



Shape the Future

Canyon Chatter

Friends of Madera Canyon Newsletter

May 2024



From the President

Links to Contents

- 2 From the President
- 4 Volunteer Opportunities
- 7 New FoMC Website
- 7 New Photography Page
- 9 Education Program
- 11 The Birding Report
- 17 Canyon Nature
- 20 YoungArtists
- 24 Hiking
- 25 The Editor's Desk
- 27 The Last Page

May 2024

A potpourri this month:

Youth Naturalist Groups

Among the Membership Categories of the Friends is the Youth Naturalist Groups (YNG). The Friends reached out to schools, scouting troops and other groups involving youth in an effort to include the young women and men for whom we are “preserving, conserving, and restoring the canyon.”

Scout Troop 247 of Sahuarita has been a very active YNG. Their Scoutmaster, Terrence Donnelly, joined our board in January. The Scouts themselves have been in the Canyon frequently volunteering time in various ways. The most visible way has been their work on the Visitor Information Station. Weather and time had deteriorated the east wall of the building. On April 27, the Scouts concluded their repair work to the wall which included resurfacing and painting. We are grateful to the Scouts for their hard work and dedication to the well-being of the Canyon.

A Court of Honor was held on April 21 for one of the members of Troop 247, Maddie Comstock, who was awarded the rank of Eagle Scout, the highest rank in Scouts. I sent a letter of congratulations on behalf of the Friends, noting that, over the course of a lifetime, Maddie will encounter people who will consider her achievement as one to be regarded with high esteem.

Committee Work

The Canyon Preservation and Maintenance Committee and the Marketing Committee have been very active in the past several months. The Canyon Preservation group has trained several FOMC members to assist with trail maintenance and a survey of “social trails” and created and trained the Ambassadors who work in the Canyon when on a hike. The Committee work also includes the labor of the more than twenty volunteers who staff the Monday Picnic Area Cleanup crews. The Marketing Committee has re-established the presence of FOMC at such regional events as the Tucson Audubon Annual meeting, the Tubac Arts Festival, and the Tucson Festival of Books to interact with the public about the Canyon and membership in the Friends. **Both committees are always open to new volunteers so, if you can help, come help!**

VISIT OUR WEBSITE

<https://friendsofmaderacanyon.org/>

On the cover: Wildflowers bloom near the Proctor Ramada forming a carpet of color. JCM.

Music in the Canyon

Once again, Carole deRivera and her committee provided the community with an outstanding series of concerts at the Proctor Ramada on each Sunday afternoon in April. A major fundraising event for the Friends, the concerts were full of good music and fun. This year, attendees enjoyed new chairs, a purchase funded by a grant made in 2023 by Vulcan Materials. Thanks to Carole, the committee, and Vulcan for bringing the joy of music to us with the splendid Santa Rita Mountains as a backdrop.

Reader, we value your opinion. Don't hesitate to tell us what you like about the Chatter and what you might want to see done differently. Thanks.

The Count of Monte Cristo (AKA The Counter of Madera Canyon)

A New Volunteer Opportunity

You were expecting Alexandre Dumas' fellow from Monte Cristo? This volunteer opportunity is not swashbuckling but does provide useful information to the Forest Service and the Friends.

The Friends record Madera Canyon car counts each month. For four years, Joe Wolowsky has checked the counts from our counter and made a report. We are grateful to Joe for this contribution of his time in this role, which he now will leave to another person.

The Forest Service finds the counts useful to their Recreation staff in planning Forest Service rounds in the Canyon. While the counter does not differentiate between visitors and residents, the numbers do provide a rough picture of the volume of traffic and how that volume varies (weekdays, weekends, holidays). FOMC can use the data as well as it advocates for the optimal usage of the Canyon and possible ways to enhance the visitor experience.

Joe reports that, on occasion, he has found breaks in the hose but that most months, the job is simple. Check the counter and report the number.

So, if becoming the Count(er) of MAC appeals to you as a stress-free, sweat free way to serve FOMC and the Forest Service, please contact **Dan White at danwhitehi@gmail.com**.



Above the band CS&M performs at Music in the Canyon

Volunteer Opportunities

FoMC welcomes volunteers to support our mission. Whether you prefer regular commitments or occasional help, we appreciate your contribution. Here are two ways you can get involved:



And as we continue to move forward with the website, we would welcome your feedback and ideas. Please address them to us at FOMC.BOD@gmail.com

4th Grade Education Docents

Docents help 4th grade students learn about the natural, physical and cultural attributes of Madera Canyon through field trips along the Proctor Nature Loop Trail in Madera Canyon.

Walks are on Thursday mornings during 4-6 weeks in late March to early May and mid-October to late November. Training provided. FoMC membership required. Contact the FoMC Volunteer Coordinator at FOMCEducation@gmail.com for details.

Special Projects Volunteers

Participate in various projects, from assisting at FoMC booths during festivals to helping with event setup, including Music in the Canyon and other upcoming events. Special events are not on a regular schedule but rely on volunteers when needed. If interested, contact Anita Woodward at awoodw3369@aol.com. Your support is invaluable to us. Please consider joining our dedicated team of volunteers.

