The SAN PEDRO River - A NAFTA TEST CASE
by Al Anderson (Huachuca Audubon Society)
and
Naomi Mudge (Southwest Center for Biological Diversity)

The San Pedro River is a 140-mile-long, green “ribbon of life” running through a semi-arid desert. Host to mesquite bosque and the Southwest’s largest remaining stand of cottonwood/willow riparian forest, this river is a virtual highway for animals. This wildlife corridor supports more than 400 bird, 100 butterfly, 83 mammal, and 47 amphibian and reptile species, including the second highest land/mammal diversity in the world, second only to the montane forests of Costa Rica. It is the principal recovery area for many endangered species including the jaguar and Southwestern willow flycatcher, as well as endangered native fish and plants. Riparian areas (where water is at or near the surface) are virtual oases of life in the desert and more than one-half of all bird species found in the United States frequent the San Pedro River. With headwaters in Cananea, Mexico, the San Pedro has international significance.

Because of the biological importance of the San Pedro, in particular its importance to migratory birds, the U.S. Congress created the San Pedro National Riparian Conservation Area in 1988. Since then it has been named as the first "Globally Important Bird Area" in North America (American Bird Conservancy.)

The San Pedro River receives much of its water from the Sierra Vista sub-watershed regional aquifer. Sierra Vista, a growing southwestern city, also uses this aquifer, as does nearby Ft. Huachuca. The area’s inhabitants ground-pump water before it reaches the river. Decreased flows of the San Pedro have led to an increase in dry sections of the streambed. Hydrologists predict dire consequences for the river’s survival if the trend continues; the base-flows have decreased 75% in the last 50 years. Growth from the U.S. Army’s Fort Huachuca remains the greatest short-term threat to the river. Uncontrolled growth remains the greatest long-term threat.

Because both the San Pedro and the wildlife that depend on it cross the U.S./Mexico border, threats to the river have international implications. The Montreal-based Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC) has been established as part of an environmental side-accord to the North American Free Trade Act (NAFTA.) For the first time the CEC has examined an environmental issue originating in the U.S.: the threat to the San Pedro River. Their draft report, titled "Sustaining and Enhancing Riparian Migratory Bird Habitat on the Upper San Pedro River," was released June 15 and they are now in the process of collecting public comment on the report. Ultimately the report is intended to promote cooperative efforts to recognize and protect habitats of special continental importance, to catalyze and call attention to existing efforts to protect such resources, and to educate more North Americans about the importance of the sustainable management of valued trans-boundary resources.

Comments on the San Pedro report will be taken until August 14. Please write and tell them why the river is important. To receive a copy of the report or to submit comments: write to Udall Center for Studies in Public Policy, University of Arizona, 803/811 E. First St., Tucson, AZ 85719, call 520-621-7189, or e-mail moote@u.arizona.edu. The Southwest Center for Biological Diversity has set up a web page with links to the report and to comment via e-mail. Please visit at: http://www.sw-center.org/swcbd/activist/sanpedro.html

Editor’s Note: The San Pedro Riparian "Conservation Area, in southeastern Arizona (very close to “home”) is between Benson and Bisbee, east of Sierra Vista. The visitor center is just off highway 90, as it crosses the river. If you haven’t visited this area, put it on your list of places to go.

SEE “YOUR COMMENTS ARE NEEDED” PAGE 3
I hope your summer is going along nicely and filled with lots of good birds. Many things of interest have transpired since our April meeting. Victor Burgett, who has served on the board of MVAS since 1996, resigned in April. Victor has also been field trip chair. We thank him for all his hard work in keeping our field trips running smoothly and for his input on the board. Although no longer on the board, Victor is still in the area and we look forward to continuing contributions from him for the newsletter.

Lorraine Schulte has filled Victor’s position on the board. A big thanks to Lorraine and John Schulte for hosting this year’s potluck. It was a delightful affair, highlighted by the presence of a number of charter members of the chapter as well as David Henderson, Executive Director of the New Mexico State Office at the Randall Davey Audubon Center.

