

Roadrunner Ramblings

Fall 2025



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Project 2025*

President's Page

As I write this, I am less than two weeks away from traveling to Montreal, Canada, to represent our chapter at the National Audubon Society Leadership Conference. I'm excited to learn more about our national organization, collaborate with other chapter leaders, and give a short presentation about nature journaling. I'll tell you all about the conference at our membership meeting on September 17.

I'm also excited about two other recent developments: past-president Jennifer Montoya has stepped forward to join the board and be our conservation chair. She's already dived into some exciting projects. Be sure to read her Conservation Corner column on page 3 for an update.

Secondly, Jay Wilbur is not only serving as the new editor for this newsletter, but also as our chair of adult education. He has set up two great offerings: a warbler ID class for folks who are ready to move beyond knowing their basic backyard birds and a three-evening birding basics class for beginners. Be sure to read the announcement on page 3 to learn more about these great options. And encourage your friends who always ask "What's *that* bird?" to take the class. They're both free and will be held at Las Cruces Village (formerly Good Samaritan) in the Creative Arts Room.

We're done with our summer hiatus and are back to our four monthly bird walks. Find all of them on our newsletter calendar and on our website (mvasaudubon.org). For easy reference, you can count on these monthly walks, all starting at 8 a.m.:

- First Monday: Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park with Julia and Pat
- Second Saturday: Sagecrest Park and Las Cruces Dam with Jonathan
- Third Wednesday: Tellbrook Park
- Last Saturday: Leasburg Dam State Park with Daniel

Nature journaling is also going strong and we'd love to have more MVAS members and friends join us for our monthly activities. Don't worry about being an artist. It's the process, not the product, that's important! It's all about connecting with nature in a meaningful way and our club would love to help you

get started. Read the article about nature journaling on page 6, and check the calendar for upcoming events that starts on page 10.

It's a good time to think about getting more involved with MVAS. We'll be holding board elections early next year and will have some openings. If you're ready to be part of the leadership team, or want to know more about what's involved, contact me at mesillavalleyaudubon@gmail.com.

- Cheryl Fallstead

Roadrunner Ramblings the newsletter of

Mesilla Valley Audubon Society
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P. O. Box 1645
Las Cruces, NM 88004

a chapter of the **National Audubon Society**

Mesilla Valley Audubon Society, a 501c3 conservation and natural history organization in southern New Mexico, promotes the appreciation and conservation of birds, wildlife, and habitat through education, advocacy, and community engagement.



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CJ Goin, Linda Miller, Randy Gray,
Whitney Watson, Dylan Osterhaus,
Marcia Wilson, Annie Mitchell
Editor: Jay Wilbur

Submit newsletter material to
mesillavalleyaudubon@gmail.com

CONSERVATION CORNER

Welcome to this revival of the Conservation Corner of our newsletter. MVAS has a proud tradition of standing up for bird habitat in southern New Mexico and we will continue our involvement in the coming year by participating in a larger effort to create and enhance habitat for two rare and declining species: Southwest Willow Flycatcher and Yellow-billed Cuckoo.

Since 1994, MVAS has supported the construction and maintenance of the Las Palomas Marsh grazing enclosure along Caballo Reservoir, south of Williamsburg, New Mexico (exit 71 on I-25). In partnership with the landowner, the Bureau of Reclamation, and the federal agency that administers the livestock grazing, the Bureau of Land Management, MVAS has promoted bird surveys within the marsh as well as educational opportunities for Hot Springs High School in Truth or Consequences. With the onset of Covid-19 in 2020, our organized surveys went on hiatus. We will be revising the survey protocol over the coming year, so be on the look-out for a call for volunteers to assist with this important citizen science project.

With fall migration upon us, here are some ways you can help birds along their journey:

- Limit bird collisions with your windows by installing tape or other deterrents on the glass.
- Turn off or shield exterior lighting and use automatic motion sensors where possible.
- Keep your cats indoors. Free-roaming cats kill over 700 million birds in the U.S. each year.

If you'd like more information or would like to get involved with the MVAS conservation committee, email mesillavalleyaudubon@gmail.com and put "Conservation" in the subject line.

- Jennifer Montoya

New Birding Classes Offered

With the pandemic behind us, the MVAS adult education committee is bringing back in-person birding classes. In the past, MVAS has offered several different types of classes intended for beginning and intermediate birders. This fall we're offering two of these: our tried-and-true Birding Basics course for beginners and a Warbler Identification class targeted toward intermediate birders.

