



ROADRUNNER RAMBLINGS

MESILLA VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY

<https://www.mvasaudubon.org/> Vol. 46, Spring 2024 (February, March, April)

Dear MVAS members and friends:

Welcome to 2024, a new year with some new names on the MVAS board, along with a bit of shuffling of positions as I move from secretary to president. First, I would like to offer my deep gratitude to our president of four years, Elaine Stachera Simon. Elaine's energy, drive, and charisma really helped our chapter flourish, and it is with trepidation that I take on her role. Fortunately, she assures me that while she is no longer president or on the board, she is available as a resource. Phew! So, thank you, Elaine, for all you've done!

Mark Ryan served as vice-president of MVAS, and he will also be missed. In fact, nobody has yet filled his shoes (let me know if you're interested in serving in this role!). Mark has wide-ranging knowledge and environmental interests, and we know that he will continue to serve the birding world and beyond with his other projects.

Another hard-working board member we are losing is Trish Cutler, who has chaired our conservation committee. Trish's knowledge helped guide important endeavors such as researching lighting for the lights out project as well as spearheading what became something that will be valuable to many for years, a booklet specific to our area on creating backyard habitats for birds. Although Trish wasn't the only one who worked on the project, without her it wouldn't have happened, so I'll never pick it up without thinking of her!

We have two new board members to welcome, Julia Osgood, who has served on the board in another Audubon chapter, as our new secretary and Whitney Watson, an NMSU graduate student. Thank you for stepping up to be part of our board, ladies!

As your new president, I have some wonderings! I wonder how else we may serve our members, for example. We offer regular bird walks at a variety of locations plus monthly meetings with fascinating presentations. What else might be of interest to you as someone who cares about birds and the environment? One of my goals this year is to get back into nature journaling and to read more books about nature, birds, and the environment. So, I wonder if anyone else is interested in those topics? Would there be a few folks interested in going out nature journaling together from time to time or getting together to discuss books? In addition, Julia, who was a master naturalist in Texas, has me fascinated with the idea of trying to create a similar program for our area. Or is there something else that would relate to our mission that is of interest to you? I'd love to hear about it or if you'd be interested in nature journaling, helping develop a master naturalist program, or forming a nature-focused book group. You can email me at our club address, mesillavalleyaudubon@gmail.com.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve you as president of MVAS. I'll work on filling those shoes Elaine left for me!

Cheryl Fallstead

MVAS Dues Hawk asks, have you paid your MVAS dues yet?



Dues were due in January. You can go to the MVAS website and pay today.

By collecting annual fees at this time, the board will have a clearer idea of our financial status for the upcoming year, which helps with planning for the year ahead.

mvasaudubon.org/join

Thank you!

Annual Christmas Bird Count

In the 1800s, there was a tradition that hunters would participate in what was called "side hunt." The hunters would see how many species they could shoot during the holiday season. Towards the end of the 1800s, scientists were concerned about the declining bird populations and so the first Christmas Bird Count (CBC) began in 1900 as an alternative.

Count circles were formed and each circle was 15 miles in diameter. The center was selected to include as many birding hot spots as possible inside the circle. Each group recorded as many birds as possible within their circle in one day. Each count takes place from December 14 to January 5 each year. The Audubon Society hosts the CBCs.

LAS CRUCES CBC SUMMARY FOR
DECEMBER 16, 2023 COUNT



WEATHER: 62 degrees F high, 32 degrees F low, slight wind

PARTICIPANTS: 50 (13 teams)

TOTAL BIRD COUNT: 27,755 (slightly lower than average for count)

Photo taken by Kevin Suter

TOTAL SPECIES COUNT: 117 (104 will be reported, don't report gen. sp. or sub-sp.)

COUNT WEEK BIRDS: American Goldfinch (1) (not seen during count day)

UNUSUAL/RARE SPECIES: 6

Painted Bunting (1) (seen in South Valley)

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (5) (seen in North Valley West, Mid-Valley, and Old Refuge)

Ruddy Ground-Dove (1) (seen at feeder in Mid-Valley)

Virginia Rail (1) (seen in Mid-Valley)

Vermilion Flycatcher (1) (seen in Mid-Valley)

Dusky Flycatcher (1) (seen in Mid-Valley)

1 Hybird Yellow-bellied Sapsucker seen in High Range

HIGH COUNTS: 5 (includes 3 new record highs – Verdin, Rock Pigeon, Mallard)

LOW COUNTS: 15 (includes 2 new record lows – Oregon Dark-eyed Junco, Red Crossbill and noting low counts for Woodhouse's Scrub-jay, Chihuahuan Raven, Eastern Bluebird, American Pip-it)

