



Friends of the San Pedro River Roundup

August 2011

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President's Report

By Ron Serviss

It would be wonderful if we could feel secure in knowing that the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area (SPRNCA) would be the same healthy, vibrant retreat for our grandchildren and their grandchildren as it has been for us.

Unfortunately, we do not have that security. The River and its surroundings are under constant threat from both human activity and nature's changes. This was recently made acutely clear by the Cochise County Board of Supervisors (CCBOS), when it demonstrated politics at its worst. With very little notice and a speed rarely seen at any level of government, the CCBOS adopted a policy to be added to its planning guidelines that define public lands in general to be something detrimental to the health of the County and which would specifically return the San Pedro River to a few cattle ranchers to feed and water their stock. Of course, the Supervisors will tell you they have included wording to protect the environment, but make no mistake, this policy is pro a few cattle ranchers and anti hikers, birders, bike riders, equestrians, photographers, and all those who have enjoyed the River for its beauty and solitude.

Why, at a time of economic difficulties, would the Supervisors pass a policy that is detrimental to the multimillion-dollar ecotourism industry? A 2002 study by the University of Arizona found that the San Pedro River and Ramsey Canyon Nature Preserve brought in \$10-\$17 million to the local economy. Let me repeat that: \$10-17,000,000. Nowhere in the report did it say that having cattle in those areas would enhance the user's

experience nor that it would increase tourism revenues. It does not take much imagination to understand that people who enjoy being in nature will seek that experience elsewhere after cleaning cow manure from their hiking boots a few times.

You should also be aware that the wording for this document did not come from a local citizens group, nor from the County Planning Department, nor from the Supervisors themselves. It was written by a special interest group in Texas. So here we have **OUR** elected officials quietly and quickly adopting a policy that was largely written in another state and that serves a few at the expense of the many. As I said at the beginning of this report, the River we love will never be secure from threats and with local politicians acting in this irresponsible fashion. This couldn't be clearer.

If you are as outraged as I am, please contact your Supervisor and let him or her know. Thank you.

Cultural History Docent Training

By Ron Serviss

This fall, FSPR will be offering a training program for members interested in becoming Cultural Docents. If you would like to help FSPR's educational outreach by leading history walks at up to four locations, here is your opportunity to learn from the experts. The program consists of five Thursday night lectures, held at the BLM office, and four Saturday morning site visits.

Although students are required to learn about each of the four historic sites we visit, docents can pick one or two locations that they wish to focus on.

Murray Springs is a Clovis encampment from about 13,000 years ago, **Presidio Santa Cruz de Terrenate** is a Spanish fort built in the late 1700s, **Millville** is a silver mill town from the 1880s, and **Fairbank** is a transportation center that existed until the 1970s and now houses a restored one-room school house museum/bookstore.

The training dates are consecutive Thursdays and Saturdays, September 29-October 29. A small fee is charged to cover training materials, but is refunded following your participation in several walks. Participants should want to become FSPR docents and help lead future walks, not just sign up to learn more local history. Space is limited and on a first-come basis.

The tentative schedule and speakers are:

Thurs, Sept 29 -- Overview of history of human habitation in the San Pedro Valley, Ron Stewart

Thurs, Oct 6 -- Clovis lecture, Perrie Barns & Sandy Kunzer

Sat, Oct 8 -- Murray Springs walk, Dwight Long

Thurs, Oct 13 -- Spanish conquest lecture, Speaker TBD

Sat, Oct 15 -- Terrenate walk, Leader TBD

Thursday, Oct 20 -- Mining period lecture, Bob Graff

Saturday, Oct 22 -- Millville walk, Richard Baurer

Thursday, Oct 27 -- Laws and regulations, Grady Cook (BLM); graduation certificates presented

Saturday, Oct 29 -- Fairbank walk, Ron Stewart

For more information, or to reserve your space, contact Ron Stewart at ronscylounge@me.com or 520-378-6318.

Fairbank Reunion October 1

By Sally Rosen

One of the best parts of volunteering at the Fairbank Schoolhouse is meeting people who lived in Fairbank or went to school there in "the old days." It is wonderful to hear their stories and memories and to see their interest in the restored schoolhouse. I recently met a woman who, as a teenager, had lived in what we call the "teacher's house." She was thrilled with seeing the schoolhouse, which had been boarded up when she lived there.

