



Shape the Future

Canyon Chatter

Friends of Madera Canyon

July 2025



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On the cover. Some days are too hot even for lizards. The Zebra-tailed Lizard, *Callisaurus draconoides*, in the photo is trying to stay cool. He is in the shade, very little surface area of his body is in contact with the rock or soil, and he is maximizing air flow around his body and legs. Photography JCM

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 to make 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](#)

From the President

July 2025

Believing and Giving

You and I give to that in which we believe. If you pay dues for membership in the Friends of Madera Canyon, it is because you believe that FoMC is worthy of your financial support. If you give of your time as a volunteer in whatever role, you believe that such a gift has a positive impact on the well-being of the Canyon and the visitors who come. If you make a financial contribution beyond your dues, you further express your belief in the work of the Friends.

You and I receive many requests from a host of worthwhile causes and organizations. We choose which ones to support because few of us are financially capable of saying “yes, I will give” to them all.

Often, a deciding factor in your decisions and mine is the specificity of a need. Judy and I give to a food bank because there are people who, for many possible reasons, are food insecure. No one should go hungry in a world where there is plenty. We give to the Nature Conservancy because their purpose is to buy land to keep it from exploitation, making sure that such areas are available to everyone to enjoy nature. We support organizations funding research into medical conditions and treatments. Many of us support churches because we believe in the messages they share with others.

Your dues and gifts to the Friends go to specific purpose, too. Together, you and I support the educational program spear-headed by our talented naturalist of long standing, Doug Moore. The brochures made available to visitors are another part of our broader educational mission, paid for by the Friends, as is the website, our electronic educational outreach. The Friends buy the tools used by our trail maintenance volunteers and what supplies we use when we are in the community informing visitors about the Canyon.

To fund the bigger projects we undertake with the Forest Service, we solicit grants from foundations and corporations. Sometimes individual donors designate their gifts for specific purposes, such as education or trail maintenance.

Just now, we would welcome donors interested in combatting the invasive grass species threatening native species in the Canyon. Likewise, gifts to support developing a plan to make the trail starting at the campground going to Bog Springs safer would be timely.

The Bog Springs project will eventually entail the Friends coordinating a partnership with several donors—individuals, organizations, and foundations—like the Friends did for the redoing of the Old Baldy trailhead.

There are myriad possibilities for the Friends to continue as a major supporter of Madera Canyon and the work of the Forest Service there. None of our work would be possible without those of us who believe in the value of Madera Canyon as an asset to our collective physical and spiritual well-being. Be assured that we never take your gifts of time, talent or treasure for granted. We cannot thank you enough.

Dan White



Announcements

Thank You, Greater Green Valley Community and Burton Family Foundations

The Greater Green Valley Community Foundation and the Burton Family Foundation have granted the Friends of Madera Canyon \$5000 in their 2025 funding cycle. \$2500 was granted to complete the bench replacement project currently underway for benches between Proctor Road and the Madera Picnic Area. Another \$2500 was granted to support the work of eradicating invasive grass species from areas in the Canyon.

We value the confidence the foundations demonstrate with their grants in our capacity to fulfill the purposes outlined in the grant request. We will continue to endeavor to be worthy of their confidence.

Benches

As many of you know, the Friends of Madera Canyon have undertaken the bench repair/replacement project noted above. Thanks to the generosity of the two foundations, we have all of the materials we need to complete the project. We have been slowed in our work because the original plan involved labor from Forest Service personnel, and their staff has been severely reduced. We anticipate completion by the Fall, the summer heat being a limiting factor to our work.

Dan White

The Birding Page

SUMMER WALKS

Bob Pitcher

Proctor Road

It's ten minutes to seven in the morning, Tuesday, June 10, when I park the truck in the Proctor Road lot. Two cars there already. It's 79 degrees and supposed to be the summer's first 105-degree day down in Tucson. Today seems a final chance at the springtime birds of the Canyon, some of which I've missed by being out of town during some of the best weeks of migration. Later in June, it's likely to be just Too Hot; by July – we hope – the rains will have begun, and it will be another season for the birds.

