

impacts to seeps, springs, and streams, including Outstanding Arizona Waters, in the Davidson Canyon and Cienega Creek watersheds.

## Forest Service Fast Tracks Mining Exploration in Patagonia Mountains

The Sierra Vista Ranger District of the U.S. Forest Service recently issued a "categorical exclusion" to foreign-owned Regal Resources for its proposed "Sunnyside" exploratory mineral drilling project in Humboldt Canyon of the Patagonia Mountains. A categorical exclusion is a policy short-cut that allows mineral, energy, or geophysical investigations on public lands that meet certain specifications to avoid undergoing a detailed environmental analysis and public process. There are questions as to whether the Sunnyside Project indeed meets all of the specifications required for a categorical exclusion.

Mining and mineral exploration are a clear threat to the health, safety and well-being of the watershed and town of Patagonia and the biological diversity harbored in the area. The Patagonia Mountains provide much of the municipal drinking water for the community of Patagonia, and are a major economic draw for outdoor recreation and nature-based tourism—especially birding! This is evidenced by the fact that the Patagonia Mountains were recently designated as an Important Bird Area by the Arizona Important Bird Areas Program (see also page 7). The new IBA designation notes that the oak-juniper vegetation community is extensive and continuous throughout the range, making it a very important area for species associated with oak habitat, such as Arizona Woodpecker,

Montezuma Quail, Dusky-capped Flycatcher and Whiskered Screech-Owl. In addition, Elegant Trogons were documented in high numbers in a special 2013 survey and patches of grassy meadows throughout the range provide habitat for resident Eastern "Azure" Bluebirds. The Patagonia Mountains are also designated as critical habitat for the threatened Mexican Spotted Owl and the endangered jaguar. Tucson Audubon opposes mining proposals in the Patagonia Mountains and thinks that exploratory mining activities in this ecologically sensitive mountain range have been given the green light without adequate environmental analysis and public review.

## Birds, Bees and Butterflies Threatened by Nasty Neonics

The Tucson-based Center for Biological Diversity, The Xerxes Society and the Center for Food Safety have recently petitioned the federal government to list the migratory Monarch butterfly as an endangered species, citing a population drop of more than 90 percent over the past two decades.

The petition notes the rise in the use of neonicotinoids pesticides ("neonics") as one of a host of threats to Monarchs. Neonics are a class of insecticides whose use by the agricultural industry has become increasingly widespread over the last two decades. It is often used on the seeds of crops, including cotton grown in Arizona, which provide breeding sites for monarchs.

Neonics are also believed to be contributing to the very alarming global decline of bees. Our region boasts diverse habitat types that support

the greatest diversity of bee species on the entire planet. Bees are a key pollinator for flowering plants and are essential for the propagation of many agricultural crops. Neonics can persist for months or years in water, soil, pollen, nectar and other plant tissues—resulting in the harm or death to non-target species such as earth worms, freshwater snails, bees, moths, butterflies, amphibians and birds.

Tucson Audubon is joining forces with other conservation organizations, businesses and concerned citizens in support of a ban on the use of neonicotinoids by the City of Tucson. Call your City Council Representative today to show your support for instituting a ban on neonics.

## Critical Habitat Proposed for Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo

While the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposes critical habitat for the imperiled Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo, questions remain if it will be sufficient to prevent the species' further decline. The service proposes to designate over 500,000 acres as critical habitat for the cuckoo, in conjunction with the species being considered for endangered species designation. The American Bird Conservancy's press release on the proposed designation was not very upbeat: ABC's Senior Policy Advisory, Steve Holmer said, "The draft rule only proposes to list the species as threatened rather than as endangered, and doesn't address the threats or propose more effective conservation measures such as removing cattle from riparian areas and restricting the use of pesticides in adjacent agricultural areas."

The service's public advisory notes that "In the proposal, the Service is considering excluding approximately 193,347 acres from the critical habitat designation because of existing conservation plans for those areas that protect the Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo and its habitat. All proposed critical habitat designations on tribal lands are being considered for exclusion."

Tucson Audubon is reviewing the proposed critical habitat designation



JERRY OLDENETTEL

Yellow-billed Cuckoo in TNC's Sonoita Creek Nature Preserve (that borders on Tucson Audubon's Paton Center for Hummingbirds) in Patagonia.

and plans to submit detailed comments. Our review will look at lands that are being considered for exclusion, as well as lands in southeast Arizona containing important cuckoo habitat that were not included in the draft proposal that should be considered for inclusion in the final designation. Act today! Visit [www.tucsonaudubon.org/conservation](http://www.tucsonaudubon.org/conservation) to learn more and make your voice heard.

## Lawsuit Launched to Restore Endangered Species Protections for the Cactus Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl

According to a joint press release, the Center for Biological Diversity and Defenders of Wildlife filed notice of intent to sue the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service over the agency's denial of Endangered Species Act protection to the Cactus Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl. Although the Service acknowledges that pygmy owls still face many threats in the Sonoran Desert and that the region is important to the species as a whole, it denied the a 2007 petition by the groups to relist the owl under a controversial new policy that will make it far more difficult for imperiled species to gain federal protection. Once again, the imperiled tiny raptor is the poster child for attacks on the integrity of the intent of the Endangered Species Act.



MONARCH BUTTERFLY, GARRY WILMORE / CCL