

# Roadrunner Ramblings

**Winter 2025**



***Page 4: Black Tern,  
Adult Birding Classes***

## President's Page

Fall is here and with it, the busiest time of the year for birders! We're enjoying the end of fall migration, looking forward to the annual Christmas Bird Count, and continuing with our monthly MVAS activities. In addition, we're thinking ahead to our January officer and board elections. We're also preparing to say farewell to board member Dylan Osterhaus, who will soon add the initials Ph.D. after his name and is off for a postdoc at Purdue University in January.

Before we look to the future, I'll mention something from the recent past. In July, I represented MVAS at the National Audubon Society's Leadership Conference in Montreal, Canada. I was one of about 500 chapter and conservation leaders from across the Western Hemisphere. I had the opportunity to bird and break bread with people who included NAS President Dr. Elizabeth Gray, Chief Conservation Officer Marshall Johnson, Vice President and Chief Scientist Chad Wilsey, Vice President of Audubon Southwest Jonathan Hayes, Vice Chair (and astronaut) Kathryn Sullivan, and Board Director Anne Beckett, the only other New Mexican at the conference. I also had lunch with Christian Samper, managing director and leader of nature solutions at the Bezos Earth Fund, and a woman who leads a nature nonprofit in Canada. There were many leaders from Central and South America who are helping to fulfill Audubon's hemispheric goals.

There, I learned more about Audubon's mission and Flight Plan, which provides a framework for action. If you haven't read it, I encourage you to download the [Audubon Flight Plan](#) and become familiar with it. If you get that far, you may be someone who is interested in serving on our board and/or attending the 2026 New Mexico – Arizona state conference, scheduled for April 2 – 4 in Phoenix, Arizona. I'll be sharing more information about both opportunities in this newsletter.

You can also read more about the Christmas Bird Count in this newsletter. We hope every member finds a way to participate, either by being on a team or submitting bird counts from their own backyard.

I want to thank Dylan Osterhaus for his outstanding contributions to MVAS over the last several years, including leading the Leasburg bird walk and serving

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the newsletter of

**Mesilla Valley Audubon Society**

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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.



**President:** Cheryl Fallstead

**Vice-President:** Elaine Stachera Simon

**Secretary:** Julia Osgood

**Treasurer:** Judy Wilbur

**Board Members:** Jennifer Montoya,

CJ Goin, Linda Miller, Randy Gray,

Whitney Watson, Dylan Osterhaus,

Marcia Wilson, Annie Mitchell

**Editor:** Jay Wilbur

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on our board. Dylan was also a member of our conservation committee, helped manage our social media presence, and has always been available to provide expert advice, all while conducting his doctoral research. We'll miss him, but we have the opportunity to wish him farewell on **Saturday, November 22, at 3 p.m. at Bosque Brewing Co. on Telshor**. We have the back room reserved for our celebration of Dylan.



Speaking of volunteering and leading bird walks, we are seeking a replacement leader for the Sagecrest bird walk, which has been ably led for the last couple of years by Jonathan Brooks. Jonathan's new work schedule prohibits him from continuing to lead the bird walk, and we need an individual or tag team who are willing to lead this popular walk. It is currently scheduled for the second Saturday of the month, but can be moved to fit with a new leader's schedule. Please email [mesillavalleyaudubon@gmail.com](mailto:mesillavalleyaudubon@gmail.com) if you are interested in helping. It only takes a couple of hours a month and is a great way to contribute to our organization!

For reference, here's a summary of the bird walks we offer each month:

- First Monday – Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park with Julia Osgood and Patricia Bowen
- Second Saturday – Sagecrest Park, LEADER NEEDED
- Last Saturday – Leasburg Dam State Park with Daniel Horton

We also hope to offer a rotating selection of “pop-up” bird walks at nearby locations. Let us know if you'd like to lead one at your favorite birding spot.

Finally, we've moved our online membership and donation payment from PayPal to Zeffy, which is only for nonprofits and doesn't charge us or you any fees. All credit/debit cards are now accepted. To renew your membership online go to [Mesilla Valley Audubon Society Membership](#). The new system will ask if you want to make a donation to support Zeffy or make an additional donation to MVAS. Both are up to you! Thank you for being a part of Mesilla Valley Audubon Society. We appreciate you!

- Cheryl Fallstead

## Conservation Corner

**Las Palomas Marsh monitoring** kicks off this fall! Since 1994, MVAS has played a role in developing and maintaining this enclosure in the wetland along the Rio Grande floodplain just south of Williamsburg, NM. The Bureau of Land Management would like us to monitor the marsh once a month.

