



AZGFD
Game Management & Nongame
Wildlife Conservation Programs

WILDLIFE TRACKS & TRAILS

Pointers Have a Propensity to Point Turtles

A funny thing happened during the first annual Scaled Quail Flush Count Survey in 2015: the dogs were pointing box turtles in addition to quail... In fact the dogs pointed out 15 individual box turtles – and only 3 coveys of quail. While at first this appeared to be a mere curiosity – once the information of the hounds’ interest to detect turtles was shared with the Department’s Turtles Project Coordinator, plans for the first ever Annual Quail Flush Count and Box Turtle Survey was hatched.

Little is known about historical or current populations of Arizona’s ornate box turtles because, put simply, box turtles are cryptic, blending into the grasslands, and reclusive, hanging out underground in kangaroo rat

mounds, making them difficult to find. Unfortunately, there is some evidence that suggests the ornate box turtle in Arizona may be in decline, possibly a result of habitat destruction, habitat fragmentation, and over-collection from the wild. The best technology for finding secretive species may be dog noses. Using dogs to detect quail and turtles allows the Department to gather much needed information on population trends, distribution, and the effects of grassland invasion on these species.

Department staff consisting of 18 volunteers and 25 dogs - representing 10 breeds – arrived the 24th of September of 2016 to begin the surveys near Bonita, in Graham County. Their efforts covered 16 routes over an estimated

38.5 miles. Results for the 2016 first annual surveys yielded the finding of 3 coveys of scaled quail (30 birds), 5 coveys of Gambel’s quail (27 birds), and 3 box turtles.

The survey results were made possible by the volunteers who contributed 159.5 volunteer hours, and drove 6,251 miles to participate in this effort. The dollar value of volunteer hours (\$1,595.00) and mileage (\$2,750.44) will be used by the Department to match \$13,036.32 towards Federal grants to fund wildlife conservation in Arizona. Keep an ear to the ground for next year’s survey – and other opportunities to get involved as one of Arizona’s Citizen Scientists on projects like this one. **Cristina Jones and Johnathan O’Dell**



Left to right: the group of volunteers prepping for the day’s efforts; a hard working pointer at work; Box turtle; and Scaled quail.

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FROM THE FIELD

Golden Eagle Nest Success Dependent On Climbing Equipment Removal

In the spring of 2016, the Department was alerted to the presence of rock climbing equipment in a canyon containing an active golden eagle nesting area. It is possible the human activity may have contributed to the failure of this year's nesting attempt. The canyon had been illegally developed by climbers with hundreds of bolts in the rock walls with hangers and carabiners attached. There were even several ropes dangling over the cliffs within feet of the nest.

In October 2016, the Department collaborated with private landowners, the Hopi Tribe, Arizona State Land Department, and Coconino County Sheriff's Office Search and Rescue team to coordinate an effort to remove the climbing gear from the nesting area. Thanks to the dedicated team effort, the golden eagles now have an opportunity for a more successful outcome at this nesting site. **Kyle McCarty**

Clockwise: Bolts and carabiners can be seen along the canyon wall; the failed golden eagle nest a few hundred feet from the climbing route; 20 people removed a box full of bolts, hangers and carabiner to ensure the future nesting success of next season's golden eagle pair.



#TRENDINGNOW

Huachuca Springsnail Precluded from ESA Listing



As of September 2016, the USFWS determined that the Huachuca springsnail does not warrant protection under the ESA since the species continues to occupy a large portion of its historic range, and most of those populations occur on federal lands with existing protections.

Over the past six years, the Department, USFWS, Coronado National Forest, and Fort Huachuca have collaborated on monitoring and management actions to benefit and safeguard the springsnail, including a new Candidate Conservation Agreement (CCA) for the species approved in August 2016. Heritage Funds were used to conduct extensive baseline inventories of the snail populations and their habitat, and to develop the initial draft of the CCA. Surveys conducted in July and September 2016 discovered two new populations of the snail in habitat not previously explored. *Jeff Sorensen*

Twenty Years Celebrating the Reintroduction of the Black-footed Ferret!