SPARROW COUNT: 1,151 (not including towhees, Dark-eyed Juncos, and House Sparrows) (down quite a bit from average sparrow count, possibly 4th lowest in 14 years)

WHITE-WINGED DOVES: 4,781 (much lower than last 10 years)

EURASIAN-COLLARED DOVES: 478 (lower than last 10 years)

AMERICAN CROWS: 6,184 (somewhat above last 10 years)

NOTEWORTHY ITEMS: the following species typically reported on the Las Cruces CBC were not observed/reported by any team this year: Horned Lark, Western Bluebird, Cedar Waxwing, Vesper Sparrow, Lark Bunting, Brown-headed Cowbird, and Pine Siskin

Many thanks to everyone who participated in this year's Las Cruces CBC

All of your hard work and time spent as citizen scientists is very much appreciated !

Wayne Treers & Mark Pendleton

The Morning Chorus

In his environmental classic, *A Sand County Alamanac*¹, Aldo Leopold documents the morning bird chorus in his sublime style. In the chapter *July* under the subheading *Great Possessions*, he introduces us to his 120 acres in Sand County, Wisconsin. Best to let his own prose tell the story.



“One hundred and twenty acres, according to the County Clerk, is the extent of my worldly domain...

Like other great landowners, I have tenants. They are negligent about rents, but very punctilious about tenures. Indeed, at daybreak from April to July they proclaim their boundaries to each other, and so acknowledge, at least by inference, their fiefdom to me.

This daily ceremony, contrary to what you might suppose, begins with the utmost decorum. Who originally laid down its protocols I do know. At 3:30 a.m., [*Ryan: the daylight comes early in Wisconsin in the summer!*] with such dignity as I can muster of a July morning, I step from my cabin door, bearing in either hand my emblems of sovereignty, a coffee pot and a notebook....

I get out my watch, pour coffee, and lay notebook on knee. This is the cue for the proclamations to begin.

At 3:35 the nearest field sparrow avows, in clear tenor chant, that he holds the Jack-pine copse north to the riverbank, and south to the old wagon track. One by one the other field sparrows...recite their respective holdings.

Before the field sparrows have quite gone the rounds, the robin...warbles loudly his claim...

The robin’s insistent caroling awakens the oriole... My watch says 3:50. The indigo bunting...asserts title to the dead oak limb. He does not claim, but I think implies the right to out-blue all bluebirds...

Next the wren...explodes into song. Half a dozen other wrens give voice, now all is bedlam. Grosbeaks, thrashers, yellow warblers, bluebirds, vireos, towhees, cardinals – all are in it. My solemn list of performers, in their order and time of first song, hesitates, wavers, ceases, for my ear can no longer filter out priorities. Besides the pot is empty and the sun is about to rise.”

I have enjoyed documenting the morning chorus at several locations over the years. In central North Dakota I had to get up at 3:00 a.m. to catch the first singers (on moonlit nights in early June the chorus actually goes all night!).

In central Missouri I could sleep in a bit. Cardinals, Chickadees, Mockingbirds, Red-winged Blackbirds and Northern Parulas were early singers; House Wrens, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, Brown Thrashers, Catbirds, Baltimore Orioles, and Mourning Doves a bit later.

I have arisen specifically for the morning chorus only a couple of times in Las Cruces. Last June I got up about 5:00 a.m., grabbed a cup of coffee (no pot like Aldo did – the cord on my Keurig™ wouldn't reach to the back porch :) and settled in to look out over the Chihuahuan Desert. The first to sing? Black-throated Sparrow! Soon after Curve-billed Thrasher, House Finch, Mockingbird, and Gambel's Quail joined in. Finally White-winged Doves (where had they been!) Then Say's Phoebe and Brewer's Sparrow. Cactus Wrens were sleepyheads but made up for it with volume. They must have awakened the Scott's Oriole as he finally joined in. By then Black-throated Hummingbirds were visiting the feeder; Barn Swallows were hunting overhead...and the coffee was gone.

I recently learned that the first Sunday in May is International (well, maybe just the Northern Hemisphere) Dawn Chorus Day. So, on 4 May, get up well before sunrise, get a coffee (or tea, ... Bloody Mary?) get your watch out and a notebook and record the morning chorus at house. If you aren't sure of your song identification, download the MERLIN app and turn on the sound ID function – it will tell you what you are hearing! Maybe in the summer newsletter we can compile the information and enjoy the variety of musical performances across the Mesilla Valley.

