



Shape the Future

Canyon Chatter

Friends of Madera Canyon

August 2024



Driving home last week I saw a small creature in the headlights. I was a few hundred yards from my driveway so I pulled over and found this little guy trying to cross the street. It is an alien. Its home is in the Mediterranean. Humans have accidentally moved this gecko all over the world. I can't tell you it damages the native flora or fauna, but it does not belong in Arizona. It is the Mediterranean Gecko, *Hemidactylus turcicus*.JCM

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Marketing Events: In August, FOMC will have a booth at the Tucson Audubon Birding Festival. This event goes for 4 days from August 7-10 at the Doubletree Hotel on Alvernon across from the Reid Park Zoo in Tucson. Please join us at this well attended event that celebrates all things birds and includes field trips to Madera Canyon as well as many other SE Arizona locations.

Photography:

We are now showing Instagram photos taken in Madera Canyon on the FoMC web Home page. Check it out. <https://friendsofmaderacanyon.org/>

When you post or share a photo on Instagram, share it to #friendsofmaderacanyon
It should show the next day.

VISIT OUR WEBSITE

[https://
friendsofmaderacanyon.org/](https://friendsofmaderacanyon.org/)

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Madera Canyon Chatter Editor
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From the President

From The President
August 2024

In July, the Board met to assess where we stand in pursuit of the strategies and goals set forth in the 2023 Strategic Plan. Jim Burkstrand, who conducted the planning process before, led our review. Our purpose was not to rewrite the plan but to agree what had been accomplished, what still needed to be done, and what parts of the plan and the factors affecting the plan had changed since Spring 2023.

Examples: we have created and staffed committees that were not in existence when we wrote the plan. We have not substantially increased membership; the numbers are about the same as they were, despite our being present at more community events through our Marketing Committee. We have succeeded in attracting foundation and corporate support for refurbishment and replacement of infrastructure in the Canyon and begun active stewardship of trails through the work of the Canyon Preservation Committee. We have not yet finished our commitment to advocate for limits on commercial collecting in the Canyon.

We have created a new website, published the Canyon Chatter monthly, and been a presence in NABUR. But we don't yet have data to indicate that the people we hope will read what we write are doing so.

As Jim reminded us, the Strategic Plan was written with life longer than one year. So, accomplishing some things and not others is consistent with what usually happens when organizations develop a three-to-five year plan.

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](#)



As one who spent a career working with non-profit schools, I am pleased that FoMC has a history of planning what it wants to accomplish in ensuing years. I am also proud to be a part of a group of people who have taken seriously the task of assessing what has been done and what remains to do.

The 2023 Strategic Plan is on the Friends' website. I invite you to read it and then ask any member of the Board of Directors for a sense of the "done" and "to do."

To Think About

Genomics describes all forms of economic activity unleashed by the development of the capacity to map genomes. Already, health care implications like combatting ALS and Alzheimer's and environmental impacts like breaking up oil spills have foreshadowed amazing economic potential as well as applications of the knowledge of genomes in transformational ways across the human experience.

In scraping and digging the land, unnumbered genomes are inevitably destroyed, never to be resurrected.

A 19th-century mentality to extract endangers a 21st-century avenue of economic activity with the potential to address real threats to human life. The issue isn't just a new mine. It is about developing a new mindset.

See the Editorial on page 10.



The Birding Report

Yellow Grosbeak, *Pheucticus chrysopheplus*

Bob Pitcher

Last month, I wrote here about the Aztec Thrush, a Mexican bird of striking appearance, seen only rarely in Madera Canyon (or in the United States at all, for that matter) but seen here mostly in the summer months. Here's another bird in the same category.

The Yellow Grosbeak is found in central Sonora State in Mexico, south along the Pacific Slope to Oaxaca, and from southern Chiapas State into Guatemala. It withdraws from the northernmost part of its range in the colder months. It looks much like a giant American Goldfinch, bright yellow overall, with mostly black wings and tail with white trim -- and, true to the name, an enormous bill, dark gray in color. The Goldfinch is some 5 inches long and weighs less than half an ounce, but the Grosbeak measures 9.25 inches and weighs five times as much. The sexes of the Grosbeak are similar in plumage.