I've made a good start, even before setting out on my first walk of the morning. I stopped briefly to listen at the Florida Wash crossing, and there were a couple of Botteri's Sparrows singing. I stopped again as I passed the Visitor Information Station (CLOSED). A chunky flycatcher flew up onto the fence – a late Olive-sided! And there was a Ladder-backed Woodpecker on one of the mesquites, and the male of the Mockingbird pair that nests thereabouts was singing someone else's song from the wire above the VIS.

Still in the Proctor lot, I could hear perhaps half a dozen White-winged Doves yelling at each other down by the creek, and a Raven commenting in the distance. I looked for the Turkey Vultures that come out of the Canyon every morning from their roost by the Santa Rita Lodge. Today, they were all out already; there was a small kettle of them off a little way down the valley, perhaps fifteen, with more coming in.

Starting down the Nature Trail, I could see why the Vultures might have congregated: there was no wind at all. Everything was completely still, and those heavy birds need a lift to raise them to the level they can soar. Their kettle meant they'd found a current of air rising from the grassland below.

Along the trail, the vegetation immediately struck me as dry. No wonder, of course, after such sparse rains the last year, but the dearth of moisture is clearly hard on plants of all sorts. Last year at this time, there was still water in Madera Creek even this far down. This year, dry and fallen leaves are more evident than any remaining bright green spring foliage.

Still, the ground bass of bug noises was there this morning, a sound that's just missing in the winter in Madera. And the summer flycatchers were about – a pair of Ash-throated and at least one loud Brown-crested along the creekbed. Several Bell's Vireos were calling, and for once I think I actually saw all of those I heard. A Broad-billed Hummingbird came by looking for gnats – the only hummingbird I saw all morning. And there were a pair of Cardinals poking about in the brush, with the male singing periodically.

Was I just too late in the morning to catch the dawn chorus, or are the birds subdued in this dry spring? Are some of them perhaps waiting to breed until the rains come? Did some birds that ordinarily end their migration in the Canyon go on to greener places this year – or fail to come north through northern Mexico, which is drier even than it is here? However it may be, I saw few birds toward the upper end of the Nature Trail loop, though I heard a Gray Hawk calling and a few Acorn Woodpeckers fussing at one another – or at me.

On the way back, things picked up a little. I saw a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher; a pair of Western Kingbirds now occupied the spot the Ash-Throated Flycatchers had been in on my way up; one or two



A Ladder-back Woodpecker. JCM



A Broadbilled Hummingbird.
Photography by Alan Schmierer/
USFWS



Lesser Goldfinches flew about the road crossing; and a family of six Bewick's Wrens crossed the path near the gravesite. A bright male Blue Grosbeak posed near the creekbed, and presently I saw the brown female as well.

Best of all, though, was a pair of Common Ground Doves together on the granite boulders in the creek near the mortero rocks. These birds are not at all common in the Canyon, though one has consistently been heard these last months. As I reached the parking lot, I could hear the male dove calling. A Black-throated Sparrow at the lot itself ended my first morning walk. It was now 84 degrees, and about 8:00; there were still only two other cars in the lot.

Carrie Nation

By 8:30, I was parked at the Mr. Wrightson lot at the top of Madera Canyon Road, ready to start up the Carrie Nation Trail, my favorite for birds of the upper trails in Madera. For the first time, I used a hiking stick. Carrie Nation is too steep and rocky in parts to trust my unaided balance any longer. And the stick helped (*Well, Duh!*, many readers may say).

As I started up the slope, there was an Hepatic Tanager singing in the distance, a Black-headed Grosbeak singing closer by, and a Dusky-capped Flycatcher calling at the top of an oak. Again a good start. As I went up, I added, mostly by ear, Acorn Woodpeckers, a Northern Flicker, and Brown-crested Flycatchers. A little bird flew across the trail and into the scrub on the left: a Red-faced Warbler – one of my favorites, and a new bird for the year! Since they nest higher up, it's unusual to see a Red-faced so low in the Canyon, at least so late in migration.

Two more good birds before I came to the really steep and rocky part of the trail. Just below where Old Baldy Trail turns off, a pair of Sulphur-bellied Flycatchers was nosing around the sycamores for nesting spots, and being loud about it in their strange, high-pitched voices. Another bird I'd missed so far in '25. Soon after, a Whiskered

Screech Owl called from near the creek, in full daylight. I didn't see the bird, but it was still calling periodically when I came down the trail an hour or more later.

