



MARCH EDITION 2024

Out on a Limb by Rob Bettaso (WMAS Board Member): "A ROSE BY ANY OTHER NAME"

In the northern hemisphere, the month of March marks the beginning of spring. Whether you chart the seasons by the position of the Earth in relation to the Sun ("astronomical seasons") or by annual temperature cycles ("meteorological seasons") March will always see spring, springing into action. And oh, what action there is: buds breaking, birds singing, flowers blooming, insects emerging, and babies of all types being born.

And while spring is an undeniably exciting season, I am not quite ready to leave winter; not just yet. I have one final story to tell pertaining to this winter's bird watching. Just a few weeks back, my good friend Mike stopped by to ask if I would be interested in joining him on a quick trip he planned to make to New Mexico in search of rosy-finches.

Two days later, we were driving to Sandia Mountain, just east of Albuquerque. As we commenced driving up the narrow road within the Cibola National Forest that heads toward Sandia's summit, the snow began to fall. By the time we reached the parking lot, the flakes were coming down hard, adding to the massive snow pack that had been building all winter long. Neither Mike nor I had been to Sandia before but Mike had read that there was a bird feeder nearby that was one's best hope for seeing the rosy-finches.

Despite the nearly "white-out" conditions, we noticed 2 people upslope of the parking lot. We followed their tracks leading from the parking lot up and around to where they stood, stock still, with their binos trained on various birds, cracking seeds from a feeder not more than 20 feet from the 2 birder's position near a grove of large fir trees. We slowly and quietly approached the 2 birders from behind, and stopped when we were within 30 feet of feeder. It was only when I stepped slightly off the tamped down snow trail and sunk clear down to my right hip that the two birders turned around to acknowledge us.

"It's only safe on the packed trail" one of the guys whispered, while I struggled to extricate half of myself from the deep snow's icy grip. Meanwhile, the birds were unperturbed and as I repositioned myself we all watched as nuthatches, woodpeckers, juncos, and jays bustled at the feeder. "Don't worry, the rosy-finches will be back soon" said one of the birders and while we watched the feeder, sure enough, a flock of Brown-capped Rosy-finches swirled down from the sky and settled into the snow-laden boughs of the nearby conifers. Soon, the rosy-finches joined the other species at the feeder and the 4 of us birders each enjoyed long, close, and spectacular views of the sparrow-sized rosie's with their heads, breasts, and backs clad in rich brown feathers; portions of their wings and tails plumed in black feathers; and lastly, a subtle, but eye-catching pink-wash of feathers filling up the remaining portions of their wings as well as their belly and rump areas. Instantly, the Brown-capped Rosy-finch was my new FAVORITE bird!

After about 15 minutes, the two earlier arriving (and by now, snow-drenched) birders left the feeder and made the short walk back to their truck; leaving Mike and I alone to draw slightly closer to the feeder and enjoy the

additional birds that were emboldened by the reduced number of birders. Soon we saw the other 2 species of rosy-finches: the Black and the Gray-crowned, which are every bit as stunning as their cousin the Brown-capped. Over our lifetimes, the “lumpers” and the “splitters” in their studies of avian genetics have alternated in how they classify the 3 North American rosy-finches. There have been periods of time when all 3 were considered **forms** of the same species; other times when they were considered 3 official **subspecies** of the same species; and still other times (currently) when each is considered its **own** species (with the Gray-crowned having its own subspecies). Regardless of how the taxonomists classify them, I’m confident the rosy-finches aren’t confused in the least and know perfectly well, who is who. Check your Bird Guides, and you too will quickly notice the slight, but wonderful, differences between the 3 species.

White Mountain Audubon Society (WMAS) 2024 Chapter Officers:

President: Mary Williams	480-235-1792
Vice-President: Tom Jernigan	928-892-3004
Secretary: Ron Pedersen	505-313-9343
Treasurer: Tom Jernigan	928-892-3004
Field Trips: Rob Bettaso	928-368-8481
Newsletter: Rob Bettaso	928-368-8481
Membership: Susie Walker	480-205-6119
Webmaster: Alan Vickers	

2024 Board Members:

Mary Williams, Tom Jernigan, Liz Jernigan, Mary Freemon, Susie Walker, Gerry Hodge, Ron Pedersen, & Rob Bettaso.



President’s Corner by Mary Williams:

How do you feel about the concept of ‘survival of the fittest?’ It is rather obvious but... The older I become, the more I question it as a worldview to which I wish to subscribe. (This no doubt has something to do with the alarming increase in human euthanasia in so-called civilized cultures around the world and I would be happy to discuss this with anyone who wishes to do so.)

It’s evident that as president of White Mountain Audubon, I love birds and truly care about protecting them. If you read my editorials or attend my classes, you will know that I reiterate the scientific findings about the decline of bird populations by the billions in the past few decades and that both macro and micro human decisions have caused this. (See the WMAS February newsletter at whitemountinaudubon.org.)

There are things we can do on a small scale about these issues. I have often asked ‘Why is the life of one roaming cat worth more than that of the thousands of birds it is expected to kill in its lifetime?’ When someone takes issue with me about removing House Sparrow eggs from the Bluebird nest boxes we installed and monitor, I ask ‘Why is the embryo of a non-native, invasive, introduced, and one of the few not-protected-by-law birds worth more than our native species?’

