



# ROADRUNNER RAMBLINGS

MESILLA VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY

www.mvaudubon.org Vol. 41, No. 1, Spring 2019

*Editor's Note: We encourage all members of the MVAS to contribute to Roadrunner Ramblings. In this issue Wayne Treers did a great job detailing the MVAS Christmas Bird Count for 2018, and Mark Pendleton has contributed his first scholarly article on our community's birds, a feature that will continue in future editions. Thank you very much Wayne and Mark, for all your help.*

## RESULTS OF THE 2018 LAS CRUCES Christmas Bird Count

Another successful Christmas Bird Count (CBC) is now under our belts. On December 15, 2018, we completed our 44<sup>th</sup> straight year of providing valuable data concerning early winter distribution of birds in the Mesilla Valley.

However, the question on everyone's mind at the end of the day was: Where were all the birds? A warm & dry fall, a continuing drought in the Rio Grande Basin, and an early harvest of many local area pecan orchards all contributed to lower species counts in 2018.

Here's the results of our 2018 CBC:

**TOTAL BIRD COUNT: 27,261** (last yr. – 32,259; avg. – 33,375)

**TOTAL SPECIES COUNT: 115** (last yr. – 132; avg. – 121)

**COUNT WEEK SPECIES** (not seen during count day): 4 (Turkey Vulture, Bullock's Oriole, Scaled Quail, Rufous-crowned Sparrow)

**UNUSUAL/RARE BIRDS: 5** (Turkey Vulture, Bullock's Oriole, Lawrence's Goldfinch, Black-chinned Hummingbird, Yellow Warbler)

(continued on Page 2: Christmas Bird Count)

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**FEATURED BIRD(S): AMERICAN CROW, CHIHUAHUAN RAVEN, COMMON RAVEN**  
by Mark Pendleton ©2019

*Note: This is the first in what will be a regular feature of "Roadrunner Ramblings" The author and editor hope you enjoy them.*

Living here in southern NM, we are privileged to be able to see three Corvid species when we're out birding. In common name alphabetical (as well as size rank) order, from smallest to largest, they are the American Crow, the Chihuahuan Raven, and the Common Raven.

As they all are large, similar looking, entirely black birds, you may ask how to tell the difference between them. Pertinent question and I hope you'll be better able to answer it after reading this article.

It's simpler than it sounds. Why? How so? Because, once you distinguish between an American Crow or a Raven of either species—easy to do when you know how—the fun of differentiating the two Ravens isn't much more challenging.

(continued on Page 6: Crows and Ravens)

### Newsletter Contents:

Christmas Bird Count	P. 1
Featured Bird Article	P. 1, 6
Election Results	P. 3
Monthly Calendar	P. 3
Upcoming Meetings	P. 4
Upcoming Bird Walks	P. 4
Upcoming Field Trips	P. 5
Why have another bird count?	P. 8
Aldo Leopold	P. 9
Photos	P. 10
Join Audubon	P. 11
Chapter Information.	P. 11.

(Christmas Bird Count, contd)

**WHITE-WINGED DOVE COUNT: 7,516** (last yr. – 6,205)

**AMERICAN CROW COUNT: 4,823** (last yr. – 7,951)

**EURASIAN-COLLARED DOVE COUNT: 939** (last yr. – 833)

**TOTAL SPARROW COUNT** (excluding towhees, dark-eyed juncos, and house sparrows):

**1,079** (last yr. – 2,157; avg. – 2,027)

**HIGH COUNTS: 7** (including 2 new record highs – Cooper’s Hawk & Eurasian-collared Dove; and, 1 record high tied – Ladder-backed Woodpecker)

**LOW COUNTS: 17** (including 1 new record low – Black-throated Sparrow; and 2 record low tied – Blue-winged Teal & Myrtle’s Yellow-rumped Warbler)