Be an Ambassador in Madera Canyon

The Ambassador initiative, sponsored by the Friends of Madera Canyon, is looking for volunteers. Ambassadors are FoMC members who, when visiting the Canyon, act as a mobile information source. That is, an Ambassador mingles with other visitors dispensing useful tips and facts. The job involves hiking your preferred trails while wearing a Forest Service vest, making yourself approachable to visitors of the canyon. Training in the many features of Madera Canyon will be provided. For questions or to sign up, contact David Linn at linngvrhc@gmail.com.

Trail Maintenance in Inner Madera Canyon

Expand your hiking skills to include trail maintenance in beautiful Madera Canyon. The Friends of Madera Canyon and the Forest Service are sponsoring volunteers to work at improving the trails in the inner canyon. Activities include brushing, that is, cutting away from the trail offending tree branches and bushes, and tread work, that is, improving the foot bed of the trail to reduce erosion and rock hazards. The job involves use of loppers, saws, shovels, and hoes and may be moderately strenuous. All activities will be under the supervision of trained FoMC members. For questions or to sign up, contact David Linn at linngvrhc@gmail.com.

Join the Cleanup Crew at Madera Canyon

Here's your chance to make a difference and make new friends. Help clean up the Madera Canyon every Monday morning by picking up trash, cleaning up grills and more. For more information or to sign up contact Colleen Verge at colleenverge@gmail.com

FoMC will have a table at the Patagonia May-Day celebration. Stop by and see us!

How to join Friends of Madera Canyon

Below are links to join as a new member, renew a membership or make a donation. The links will take you to a secure server to use a credit card or an automated payment. Do you have any questions? Let us know. If you prefer to help by writing a check, please make your check payable to Friends of Madera Canyon - mail to:

FOMC
PO Box 1203,
Green Valley, AZ
85622-1203

Links
[A NEW MEMBERSHIP](#)
[RENEW A MEMBERSHIP](#)
[DONATE TO FoMC](#)

3/5/24, 10:15 AM

May-Day (1).png

Patagonia
MAY-DAY

Facing our future together with creativity and resilience

Celebrate our region's rich biodiversity and thriving naturebased restorative economy.

About Our Event

A free community-wide celebration of our deep connection with Santa Cruz County's rich biodiversity and thriving nature-based restorative economy. We'll kick off with an Endangered Species Parade, featuring 3-D models of local animals and plants created by youth under the guidance of biodiversity experts, teachers, and artists. Together, we'll voice our concerns about environmental changes and dance to release grief, fortifying ourselves for an uncertain future. Throughout the day, explore climate change solutions, enjoy local music, and catch inspiring films.

Saturday, May 4, 2024 12:00pm - 5:00pm

Plan for

- Endangered Species Parade & Presentation
- Business & Organizations solution showcase
- Film and song

Town Park Patagonia AZ

PatagoniaAlliance.org

New FoMC Website

On Monday afternoon, March 11, a “new” website for the Friends of Madera Canyon (FoMC) was launched. The website contains both old and new content. The web address of the Home Page remains the same

<https://friendsofmaderacanyon.org/>

It was designed by Shield Bar Marketing using Divi, a flexible WordPress page builder. The design team was guided by the requirements requested by the FoMC BoD. The new website is still, in some ways, a work in progress. A few new pages were added, and there will be some new pages coming, and some of the sections like Education still need to be revised. But we wanted to get the new site up and running as quickly as we could. We envision the website homepage as one of the first places a visitor may go to before they actually travel to Madera Canyon. Very early on the home page the reader finds links to the current weather forecasts – both in the lower canyon, as well as on Mount Wrightson.

Just below that are four new sections. We are aware that most people come to Madera Canyon for one of three primary activities: birding, hiking, or simply to explore and enjoy the natural beauty of Madera Canyon. And almost everyone takes photographs these days so there is a section for that along with a Photograph of the Month where you can submit photos. From there, you can quickly go to the activity you want more information on. We intend to keep those pages current with up-to-date articles and information, so come back to the Home Page on a regular basis.

And as we continue to move forward with the website, we would welcome your feedback and ideas. Please address them to us at FOMC.BOD@gmail.com.

New Photography Web Page

WITH A PHOTOS OF THE MONTH (POM) SITE

JIM BURKSTRAND

Along with the new Home Page that was launched, the website now has a place to share your photos taken in Madera Canyon. The FoMC has instituted two Photo of the Month sections – one for students, one for anyone else. The Student section is open to anyone in High School or younger. The Rules and Entry Instructions are listed on the page. Students must have parental or guardian approval. See <https://friendsofmaderacanyon.org/photography/>

To begin with we are accepting photos taken within the last year, and they will be placed in a POM album for the month that they were received. These photos will be shown on a revolving slide show on the webpage, and also on a Flickr page <https://www.flickr.com/photos/198518361@N07/albums>

An example of such a photo, Coues Deer, is shown here.

