



Nature Journeys

By Vince Pinto

April's Bird Blitzkrieg: Mexican Specialties

April is finally upon us - a halcyon time for all things wild, especially birds. This is peak migration time for many species in our famed Sky Islands. Thus, a wide variety of neotropical migrants make their return to our local haunts, either for mating or as a way station along their routes to breeding grounds further north. A number of other resident birds become more vocal and/or visible in April as hormones and the associated reproductive imperative takes over. Among both groups are a number of species more characteristic of Mexico than of the rest of the United States. Commonly referred to as "Mexican specialties," these birds help define the unique biodiversity of the Sky Islands.

While it's true that the species mentioned here may first

have appeared in March, numerically speaking they are much more in evidence in April. Such is the case with gray hawks, a small tropical buteo that penetrates into southeast Arizona. Perhaps only 100 pairs or so grace the entire U.S. in breeding season, the majority along the Santa Cruz and San Pedro Rivers. A handful also breed in the extreme southern tip of Texas.

It's hard to miss these icons of the Sky Islands. Whether they are deftly plying the skies above or within lush riparian forests, they stand out from the rest of the raptor crowd. While Cooper's hawks are also built for maneuvering for prey within the tight confines of dense forests, the calls of the two species could not be more disparate. Gray hawks have several vocalizations, though all

sound haunting or mournful. They are literally a far cry from the flicker-like "kek-kek-kek's" of the more ubiquitous Cooper's hawk.

Two other neotropical Hawks come into full swing in April. The zone-tailed hawk breeds mainly in mountain canyons and riparian forests. This large buteo reflects the tropics with its intriguing mimicry of our familiar turkey vultures. These carrion-eaters elicit little or no fear among small prey species, as they very rarely bother with the living. Thus, a hawk that looks, flies, and behaves similarly to the vulture can play the role of a wolf in sheep's clothing. Zone-tailed hawks, in fact, *do* soar in concert with turkey vultures quite frequently, no doubt nabbing many a prey item as a reward.

Common black hawks are to black vultures what zone-tails are to turkey vultures - mimics. They too are large, neotropical buteos, colored mostly black. Once airborne, however, the chunky, short-tailed black hawk looks only superficially

similar to its cousin. While zone-tails fly with a distinct dihedral or shallow "V" in their wing posture, common black hawks soar mostly flat-winged, imitating black vultures in an effort to procure food.

While these two hawks make their annual return to the Sky Islands, other Mexican specialties merely become more evident as a result of breeding activity. Such is the case with Montezuma quail, which started to vocalize in March near Patagonia. The diagnostic, downward-slurring call sounds some-

mostly Madrean evergreen woodland—these reclusive quail are no sure bet, unless of course you unwittingly happen upon a hidden individual or covey. It is then that you may want to call them the "heart-attack bird!" Reticent to fly, they often flush with a disarming flourish, which accomplishes its intent - startling the would-be predator. I hope that you too are dumbfounded by our eye-popping influx of avian treasures in April.

Vincent Pinto and his wife, Claudia, run Raven's Way Wild Journeys. They offer local tours dedicated to the preservation of the incredible biodiversity in the Sky Islands.



Zone-Tailed Hawk

what like an odd computer-generated sound or the sound of a falling mini-bomb. This much-coveted "life bird" is often missed even by highly intrepid birders. Even in the proper habitat—



Patagonia Movie House members turned out in droves for the Tombstone Movie and Cowboy Supper Fundraiser. It was a night filled with cowboy boots and happy movie goers. All of us here at the Patagonia Creative Arts Association (PCAA) would like to thank everyone who came out and showed support for our new venture. Thanks to the fundraiser we are now ¾ of the way to our goal of a new projector and soon we will be able to supplement the Art Centers bottom line—which is good news for children's programming and a giant step toward becoming a sustainable organization that will last well into the future. If you didn't get a chance to join us for "Tombstone," Patagonia Movie House members will get another chance to come out and see what we are about. Mark your calendars for two special events: "2001: a Space Odyssey," on Saturday April 11 (doors open at 6 p.m., movie starts at 7 p.m.) and our second Movie House fundraiser, "Oklahoma!" (date and time to come). We recommend buying special event tickets in advance. Please contact the Art Center Tuesday - Thursday for tickets and details at 394-9369, or by Email to makeart1@msn.com.

— Cassina Farley, PCAA Director