We can all have a chance to "meet the pioneers" on October 1 when BLM hosts its annual Fairbank Reunion. Former residents come and bring artifacts used in their homes or in the schoolhouse. Some artifacts are donated to the BLM for historic purposes. I was fortunate to have a chance one year to see actual tests and teaching materials donated by the niece of a former teacher before they were put into BLM's archives. As a retired teacher, I found these things fascinating.

Although the Fairbank Reunion is not open to the public in the same way as a Fairbank Day, non-Fairbank-ites are welcome to come and bring something to share for the potluck lunch. FSPR provides beverages and dessert. Most people will be arriving around 10 a.m. Handicapped parking is limited, but it is only a short walk from the main parking area.



Red-faced Warbler, by Lisa K. Walraven

Awesome August at SPH

By Laura Mackin

Every year, San Pedro House (SPH) sets up a vendor booth at the **Southwest Wings Birding & Nature Festival (SWW)**, which is the longest-running nature festival in Arizona. This year, the festival celebrated its 20th anniversary, with a move to a new location -- the Cochise College Campus. We were very excited when festival organizers asked us if we would host the artwork of the festival's featured artist, Lisa Walraven, in our booth. She was unable to attend the festival this year, so we were given her booth space to incorporate into ours and created a very large, visually attractive vendor booth. Our booth sales were spectacular, up 60% from last year, setting a record for highest sales. We had a great location in the exhibit area and saw a steady stream of customers throughout the 3 days. Everyone

seemed very pleased with the greatly improved facilities of the Cochise College Library and new Student Union Building. We are looking forward to increasing our presence and participation in next year's festival by adding educational exhibits as well as the vendor booth.

Following on the heels of SWW, another major birding event took place in Sierra Vista: the **36th Annual Conference of Western Field Ornithologists (WFO)**. Although the 185 participants were kept very busy with workshops, field trips, and meetings, many of them made it down to SPH to take advantage of the 10% discount we offered to WFO participants. Some even came back after the conference to shop!

The **Hummingbird Banding** sessions conducted by the **Southeastern Arizona Bird Observatory (SABO)** continue to draw large crowds to SPH. Tom Wood from SABO reports they are seeing more mountain species down on the river than ever, especially Broad-billed Hummingbirds. Normally found in the mountain canyons, the Broad-bills have retreated to the river after the fires. Tom believes the river served as a "fire escape" for many species, including large number of Rufous, Calliope, and even a rare Allen's.

For the past month, SABO has been distributing **free** hummingbird feeders and nectar concentrate donated by Kaytee in response to the dramatic increases in hummingbird activity at feeders following the wildfires in Arizona. The freebies are being given out at SABO hummingbird banding sessions, local farmers' markets, and the front porch of SPH. Visit www.sabo.org or www.wildbirds.kaytee.com/putting_birds_first/az_hummingbirdrelief.aspx for more information.

On August 17, a large group was at SPH observing a hummingbird banding session when a monsoon swept in and dumped 3 inches of rain in 1 hour. The group huddled in the ramada, but 60-mph winds with rain and hail quickly drove them out as they made a mad dash for the bookstore. While waiting for the storm to pass, they had plenty of time to shop for dry clothing! Unfortunately, SABO was not able to resume the hummingbird banding session and the group had to wade through the flooded parking lot to get to their bus. It was an awesome storm, but a bit frightening for some of the tour group who had never experienced an Arizona monsoon.

Although we need the rain, a storm of that intensity did some damage. The large cottonwood trees lost several branches, the bathrooms flooded, the gravel paths around SPH took a beating, and the Community Xeriscape Garden was showing some bruises. Our gardening crew has been trying to keep up with the explosion of weeds, but this year, it has been a monumental task. The rain gauges at SPH have recorded over 10 inches of rain since June 30. We are always looking for more volunteers who like working outside and don't mind sweating and a few bug bites. The gardening crew usually works on Tuesday mornings and welcomes any extra help.

FSPR Is Being Sued

Some of you may already be aware that FSPR is being sued for an incident that happened 2 years ago. In August 2009, during one of our trail rides at Las Cienegas near Sonoita, a woman fell or jumped from her horse when she lost control of it. She broke both her wrists when she tried to break her fall. What happened that morning is in contention and won't be discussed here.

When this woman, now the plaintiff, first retained a lawyer in the fall of 2009, the legal department for BLM in Phoenix gave us assurance that we would be protected by the government under our Volunteer Agreement. The case then appeared to go away and we heard nothing more about it.

