains and is a rare fall migrant.

Gray-cheeked Thrush has no face pattern at all. The eyeing is indistinct and incomplete, though there may be a thin, dark malar stripe. It is heavily and darkly spotted against a light, buff to off-white background. It has the darkest and most extensively colored flanks of the Catharus thrushes. Based mainly on our quiz bird's bold and complete eyeing and its very light, probably white, chest color, this is not a Gray-cheeked. Gray-cheeked is an accidental fall migrant in Arizona, not to be expected. If you see a Gray-cheeked Thrush in Arizona, the Arizona Bird Committee wants documentation.

This Hermit Thrush was photographed at the arboretum in January, '02. Without the benefit, in living color, of the contrasting reddish tail, without the consideration of probability, and without the presence of at least half a dozen other Hermit (a veritable flock), I believe this bird could for sure be passed off as a Gray-cheeked, possibly as a Swainson's, but probably not as a Veery and certainly not as a Woody. Hermit are common breeders in Arizona's mountains and common migrants throughout the state, and are not hard to find in the lowlands in the winter. They are, in fact, the only thrushes found in the U.S. in winter. Based on this bird's white chest, it is probably the Rocky Mountain subspecies. Watch for Hermit's distinctive behavioral characteristic of cocking and then dropping the tail, particularly after landing.

D—Good photo, easy bird
Those of you who have followed this feature from its inception have seen this species before. And you should have immediately noticed this bird's short, conical bill is quite different than the longer, thinner, straighter bills of our other two quiz birds; for sure placing it in a different family than theirs.

This bill shape says "sparrow," and the combination of light bill with lighter lower mandible and the heavy, sharply triangular breast spots resembling mountains on a map which coalesce into one large central spot says "Fox Sparrow." Our January/February, 1999 quiz also featured a Fox Sparrow, with the note that "at least one is reported somewhere around the Valley every winter." This year there were at least three and possibly four wintering at the arboretum. That is a flock for a species of bird that isn't considered a flocking species!

End of story? Not quite. Some ornithologists, though acknowledging zones of intergradation, consider the four main subspecies of Fox Sparrow to be separate and distinguishable, and the species may be taxonomically split if and when DNA studies are completed. The "Red" Fox Sparrow, the nominate subspecies, ilaca, breeds across the northern taiga and winters primarily in the southeast. "Sooty" and "Slate-colored" Fox Sparrows, fuliginosa and schistacea respectively, breed in the northwest and winter in the southwest. The "Thick-billed" of California, stephensi, closely resembles Slate-colored but has a massive bill.

The consensus of experienced birders who saw multiple Fox Sparrows at the arboretum this winter was that there were two Sooties and at least one Slate-colored present. Our quiz bird is one of those Sooties, photographed last October, showing little or no facial contrast and heavy spotting extending all the way down the flanks. Slate-coloreds often have little or no spotting on the belly and lower flanks, a noticeably paler lateral area, and enough of a lower face pattern to be considered sub-moustachial and malar stripes.

My side view slides of our quiz bird showed no wingbar and no dorsal contrast, whereas my slides of the Slate-colored showed a faint but distinctive wingbar and a definite contrast between gray back and rump and red wings and tail.
Your choice of coffee could save songbirds

Had your morning coffee yet? The only connection you may see between coffee and birds is the obvious one: To be out there at the crack o’ dawn when the birds are most active, you need that wake-up jolt that comes in a cup of caffeine. But there’s another connection, much less evident, much more important.

September is the peak of southbound songbird migration. Have you ever thought about where your migrant songbirds are going and how they’re going to survive? Most of them are going to where your coffee is coming from, and they need trees and insects there. If you want to continue enjoying their spring and fall passages, I’d like you to consider buying only “shade-grown” coffee. Originally, in the wild, coffee was an understory plant. Shade-grown refers to coffee that is cultivated in the traditional way, beneath a canopy of trees, typically leguminous species that fix nitrogen into the soil.

