

Wilderness First Aid Classes to be Offered at North Mountain Visitor Center

By Kerry Ecker

Accidents happen. People get hurt, sick, or lost. Would you know what to do?

By learning a few basic skills, you can make the difference between a good outcome and a bad one -- and maybe even save a life.

Central Arizona Mountain Rescue Association (CAMRA) is offering the two-day Wilderness First Aid (WFA) certification course on March 26 & 27, and again on May 14 & 15. These classes will be held at the North Mountain Visitor Center, at 12950 North 7th Street in Phoenix.

The WFA is the perfect course for the outdoor enthusiast or trip leader who wants a basic level of first aid training for short trips with family, friends, and outdoor groups.

The WFA is 16 hours long (two days) and focuses on the basic skills

HELP PMPC ATTEND CITY of PHOENIX MEETINGS

The Hillside Ordinance and the Edge Guidelines are part of the Zoning Ordinance for the City of Phoenix. Both zoning issues are important to PMPC because they help to provide standards for development on lands adjacent to the Preserves.

If you are interested in serving on the Development Advisory Board please contact PMPC board for possible recommendation to the board, as it is clear that the Preserves need a positive force to speak for them at these hearings.

For more details read Susanne Rothwells report under "Hot Issues" on: www.phoenixmountains.org

of: Response and Assessment, Musculoskeletal Injuries, Environmental Emergencies, Survival Skills, Soft Tissue Injuries, and Medical Emergencies. Tuition is \$155. You will receive a WFA certification, which is good for two years. To register, visit mountain-rescue.org/solo. If you have questions, please write to: wildernessmedicine@cox.net, or call Mike Englund at (623) 692-1908.

**NEW LOCATION
for
PMPC BOARD
MEETINGS**

**First Monday
of Month**

7:00 PM

**NORTH MOUNTAIN
VISITOR CENTER**

LOOKOUT

Phoenix Mountains Preservation Council, Inc.
P.O. Box 26121
Phoenix, Arizona 85068-6121

Executive Board

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Craig Weaver, *Editor*

Phoenix Mountains Preservation Council is dedicated to protecting our Phoenix Mountains Preserves.

www.phoenixmountains.org

WATCH FOR MORE UPCOMING DETAILS AT:
www.phoenixmountains.org

SATURDAY MORNING - APRIL 2, 2011

PLAN ON ATTENDING GRAND REOPENING OF NORTH MOUNTAIN VISITOR CENTER



Phoenix Mountains Preservation Council, Inc.
P.O. Box 26121, Phoenix, AZ 85068-6121

TO:



LOOKOUT

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www.phoenixmountains.org

North Mountain Visitor Center Open!

By Karen LaFrance & Susanne Rothwell

Partners including Save Our Mountains Foundation (SOMF a 501c3), Phoenix Mountains Preservation Council (PMPC), Central Arizona Mountain Rescue Association (CAMRA), and Arizona Parks and Recreation Association (APRA) reopened the North Mountain Visitor Center (NMVC) on January 1, 2011. The 10,000 square foot facility, on 7th Street south of Thunderbird, was shuttered in April of 2010 due to Phoenix City budget shortfalls.

Save Our Mountains Foundation is the managing organization for the center. It, (SOMF), has signed the Operating Agreement with the City of Phoenix for a five year term with the three collaborating organizations and was the only response to the Parks Department's request for proposals for a non-profit partner to operate the visitor center.

Folks from nearby neighborhoods, far off suburbs, and even other countries have been enthusiastic since the North Mountain Visitor Center opened. About 150 people have stopped by each Saturday and over 20 on weekdays.

The NMVC is now open to the public Monday through Thursday and Saturday 8:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. As soon as there are enough volunteers signed up for weekends, the facility will open on Friday and Sunday also.

The Dottie Gilbert Library will be re-constituted at NMVC in the Resource Room on February 9, 2011, thanks to the efforts of Maxine Lakin, Terry Horne, SOMF President, a volunteer group of gardeners and city staff. Now a home for its mail and its meeting the PMPC office is inside the NMVC and alongside offices for SOMF and the Arizona Parks and Recreation Association. Soon all of the PMPC archives and "stuff" will be brought into the center's storage areas.

The North Mountain Visitor Center Grand Reopening is scheduled for April 2, 2011 in conjunction with PMPC's Annual Spring Trek. The center's gift shop is planned to be up and running by that date.

Reopening North Mountain Visitor Center has been, and will continue to be, a seriously major, and fitting, effort by PMPC and partner groups, all of whom share the preservation and outdoor values inherent in this project. We urge all PMPC members and friends to come by the facility and take a look. The visibility this project offers PMPC is a magnificent opportunity to give back to the Preserve that we all enjoy so much and grow at the same time.