In the future, we can envision including articles on shooting photos of various subjects in an outdoor environment like Madera Canyon. And as we continue to move forward with the Photography site, we would welcome your feedback and ideas. Please address them to us at FOMC.Photography@gmail.com



The white-tailed deer is a widespread species that has been suggested to have 38 subspecies. It ranges from the treeline in northern Canada southward through the USA, Mexico, Central America, into South America to 15 degrees South latitude (south of the equator). One of those subspecies is Arizona's Coues Deer. Although they can be found on the Mogollon Rim and in the highlands of the White Mountains, Coues Deer are most frequently seen in the sky islands of southeast Arizona. They are most prevalent in regions with consistent summer precipitation.

Send your photo entries address them to us at FOMC.Photography@gmail.com



Education Program

Education Program

April, 2024, Spring Field Trips Update

Doug Moore, Education Director

April, 2024, was a busy month for me and the FoMC Education Program, despite only one 4th grade nature walk scheduled due to standardized testing prep scheduled by elementary schools for most of the month.

On April 4th I led a small group from Quail Creek that had been the highest bidders on a “spring morning nature walk around the Proctor Loop” at the annual Women of Quail Creek Scholarship Auction Fundraiser. On the following Monday, April 8, our FoMC “birding” Secretary Bob Pitcher and I led a morning birding walk around the Proctor Loop with 10 FoMC members & their friends. It was a splendid spring morning, though a bit quiet in general for birds.

19 students from the Walden Grove High School Advanced Placement Environmental Studies class participated in a morning nature/ecology field trip at Proctor on Thursday, April 11. Docents Julie Porter, Dave DeGroot, Nancy Bowen and I divided the students up into four groups, then led them on a “journey of nature exploration and discovery” around The Loop. We found the students to be engaged, curious, and with sharp senses of humor, which made for an enjoyable, productive activity. Madera Canyon was showing off in full spring glory and the students saw diverse plants, wildflowers, birds, and animals, making an important connection between classroom concepts and real outdoor nature experience.

Monday, April 22, I led a large, enthusiastic group of “On the Go Women of Quail Creek” around the Proctor Loop on yet another spectacular full-spring morning in the canyon. The running creek and varied bird songs from returning migrants were background music to a trail side of wildflowers at peak bloom under the trees. It was really one of

Monday, April 22, I led a large, enthusiastic group of “On the Go Women of Quail Creek” around the Proctor Loop on yet another spectacular full-spring morning in the canyon.



On the Go Women of Quail Creek, Nature Walk, April 22, 2024

those “as good as it gets” Madera Canyon experiences that can happen this wonderful time of year. We may get a few new FoMC members as a result.....

As I write, we are preparing for a 4th grade nature walk with Sopori Elementary School on Thursday, April 25. Ms. Maru Ainza is bringing her class of 16 students to Proctor for a morning field trip. The weather forecast is favorable and the canyon is still in fine spring form for a very productive morning of “student naturalists exploring Madera Canyon” with the help of our enthusiastic docent volunteers. Sopori kids are always lots of fun, so we are looking forward to their visit again this year to top off the April schedule.



The Birding Report

The Birding Report

Flycatchers in Madera Part 1

Bob Pitcher

In last December's issue of Chatter I wrote about a walk I took into the upper Canyon late in the fall. There were few birds – I didn't expect many -- but what especially struck me was how quiet everything was up there that morning: The creek wasn't flowing and there were no insect noises and no bird calls. In particular, I missed the calls of the various flycatchers so evident in Madera in warmer months. But no flying insects, no flycatchers. By November most had gone to Mexico or points south, and the winter representatives of the family stay lower down in the Canyon. Now that it's spring, though, the flycatchers are coming back. Some are just passing through on migration, but many will stay to breed here, and their calls will be heard everywhere.

I recently catalogued Madera's hummingbirds here (see the February and March issues); seventeen hummingbird species have been seen in the Canyon, which seems like a lot – and certainly is, for hummingbirds at a single location in North America. But there are 25 species of flycatchers here, including a few rare ones and a becard, the last of which is at least a close flycatcher relative.

Flycatchers can be a trial for birders. With some spectacular exceptions, most are drab in color, medium to small in size, and similar in shape and manner. Some species are exceedingly difficult to tell apart. For a few, the bird books contain the dreaded note, "May not be safely identifiable in the field." But birdwatchers like challenges, or we wouldn't be in the business. So this month and next, I'll go through the flycatchers to be found, readily or rarely, in Madera Canyon, and try to sort them out.

In General

The New World flycatchers, the Tyrannidae family or Tyrant Flycatchers, comprise in all more than 400 species – it's the largest of the bird families. None is found outside the Americas; the birds called flycatchers in the Old World are unrelated. The couple dozen flycatcher species in the Canyon are a lot for this



The distribution of the Tyrannidae.

country, but if you go south, there are many more. My Mexican field guide lists 65, and a Costa Rican has 77. Wherever you go, many flycatchers will be hard to identify.

Why are they called Tyrants? The family as a whole takes the name from the generic name for the Kingbird tribe, *Tyrannus*, some of which are notably aggressive toward other birds. Other flycatchers don't share that trait, and outside of breeding season even more aggressive species are less belligerent.