I’m concerned too about the decline of other cavity-nesting native species as the invasive, introduced, not-protected European Starlings take over the nest holes drilled by native Woodpeckers and Flickers. Starlings establish aggressive colonies that compete for food with many native species and will displace cavity-nesting Bluebirds and Swallows and Chickadees and Nuthatches and Titmice and Flycatchers and Wrens and Kestrels and

Owls – and even the Woodpeckers themselves! Let's continue to install and monitor nest boxes and to lobby with those who thin forests so they allow the bird-drilled snags that are not a danger to buildings and hikers to remain.

I will argue against that old 'survival of the fittest' worldview when we're discussing how to protect our beautiful birds. Seems to me that humans are stewards of the environment. Seems to me too that we have a mandate to protect the most vulnerable among us. And to contribute to the scientific research about what is happening to them, which is what those of us who submit accurate eBird checklists are doing.

If you want to learn more, contact us about attending classes and going on field trips and bird walks. Join us at our Audubon chapter meetings starting on April 3 at 6:30 at the White Mountain Nature Center. We meet there the first Wednesday of the month from April to November. Eric Kramer of Save Our Parks will be our first guest speaker addressing the issues surrounding Woodland Lake Park in Pinetop. Hope to see you there!

White Mountain Audubon Society Calendar:

For 2024 we expect that **all monthly Audubon programs** will continue to start at **6:30 pm on the first Wednesday of the month (except in December, January, February & March when there are no meetings)**. The programs are free and open to all. Monthly meetings are **held at the White Mountain Nature Center, 425 Woodland Road, Pinetop-Lakeside**.

Our 1st public meeting/presentation of 2024 is getting closer – April 3rd. You will hear more about the April presentation in the April Newsletter but for now, know that Eric Kramer will speak on the latest developments in the Save Our Park efforts.

Local Bald Eagles (photo on left by Jon Orona; photo on right by Gaston Porterie)



The Regular Monthly WMAS Birding Field Trip: Monthly bird watching field trips on the **3rd Sat of every month**, alternating between Rob Bettaso & Jon Orona. If you're interested in attending, feel free to give me a call and leave a message so that I can return your call to give you the details for the upcoming trip. The **next outing is March 16th**. Also, on the **fourth Sat of each month** I lead a "Fitness Birding" outing that combines slightly strenuous activities (longer hikes, bicycling, paddling, X/C skiing) with birding. The next **Fitness Birding trip will be March 23rd**. Feel free to give me a call if you're interested (Rob: 928-368-8481).

MOST RECENT 3rd & 4th SATURDAY FIELD TRIPS:

You may have noticed that I didn't send out my monthly field trips announcement and that is because I expected muddy and/or slippery trails and/or inclement weather. Sure enough, the trails were muddy/slippery and so I just birded with a few friends who, like me, have boots that are suitable for such conditions. If you are also somebody

who isn't dissuaded by slightly difficult conditions, you can always feel free to give me a call and I'm happy to take field trips with just a person or two. –Rob

Photo below of Lewis' Woodpecker by Carol Axford



UPDATES & REMINDERS:

Have you paid your annual membership dues? If not, a friendly reminder that WMAS relies on membership dues for such important Chapter actions as our annual Scholarship Awards to White Mountain area graduating seniors who have expressed an interest in pursuing a career in natural history, conservation, and other related fields. Thank you for helping us to continue to make such programs a regular part of our Chapter mission. Note that the

Donation form is at the end of every Newsletter. Dues are for the year in which they are paid and **not** good for 12 months following payment (unless you pay in January).

Also, if you are not a member of the National Audubon Society, we encourage all Chapter members to join the national organization. Information on joining the national organization is easy as you only need to type "National Audubon Society" into your internet search engine to obtain the simple instructions for joining.

And remember, you can always feel free to offer your assistance to the Board. For that matter, there are some on the Board who are interested in moving on from the Board to focus on other aspects of their lives, so, we are always interested in hearing from anyone who might want to accept the fun challenges of filling a Board position! **We are especially keen to recruit diverse candidates to be a part of WMAS, including more people below the age of 60 (so that we can plan for our Chapter's future) and also more people that are representative of the various demographic groups found in the White Mountains. And remember, you can be on the Board without being an Officer – in fact, you can even just attend a Board meeting as a guest. Please feel free to join us (call Rob: 928-368-8481).**

Membership/Donation Form

White Mountain Audubon Society chapter membership dues are: Individual \$15 or Family \$25 per year. Please renew your membership every January. Your tax-deductible membership supports our on-going programs and activities, as well as future new projects. Your membership and donations do make a difference!

MEMBERSHIP _____ DONATION _____

Individual _____ Family _____

Name _____

Date _____

Mailing Address _____

E-mail _____

Phone _____

Send this form and your dues or donation to: White Mountain Audubon Society; P.O. Box 3043; Pinetop, AZ 85935 You may use this form for either your Membership renewal or a Donation to WMAS. Please designate above which you are doing. Thank you very much for your support of White Mountain Audubon Society! LIKE US ON FACEBOOK and visit our website.

White Mountain Audubon Society is dedicated to the enjoyment of birds and other wildlife by providing environmental leadership and awareness through fellowship, education, community involvement, and conservation programs in the White Mountains and surrounding areas.