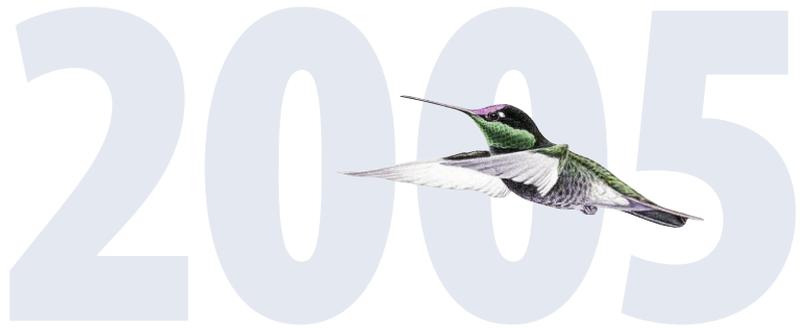


Tucson

18–24 July



South of Tucson, smoke billowed up from the north flank of the Santa Ritas. In town, temperatures soared into the 100s before noon. Beneath the smoke, world-famous Madera Canyon and its wealth of birdlife were the battlefield on which over 1,000 firefighters struggled to protect the canyon, its residents, and its unique habitats. With a week-long closure in effect, hopes of seeing Madera Canyon's Flame-colored Tanager were dashed.

Other Southeast Arizona specialties, however, were a vivid reality to the more than 600 participants of the Annual ABA Convention in Tucson. As temperatures increased, so too did individual life lists. By the end of the Convention, young birder Samantha (Sam) Fortunas from Tallahassee, Florida, had added 122 lifers. Overall, conventioners logged 220 species during the weeklong Convention. Our globetrotting attendees hailed from such far-away places as Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador, and England. From the ABA Area, we had attendees from 44 U. S. states, plus Canada.

Tucson-area experts, combined with internationally known professional birders, provided a staggering assemblage of talent for the field trips, workshops, and evening programs. The food and accommodations at the Tucson Doubletree Hotel were excellent.

But center stage, of course, belonged to the diverse and cooperative avifauna of Southeast Arizona.



The quality of summertime birding in Southeast Arizona is closely connected with the timing and extent of monsoon rains, which were late in 2005. Despite talk of the 'nonsoon' season, the rains finally did come, right in the middle of the Convention, in fact. With the onset of the monsoons, desert sparrows, such as Botteri's and Cassin's, began to sing. All of the regional sparrow specialties were seen. The range-restricted Rufous-winged and Five-striped Sparrows were seen by many, especially by the adventurous who signed on for the "Death March" into Sycamore Canyon or who bounced their way into California Gulch to view the latter species.

Nearly all of the specialties—in a wide diversity of avian families—were seen, and a few rarities were picked out, too. Perhaps the rarest species of the Convention was Louisiana Waterthrush. One individual was found along the trail at Peña Blanca Lake, and later in the week, another was discovered on the grounds of the San Pedro River Inn. Unrecorded in Arizona until the 1990s, Short-tailed Hawks were observed at three locations. Brian Sullivan, scouting for a field trip to Upper Miller Canyon (a replacement for the

fire-cancelled Madera Canyon trip), was surprised to find a Yellow-throated Vireo. Later, he showed one group his discovery. Rick Taylor's Patagonia Lake State Park van trip found two Brown Pelicans and a Reddish Egret, to go along with a pair of rare Black-capped Gnatcatchers. A young Black-capped was later caught in a mist net at the MAPS (Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship) banding station near Tumacacori, along the upper Santa Cruz River. American Crow is rare in Southeast Arizona, and one Sulphur Springs Valley group was surprised by a flock of twelve.

On the heels of Sheri Williamson and Tom Wood's hummingbird workshop, participants were anxious to get out and sort among the hummers, using their newfound knowledge. The Huachucas, known for their diversity of hummingbirds, were most productive, but even the low deserts hosted hummers. Thirteen species, plus a Magnificent × Berylline hybrid in Miller Canyon, were seen.

Flycatcher diversity was superb, with good views of everything from Rose-throated Becard to Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet. And Conventioners were well-prepared for their in-field encounters with the Tyrannidae, thanks to the fascinating flycatcher workshop presented by Alvaro Jaramillo and Tucson's own Chris Benesh. Al and Chris presented some beyond-the-field-guides information,

and they helped us to interpret sonograms. At the workshop we learned how sonograms can be of considerable help in separating *Empidonax* flycatchers and the even-more-challenging species in *Myiarchus*.

There were non-avian wonders, too. Hikers into the wilderness area of Arivaipa Canyon produced desert bighorn on two of the trips. Other mammals seen by Conventioneers included bobcat, mountain lion, mule and Coues's white-tailed deers, and javelina. The long list of Sonoran Desert reptiles included regal and short horned lizards, and some groups encountered black-tailed rattlesnakes.



The evening presentations were widely admired. On Monday evening, Tucson resident Rick Taylor presented an introduction to the birds and bird habitats that each field trip would explore. Rick Wright, editor of *Winging It*, eloquently discussed the early exploration of the Southwest by soldier ornithologists. Pinau Merlin, who admitted to having lain by the banks of Arivaipa Creek to see how close Turkey Vultures would swoop, told us about the natural history of the animals that dig or use holes and depressions in the Sonoran Desert. Keynote speaker and Pulitzer Prize finalist Scott Weidensaul received a rare ABA standing ovation after his inspirational presentation that retraced the adventures of James Fisher and Roger Tory Peterson's trip across Wild America.

