



SUPPORT THE COMMUNITY GARDEN: ENTER THE 40th ANNUAL CASCABEL COMMUNITY RAFFLE—see page 5

Cascabel Conservation Association

Supporting Conservation, Community, and Contemplation in the Middle San Pedro Valley

2020 CCA NEWSLETTER

Garden Greenhouse Now in Use



Photos by Kai Staats

THE NEW GREENHOUSE AT THE COMMUNITY GARDEN IS FINISHED AND OUR winter crops, started in the greenhouse, are thriving. Community is also thriving. With care, we have not missed a beat because of the coronavirus. In fact, participation is high, and

harvests have been abundant, especially spring greens, onions, and garlic. We were delighted to be able to offer vegetables to the larger community in the spring when produce was scarce at the groceries in Benson.



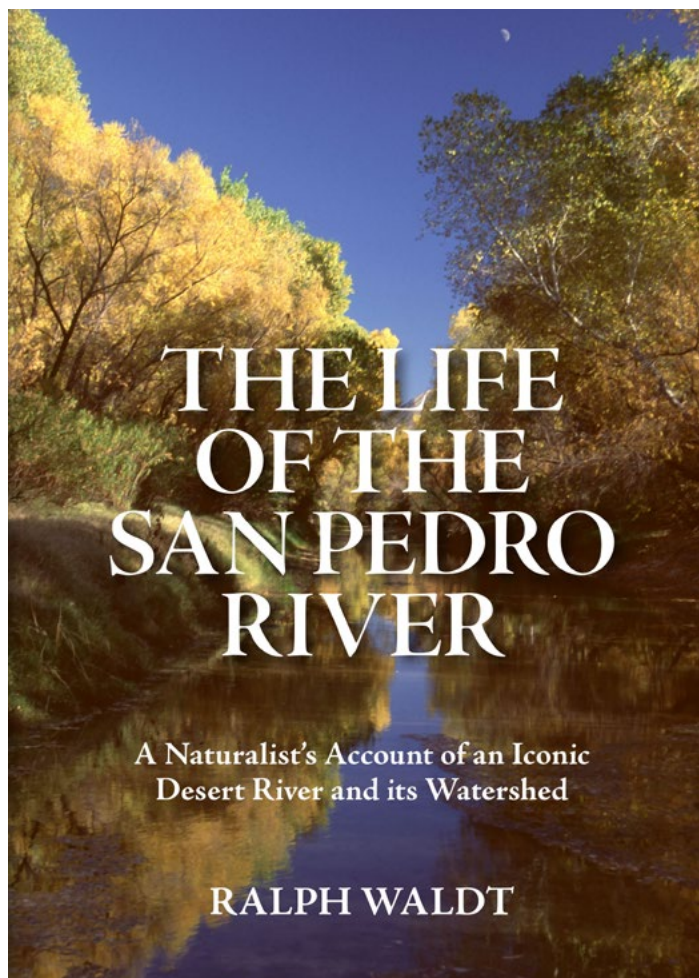
The Life of the San Pedro River

In conservation news, we'd like to highlight an important contribution by local author and CCA member, Ralph Waldt, who recently published *The Life of the San Pedro River: A Naturalist's Account of an Iconic Desert River and its Watershed*.

RALPH WALDT'S RECENT BOOK, *THE LIFE OF THE SAN PEDRO RIVER*, brings together two qualities that don't always come in the same package: it is both lovely and accurate. Those who are looking for beauty will find it in the gorgeous photos, the vivid pictures Ralph paints with words, and the pleasing design of the book itself. Those who are looking for information will find a deep dive into the lived specifics of all the residents of the valley—winged, finned, furred, scaled, rooted, footed, or spined.

I say "lived" specifics because this is not a book written from a library or a lab. It is a book written by someone who has spent most of his life outside: walking, wandering, watching, aware. It is the element of personal observation that sets this book apart; the "I was there" story, which invites each one of us to "be there" too, wherever we are.

Termites, turkeys, burn worms, toads, ringtails, coach-whips, cactus, bats—all of Ralph's friends are delightfully accounted for in this book. But Ralph's enthusiasm doesn't stop at the individual; with a storyteller's wisdom, Ralph keeps focusing our attention on the whole—the way everything affects, well...everything.



Copies can be purchased at Amazon, or for a deluxe signed copy, <https://waldt.square.site>.