The Birding Basics course includes lecture/discussion sessions on the first three Tuesday evenings in September. These will sandwich two supporting field trips on the intervening weekends. Topics covered include:

- How to find, watch, and listen to birds
- How to identify and learn about birds
- How to record and share your observations
- How to conserve birds and their environments
- How to meet and learn from other birders



Did you recognize this bird, seen at the Dripping Springs Visitor Center, as a Hermit Warbler?

At the end of August, just in time for fall migration, our warbler class for intermediate birders will focus on applying identification techniques to the warblers we usually see in Doña Ana County and nearby. Details for both classes are in the events calendar on page 11.

- Jay Wilbur

Kestrel Project 2025: A Photo Essay

by Laura Steinmann

The NMSU American Kestrel Project is part of the university's Department of Fish, Wildlife and Conservation Ecology. This year the project is led by Megan Lemmo, a first-year master's student in the department. Her team monitors about 100 nest boxes and 50 active nests in the Mesilla Valley and White Sands Missile Range. These photos (and the cover) journal part of the 2025 effort.

March 2025: Team members Emma and Brianna clean nest boxes and add nest material. They return every couple of weeks to check for activity such as scratch marks in the nest material.



April 18: The first kestrel egg is seen!

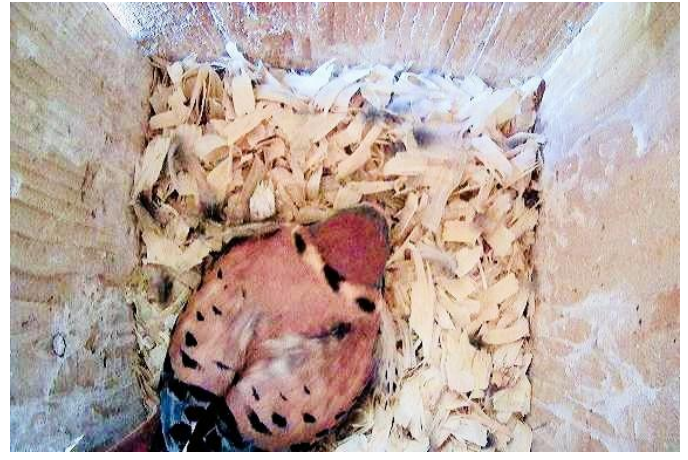


April 25: Two additional kestrel eggs are present.





May 5: Now there are five.



May 5: Later, a male is on the eggs.



June 12: Two male chicks. As often happens, the other three eggs don't hatch.



June 17: Megan and faculty advisor Brian Millsap band the chicks.



May 21: Megan and Katie weigh, measure, and band the adult female. A Pringles can is handy!



June 17: After they've left the nest, Megan pinpoints the chicks' signals.

Connect with Nature via Journaling

by Cheryl Fallstead

Getting outdoors and peering into trees and bushes is already something you do as a birder. You may use eBird to tally your finds and perhaps photograph the birds you spot, too. But how often do you sit quietly and observe a bird's behavior, making notes about what you notice and asking yourself questions about what you don't understand? If you'd like to develop a deeper connection to birds and other parts of nature, we have a program for you!



The MVAS Nature Journal Club

More than a year ago, Julia Osgood, Ellen Jaffe Castello, and I launched the MVAS Nature Journal Club and it has become a popular activity for those who consider themselves birders and those who are simply fascinated with nature. Bonus: We've seen some who didn't consider themselves birders becoming more interested in our avian amigos.

So, what is nature journaling? Simply put, it's recording your observations of nature in a journal using words, pictures, and numbers. You don't have to be an artist to become a nature journaler! The point of journaling is to observe nature and use your journal sketches and notes to form a deeper understanding and connection with the subject of your observations. It's the process, not the product that's important.

Novelist Amy Tan is an avid nature journaler and her best-selling book, *The Backyard Bird Chronicles*, introduced thousands to nature journaling and a love of birds. In the book, Amy shares her progress from Roadrunner Ramblings

basic sketches to more advanced, careful drawings as the years went by, increasing her knowledge and understanding of bird behavior as she spent time focusing her attention on the birds that visit her Bay Area home.