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Please consider joining our Citizen Science program to conduct bird surveys along a set transect through this beautiful and birdy locale. If we get 12 people signed up, we'll assign a month to each for an easy and fun, once-a-year effort. Volunteers will be provided training and orientation. Please submit your interest to [mesillavalleyaudubon@gmail.com](mailto:mesillavalleyaudubon@gmail.com) with the words Las Palomas in the subject line and include your name and phone number.



*Las Palomas Marsh in Sierra County is a rare example of riparian habitat that, unfortunately, is declining throughout southern New Mexico. MVAS is proud to be part of its management.*

**The 2026 New Mexico State Land Commissioner election** is still a year away but MVAS, along with four other local conservation organizations, is going to host a forum so voters can learn more about the four candidates. Land Commissioner is a very powerful office overseeing two million acres in southern NM. Of particular interest to MVAS is the long-term integrity of Chihuahuan Desert grasslands managed by the State Land Office that provide wintering grounds for dozens of species of birds that breed in northern prairies.

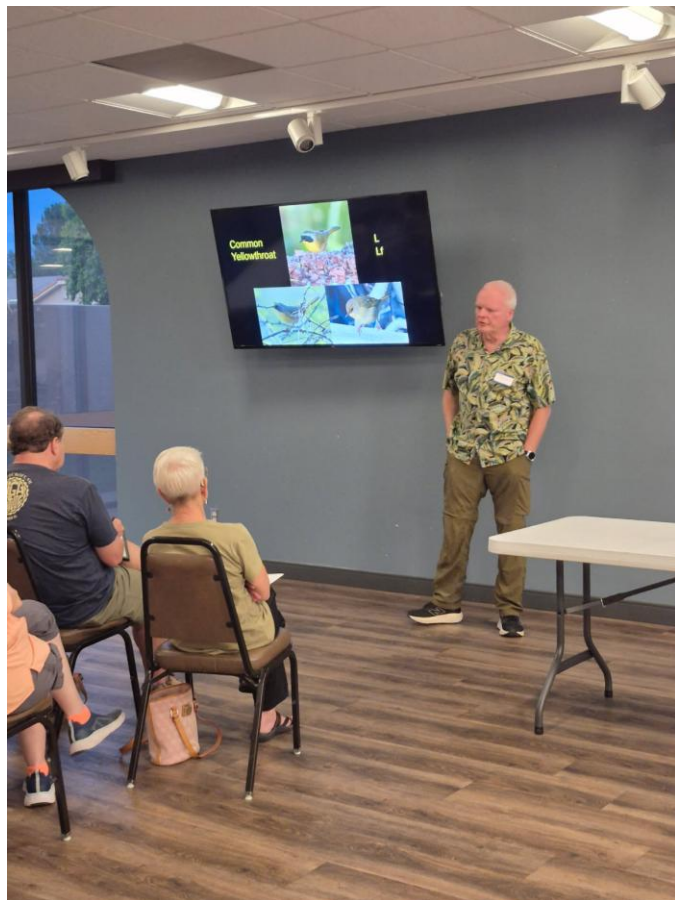
Mark your calendars to attend the State Land Office Commissioner forum on November 19, 2025. The location is Centennial High School, 1950 Sonoma Ranch Blvd. in the Theater building. Doors open at 5:30 p.m. The question-and-answer session will be from 6 to 8:30 p.m. The event will be moderated, and all candidates will be asked the same questions. It's a golden opportunity to become an educated voter in an election with a big impact on local birds.

- Jennifer Montoya

# Adult Birding Classes Resume

by Jay Wilbur

This past August and September saw the return of adult birding classes offered by MVAS. A Warbler Identification course for more experienced birders led things off at the end of August in hopes of increasing our appreciation of fall migration in southern New Mexico. Then in September, Birding Basics was presented. This class, comprising three lectures and two field trips, was designed to get interested beginners started on the right foot by showing them good tools and techniques.



*Jay Wilbur describes three Common Yellowthroat plumages during the Warbler Identification Class.*

Both classes attracted full houses of over 30 attendees each. Most participants were existing MVAS members, but about 10 new members joined the flock because these classes were open to the public. Feedback from participants was very positive with virtually everyone asking for more. This feeling was shared by the team of instructors, who all said teaching the classes was a great experience.

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Going forward, the MVAS Board has approved a proposal by Adult Education Chair Jay Wilbur for a two-year, revolving curriculum including identification classes for waterfowl, sparrows, shorebirds, raptors, flycatchers, and, of course, warblers. The Birding Basics class will be taught annually in the fall, and a new Birding Basics Part 2 will be taught each spring.

