

Nature at the Tinneys – May 5 – July 16, 2020

(Photos and Story by Bob and Maxine Tinney, The Ranch in Prescott, AZ)



A yellowish female and colorful male **Western Tanagers** visit in early May on their migration northward.



Two large and stocky female **Evening Grosbeaks** with enormous greenish-yellow beaks visit on May 15-16.



The **Evening Grosbeaks** normally are found in larger groups, but we are thankful for a visit of these two.



The more common **Black-headed Grosbeaks** (above) have hefty beaks. Males are rich orange-cinnamon with black head, while females and immatures (below) have warm orange or buff on the breast with strongly marked head.





Mourning Doves form a heart between their beaks (above) and may preen each other with gentle nibbles around the neck as a pair-bonding ritual. Eventually, the pair will progress to grasping beaks and bobbing their heads up and down in unison. Males have favorite “cooing perches” which they defend from other males.



While preening, Doves remove dust, dirt, and parasites from their feathers and align each feather in the optimum position.



Common Ravens are bold, playful, and clever parents, and they take time to teach their youngsters.



A flock of 20-30 forest **Band-tailed Pigeons** will visit in the early mornings in the Spring/Summer and feed from the ground and bird feeders. The adults have a white band and green scaly-looking feathers on the back of their necks (two left) while many juveniles (two right) visit without both the white neck crescent and lovely red ringed eyes.



The male **Gambel's Quail** guards while the female quail brings in 8 chicks for a morning family drink of water.



The male **Red-shafted Northern Flicker** watches as the female guides the juvenile male to the suet cake and seed block.



The clown-face **Acorn Woodpeckers** live in large groups, hoard acorns, and breed cooperatively.



Hairy Woodpeckers are a small but powerful bird that forages along trunks and main branches of large trees.



The beautiful **Steller's Jay** (*Cyanocitta stelleri*) is a jay native to western North America, closely related to the blue jay found in the rest of the continent, but with a black head, crest, and upper body. It is also known as the long-crested jay, mountain jay, and pine jay.



The adult **Woodhouse's Scrub-Jays** are attentive to their young, showing them where to eat and bathe.



The juvenile Woodhouse's Scrub-Jays are animated birds, like their parents, that move about in bold hops and lunges, looking around with sharp turns of the head and are playful in the water pans and often vocal.



The male (left) adult **House Finch**, female (center), and a juvenile (right) with wild head feathers have cheery songs.



Pine Siskins are very small songbirds with sharp, pointed bills and short, notched tails. Their uniquely shaped bill is slendrer than that of most finches. Adults are brown and streaky with yellow edging on wings and tail.



Jabbering male and female yellow, green, and black **Lesser Goldfinches** mate and tend to their young.



The **Brown-headed Cowbird** is a stocky blackbird (male left, female right) with a fascinating approach to raising its young. Females forgo building nests and instead put all their energy into producing eggs, sometimes more than three dozen a summer. These they lay in the nests of other birds, abandoning their young to foster parents, usually at the expense of at least some of the host's own chicks.



The warm-brown **Canyon Towhees** are common on the ground underneath shrubs and come to the yard for water.



The **Spotted Towhees** love to bathe in the water feature and preen afterwards.



The **Bridled Titmouse** is a small, crested and gray with a black/white patterned face, a black bib, and loves seed blocks.



Plain and drab but full of personality, the **Juniper Titmouse** enlivens pinyon-juniper woods of the interior of the west.



A normally upside-down clean black, gray, and white markings the **White-breasted Nuthatches** are active, agile little birds with an appetite for insects and large mealy seeds.



The male and female Audubon's Yellow-rumped Warblers with yellow throats transit the Tinneys' yard.



Butterflies and Moths

A variety of butterflies and moths visit the yard including Arizona Sister, Spring Azure, Cream Skipper and Grey Hairstreak And various gray/tan/green moths.

☛ Birds seen by the Tinneys from home, but not photographed this summer, include Ash-throated Flycatcher, Turkey Vulture, Black-chinned Sparrow, Cassin's Finch, and Cooper's Hawk.

