



# ROADRUNNER RAMBLINGS

## MESILLA VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY

<http://www.mvasaudubon.org/> Vol. 41, No. 3, Fall 2019

**Editor's Note:** All the photos in this edition of Roadrunner Ramblings are courtesy of Tom Johnson. We also have articles by Tom and our third Featured Birds by Mark Pendleton. And, Elaine Stachera did some very necessary proofreading. Thank you all very much. sw.



Great Blue Herons @ Lake Roberts, photo by Tom Johnson

### MVAS Set to Go! Fall 2019 Meetings

Mesilla Valley Audubon is ready to fly into the fall season! The heat is still with us, but before you know it, fall migration will be upon us.

Our full slate of monthly programs starts with Wayne Treers on Wednesday, August 21. Wayne will provide insight and explanations for how to use eBird.org app we restart our birding. He will surely be able to answer any and every question the audience might have. I know that eBird is as essential on a bird outing as is a pair of binoculars! On Wednesday, September 14, our guest speaker will be Shelly Valdovinos of SWEC. She will tell us about how she is working with SWEC to help rehabilitate the Rio Grande and maybe together we can figure out how our two organizations can work together! On October 16, our very own Nirmala Khandan will share his personal bird photos taken in Sri Lanka. We saw a sampling during our last meeting that was devoted to members' bird photos, and his were spectacular.

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## MVAS Fall Calendar 2019

### August

**Saturday, August 10:** Bird walk—Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park. Meet at Visitors' Center at 8:00 AM. C.J. Goin is your guide.

**Wednesday, August 21:** Bird walk—Wayne Treers hosts a “beginner’s bird walk” at Tellbrook Park. Meet at park entrance at 7:45 AM.

**Wednesday, August 21:** MVAS monthly meeting at SWEC. Meet ‘n greet at 6:30 PM, 7:00 PM Wayne Treers to present introduction to eBird.org.

**Saturday, August 24:** Bird walk—Leasburg Dam State Park. Meet at Visitors' Center at 8:00 AM. C.J. Goin is your guide.

**Saturday, August 31:** Field trip—Dripping Springs. (see article below for details)

### September

**Saturday, September 14:** Bird walk— Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park. Meet at Visitors' Center at 8:00 AM. C.J. Goin is your guide.

**Wednesday, September 18:** Bird walk—Wayne Treers hosts a “beginner’s bird walk” at Tellbrook Park. Meet at park entrance at 7:45 AM.

**Wednesday, September 18:** MVAS monthly meeting at SWEC. Meet ‘n greet at 6:30 PM, 7:00 PM Shelly Vadovinos of SWEC will talk about her involvement with a youth conservation corps.

**Saturday, September 21:** Bird walk—Leasburg Dam State Park. Meet at Visitors' Center at 8:00 AM. C.J. Goin is your guide.

**Saturday, September 28, 7:00 AM.** Field trip—Cloudcroft (see article below for details)

### October

**Saturday, October 12:** Bird walk— Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park. Meet at Visitors' Center at 8:00 AM. C.J. Goin is your guide.

**Wednesday, October 16:** Bird walk—Wayne Treers hosts a “beginner’s bird walk” at Tellbrook Park. Meet at park entrance at 7:45 AM.

**Wednesday, October 16:** MVAS monthly meeting at SWEC. Meet ‘n greet at 6:30 PM, 7:00 PM Nirmala Khandan will present on birds of Sri Lanka.

**Saturday, October 19:** Bird walk—Leasburg Dam State Park. Meet at Visitors' Center at 8:00 AM. C.J. Goin is your guide.

**Saturday, October 26:** Field trip—Percha Dam State Park (see article below for details)

### **Birds and Bevvies: A new MVAS event**

Over the summer break, MVAS gathered a couple times at local breweries to talk birds and everything else (except politics) for a couple hours. The hosting pubs were gracious and helpful (Picacho Peak Brewery and Spotted Dog Brewery). Stories about trips to the Ukraine to scout out never-before-seen birds, as well as treks to Costa Rica, Ohio’s spring migration, and meanderings all around New Mexico were fun to hear. Some of us even talked about our local bird feeders and their crazy visitors.

There were about 20 participants each time, and all agreed it is an event that needs to be repeated. Everybody is welcome! Watch for announcements via email and Facebook. Once established, we’ll add it to our newsletter calendar.



