

The Paton Center for Hummingbirds Hard Times Ahead for a Natural Oasis?

Keith Ashley, Coordinator: Tucson Audubon's Paton Center for Hummingbirds

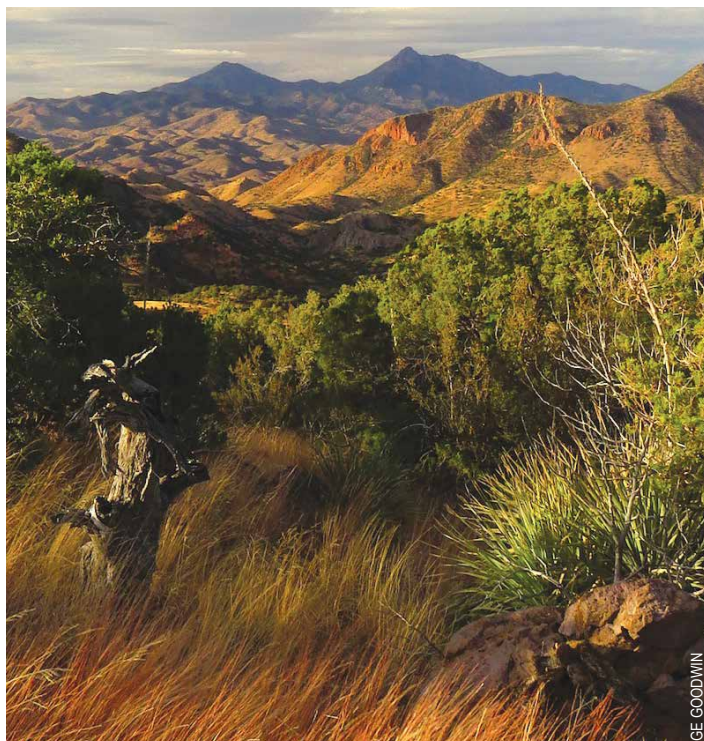
We like to think of the **Paton Center for Hummingbirds** in Patagonia as a safe space for birds and people alike, but life is rarely so simple. Both birds and people depend upon a much larger context for their survival than what is immediately obvious. Sadly we've learned that exploratory mineral drilling—and the disturbance of vital habitat—has now been sanctioned in the heart of the Patagonia Mountains, without appropriate environmental studies.

Mines destroy and poison communities of both people and birds. While mines provide necessary resources, in the case of recent claims around Patagonia, the gross contrast between tiny profits for foreign companies and vast destruction of the local ecology and economy is alarming and extreme.

Mining operations bring with them noise, roads, air pollution, water pollution, water depletion, potential changes to the bedrock itself, and many unknowns. Two things to keep in mind about the Patagonia Mountains are that their water is already highly mineralized and in relatively short supply. Mining operations from the late 1800s into the early 1960s have left a legacy of contamination, adding higher levels of dangerous metals to the water supply. New mining efforts would most likely raise the level of those contaminants even higher—perhaps quite steeply. They would also drain enormous amounts of water for their operations—water currently supporting wildlife. We don't believe it's too late to save this treasured area, but we must act soon.

What can you do? Arm yourself with education by studying the PARA website (www.patagoniaalliance.org) and Tucson Audubon's Action Alert web page (www.tucsonaudubon.org/act-now/alerts.html). Participate in related activities and support our conservation work through generous donations.

Visit tucsonaudubon.org for updates and more.



Hike, Learn, Eat: Seven Saturdays in Patagonia

One way to build awareness of the richness of the Patagonia Mountains is to participate in the **Seven Saturdays in Patagonia** program activities. One Saturday each month from October 2014 to May 2015 (excluding December) we will lead a hike in the surrounding area, offer a relaxed lecture on a local conservation topic, and invite people to support the local economy by purchasing food in town for a picnic. **Registration for the hike and the lecture are required and are separate.** You can participate in one, two, or all three of these activities. Find out more on our website at: www.tucsonaudubon.org/paton.

Nov. 15: **Hike with Bryon Lichtenhan in Guajalote Flats** (in search of Azure Bluebirds).

Nov. 15: **Relaxed Lecture with Jennie MacFarland: Why Subspecies Matter** (a discussion of southeast Arizona subspecies and the stories they tell us).



Meet PARA!

The Patagonia Area Resource Alliance (PARA) is a grassroots, non-profit community alliance committed to preserving and protecting the Patagonia, Arizona area. One way to get to know their work is by watching the 18 minute documentary film "Mining Patagonia" on their website at www.patagoniaalliance.org/patagonia-area-videos/



Win-Win for Azure Bluebirds and Arizona Vineyards

Jonathan Horst

Azure (or Mexican) Bluebirds (*Sialia sialis fulva*) are a subspecies of the Eastern Bluebird limited in range to northern Mexico and southeast Arizona. Here they nest primarily in the Patagonia and Huachuca Mountains, often visiting the grasslands surrounding these Sky Islands. Due to its strict habitat requirements, the Azure Bluebird is listed by Arizona Game & Fish as a "Species of Greatest Conservation Need" and "Vulnerable."

In partnership with the Sonoita Wine Guild and several other organizations, Tucson Audubon is launching an Azure Bluebird conservation project. We will install nest boxes on the vineyards of the Sonoita grasslands and in the Patagonia Mountains. Though breeding in the grasslands is historically documented for Azures, eBird and first-hand accounts reveal that the breeding range and population numbers have decreased. Research states lack of adequate nesting cavities to be the population's primary limiting factor.

Re-opening the grasslands as breeding territory will not only strengthen the population, but also increase species resilience to climate change and potential loss of habitat through mining and agriculture. This project will also model the innovative principle of reconciliation ecology—intentionally designing human land use to actively benefit sensitive species. In this case, the vineyards hosting nest boxes will benefit by hosting a beautiful, blue-feathered, insect-eating army to protect their grapes.

We need your help to make this project a reality. Teams of nest box builders and monitors will be crucial to success. We are also actively seeking financial sponsorship for the project. Contact Keith Ashley (kashley@tucsonaudubon.org) or Jonathan Horst (jhorst@tucsonaudubon.org) for more information.