

BOOK REVIEW

THE ESSENTIAL TOOL FOR BIRDING MARICOPA COUNTY

BY WALTER THURBER

Birds of Phoenix and Maricopa County, Arizona, Third Edition. By Janet Witzeman and Troy Corman. 2017. Maricopa Audubon Society, Phoenix, Arizona. 228 pp., 83 color plates, 10 maps, 1 table. Spiral bound paperback. ISBN # 978-0-9654566-1-6. \$26.95

Owing to its large size and considerable habitat diversity, Maricopa County is a great place to find birds. Nowhere is this view better illustrated than in *Birds of Phoenix and Maricopa County, Arizona*, now in its third edition. The book has grown larger as more birding areas are discovered and species documented. Improvement in the layout and design is noted, and color photographs now grace the text and document most of the new species. Another nice improvement over the previous editions published in 1972 and 1997 are separate indexes for birding areas and species.

The county is larger than 4 states, with elevations ranging from 131 m to 2332 m; this represents an elevation change of 2201 m. Witzeman and Corman describe the predominant habitats in the county and habitat changes that have occurred over the past 20 years. Population growth has led to the urbanization of farm fields and other open spaces. Offsetting this loss has been an increase in ponds, lakes, recharge basins, and restored riparian lands, resulting in a dramatic increase in waterbirds. The annual Greater Phoenix Area Waterbird Survey, initiated by the Arizona Game and Fish Department in 2007, has recorded huge increases in many species. Various waterbird and other species that are increasing or decreasing in numbers, or arriving or nesting earlier in spring, are highlighted.



The first major section in the book describes the best birding areas within the county. The area descriptions, written directions, and maps have been revised, and new areas added, bringing the total to 82. Several smaller regional parks are not mentioned, but they too have birding potential and should not be overlooked. Tommy DeBardeleben and Laurie Nessel made significant contributions to the birding areas section.

The species accounts have been revised as well. The 459 species documented in the book are all on the official state list and include 85% of that list. They are presented according to the taxonomic order and nomenclature of the 58th supplement to the American Ornithological Society's *Checklist of North and Middle American Birds* (2017). Both common and scientific names are provided. Some 33 species have been added to the county checklist since the previous edition, 4 of which are first records for the state as well as the county: Baikal Teal, Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Lesser Black-backed Gull, and Rosy-faced Lovebird.

Bar graphs depict relative abundance of each species throughout the year. Each month is divided into 4 weeks. The graphs have been updated and simplified, with 8 abundance categories reduced to 6, and the bars are easier to distinguish. There are 15 new breeding species documented, bringing the total to 186 species known to have nested in the county. The bar graphs appear opposite the species accounts, making it easy to refer back and forth.

The birding community will benefit greatly from this essential reference book. Few of Arizona's 15 counties have such guidebooks, and this one is the most detailed. Copies are available at Maricopa Audubon Society meetings, the Desert Botanical Garden in Phoenix, the Changing Hands bookstores in Phoenix and Tempe, and the Wild Birds Unlimited store in Scottsdale. The Tucson Audubon Society Nature Shop and Buteo Books/ABA Sales also stock the book.

The book is dedicated to Bob Witzeman, Janet's late husband, who worked with the Maricopa Audubon Society for over a half century to protect habitats for birds and other life forms. Bob was a charter member of the Arizona Bird Committee and the American Birding Association, among many other accomplishments.



Just prior to the publishing of the book, this Royal Tern was discovered 23 July 2017 at the Riggs and Price Roads ponds, providing the 459th species for Maricopa County. Photo by Dale Clark