A few months ago we were served with suit papers. Nancy Doolittle, our equestrian program leader, and Diane Heath, a member and ride participant, were also named as defendants. We expected that the government would formally certify us as being protected under federal law by virtue of our volunteer agreement. To date, that has not happened. The problem appears to hinge on the interpretation of one word: "adjacent." The government lawyer appears to be saying (we don't know for sure, as they won't talk to us) that Las Cienegas is too far away to be considered adjacent. We, of course, disagree with this position. We had done previous rides at Las Cienegas and BLM staff was aware of these events and approved the rides.

Our lawyer has had the case transferred from the superior court in Tucson to the US District Court in Tucson in order to have a federal judge rule on the proper interpretation of the volunteer agreement. In the meantime, we are incurring considerable

legal costs. Based upon prior assurances we received from BLM, our liability insurance protects our operations only at San Pedro House, the Fairbank Schoolhouse, and our office in Sierra Vista. The individual defendants have been forced to rely upon their homeowner's liability insurers to provide them with a defense. It is unclear if we will ultimately be able to recover these costs from the government. Although your board is convinced that there is no legitimate basis for imposing liability against us, we must await the decision of a federal magistrate. We will keep you apprised of how this is proceeding.

We do want to make one thing very clear to our wonderful volunteers. Had this incident happened in SPRNCA, the position taken by the government in the lawsuit could not reasonably be interpreted to foreclose federal protection under the volunteer agreement. We have just received our new agreement with BLM, which is more specific in stating that activities related to our mission that occur in neighboring communities such as Sierra Vista and Bisbee are also covered. We are also implementing steps to obtain BLM's written approval of any activity that might be questioned, should an incident happen.

If you have any questions or concerns, contact Ron Serviss at serviss.ron@gmail.com or 520-432-6773 or talk to any Board member.

FSPR Volunteer Appreciation & Awards Luncheon

The ramada behind SPH was the site for a "Thank You" Celebration held on Saturday, August 27. FSPR provided a catered lunch and awarded pins and plaques to those who contributed to our volunteer program during FY 2009-10. The Board thanks Gary Noonan for his substantial efforts in putting the Awards Program together.

AWARDS

Federal Presidential Awards (pin, certificate, letter -- all but Lifetime based only on hours volunteered in FY 2010)

- Bronze Level: 100-249 hours
- Silver Level: 250-499 hours
- Gold Level: 500+ hours

Lifetime

Lester Mauk, Dutch Nagle

Gold

Alan Blixt, Mike Foster, Chris Long, Dutch Nagle, Sally Rosen, Ronald Serviss

Silver

Tom Arnold, Mary Bonds, Jeanie Bragg, Ann Hartfiel, Bob Herrmann, Lori Kovash, Dwight Long, Ted Mouras, Gary Noonan

Bronze

Richard Bauer, Virginia Bealer, Jane Chambers, Tom Clancy, Bette Ford, Dave Heck, Kathy Holland, Sandy Kunzer, Gabrielle LaFargue, John Rose, Renell Stewart, Jack Whetstone, Michael White

Total Hours, All Years Combined (awards from FSPR)

- 500 hours: FSPR pin
- 1000 hours: Plaque
- 1500 hours: Vermilion Flycatcher Pin
- 2000 hours: Memorial Brick (Triple Size) and Green Kingfisher Pin
- 3000 hours: Memorial Brick and Quail Pin
- 4000 hours: Memorial Brick, Roadrunner Pin, Presidential Lifetime Pin, Certificate, and Letter

4000+ Hours

Lester Mauk (4082), Dutch Nagle (4407.1)

3000+ Hours

Alan Blixt (3767.25), Mike Foster (3655.5), Chris Long (3614.5), Ted Mouras (3072)

2000+ Hours

Ann Hartfiel (2745.25), Gary Noonan (2634.25), Sally Rosen (2411.54)

1000+ Hours

Tom Arnold (1622.5), Jane Chambers (1463.75), Dwight Long (1126.5), John Rose (1338.75), Ronald Serviss (1047), Jann Weiss (1289.75)

500+ Hours

Dawk Bianchi (674.5), Mary Bonds (641.35), Hank Brodtkin (640.2), Nancy Doolittle (600), Morris Farr (521.5), Patricia Gerrodette (992), Betty Goble (953.75), Mike Guest (591), Kathy Hill (526.25), Sandy Kunzer (838.55), Teresa Miranda (863.25), Diane Riviere (811.75), Regina Rutledge (588), Katie Salwei (678), Joan Spiczka (601.2), Jack Whetstone (989), Brenda White (720.25), Alice Wilcox (790.5)

Fairbank Schoolhouse Museum Improvements

By Ron Stewart

Actions are underway to improve the exhibits in the Fairbank Schoolhouse. One objective is to increase the information presented regarding the area's prehistory. To achieve this, I am working to consolidate artifacts already on hand and acquire new ones. I have contacted local museums about lending appropriate items to exhibit at Fairbank. The BLM has purchased two additional display cases for this purpose that are located in the side room of the school.