Though larger than that species too, the Yellow Grosbeak is similar in shape and closely related to the Black-headed Grosbeak, one of the common birds of the Canyon in spring and summer, and is said to sound similar as well, though not as accomplished a singer. The Yellow eats a wide range of foods, from seeds to insects and fruit, and may be found at any level in the woods. In this country, it has commonly been seen in groves of trees at elevations from 3,000 to 5,000 feet – and it sometimes visits feeders.

Though Yellow Grosbeaks have been reported in Colorado (at least three times), New Mexico (four times), and Texas (once), it has been seen most often in this country in Arizona. Even in Arizona, however, it is very much a rare bird, not seen every year. (Sibley says, somewhat



ominously, “There are few confirmed records from Arizona, despite many reports...”) Accepted reports, those backed up by photos or good field notes, are mostly from June, though one year there were a couple reports from the same day in early November as far apart as Pena Blanca Lake and Sedona. Apart from that last one, all reported sightings in the state are from Phoenix on south, in or near the Chiricahuas and Huachucas and, closer to Madera, from Patagonia, Tubac, and Green Valley.

Yellow Grosbeaks have been reported in Madera Canyon only three times. The first two sightings were in 1977 and 1981, but the third was last year, on June 16, 2023, at the Santa Rita Lodge. A picture was taken to prove it. This year, the only Arizona record so far has been on May 22 in Catalina Regional Park, north of Tucson and a few miles north of Catalina State Park.

Yellow Grosbeaks have stayed all winter in Uvalde, Texas (in 2019), and in Albuquerque (in 2006), surviving at bird feeders, but in Arizona, Yellow Grosbeaks have been One Day Wonders, only occasionally staying to be seen even a second day. And never more than a single individual here at a time. All those that appear in this country are presumably strays that have overshot the border and most hasten to return to Mexico.

Still, one never knows. Keep your eyes open!





Education

Summer, 2024, Ed Program Activities

Education Director Doug Moore

Despite the summer heat not moderating much at all this year with the onset of the monsoon, the FoMC resumed outdoor nature walks and activities in July. For participant safety, morning and evening plans were made to avoid heat-related safety concerns, as mid-day and afternoon temperatures in the canyon routinely rose above 95° daily throughout the month.

A great blessing of summer walking in the canyon is the availability of abundant tree shade. A little shade can drop the ambient temperature significantly from direct sunlight! With that very concept in mind, FoMC members did a nature walk on the “shady side” of the Proctor Nature Trail up to the upper bridge & back on Saturday, July 13. Despite high humidity, the temperature was pleasant under the trees; understory shrubs and many perennial plants had greened up from early monsoon moisture. Madera Canyon looked verdant and gorgeous; the creek was actually trickling along the protected run below the upper bridge.

Though it appeared too early for summer flowers, there were buds on the Smooth Bouvardia, and some annuals had germinated, promising a later show. Many butterflies were out, particularly Pipevine Swallowtails and Queens. One Pipevine female put on quite a display, first searching methodically through the undergrowth for a Watson’s Pipevine plant, then upon finding one, contorting her abdomen around to attach eggs to the underside of its leaves. We also saw some tiny, but flashy, golden tortoise beetles making “Swiss cheese” out of trailside leaves and a very formidable large Tarantula Hawk wasp hunting spiders.

The stars of the morning though were canyon birds- both resident and summer nesting migrants. Numerous Bell’s Vireos were territorially chasing each other through the canopy. “Little brown jobs” with a really “loud mouth”, they provided a background chorus for much of our walk. Northern Cardinal, Canyon Towhee, Hooded Oriole, Varied Bunting, Hermit Thrush, and Cassin’s Kingbird made for fun birding. The highlight was a brilliant male Vermilion Flycatch-



er just above Proctor Rd. crossing on our way back down- an unusual sighting up in Madera Canyon!

Sometimes the best made plans go awry.... With the monsoon rain bringing out all the plants & insects, we planned the annual Bud Gode Bug Night at White House Picnic Area the evening of Saturday, July 20. Planning a monsoon Bug Night always comes with the caveat “weather permitting”, as every other year or so the monsoon has other plans for the canyon! Saturday 7/20 was one of those spectacular events- a real “rip-snorter” thunderstorm line charged south off the Mogollon Rim. Thank goodness for weather radar! Bug Night was cancelled at 4pm and by 5:00 there was a deluge and high wind in the canyon (and almost everywhere else from Tucson to Nogales). That’s the way it goes- monsoon safety first!