The rocky part of Carrie Nation is just not easy, but today it wasn't as bad as it can be. There was a little breeze, and it wasn't much more than 80 in the shade. I remember the first time I made this climb, 35 or more years ago. Yes, I was that much younger, but I lived then at sea-level, not a half-mile up. I was thoroughly out of breath every few yards.

Once one gets past the rocks, the terrain and the trail both even out for a time, and one can look about oneself again. Even without the birds – and this tends to be the birdiest part of the trail – there's always plenty to enjoy here. The woods

along the creek and on the slopes are probably as diverse as anywhere in the Canyon, with Apache, Chiricahua, and Ponderosa Pine, a selection of oaks always difficult to distinguish, and large Black Cherry, Alligator Juniper, and Arizona Walnut trees, along with smaller species. This may not be a good summer for wildflowers, even if we do get rain – I saw fewer signs of ground plants growing up than is usual. A few butterflies were out, including at least one bright Arizona Sister. And the forest smelled good.

Many of the common birds at this elevation, which must be getting close to 6,000 feet, were evident this morning: House Wrens (now called the Northern House Wren), singing Western Tanagers, a few Mexican Jays, Painted Redstarts, White-breasted Nuthatches, and Spotted Towhees. Plumbeous Vireos seemed to be everywhere, many singing, and one pair, it seems, were already leading around a couple of newly fledged young ones. A Hutton's Vireo or two were mixed in. Western Wood Pewees were almost as common, and a couple of Greater Pewees too. With a few exceptions, all these birds migrate north to the Canyon, and the exceptions are mostly elevational migrants, moving downhill to the lower Canyon for the winter months.



An old rockslide along the Carrie Nation Trail. JCM





A nestling Cooper's Hawk. Photographed at Pinnacles National Park. Photographer unknown.

For a while I sat at on a rock where Carrie Nation crosses the creekbed for the second time. After a bit, a second pair of Sulphur-bellied Flycatchers flew into the Sycamore next to me, twittered and squawked, and flew off again. And a little below the crossing, as I started back down, was a second Red-faced Warbler, giving an abbreviated version of its song.

The nesting pair of Cooper's Hawks, about where the Vault Mine Trail takes off up the hill, were noisy as I passed; one of the pair seemed to have brought home the bacon just then. I saw little more until, very

near the parking lot, there were three Bridled Titmice in the oaks along the trail, another of my favorite Canyon birds.

I neither saw nor heard either Trogons or Grace's Warblers on my walk. Both are being reported by other birders, but from farther up the Canyon than I went. But my two combined walks this morning produced some 44 species. At no point was it really too hot along either trail. And, as always with a walk in the Canyon, I appreciated once again how wonderful a place Madera is. The mountain scenery is beautiful; the beauty of the forest

The Friends of Madera Canyon booth at the Tucson Bird Alliance Birding Festival

The Friends of Madera Canyon will have a booth at the Tucson Bird Alliance Birding Festival in early August. The Festival will be held at the Doubletree Hotel on Alvernon, across from Reid Park. The Festival goes from Wednesday afternoon, 8/6 to Sunday morning, 8/10. The FOMC booth will be staffed from Wednesday through Saturday. A call for volunteers to staff the booth will go out shortly. The Birding Festival is a big event for the Bird Alliance and brings in over 500 people from all over the country.

Volunteer Positions Open **STOP! LOOK! LISTEN!**

My wife Cheryl, and I, drive to the VIS Friday morning, and load the car with one box each of BIRDS, HIKING, and WELCOME brochures. Fifteen miles and, say . . . thirty minutes from our home in Green Valley. We then travel the inside paved park road, and refill brochure boxes - as necessary - at 13 locations. Return the boxes to the VIS, and . . . Done! Less than two hours by forty miles total. And only six times a year! It's an eight-week rotation. We have a great working, long-tenured Crew, and swap assignments freely. Continued thanks to Sharon Toborg, John and MJ Van Veldhuizen, Joe and Joan MacIssac, and Franz and Doris Schatz. Three shifts open. Come join up!



The Editor's Desk



Snake Week, organized by the IUCN* Snake Specialist Group, is a week dedicated to celebrating and raising awareness about snakes. It takes place in July, with World Snake Day on July 16th, and includes various online and in-person events.