It's easy for most anybody to tell that what's in front of one is a hummingbird. How does one distinguish a flycatcher from something else? First of all, by its action. As the name indicates, flycatchers catch bugs on the fly, often from prominent perches, and almost always on short forays out and back to the same or a nearby perch. Some other birds do this too, at least on occasion, but this is the flycatchers' basic mode of feeding. I can't think of a single flycatcher of which it's not characteristic. Between forays, flycatchers are apt to sit still, watching for the next flying insect.

Then, if you see a bird flycatching like this, does it look like a flycatcher? As I've noted already, most of the flycatcher tribe are drably colored, with shades of gray and greenish above and whitish below, with sometimes some yellow trim. Many have at least faint wingbars, and many have eye-rings. The smallest of the family found at Madera is some 4.5 inches in length, the largest 8 inches or a little more. So all are small to medium in size, and most are comfortably in the middle of this range. (There is one beautiful exception to this that I'll deal with in Part II, but one would be lucky to see that species in the Canyon.)

Finally, does it sound like a flycatcher? Although flycatchers are included in the enormous order of Passerine birds, the Perching Birds, they've been placed taxonomically in the separate sub-order, the Suboscines, for, unlike (most) other Passerines, flycatchers don't sing. Still, many flycatchers are quite vocal, and often a species' best fieldmark is its call.

With this foundation, many of the flycatchers can, with a little experience and some study of the bird books, be placed in one of several general categories of the family, which at least narrows down the possibilities. To my mind, there are five such categories, which among them accommodate almost all the flycatchers to be found here. And then there are three more species that are in categories by themselves, for a total of eight types. This month, I'll deal with the Tyrannulet (one of the one-member categories), the Pewees, the Phoebes, and the Myiarchus Flycatchers, known by their Latin generic name. Next time, I'll go on to the confusing little Empids (short for Empidonax), the Kingbirds, and the Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher and the Rose-throated Becard, both in categories by themselves, at least in this country.

The Tyrannulet

The Northern Beardless Tyrannulet, *Camptostoma imberbe*, is the smallest of our species, "the bird shorter than its name." There are other tyrannulets in



The Northern Beardless Tyrannulet, *Camptostoma imberbe*.



Western Wood Pewee, *Contopus sordidulus*, can be found in open forests and along wooded streams.

Latin America – one, the Paltry Tyrannulet, has one of my favorite bird names -- but there's only the one here, and it's only found in southern Arizona and far south Texas. "Beardless" refers to the lack of bristles at the base of its bill, which many other flycatchers have. In general, the Tyrannulet is, apart from its small size, quite like many other species, gray-green above, lighter gray or off-white below. It has a slight crest. It can be found in scrubby thickets lower in the Canyon, frequently toward the beginning of the Proctor Trail, and sometimes up into the oak woods. Its call is a descending series of whistled peer notes. Rare in winter, tyrannulets are fairly common in warmer months.

The Pewees

Three species of Pewee are regular in the Canyon. Two breed here and one is a reasonably common spring and fall migrant. A fourth species has been seen here very rarely. All these birds are dark green above, lighter below. They sit up straight, often on a prominent snag, and have slight crests. Fortunately, the species vary somewhat in size, and their calls are distinctive.

First is the Greater Pewee, *Contopus pertinax*, a species of Madrean pine-oak woods. It's generally found in breeding season well up Carrie Nation Trail, say, sitting upright on top of a snag, whistling its slow José María. About 8 inches long, the Greater is dark greenish-gray above, lighter gray below, slim, with a relatively long tail, and a noticeable crest. In this country, it's found only in southeast and central Arizona and a small part of New Mexico. Most leave in the fall, returning in early spring, but one might be found in colder months along the lower creek.

The Western Wood Pewee, *Contopus sordidulus*, can be confused with the Greater, of which it is mostly a smaller version. But it's only a little over 6 inches and has less of a crest. Like the other pewees, it has no eye-ring, which separates them from many of the other smaller flycatchers. The Western is best told by its call, a rough whistled breeerr, says Sibley, accented toward the beginning. And it calls all day in breeding season, in mid- and upper elevations of the Canyon. This pewee ranges well beyond Arizona, up to Alaska, in fact, and is strongly migratory. The Eastern Wood Pewee, *Contopus virens*, accidental in the Canyon, and common in the U.S. east of the Plains, can be told from the Western only by its call, a clear, long whistle pee-ee-wee.

The remaining pewee is the Olive-sided Flycatcher, *Contopus cooperi*. It's found only as a migrant this far south, though it breeds from central Arizona up



The Olive-sided Flycatcher, *Contopus cooperi*. Photography by Doug Moore.

to central Alaska. It is nowhere common. It's speculated that the Greater Pewee out-competes the Olive-sided for nesting spots. An Olive-sided is almost always seen on a snag, and might be either high or low in the Canyon. It has a burly appearance, short-tailed, and not as distinctly crested as the Greater. It has the "olive sides" on its underparts, like a dark, unbuttoned waistcoat setting off a central, lighter streak down its middle. Frequently an Olive-sided also shows white tufts of feathers on its lower back. In my experience, Olive-sided are quiet here in Arizona, but its call is a loud, Quick, three beers!