Phoenix Mountains Preservation Council and its partners are looking for volunteers and funding help, and will gladly speak to any would-be volunteers or donors. Jan Dunkelberg is helping us to coordinate and recruit volunteers. If you hear of anyone interested, however, ask them to contact Karen LaFrance of Save Our Mountains Foundation at klaf@cox.net or telephone 602-809-3360.



BATTLE on BUFFELGRASS CONTINUES to SAVE NATIVE VEGETATION in the PRESERVES

By Scott Frische

In recent decades several non-native plants have established themselves in the Sonoran Desert.

These plants have been intentionally introduced as landscape specimens and livestock forage or accidentally spread as weed seed hitchhiking on shipments of livestock or hay.

One introduced plant that is especially virulent is Buffelgrass, (*Pennisetum ciliare*).

Buffelgrass is a tough, dryland grass from Africa and Asia. It was introduced into the Sonoran Desert of Arizona in the 1930s as a forage grass for cattle. Trials and experimental plots of Buffelgrass were established in Tucson and Aguila, Arizona in the 1930's, through the 1950's.

Even though many of these trials were deemed to be failures the grass later appeared in wild areas as colonies of volunteers. It has since continued to move into new portions of the Sonoran Desert.

Currently Buffelgrass has become established in much of the Sonoran Desert of Mexico and the USA, including portions of the Phoenix Mountains Preserve. This process of colonization is ongoing.

The reason Buffelgrass is detrimental to the Sonoran Desert landscape is twofold. First it competes directly with native vegetation for space, nutrients and scant resources like soil moisture.

More importantly it provides sufficient fuel for desert fires to burn hotter and longer than would be normal with the native vegetation. Fire plays an important role in the vegetative makeup of many plant communities.

The vegetation of the Chaparral lands of Arizona and the Pacific Coast of Southern California is

influenced in part by the periodic occurrence of fire. Plants in these communities burn with some degree of regularity. While the plants burn readily the crowns and roots of many species survive the fire and resprout in the ensuing months. The seeds of some of these plants actually germinate better after a burn because chemicals created in smoke break the seed's dormancy.

The Sonoran Desert is not "designed to burn" like Chaparral. Naturally occurring fires in the Sonoran Desert are rare and they tend to be shorter lived and less intense due to sparse and patchy accumulations of fuel. These fires burn in more of a mosaic pattern rather than the "clean sweep" and complete burn of a well fueled Chaparral fire.

Many desert plants are spared the killing effect of fire due to this relatively "cool burn". When the fuel accumulations supplied by Buffelgrass magnify the intensity of a desert fire the recruitment of new generations of plants like Saguaro, barrel cactus, Ocotillo and many other shrubs and succulents is severely hampered.

Meanwhile the grass recovers its numbers and density relatively quickly after a fire. So the desert can become ready to burn again long before the numbers of smaller and slower growing native plants can establish and mature to

the point of being able to survive fire.

After just a few fires of this type, in a given area, plant makeup can be changed dramatically for the long term. Slopes that used to contain open forests of cacti, Creosote bush and bursage can become nearly pure stands of the

exotic Buffelgrass. Once this has occurred a reversion to the more diverse native landscape is unlikely without the intervention of people going about the business of weed control. This is usually expensive, laborious and time consuming.

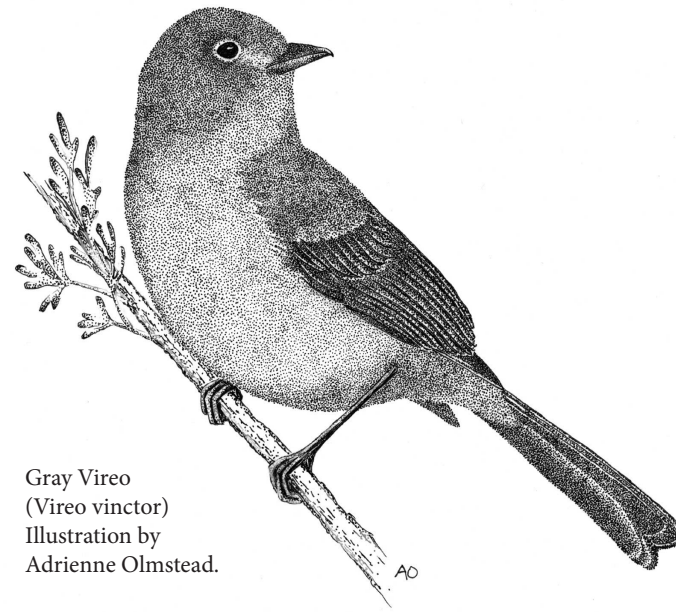
Manually digging established grass with follow up treatments of herbicides on the regrowth and new seedling populations seem to be the most effective methods of control to date. Vigilance and persistence are necessary in the control and eradication of most pest species.