White-Breasted Nuthatch @ Lake Roberts, photo by Tom Johnson

### **NOTES on bird walks:**

Bird walks will restart with C.J. Goin back in action for his Mesilla Valley Bosque treks on Saturday, August 10 starting at 8:00 AM, and continuing the second Saturdays of the month for September and October. Note that Leasburg Dam walks are scheduled for August 24, September 21, and October 19, which is a change from the usual “last Saturday of the month” routine, which will resume in November. “Beginner’s” bird walks, hosted by Wayne Treers, will take place as usual the third Wednesday of each month, starting at 7:45 AM at Tellbrook Park. Bring your binoculars, everybody. There will be lots of birds!

## MVAS Fall Field Trips 2019: A work in progress

MVAS field trips this fall will be different! We are looking for new bird walking guides, as for three months our super-experienced leaders will all be unavailable at the same time (searching distant vistas for new and exciting chirps). Not to fear! MVAS has plenty of great birders, and as a group on a field trip we'll spot birds a-plenty! The difference will be that we may have discussions regarding what we find: Was that a phainopepla or a European starling? Was that a barn swallow or a cliff swallow? Don't let this scare you from joining. We'll all have just as much fun. Here is the plan:

**Saturday, August 31, 8:00 AM Dripping Springs.** Meet at the Visitors' Center. No mosquitos (well...)! Plenty of birds. Volunteer leader needed.

**Saturday, September 28, 7:00 AM Cloudcroft.** Meet at the old K-Mart parking lot (off highway 70) at 7:00 AM and plan to carpool to High Rolls where Sid Webb will meet you. After a stop or two to check the birds before reaching the summit, Sid will lead you to his cabin for lunch and probably more birding (he needs all the help he can get). Because of the distance and lunch plans, participants should call Sid Webb (575-915-5017) in advance of the field trip to be sure there are no changes in the schedule. Volunteer leader needed.

**Saturday, October 26, 7:30 AM Percha Dam State Park.** Meet at the old K-mart parking lot (off highway 70) before heading north on I-25 to what many consider their favorite birding spot. Volunteer leader needed.

The MVAS Board will be looking for new field trip leaders this fall. Volunteer, just for the fun of it! If you would like to help, call Sid Webb (575-915-5017). We will keep you updated at meetings, email, Facebook, and on the web. No fear. Everything will be all right, and our old heroes will be back in action in November.



**Editor's note:** Just before publication deadline, Tom Johnson submitted this note via email. It would be a great recurring feature for future editions of Roadrunner Rambler. Readers are encouraged to submit their "rare birds" wherever they find them. sw

### Rare Bird Sighting:



Hi Sid,

If you want to, in the newsletter for Rare Sightings, add that there are a couple of families of Tropical Kingbirds at Ascarate Park in El Paso. I went to find them this morning and it was great fun! I saw a few other interesting birds and had a nice time getting to know the park. See photos attached of Tropical Kingbird. Here is my eBird list: <https://ebird.org/view/checklist/S58301174>

-Tom J

### Invitation from El Paso Audubon to MVAS

#### Interested in Birding the Mountains of Colombia, South America?

Colombia is a land of incredible bird diversity with more than 1,900 species, many found nowhere else on earth. By some accounts, it has the most bird species of any place on earth.

The El Paso/Trans-Pecos Audubon Society will be offering a 10-day trip to Colombia from February 29 to March 9, 2020. The excursion will visit mid- and high-elevation sites in the eastern and central mountain ranges of the Andes mountains. With an expert guide, we will have the opportunity to see stunning examples of the avifauna of the region and have ample opportunities to watch and photograph them.

You can read more about this trip (itinerary, pricing, sign up, etc.) at the Holbrook Travel site below. Additionally, \$200 of your trip fee will be donated to the Mesilla Valley Audubon Society to support their conservation and education activities. A \$200 deposit will reserve your spot. Final payment is due by November 26, 2019.