¹ There are several editions of *A Sand County Almanac* I used:

Leopold, A. 1949. [1970 printing by Ballantine Books]. *A Sand County Almanac*, with essays on Conservation from Round River. Oxford University Press, Inc.

Name That Bird

Which is the White-crowned Sparrow?



answer on p11

A Tale of Two Cranes: Lessons Learned from 50 Years of the Endangered Species Act

A Book Review by Sid Webb © 2024

The author, Nathaniel Gronewold, describes his credentials as follows: "I lecture at a university. My specialties are journalism, international affairs, and environmental studies. I explore how global society tries to manage its environment and the natural resources bestowed by, either through the United Nations and its treaties and institutions or through unilateral vehicles like the Endangered Species Act." Additional information about the author is that he has travelled extensively, spending much time in Japan, where he met his wife. Although this book is much more a critique of the Endangered Species Act and the world's efforts at bird conservation than a biological report of two of the world's largest birds, let's begin with a description of North America's Whooping Crane and Asia's Red-crowned Crane.

The two beautiful white cranes are amongst the largest birds in the world. They were one species until over a million years ago. At that time some Red-crowned Cranes crossed the Bering Strait into North America where they evolved into the North American Whooping Crane, a slightly different looking species, with dramatically different behaviors. North America's Whooping Crane migrates between northern Canada, where it breeds, to the Gulf Coast, where it spends its winters. It avoids other birds and any human contact. In the 1800s there were several flocks spread out between the Southwest and Florida. About 100 years ago conservationists noted that each species was in a dangerous decline and needed attention to avoid extinction. For the Whooping Crane, there was attention to maintaining a safe breeding area in Canada and in the USA. The Aransas National Wildlife Refuge was established in southern Texas in 1937. Managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Whooping Crane is assured of a safe environment free of predators and with a continuous supply of food from the environment. No human-provided nutrition was supplied, as the consensus amongst American conservationists was that such human behavior would disrupt the instinctive migratory bird behaviors of the "Whoopers" and be a detriment to their overall survival. There have been attempts to reintroduce migratory crane populations to Florida, but they were unsuccessful. There is still a small nonmigratory flock in Louisiana. In 1941 the population count was 21 Whooping Cranes. The last count was over 800 in 2020. It is still included on the Endangered Species list.

In Japan, where the Red-crowned Crane was considered extinct after World War II before being found in a small province in the northern section of the country (Hokkaido). When last counted in the year 2000, the population has risen to approximately 1900. Two major differences between the two species are the absence of migratory behavior in the Japanese flock of Red-crowned Cranes and the much more social behavior they display. They do not shy away from humans or other animals in their living community. The human community of northern Japan readily feeds the flock during the



North America's Whooping Crane

stress of winter. It should be noted that two smaller flocks of Red-crowns live in China and Russia and they are migratory. All flocks are still included on the international endangered species list, and continue to receive governmental support in Japan, China, Russia and North Korea. In both Japan and the USA the two cranes have received extra attention from private organizations to be sure the upward trend in population continues.

America's Endangered Species Act celebrated its 50th birthday last fall, just as this book was being published. It has been a landmark law and to quote from its preamble, it is a law that addresses extinctions of plants, animals, and wildlife as a "consequence of our country's economic growth and development untempered by adequate concern and conservation." Its passage was remarkable for the widespread support by both political parties to provide the federal government with extensive laws to protect the land and environment for the purpose of maintaining our natural ecologic heritage. The law addressed interaction with states and local interests and the potential for treaties with foreign governments interested in working with us for the same goal. Since its passage there have been multiple examples of the federal government involved in issues where state support of industrial expansion confronted this law and judicial action was required to defend a species or the environment. Multiple nations used this law as a template in enacting legislation supporting their natural environment. It has led to multiple international treaties addressing specific habitat conservation to the advantage of migrating birds in the sky or fish in the oceans all over the world.

The author credits America's Endangered Species Act to the survival of the Whooping Crane and much of the book is devoted to activities related to this national legislation. He notes that a major reason for Whooper's loss of population followed loss of habitat during migration and the winter due to land being lost to urbanization and farming over the prior century. When confronted by con-

servationists, the local and state governments of Texas and other states did not support the conservationists' view in multiple confrontations that had led to lawsuits. It took laws associated with the Endangered Species Act and lawsuits initiated by conservationists to try to maintain the birds' habitat. The Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas is a Fish and Wildlife Service institution, not state run institution.

