

Return of favorite vulture, ragweed and quail chicks sure sign of spring

by Jane Ekrom

The sun is shining brightly now and my old friend "Broken Wing," the vulture, is back for the eleventh spring.

Three weeks ago however, things were different on our desert. A large storm system was passing through, soaking the earth with rain, pounding it with hail, and most birds sought shelter.

As the storm waned and the dark grey mingled with light, I stood at my window enjoying the dramatic scene and noticed something flashing in the light. Bits of silver or white all over — here and there like that strange phenomenon of things that fall from the sky.

I tried to sight one of the flashing things with my binoculars.

They were birds, and against the dark background of the wild clouds they put on quite a show of darting this way and that — too many to count!

I watched them for nearly an hour, got out the bird books and researched them.

I am quite sure they were white throated swifts, and my Audubon Encyclopedia of North American Birds offered me the following information:

Swift - apodidae, which in Latin means, "without feet." They have feet but their legs are so small and weak that if they land on the ground they may have difficulty

taking off. They spend more time in flight than any other land birds.

The white throated swift is one of the fastest swifts, being estimated at speeds of more than 200 mph.

Sometimes called the rock swift, they are 6-7 inches long, generally sooty black with a white throat and a broad white streak down the center of the breast to the belly. There also are white patches along its sides at the rear, and its tail is slightly forked.

They mate entirely on wing, copulating in air with bodies together pinwheeling down in a free fall.

Their flight is a dash of darting, swooping, and high-speed direction changes, and their call is a combination of a shrill he-he-he-he, and shrill twitter.

They feed on flies, beetles, bees and bugs in flight, and nest in rocky, high cliffs in a flimsy cup of feathers and grasses cemented together with their saliva and glued to the wall. They have 4-5 white eggs.

Its range is the far west from Canada through Arizona. It winters in its southern range and Central America.

by Nancy Laizure

The purpose of this article is to alert people that the noxious, hay-fever-producing weed, com-

mon ragweed, is becoming established in our Desert Foothills.

Pollen from plants, plus dust, lint, molds, hairs and other things, cause hay fever. But according to research on the sub-ject, pollens from the ragweeds and close relatives are more toxic than other hay-fever-causing agents.

If every homeowner and renter in this area will look at the drawing of the common ragweed that accompanies this article and then destroy all weeds on or near their property that resemble this draw-

ing the hart-leaved bur sage, also called canyon bur sage, *Fraseria ambrosioides*. Another is a *Fraseria deltoidea*, which is a small shrub and very abundant in all south central Arizona.

Canyon bur sage grows numerous places along Cave Creek Road up to 2- to 3-foot tall, with many branches and large leaves. It looks like what it is, a large weed.

April is the time the bur sage blooms, and time to wear a pollen mask if you are allergic to property that resemble this draw-



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ing, we just might be able to control the growth of this invasion of our environment.

Other species of ragweed may be present here also, and can usually be recognized as their leaves are very similar to those of the common ragweed. They also should be destroyed.

At least some of the species of the genus *Fraseria* produce the pollen that cause hay fever. One

by two new chicks. The parents hopped up the curb to the median and proceeded on their way.

However, the chicks were too tiny to climb the obstacle and could not make it up onto the curb, doomed to abandonment or to be hit by a car. The caring motorist, seeing their predicament, parked her car and raced out to the chicks' rescue, helping them across the street.

The motorist, along with an interested man from the real estate office, then discovered five more chicks trapped behind the first curb, unable to cross.

With some difficulty, all the chicks were rounded up and carried safely across Cave Creek Road and placed under a bush to be reunited with the parents.

From now until possibly late June, young quail will be hatching and crossing our busy streets. Please watch for them.

If you see a mother or father start across the road, they probably will be followed by a covey of a few, to as many as 16 young, and they are sometimes hard to see from a car because they are so small. Upon hatching, they leave the nest immediately and are taken by the parents to water.

Slow down and give them a brake. Just a little time is all they need to cross. Just a second or two isn't going to mean that much in your life, but to them, it may mean life and death.



THE FINELY DIVIDED leaves of the common ragweed look something like the top of a carrot.