Another project that will soon be completed is a timeline of human occupation in the middle San Pedro River valley, dating from Clovis times to the abandonment of the Presidio. Local events are compared to regional and world events, to give visitors perspective on the local area. The timeline will be printed in panels and positioned across the top of the partitions in the side room, above the new display cases.

We will also be working to refurbish the exhibits in the main room. The displays have been rearranged and cleaned, adding new items related to the railroads. Finally, I will be working over the next few months to improve and standardize signage, using a "logo" graphic I have created from rock art at the Charleston Narrows.

Hopefully, the net result of this effort will be a better-rounded exhibit that reflects the pride all FSPR docents feel about the river and our involvement with it.

Rare Birds in SPRNCA, Summer 2011

By Robert Weissler

Buntings featured prominently among interesting birds to turn up throughout the upper San Pedro Valley this summer. While Indigo Bunting is an uncommon breeder along the river (as is Varied Bunting), Painted Buntings have also turned up in unusual numbers this summer. Painting Bunting has been sighted near Garden Wash south of San Pedro House, at Casa de San Pedro, and in Palominas at the river, among other locations in southern Arizona.

In the aftermath of the Monument Fire in the Huachucas, some birds are occurring in larger numbers than normal along the river, including Broad-billed Hummingbirds, presumably displaced by loss of habitat and nectar sources in the foothills. Very unusual were reports of Lucifer and Berylline Hummingbirds from the river.

In the raptor department, the Mississippi Kite pair breeding along the river at St. David is surely a highlight. Zone-tailed Hawks have also been encountered along the river nearby. Gray Hawks were seen in many locations along the river, as well as in canyon outlets, at least prior to the fire.

Breeding Yellow-billed Cuckoos were recorded in the usual places along the river. A pair of Tropical Kingbirds was found at Kingfisher Pond. In the grasslands, Cassin's and Botteri's Sparrows can be heard singing throughout, especially with the onset of summer monsoon thunderstorms. As for warblers, a male American Redstart was reported from Kingfisher Pond.

Arizona Centennial Volunteer Challenge

FSPR volunteers are urged to participate in the Arizona Centennial Volunteer Challenge. This program recognizes the important role that service and volunteer efforts have played in our state's development. Volunteers pledge to contribute 100 hours and report on a website.

The Governor's Commission on Service and Volunteerism, in partnership with 3TV, created the Arizona Centennial Volunteer Challenge to promote volunteerism and civic engagement in the lead-up to Arizona's Centennial in February 2012. The goals of this program are to 1) create and implement a cross-platform, statewide campaign that links Arizonans' commitment to service to the state's Centennial Celebration and 2) create a statewide network of volunteers and strengthen the civic engagement of Arizonans. It is hoped that 100,000 Arizona volunteers will each log 100 hours between January 2011 and February 2012, resulting in a cumulative total of 10 million hours of volunteer service.

Info: www.azfamily.com/community/Arizona-Centennial-Volunteer-Challenge-06162011.html

Photos of Note

By Gerald R Noonan, PhD

This new column will present photos of SPRNCA, along with information about the photos. Its first few issues will display historical photos. The column subsequently will feature photos of interest from members and volunteers. Start now to take your photos for future submission.

Farming by the San Pedro House

People often wonder why the countryside between the San Pedro House and the cottonwoods lining the river looks so different from other areas near the river. It has relatively few clumps of native grasses, contains many plants found in disturbed areas, and includes a number of invasive or nonnative species. The reason is that these fields were intensively farmed. The Tenneco Corporation that owned most of the land now in SPRNCA began intensively cultivating a number of crops near the river, including cotton, alfalfa, and the drought-resistant grain milo. Eventually, approximately 3000 acres near the river were under cultivation. The fields immediately east of San Pedro House were part of the farming endeavors. The efforts by Tenneco to remove trees and other riverside habitat sparked anger among local citizens and ultimately led to the formation of SPRNCA to protect the trees, riverside and other habitats, and the animals and plants found near the river.