Some classes will include field trips to extend the classroom outdoors and reinforce lessons from the lectures while looking at actual birds. For example, the next class to be offered, our Waterfowl Identification class, will include an overnight trip to Bosque del Apache. This class will be offered in mid-January 2026. Check out the announcement on page 9 for details.



*David Coalson leads the Birding Basics Class on a field trip to Leasburg Dam State Park, September 16.*

Speaking of class field trips, we had a pretty exciting one on September 9. While leading the Birding Basics class through Sagecrest Park and the area, East of Las Cruces Dam, David Coalson spotted a pair of Black Terns, quite rare visitors to Doña Ana County. A picture of one taken by Jay Wilbur provides the cover for this issue. It was the event of the day and quite a treat not only for the beginners in the class but also for the more experienced birders tagging along. Who knows what other interesting finds await us on future trips?



# Migration Day 2025

by Juliemar Cuevas-Hernandez

The third annual Migration Day was held on Saturday, October 11, 2025, at Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park. This outreach event was organized by the New Mexico State University (NMSU) Avian Migration Program (AMP) to teach members of the community about fall bird migration and connect with fellow bird enthusiasts. This year, the event took place on World Migratory Bird Day and was registered as one of many international migration-related events.



*NMSU students lead one of several bird walks along park trails. Photo by Frannie Miller.*

Over 120 community members came out to learn about local birds and see migration in action, an increase in attendance from last year. Activities included student-led bird walks, banding demonstrations, and bird-related games for children and adults alike. Attendees had the chance to view migrating and resident bird species in their natural habitat, witness the process of bird banding, and try their hand at matching bird foot specimens to the correct species. Participants also learned about the various avian-related research projects conducted at NMSU by undergraduate and graduate students. AMP students showcased the various tools used for their research, such as radio-telemetry tracking equipment, acoustic recording devices, and nest boxes.



*Park visitors check out MVAS displays to learn about local birds. Photo by Sid Webb.*



*NMSU students and MVAS volunteers work together to educate park visitors. Photo by Jeremiah Fierro.*



*NMSU students explain some of their research at the bird banding table. Photo by Jeremiah Fierro.*

AMP is a USDA-funded training program for graduate and undergraduate students in the departments of Biology and Fish, Wildlife, and Conservation Ecology at NMSU. AMP students engage in hands-on research related to bird migration while receiving specialized training for jobs in migration ecology. The first Migration Day event was held in fall 2023, and the event is expected to continue in future years.

## **Get Ready for the CBC!**

**By Julia Osgood**

The Christmas Bird Count (CBC) is an annual community science project organized by the National Audubon Society. Each year between December 14 and January 5, volunteers across the Americas count all the birds they see within designated 15-mile-wide circles. The data collected helps track bird populations, migration patterns, and long-term environmental trends, making it one of the longest-running wildlife surveys in the world. The data collected by volunteers has become an indispensable tool for understanding and protecting bird populations.

The Mesilla Valley Audubon Society will hold its Las Cruces CBC on Sunday, December 14, and the Caballo CBC, coordinated by Wayne Treers, will take place on Saturday, December 27. There has also been a La Luz count, but we are seeking a compiler to coordinate this effort.

### **How it Began**

The CBC began in 1900, when ornithologist Frank M. Chapman offered an alternative to the popular “side hunt,” a Christmas pastime in which groups competed to shoot the most birds and animals. Chapman suggested counting birds instead of hunting them. That first year, 27 people took part across 25 locations, tallying more than 18,500 birds and 89 species.

What started as a small movement is now an international effort. Today, more than 80,000 volunteers participate in the CBC each year, counting over 40 million birds across the Western Hemisphere. The tradition has endured because it combines the joy of birdwatching with the satisfaction of contributing to real science.

### **Why the Data Matters**

Over the decades, CBC volunteers have built one of the largest and longest-running wildlife datasets in existence. This information is invaluable to scientists tracking bird populations and environmental changes over time.

Data from the CBC has played a key role in major scientific findings. It helped confirm that North America has lost nearly three billion birds since 1970, and it contributed to Canada’s 2024 State of the Birds Report showing steep declines in grassland and shorebird populations. Data from the CBC has supported more than 300 studies on topics such as climate change, migration shifts, and habitat loss.

Like the proverbial canary in the coal mine, birds serve as indicators of the health of the planet. Long-term data from the CBC shows how birds are adapting to climate and habitat changes. Decades of records reveal that species dependent on grasslands and wetlands have declined as those habitats disappeared, while warmer winters have altered duck migration patterns, with many species now staying farther north. These findings demonstrate the critical value of continued monitoring by CBC volunteers.

