



Photo by Lynn Davison

Paton Center Welcomes Spring Visitors

By Bob Brandt

A dozen avid aviary admirers, acting on the advice that the early bird gets the worm, arrived well before the official opening time of 7:00 a.m. at the Paton Center's Spring Wing Fling on Saturday, April 8. The "worm" in this case was not only sightings of the winged wonders that make the Paton Center for Hummingbirds one of the premier destinations in the entire realm of birdwatching, but hot coffee and donuts as well, for those willing to lower their binoculars long enough to grab a bite or a drink.

On this made-for-birding spring day, Center Manager Jonathan Lutz and his Tucson Audubon Society (TAS) colleagues, Diana Rosenblum and Luke Safford, nearly a hundred lovers of birds, plants and wildlife welcomed to this inviting special place. Visitors came, of course, primarily to see birds, but the event also afforded an opportunity to learn

about birds, about the organization that works so hard to protect them, and about the Center's transformation from the welcoming and casual backyard of former residents Wally and Marion Paton to the expanded and improved birding hotspot that has been unfolding in stages since Tucson Audubon took over the property in 2014.

Along with the considerable knowledge of bird behavior, identification and habitat shared by the staff and volunteers, a front yard table offered printed handouts on a wide variety of birding topics and brochures touting membership in the Tucson Audubon Society.

Birders spotted dozens of bird species on both the Paton property and along Blue Heaven Road during guided walks scheduled throughout the morning. One of the best attended walks, led by volunteer Bill Hays, was geared towards beginning birders. Among the notable species

spotted during the event were Gray Hawk, Cassin's Kingbird, Bell's Vireo, Rufous Hummingbird, Black-chinned Hummingbird, Yellow Warbler, and Lazuli Bunting.

A "birding by bicycle" activity failed to draw even a single taker, but Lutz was undeterred. He had successfully instituted that kind of birding experience in Michigan, plans to offer it again here in Patagonia, and is confident it will catch on.

TAS has made dramatic changes to the property while trying to maintain the welcoming tradition the Patons had established. The bird viewing area has been greatly expanded. The paddock area has been transformed into the Richard Grand Memorial Meadow and includes a perimeter walking path, native plants, benches and a water feature. Native grasses and other plants have been planted along the creek to help control erosion, birdfeeders and benches have been strategically

placed throughout the property and a new wood fence defines the entire perimeter. Signage interprets much of what is offered at the facility.

A new viewing pavilion, designed by DUST, an award-winning Tucson architectural firm, will be erected by the end of 2017 in the spot where the Patons had maintained a backyard canopy to shelter birders. Much of the groundwork for the pavilion has already been completed including a gradually sinking gravel pathway lined with a beautiful stone retaining wall that leads visitors to the back yard.

Lutz, the former director of the Michigan Audubon Society, was pleased with how the event was received. He also noted that the Center needs more volunteers to help care for the property, the birds and the humans who enjoy them. Reach him at jlutz@tucsonaudubon.org.



Photo by Lynn Davison

Benefactor John Kendall looks out from behind the new statue at the Opera House

Opera House Unveils New Sculpture

By Lynn Davison

The Santa Cruz Foundation for the Performing Arts unveiled a remarkable outdoor sculpture on Saturday, May 8, commemorating community donors who helped to build the Benderley Kendall Opera House. Local artist Linda Chase created a larger than life mosaic peacock adorned with individual donor's name tags,

which was installed in the front yard of the Opera House.

Both the artist and the major benefactor of the Opera House, John Kendall, were on hand for the celebration, where guests sipped wine and scoured the peacock to find their name tags.

As a special treat, everyone was invited into the Opera House for a quick preview of the next day's concert, musicians playing baroque music with their beautiful period instruments. Their brief impromptu performance was topped only by a truly amazing concert on Sunday.



Photo by Lynn Davison

Local artist Linda Chase stands with her mosaic statue designed to honor donors to the opera house