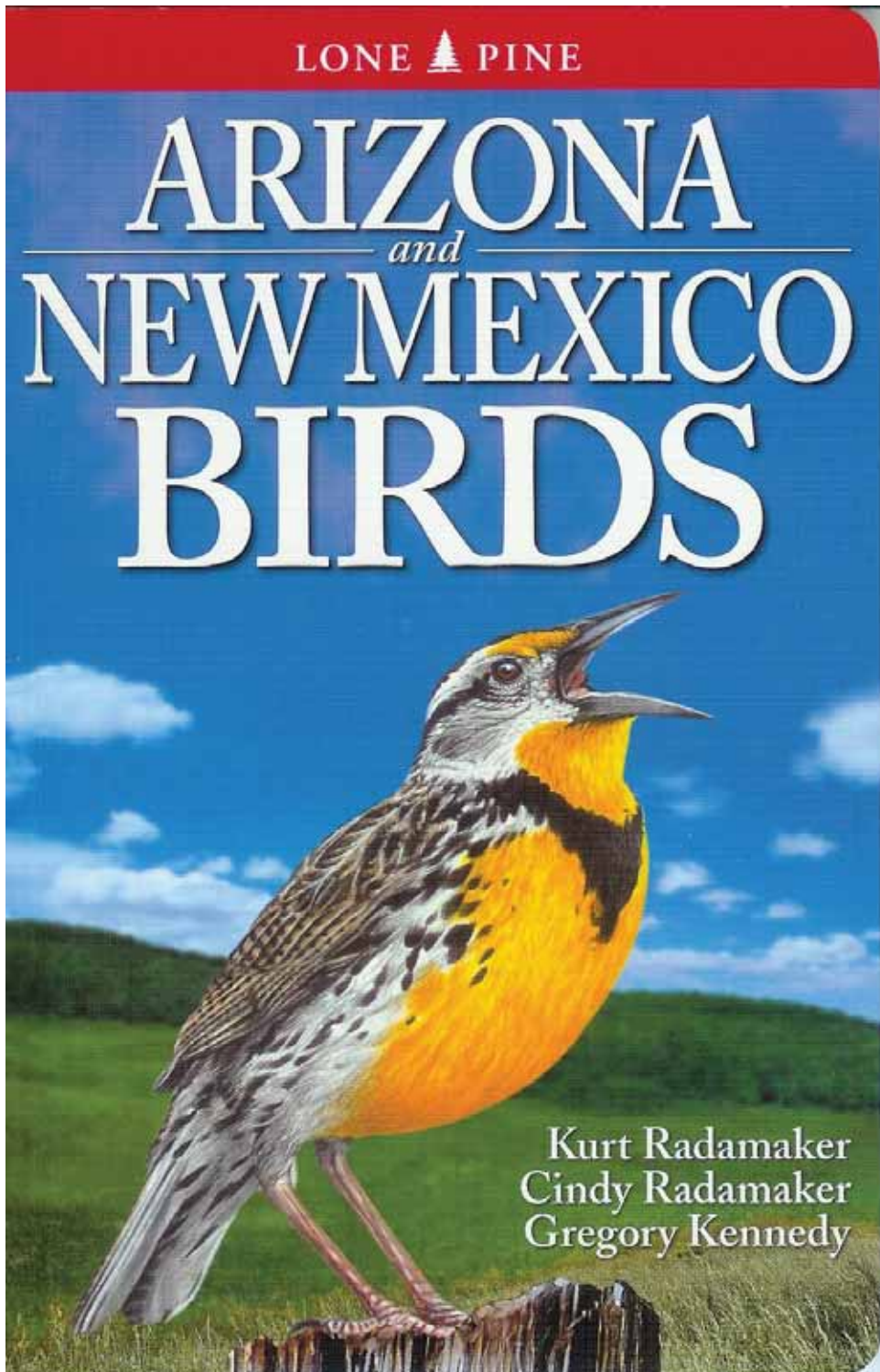


Sharing a passion for birding



Kurt and Cindy Radamaker will be signing copies of their birding book July 15 at the Boyce Thompson Arboretum.

Fountain Hills couple collaborate on birding book

Kurt and Cindy Radamaker are no novice birders.

If a bird came to Arizona that was never recorded here, Kurt would know instantly if he saw one.

Birding is an obsession for the Radamakers.

While Kurt works as a computer programmer, and Cindy director of human resources for Westin Kierland, looking for birds is where they long to be, adding new sightings to their list.

"It's (birding) actually very competitive believe it or not," says Kurt. "It's done in fun. We don't trip each other on our way out to see a bird."