**NUMBER OF OBSERVERS: 52** (last yr. – 48)

**NUMBER OF FEEDER WATCHERS: 5** (last yr. – 4)

**NUMBER OF NOCTURNAL BIRDERS: 1** (last yr. – 0)

**Other highlights of our 2018 CBC:**

3 Golden Eagles were sighted (near Dripping Springs and Las Alturas area)

2 Harris’s Hawks were sighted (near Triviz & Madrid, and in Jornada North)

5 Anna’s Hummingbirds were sighted, and 1 Rufous Hummingbird were sighted

24 Horned Larks were sighted (in Jornada South)

2 Townsend’s Solitaires were sighted

In our 44-year record for the Las Cruces CBC, this is only the 4<sup>th</sup> year that a Turkey Vulture was observed, only the 3<sup>rd</sup> year that a Black-chinned Hummingbird was observed, only the 6<sup>th</sup> year that a Yellow Warbler was observed, only the 3<sup>rd</sup> year that a Bullock’s Oriole was observed, and only the 4<sup>th</sup> year that Lawrence’s Goldfinches were observed.

Photos of the Lawrence’s Goldfinch (seen at Tellbrook Park on 12/15/18 by Evelyn Treiman) and Bullock’s Oriole (seen at a private residence by

owner on 12/17/18 at 4 Hills neighborhood) are below.



Lawrence’s Goldfinch (male) – Tellbrook Park)  
12/15/2018 Evelyn Treiman



Bullock’s Oriole (seen at a private residence by owner on 12/17/18 at 4 Hills neighborhood)

I would like to thank all the birders who gave of their time to bird in the 2018 Las Cruces CBC. I especially want to thank our team leaders. Without their planning and organizing of their teams, our CBC would not even be possible.

Wayne Treers, compiler for Las Cruces CBC,  
Mesilla Valley Audubon Society

## Annual MVAS Election Results

At the January Membership Meeting the slate of officers endorsed by last year's board was elected unanimously with much fanfare! Although the posts for President and Vice President are open, a monthly rotation of the directors will fill the void. As before. The board will meet the second Thursday of each month, at SWEC at 5:30 PM, and all MVAS members are welcome to attend and participate in those meetings of their elected directors.

### 2019 Officers of Mesilla Valley Audubon Society:

President: OPEN

Vice-President: OPEN

Secretary: Aaron Lucas

Treasurer: Diane Moore

Director 2017 – 2019: CJ Goin

Director 2017 – 2019: Mark Pendleton

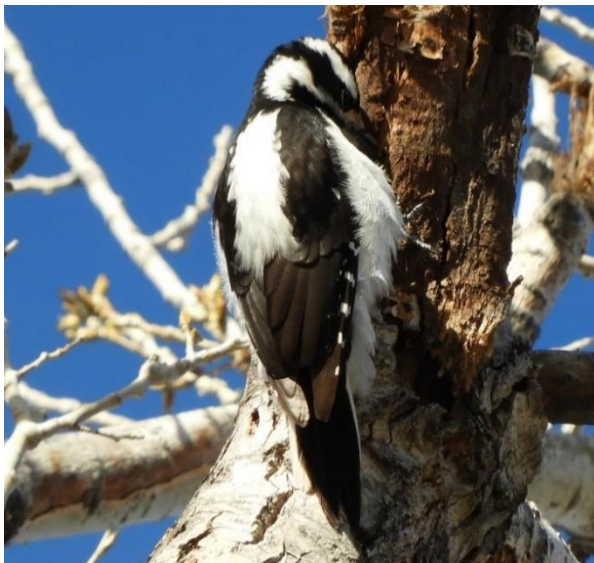
Director 2018 – 2020: Sid Webb

Director 2018 – 2020: Elaine Stachera

Director 2019 – 2021: Gill Sorg

Director 2019 – 2021: OPEN

Also, Open: Head of Conservation Committee, Head of Programs Committee and Head of the Publicity committee.



Hairy Woodpecker. CJ Goin.

## MVAS Calendar

### February, March, and April 2019

#### February 2019

**Sat, Feb 9:** *Bird walk* at Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park. Meet at 8:00 AM, Visitors' Center. CJ Goin to guide.

