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# CURRENTS & FLOWS *Summer 2023*

## Welcome to Vermilion Central!

During this year's Verde Valley Birding and Nature Festival, Mike and I, along with our son Eamonn and his spouse Dennis, hosted birders for the Birding and Beef field trip. Birders traveled down our ranch road, spotting grassland birds on the way, before arriving at our compound, Rancho Tres Brisas. This year it was Vermilion Central. We had more vermilion flycatchers (VFC for short) than any other year since I've lived here. There were four nesting pairs in the compound area alone. The birding group reported seeing at least ten more pairs of VFC as they explored the Tres Brisas property, which includes about ¼ mile of Verde River frontage.

Vermilion flycatcher males are small brightly colored vermilion and black birds that sit prominently on a branch looking for flies. The female is gray black with some pink on her underside. In Oaxacan lore they are called the buen viaje bird. Literally the "good travel bird." They live from the USA's southwest deserts down to central Argentina. Their Latin name means "firehead."

The Verde is a ribbon of green in Central Arizona, providing habitat for VFCs and other creatures that depend on flowing water. The birders for the VVBNF saw over 50 species of birds at our property. From a majestic redtail hawk, to an osprey, countless yellow warblers, and more, it was a great day for birds at Tres Brisas.



VFCs and other river denizens will only live if our Verde River is healthy and flowing. Your generous gift to Friends of the Verde River will ensure our river continues to be healthy and flowing.



Jeni O'Callaghan  
 President of the Board



## Help Bessie Retire

Have you ever been trying to get somewhere, and you know you will make it - but you're not close enough to stop and take a break because you absolutely MUST get there? That's Bessie. You know Bessie. She is our beloved, beleaguered, somewhat undependable F150, responsible for getting our work crews out to the river. She hauls people, carries away invasive plants, sometimes pulls a chipper. She has worked with us up and down the river for years and she isn't quite falling apart, but some days she just can't get going. Friends needs to let Bessie lead a less demanding life and have someone younger - we have Birdie in mind - step into her tires.



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# River Otter Spotters

We've enjoyed seeing river otters many times while out hiking by the Verde or one of its tributaries. It's always a delight! Jon Fuller, in his book *Verde River Elegy*, said it was a rare day that he didn't see otters while he was boating on his journey from the Verde's headwaters in Chino Valley to Horseshoe Reservoir.

But we don't know a whole lot about the river otters that live here. To learn more, we are teaming up with The River Otter Ecology Project in northern California to start a new community science project. It is called Otter Spotter and will help us to learn more about river otters in Arizona.

## WHAT IS OTTER SPOTTER?

When you see river otters, snap a photo, if you can, and record as much information as you know – the time and date, location, any behaviors you see, and so on. Otter Spotter uses a website called FieldScope so that the data can be available for scientists to use in understanding river otter ecology. By recording your sightings of otters in Otter Spotter, we'll expand our knowledge of river otters – where they are, if their population is growing or declining, and common behaviors.



**Get Fieldscope and become an Otter Spotter!**



In May we held two webinars to teach you how to become an Otter Spotter. Recordings are available and you can join the otter spotter project on FieldScope.

With your help we can ensure that otters will continue to grace the banks and waterways of the Verde River for future generations to enjoy.



## Help Bessie Retire continued...



About Bessie's destination -- we will make it. You helped us get started with Arizona Gives Day. We stand at \$25,336. Our destination total is another \$15,664. So we can't take a break yet. We have to keep going. You can make a gift online at [Donate - Friends of the Verde River](https://www.donate-friends.org/). Then let Katherine know your gift is for Bessie with a quick email to [katherines@verderiver.org](mailto:katherines@verderiver.org). Or send a check and put Bessie in the memo section. But please help us get Bessie to her destination. We promise to invite you to the welcome party for Birdie!



**Donate today at [verderiver.org/riverhero](https://verderiver.org/riverhero)**



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# River Friendly Highlight- **MINGUS UNION**

This spring, Friends of the Verde River partnered with Mingus Union High School to solve some problems with flooding and erosion at the corner of Camino Real and Fir St in Cottonwood. While we control the flooding problem, we can also put some water back into the ground. Rain runoff from the Mingus Union parking lot regularly flooded the road, carrying sediment and pollution into the river. The erosion and flooding at this intersection was listed as the #5 priority on the City of Cottonwood’s Drainage Master Plan.

Now you see a decorative gabion wall and a series of infiltration trenches. They will slow down the water and allow it to sink into the ground. The system has already been tested and passed during an early May storm! The changes reduce erosion, keep sediment and pollution out of the river, and increase groundwater recharge.

The project is designed to infiltrate about 2 million gallons of water per year, on average. This is the equivalent of the water use of as many as 25 homes in the Verde Valley! We are grateful to all our partners: The Nature Conservancy, City of Cottonwood, Yavapai County Flood Control District, Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust, and Mingus Union High School. The project was designed by Shephard & Wesnitzer, Inc, (SWI Engineering) and constructed by Longfellow Excavation, LLC.

**An Estimated  
2 Million Gallons of Water  
Will be Infiltrated per Year**  
*This would offset the water footprint for as many as 25 homes!*



# FRIENDS' TEAM CHANGES



**Anne Buzzard**

*Board Member*

Anne Buzzard joined the board in March. She lives in the Verde Valley and Flagstaff, having retired not long ago from Northern Arizona University. Anne also serves on the Yavapai County Bicycle Advisory Committee. Together with her husband Mark, she enjoys recreational activities in the Verde Valley, often accompanied by their five granddaughters.



**Anna May Cory**

*Board Member*

Anna May Cory joined the board in May. She brings a wealth of experience in entrepreneurship, community engagement, and real estate to her board service. In addition to her role on the Friends' Board, she serves as an ambassador for the Greater Cottonwood Chamber of Commerce, actively advocating for local businesses and fostering economic growth. Anna May currently owns and operates The Pines Inn and Suites in Cottonwood.



**Grace Filson**

*Fundraising Outreach Coordinator*

Grace joined our staff in March. She is a dedicated Arizona local, with deep passion for working with others and making a positive impact on her community. As a Fundraising Outreach Coordinator, Grace plays a vital role in organizing and managing events for Friends of the Verde River, contributing to the organization's mission of preserving and protecting this invaluable natural resource.



## ***A personal note from Nancy Steele, your executive director.***

This month, Friends announced that I will be retiring at the end of 2023. I will have served you and the Verde River for six years. In my time here, we've held two State of the Verde River conferences, and launched the Verde Report Card and our River Friendly Living program. We've restored habitat, saved water, and educated kids and adults about our rivers. And through most of that time, we were dealing with the effects of a global pandemic.

I will miss running this fine organization, but I won't be leaving the Verde Valley. I am looking forward to relaxing and getting in more travel, writing, hiking, and volunteering in 2024. Let's keep the Verde River flowing, together!

Nancy

*< New board member Anna May Cory, left, with Nancy Steele, right*