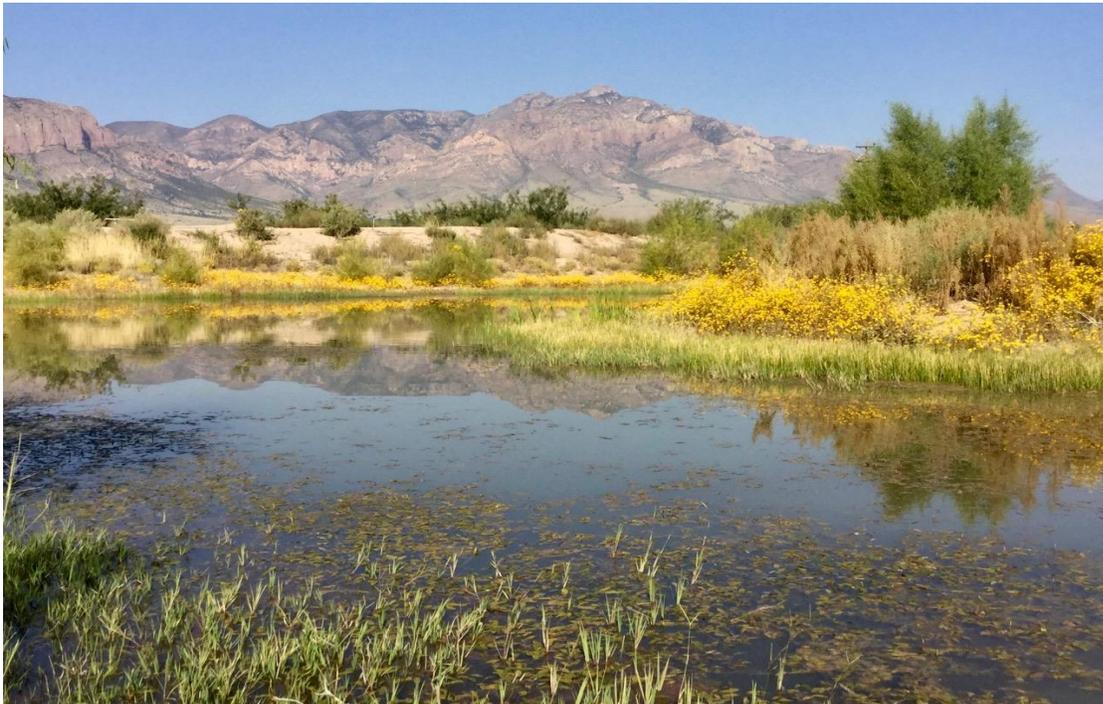


WILLOW TANK REPORT

Rene Donaldson and Alan Craig

Purpose

Willow Tank is one of the very few reliable sources of water for birds and critters on the east side of the Chiricahua Mountains and has also been used by the Forest Service in controlling fires. It is located in Arizona, west on Sulphur Canyon Road off of State Line Road south of Rodeo, New Mexico, and is managed by FOCCC on property owned by Larry Rivers.



Year In Review

The year began with record levels of water in the tank after a partially dry 2019 when it was drained (2018) to eliminate the non-native predator bullfrogs (see FOCCC website <http://www.friendsofcavecreekcanyon.com/projects/willow-tank/>). At the same time, the Tank was reconfigured to provide some deeper water for diving ducks and accommodate the Forest Service's helicopter-transported water bucket used in fighting fires and a larger island for nesting birds including ducks. Even though the water level was high this year throughout the spring, bird numbers and species remained low through the first six months. Perhaps having just been pumped from below ground, the water still had very little aquatic vegetation or invertebrates to attract birds and other critters? Or perhaps the current severe drought caused birds to starve or to go elsewhere?

As of mid-November, birders had reported on eBird checklists, 157 species of birds at Willow Tank during the year. In addition to the frequently seen Gambel's and Scaled Quail, American Coots, Swainson's Hawks, Killdeer, Greater Roadrunners, Lesser Nighthawks, Vermilion Flycatchers, Common and Chihuahuan Ravens, Cactus Wrens, Curve-billed Thrashers, Black-throated Sparrows, Blue Grosbeaks and Red-winged Blackbirds were such goodies as Wood Duck and 10 other species of ducks, Pied-billed Grebes, a fly by Roseate Spoonbill, White-faced Ibis, Golden Eagle, Virginia Rail, Soras, 7 species of shorebirds, Painted Bunting, huge numbers of Lark Buntings, and 12 species of warblers, including Lucy's, and Northern Waterthrush.

Rain

With two storms in March and September, the Tank received over 3.4 inches of rain, a record amount since we started to record it. There were botanically insignificant amounts in July.



Current Projects

In October we transplanted horsetail milkweed (*Asclepias subverticillata*) from the Sulphur Canyon roadside opposite Willow Tank. This year's heavy rainfall came at the right time to produce many roadside plants, and we were able to transplant before the mowers arrived. The plants joined three already planted in September 2019, a donation from Narca Moore-Craig.

A Lucy's Warbler nest box was installed on the large mulberry tree. The unusual nest box design was developed recently, and tested with great success, as a Tucson Audubon project.

Problems

Bullfrogs. Despite our best efforts (and with AZ Game and Fish and SWRS support) bullfrogs were first noticed in the Tank in June. Geoff Bender (SWRS) was notified and made several trips to eliminate them. There are still a small number in the Tank and we hope the Great Blue Herons are enjoying them.

Domestic Fowl. Earlier in the year there were four domestic ducks in the Tank that posed a threat to native waterfowl as far as virus transmission is concerned. They are no longer enjoying our largesse.

Agricultural Pump. While records are unavailable for Willow Tank, the summer was surely one of the hottest on record with the result that our solar pump could not keep up with the rate of evaporation. Even in a normal, year, it is challenged to do so. In the past we have used an agricultural pump owned by Larry Rivers to top the Tank off when the water level is low. When we attempted to do so this summer, we discovered a problem with the 2-year-old pump. This begs the question whether or not to replace it at great expense or to increase the number of solar panels to power a new larger solar pump that FOCCC will own. The two alternatives are being researched at present.

Goals

Host Work Day

Replace pump (see above)

Install Burrowing Owl nest "boxes"

Plant weeping willow (namesake of Tank) to replace a young one that didn't make it over the summer

Plant mulberry

Keep bullfrogs to a minimum

When water is available, keep shallow water on all exterior sides of Willow Tank if Geoff Bender and AZ Game and Fish agree.

Thumbs Up

To visitors who have taken the time to list species in our logbook: Peg Abbott, John Barthelme, Dave Jasper, Reed Peters, Cathie Sandell. And we give kudos to our regular ebird listers Dawn Zappone, Cathie Sandell, Peg Abbott, John Barthelme, Rick Taylor, John Yerger, Debra Davison and many others who have followed suit. We thank you all.

Photo Captions

Fall w/reflections: Fall color

Rick and Joan working: Joan and Rick Schneider at work

Horsetail milkweeds: Newly transplanted horsetail milkweeds

Lucy Warbler nesting box