**Sat, Feb 16:** *Field trip* is Great Backyard Bird Count at Sagecrest Park/Las Cruces Dam with Mark Pendleton. Meet at park entrance (see Field Trips)

**Wed, Feb 20:** *Bird walk.* Beginning Birding at Tellbrook Park 7:45 AM. Wayne Treers is your guide

**Wed, Feb 20:** *Monthly MVAS Meeting* 6:30 PM Meet&Greet, 7:00 PM Business. Mayra Weisenberger on bird banding and her book on the first bird surveys in NM.

**Sat, Feb 23:** *Bird walk at Leasburg Dam State Park.* Meet at 8:00 AM, Visitors' Center. CJ Goin to guide.

#### March 2019

**Sat, March 9.** *Bird walk at Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park.* Meet at 8:00 AM, Visitors' Center. CJ Goin to guide.

**Wed, March 20:** *Bird walk.* Beginning Birding at Tellbrook Park 7:45 AM. Wayne Treers is your guide.

**Wed, March 20:** *Monthly MVAS Meeting* 6:30 PM Meet&Greet, 7:00 PM Business. Speaker: – Kristie of Wild Birds Unlimited to give presentation on hummers and attracting them to backyard feeders.

**Sat, March 23:** *Field trip* to Deming to check out birding hot spots there. Meet at 7:15 AM at Brannigan Library for carpooling. (see Field Trips)

**Sat, March 30 :** *Bird walk at Leasburg Dam State Park.* Meet at 8:00 AM, Visitors' Center. CJ Goin to guide.

#### April 2019

**Sat, April 13.** *Bird walk at Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park.* Meet at 8:00 AM, Visitors' Center. CJ Goin to guide.

**Wed, April 17:** *Bird walk.* Beginning Birding at Tellbrook Park 7:45 AM. Wayne Treers is your guide.

**Wed, April 17:** *Monthly MVAS Meeting* 6:30 PM Meet&Greet, 7:00 PM Business. Speaker: Awards presentations and more

**Sat, April 27:** *Bird walk at Leasburg Dam State Park.* Meet at 8:00 AM, Visitors' Center. CJ Goin to guide.

April Field Trip: to be determined.



## Monthly Meeting Programs for all Members:

### Wednesday, February 20

The February monthly meeting is on Wednesday, February 20, starting at 6:30 PM with a meet and greet and the business meeting starting at 7:00 PM. We will have final results from the Christmas bird count and further announcements of field trips and bird walks.

The guest speaker will be Mayra Weisenberger, who will be speaking about bird banding and her book on the first bird surveys in New Mexico. She comes to us from our local Wild Birds Unlimited and should have a lot of neat information.

### Wednesday, March 20

As usual, there will be Meet & Greet, starting at 6:30, followed by the monthly program. The speaker will be Kristie Lane of Wild Birds Unlimited to give presentation on hummers and attracting them to backyard feeders. We will also present the Annual Richard Bischoff Memorial Scholarship. The scholarship supports graduate student research at New Mexico State University that is consistent with the MVAS mission and promotes natural resource conservation.

### Wednesday, April 17

In April the Bischoff Scholarship Award Presentation will start the meeting at 7:00 PM. The scholarship supports graduate student research at New Mexico State University.

## Upcoming Bird Walks:

Mesilla Valley Audubon Society sponsors bird walks throughout the month. These are a fun, easy way to enjoy your hobby with other enthusiasts. The birds change with the season, so returning to a spot you enjoyed previously makes perfectly good sense.

The list below includes our currently scheduled locations, with the dates for the upcoming three months. You can “*control click*” or “*tap*” on the included web reference and be directed to the eBird.org web page that will have a list and pictures of the most recent birds seen as well as a Google map to help you find its location. It allows you to come prepared!



juvenile yellow-crown night-heron, 8/4/2018. CJ Goin

**Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park.** Second Saturday of the month. Meet at the park entrance at 8:00 AM. CJ Goin is the guide.

Upcoming dates: **February 9, March 9, April 13.**

eBird information: <https://ebird.org/hotspot/L280626>

**Tellbrook Park:** Although labeled as “Beginner’s Bird walks”, they are open to everybody. Third Wednesday of the month. Meet at the park entrance at 7:45 AM. Wayne Treers is the guide.