David Coalson journals a museum exhibit.

Nature journaling is for people of any age, and we encourage young people to participate. One of our goals is to use nature journaling to help develop the next generation of conservation leaders. If you have kids or grandkids, bring them along to journal with you. We've done some activities with homeschool groups to introduce them to nature journaling and hope to reach out to do more activities for families at state parks and other venues soon.

We offer at least one nature journaling activity a month, usually on a Saturday or Sunday. We move our locations around to help us discover new subjects to journal about. Upcoming destinations include Keystone Heritage Park in El Paso, private land being rewilded that includes a pond, La Mancha Wetland, and a plant nursery. In December, we're putting together a fun make-and-take activity to

create some nature journaling supplies like a watercolor journal and tins for storing your paints.

Speaking of supplies, you're probably wondering what you'd need to get started. It can be as simple as an inexpensive sketchbook and a pencil (although pencil tends to smudge). Many nature journalers use a travel watercolor palette and water brushes that hold the water in the handles of the brush. But you don't have to paint. You can use colored pencils, a ballpoint pen, a Micron art pen, a fountain pen, or combine pen-and-ink with your watercolor sketches.

What do you write about? Well, anything you'd like! Some people even write poetry to go with their sketches. Some write bullet points about what they observe. The Wild Wonder Foundation suggests starting with "I notice...", "I wonder...", and "It reminds me of..." to get your thoughts down on paper.

There are many resources available to help you get started, such as articles and videos on websites like JohnMuirLaws.com and WildWonder.org. There is a worldwide community of nature journalers ready to support and embrace you! If you're ready to dive in, consider attending the online Wild Wonder Conference September 10 – 14. Learn more about it on the Wild Wonder website. Of course, we'll be happy to get you started during our monthly nature journaling outings. Join us!



Remembering 300 Species in Doña Ana County

by Dylan Osterhaus

My love for baseball started at a young age, thanks to my father, and in many ways led directly to my love for birding, or at least was a major contributing factor. Growing up playing and watching baseball, I fell in love with the statistics of the game. In baseball, you can keep a multitude of statistics on many aspects of the game, as I did for myself in Little League. What I did not know at the time was baseball fans were closely rivaled by birders in regard to their love for stats and record keeping.

During my junior year at Emporia State University, I enrolled in an ornithology course with Dr. William Jensen. Throughout the semester, I kept a list and close count of all the birds that we saw in the field. Towards the end of the semester, I was introduced to eBird and immediately fell in love with the platform not only for its usefulness to academic researchers, which I was aspiring to become, but also for its ability to track your statistics as a birder. I became interested in tracking not just the total number of species I've seen, but also the number of species seen in each state, within counties in a state, and within a single month or year.

Before I left Emporia, I was able to tally 166 species within the county. After moving to Iowa in May 2019, I set a goal to see 200 species in my home county before moving from the state. I completed this goal in a little less than a year with my 200th species being a Harris's Sparrow at my favorite wetland. Before I left, I managed to accumulate 244 species in my county. My time in Iowa served to fully solidify my love for birding, and my interest in lists at the county level.

As I prepared to move to New Mexico for my doctoral education, I set a goal to see 300 species in Doña Ana County before my degree program ended. This was a large number, considering I had not yet recorded 300 species in any one state, let alone a single county. But I knew that the Southwest was famous for its diversity, and the number of species available to be seen would be much higher than what I experienced in Iowa or Kansas.



White-winged Dove, Species 1.

My road to 300 species in Doña Ana County began on July 13, 2021, in the parking lot of the Ramada Palms hotel on E. University Avenue. I had arrived in town late the night before and as I stepped out of the hotel that morning, I was greeted by a bird that I now see on a daily (if not hourly) basis, a White-winged Dove. It is very fitting that this was my first species recorded in the county given that they are likely the most abundant bird in our area.

After completing my move to Las Cruces in August 2021, I quickly began to add up species and found my 100th, a Marbled Godwit, on August 29 at a flooded agricultural area on Gardner Road. Unlike the White-winged Dove, Marbled Godwit are very rare within Doña Ana County and was a very exciting species to find.

Species accumulated rapidly at the start, and it only took me four full months until I tallied my 200th species, a Hooded Merganser. The accumulation of species slowed greatly over the next year. I only added 51 species to my total and only 26 species the year after that. I started 2024 at 277 species and a shot to reach my goal of 300 by the end of the year. However, throughout the winter, spring, and summer, I managed to add only nine new species.