The photo at the upper left shows cultivation of the fields. Notice the irrigation pipes visible in the foreground. The photo immediately above shows the irrigation system in operation. The bottom left photo shows the powerful pump used to supply water to the irrigation system. The pump is still in place to the south of San Pedro House. Large amounts of water were used with the irrigation system.

“Dead cattle laid everywhere. You could actually throw a rock from one carcass to another.”

By Gerald R Noonan, PhD

Lands in the San Pedro River Valley and elsewhere in Arizona still may not have fully recovered from past overgrazing. Coronado brought the first cattle into Arizona in 1540 (Sayre, 1999). However, these animals were consumed as food or otherwise perished without establishing breeding populations. Padre Eusebio Kino brought the first enduring herds into Arizona. He dispersed cattle and other livestock to the missions and *visitas* (visiting stations of the *cabecera* or primary mission) he founded in present-day northern Sonora and southern Arizona between 1687 and 1710.

Historical accounts of the numbers of cattle in southeastern Arizona before the cattle boom and severe overgrazing of the late 19th century are limited, sometimes contradictory, and of limited use for evaluating the impact of livestock grazing on the environment. It does seem clear, however, that Apache raids interfered with or prevented ranching during most years of the Hispanic era (Sheridan, 2000).

Hereford (1993) contended that large numbers of cattle were present in the Upper San Pedro River valley since at least 1820. He concluded that cattle were introduced to the valley in 1697 or possibly even a decade earlier and that the valley was settled and had cattle ranching from 1820-31. His conclusions were based upon petitions filed by Mexican Nationals for land grants that form the present San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area. Hereford noted that the ranching was unsuccessful because of Apache attacks, and the ranches were soon abandoned. However, he concluded that abandoned livestock multiplied successfully without human intervention after the abandonment of the ranches. Hereford's conclusions about the early establishment of cattle in the Upper San Pedro River valley agree with historical records indicating relatively peaceful relations with the Indians from 1790 into the 1820s that allowed several secular cattle operations to become established in favorable locations in the Santa Cruz, Sonoita, San Pedro, and Babocomari Valleys (Sayre, 1999).

The records of early Anglo-American travelers show that cattle were present in southeastern Arizona before the disastrous cattle boom and overgrazing of the late 19th century. Turner et al. (2003) noted that visitors to southeastern Arizona in the 1840s and 1850s found evidence of former cattle ranching and saw herds. Lieutenant Colonel Philip St. George Cooke led the Mormon Battalion through southeastern Arizona in 1846 and reported (Bahre, 1991) that wild cattle attacked it at the junction of Babocomari Creek and the

San Pedro River. He also reported, “There is not on the open prairies of Clay County, Missouri, so many traces of the passage of cattle and horses as we see every day.”

In 1851, John Russell Bartlett, commissioner to the United States-Mexican Boundary Survey, entered southern Arizona along with other members of the boundary survey (Bartlett, 1854). His report showed that cattle were present in southern Arizona but did not indicate that overgrazing was occurring. His travels took him into the San Bernardino Valley, located east of current day Douglas in southeastern Arizona. Bartlett first viewed the valley from a high hill and characterized it as “the rich valley of San Bernardino” and recorded, “Here was stretched out before us a level patch of green, resembling a luxuriant meadow.” He visited the ruins of the former San Bernardino ranch and reported that vast herds of cattle were raised there before Apache attacks caused abandonment of ranching approximately 20 years previously. Bartlett reported that cattle that had strayed away had greatly multiplied since, roamed over the plains and valleys, and produced cattle trails, some of which were fresh. He encountered small herds, comprising up to six cattle, each led by a bull. At one campsite in the San Bernardino Valley, Bartlett and his party used dried cattle dung as fuel for a campfire. The bellowing of bulls and the incessant yelping of wolves occasionally disturbed the sleep of his party. According to Bartlett, Colonel Cooke, in his march to California, supplied his whole command with beef from these cattle, and travelers journeying to California also used this source of meat. Bartlett reported that the valley of the Babocomari River contained an abandoned ranch that had not less than 40,000 head of cattle, as well as a large number of horses and mules, when Apache attacks forced its abandonment. He reported that many of the cattle had remained and spread themselves over the nearby hills and valleys, giving rise to many herds that then ranged along the entire length of the San Pedro River and its tributaries.