<https://www.holbrooktravel.com/where-we-travel/americas/colombia/colombia-birding-elpaso-transpecos-audubon-society>

If you have any questions about this trip, please call Scott Cutler at 915-494-2193



European Robin, photo by Tom Johnson

#### Birding in London by Tom Johnson

If you are like me, usually I find myself in places where birding is not the primary reason for visiting, such as family vacations or business trips. However, I always try to sneak in some early morning or evening walks in a park, stroll by a river, the seaside, or a local wetland. In June I visited the London Wetland Centre and had a great time seeing some new birds and seeing some birds I know but have different names across the pond. You can see 40 species of birds here with a short train ride or a quick Uber. I saw many birds that migrate from Africa to London for the summer. A great find I spotted was a Green Sandpiper. My eBird list is here: <https://ebird.org/view/checklist/S57678870>. I also frequented a local park and found many birds I had never seen, such as Great Tits, Gray Herons, wrens, and Mistle Thrushes. My favorite bird was the inquisitive European Robin, who loved to see what I was doing and seemed to be in every park (see photo above).

## Conservation

### US-IBWC: An Important Partner in Preservation of the Rio Grande and Riparian Habitat

The United States International Boundary and Water Commission (USIBWC) was established in 1889 as part of a treaty with Mexico that set up joint management of rivers that the countries share. Its mission is as follows:

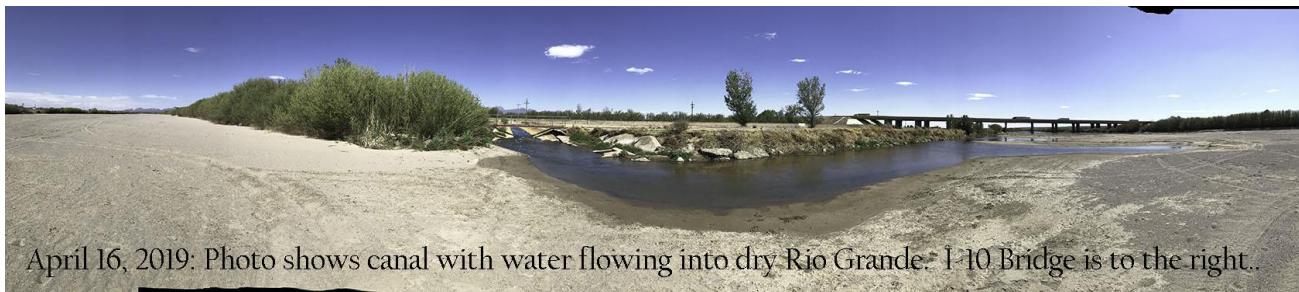
*The mission of the IBWC is to apply the rights and obligations which the Governments of the United States and Mexico assume under the numerous boundary and water treaties and related agreements, and to do so in a way that benefits the social and economic welfare of the peoples on the two sides of the boundary and improves relations between the two countries. (See 1, below.)*

The Rio Grande is an important focus of US-IBWC's activities. US-IBWC recently held two public meetings to solicit public input for its "Canalization Project" in our section of the Rio Grande, outlining its plans for the next 10 years. Before beginning any new intervention, the US-IBWC presents its case to the public. That is where we are now.

The US-IBWC took an important step on its Aquatic Habitat Restoration in the Rio Grande Canalization Project with its public hearing at Las Cruces City Hall on 6/12/2019. With a positive response from those present, it outlined four projects within Doña Ana County that would make this region of the river a more bird- and animal-friendly place.

Two of the four planned interventions are in the northern part of Doña Ana County on land owned by the US-IBWC in Broad Canyon and Selden Point. Plans include removal of non-native flora (e.g., salt cedar), removal of accumulated dead wood debris, planting of native flora, and research of river flow to improve the river's positive impact on its nearby aquatic plain in the area under consideration.

In Las Cruces, some exciting interventions are proposed. Just north of the bridge for I-10 (one mile south of La Llorona Park), water effluent from the Water Treatment Station drains into the river 12 months a year via a concrete structure. The plan is to divert this water into a four-acre site that will have ponds, meandering streams, and newly planted cottonwood and willow that will surely attract many new birds (and humans). Just north of El Paso, at the Courchesne Bridge Site, a similar project is planned. The water source there is flood water currently entering the Rio Grande directly that will be diverted over a 13-acre site.



April 16, 2019: Photo shows canal with water flowing into dry Rio Grande. I-10 Bridge is to the right.

The US-IBWC prepared carefully for this presentation. It had narrowed down its recommendations to the four sites after doing more study of effectiveness and feasibility since their stakeholders meeting in November of last year. In addition to environmental concerns, they dealt with the arcane land ownership issues that make this project so difficult. The handout provided to meeting attendees is available at <https://www.mvasaudubon.org/conservation>.