Buffelgrass is now established in and around the Phoenix Mountains Preserve. It has the potential to make the Preserve a simpler, less unique and less functional landscape. While reductions in the numbers of Buffelgrass may be difficult, to allow this weed to continue its encroachment into new parts of the desert will likely cause further fire and vegetation management problems for those charged with protecting our preserves and natural spaces.

The Phoenix Weedwackers started their work in December of 2006 at Piestewa Peak.

With an average of 20 volunteers a month they have made significant progress in removing invasive Buffelgrass around the trailheads and entrance to Piestewa Peak.

To learn more or to volunteer visit Weedwackers at: www.phoenixweedwackers.com



Gray Vireo
(*Vireo vicinior*)
Illustration by
Adrienne Olmstead.

A BIRD IN THE BUSH

By Tice Supplee

Audubon Arizona Director of Bird Conservation

South Mountain Preserve is a jewel in the Phoenix Mountains Preserve system. Most of us do not stop to ponder the differences in the plants and animals over what seems a short distance from the Sonoran Preserve and North Mountains Preserve to South Mountain. Scientists have long appreciated the presence of plants and animals at South Mountain that are more typically associated with Sonora, Mexico and the southwest desert mountains of Arizona.

The Bush: Elephant Tree (*Bursaria microphyllum*), is a true desert species, occurring in western Sonora and almost all of Baja California with a few marginal populations in south-central Arizona (reaching northern limits at South Mountain and in the Sierra Estrella and White Tank Mountains, and no where else in Maricopa County). It is the only member of the family that is not considered a tropical species, but like the rest of the family remains sensitive to cold temperatures.

Elephant trees are shrubs or small trees up to 25 feet tall, most Arizona specimens are shrub size and do not develop the large contorted and swelled trunks that give it the common name of Elephant Tree. The main trunk is covered with whitish sheets of thin, peeling bark that transmits sunlight to chlorophyll-bearing tissue in the stems, which can thus conduct photosynthesis when the plant is leafless. The maroon to reddish brown stems and the finely divided, shiny green leaves are highly aromatic and weep a transparent resin. While the aromatic sap smells pleasant to humans, it tastes foul and functions as an herbivore deterrent. The sap is under pressure; when a leaf is broken, a thin stream of sap spurts out an inch or so. This "squirt-in-the-eye" defense is apparently effective, since the elephant tree's foliage is nearly always intact. The sap is used in a variety of herbal medicines, including treatments for stingray wounds, lice, cuts, and gonorrhea. The sap from old world relatives is well known as frankin-

cense and myrrh. The flowers open around the time of the summer solstice (the hottest, driest time of the year, when almost nothing else is blooming), and are tiny and inconspicuous. The bitter fruit stimulates salivation and the Seri sometimes chew it to quench thirst.

The Bird: Gray vireo (*Vireo vicinior*). is an Audubon Society bird of conservation concern that breeds in the pinyon pine and juniper woodlands in the southwest. Arizona supports a significant percentage of the breeding population. The gray vireo has a limited winter range that matches almost perfectly the distribution of elephant trees (*Bursaria microphylla*). The primary winter range for gray vireo is in the lowlands of Sonora, Mexico as well as in southern Baja California, and southwest-ern Arizona.

The fruit of *Bursaria microphylla* ripen in the winter and are known to be eaten by only two species of birds, one of which is the gray vireo (*Vireo vicinior*). Gray vireo is unusual among migratory birds because the species shifts from a summer diet of insects to become primarily frugivorous (fruit eating) in the winter. Because individual vireos are territorial, maintaining an area through the winter of approximately two acres. Individual birds will return to the same winter territory for successive years. The vireos' frugivorous diet consists almost entirely of fruit from *B. microphylla* and wintering gray vireo are invariably found where there are elephant trees. A possible mutualistic relationship between gray vireos and *B. microphylla* may explain the high degree of overlap between the winter range of the bird and the geographic distribution of the plant.

South Mountain: Elephant tree specimens are documented at the ASU herbarium throughout South Mountain. The tree is not common and tends to occur on rocky slopes and in canyons that includes the ridges where the proposed South Mountain Freeway (Route 202) would traverse. The presence of elephant tree and wintering gray vireo on South Mountain represent a unique ecological relationship found only in this Phoenix Mountain Preserve. Protection of elephant tree populations within South Mountain should be a priority and further study of these trees and the association with wintering gray vireo encouraged.

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WATCH FOR UPCOMING DECISION BY GILA RIVER INDIAN COMMUNITY REGARDING PROTECTION OF SOUTH MOUNTAIN AND 202 FREEWAY ALIGNMENT.