Researchers agree that intensive cattle ranching and overstocking of Arizona ranges began with the 1881 arrival of the Southern Pacific Railroad that provided a means of transporting cattle to market (Bahre, 1991; Sayre, 1999). Additionally, the spread of windmills and elimination of the Apache threat opened up southeastern Arizona to ranching. The Southern Pacific advertised for settlers in 1881. Soon afterward, ranchers began moving their herds from overgrazed areas in Texas, New Mexico, and the Mexican states of Durango, Chihuahua, and Sonora. Southern Arizona had large public domain areas of desert grassland with “free grass.” The transformation of the rangelands was so rapid that, by 1884, a pioneer rancher in the San Rafael Valley complained that every running stream and permanent spring had been claimed and adjacent ranches stocked with cattle. In 1870, there had been

fewer than 40,000 or so cattle in Arizona, with slightly over one-third of them in the Gadsden Purchase area. Twenty-one years later, there were approximately 1.5 million cows, with about 400,000 of them grazing in southeastern Arizona.

Ranchers became concerned about overstocking of cattle in the San Pedro River Valley (Turner et al., 2003). In 1885, the Tres Alamos Association passed a resolution stating that the ranges were “already stocked to their full capacity” and demanding that the influx be controlled. In 1886, the Tombstone Stock Grower’s Association reported that “a crisis is fast approaching,” and that the San Pedro River Valley ranges have been stocked to the extreme limit of their capacity, leaving no surplus grass. However, ranchers continue to increase their herds throughout the rangelands of Arizona. The Southwestern Stockman reported in 1891, that “the malady of overcrowding is with us in an aggravated form” and disaster had been averted that summer only by “phenomenal” late rains. An official assessment roll for 1891 showed 720,940 cattle in Arizona, while the governor wrote that there were “closer to 1,500,000.”

Drought and overgrazing seriously damaged grasslands in southern Arizona and resulted in the death of many cattle (Bahre, 1991; Bahre and Bradbury, 1978). Rainfall in 1890 was less than normal. Summer rains were almost absent in 1891 and 1892. During the first months of 1893, 50 to 75% of the livestock died, mostly in southeastern Arizona.

Sheridan (1995) described the massive die-off of cattle. The losses were greatest in southern Arizona, where 50 to 75% perished. Judge J.C. Hancock reported that San Simon Creek was littered with the bodies of cattle and that the cowboys strained their drinking water through burlap sacks to filter out the maggots. Rancher Edward Land recalled, “Dead cattle laid everywhere. You could actually throw a rock from one carcass to another.”

Summer rains in July 1893 rescued the cattle industry from complete ruin, but overstocking and overgrazing continued (Bahre, 1991).

Major changes in the landscape occurred after 1893, with many areas becoming almost completely denuded of grass cover, with topsoil eroding and cienegas being destroyed (Bahre, 1991). The degraded range conditions were substantiated in a government publication with pictures of southeastern Arizona and in the Roskrue Photograph Collection at the Arizona Historical Society in Tucson. The pictures showed hundreds of square miles of rangeland that were denuded of cover. The grasses, even sacaton in the bottomlands, were grazed to the ground. Hills were covered with cattle trails, and erosion was rampant. Photographs taken in 1892 of the U.S.-Mexican Border Monument 105 in southern Arizona showed almost

total destruction of the grass cover over vast areas of land. In 1891, a University of Arizona botanist reported that southeastern Arizona ranges were so depleted that it was difficult to find suitable grass specimens for study. He further noted that cattle had to depend on oaks and shrubs for browse.

In 1901, D.A. Griffiths, chief botanist in charge of grass and forage investigations for the Arizona Experiment Station in Tucson, concluded that the rangelands of southern Arizona were more degraded than any he had seen in the western United States (Bahre, 1991). He sent a questionnaire about range conditions to several pioneer ranchers. The answers of H.C. Hooker, proprietor of the Sierra Bonita Branch, and C.H. Bayless, owner of a large ranch near Oracle, provided information about conditions in the San Pedro River Valley.