We had an amazing fall migration in 2024, and rarities such as Greater White-fronted Goose, Great Crested Flycatcher, Rufous-backed Robin, Wood Thrush, and Northern Parula all appeared and helped to push my species total to 296 by the end of the year. As 2025 began, I knew that this was the year I would be finishing my degree at NMSU. I only needed to find four new species to reach my goal of 300.

It took until March 20 for me to add 297, an American White Pelican on a pond at Picacho Hills Country Club. Soon after, MVAS member Dana Parsons found a first state record Tufted Flycatcher in Young Park, which was my 298th species. Two weeks later, I stopped at a tree-lined canal in Mesilla for a quick birding walk before heading into the office and was greeted by a sound very familiar to me from my time in Iowa, a Carolina Wren singing loudly, my 299th species.



Rufous-backed Robin, Species 290.

On April 15, 2025, I had just finished a meeting on campus when I received a report of a possible Glossy Ibis, a very rare visitor to our area, on the Rio Grande near Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park. I rushed to the location and sifted through the large group of White-face Ibis, looking for anything that looked different. Ben Guo and I, with help from Tony Godfrey, studied the flock and concluded that the potential Glossy Ibis was in fact a hybrid offspring of a Glossy Ibis and White-faced Ibis. I do not count hybrids towards my species total, so it remained at 299.

I had left my camera at home that morning, but wanted better photos to document the hybrid ibis, so I made a quick trip home to grab my camera and returned to the river. As I began taking photos of the bird, I noticed another ibis in the flock, and this one had very dark colored knees, a trait that is present in Glossy Ibis, but not White-faced or hybrids. I snapped a few photos and sent them to friends for confirmation, who quickly agreed that this was in fact a Glossy Ibis and my 300th species in Doña Ana County.



Glossy Ibis, Species 300.

It took me three years and eight months to achieve my goal of 300 species. Upon reaching this milestone, I was prompted to look back and think about all the experiences that had led to this point. For me, one of the most enjoyable aspects of birding, besides the record keeping, are the friendships we make with fellow birders. I have been so lucky in my time in Doña Ana County to have met many amazing and avid birders who I now call friends. Many of these friends helped me greatly on my path to 300 species by notifying our local groups of rarities that they had found, and for that I am very grateful.

My time at NMSU is quickly coming to a close, and as it does so too will my time in Doña Ana County. I will be very sad to leave the birds, and especially the birders, when the time comes, but I will always be able to look back fondly on the memories that I made here, and the people that have made this place so special for me.



Black-throated Sparrow

Echoes of Laughter

Story by Nichole Palacio

Photo by Matthew Becker

For me, there is one group of birds in particular that evokes the truest sense of wonder: parrots. Hearing their calls feels otherworldly. Their colors are incomprehensibly brilliant. Their movements, habits, and interactions are at once familiar and alien.

The first time I saw one was in the state of Jalisco, Mexico. As my husband and I hiked, a sound unlike any I had ever heard pierced the thick humidity. Far across the canyon and through the trees, too dark to see most details, was an unmistakable shape: a long, streaming tail and wings beating in a motion foreign to me. Gracefulness combined with a grating, almost harassing and downright obnoxious call, it was an impossible combination. It was *Ara militaris*, the Military Macaw.

But Jalisco is about a thousand miles away. Fortunately, one need only seek as far as our closest southern neighbor, the far-too-overlooked state of Chihuahua. Mexico's largest state by land area comprises three major ecoregions: North American deserts, southern semi-arid highlands, and temperate sierras, with many sub-ecoregions filling the interstitial spaces. It's here, within the Sierra Madre Occidental, we can find the northernmost parrots in North America.



The Thick-billed Parrot (*Rhynchopsitta pachyrhyncha*) once inhabited a portion of the United States, including southeastern Arizona and

southwestern New Mexico. The last reports are from the mid-1930s. It has since been extirpated.

Reintroduction attempts to the Chiricahua Mountains in Arizona in the 1980s and 1990s were unsuccessful. Conservation efforts continue, however, and with a collective of organizations involved, there remains a viable hope that we can be proud to play host to our own population of Thick-billed Parrots once more (see <https://therevelator.org/species-spotlight-thick-billed-parrot/>).