Photos © Ralph Waldt

Rainbow grasshoppers are aposematically colored, meaning that they are colored conspicuously as a warning to potential predators. Insects like this usually retain or manufacture noxious chemical compounds as a defense mechanism. —from *The Life of the San Pedro River*

This book also intimately explores another “rare bird.” Though unnamed, this animal is present on every page and behind every word. That animal is Ralph himself: encyclopedic naturalist, curmudgeon, wanderer of wild places. His knowledge is built from a lifetime of immersing heart, mind, and body in the wildlands he loves. But more than anything it is his unique spirit that shines in this book—a spirit extraordinarily infused by a sense of awe.

One of my first memories of Ralph is from a river walk with him our first week here. After a cascade of information about black bears and cougars and tarantula hawks and snakes—and their roles in the larger ecosystem—we stopped at a small mound of fresh dirt where Ralph dropped immediately to his knees on the ground, and patting (*patting!*) the dirt ever so gently with his large hands, spoke with what I can only describe as *tenderness* about the importance of gophers. I have forgotten all the details about the gophers—how many feet they can tunnel in a day, how important they are for soil aeration—but I clearly remember his hands stroking the dirt.

Ralph says that his only purpose in writing this book is to help the San Pedro River thrive. And certainly all of the information packed between the beautiful covers will do



this. But his devotion has also resulted in a book that reveals something equally precious: a man in love with the world and unafraid to show it. It is this love, and this vulnerability, that are at the heart of any true harmony. Wild places don't survive because they are a good idea; they survive because we love them. This is a lover's book about his beloved, filled with every intimate detail that the lover notices.

—by Katie Talbott



Photos by Alex Binford-Walsh

Leopard Frogs Make the Leap to Cascabel

ALEX BINFORD-WALSH HAS BEEN WORKING WITH Pima County to maintain a population of lowland leopard frogs at the pond he manages in Cascabel. Lowland leopard frogs are a species of concern that face various threats. CCA has supported this effort by funding the purchase of plants for the pond, and by providing use of the CCA truck

to help translocate the frogs. Forty-three frogs were translocated from Buehman and Bullock Canyons in July when their habitat was threatened after the Bighorn Fire. By September an egg mass was visible in their new pond. The hope is that this population can grow and be used to translocate frogs to new areas.

A Tribute to Dr. Dennis A. Thoennes

1945–2018

DR. DENNIS A. THOENNES WAS A FOUR-TIME SOJOURNER WITH OUR HERMITAGE PROGRAM, and was in fact our very first sojourner in 1996. As we had no hermitages at that time, Dennis simply camped for five days at the crest of the “scar road” just up the hill from the present Corbett Center. He was also the first sojourner at the Leitner-Gonzales Straw Bale Hermitage before it was finished, and then once again when complete. His last sojourn with us was at the former Tent-Ramada in 2010.

Dennis was a doctor of psychology and practiced in Redmond, Washington. He was directed to us by Fr. John Kane of Tucson’s Desert House of Prayer not long after Fr. Kane had blessed our hermitage land in Hot Springs Canyon, marking its liberation from becoming a militia group’s firing range.

Dennis left meaningful reflections on what his retreats meant to him and how he found refreshment here in his love for the earth.

“[My recollections of my retreat] help me recalibrate and refocus. I remember the paths, dances and mannerisms of the bumble bees, butterflies, bats,

hawks, and many insects—and the flowers and, and—there’s so much. I come back repeatedly in my meditations.”

Likely due both to his profession as well as being himself an orphan, Dennis also reflected on the difficult parts of life.

“...the true path includes wandering, travail, and wavering faith. Being on the path (like the road from the air park to the windmill) doesn’t mean it’s a yellow brick road. Friends and community are important to receive from and give to while in this process of exodus and finding liberation from the many things that keep me tangled and lost.”

Dennis became a friend to several of us here. He shared not only our love of the earth as a healing presence, but also a key value of our association—gifting. Despite his difficult background, he led a life of giving to family, friends, patients, and CCA, leaving us a major bequest in his will. Dennis was a friend and kindred spirit and is greatly missed.

—by Daniel Baker



Tom Tabbot, Jr.

Time for Reflection

“As a nurse, grad student, and parent to two small children, 2020 has been a lot to say the least. I can’t tell you how many times during all of the craziness of the year I’ve thought of Cascabel and looked forward to my return this fall. There are so few moments of silence and at times it feels impossible to find time for reflection—even though there is so much to reflect on. Thank you for your work as stewards not only of a very special place, but of silence, meditation, and reflection. Your work is truly a gift.”