Let’s connect the dots between shade-grown coffee and songbirds.

It is estimated that up to 10 billion birds breed in North America, then migrate to winter in Latin America. In the late 20th century, two factors adversely impacted our songbirds’ winter habitat: slash-and-burn agriculture and the invasion of leaf rust. These have led to vast and rapid deforestation in Latin America, the latter because it induced many large coffee growers to convert their operations to sun-coffee grown with no canopy, using fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides, an ecological desert with no trees, no insects and, thus, no birds.

Here are three random statistics along our dotted line that will surprise, if not shock: By one estimate, more than 40 percent of Latin America’s permanent cropland is devoted to coffee; in 1999, 60 percent of the remaining forest habitat in El Salvador was on shade-grown coffee plantations; during the time of greatest decline in shade-grown coffee, U.S. Fish and Wildlife surveys documented a songbird decline up to 3 percent annually. The shade-grown coffee movement by consumers has not yet reached the critical mass of the dolphin-free tuna campaign of the 1980s, but the time has come today.

In the Phoenix area, shade-grown coffee is available at Starbucks, Trader Joe’s and the Sunflower Markets. Coffees carrying “organic” and “fair trade” labels imply smaller plantations operating in the traditional way under a forest canopy, but there is much obfuscation in labeling practices. To be sure, look for the shade-grown label.

Flip to the second half of your field guide and savor the color plates of some of our most endangered songbirds: wood thrush, black-throated blue warbler, Blackburnian warbler, cerulean warbler, scarlet tanager. Loss of winter habitat is a primary cause of precipitous decline in these and other songbird species. Birds need coffee, as much as you do, but they need the canopy that protects and nourishes the shade-grown varieties. Would it still be fall migration if there were no songbirds to migrate?

They really can sing

The common songbird can pick up the simplest grammar. Starlings can tell the difference between a regular birdsong “sentence” and one containing a clause or another sentence of warbling, according to an April study in the journal Nature.

Songbirds also can add style to their songs using the same mechanism as humans, according to a March study.

X-ray movies of a singing northern cardinal reveal the bird rapidly changes its vocal tract shape, from the simple shape of a drinking straw to a voluptuous flower vase, to give the song some flavor. Sources: www.cnn.com and www.livescience.com
MAS publishes "Birds of Phoenix and Maricopa County"

An indispensable asset to the birdwatching community of our valley - compiled by three seasoned local birders, Janet Witzeman, Salome Demaree and Eleanor Radke. The book contains the history of bird watching in the region, bird sightings and records for the county, monthly bar-graphs of status (nesting, migratory, breeding, accidental etc.), habitat descriptions, and maps of places to find birds. First edition was 1972, second edition 1997.

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1st Edition inauguration, publicity photo, Arizona Republic, May 1972, Eleanor Radke, Janet Witzeman, Bix Demaree

Published by Maricopa Audubon Society
1997

Proceeds from the sale of this publication go to support the Maricopa Audubon Society and the Hassayampa River Preserve.
Who We Are

Maricopa Audubon Society (MAS) is National Audubon Society’s Phoenix metropolitan area chapter. The chapter numbers over 3000 members.

Globe, AZ: The Pinal Mountain

range just two hours east of Phoenix is known as a great birding spot, reliable for bridled titmouse, black-throated gray warbler and broad-tailed hummingbird... Numerous interesting seasonal migrants such as gray-eyed junco and red-faced warbler.

Noftsger Hill Inn Bed & Breakfast new "Birders' Weekend" starts with a guided birdwalk included at no additional charge. Reserve a guest room for either July or August.

Kurt Radamaker is our chapter's talented webmaster. Thanks to Kurt our field trips, programs, birding locations, Christmas Counts and past newsletters can all be easily visited on our website. Kurt leads the MAS Christmas Count and makes it fun. His thoughtful planning brings great results.