The Black-footed Ferret Recovery Program celebrated two milestones in 2016; the 20th Anniversary of releasing Black-footed ferrets back into Arizona and establishing a third ferret reintroduction area in the state through a Safe Harbor Agreement with the Double O Ranch. In 1996, the Aubrey Valley became the first reintroduction area in Arizona. The released ferret population thrived. In the fall 2007, the Espee Allotment became the second reintroduction area through a Safe Harbor Agreement with the Babbitt Ranches.

On October 4, 2016, the 20th Anniversary Celebration was held on the Double O Ranch with approximately 60 people in attendance. Activities included a picnic-style lunch, educational booths and photos highlighting BFF

releases, presentations by representatives of the Arizona Game and Fish Department, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, The Phoenix Zoo, and U.S.D.A.'s Wildlife Services in Arizona. The Department commemorated the event by releasing six ferrets on the Double O Ranch through a Safe Harbor Agreement with Siebert Land Company, creating Arizona's third reintroduction area.

The Arizona Game and Fish Department is a national leader in endangered species management. With the invaluable cooperation of private landowners, private business and cooperating agencies to establish new populations and participate in sound research, Arizona will continue to celebrate successes in black-footed ferret recovery.

FROM THE FIELD

Pronghorn Recovery



The pronghorn population in Game Management Units 35A and 35B was in dire straits in the early 2000's. In 2005, numbering a few hundred animals, the herds of pronghorn on the Sonoita Plains and in the San Rafael Valley began declining. In 2010, with only 50 pronghorn surveyed, the Arizona Antelope Foundation and the Arizona Game and Fish Department sprang into action, closing the 35AB hunt and forming the Southeastern Arizona Grasslands Pronghorn Initiative. Only 26 pronghorn remained by 2011.

Recognizing that the population would continue its nosedive because fawns were not surviving, the Pronghorn Antelope Fawn Enhancement Project was implemented in 2012. Targeted removal of coyotes during the fawning season, restoration of grassland habitat by removing invading mesquites, and modification of barbed-wire fence in pronghorn movement

corridors immediately led to an increase in pronghorn numbers. In January 2014, the growing pronghorn herds were supplemented with nearly 50 pronghorn from the Prescott area and New Mexico. The pronghorn population rebounded spectacularly and the hunt reopened in 2016. Pronghorn in GMUs 35A and 35B now number over 230 animals spread out across the Sonoita Plains and San Rafael Valley, where herds can once again be seen roaming the grasslands. **Karen Klima**

Quitobaquito Tryonia Survey Along the Border

Department staff surveyed the springsnail population at Quitobaquito Spring in Organ Pipe National Monument on October 2016. These tiny snails—the size of large sand grains—are of the genus *Tryonia*, and are only found at this locality. Along the nearly 200-m long spring run, the survey crew counted over 6500 springsnails among nine sample transects and on 12 sample tiles. Most of the snails were found in clusters in areas with moderate flow and rough concrete “bedrock” that lines the spring channel. The tryonia are one of several species being managed under a voluntary conservation agreement (in review) for the Quitobaquito Spring and nearby Rio Sonoyta drainage in Sonora, Mexico. Quitobaquito tryonia is one of 12 Arizona native snails that the USFWS will be evaluating for ESA listing in the upcoming years. **Jeff Sorensen**



Mount Graham Red Squirrel Fall Count

Mount Graham red squirrels live only in the upper elevation conifer forest of the Pinaleno Mountains and feed primarily on conifer seeds. Habitat losses caused by fire and insect infestations and poor cone crops caused by drought are considered primary factors influencing population size. The subspecies was declared endangered in 1987. Population numbers peaked at about 550 animals in the late 1990's, but typically range between 200 and 300 individuals.



Survey results indicate that there are 252 red squirrels occupying the Pinaleno Mountains near Safford. This is a slight decrease from the 263 squirrels observed last year.

The survey is conducted jointly by the Department, USFS, USFWS, and the University of Arizona every fall. The group visits a random sample of known middens, which are areas where red squirrels store their pinecones. **Tim Snow**

PARTNERS IN ACTION



(Above) Mule Deer Foundation (MDF) volunteers helped rebuild a trick tank in Unit 23 which had been destroyed by a forest fire years ago. MDF also contracted to film this project on the Bar X Ranch so they can showcase the great work they have been completing through the Adopt-a-Ranch Program.



(Above) Commissioner James R. Ammons takes part in the Celebration of 20 Years of black-footed ferret reintroductions in Arizona.