The Phoebes and Vermilion

The Phoebes are all much of a size, about 7 inches long, and are the typical flycatcher shape, but these birds – apart from the rare visitor – are at least distinctively colored. All are more closely associated with water than many other flycatchers. The Black Phoebe, *Sayornis nigricans*, is generally found near ponds or running water; it's unlikely to be seen in Madera at all in really dry seasons. But it breeds here in a wet spring, and is fairly readily found around Proctor Road or in the lower oak woods, usually a pair together. It's all dark above – we may as well call it black, though it's not truly so – and a brighter white below than most flycatchers. Like the other phoebes, it wags its longish tail up, particularly after it has just perched. Its call, persistently repeated, is a high whistle. Black Phoebes are found throughout the Southwest and up the West Coast as far as Washington State.

The rare species here, found very occasionally in the winter months, is the Eastern Phoebe, *Sayornis phoebe*. It too likes water, and in the East often builds its nest under a bridge. Its coloration is much more typical of a flycatcher, dark gray above, whitish below (quite yellow in a juvenile). But it too constantly flicks its tail up, and it says rather than whistles its name, fee-bee.

Say's Phoebe, *Sayornis saya*, like the genus, was named for Thomas Say, an early American naturalist who specialized in bugs, snakes, and shells rather than birds. His phoebe is marginally larger than the others in the category, and a grayish brown overall, with rusty underparts that are especially evident when the bird flies. It's generally a grassland bird, and quite common around Proctor Road, especially in the winter, though it also breeds there. Say's is probably not quite as dependent on water as other phoebes, and though it breeds close to water, it may stay all year in what's otherwise a dry area. Its call is an unobtrusive pdeer. This bird ranges to the north as far as the Arctic Ocean.

The Vermilion Flycatcher, *Pyrocephalus rubinus*, isn't a phoebe, but is closely related. Though somewhat smaller, it acts much like a phoebe, including the tail-flicking. Unlike the others, however, and unlike other flycatchers generally, the Vermilion is dimorphic sexually. The male is dark brown above, but one hardly notices that, since its head and underparts are a gorgeous, bright shining RED. In the sun, the bird seems actually to glow, rivalling even an Arizona Cardinal. In the spring, the male makes display flights from a high perch. The female is less colorful, a lighter brown above, whitish below with lightly striped



Black Phoebe *Sayornis nigricans* near St. George, Utah. From the My Public Lands Magazine, Spring 2015

breast and pinkish belly. Juvenile Vermilions show no pink at first, and may be perplexing until they start to show traces of red or pink. The calls are a persistent short whistle. The Vermilion is restricted in this country to drier parts of the Southwest.

The Myiarchus Flycatchers

There are three species of this genus in the Canyon during the summer months, and to me their calls are among the characteristic sounds of Madera. This category is sometimes denominated the Crested Flycatchers, and Easterners will be familiar with the Great Crested Flycatcher, pretty typical of the genus. The three species here all look similar to the Great Crested and to each other: from 7 to near 9 inches long, with a moderate dark-brown crest, gray breast, yellowish underparts, some rufous in the tail and wings. They're best distinguished from each other by size, habitat, and voice. All are common in Madera.

The Brown-crested Flycatcher, *Myiarchus tyrannulus*, is the largest and loudest, its rolling, ringing calls mostly variations on rrreeep!, and given especially in the early morning. In Madera, this one is found most easily along the creek in the cottonwoods and sycamores. The Brown-crested can be confused with the following species, but its crest is larger and fuller, its colors stronger overall, and it's much louder. The Brown-crested doesn't usually appear in the Canyon until May, but once it's there you know it. In this country, the Brown-crested is confined mostly to Arizona and South Texas.

The Ash-throated Flycatcher, *Myiarchus cinerascens*, is a subdued version of the Brown-crested, slimmer, quieter, even shy at times, and paler in color. It fits in well with its surroundings, the drier hillsides of the Canyon and the grassy area along Proctor Road. It arrives in April, and calls more frequently at first than later in the season, a series of kibrr, kibrr sounds. Occasionally, one might stay all winter. The Ash-throated is found throughout the Southwest and in drier areas to the north.

The smallest of the three species in this category is the Dusky-capped Flycatcher, *Myiarchus tuberculifer*. This bird is a Mexican species, found in the U.S. only in southeast Arizona and the Davis Mountains of Texas. It's common in the oak woods in Madera, and while it can be hard to see at first, it constantly gives its call, a descending peeer, which to me sounds sad, or at least resigned. Once seen, however, the dark crest is plain, and the bird's underparts are a somewhat brighter yellow than is found on the other species in the category.

Although this one has never been reported from the Canyon, and is not generally to be looked for, a Nutting's Flycatcher, *Myiarchus nuttingi*, is, I think, a possibility. To my knowledge, only two Nutting's have been confirmed in Arizona, one 25 years ago at Patagonia Lake, and the other on the east side of the Rincons just the last couple of years. And it's common in the mountains of central Sonora. Of course, if one does get here, it will be very hard to tell from an Ash-throated. It's a little smaller and bulkier, and a little more brightly colored, but the differences are slight, and the only diagnostic feature is the bright orange inside of its mouth! So good luck!