Donation Wish List

Maricopa Audubon Society is looking for a donation of a laptop computer in order to provide educational presentations to youth groups and classes. To donate please contact any board member here.

Last updated: Wednesday, August 30, 2006
9th Circuit Unanimously Rejects Appeal of U. of Arizona Telescope Project.

News Release—July 25, 1995

9th Circuit Unanimously Rejects Appeal of U. of Arizona Telescope Project. Appeals by the university to reverse environmental and cultural studies they have tried to avoid for 10 years.

NEWS RELEASE: Sept. 19, 1985, 2:30 PM, Phoenix

CONSERVATION COALITION CHALLENGES CLIFF DAM

At a news conference today at the Phoenix Press Club, Audubon Society President Herb Fibel announced the coalition's challenge to the project.

Phoenix May 19, 1985

Maricopa Audubon Society
P.O. Box 15451, Phoenix, AZ 85060

News Release 11-05-85,

"The Rio Salado of 2065 makes sense," state Dr. Robert Witzeman, Conservation Chairperson, of the Maricopa Audubon Society. "We are pleased with the result of the Army Corps, and the Maricopa Audubon Society. "We are pleased with the result of the Army Corps, and prom to the conclusion that the Rio Salado of 2065, as opposed to the 1984-1985, makes sense. It is true that the riverbed was deepened with sediment, but it is also true that the riverbed will be narrowed to a narrow greenbelt of only 50,000 cubic feet per second (cfs). The Rio Salado version proposed to place 36,000 people, their homes, and intense cfs. This Rio Salado version proposed to place 36,000 people, their homes, and intense cfs.
Salt River vegetation to be studied

The Maricopa Audubon Society will conduct a field trip Saturday to evaluate riparian vegetation along the Salt River, which will be flooded after the construction of the proposed Orme Dam, Dr. Robert A. Witzman, society president, said Thursday.

The field inspection will begin at 8 a.m. at the parking lot of the caretaker’s residence at Granite Reef Dam, 4½ miles north of the intersection of McKellips Road and the Bush Highway.

The society conducted a similar trip last month to study 15 miles of Verde River bottom to be flooded by the reservoir.

The nests of three of Arizona’s estimated 20 pairs of bald eagles will be eliminated by the reservoir, along with one osprey nest, the society said. Fifty-three different species of birds were identified by the society on its Verde River trip.

By JOHN J. HARRIGAN

YUMA — One of the celebrities participating in the 1971 annual Audubon bird count Monday in the Yuma area was Phoenix archeologist Dr. Robert Witzman, a widely-respected ornithologist.

Witzman was here as much to inventory marshland birds as to check on the status of the scarce marshes. Marshlands around Lake Martin, Mittry Lake and Imperial Dam, he said, offer a rare habitat for such exotic birds as herons, snowy egrets, egrets, egrets, and bitterns — and such endangered species as the black rail and the Yuma clapper rail, found nowhere else in the nation.

The land remains comparatively unspoiled. One of the indications of man’s slight intrusion is the presence of owls in the count area. This year’s count located two screech owls, two great horned owls, and one barn owl during the one-day count. By comparison, bird counts in the Phoenix area rarely turn up owls. People tend to shoot them, he observed, “simply because they’re there.”

Witzman was pleased to find a ring of cottonwoods and willows getting started around Mittry Lake. “They are a valuable part of the marsh resource,” he said, and he urged local citizens to encourage the growth of cattails, willows and cottonwoods as nesting or feeding areas for the large, beautiful herons and egrets.

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Dr. Robert Witzman, president of the Maricopa Audubon Society, will lead a tour of the river-bottom of the Verde River Saturday “to show the public the area being threatened by Orme Dam.”

The tour, which will begin at 8 a.m. where the Verde crosses Payson Highway, is open to the public.

The Audubon Society is proposing an alternate storage area be built at Lake Pleasant instead of Orme Dam to protect 15 miles along the Verde and nine miles on the Salt River which would be inundated.