Here's a more detailed look at Snake Week:

- Dates: [Snake Week 2025](#) will take place from July 13 to 19.
- Purpose: The week aims to promote appreciation, coexistence, and safety regarding snakes.
- IUCN Snake Specialist Group: The IUCN SSG partners with Snake Week to organize events and promote the initiative.
- World Snake Day, celebrated on July 16th, highlights the importance of snakes in maintaining ecological balance.
- Events: The week features a Snake Week Speaker Series, with online talks from around the world, as well as other events focused on snake conservation and research.
- How to get involved: You can register for online events, share information about Snake Week, and participate in discussions related to snakes.



[*The IUCN](#)

Created in 1948, IUCN is now the world's largest and most diverse environmental network, harnessing the knowledge, resources and reach of our more than 1,400 Member organisations and 17,000 experts. This diversity and expertise makes IUCN the global authority on the status of the natural world and the measures needed to safeguard it.

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Fragmentation

and other reasons not to sell public lands

In case you haven't noticed, Senator Mike Lee (R) from Utah has been trying to sell off vast areas of public land. At the time of writing, this is an on-again, off-again proposal that involves the Santa Ritas and about 14 million square acres of Arizona. The proposal includes Madera Canyon, Sabino Canyon, and Mount Lemmon. This is a giveaway to the wealthy, allowing them to expand their fortunes by cutting down trees, digging holes for minerals, converting natural habitats into agricultural land, and increasing urban sprawl.

Currently, it appears that the public land sale is no longer scheduled to occur. But it could very likely return. We need the public to understand why this is unacceptable. Furthermore, we must convey to the public that the negative impact extends beyond the sold land.

Habitat fragmentation divides large natural areas into smaller areas by selling public property. This will disrupt wildlife corridors and isolate animal populations more than they are now. Private ownership may lead to increased demand for resource extraction (such as mining, drilling, and logging) and development, which can impair air and water quality and increase the likelihood of wildfires. Carbon dioxide absorption depends on forests and other public spaces. Development may reduce this capacity and worsen climate change after land sales. State trust lands typically prioritize financial gain over federal management, resulting in reduced biodiversity conservation.

The sale of public lands to private owners does not guarantee the public's continued access to recreational activities such as hiking, camping, hunting, and fishing. Public lands are vital to the outdoor recreation industry, which generates substantial economic activity and employment opportunities. Reduced access could negatively impact businesses and local economies that rely on tourism. Inherent in the American identity, public lands offer people from all walks of life chances to relax and connect with nature. The sale of these lands may diminish the value of our shared heritage.

States may lack financial resources to effectively manage large tracts of land transferred from the federal government, potentially leading to sales or reduced services. Increased reliance on resource extraction industries, resulting from land sales, could make state and local economies more vulnerable to fluctuations in commodity prices. Environmental degradation from resource extraction on formerly public lands could lower the value of neighboring private properties.

Proposed land sales might bypass existing guidelines for agency-led planning, environmental review, and public input. Land sales are sometimes considered a quick way to generate revenue, potentially neglecting the long-term value of public lands for conservation and recreation.

The loss of cultural and historic sites is also a problem. The sale of public land undermines the preservation efforts to protect culturally and historically significant sites, which could be at risk if land is sold and developed without proper safeguards.

In summary, we must make the case against selling public land because of the environmental damage, loss of public access, economic risks, and lack of transparency outweigh the potential short-term gains. JCM



Fragmenting habitat, the old-fashioned way, has now been replaced by huge machinery. Photography JCM



The Last Page



The Western clade of the Coachwhip, *Masticophis piceus* found in the Sonoran and Mojave deserts. They come in a variety of colors and patterns and many of these morphs exist side by side in Green Valley and the Santa Ritas This is a large snake, reaching 2.59 m or 8.5 feet and it may be the largest snake in the state. A variety of names has been applied to them, including *Masticophis piceus*, *M. flagellum piceus*, *M. f. cingulum*, *M. p. cingulum*. Coachwhips are also dietary generalists and will eat just about any animal they find. Photography JCM.

See: Myers EA, Burgoon JL, Ray JM, Martínez-Gómez JE, Matías-Ferrer N, Mulcahy DG, Burbrink FT. 2017. [Coalescent species tree inference of *Coluber* and *Masticophis*](#). *Copeia*. 2017,105(4):640-8.

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