Much of the book is autobiographical and the author expresses many opinions. Throughout the book he wonders what our Whooping Crane population would be if we had allowed supplemental feeding during harsh winters, noting the success of the Japanese and discounting the concern that this might lead to a change in the bird's migratory behavior. In closing he notes that the current direction in conservation issues is leading to totally depressing statistics of loss of numbers of birds living around us and wonders how much of that is due to the lack of journalists reporting on the extent of ongoing loss and the refusal of our country to address the extent of the conservation problems confronting us. It is an interesting read and one that makes you want to do all you can to protect our birds.



Asia's Red-crowned Crane

Butterflies

by CJ Goin



We are now in the midst of winter and I suspect many MVAS members are looking forward to spring, so I thought I'd present two of the earliest spring arrivals: The Mourning Cloak and the Southwestern Orangetip. The Mourning Cloak (Left photo) may be seen as early as February. It is almost unmistakable, with rich maroon brown wings, blue submarginal spots and broad yellow borders. It's always a welcome sight signaling the end of winter is near. The Mourning Cloak it will continue throughout our area as long as warm weather lasts.

The Southwestern Orangetip (Right photo) is a beautiful butterfly. It has a short flight in our area (March - mid-April) and you're unlikely to see one after that. It is mostly limited to foothill and mountain habitats, so you're unlikely to see one in or around Las Cruces, but Aguirre Springs, Dripping Springs and Soledad Canyon all offer a good chance to see one. I hope we can all see them in the next few months and I hope we have a good birding and butterflying year.





Photo by Robert Shantz

Upcoming MVAS Events: February, March, & April 2024

Watch for updates at the MVAS website calendar & your email

February 5 (Monday) | Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park Bird Walk from 8:00—10:15. Meet in front of the visitor center. There is a \$5 use (vehicle) fee at MVBSP unless you have a state parks annual pass. Your walk leader is Danny Tipton.

February 10 (Saturday) | Sagecrest Park Bird Walk from 8:00—10:15. Sagecrest Park is at Roadrunner and Frontier. Meet at entrance on Frontier. Your walk leader is Jonathan Brooks.

February 21 (Wednesday) | Telbrook Park Bird Walk from 8-10:15. Park is at 4290 Winchester Rd. Meet at park entrance. Walk leader is Linda Miller.

February 21 (Wednesday) | Monthly Program (in person and Zoom) 6:30 - 7 p.m. meet and greet, 7:00 p.m. program TBD.

February 24 (Saturday) | Leasburg Dam State Park Bird Walk from 8-10:15. Meet at the visitor center at 8am for carpooling to the day-use picnic area on river. Your walk leader is Dylan Osterhaus. The walk goes along the Mogollon Trail for approximately one mile (flat) and based on sightings will return along the same trail or the upper road.

March 4 (Monday) | Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park Bird Walk from 8:00—10:15. Meet in front of the visitor center. There is a \$5 use (vehicle) fee at MVBSP unless you have a state parks annual pass. Your walk leader is Danny Tipton.

March 9 (Saturday) | Sagecrest Park Bird Walk from 8:00—10:15. Sagecrest Park is at Roadrunner and Frontier. Meet at entrance on Frontier. Your walk leader is Jonathan Brooks.

March 20 (Wednesday) | Tellbrook Park Bird Walk from 8-10:15. Telbrook Park is at 4290 Winchester Rd. Meet at park entrance. Walk leader is Linda Miller.

March 20 (Wednesday) | Monthly Program (in person and Zoom) 6:30 - 7p.m. meet and greet, 7p.m. program TBD.

March 23 (Saturday) | Keep Las Cruces Beautiful (for the birds) Adopt-A-Spot Cleanup 8-9 a.m. at Sagecrest Park (Roadrunner at Frontier). Every 6 weeks (or so) MVAS protects birds by keeping Sagecrest Park litter free. Litter-picking supplies provided, bring your own water, sunscreen, snacks, and gloves. Leader is Aaron Lucas.



Upcoming MVAS Events: February, March, & April 2024 (cont.)

March 30 (Saturday) | Leasburg Dam State Park bird walk 8-10:15am. Meet at the visitor center at 8am for carpooling to the day-use picnic area on river. Your walk leader is Dylan Osterhaus. The walk goes along the Mogollon Trail for approximately one mile (flat) and based on sightings will return along the same trail or the upper road.

April 1 (Monday) | Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park Bird Walk from 8:00 – 10:15. Meet in front of the visitor center. There is a \$5 use (vehicle) fee at MVBSP unless you have a state parks annual pass. Your walk leader is Danny Tipton.

April 13 (Saturday) | Sagecrest Park Bird Walk from 8:00 – 10:15. Sagecrest Park Bird Walk from 8:00 – 10:15 Sagecrest Park is at Roadrunner and Frontier. Meet at entrance on Frontier. Your walk leader is Jonathan Brooks.