Hummingbirds are delicate/graceful and remind us that life is rich.



"Legends say that hummingbirds float free of time, carrying our hopes for love, joy and celebration. Hummingbirds open our eyes to the wonders of the world and inspire us to open our hearts to loved ones and friends. Like a hummingbird, we aspire to hover and to savor each moment as it passes, embrace all that life has to offer and to celebrate the joy of everyday. The hummingbird's delicate grace reminds us that life is rich, beauty is everywhere, every personal connection has meaning, and that laughter is life's sweetest creation."
- Papyrus



Juvenile and adult **Black-Chinned, Rufous, and Anna's Hummingbirds** enjoy nectar from the feeders, and a dip in the water feature (above).



Natural nectar is provided from various plants such as Salvia and Firecracker and Purple Penstemon (above).

Arizona Black Rattlesnake - 22 May 2020



As Bob walks around the house about 10:40 this morning, a greater than 3' Arizona Black Rattlesnake with thin yellowish crossbars slithers across the pavers to the south of the house and into a flower bed. Bob lets Maxine know.



The Black Rattlesnake moves thru the garden and goes near a small tree (right) and begins to roll and coil (below), rattles a bit, flicks its tongue (below right) and the pupils turn vertically elliptical.



It rattles its four interlocking tail sections, and slithers away probably seeking lunch of a mouse, chipmunk, lizard, or bird.

Gopher Snake – Lizards - Tarantula Wasp – May 2020



This about 5-foot Gopher Snake is a muscular, long serpent that can be intimidating because of the size; however, there's little to fear because it is nonvenomous. In fact, they are important to keeping the rodent population in check and maintaining their local ecosystems.



Pleateau Fence Lizard and Arizona Striped Whiptail



Possible Desert Spiny and/or Western Fence Lizards



The most well-known species of the spider wasps in Arizona is the *Pepsis* **wasp**, better-known as the **Tarantula Hawk**. The **Tarantula Hawk** is one of the largest species of wasps and can grow to be up to two inches long. It is identified by its large dark body, bright red or orange wings and long legs ending in hooked claws. They are one of the largest parasitoid wasps, and their sting paralyzes their prey such as a tarantula (center) before they drag it to a brood nest as living food; a single egg is laid on the prey, hatching to a larva which eats the still-living prey.

“And into the forest I go, to lose my mind and gain my soul.” - John Muir



Sotol reproduces vegetatively by sprouting from a terminal bud and grows up to 5 meters in height. In the Sotol flower buds are initiated in mid- to late May, flowering occurs in June and July, and fruits are mature by August. Sotol plants are dioecious, producing thousands of tiny flowers in a long narrow cluster which the bees enjoy (two right photos).



Male and female pine cones and pollen cones form an integral part of Gymnosperm tree reproduction.

Rainbow of Flowers - Insects - Berries - Seeds



Flying Ant Day . . . Winged Ants take their Nuptial Flight – July 4

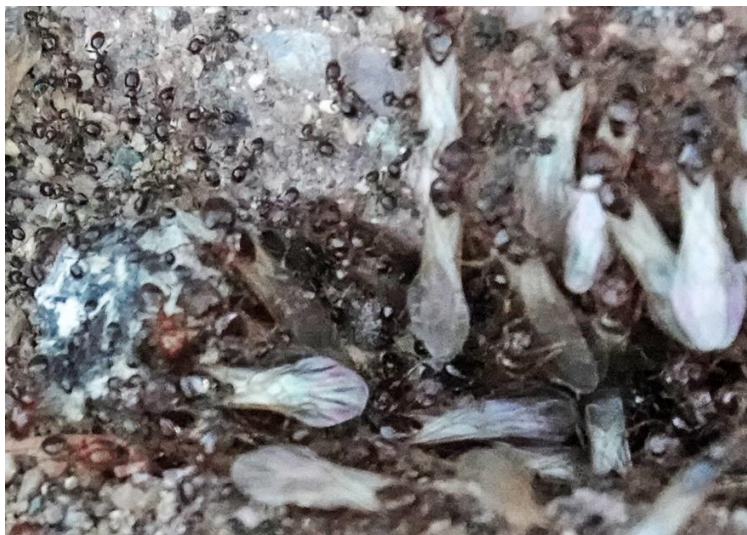
On July 3 the first Monsoonal Rains release about ½ inch of water to the thirsty earth in Prescott. This humidity is critical to Ant Swarming activities which are observed by the Tinneys on the morning of July 4 just outside the windows.