### **Volunteers are Essential**

The CBC has lasted for years because volunteers show up and count birds. Every extra pair of eyes means better coverage of the count circle. You don’t have to be an expert birder to participate. Beginners can team up with seasoned birders, and feeder-watchers can contribute valuable data from home. Joining connects you to a network of people who care about birds, locally and globally.

Our Las Cruces circle has 13 areas, each counted by a team coordinated by a leader. Julia Osgood and Patricia Bowen are the CBC compilers for the Las Cruces circle and will consolidate all the information provided by each team leader. Wayne Treers will do the same for the Caballo CBC.

### **To Sign up:**

- For the Las Cruces CBC, email [mesillavalleyaudubon@gmail.com](mailto:mesillavalleyaudubon@gmail.com) and put LC 2025 CBC in the subject line.
- For the Caballo count, email Wayne Treers at [way1mike@yahoo.com](mailto:way1mike@yahoo.com).

- Indicate your birding level in the email: Are you a beginner, intermediate, or experienced birder? With that information, the compiler can assign you to a team.
- State whether you want to join a team or participate from your backyard feeder if you live inside the circle. Both options are valuable.

#### **Then come prepared:**

- Dress for the weather.
- Bring binoculars if you have them. We have some you can borrow, but let us know ahead of time so we'll be sure to have them for you.
- Bring water and snacks. In most cases, teams stop for lunch and then continue birding in the afternoon.

#### **Be Part of the Legacy**

From 27 people in 1900 to tens of thousands today, the Christmas Bird Count has endured because it matters. It matters to science, to conservation, and to every participant who finds joy in a winter day spent with birds.

So, this year, bundle up, grab your binoculars, and join us. Your sightings, your enthusiasm, and your love of birds are greatly appreciated.

## **Coming Soon: Officer and Board Elections**

**by Cheryl Fallstead**

As the end of the year draws nearer, I'll be reaching out to seek nominations for officers, who are elected annually, and board members, who serve three-year terms. If you are passionate about birding, birds, and protecting their habitats, you may be a great candidate!

Our board meets monthly, and we plan to meet online two times and in person once each quarter. Officers are the president, vice president, treasurer, and secretary. We have eight elected board members, and four have terms ending this year, plus with Dylan moving away, his term has a year left to fulfill. While some board members may be willing to run for another three-year term, they and officers must stand for re-election.

Many of our board members also serve as committee chairs, although some committee chairs, like Adopt-a-Spot Coordinator Aaron Lucas, Scholarship Chair Dr. Carol Campbell, and Newsletter/Education Chair Jay Wilbur, are not on the board.

Our board can benefit from people with a wide range of skills, including those with a wildlife and conservation background or those who are proficient in social media (note Dylan's popular Migration Monday posts on Facebook). People with connections to local government officials or agencies can help build bridges, and those with organizational skills or ideas for programming also have a way to contribute.

If you peruse the [National Audubon Society's Flight Plan](#), you may be inspired to provide leadership in ways we aren't currently pursuing to help our national organization fulfill its goals.

Interested parties, whether board members or not, can also learn more about Flight Plan and what other chapters within our region are doing by attending the 2026 New Mexico – Arizona leadership meeting. It will be held at the Rio Salado Audubon Center in Phoenix, Arizona, the first weekend of April. Topics on the draft agenda include Flight Plan, increasing chapter engagement and membership, experiences with Motus towers, developing the next generation of conservation leaders, fundraising, and habitat conservation. The event will also offer field trips and social opportunities. Watch for more information in the coming months.

If you're interested in learning more about how you can support our chapter, as an officer, board member, committee member, or bird walk leader, please email me. I'd love to hear from you and discuss the opportunities!





## Calendar of Events

### November

#### **Nature Journaling @ Sierra Vista Growers**

Saturday, November 1, 2025, 10 a.m. – 1 p.m.  
Sierra Vista Growers, 2800 NM Hwy 28, La Union.  
Nature journaling at this nursery with greenhouses.  
RSVP to join us. Beginners welcome!

#### **Bird Walk @ Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park**

Monday, November 3, 8 – 10 a.m.  
Meet near the park visitor center and then take a guided bird walk led by Julia Osgood and Patricia Bowen. Park entry is free for New Mexico residents; non-residents pay \$10 per vehicle.

#### **Bird Walk @ Sagecrest Park**

Saturday, November 8, 8 – 10 a.m.  
Meet bird walk leader Cheryl Fallstead near the park entrance, then explore the desert and wetlands areas east of the Las Cruces Dam.

#### **Sagecrest Park Clean-Up**

Saturday, November 15, 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.

