

LOTS TO DO!

SEE FIVE MONTHS OF ACTIVITIES ON CALENDAR PAGES 4-7.



Autumn 2013
Volume 39

the quarterly newsletter of Audubon Miami Valley, in Butler and Preble Counties, Ohio

EDUCATION

Baja desert reveals wonders to scholarship winner

Thanks to the Rosie Bloom Scholarship and Audubon Miami Valley, I had the privilege of traveling to Baja California, Mexico this summer.

As part of Project Dragonfly at Miami University, Oxford and in conjunction with Earth Expeditions, this trip was the first step in my journey toward a Master of Zoology.

The course description was rather vague, citing themes such as field methods, introduction to the ecology of desert ecosystems, marine investigations, inquiry-driven learning, community-based conservation, and participatory education. These do not begin to cover the true amount of knowledge gained from this phenomenal experience.

As an Ohio resident for most of my life, I had never seen the desert. Hollywood had led me to believe the landscape would be barren, lifeless, and unforgiving. What I saw as our group drove down the Baja peninsula were beautiful geographical formations millions of years in the making, 100-year-old Cardon cacti lining the road, elephant trees covered with witches hair, and the tall, slender Cirio cactus reaching for the desert sky with its Dr. Suess-like appearance.

Arriving at the Rancho San Gregorio ranch, we met Rafael Galvan Villavicencio, who knows medicinal uses for endemic plants that rival the effectiveness of modern pharmaceuticals.

We explored the canyon and its surrounding ranges, practicing field methods such as forming quadrants to

Another Baja student will tell her story in February. See the calendar, page 7.



Photo by Kathi McQueen

Seussian Cirio cacti surround a Cardon cactus in the beautiful Baja desert.

count species or measure biodiversity.

One of the main components of Project Dragonfly is learning about inquiry-driven education. When you use inquiry as a teaching tool, people are encouraged to observe nature, ask questions, and explore the possible answers as citizen scientists.

Someone reaching an answer through the inquiry process is more likely to remember and appreciate what is learned.

On our last day at the ranch we hiked up the mountainside to watch the sun rise. Orioles, hummingbirds, ravens, hawks, and many others dotted the sky, sang from the underbrush, and flew gracefully past us while all we could do was watch in amazement.

(Continued on page 3)

FROM THE PRESIDENT

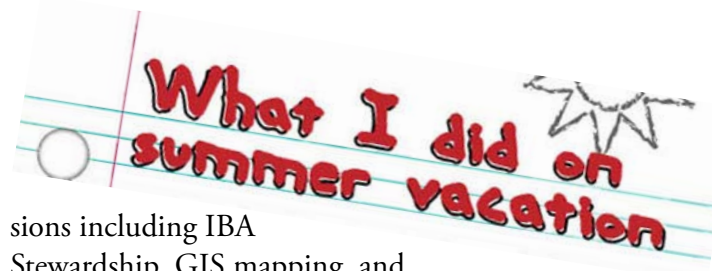
Trip out west mixes business with birding

Did you know that the National Audubon Society hadn't held a national conference in 13 years?

Under the leadership of David Yarnold, representatives of the four "flyways" (Pacific, Central, Mississippi, and Atlantic) came together this summer at the Skamania Lodge in the beautiful Columbia River Gorge in the state of Washington for a weekend of workshops and networking. The flyways represent the focus on conservation under new NAS strategic plan.

We are part of the Mississippi Flyway, where efforts are focused on the restoration of the Gulf Coast. However, from Minnesota to Louisiana, whatever happens upstream affects prairie and bottomland forest habitat along the river and all the way to the Gulf of Mexico.

Thanks to the 2012 Toyota Togethergreen Fellows Grant, I was able to attend as the leadership training component of the grant. I participated in excellent ses-



sions including IBA

Stewardship, GIS mapping, and

Bird Language (behavior) and enjoyed meeting

Audubon leaders from all over the country - so inspiring!

But really, how can you keep 400 birders inside?

You can't!

A field trip to Trout Lake Preserve fulfilled my dream of a brilliant Western Tanager, and tossing about on a small boat (my first pelagic trip ever) 26 miles out into the Pacific Ocean brought sightings of seabirds, including Pink-footed Shearwaters, Storm-petrels, and a Black-footed Albatross.

Nineteen life birds later, I am back home with many fond memories of my summer vacation.

— Gail Reynolds, AMV President

Art by Tonya Ricks for Grist, used with permission

Baja desert, Bahia de Los Angeles reveal wonders

(Continued from page 1)

After leaving the ranch we headed towards Bahia de Los Angeles and the Vermilion Field Station. The first order of business was for everyone to become familiar with snorkeling so we could begin to explore the beautiful Sea of Cortez.

Sea stars, urchins, pufferfish, stingrays, sponges, and dozens of fish greeted us as we swam the coastline in front of the sea station. We also had the privilege of meeting Lane McDonald, who founded the Vermilion Field Station.

The next morning we headed out to snorkel at a nearby island and to practice what we had learned about inquiry. Along the way, we spotted Bryde's whales and found our boats among a pod of common dolphins



Photo by Kathi McQueen

Witches' hair lichen covers elephant trees in Baja.

that played in the waves we created. We gazed in wonder as we passed birds such as the Blue-footed Booby, Brown Pelican, and Magnificent Frigatebird perched on tall islands.

On our last full day, we hit another high note by swimming with 25-foot whale sharks and a group

of sea lions. It is hard to describe the majestic presence of the whale sharks or the quick, playful sea lions. Those experiences will give me joy for years to come.

Another topic of discussion during our journey was community-based conservation, and this came to be something that our entire group felt strongly about. Our new friends Raphael and Lane were partners in helping their dreams become reality. They not only work together for a common cause, but involve the surrounding communities so that local people will recognize the importance of both the desert and ocean ecosystems. Their story inspired us and gave us an emotional connection to the trip that most, including me, will tell you changed their lives forever.

— Kathi McQueen