Ants live in a caste system, where individuals have specific jobs. The queen lays the eggs while female workers look after the queen, eggs and larvae. They also gather food, enlarge the nest and otherwise ensure the colony runs smoothly. Most of the eggs develop into workers, but when the colony is ready, the queen begins to produce **virgin queens and males**.



By evening on July 4 before the Fireworks begin, there are numerous ants (called alates) gathering above their burrow nests. Winged ants actually emerge over several weeks, although there are often several peaks in appearances, each lasting only a few days and this precise pattern of swarming varies from year to year.



The large virgin winged females and the smaller winged males are often seen flying joined together. This is known as the nuptial flight.

Reason to swarm is to deter predators and increase the chance of reproduction - with larger numbers of their species around the ants won't have far to look for a mate.

During this brief, once-in-a-lifetime mating period, a queen usually mates with several males. Once ants have mated, the role of the males is over. The mated queens quickly chew off their own wings and begin looking for a suitable site in which to nest and set up a new colony.

Tinneys' Photos - July 4, 2020 Firework over Watson Lake and Prescott Valley



Mule Deer - Skywatchers and the July 4-5 Full Buck Moon



Some skywatchers had more than mere fireworks in the night sky during their Fourth of July celebrations on Saturday and on Sunday night with a partial penumbral eclipse (not invisible, but darkened moon) of the Full Buck Moon (left). The full moon in July is referred to as the Full Buck Moon, Thunder Moon and Hay Moon. Tinneys choose the Full Buck Moon, as it is the time of year that the **Mule Deer buck's** antlers are in full growth mode.



Typical Mule Deer antler configuration has each side branching equally into two main beams (left photos), each may fork into two tines (third photo). The side and number of 'points' is dependent on a combination of age, nutrition, and genetic background (right photo). The antlers will continue to grow into the fall under the layer of skin called velvet. The velvet supplies blood to the growing antlers, which are soft. Before the winter Rut, the antlers harden, the velvet dries, and is rubbed off.



The pedicels which begin growing at a couple months of age in buck fawns provide the base from which the antler will grow. The small hair covered bumps/nubs/buttons on these 1st year male fawns' heads are the pedicels (not antlers).



The gestation period of the **mule deer** does lasts for a little over 200 days. The Does will generally run off last year's juveniles before giving birth to their new fawns. The doe delivers one to four fawns (usually 2) from June to August. There are no signs of swollen teats as yet to indicate they have dropped their new fawns, but time is near.



The 1st year female fawns will also soon say good-bye to their Moms, as the Does give birth again.



Curious Mule Deer enter the Tinneys' yard with caution.



A **Grey Fox** comes to the yard for a drink of water and hunts for birds and bird seeds.



A few **Javelina** seek bird seeds from the ground and water from the water pans.



The normal nocturnal **Skunk** actually visits in the daytime.

Crissal and Curve-billed Thrashers – July 6



About 8:39 a.m. on July 6, a **Crissal Thrasher** (*Toxostoma crissale*) comes to a water pan to have a drink.



In a few minutes the Crissal Thrasher is gone and a hatch-year **Curve-billed Thrasher** (*Toxostoma curvirostre*) with lightly spotted breast comes to the water pan for a drink (bill too curved for Bendire's Thrasher).



About 8:53 both the **Crissal Thrasher** and hatch-year **Curve-billed Thrashers** visit the same water pan at the same time. To have a hatch-year Curve-billed visitor is exciting. The odds are amazing that an adult Crissal and hatch-year Curve-billed Thrashers visited at the same water pan at the same time.

Thanks to David Moll for helping with identifications and verifying evidence to the above species.

“Blessings come to those who are ready to receive them!” - Walt Anderson