I heard that the field trip led by Ken Stinnett to the Ladder Ranch was very successful, with a large number of participants and some good sightings. In July, Jennifer Aitchley will lead a trip to Las Cruces State Park. In August, the chapter will continue a tradition with an overnight trip to Arizona. More information about these trips is listed in the Field Trip section of the newsletter. Volunteers to lead trips are always needed. Contact me or any board member if you are interested.

Our meeting time and place have changed! We will begin meeting in the library of Las Cruces High School. The business meeting will start at 6:35 pm. This is 15 minutes earlier than in the past and hopefully will allow us to proceed at a more leisurely pace giving time for greater member participation. Jennifer Aitchley is the board member in charge of programs for the upcoming year. One program she has already scheduled is a speaker on White Pelicans.

Thanks again to Tim Lawton for organizing a successful Birdathon. We had a good year both in terms of numbers of participants and total dollars collected. Half the money collected goes to help support the Randall Davey Audubon Center in Santa Fe. We use the rest to help fund Audubon Adventures and other educational activities of the chapter.

Anyone willing to spend an hour or two surveying birds at Palomas Marsh please contact me at 382-6877. We had a willing group of volunteers last year. The surveying went smoothly and the BLM is pleased with the job we are doing.

The board is presently developing a letter to be sent to new members and a questionnaire to survey the membership concerning the chapter and its activities. These should be finalized soon.

I look forward to seeing you at the next meeting on September 16.

FIELD TRIP REPORT
by Harold Harrison - trip leader

On April 25, seven enthusiastic birders, who were relatively new to Mesilla Valley avian life, joined me on a very productive trip toward the Old Refuge. The combination of migration and irrigation produced passing ducks, shorebirds, warblers, and newly arriving summer residents to the tune of approximately 66 species in less than five exhilarating hours.

The highlights were many and often, among them: a trio of White-faced Ibis undisturbed by excited birders; nervous Wilson’s Phalaropes; yakking Mallards, and midsized sandpipers. Nine duck varieties included all three teal species in one field of view with the drakes in full breeding plumage. Abundant Roadrunners led our tour to the “living Christmas tree ornament”, the Summer Tanager, and several colorful warblers: Wilson’s MacGillivray’s, Black-and-White, and a singing Common Yellowthroat. Green Herons, Bullock’s Oriole, Green-tailed Towhee, singing Western Meadowlarks, Ash-throated Flycatchers, Scrub Jays, and amorous Ladder-backed Woodpeckers were other good birds that were heard, seen, and studied prior to the wind kicking up. Everyone enjoyed the morning and the birds.

Programs and general meetings are held on the 3rd Wednesday of each month. September through April. Beginning with our September 1998 program, the meetings will be at the Las Cruces High School library beginning at 6:45 pm. The program will start at 7:30 pm.

We have some exciting programs lined up for the fall with a talk and slide show about White Sands National Monument in September and Feathertop Lake Sanctuary (El Paso) in October. Details will be in the next newsletter.

FIELD TRIPS
Weather in the Southwest is changeable. In the summer, please be prepared with plenty of water, sunscreen, and a hat.

July 25, Saturday, Lee’s Ferry State Park. The park is about 20 miles north of Las Cruces. We will start birding in the Saltmeadows along the ditch road at the park. Then drive up the valley toward Hatch to bird the ponds and the river. We should see a variety of wading birds, riparian breeding birds, and desert species. The length of the trip will depend upon what the group wants and the weather. You may want to be prepared with lunch for a picnic. Meet at the Kmart parking lot on N. Main St. at 7 AM. Call Jennifer Aitchley at 526-3200 for more information.

August 1-2, Saturday and Sunday, Chihuahua Mountains, Arizona. Our traditional Arizona field trip for members and guests! This year we will bird Cave Creek and Rustler Park in the Chihuahua Mountains of SE Arizona with a stop at the Spofford’s yard for hummingbirds. This is an extremely bird-rich area. In the summer we can expect to see some area specialties: Sulfur-bellied Flycatcher, Painted Redstart, Elegant Trogan, Blue-throated and Magnificent Hummingbirds, and in the high country the Mexican Chickadee. We will meet on Saturday morning at the trailhead for the Southfork of Cave Creek. Motels and camping are available. Call Storm Serran at 382-3348 for more information and meeting times.
YOUR COMMENTS ARE NEEDED!