Hooker reported that, as of 1870, the valley had an abundance of willow, cottonwood, sycamore, and mesquite timber; large areas of sacaton and grama grasses; sagebrush; and underbrush of many kinds. The riverbed was shallow and grassy and its banks boasted a luxuriant growth of vegetation. However, he reported that conditions were quite different in 1901. The river was deep with washed-out banks, trees and underbrush were gone, the sacaton had been cut by the plow and grub hoe, thousands of horses and cattle had grazed the mesa, and people had farmed the valley. There were many cattle and horse trails and paths to the mountains. Fire had destroyed much of the shrubbery and grass. Rains would sweep away much of the earth loosened by the feet of animals, causing many waterways to be cut from the hills to the riverbed. Hooker reported that the unproductive condition of the range in the valley was principally because of cattle overstocking. During drought, the livestock ate and destroyed even the roots of plants. If the roots had not been destroyed, they would have grown out again with winter moisture.

Bayless concluded that the valley lands as of 1901 were unproductive due entirely to overstocking. He reported that the valley still received the same average amount of rainfall and sunshine necessary for plant growth and droughts were not more frequent in 1901 than in the past. However, the earth had been stripped of all grass covering. When rain fell on the bare ground, water washed away in destructive volumes and bore with it all the lighter and richer particles of soil. The remaining sand and rocks were not adequate for native vegetation to thrive as previously. Cattle had trampled the roots of the grass, and there were no roots or seeds to provide for regeneration of native plants. Bayless reported that around 1889, 40,000 cattle grew fat “along a certain portion of the San Pedro Valley” where now 3000 were unable to find sufficient forage for proper growth and development. He noted that few of the cattle had been sold or removed from the range. Ranchers simply left them there until the pasture was destroyed and the livestock perished from starvation.



(Left) San Pedro River near Charleston Bridge in 1988.

(Right) Similar view in 1998, after 10 years without grazing.

Concentrations of cattle along waterways in southeastern Arizona in 1891-3 severely damaged waterside communities, especially cienegas (Hendrickson and Minckley, 1984). Cattle sought out and destructively grazed and trampled cienegas. These wetlands had the most permanent water supplies and supported lush plant communities consisting of species palatable to cattle. The activities of cattle fragmented the sponge-like surface deposits and promoted drying of part of the cienegas.

The severe overgrazing of lands in Arizona resulted from three human-controlled factors that overrode negative feedback mechanisms that might have prevented the catastrophe (Sayre, 2005). The sustainable management of livestock grazing requires matching forage demand and supply, especially during drought. Natural grazing systems have built-in mechanisms to limit grazing by native animals. In natural populations, the scarcity of forage leads to animals leaving the overgrazed areas, increased mortality of animals, and reduced production of offspring.

The first overriding factor was that markets for credit and livestock were national in scale and overheated by speculation. The cattle industry was particularly dependent upon credit. When forage gave out in one area, indebted ranchers decided to move elsewhere, rather than selling their livestock in a sagging market. Selling such livestock would have been tantamount to defaulting. The second factor was obstacles to rapid destocking during times of drought. One obstacle was the belief by early ranchers that rains would continue to be plentiful. The second obstacle was that, in the 1890s, meat processors began refusing to buy older cows. This refusal left ranchers with no economical way of disposing of excess livestock. The third factor was that government policies rewarded aggressive overstocking as a means to control land. The public rangeland was an open access free-for-all. "Use it or lose it" was the prevailing ethic. The result was that ranchers stocked all available public acres beyond the maximum carrying capacity of the land and encouraged their livestock to consume everything palatable.

Overgrazing continued even in 1900 (Bahre, 1991). However, it was at lower levels than during the 1880s and 1890s. By 1900, the large ranches in southeastern Arizona had begun to buy up smaller ranches. This consolidation -- along with the Stock Raising Act of 1916 that expanded the size of ranching homesteads -- led to the death of the open range. In 1906, the U.S. Forest Service placed grazing control on its lands. However, it was not until 1934, with the passage of the Taylor Grazing Act, that there was an effort to stop injury to other public lands and to stabilize the livestock industry dependent upon public ranges.

Lands in southern Arizona have partly recovered from the overgrazing (Bahre and Shelton, 1993; Hutchinson et al., 2000). However, most such lands have notably less grass and much more woody vegetation (e.g., mesquite). Scientists are still investigating the reasons for the great increases in mesquite and other woody vegetation in Arizona and other areas of the southwestern United States. Evidence to date suggests that most of this increase is due to human activities. Livestock grazing apparently significantly contributed to the reduction of grass and increase of woody vegetation. Grazing reduced grass fuel and reduced the ability of the rangelands to carry hot fires that killed mesquite and other woody plants. The grazing also reduced competing stands of perennial grasses that, when healthy and dense, were able to keep mesquite and other woody plants in check. Livestock also increased the dispersal of woody plants by eating material that contained seeds. The passage of the seeds through the digestive tracts of the animals resulted both in the spread of the seeds and in the seeds being scratched and more likely to germinate than nondigested seeds. In other words, overgrazing contributed to public lands having less suitable food for cattle.