The Ash-throated Flycatcher, *Myiarchus cinerascens*. Big Bend National Park has more bird species than any other national park. National Parks Gallery



The Vermillion Flycatcher. National Parks Gallery



Young Artists



Colored pencil art, A Typical Bouquet, by Naima, age 11.

If you know a young artist who would like to contribute their work to the next Canyon Chatter, please send an image of the art with the artist's age and first name to <FOMC.Chatter@gmail.com>.



Canyon Nature

Canyon Notes- Late April, Spring 2024 Update

Doug Moore
text and photography

“Are there any fish in the creek?” That is a frequent question I am asked, probably second only to, “Where is the Trogon?” It is a fair question, as when flowing at its current spring rate, Madera Creek is equal to many gorgeous little trout streams in the mountain west. But, alas, ours is a seasonal stream without perennial water; it seasonally dries up every year and cannot support any fish.

Adequate winter rain and snowmelt have the creek flowing strongly now, the “water music” delightfully filling the air for quite a distance. The lovely sound is a fine accompaniment to peering into pools and riffles for signs of life. With the significantly warming day and nighttime temperatures of the past two weeks, a corresponding response in canyon plants and animal activity has been seemingly instantaneous! Canyon Treefrogs are “suddenly” out basking and calling from streamside boulders. A surprising multitude of aquatic insects are now paddling about on the surface, and down in what seemed just short days ago to be sterile water. A warm April following a wet winter creates an amazing flourishing of canyon life!

Along the creek, the deciduous trees are all leafed out- Fremont Cottonwood, Arizona Sycamore, Velvet Ash, Goodings Willow, and Netleaf Hackberry sporting brilliant green new foliage. Shrubs and grasses have woken up and spring wildflowers along the Proctor Trail are making one of the best color shows in memory. A quick survey reveals over 35 species of flowering shrubs, perennials, and annuals around Proctor this spring. The profusion of Desert Honeysuckle blooming trailside this week is only the most recent addition to the list.



1) Madera Creek



2) Canyon Treefrog

Insect numbers seem to be correspondingly up also. Honeybees, bumblebees, carpenter bees, and other pollinators are visiting flowers. Two-tailed and Pipevine Swallowtails with other smaller butterflies flutter along trails and clearings. Ants are emerging from their nests. Gnats and other tiny winged insects swirl in mating flights in the brilliant sunlight. There is a definite “buzz” in the air.

All this activity “rings the dinner bell” for larger canyon animals. Clark Spiny and Ornate Tree lizards are now hunting from boulders and tree trunks. Deer graze under shade of the mesquites. Distinctive calls reveal that resident Northern Cardinals, Canyon Towhee, and recently returned Bell’s Vireo, are setting up their nesting territories, while bright flashes of color high in the trees indicate other migrants, like Hooded Oriole, Western Tanager and Ash-throated Flycatcher, have made their seasonal return. Scat along the trail indicates that the nocturnal and “seldom seen” are also active and getting in on the action- skunks, Gray Fox, Ringtail, White-nosed Coati, and other mammals coming out to partake of the spring bounty.



