

# Birding creates thrilling adventures

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By LAURA COX

Three or four years ago, I was heading down Highway 84 into Casa Grande to visit some customers when my companion, a three-piece suit, investment banker type, suddenly threw his Wall Street Journal to the floor and yelled, "Pullover!"

I hit the wipers, slammed on the brakes, and with driving skills I didn't know I possessed, brought us safely to rest within an inch or two of an irrigation canal.

Three-piece, meanwhile, grabbed his briefcase, whipped out the biggest pair of binoculars I've ever seen, and busily scanned the cotton fields. White knuckles clenched around the steering wheel, heart fluttering madly, I gasped, "Are you crazy or what?"

I was in the hands of an avid, make that "obsessed" bird watcher.



What Pin Stripes had his sights on is known in the fraternity as a "good" bird. It's a ferruginous hawk.

Since my previous experience with these feathered fellows is limited to some old reruns of Marlin Perkin's "Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom" and a few dozen derelict city pigeons, watching this graceful creature swoop slowly over harvested fields was a thrill I wouldn't soon forget.

I set out determined to make this hobby a success. But it doesn't take

long to realize that the backyard of a brand new Phoenix tract house on a hot July afternoon may not be the most satisfying way to start, if you're looking for action. I got one little grey bird who didn't show up in any field guide I thumbed through. So I joined a society.

Now this group sponsors a lot of field trips to some of the birding hot spots around the state. The newsletter states "Meet at the Canelo Road Exit at 7 a.m. on Saturday, the 3rd, and bring a lunch." I'm off.

What I didn't figure out right away is that getting to the rendezvous on time means leaving my place shortly after midnight. Something else I learned as I was working on my second sandwich just a little south of Toltec. There was a misprint in the instructions. I think it should have read, "bring two lunches."

This band I finally caught up with was a different breed from you and me. They've got their own peculiar greeting rituals. There's something called "pishing," which is followed by blowing their lips against the backs of their hands. Beats me. But for some reason, birds seem to find it attractive. Most of these folks have a sense of humor.

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Like most specialists, birders have got their own jargon. Yellow bellies, red shafts, buff breasts, coots and harriers flit across the horizon. I was instructed to focus on the fourth dead limb below the canopy at approximately 3 o'clock in the second alligator on the far side of the ravine.

I overheard someone talking about TVs. I'm in this game, I thought. "What show was that?" I asked.

"Heck, no," I concluded. They were discussing a turkey vulture riding the thermals. My neck started to ache. I decided to concentrate on the easy stuff and have a good list of big, colorful, slow-moving birds that I can share with other neophytes.

There's no waterfowl on my list yet because I haven't figured out a way to get on the side of the lake they seem to prefer.

I'm still at this sport.

Three-Piece and his Mrs. just returned from a weekend in San Francisco. "Catch the opera?", I inquired. Turns out the wife went shopping as he had a bead on a semi-palmated plover over at the Oakland sewage pond. Heard he's planning his next vacation in Texas. The Brownsville city dump is the place to look if you want to see a Mexican crow.

Me? Well, I moved to Cave Creek. I just look out the kitchen window and find I've got harris hawks on the telephone poles, gambel's quail at the feeder, black throated sparrows on the fence, cactus wrens in the garage, a pair of flashy cardinals perched in the mesquite, and a little grey bird I'm still working on. Paradise!