A second meeting of the US-IBWC soliciting public input occurred on 6/18/2019. This second meeting focused on the environmental impact of ongoing and proposed USIBWC interventions on the Rio Grande. Basically, US-IBWC outlined a river management plan that would manage levees already in place, continue attention to the vegetation within and at the side of the river, and floodplain management that involves removal of sediment that accumulates year after year. Also, it recommends partnering with the Rio Grande Trail coalition to open land along the river to public access. US-IBWC did not address specific projects discussed at the first meeting.

Unlike the first session of public input, this meeting's attendees had some significant concerns with regard to some basic assumptions by US-IBWC and the suggested problem resolution proposed by the US-IBWC. Attendees criticized the US-IBWC for not doing enough sediment removal to keep up with deposition. Also, the observation that US-IBWC uses five-year easement assessments to justify interventions designed to be completed over a 10-year period raised concerns that a lot of potential problems might not be covered.

**10-Year Report:** During much of the second meeting described above, the US-IBWC referred to its 10-year report on activities and promised to make it available to the public. A few days later, the 242-page report appeared on its website. For anyone new to this subject, it provides a comprehensive review of what is going on with our Rio Grande. The report documents the successes, failures, and controversies involving management of the Rio Grande over the last decade. Its availability as a reference will certainly be of interest to Audubon Society membership. (See 2, below.)

References:

1. [https://www.ibwc.gov/About\\_Us/About\\_Us.html](https://www.ibwc.gov/About_Us/About_Us.html)
2. [https://www.ibwc.gov/Files/Final\\_Report\\_TenYear\\_Imp\\_RodwAppendices\\_061719.pdf](https://www.ibwc.gov/Files/Final_Report_TenYear_Imp_RodwAppendices_061719.pdf)



Bushtit @Lake Roberts, photo by Tom Johnson

**From National Audubon**

**Western Rivers Bird Count: Where do we count the birds?**

The National Audubon Society has an established Western Rivers Bird Count (<https://www.audubon.org/western-rivers-bird-count>). During May and June each year, they invite birders to submit data to them via eBird.org. Featured birds include the Yellow Warbler, Summer Tanager, Yellow-breasted Chat, and Bell's Vireo, but they invite a list of every bird you identify. Their goal is to chart bird abundance (or lack thereof) and use the data to characterize bird responses to stream management.

But ... in Doña Ana County the birding sites they chose are closed to the public! Arg! One spot by Broad Canyon is owned by the State and the other is owned by the U.S.-International Boundary Water Commission. Neither is accessible as a public birding location at this time.

However, when I informed National Audubon Society of this, they were very accommodating. After an apology, they invited us to recommend two locations that would satisfy their criteria for a “good site.” The goals of the Count are: 1) To monitor habitat where their priority species occur (listed above), 2) To target important riparian areas for birds where there is limited data, 3) To track bird response to conservation efforts and drying, and 4) To track species abundance.

Surely we can find a spot satisfies program goals and is convenient for us to bird as of 2020. Two options are Mesilla Valley Bosque and Leasburg Dam State Park. Alternatively, choosing an area where the IBWC may alter the environment could prove very interesting. What do you think? Send a note to Roadrunner Rambler with your ideas. We need to be ready for next year!



Hairy Woodpecker in agave flower, photo by Tom Johnson

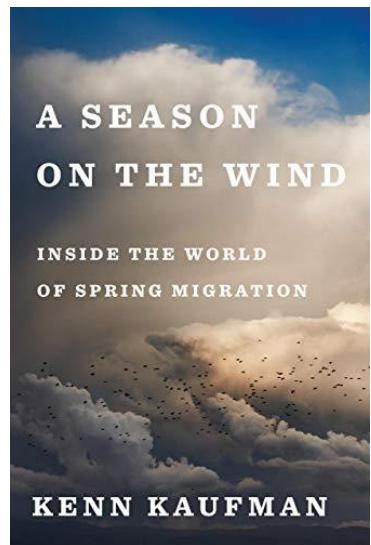
## Book Report

*A Season on the Wind: Inside the World of Spring Migration*

Kenn Kaufman, 2019

No index. No references. No footnotes. Despite this, *A Season on the Wind* is an authoritative account of spring bird migration, focusing on the southern shore of Lake Erie. Author Kenn Kaufman has been a birder since age 6, dropped out of high school for his “big year,” and resided in Ohio (after leaving the birds in Arizona!) for the last 20 years, where he has been totally dedicated to the annual arrival of millions of birds each May. Kaufman paints the picture of birds heading north in an event that has been happening for thousands of years. Warblers no bigger than a human thumb may fly over a thousand miles in one season. Every bird is a hero and is the offspring of heroes who faced the same journey.