Among their many birding activities, the two have collaborated on scientific articles, led birding walks and have recorded first sightings for birds in Mexico.

Now, the Fountain Hills couple is recording another first - a book together.

Arizona and New Mexico Birds was recently published by Lone Pine.

Sunday, July 15, they will sign copies of the book for novice birders at the Boyce Thompson Arboretum.

"It was fun to collaborate with Cindy on it," says Kurt.

The two had to whittle down their vast knowledge of birding to arrive at some of the more common species of birds for the book.

Cindy says that was the hardest part of putting the book together.

In Arizona alone, 540 species have been recorded, about 350 of them occur regularly, says Kurt.

The book groups and color codes 145 species of birds to allow for quick identification by novice birders.

The book also has a glossary of terms, a checklist in the back for people to start their own "life list," descriptions and pictures of each bird as well as a map of the area they can be found in various times of year.

The book is of the more common birds, says Cindy.

They are birds people will be able to see more

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regularly so beginning birders can be encouraged and stay enthusiastic about finding more and get hooked like the Radamakers.

Early Birding

Kurt's love of birding began at the age of 8. He remembers though when the obsession occurred.

In grade school, fourth or fifth grade, Radamaker had a book report to do on an animal of his choosing.

He went to the school library and checked out one on spiders and another on birds.

The bird book was a field guide with a check list in the back.

He remembers seeing the checklist and being captivated by it, wanting to see all the birds on the list.

He got his binoculars and walked around the neighborhood, the book in hand, checking off which ones he saw.

"It's very gratifying to me to check a bird off the list," he says.

At age 15 Radamaker completed Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology's seminars in Ornithology.

And in the early 1990s he taught ornithology for the University of La Verne in southern California where he met his wife.

While no one in Kurt's family was really interested in birding, Cindy was first introduced to bird watching by her grandparents.

Raised in a small town in Trinity County, Calif., Cindy's grandparents lived on 15 acres.

Her grandfather recorded everything, she said, from the first time the wood ducks

came back from winter to when the salmon would run.

Cindy's passion for birding; however, started when she registered for an ornithology class that fulfilled her biology requirements at college.

She had gone back to school to get her teaching credentials.

Three or four months after finishing the class she ran into her teacher.

The two started dating and a few years later they were married.

"Since Kurt and I first started dating, this (birding) is pretty much a consuming passion of our lives," says Cindy.

Chasing, Life List

Like many birders, the consuming passion includes the Life-List.

It's the list of birds the serious bird watcher compiles of sightings.

"A lot of bird watchers are very obsessed with the list and being able to see everything," says Kurt.

Part of the list is not just seeing rare birds, but birds that are rare to an area.

Often times a bird might be common somewhere else, but when it shows up in Arizona it's rare.

And birders are a well-linked group.

If a bird rare to Arizona is discovered, the next day, says Kurt, there will be 50 or 60 birders from around the state at the site to get a glimpse.

In addition to working on scientific articles, Radamaker is the webmaster for www.azfo.org and he and Cindy are also on the board for the Arizona Field Ornithologists, an organization of birders and ornithologists "dedicated to increasing the knowledge of the identification, status, and distribution of Arizona's birdlife."

Kurt also has several websites of his own dedicated to birding.

For dedicated birders, the chase is another exciting aspect.

Some end with a rare sighting, others provide a long-ride home.

Kurt has left at midnight after hearing about a rare sighting, driving all night.

A crowd had gathered around and people were pointing and gesturing where the bird was located.

"The bird picked up and left just as we were walking out there to see it," he said. "I never did see the bird, just people pointing and frantic

telling us it was flying away. "When you miss something like that and drive all those miles, the ride home is a weary one."

In one of their more recent chases Kurt and Cindy shared the joy of seeing a Yellow-browed Warbler.

After flying to Mexico and then renting a car, they drove to see the bird.

They looked for five hours, but didn't see it.

After looking in other places they returned to where it was originally sighted and an hour later saw the bird, photographed it and recorded the voice.

It was a first-record for the Yellow-browed Warbler in Mexico. Usually the bird occurs in Asia and Europe. There have only been a few records in the high Arctic region of the states.

"One of those things that's once in a lifetime," says Kurt.

He ran into a friend and told him of the bird, but the next day it was gone.

And when the subject has wings, that's the way birding goes.

Join Fountain Hills authors Kurt and Cindy Radamaker for a guided bird walk Sunday, July 15, starting at 6:30 a.m.

Kurt and Cindy will also be available after the walk to sign copies of their new Arizona and New Mexico bird field guide.



Cindy and Kurt Radamaker photographing a Trogon in Madera Canyon south of Tucson.