Upcoming dates: **February 13, March 13, April 20.** eBird

information: <https://ebird.org/hotspot/L3980928>

**Leasburg Dam State Park:** Last Saturday of the month. Meet at the main Visitor’s Center at 8:00 AM. CJ Goin is the guide.

Upcoming dates: **February 23, March 30, April 27.**

eBird information: <https://ebird.org/hotspot/L335262>

## Field Trips: February--March--April

### February

Take part in an International Citizen Science Event as birders of all ages count birds to help provide a snapshot of global bird distribution. Friday the 15th through Monday the 18th is the Great Backyard Bird Count. Visit the official site of the count at [gbbc.birdcount.org](http://gbbc.birdcount.org) to find more information. On Saturday the 16th, we'll meet at Sagecrest Park at the corner of Frontier Dr and Roadrunner Pkwy to spend an enjoyable morning of birding near the Las Cruces Dam. We'll enter a list on the Great Backyard Bird Count site and encourage you to go birding at other times on this weekend and enter your sightings on the same site! Info: Mark Pendleton at [mpndltn@gmail.com](mailto:mpndltn@gmail.com) (GBBC in subject line) or 575.635.8711.

(see article below for some comments on the GBBC)

### March

On Saturday the 23rd, we'll head to Deming for our field trip. Meet at 07:15 in the parking lot of Branigan Library (200 East Picacho Ave Las Cruces NM) to leave at 07:30. Be prepared to count raptors, especially on powerline poles along I-10, along the way. Birding hotspots in Deming include the Spring Canyon unit of Rock Hound State Park, the Mountain View Cemetery on the eastern side of town and the Wastewater Treatment Plant. Spotting scopes will be particularly useful at the park and water treatment plant. If you have NM State Parks Annual entrance pass, bring it along as well to save the \$5.00 entrance fee. There are several good to great eating places in Deming also, and we'll plan to stop at one for lunch. Info: Mark Pendleton at [mpndltn@gmail.com](mailto:mpndltn@gmail.com) (MVAS Deming Mar 2019 in subject line) or 575.635.8711.

### April

Where would you like to go for a fieldtrip? Some suggestions are:

- |                                     |                          |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| a) La Luz Village                   | d) Iron Creek Campground |
| b) Las Palomas Marsh                | e) Tellbrook Park        |
| c) Valley View Park/Sandhill Arroyo | f) Dripping Springs      |

Or, maybe you have another idea. Take a minute or two to let me know and I'll see what we can do. Please get me your suggestions by 5 pm on Friday April 5th. I'll tally them over the weekend, and on Monday the 7th I'll announce our April field trip destination. Please email your suggestions to [mpndltn@gmail.com](mailto:mpndltn@gmail.com) and put MVAS Apr FT in subject line.



Sharp Shinned Hawk at El Paso's Rio Bosque Park (Socorro), photographed by Mark Pendleton during MVAS field trip on 1/29/2018

For up to the minute *Mesilla Valley Audubon Society* news, photos, updates and more, go to our page on **FACEBOOK**: <https://www.facebook.com/MesillaValleyAudubonSociety/>

(continued from page 1—Crows and Ravens)

Whatever species you're attempting to identify, there's a short, easy to remember checklist of criteria to consider. I call it **VHAB**, and it stands for **Voice, Habitat, Appearance, and Behavior**. I didn't invent it, and I forget where I first heard it, but what's important is that it works. Very well.

Let's briefly consider this method. Here's a summary of the items to consider when identifying a bird.

**VOICE:** Important because many times you'll hear a bird before you see it. What does the bird sound like? Musical or mechanical? High or low pitched? Loud or soft? Guttural or nasal? Incessant or intermittent? Does it sing/call only at certain times?

**HABITAT:** You can eliminate hundreds of potential matches from consideration by answering the question: where did you see the bird(s)? In lower elevation open grassland? In the desert? Above 5,000 ft. in the Organs? Another wrinkle to consider: many birds favor different habitats at different seasons.

**APPEARANCE:** Not so much color, but shape, size, and posture. What does it look like? Large or small? Does it have wingbars? What does the beak look like? How about the tail? What shape and size are the wings? When it perches is it mostly horizontal or is its silhouette vertical?