Nesting grounds for the bald eagle and osprey are in the endangered area, Witzman said, as well as the habitats of 205 species of birds and 54 mammals. Particularly important are stands of cottonwood and willow trees, he said.

The tour is free and will be designed for all ages. A second tour of the Salt River bottom is scheduled for next month.

He said he believes that, unfortunately, the habitat for the endangered rails is threatened.

The tiny, 4-inch-long black rail depends for survival on a stable water level only 10 to 20 feet high. Imperial Reservoir area, now withdrawn from the game refuge for most recreational purposes, offers an exclusive habitat, Witzman said. It also offers a peculiar vegetation the bird favors: A combination of three-square bullrush and salt grass, found only in the Imperial Dam area.

Fortunately, duck hunters, Arizona game and fish suppliers and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation have been protecting the rail.

Border Lines

Of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, are interested in preserving the marsh resource, Witzman said. Were it not for them, the entire river would have been channelized, lined with boulders and over-populated with water skiers and speed boats, he said.

The small strip of land from the south end of Mittry Lake to the north end of Lake Pleasant has all the known black rail habitat and the only black-rail habitat from West Texas to the coast; it is tending toward the sort of development that has occurred on the strip north of Yuma, where jet boats roar from dawn to dusk.

Witzman observed that no native pelicans now exist in Louisiana, the Pelican State. DDT wiped them out and new ones had to be reintroduced from Florida.

No wolverines are found in the Wolverine State — Michigan, trappers got them. And the country, as a whole, seems destined to kill off its few near the Verde River the national bird — including the few near the Verde River in the Phoenix area where private development is in the offing.

The future of the black rail in Arizona, Witzman observed, “depends on whether man wants to co-exist with it,” he said.

California long ago drained or polluted all the marshes that once supported the black rail and drove it into extinction.

Verde River Tour Planned

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AGRICULTURE VS. WILDLIFE IN THE SOUTHWEST: PHREATOPHYTE CLEARING, FLOODING FOR EXTRA WATER, DESTROYS WILDLIFE HABITAT ALONG RIVERS; COME DAME AN EXAMPLE

An ill-conceived program that has spread throughout the arid Southwest is the clearing of phreatophytes from riverbanks. Phreatophytes is a term that covers all long-rooted, water-drawing trees and plants, such as cottonwood and mesquite. The U.S. government offers incentives (increased water rights or cash payments) to farmers for clearing out such vegetation, on the theory the trees and plants use up water from the rivers which could otherwise be used for irrigation.

However, there has been no conclusive study or even tangible evidence that removing the phreatophytes increases the flow of water in the river. On the contrary, the tight web of the root matrices of these plants holds in place the precious gravels and rocks, through which water can flow several feet beneath the arid surface. The moisture-bearing leaves maintain a higher relative humidity over the water surface than usual in areas where there are no trees, thus reducing evaporation. The plants act as windbreaks along the river banks, cutting down the force of hot dry winds which also cause high evaporation. And, of course, the trees and underbrush offer valuable cover for wildlife, even some nesting bald eagles and ospreys.

The proposed Orme Dam portion of the Bureau of Reclamation's vast irrigation plan, the Central Arizona Project, would flood 15 miles of lush vegetation along the Verde River and nine miles along the Salt. Alternatives, per usual, have not really been looked into. Re-evaluation of the CAP in terms of modern needs and conditions (it was conceived in 1947) has not been made. Dr. Robert Witztman, president of Maricopa Audubon, and his chapter, have been leaders in the fight to drum up citizen opposition to the Dam, but it is still an uphill job.

_The Phoenix Gazette_. DECEMBER 9, 1974

**Loud Objections Soar On Falconry**

By DEWAYNE SMITH

After some four hours of testimony — mostly from persons in opposition — the Arizona Game and Fish Commission deferred action Saturday on proposed regulations to govern the sport of falconry.