—Sojourner, October 2020

THERE IS ALWAYS A NEED FOR SPACES OF WILDNESS WHERE PEOPLE CAN SOJOURN FOR A TIME, live simply, and let the wildness without and within teach, guide, and heal; in times of great upheaval that force change, these spaces are particularly important. For this reason, we have adopted additional protocols at the hermitage to allow us to offer a safe retreat experience during the pandemic and are hosting sojourners this fall and winter.

In addition to individual sojourners, we also welcome small groups at the group retreat campground at the Corbett Center. This area is set up for groups of 2-8 people who are interested in reflecting together or in taking solo retreats in the surrounding wildlands.

See www.cascabelconservation.org/retreats for COVID-19 protocols and reservation information.



Inside the Corbett Center hermitage

SPECIAL THANKS TO MICHAEL PUTTONEN FOR creating *Cascabel Books*, an imprint dedicated to helping local, self-publishing authors. Both books reviewed in this issue were designed by Michael under the *Cascabel Books* imprint. www.facebook.com/cascabelbooks



40th Annual Cascabel Community Raffle

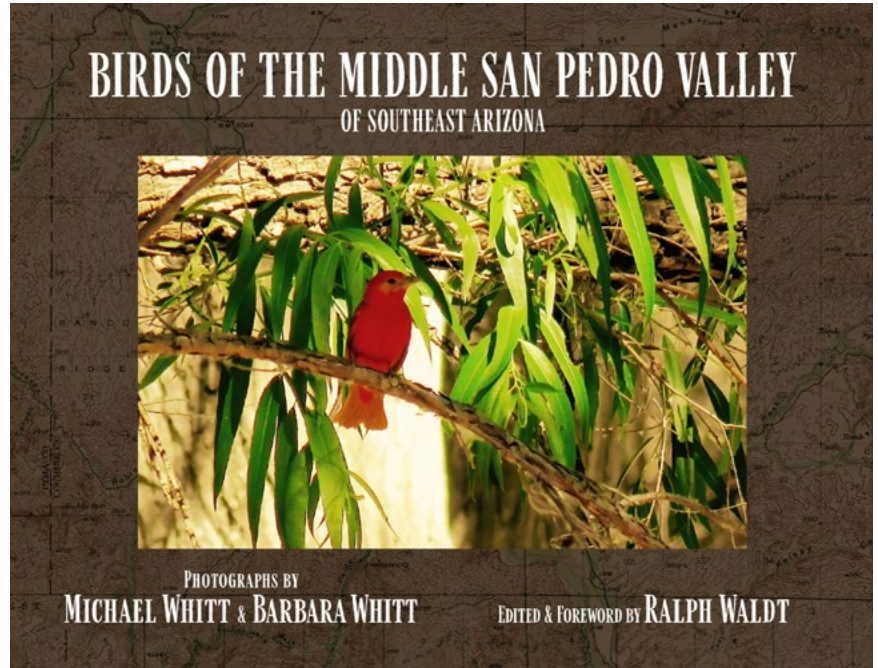
The annual Cascabel Community Fair usually provides much of the funding for the Community Garden. Though there won't be a 2020 Fair, CCA member Anna Lands led a community quilt effort, and so, *you still have an opportunity to win a beautiful handmade quilt!*

Visit www.cascabel.org/fair for more information and a link for participating in the [online raffle](#). *By doing so you will be supporting our Community Garden, as well as the Cascabel Community Center.* The deadline for purchasing tickets is December 31, with the drawing on January 1, 2021.

Connecting Bird to Human

IN HIS LATEST BOOK, *BIRDS OF THE MIDDLE SAN PEDRO VALLEY OF SOUTHEAST ARIZONA*, CCA member Michael Whitt intends to “connect bird to human.” There is no better measure of his success than the personal experience of someone reading his book, and long-time resident Annie Wilkinson came immediately to mind. She told me this story in a recent conversation.

“It’s funny that even though I’ve lived here all these years, I’ve never been a birdwatcher. Then this year—in April—my daughter’s partner, Ian, got me started, and I set a goal for myself that this summer I would learn to identify song birds in this area. Then in May, when Sue Newman sent out the email about this book, it was perfect timing. I found it so inspiring, really affirming for me, because I was trying to identify birds with the technical books, but this book seemed so much more personal. For one thing, it is birds I can see in my own back yard, right here on the river. Within a few months I found that I could see at least fifty percent of the birds in his book right here! And I love the narrative of Michael’s own story and how he got involved with birds a little later in life. His book was a nudge to explore deeper, right here in my own home.”