**BEHAVIOR:** Is it hyperactive (think Ruby-crowned Kinglet) or almost sluggish? Does it flick its tail when perched? Does it favor the highest perch around (House Finches and Goldfinches) or plunge into less elevated foliage (House Sparrow)? Is it solitary or only in small groups (Woodpeckers) or is it commonly seen in huge flocks? Migrating Broad-winged Hawks are a good example of the latter.

With practice, you'll become better at this. Soon you'll find you're doing it without even realizing it, and you'll surprise yourself with how good at it you are.

#### **American Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*)**

**VOICE:** In North America, even people who may never have seen a live Crow probably know what it "says". We all know that crows caw. As the description of a crow's vocalization, this term has entered the English language and stands on its own.

**HABITAT:** American Crows also do well close to human settlement. They seem to thrive around agriculture, or dumps/landfills, fast food restaurants, parking lots, etc. They're also found in open grasslands and forest edge. Proximity to humans means increased potential food supply, so Crows are willing to risk the increased danger of harm and death it also brings.

**APPEARANCE:** With Crows, appearance and behavior can be as important as voice. In the rare event that you see an American Crow without also hearing it—it *could* happen—size will be your first clue. Measuring about 16-21in. (40-53 cm.) with a wingspan approaching twice that—33.5-39.4 in. (85-100 cm.)—the American Crow is the smallest species of the group.

Alas, size comparisons work best when you can compare. What if you see only birds of roughly the same size? Don't worry, identification is still simple. Look at the tails and note how the birds fly. An American Crow has a rather short squared off looking tail.

**BEHAVIOR:** If you think it's unusual to see and *not* hear one, even rarer is a soaring American Crow. I'm not saying they never do, but the odds are about 99<sup>44</sup>/<sub>100</sub> % against it. Instead, they appear to struggle along rowing themselves through some viscous medium. Put another way, American Crows look almost as if they're not quite sure that they'd stay aloft should they stop flapping.

#### **Common Raven (*Corvus corax*)**

**VOICE:** When my brother and I were fledgling birders of about 8 or 9 and 12 or 13, respectively, we met Clarence E. Allen, one of the two men to whom Roger Tory Peterson dedicated the first edition of his landmark *Field Guide to the Birds*. Birding trips with him were memorable. I'll never forget him saying that a Common Raven sounds like a crow who had spent its entire life smoking too many cheap cigars and drinking too much cheap Bourbon. Now, whenever I hear the guttural "cronk" of *C. corax* or sip discount Bourbon, I smile and fondly remember that delightful gentleman.

**HABITAT:** In southern New Mexico, Common Ravens inhabit wilderness and higher elevations. That means such places as the Organs, Doña Anas, Robledos, Sacramentos and other mountains along with their surrounding foothills.

This brings up a question. When you're out birding in areas close to mountains and see Ravens, which ones are they? Well, listen for their calls. If they're "cronking" or "popping" or their voices are definitely low, growly and guttural, you're looking at Common Ravens.

**APPEARANCE:** What if they don't give voice? A silent Raven is only slightly less improbable than a silent

Crow, but they do exist. If such is the case with “your” Raven, go to appearance and behavior to make an ID. In the appearance department, three characteristics stand out regarding Common Ravens. Overall size, the tail, and the bill.

First, they are *huge*. They dwarf Red-tailed Hawks. If you wonder whether it’s large enough to be a Common Raven, then it isn’t. That doesn’t mean that all large Ravens are Commons. No, there are some enormous Chihuahuans. You can easily be forgiven for mistaking a Chihuahuan and American Crow. You *never* will confuse a Common Raven with one, though!

Also, if the big black bird in your binoculars has a large, wedge shaped diamond of a tail, you’ve got a Common Raven. This contrasts with the fan shaped rounded tail of a Chihuahuan Raven. At first, it may be somewhat tricky telling wedgy diamonds from rounded fans and vice versa. There is a distinct difference, though, and with practice, it gets easier.