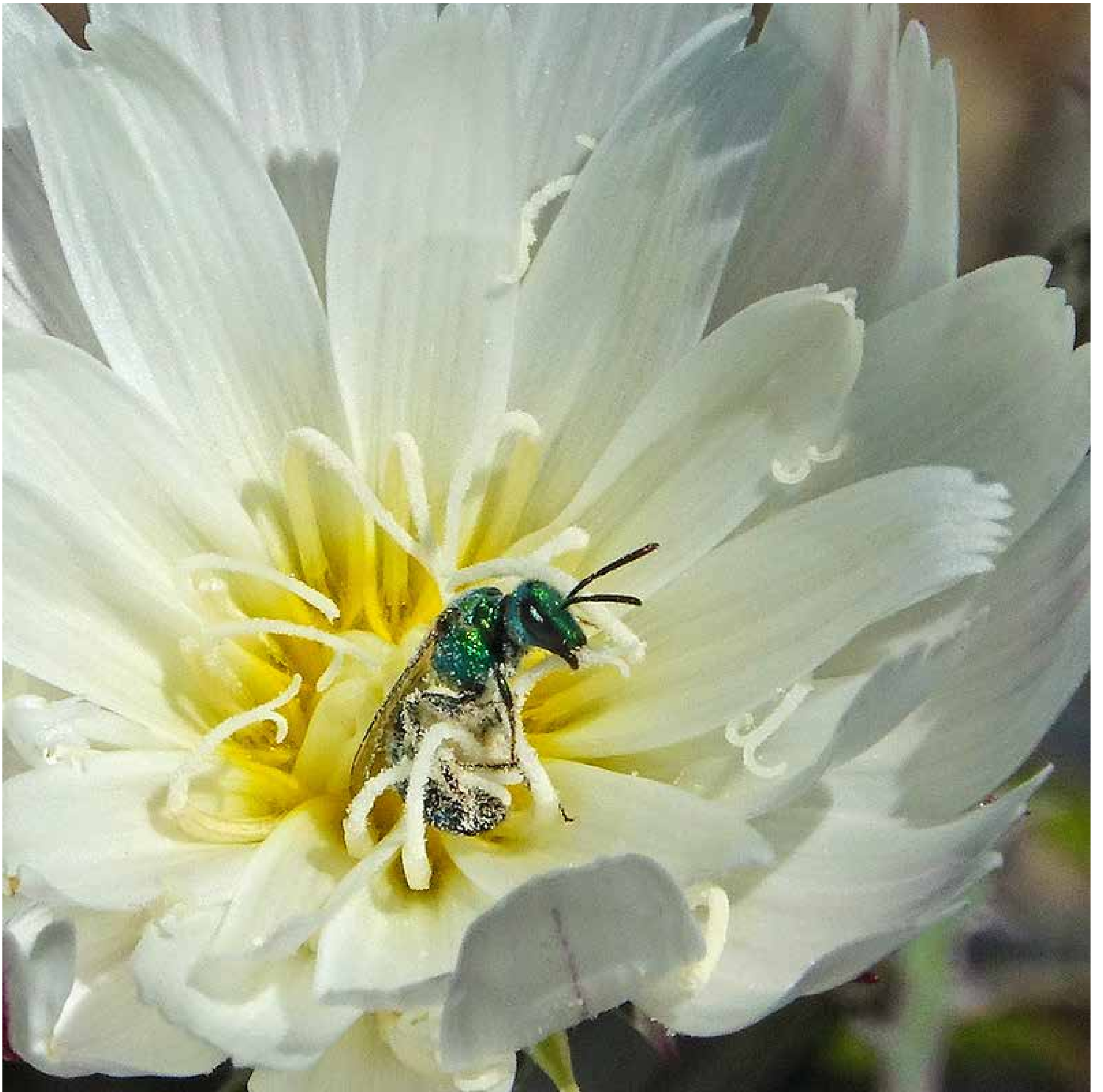
3) Desert Honeysuckle



4) Ash-throated Flycatcher



Fairy Duster



Desert Chicory with green halictid bee

YoungArtists



Mexican Gold Poppies



Mexican Gold Poppies at Proctor Ramada



Blue Phacelia



Hiking

Madera Canyon and the Santa Ritas David Linn

Spring is a great time to enjoy hiking in Madera Canyon. The wildflowers are out and the water in Madera Creek is flowing. Next time you are in the Canyon consider taking the Madera Creek Trail. This trail follows the Creek from the Proctor Trailhead to the Amphitheater Trailhead, a 550 feet elevation gain over 1.7 miles. Enjoy this easy-moderate hike by paying special attention to the flowing water. Take your time and check out the many miniature rapids and waterfalls you will encounter. Allow yourself to be soothed by the gurgling of the water flow. As you go by notice the great size and beauty of the white barked native Sycamore trees. You are also likely to see deer and many different species of birds. Think of this as your introduction to the many hiking trails in the Canyon. For maps pick up a copy of the pamphlet "Hiking In Madera Canyon" at any of the trailhead information centers.





The Editor's Desk

Get Ready for El Niño

El Niño, a shorter-term global climate pattern that emerged in 2023, is layered on top of long-term human warming, with dire implications forecast for numerous locations worldwide.

A significant climatic phenomenon known as “El Niño/Southern Oscillation” (ENSO) consists of three phases: El Niño, La Niña, and neutral. They sporadically change every few years. The most extensive effect on sea surface temperatures worldwide is caused by El Niño, which occurs when winds across the tropical Pacific weaken and the warmest waters in the western Pacific flow eastward, upsetting the entire atmospheric circulation. La Niña circumstances, characterized by lower global temperatures and sea surface temperatures below average in the central and eastern tropical Pacific, have been plaguing the planet for the last three years. El Niño appeared emerging as tropical Pacific conditions reversed earlier in 2023. With peak tropical temperatures usually occurring between December and February, it intensified in 2023 and early 2024 and set the possibility of significant marine heatwaves.

Arizona has an arid climate with highly variable precipitation between wet (El Niño) and dry (La Niña) years. The state is now in its 26th year of long-term drought; annual precipitation has been less than average for nearly two-thirds of this period (Arizona State Climate Office 2022).

This ongoing drought is likely impacting the health of many organisms. The firefly populations that depend on freshwater resources is a good example. Future climate predictions are sobering: global climate change is expected to increase the frequency and intensity of severe weather events such as droughts and create drier overall conditions. This, coupled with growing and competing water demands for agriculture, mining, and human consumption, threatens the survival of imperiled, moisture-dependent species such as the Southwest spring firefly and its snail prey (Walker et al. 2023). Bowers (2005) found good wildflower years were 3.6 times more likely after redefined El Niño years than after other years. Rain in the months before good wildflower years was at least 30% greater