#### **MVAS Monthly Meeting**

Wednesday, November 19, 6:30 – 8 p.m.  
Knox Hall Room 142 and on Zoom  
Topic: NMSU grad students will give presentations about their projects. Visit with fellow members from 6:30 – 7 p.m., when the presentation begins.

#### **Celebration for Dylan Osterhaus**

Saturday, November 22, 3 p.m.  
Bosque Brewing Co., 2102 Telshor Court.  
Help us thank Dylan for his years of service to MVAS, and wish him well as he departs for Indiana and a postdoc at Purdue.

#### **Bird Walk @ Leasburg Dam State Park**

Saturday, November 29, 8 – 10 a.m.  
Join bird walk leader Daniel Horton in birding the bosque along the Rio Grande. Meet at the park visitor center, then carpool to the south picnic area. Park entry is free for New Mexico residents; non-residents pay \$10 per vehicle.

## December

#### **Bird Walk @ Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park**

Monday, December 1, 8 – 10 a.m.  
Meet near the park visitor center and then take a guided bird walk led by Julia Osgood and Patricia Bowen. Park entry is free for New Mexico residents; non-residents pay \$10 per vehicle.

#### **Nature Journaling Holiday Nature Journaling Make-and-Take**

Saturday, December 13, 2025, 1 – 4 p.m.  
Las Cruces Village Social Center, Creative Arts Room, 3011 Buena Vida Circle.  
RSVP for this activity, where there will be the opportunity to make a variety of nature journaling-related items, like mini watercolor palettes and journals.

#### **Bird Walk @ Sagecrest Park**

Saturday, December 13, CANCELLED.

#### **Las Cruces Christmas Bird Count**

Sunday, December 14. See article on page 6.

#### **MVAS Monthly Meeting**

Wednesday, December 17, 6:30 – 8 p.m.  
Knox Hall Room 142 and on Zoom  
Topic: It's Holi-birdy time! Visit with fellow members from 6:30 – 7 p.m., when the presentation begins. Submit your favorite bird photos from the year to be included in the presentation.

#### **Sagecrest Park Clean-Up**

Saturday, December 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.

#### **Bird Walk @ Leasburg Dam State Park**

Saturday, December 27, 8 – 10 a.m.  
Join bird walk leader Daniel Horton in birding the bosque along the Rio Grande. Meet at the park visitor center, then carpool to the south picnic area. Park entry is free for New Mexico residents; non-residents pay \$10 per vehicle.

#### **Caballo Christmas Bird Count**

Saturday, December 27. Email Wayne Treers at way1mike@yahoo.com for information.



## January 2026

### **Bird Walk @ Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park**

Monday, January 5, 8 – 10 a.m.

Meet near the park visitor center and then take a guided bird walk led by Julia Osgood and Patricia Bowen. Park entry is free for New Mexico residents; non-residents pay \$10 per vehicle.

### **Bird Walk @ Sagecrest Park**

Saturday, January 10, 8 – 10 a.m.

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

### **Waterfowl ID Class**

Tuesday, January 13, 6:30 – 8 p.m., and field trip January 17 – 18.

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

Winter is the season when ducks and other waterfowl fly south and enjoy our warmer lakes and ponds. Jay Wilbur and David Coalson team up to teach a class in waterfowl identification. This year, the class will include an optional overnight field trip to Bosque del Apache. To reserve your spot email [mesillavalleyaudubon@gmail.com](mailto:mesillavalleyaudubon@gmail.com).

### **Sagecrest Park Clean-Up**

Saturday, January 17, 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.

### **MVAS Monthly Meeting**

Wednesday, January 21, 6:30 – 8 p.m.

Knox Hall Room 142 and on Zoom

Topic TBD. Visit with fellow members from 6:30 – 7 p.m., when the presentation begins.

### **Bird Walk @ Leasburg Dam State Park**

Saturday, January 31, 8 – 10 a.m.

Join bird walk leader Daniel Horton in birding the bosque along the Rio Grande. Meet at the park visitor center, then carpool to the south picnic area. Park entry is free for New Mexico residents; non-residents pay \$10 per vehicle.

## Parting Shots

CJ Goin submits this nice photo of a Green Heron he took at Leasburg Dam State Park.



CJ also shares this about one of our local butterflies:

*The Dainty Sulphur is the smallest sulphur. Any tiny, yellow butterfly you see near Las Cruces is most likely this species. Although abundant in our area, they are easily overlooked since they're small and fly close to the ground. The underwings vary from pale yellow to dusky green, with submarginal black spots and an orange flush near the base. They often sit with their wings closed, so it can be difficult to see the upperwings, but in flight they usually appear a pale greenish yellow.*