Then, there’s the matter of beaks. Both Ravens have unmistakable “Roman Noses” and their beaks are larger than those of Crows. If you think that Crows have large beaks; once you’ve seen those of Ravens, well . . . you’ll think again. A Crow has a perfectly respectable steak knife of a bill; a Chihuahuan Raven, a wickedly impressive carving knife of one. But Common Ravens possess great honking monstrous meat cleaver beaks. Also, Ravens have bristly feathers on their culmens, or upper mandibles. On Chihuahuans, the feathering extends roughly half the length of the mandible; on Commons, well beyond half way. You need to be close and get a good look to see this but when you are and do, you’ll spot it.

**BEHAVIOR:** In this corner of the American Southwest, at least, Common Ravens almost never appear in large groups. The norm is small probably family groups of three or four individuals rather than the hundreds and even thousands of American Crows that congregate in some areas. And, while the two Raven species sometimes do associate together, the chance of Commons and American Crows foraging or otherwise associating together is so rare as to be statistically not worth considering.

#### ***Chihuahuan Raven (Corvus cryptoleucus)***

**VOICE:** Chihuahuan Ravens vocalize somewhere between American Crows and Common Ravens. Their call isn’t a crow’s classic “Caw...Caw...Caw”, but neither is it growly and guttural as its larger cousin’s is. Think a Common Raven who somewhere along the way jumped onto the temperance bandwagon giving up booze and cigars! It still croaks, but it’s just higher pitched and more nasal than a Common Raven. And a Chihuahuan *does not* cronk!

A suggestion: listen to the calls of all three species; this is invaluable for fixing the differences in your mind. There are several apps online that allow you to hear various bird calls and songs on your smart phone. You can also go to the Cornell University Laboratory of Ornithology online and listen to avian vocalizations at the McCauley Library link on the site.

**HABITAT:** *C. cryptoleucus* inhabits lower elevation desert and grasslands, rather than higher elevation foothills, mountains and forested areas. So, in the former areas, the smaller Raven will abound. As the altitude increases, you’ll begin to see both species; then, at some point, only Commons.

All Corvids have evolved to thrive around humans, and the Chihuahuan Raven is no exception. Along with Common Ravens, they appear at dumps where they feed on garbage; in some places, both also inhabit cities, and agriculture also attracts them.

**APPEARANCE:** Chihuahuan Ravens and American Crows have some overlap in size. They also both inhabit much of Doña Ana, Otero, and Sierra Counties. If you spend much time birding, you’ll likely see mixed flocks (unkind—what *other* type are there? —murders, or murderous unkindnesses?\*) of them. When you do, remember to look at their tails when they fly. A shortish squarish tail denotes an American Crow; a larger, fanned-out, rounded one, a Chihuahuan Raven.

When you’re distinguishing between Chihuahuans and Commons, don’t forget to check the neck and bill. When the wind ruffles its neck feathers, you’ll see that the under-feathers of a Chihuahuan are white. In fact, at one time, the American Ornithological Union called it “White-necked Raven” and its scientific name *Corvus cryptoleucus* translates roughly as “crow with hidden white.”

Whatever the aeolian conditions, a Common Raven’s neck plumage appears shaggier and more unkempt than that of its smaller cousin. Neither do beak size and feathering depend on the wind. Both Ravens have unmistakable “Roman Noses” of beaks. The Common’s is a whopping gargantuan chopper covered in bristly feathers for about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the upper mandible. There’s also no doubt that a Chihuahuan is endowed with an impressively wicked bill. The bristling extends for only about half of the culmen though, and you’d never call the whole thing epically fearsome on a Viking scale, as you easily could a Common Raven’s.



**BEHAVIOR:** Be reminded that both Raven species, in contrast with American Crows, frequently soar and glide. In fact, Ravens habitually tumble, do barrel rolls, freefall, and perform other aerial acrobatics seemingly just for the sheer unadulterated fun of it.

This could just as easily fall under habitat, but it's behavior as well. In the three Counties named above—the area MVAS covers—both Ravens are year-round residents, while American Crows are winter visitors.