Signed and inscribed copies of Michael Whitt’s book may be ordered online at <https://michaelwhitt.square.site>.

Michael’s book is also a tender tribute to his late wife, Barbara, and how birds enlivened her life, as well as their relationship. “Birds opened the larger doors of nature for Barbara and me... Barbara had always liked birds, to watch them, to study them, and to be around them.” I think Barbara would have liked this book, too.

—by Katie Talbott

Sources of Perennial Water in the San Pedro Valley

LONG-TERM DROUGHT AND INCREASING DEMANDS ON GROUNDWATER FOR DOMESTIC USE are leading to progressive reduction in perennial flow in the San Pedro River, despite reduced groundwater demand for irrigation in recent decades. As water becomes more scarce, good water management in the San Pedro Valley will require a solid understanding of water sources. CCA President Chris Eastoe’s forthcoming article in the peer-reviewed journal *Environmental & Engineering Geoscience* helps differentiate

different sources of water using isotope studies. This article identifies several distinct sources of water for the valley, including summer monsoon floodwater stored in the riverbanks, water from upstream reaches of the river, and water from the mountainous flanks of the valley.

Eastoe, C.J., “Sources of Perennial Water Supporting Critical Ecosystems, San Pedro Valley, Arizona,” *Environmental & Engineering Geoscience*, in press.



6146 N. Canyon Road, Cascabel, Arizona 85602

Contributing Editors: Daniel Baker, Alex Binford-Walsh, Chris Eastoe, Pearl Mast, Katie Talbott, Susan Tollefson

Production and Proofreading: Katie Talbott and Pearl Mast

Graphic Design: Michael Puttonen

JOIN THE CCA TODAY!

MISSION

The Cascabel Conservation Association is dedicated to the collaborative stewardship of the Middle San Pedro River watershed in a way that promotes the health, stability and diversity of the whole community, including its earth, waters, plants, and animals. We strive to integrate the needs of the land with the needs of a sustainable human community through educational, economic, agricultural, contemplative and other conservation related endeavors.

COMMUNITY

CCA opens itself to the community. It has a friendly and supportive relation with the Saguaro-Juniper Corporation, sharing a common Covenant, adjacent land and similar purposes. It also partners with the Lower San Pedro Watershed Alliance, Cascabel Community Center, the Cascabel Working Group, and is a member organization of the Lower San Pedro Collaborative, the Land Trust Alliance, and the Coalition for Sonoran

Desert Protection. Furthermore, it is open to you. CCA operates in a consensual manner and your voice and participation are welcome.

FINANCES

In keeping with its integrative approach to the human and natural community, CCA seeks simplicity, equality and justice in financial matters, offering all services at no fee or minimal cost. CCA is run primarily by volunteers, and staff members work for minimal or no compensation. Nonetheless, financial support is required for expenses (such as office, infrastructure, insurance, vehicles, etc.) and the sustainability of our programs.

We would like to invite your participation in CCA by becoming a member (no fee required), or by donation (no membership required), or both. Donations are tax deductible.



Cut here and return the form below.

CCA MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

I, _____ [PRINT], wish to become a member of the Cascabel Conservation Association: **Supporting Conservation, Community and Contemplation in the Middle San Pedro River Valley**. I understand that I will receive announcements of CCA meetings, minutes, mailings and invitations to participate in events and decision making. (If you were a CHA member, you are already a CCA member)

MEMBERSHIP AGREEMENT: I support the mission of the Cascabel Conservation Association (see above), am in accord with its efforts to function in a consensual manner, and agree to abide by applicable covenants and/or conservation easements when on CCA lands.

SIGNED _____ DATE _____

ADDRESS _____

PHONE _____ EMAIL _____

CCA DONATIONS

- I would like to make a monetary donation to CCA. *(Please specify if you want your donation to go to the General, Hermitage, Garden, or Education Fund. For Conservation Fund: see below).*
- I would like to make a donation or bequest to the **MICK MEADER CONSERVATION ENDOWMENT** fund.
- I would like to help at CCA work parties. Please contact me when they are scheduled.

Please make checks payable to CCA and return to: CCA, 6146 North Canyon Road, Cascabel AZ 85602