ABA Conventions aren't just for the middle-aged and elderly. Sprinkled in with the regulars were as many as 160 first-timers of all ages and 10 participants in the three-day Young Birder Track. How would you like to be a 15-year-old and have as your field guides such luminaries as Michael O'Brien,

Louise Zemaitis, Jon Dunn, and Steve Howell? Teenager Oscar Johnson was runner-up in both the photo and the sound quizzes, which included adult participants.

Sales were brisk at ABA Sales, with the usual offerings of diverse and high-quality book titles, plus deep discounts on certain products. Nine talented artists showed off their paintings and sculptures, and 42 vendors were

stationed in key hotel locations, offering the latest and greatest in birding gear, books, and birding destinations around the world.

Special guests included a film crew from *60 Minutes*, as well as Dr. James Tate, science advisor to the U. S. Secretary of the Interior. Dr. Tate made a special presentation about the federal government's efforts to protect Ivory-billed Woodpecker habitat, and he

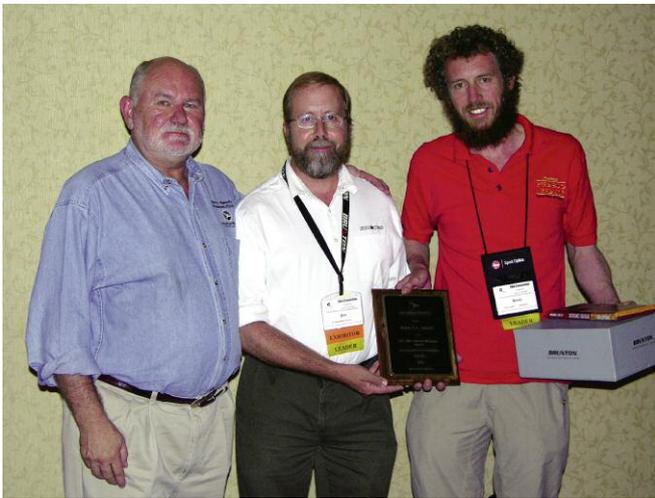


Pima County, Arizona; July 2005. © Brian E. Small.

The story of the 2005 ABA Convention in Tucson was hot deserts and cool mountains. Whatever the venue, the birding was great, with superb viewing of species such as **Gilded Flicker** (above) and **Red-faced Warbler** (below).



Cochise County, Arizona; July 2005. © Brian E. Small.



The Robert Ridgway Award was presented to **Steve N. G. Howell** (right) by Brunton representative Jim Danzenbaker (center) with ABA President & CEO Steve Runnels (left). © Bryan Patrick.



The Claudia Wilds Award was presented to **Hugh Willoughby** (second from right) by Pentax representative John Carlson (right) with Wayne R. Petersen (left) and Steve Runnels (second from left). © Bryan Patrick.



The Ludlow Griscom Award was presented to **Wayne R. Petersen** (right) by Leupold representative John Riutta (second from left) with ABA Publications Chairman John Kricher (second from right) and Steve Runnels (left). © Bryan Patrick.

accompanied us in the field for the Century Club tour. Other special guests were recipients of ABA Awards. Wayne R. Petersen, winner of the Ludlow Griscom Award (sponsored by Leupold), was cited for his significant contributions to ornithology in New England. The Claudia Wilds Award (sponsored by Pentax) was presented to Hugh Willoughby for his long and useful service to the ABA, and Hugh's acceptance speech rivaled any of the material heard at nationally known comedy clubs. The Robert Ridgway Award (sponsored by Brunton) was presented to Steve N. G. Howell for his excellence in publications pertaining to field ornithology; Steve's two-word acceptance speech was wildly applauded.

Birders' Exchange collected optics donated by ABA participants, and Birders' Exchange guest Doug Trent gave a special presentation on the Brazilian Pantanal's Jaguar Reserve. Four Panamanians—Hernán Arauz, Rick Morales, José Soto, and Carlos Bethancourt—encouraged Conventioneers to attend the October 2005 ABA International Conference in Panama. Alicia Craig, from the American Bird Conservancy, spoke about the Bird Conservation Alliance, and Tucson Audubon Society's Executive Director Sonja Macys revealed the secrets of Arizona's unique habitats.

More than \$7,000 was collected to be contributed to the recipient of this year's Convention Conservation Project—habitat enhancement at the Mason Audubon Center for ironwood preservation and environmental education in Northwest Tucson. Both private and corporate donations were greatly appreciated. A huge thanks goes out to Leica Sport Optics, the gold sponsor of this year's Convention, as does kudos to the entire ABA staff for their months of diligent planning to make this one of our best conventions ever.

Did I mention that everyone had a good time? Did I mention that George Zepko reached a major milestone, having attended the past 20 consecutive ABA Conventions? Did I mention that even wizened veterans and professional field trip leaders saw life birds? Did you perhaps foolishly miss the fun in Tucson? There will be even more fun and a chance to see great birds at the 2006 Annual Convention in Bangor Maine, 19–25 June. Mark your calendars now!

For an annotated checklist of the birds seen at the 2005 Convention, please check out the ABA web site <www.americanbirding.org>.

— **Bill Maynard**
ABA Field Programs Manager