Hunting of the bird itself and logging of old-growth forests (in other words direct killing and habitat destruction) are tried-and-true human methods for species eradication. In the case of the Thick-billed Parrot, the story is quite the same.

Today in Mexico these birds also face the threat of the pet trade. While beautiful, it baffles me that someone would want to keep *such* an annoying bird!

We spent a total of three hours, lying on the ground, watching these birds from below. They are raucous in every sense of the word, and show a curiosity that's hard to find, even in our own species.

Each bird, and each pair of birds, had its own distinctive personality. Some appeared to dote, while others were reminiscent of a matrimonial squabble. It's difficult not to anthropomorphize them, although I like to imagine that they form their own constructs of us and how we fit into their understanding of the world, too.

Near the end of our visit, we encountered a group of children being wrangled by CONANP (Comisión Nacional de Áreas Naturales Protegidas). Unfortunately, neither of us comes armed with Spanish fluent enough to go much beyond "Amazing birds, so beautiful!" We did, however, understand that we were supposed to pay prior to entering this protected area. Where were our *brazaletes*?!

My only regret is lacking the fluency to impress upon those children how important they are to the future of conservation, and that what they have is so special. I would have told them that we in the United States were once able to call these birds part of our world, too. The laughter of parrots that fill these forests once filled ours.

Calendar of Events

August

Bird Walk @ Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park
Monday, August 4, 8 – 10 a.m.

Meet near the park's visitor center and then take a guided bird walk led by Julia Osgood and Patricia Bowen. New Mexico residents pay a \$5 per vehicle entry fee or use your state park annual pass; non-residents pay \$10 per vehicle.

Bird Walk @ Sagecrest Park

Saturday, August 9, 8 – 10 a.m.

Meet bird walk leader Jonathan Brooks near the park entrance, then explore the desert and wetlands areas east of the Las Cruces Dam.

Sagecrest Park Clean-Up

Saturday, August 16, 8 – 9 a.m.

Meet at Sagecrest Park to clean up our Keep Las Cruces Beautiful adopted space to keep it safe for people and birds.

Bird Walk @ Tellbrook Park

Wednesday, August 20, 8 – 10 a.m.

Meet our rotating bird walk leader to explore this neighborhood park that is remarkably birdy.

MVAS Monthly Meeting

Wednesday, August 20, 6:30 – 8 p.m.

Knox Hall Room 142 and on Zoom

Topic: "Helping Birds During Migration," presented by David Coalson. Visit with fellow members from 6:30 – 7 p.m., when the presentation begins.

Nature Journaling

Saturday, August 23, 9 – 11 a.m.

Keystone Heritage Park, 4220 Doniphan, El Paso

Admission \$3 general, \$2 for seniors

Join the MVAS Nature Journal Club in exploring and journaling the gardens and wetlands at Keystone Heritage Park in west El Paso. Lunch afterwards at location TBD. RSVP to mesillavalleyaudubon@gmail.com.

Warbler ID Class

Tuesday, August 26, 6:30 – 8 p.m.

Las Cruces Village Social Center, Creative Arts Room, 3011 Buena Vida Circle

Each year our area is visited by a group of small, beautiful, and otherwise fascinating birds called warblers. If you'd like to up your game on how to tell them apart from other birds and from each other, you won't want to miss this. Just in time for fall migration, Jay Wilbur will teach a class in warbler identification. Jay will focus on how to apply identification techniques to the warblers we usually see in Doña Ana County and nearby. Reserve your spot in the class by emailing mesillavalleyaudubon@gmail.com.

Bird Walk @ Leasburg Dam State Park

Saturday, August 30, 8 – 10 a.m.

Join bird walk leader Daniel Horton in birding the bosque along the Rio Grande. Meet at the park's visitor center, then carpool to the south picnic area. New Mexico residents pay a \$5 per vehicle entry fee or use your state park annual pass; non-residents pay \$10 per vehicle.

September

Bird Walk @ Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park

Monday, September 1 (Labor Day), 8 – 10 a.m.

Meet near the park's visitor center and then take a guided bird walk led by Julia Osgood and Patricia Bowen. New Mexico residents pay a \$5 per vehicle entry fee or use your state park annual pass; non-residents pay \$10 per vehicle.

Birding Basics

Three Tuesdays: September 2, 9, and 16, from 6:30 to 8 p.m.