(Left) AAF members and volunteers modify a fence in Sonoita. (Above) Gates, signs, and walk-thru gates were installed around the Hay Lake Wetland to reduce issues with people driving into the designated road-less area. These enhancements will benefit the Bar T Bar Ranch, USFS, hunters, and AGFD.



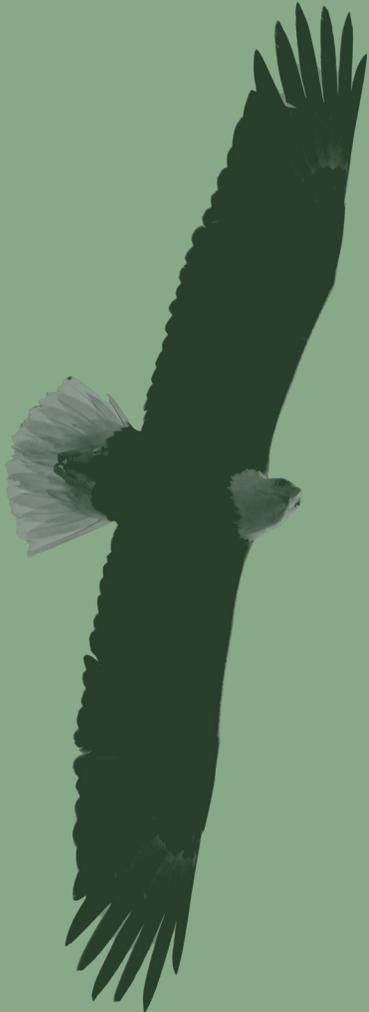
Upcoming...

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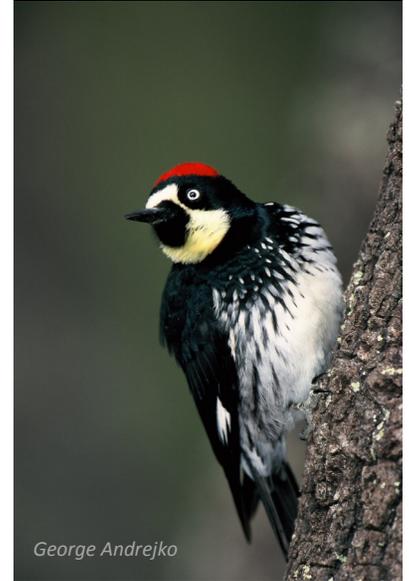


Citizen Scientist Opportunity

The annual Arizona Christmas Bird Counts (CBC) will run from December 14, 2016 to January 1, 2017. Participants with some birding identification skills are needed state-wide. Dates for the various CBC areas and compiler contacts can be found at http://azfo.org/CBC/2016_2017.html.

In preparation, a morning pre-CBC workshop will be offered December 10, 2016 in Phoenix. For details go to <http://www.azfo.org/events/custom/eventslist.html>.

Be sure to check out the [CBC video](#) by Arizona Game and Fish Department created to provide useful information about CBC protocol and preparation. Hope to see you out in the field!



Publications

Blanchette, G.E. and J.A. Sorensen. 2016. Verde Rim springsnail survey results 2009-2016. Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program Technical Report 305. Arizona Game and Fish Department, Phoenix, Arizona.

Justice-Allen A, K.A. Loyd. [Mortality of Western Burrowing Owls \(*Athene cunicularia hypugaea*\) Associated with Brodifacoum Exposure. *Journal of Wildlife Diseases*. 2016 October. \[Epub ahead of print\]. PMID: 27763828](#)

Harding, Lisa A., J. Heffelfinger, D. Paetkau, E. Rubin, J. Dolphin, A. Aoude. 2016. [Genetic management and setting recovery goals for Mexican wolves \(*Canis lupus baileyi*\) in the wild. *Biological Conservation*, 203: 151-159.](#)

Justice-Allen, A., K. Orr, K. Schuler, K. McCarty, K. Jacobson, and C. Meteyer. 2016. [Bald eagle nestling mortality associated with *Argas radiatus* and *Argas ricei* tick infestation and successful management with nest removal in Arizona, USA. *Journal of Wildlife Diseases*, 52: 940-944.](#)

For more information about any of these articles, visit www.azgfd.gov

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