Federal laws currently control grazing on public domain lands. Hopefully, future overgrazing of public lands, especially those in nature preserves, will continue to be firmly controlled.

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For information about the contribution of overgrazing to the development of arroyos along the San Pedro River and other southwestern waterways, see Noonan, G.R. 2011. Major Changes in Riparian Habitat Along the Upper San Pedro River and Other Southwestern Waterways as a Result of the Alluvial Cycle. 74 p. (PDF at sciencequest.webplus.net/noonan%20san%20pedro%20river%20papers.html).

Hummingbirds in Old Bisbee

By Ron Serviss

It is now pretty common knowledge that the very dry winter of 2010-11 left a scarcity of food out in the wild this summer, which has impacted the behaviors of many of our feathered friends. While I have seen a tremendous increase in Grosbeaks (Blue and Black-headed), Orioles (Bullock's, Hooded, and Scott's), Cardinals, and other seed-eaters at my home in Old Bisbee, it is the Hummingbirds that have been most impressive.

To date, I have had nine different species visit my feeders. These have been frequent visits, often in large numbers, and usually include both females and males at different times. The nine species have been Anna's, Black-chinned, Broad-billed, Broad-tailed, Calliope, Costa's, Lucifer, Rufous, and Violet-crowned.

A few weeks ago, the nectar-eating bats arrived. Does anyone know a good source of inexpensive sugar?

[NOTE: Not being a birder myself, I wish to thank Eva Nagy, who helped me with the difference between a White-winged Dove and a Calliope.]



Bat at editor's hummingbird feeder, July 2009.

Friends of the San Pedro River – Annual Events Calendar

Understanding the River

- **Interpretive Walks**

Every Saturday at San Pedro House

9 AM - October thru March

8 AM - April thru September

- **Evening Walks**

5:30 PM at San Pedro House

September 21

FSPR Hikes

Sept 17 – 7 AM – Hereford to SPH (SPH)

Nov 19 – 9 AM – St. David Cienega (at Natural Research Area)

For details see FSPR 2011 Hike Flyer

FSPR Members-Only Events

Charleston Walk – TBD

Contention Walk – TBD

Potluck Lunches

Annual Meeting

Birding Walks

- **FSPR Bird Walks**

At San Pedro House

September 14 & 24 – 7 AM

October 12 & 22 – 8 AM

November 9 & 26 – 8 AM

December 14 & 24 – 8 AM

FSPR/HAS/SABO Bird Walks

Every Sunday at Sierra Vista Environmental Operations Park

8 AM - October thru March

7 AM - April thru September

FSPR History Walks

September 10 – 8 AM – Millville

Oct 8 – 9 AM – Clanton (at Escapule)

Nov 12 – 9 AM – Murray Springs

FSPR Special Events

- **Ghostly Halloween**

October 22 – at Fairbank Historic Townsite. 6:30 PM walk for small children, 7:30 PM walk for bigger kids.

Watch out! There are ghosts and goblins out there as you hike with flashlights to the Fairbank

Cemetery. This is a Halloween adventure for the children. Bring water and a flashlight; snacks are provided. Fee \$5 for adults, kids under 12 free.

SABO Hummingbird Banding

Southeastern Arizona Bird Observatory conducts hummingbird banding in the spring and fall at San Pedro House. Check www.sabo.org for dates and times.

Points of Contact

- President – Ron Serviss
- Vice-President – Chris Long
- Directors – Tom Clancy, Gary Noonan, John Rose, Sally Rosén, Renell Stewart, Robert Weissler
- Treasurer – Renell Stewart
- Docent Activities – Tom Clancy, Ron Stewart
- Education Program – John Rose, Ron Serviss
- Bookstore Manager – Laura Mackin
- Bookkeeper – Pam Collins
- Program Manager – Kathryn Ojerio
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Friends of the San Pedro River is a volunteer, nonprofit, nonpolitical organization providing support to the Bureau of Land Management in its stewardship of the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area (SPRNCA).