Also, Chihuahuan Ravens are more social creatures than Commons are. So, in this area, where Crows tend to stick closer to human settlement, if you're out in desert or grasslands habitat at elevations where both Ravens could occur and you see more than three or four Corvids together, odds are that they're Chihuahuans. Thus, although individually they're bigger, a large unkindness of *C. corax* would probably be smaller than a small unkindness of *C. cryptoleucus*. Cutting in front of you in a queue, say, rather than running you off the road to get onto an Interstate exit ramp first, maybe? Never mind.

I trust you've profited from reading this. Hopefully, you've enjoyed it as well. If you'd like to ask questions/suggest topics for future **FEATURED BIRDS** columns, contact me at [mpndltn@gmail.com](mailto:mpndltn@gmail.com) (**FEATURED BIRD** in the subject line) or 575.635.8711

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\* The respective collective nouns are a Murder of Crows and an Unkindness of Ravens

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## Great Backyard Bird Count

### We just finished the Christmas Bird Count. Why another bird count?

Four days in February are designated as the time of “The Great Backyard Bird Count” by the National Audubon Society, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, and eBird.org. This year February 15-18 (Friday-Monday) is when we are all encouraged to submit our checklists to them. The primary scientific purpose is to document before annual spring migrations begin where birds reside during the winter months. Worldwide data will be added to the vast database of eBird.org to determine how much change there is compared to prior years and if there are any surprises in store for 2019. Encouraging as many participants as they can helps to develop better data.



This is different from Christmas Bird Count data, which is processed by Audubon society and does not use the eBird database. The CBC was first developed over 100 years ago and has allowed Audubon society to develop national data on bird populations, which in turn has helped develop its conservation policies and direct attention to areas in need of help. They outline multiple examples on their website ( <https://www.audubon.org/conservation/science/christmas-bird-count> ).

With the CBC, data is collected by groups and sent to Audubon using specified criteria to accommodate their database developed over many years' time. eBird's computerized approach that allows individuals to report their findings is a function of our technological age and is timed to correlate with expected bird behavior worldwide, rather than our Western civilization's holiday season.

If someone is not a regular user of eBird.org they may develop an account with GreatBackyardBirdCount.org (a GBBC account) and submit data via their computer or (preferably) portable phone or iPad. It is free. Regular eBird.org users may use their usual account. Minimum participation is 15 minutes and maximum is limited only by the time frame of Feb 15-18. One thing that is nice about this project is that they encourage individuals to submit multiple lists if they find themselves looking for birds over the 4 day period. For details, visit their website <http://gbbc.birdcount.org/> .

Group participation is encouraged, and our local Mesilla Valley Audubon has a scheduled event for this purpose, with Mark Pendleton planning to lead a group at Las Cruces Dam on Saturday. See “Events” section of this newsletter. It should be noted that GBBC uses eBird.org ground rules for reporting. If you are a member of a group, one person should



report for all participants and designate on his/her submission who the other birders were. This will allow every participant to receive credit without duplicate (and thereby erroneous) reporting. When you are reporting as an individual (e.g. in your backyard) this does not apply.

You can be a citizen scientist, just for the fun of it.



Nesting White Winged Dove, Tellbrook Park 1/16/2019. It looks like they will be with us at least another year!



### **Aldo Leopold: would he have supported eBird?**

Over Christmas I was the fortunate recipient of A Sand County Almanac. Despite being first printed in 1949 (a year after the author died of a heart attack), it still makes for a great read, or re-read as it was for me. I was a bit worried when I started because I have become infatuated with eBird and rely on it heavily when thinking about birds and the out of doors. What would Aldo Leopold think about that?