In the Midwest, which is known for its farmland, Ohio south of Lake Erie was a vast swamp and forest unattractive to early settlers. Toledo became a commercial hub within the Great Lakes transportation zone, but along the coast, no farms could be started without extreme intervention to modify the native habitat. Instead, hunting groups set up blinds and headquarters and made the habitat friendly to birds (other than the hunters and their guns). Paradoxically, Kaufman notes bird hunters really do love their prey, and thanks to them the habitat known as the Magee Marsh Wildlife Area, the Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge, and other tremendous birding spots are active birding destinations year-round, but especially every spring.



Kaufman describes his role at the Black Swamp Bird Observatory, which is both a research center for bird migration and a source of promotion for birding along Lake Erie’s coast. BSBO is the main sponsor of the “Biggest Week of American Birding,” a 10-day event each May that has come to attract thousands of birders from all over the world (including this year MVAS board member Elaine Stachera Simon), with migrating warblers being the primary attraction. In addition to tours and lectures, BWAB features a popular bird tattoo contest and an annual “prom” for all those birders. Another function of the BSBO is to advocate for birds, most notably with its persistent and eventually successful effort to block a wind farm with bird-killing turbines that would have been devastating to the migrating birds that flock to these rare pieces of habitat along the shore of Lake Erie.

The overriding theme of the book is the wonder and the miracle of the birds. Kaufman stands in awe of what they do and describes in loving terms the beauty of birds. With his long experience in northern Ohio, he can predict which birds will arrive early and which will be latecomers. His use of a weather map and bird-finding radar allows him to predict with great accuracy when a new wave of birds will arrive and which species it will contain. He is the author of several other books and field guides, but notes that this book has been in the back of his mind for most of his life. He has written a beautiful book, well worth reading.

## FEATURED BIRD(S) by Mark Pendleton © 2019

### WILSON'S BIRDS

At first glance, you probably think that *Phalaropus tricolor*, *Charadrius wilsonia*, *Gallinago delicata*, *Oceanites oceanicus*, and *Cardelina pusilla* have nothing in common save that they're birds. They are, after all, a phalarope, a plover, a snipe, a storm petrel, and a warbler.

Still can't guess their shared trait? There are five clues in that first paragraph.

OK, so you probably know them better by their common names, right? They are—in both alphabetical and taxonomic order—Wilson's Phalarope, Wilson's Plover, Wilson's Snipe, Wilson's Storm Petrel, and Wilson's Warbler. And what they have in common is being named after Alexander Wilson, called by some “The Father of American Ornithology.”

#### The Man

Wilson, born 6 July 1766 in Paisley, Scotland, was a poet, ornithologist, and naturalist. At the age of 13, he apprenticed as a weaver. While working as a weaver, he developed an interest in poetry, and wrote ballads, bucolic poems, and satiric comment about the conditions in the textile mills. One of these poems mocking a local mill owner was burned in public and earned Wilson a fine and prison sentence.

Upon his release, Wilson, along with a nephew, departed Scotland in May 1794 for the newly independent United States of America. They settled in Philadelphia. Jobs for weavers were few, so he tried his hand at teaching. Teaching was only barely more lucrative than weaving. So, ten years after arriving in America, influenced by the naturalist William Bartram plus the study of art and ornithology in his spare time, Wilson decided to write the definitive book on American birds. A prominent local publisher agreed to print and publish it if Wilson could find 200 subscribers, so he set out to do so.

In his wanderings to collect—since ornithology was practiced down the barrel of a shotgun, here read “shoot”—specimens for his paintings and sign up subscribers for his project, he met another naturalist whose fame would eclipse his own: John James Audubon (who, incidentally, did not subscribe). It was largely the success of Wilson's work (he even hand-delivered a copy of the first volume when it came out in 1808 to President Thomas Jefferson, whom he had earlier persuaded to subscribe) that kept Audubon going when he was tempted to give up.