On June 15, NAFTA’s Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CCE) released a public review draft of its scientific assessment of water depletion in the upper San Pedro River. The report concludes that the river will dry up, destroying the nation’s first Riparian National Conservation Area if serious efforts are not taken to curtail urban sprawl, superfluous agriculture, and excessive water pumping. The CCE is only soliciting comments from within the river basin itself, which is dominated by developers and the military, thereby attempting to stack the weight of comments against major policy reforms.

Here are some points you may want to use in commenting on the San Pedro River National Conservation Area (SPRCA) report.

1) Retire agriculture within the basin. Irrigated agriculture makes up a very small part of the local economy. BLM and the Nature Conservancy have already retired some agricultural lands.

2) Don’t move the conservation area. One suggestion is to shift the riparian conservation area southward, away from the portion of the river most immediately threatened. This would “save” the conservation area but allow the continued destruction of the river. A better solution is to expand the SPRCA to include more of the river, including the area that crosses the international boundary. This will provide an incentive to control water depletion in the entire upper river basin and provided better wildlife habitat and open space.

3) Create an Active Management Area (AMA). Sierra Vista is one of the only metro areas in Arizona that doesn’t have an AMA. Most AMAs state that you cannot drill a well or build a development unless you can demonstrate you have an assured water supply that will not negatively affect the aquifer.

4) Don’t import water. This will be only a temporary solution that will cause water problems in other areas and fuel unsustainable growth.

BIRD NOTES

Due to a lack of recent bird sightings (summer is a slow time with lots of people on vacation) there are no birds listed for this newsletter.

Please continue to report any early, late, or unusual sightings to: Storm Sermay 505-382-3348, or e-mail ssermay@azianet.com.

Keep up with the most recent sightings for Arizona and New Mexico. Subscribe to the NM/Arizona bird list by sending an e-mail message to: listserv@listserv.arizona.edu with the message - subscribe birdlist your name

New Mexico Rare Bird Hotline 505-323-9323
THANK YOU FROM AUDUBON ADVENTURES

by Lorraine Schulte

Many Audubon Adventures classrooms are supported by the money we raise through Birdathon. However, individuals and organizations also contribute directly to Audubon Adventures to sponsor one or more classrooms. We would like to thank the following for their sponsorship of classrooms for the 1998-99 school year: Ethelene Herriman, Helen Barber, Bill and Donna Jacobson, Kiwanis Club of Las Cruces, Mary R. Williams, Jean Henry, Darrell Mott, Richard Bischoff, Las Cruces Area Catholic Schools, John Mangimelli, John and Lorraine Schulte, Robert Tufanelli, Tim and Diana Lawton, VFW Post 3224 (T or C), Las Sembradores Garden Club, Eleanor and Tom Wootten, Donald and Sheila Klug, Madeline Schroeder, Ann Heying, Mary Lou Wallaece, Desert Danbers Garden Club, Hi Hopes Garden Club, Janice and Myron Bond.

NAS OFFERS NEW MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

Looking for a better value on your auto and homeowner's insurance? National Audubon Society has made arrangements with The Hartford to offer a quality auto and home insurance program to Audubon members. This program features competitive rates, several discounts and credits, and convenient 24-hour claim service.

Find out how much you may save! For a free no-obligation quote, call The Hartford at 1-888-529-1797 and mention code 101 when you call.

A NOTE TO MEMBERS FROM YOUR EDITOR

This is your newsletter, MVAS welcomes contributions of birding and conservation articles for the newsletter. If you have an article to submit, please feel free to contact me at 526-1320 or email the information to wesmay@zianet.com. Contributions from a variety of sources makes our newsletter more interesting to all.

Roadrunner Ramblings is published six times a year: January, March, May, July, September, and November. Contributions are welcome. Please e-mail copy to wesmay@zianet.com, or call for mailing information. Next deadline: August 22.
Printed by Insta-copy on 100% tree-free, chlorine-free, acid-free paper made from the kenaf plant.

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