Audubon Society members from all over the state, including a building of 70 from Southern Arizona, mainly objected to adding three new raptors to be used in the ancient hunting activity.

"THE DEPARTMENT wanted additional time to review the contents of the testimony and include some of the suggestions," said commission member Bob Sphinn of Scottsdale. "We'll probably come up with a better regulation."

Milton Evans of Flagstaff, chairman of the Navajo citizen board, revealed at the beginning of the meeting that the falconry proposal had generated the "most mail I have ever gotten on any one subject, probably more than the total I have received in two terms of service on the commission."

The department and the Arizona Falconers Association had developed the proposal which was more restrictive than current rules and added the additional species.

Dr. Bob Witzelman, president of the Maricopa Audubon Society, and the prime force in generating the 20 some speakers at the meeting, drew a public apology from Bob Hankins, director of the Game and Fish Department, for allegedly not informing him of an October meeting to finalize the proposal.

**OBJECTIVES** centered around the addition of the Common Osprey, Prairie Falcon and Merlin to the regulations. Birders questioned the addition on the basis that populations were not known in the state, and that they were threatened by DDT.

The proposal called for the taking of five each during a year. Federal regulations are also pending on raptors.

In other action, the commission approved an agreement with the Forest Service on state projects constructed by State Lake Improvement Fund monies. Recent legislation eliminated Forest Service charges for normal day use of facilities at state-constructed lakes on Forest Service land.

The commission plans a special meeting Dec. 23 to cover wildlife water allocations from the Central Arizona Project, an item that was not finished Saturday. The next regular commission meeting has been set for Jan. 25.
Threat To Desert Ecosystem Is Seen In Land

Tradeoffs And Proposed Dam

By ANTHONY SOMMER

The stately saguaro towered above a paloverde where a pack rat had built its nest.

On the site of Ft. McDowell, footsteps crunched along a path running along the top of what once was an adobe bar- racks for long-ago cavalrymen.

At the confluence of the Verde and Salt rivers, children in the party waded in the cold springing waters.

A Sierra Club member told the group that because of government land tradeoffs, land developers striping away great chunks of the desert and the flooding by the backwaters of proposed Orme Dam, "We may someday find there is nothing left."

About 30 members of the Sierra Club toured the area this weekend, stopping to look at the fragile desert ecosystem. Biologist Tom Danielson pointed out the marks left by birds and small animals.

"Phoenix is lucky to have these lands so close," he said. "Federal land in close to the cities should be made into urban national parks, not traded away for inaccessible pieces of land far from where the people can enjoy it."

No trespassing signs all along the road and developments such as Rio Verde and Fountain Hills on what had once been public land underscored his point.

ROWE suggested the land should remain in the public domain with trails for backpackers, four-wheel drive vehicles and motorcycles. Damage caused by uncontrolled motorcycling across open country was evident in many scarred hillsides.

The caravan stopped for refreshment at a small grocery store where Ben Kill, the owner, visited with them on the front porch and sadly told them his store will be under water if Orme Dam is built.

EPA SUBMITS TO WESTERN STATES' PRESSURE AND ALLOWS 'LIMITED' USE OF CYANIDE DUST. 21 WESTERN SENATORS SEND LETTER ATTACKING INTERNAL USE.

In response to extreme pressure from Western states, the Environmental Protection Agency has decided to permit limited use of the M-44 cyanide device for predator control under the experimental Use Permit section of the 1972 pesticide act. Although specific details of how distribution and use would be controlled have not yet been worked out, we hope that EPA will put every possible restriction on these lethal devices, use of which we continue to oppose.

Scathing Letter Meanwhile, 21 Western Senators have sent a scathing letter to Secretary of the Interior Rogers C.B. Morton accusing Interior of disseminating "misleading information and distorted analyses" and of failing to "provide effective predator control."
The Senators, egged on by the wool growers, are irate because the Interior

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Elvis J. Stahr, President / Robert C. Boardman, Editor / Deborah Appel, Associate Editor