#### The Work

Published in 1814, the nine volumes of *American Ornithology* contained illustrations of 268 birds, with 48 of them new to science. In addition to the illustrations, Wilson described the diet, range, and behavior of the birds with poetic skill. In all, he tramped more than 12,000 miles from New England to Florida to western Tennessee in the seven years he worked on his project.

The resulting work highlighted important field marks in a crisply colored, two-dimensional style that users of modern field guides will recognize. He was the first to differentiate between Turkey and Black Buzzards (Vultures), and his work both sparked and fed an insatiable appetite for knowledge about the avifauna of the new country.

It was not an easy project. Midway through collecting specimens for the final two volumes, a press workers' strike in Philadelphia forced Wilson to have to hand color many of the engravings for his book himself. He never saw many of the western species he described, instead relying on ones collected by the Lewis and Clark expedition.

After years of tramping through the wilderness, Wilson's health gave out on him and he died of dysentery in Philadelphia on 23 August 1813 before the ninth and final volume of his work was published. It was finished and published the next year by his friend and patron George Ord.

#### The Birds

(For illustrations, please look up the individual birds either online or in your favorite field guide.)

Wilson's Phalarope: This was one of the birds that Wilson sketched from specimens collected by the Lewis and Clark Expedition.

Wilson's Plover: Wilson collected the type specimen—the specimen upon which the first scientific description is based—in 1813 at Cape May, New Jersey, where the bird was, and is today, a rarity. The oldest recorded Wilson's Plover was probably a male that was more than six years old when it was recaptured by bird banders in South Carolina.

Wilson's Snipe: *Gallinago delicata* was not “split off” from the Common Snipe of the Old World until 2003. Fittingly, the American Ornithological Union named it after Wilson, who first described it for science. In his description, he noted that it had sixteen, rather than fourteen, tail feathers, as does its Old World cousin.

Wilson's Storm Petrel: As with the Wilson's Plover, it was off the coast of New Jersey that he spotted a small, swallow-sized bird skimming the waves behind his boat. So, we have Wilson's Storm Petrel.

Wilson's Warbler: Wilson was always descriptive when naming new birds. When he saw this tiny yellow-green bird with a black cap flitting about catching insects, he called it a “Green Black-capt Flycatcher.” Wilson's Warbler is so much easier to remember and say!

## Watch for Late Summer Hummers by Tom Johnson



It's that time of the year for the numbers of hummingbirds to increase as the Rufous work their way south from the Northwest and mingle with the already-present Black-chinned. Dripping Springs Natural Area workers are reporting a few Rufous males and females showing up at the feeders at the Visitor Center. There are plenty of juvenile hummers around everywhere you look as the Black-chinned and Broad-tailed Hummingbirds finish up their final broods of chicks. Keep your eyes open for infrequent visitors to your feeders such as the tiny Calliope or Anna's (recently spotted in a neighborhood below Dripping Springs). Keep those feeders fresh, don't be afraid to NOT know which type of hummer you are seeing, and ask for help from others if you need help with identification.

Black-chinned Hummingbird, photo by Tom Johnson

### Officers & Board 2019

President: open  
Vice-president: open  
Secretary: Aaron Lucas  
Treasurer: Diane Moore  
Director 2017–2019: C.J. Goin  
Director 2017–2019: Mark Pendleton  
Director 2019–2020: Gill Sorg  
Director 2019–2021: Sid Webb  
Director 2019–2021: Elaine Stachera Simon  
Director 2019–2021: open

### Committee chairs:

Conservation: vacant  
Education: CJ Goin  
Field Trips: Mark Pendleton  
Programs: open  
Newsletter: Sidney Webb  
Website: Sidney Webb  
Membership: Diane Moore  
Christmas Bird Count Coordinator:  
Wayne Treers  
Facebook admin: Elaine Stachera Simon



Summer Tanager @ Leasburg State Park, photo by Tom Johnson

Roadrunner Ramblings is published quarterly and available on the MVAS website, with a copy emailed to all MVAS members. All members of MVAS are encouraged to submit articles of interest to the group and any bird photographs recently taken, which can be emailed to [sidwebb@gmail.com](mailto:sidwebb@gmail.com). 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.

Mesilla Valley Audubon Society  
A Chapter of the National Audubon Society



P.O. Box 1465 Las Cruces NM 88004

 mesilla valley audubon society

*www.mvasaudubon.org*