Early in the book, his comments were not promising. There is much he did not like about what was going on in America's wilderness in the 1940's, with new roads clearing much of the forest, and a real invasion by the public with little appreciation for the "land" as Leopold defined it. Moreover, even in the 1940's, he was aghast at all the development of the use of wilderness as a "sportsman's paradise", and the gadgets that were being brought to the forest to make it "easier" for the public. These included the bird callers used by the hunters, anything one attaches to his belt, the plethora of camping gear, log cabins made from imitation logs, the "recreation industry" with its new roads and automobiles and tourist guides everywhere, and even the government's attempts to assert control over the land and euthanize some of its inhabitants. But then he wrote about wildlife research. He noted that individuals carefully documenting what they saw in the wilderness added to our knowledge and understanding of how all the members of the "land" work together. His first example was of the backyard birder who carefully watched what was going on just outside her window. He noted that the camera, unlike much of the other material brought into the forest, did not necessarily alter what was already there. He described an important role for citizen science to work alongside the researchers at universities. He described, 50 years before its invention, how an eBird-like collaboration could work both for the individual birder and for the benefit of nature as an example of the citizen science he extolled. Vindicated!



Aldo Leopold holds special status in New Mexico. His first employment as a conservationist was as a forest ranger in the Southwest and the country's first wilderness area was named for him in our state. His example in work and writing continues to exemplify the best in the conservation ethic. For all of us A Sand County Almanac remains a pertinent and provocative work in 2019, even if you don't use eBird.

Sid Webb

## Photos:

On January 26 at 8:00 AM Leasburg Dam State Park was a beautiful, crisp and inviting hotspot for any visitor. The cloudless blue sky and fresh air were truly invigorating. The Rio Grande, with enough water supplied by the natural springs below the dam, attracted water fowl that added to the park's winter migrants and year-round residents to make for a magnificent morning. MVAS birders, led by CJ Gojn, took advantage of the opportunity with a bird walk that netted the sighting of 35 species. Tom Johnson brought his camera and is sharing with our readers some of the exciting moments we all experienced. Thank you, Tom. Thank you, CJ.



Western Bluebirds



Cooper's Hawk



Wilson's Snipes



Chihuahua Raven



Lesser Goldfinch



Phainopepla

For more of Tom Johnson's photographs and a complete list of what he saw, visit the eBird Hotspot for Leasburg Dam, January 26, 2019: <https://ebird.org/view/checklist/S52059761>

## JOIN AUDUBON NOW!

### New Members:

- **National Membership** (special for new members only): Join both the National Audubon Society and Mesilla Valley Audubon Society for the introductory rate of \$20 for your first year of membership. This is a \$15 savings. You'll receive both *Audubon Magazine* and *Roadrunner Ramblings*. Make check payable to National Audubon Society and then send it to the local address below after completing this form with your name and address.
- **Local Chapter Membership**: Join, or renew your membership in, Mesilla Valley Audubon Society for \$15 per year. You'll receive *Roadrunner Ramblings* and be eligible for member-only events such as bird identification classes. Make check payable to Mesilla Valley Audubon Society.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

email: \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Send this form with your check to

Membership MVAS

PO Box 1645

Las Cruces, NM 88004

### Existing Members:

**National renewal** after the first year is handled with a bill being sent to the member annually by National Audubon Society. Annual dues for national members are \$20, with the option to make a larger, charitable donation.

**Local chapter membership renewal** is \$15 per year after the first year. This can be paid with a check at a monthly meeting or by using the above address and sending it to the MVAS treasurer. After the first year, it is a separate expense from the national membership.

All Audubon dues are tax deductible expenses.

*Roadrunner Ramblings* is published quarterly and is distributed via the web, with a copy e-mailed to all MVAS members. and a copy is posted on the MVAS website. All members of MVAS are encouraged to submit any article of interest to the group and any bird photograph recently taken. Please email a copy to [sidwebb@gmail.com](mailto:sidwebb@gmail.com), (575) 915 5017. To be added to the distribution list, contact Diane Moore, [hiplibrarian8090@gmail.com](mailto:hiplibrarian8090@gmail.com) or (575) 528-9164.

**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.

Board meetings are held on the Thursday before the 3rd Wed at 5:30 pm at the Southwest Environmental Center on the downtown mall. All Audubon members are welcome.

BIRDBRAINS Mark Pendleton ©2019

**Birdbrain 1:** "What do you call two crows sitting in a tree?"

**Birdbrain 2:** "Hmm . . . I don't know."

**Birdbrain 1:** "An attempted murder!"

**Birdbrain 2:** "GROAN!!!"