April 14 (Sunday) | Sagecrest Park Clean-up from 8:00 – 9:00 Keep Las Cruces Beautiful (for the birds) Adopt-A-Spot Cleanup 8-9am at Sagecrest Park (Roadrunner at Frontier). Every 6 weeks (or so) MVAS protects birds by keeping Sagecrest Park litter free. Litter-picking supplies provided, bring your own water, sunscreen, snacks, and gloves. Leader is Aaron Lucas.

April 17 (Wednesday) | Tellbrook Park Bird Walk 8-10:15. Tellbrook Park Bird Walk from 8-10:15. Park is at 4290 Winchester Rd. Meet at park entrance. Walk leader is Linda Miller.

April 17 (Wednesday) | Monthly Program (in person and Zoom) 6:30 - 7p.m. meet and greet, 7p.m. program TBD.

April 27 (Saturday) Leasburg Dam State Park bird walk 8-10:15am. Meet at the visitor center at 8am for carpooling to the day-use picnic area on river. Your walk leader is Dylan Osterhaus. The walk goes along the Mogollon Trail for approximately one mile (flat) and based on sightings will return along the same trail or the upper road.

Butterfly walks: During summer months CJ Goin leads walks to several locations that are known to attract a butterfly population. Details will be posted on the Calendar and Events pages when butterflies are in season.

Unscheduled bird walks:

Doña Ana County has many locations that are known for their bird populations and attract many naturalists. Please see the attached file for a description and map for 10 of these spots. [**10 Birding Locations in Southern NM**](#)

For a longer list of “hotspots” and list of bird sightings, go to ebird.com ([Dona Ana, NM, US - eBird](#)).

Name That Bird

(continued from page 5)



White-crowned Sparrow

Photos taken by Sid Webb



Northern Mockingbird Fun Facts

By Marcia Wilson

Northern Mockingbirds are famous for the many imitations they incorporate into their songs. This can include car alarms, other birds, and creaky gates. In the nineteenth century, people kept so many mockingbirds as cage pets that the birds nearly vanished from parts of the East Coast. People took nestlings out of nests or trapped adults and sold them in cities such as Philadelphia, St. Louis, and New York, where, in 1828, extraordinary singers could fetch as much as \$50.

In fact, as a bit of history, the Northern Mockingbird was Thomas Jefferson's favorite bird because of its intelligence and ability to mimic. He kept a pet mockingbird, named Dick, in the White House.

Northern Mockingbirds continue to add new sounds to their repertoires throughout their lives. Nighttime singing is more common during the full moon.

The Northern Mockingbird frequently gives a "wing flash" display, where it half or fully opens its wings in jerky intermediate steps, showing off the big white patches. No one knows why it does this, but it may startle insects, making them easier to catch. On the other hand, it doesn't often seem to be successful, and different mockingbird species do this same display even though they don't have white wing patches.



Officers and Board

President: Cheryl Fallstead

Vice-president: vacant

Secretary: Julia Osgood

Treasurer: Diane Moore

Directors (elected with three-year terms)

Director 2022-2024 Sid Webb

Director 2022-2024 Gill Sorg

Director 2023-2025 CJ Goin

Director 2023-2025 Annie Mitchell

Director 2023-2025 Marcia Wilson

Director 2023-2025 Linda Miller

Director 2024-2026 Dylan Osterhaus

Director 2024-2026 Whitney Watson

Committee chairs

Conservation: vacant

Education: vacant

Field Trips: Linda Miller

Programs: currently managed by President

Newsletter: Marcia Wilson

Website: Linda Miller

Membership: Annie Mitchell

Christmas Bird Count: Mark Pendleton

Facebook admin: Dylan Osterhaus

Climate Watch Coordinator: Mark Pendleton

Roadrunner Ramblings is published quarterly and is distributed via [the MVAS website](#), with a copy emailed to all MVAS members and friends. All members of MVAS are encouraged to submit articles of interest and any bird photograph recently taken. Please email your contributions to Marcia Wilson at sleepingsafe@yahoo.com. To be added to the distribution list, contact Cheryl Fallstead at mesillavalleyaudubon@gmail.com

Mesilla Valley Audubon Society, a chapter of the National Audubon Society, is a conservation and natural history organization in southern New Mexico that promotes appreciation and conservation of birds, other wildlife and habitat, through environmental education, issue advocacy, and natural history experiences.

Mesilla Valley Audubon Society

A chapter of the

National Audubon Society



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