Las Cruces Village Social Center, Creative Arts Room, 3011 Buena Vida Circle.

Notice all the fun birders are having, but aren't sure birding is for you? Want to get outside, but need something interesting to do while you're there? Fascinated by all the birds around your home and want to learn a bit more about them? Here is the class for you. This free class is intended for those with little or no experience birding. Two optional field trips will be arranged during the class for participants. Reserve your spot in the class by emailing mesillavalleyaudubon@gmail.com.

Bird Walk @ Sagecrest Park

Saturday, September 13, 8 – 10 a.m.

Meet bird walk leader Jonathan Brooks near the park entrance, then explore the desert and wetlands areas east of the Las Cruces Dam.

Bird Walk @ Tellbrook Park

Wednesday, September 17, 8 – 10 a.m.

Meet our rotating bird walk leader to explore this neighborhood park that is remarkably birdy.

MVAS Monthly Meeting

Wednesday, September 17, 6:30 – 8 p.m.

Knox Hall Room 142 and on Zoom

Topic: National Audubon Society Leadership Conference Update, presented by Cheryl Fallstead. Visit with fellow members from 6:30 – 7 p.m., when the presentation begins.

Sagecrest Park Clean-Up

Saturday, September 20, 8 – 9 a.m.

Meet at Sagecrest Park to clean up our Keep Las Cruces Beautiful adopted space to keep it safe for people and birds.

Nature Journaling

Sunday, September 21, 8 – 10 a.m.

Explore a pond, native plants, and animals on private land that is being rewilded. RSVP and get meeting directions at mesillavalleyaudubon@gmail.com.

Bird Walk @ Leasburg Dam State Park

Saturday, September 27, 8 – 10 a.m.

Join bird walk leader Daniel Horton in birding the bosque along the Rio Grande. Meet at the park's visitor center, then carpool to the south picnic area. New Mexico residents pay a \$5 per vehicle entry fee or use your state park annual pass; non-residents pay \$10 per vehicle.

October

Bird Walk @ Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park

Monday, October 6, 8 – 10 a.m.

Meet near the park's visitor center and then take a guided bird walk led by Julia Osgood and Patricia Bowen. No entry fee for NM residents October through April; non-residents pay \$10 per vehicle.

Bird Walk @ Sagecrest Park

Saturday, October 11, 8 – 10 a.m.

Meet bird walk leader Jonathan Brooks near the park entrance, then explore the desert and wetlands areas east of the Las Cruces Dam.

Bird Walk @ Tellbrook Park

Wednesday, October 15, 8 – 10 a.m.

Meet our rotating bird walk leader to explore this neighborhood park that is remarkably birdy.

MVAS Monthly Meeting

Wednesday, October 15, 6:30 – 8 p.m.

Knox Hall Room 142 and on Zoom

Topic: Explore the wide world of birds with mini-presentations by members who have traveled for birding. Visit with fellow members from 6:30 – 7 p.m., when the presentation begins.

Sagecrest Park Clean-Up

Saturday, October 18, 8 – 9 a.m.

Meet at Sagecrest Park to clean up our Keep Las Cruces Beautiful adopted space to keep it safe for people and birds.

Nature Journaling

Sunday, October 19, 9 – 11 a.m.

La Mancha Wetlands

The MVAS Nature Journal Club will observe and record the natural world of La Mancha Wetland near Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park. RSVP and get meeting directions at mesillavalleyaudubon@gmail.com.

Bird Walk @ Leasburg Dam State Park

Saturday, October 25, 8 – 10 a.m.

Join bird walk leader Daniel Horton in birding the bosque along the Rio Grande. Meet at the park's visitor center, then carpool to the south picnic area. No entry fee for NM residents October through April; non-residents pay \$10 per vehicle.

Parting Shots

Joni Johnson had an unusual backyard visitor that stayed around for several days.



Black-crowned Night-Heron

CJ Goin showcases this local beauty:

The Giant Swallowtail is one of North America's largest butterflies. It is a large swallowtail that is mostly dark above and yellow below. On the upper side, the yellow bands cross, forming an X near the tip of the forewing. Tails on the hindwing have yellow centers. It is not a common butterfly around Las Cruces but neither is it rare, so there's a good chance of seeing one in warm weather. It's a beautiful butterfly, so please keep your eyes open.