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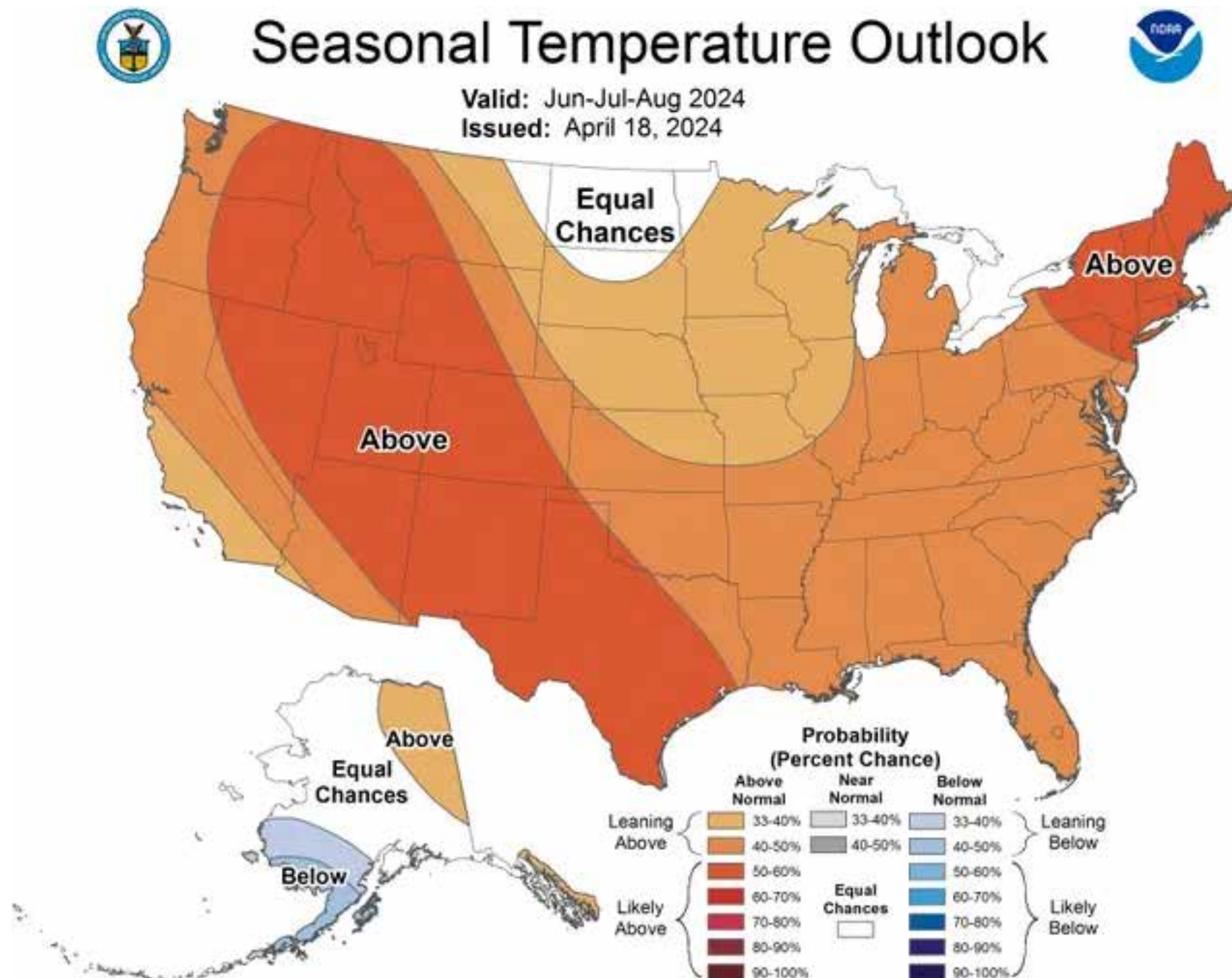
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than the long-term average in the Mojave Desert and at least 50% greater in the Sonoran Desert.

The NOAA meteorologist Anthony Artusa told **USA TODAY** that the agency’s prediction for a warm summer is influenced by the waning El Niño and approaching La Niña. Long-term patterns of above-normal temperatures are also taken into account in the forecasts. In the northeastern United States in particular, Artusa said.

It is predicted that summer temperatures will not be below average in any area of the contiguous United States. Only the far northern Plains may be able to avoid the abnormally warm summer, according to the NOAA’s forecast map.

While much of the Eastern Seaboard may see a damp summer, most of the Plains and Rockies should see a drier-than-average summer, according to forecasts. That might make drought and wildfires worse throughout the West when combined with the heat, according to Artusa.



The summer forecast map for the US shows that nearly the entire nation is expected to see above-average temperatures. NOAA

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The Last Page



The Regal Horned Lizard (*Phrynosoma solare*) is native to Mexico and the Southwest United States, and it is common in and around the Santa Ritas. The palm of a human hand is roughly the size of the medium-sized *P. solare*. The entire lateral surface of its body is covered in spikes. When fully grown, it is 3.4 in (117 mm) in length from nose to tail. Its color ranges from pale grey to yellow-brown to reddish, with dark markings on top of the body and back. Each of its four legs has five toes, and every toe has a claw. The species is a sluggish runner that hides from predators using camouflage. JCM

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Friends of Madera Canyon Chatter Editor
email: FOMC.Chatter@gmail.com**