Finally, on Thursday, July 25, FoMC Secretary Bob Pitcher and I planned a birding/nature walk on the trail between White House and Madera Picnic Area. Not sure if it was the day of the week- or the temperature forecast- but only one FoMC member signed up and joined us at the start?!? I CAN say that anyone not going really missed out! This section of the Nature Trail is particularly scenic with abundant shade under gallery trees and many impressive, colorful boulders. A significant rain earlier in the week brought out some flowers and many annuals had germinated. Madera Creek was flowing in several sections and there were some lovely pools complete with darting dragonflies.



A spectacular Jewel Beetle, *Lampetis* sp., like our group saw on the July 25 walk.



Smooth Bouvardia, *Bouvardia ternifolia*, blooming in the canyon.



The rain also brought out other insects- lots of small butterflies, bees, and other pollinators swarmed flowers, especially Apache Plant, *Guardiola platyphyla*, and Smooth Bouvardia. We also saw several very cool beetles!

We watched deer grazing placidly near the trail and saw a variety of birds- Blue Grosbeak, White-breasted Nuthatch, Hooded Oriole, Bridled Titmouse, Common Raven, and more. We spotted all three species of the large *Myiarchus* flycatchers- Brown-crested, Ash-throated, and Dusky Capped. A somewhat disheveled, post-nesting male Elegant Trogon was a special treat, calling repeatedly as it flew from tree to tree. Apparently he was looking for a female and fledgling nearby too, but we only saw “Dad”. There were quite a few lizards out enjoying the morning. Clark’s Spiny and Ornate Tree lizards sunned on rocks and tree trunks. Many striped Sonoran Spotted Whiptail and Desert Grassland Whiptail lizards scampered before us, hunting ants and other insects along the trail.

Our most fortuitous sightings on the trail were, first, FoMC member Anita Woodward (who told us about the trogon up-trail), then former FoMC president Rusty Lombardo. Rusty had been looking for us, but must have zigged when we zagged.... Luckily we met up just below Madera Picnic. Everyone leisurely made their way back down the trail to White House, stopping again to watch the trogon, checking flowers with buzzing pollinators, and enjoying the scents, sounds, and scenery. Just another lovely outing with the Friends of Madera Canyon!



The Editors' Desk

Why should anyone be allowed to mine in a biodiversity hot spot?

Thirty-six areas worldwide are considered biodiversity hotspots, supporting over half of the world's plant species and nearly 43% of bird, mammal, reptile, and amphibian species. These areas are home to complex evolutionary histories, such as the co-evolution of squirrels and seeds, woodpeckers and insects, jays, parrots, and bats. The value of genomes, which are found in organisms growing above around metallic ores long buried in the earth's crust, is more valuable than the ore.

Genomes are all the genes in an organism and are essential for conservation planning, ecological research, evolutionary processes, and drug development. They can reveal how species adapt to changing environments, predict their responses to environmental changes, and guide selective breeding programs and genetic engineering efforts. Understanding the genomes of pests and pathogens can lead to targeted strategies for controlling agricultural pests and diseases, reducing crop losses, and improving food security. Genomics can also be used to monitor ecosystem health, identify microorganisms capable of degrading pollutants, and develop bioremediation strategies. In summary, genomic data holds immense value in conserving biodiversity, understanding species adaptation, and promoting sustainable practices.

This brings me back to why any person or organization should be allowed to mine in a biodiversity hotspot. The answer is clear to me - they shouldn't.

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The Last Page



Spadefoots and the toads make their appearance with the monsoon rains. This male Couch's Spadefoot is calling to attract a female. He was calling in a flooded ditch along Whitehouse Canyon Rd. Notice the black object attached to its knee. It's a leech - a symbiotic blood sucking worm. Maybe it makes him more attractive to females?

**Send comments, articles, & announcements to:
Friends of Madera Canyon Chatter Editor
email: FOMC.Chatter@gmail.com**

