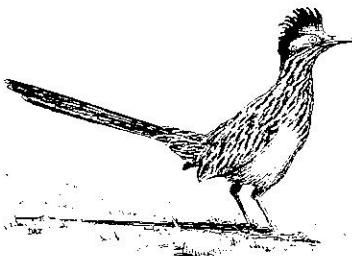


MESILLA VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY



ROADRUNNER RAMBLINGS

NEWSLETTER OF THE

VOLUME 21, NO. 1 JANUARY/FEBRUARY 1999

PALOMAS MARSH REVISITED

by Storm Sermay

On Thanksgiving Day, I made my third visit to Palomas Marsh. And for the first time I wasn't in a hurry to be somewhere else. I had time to enjoy my stay.

The exclosure at Palomas Marsh is a 40 acre fenced area (to keep out domestic livestock) owned by the Bureau of Reclamation and managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Except for the exclosure, the land is leased for grazing. This is a freshwater wetlands and is endangered habitat along the Rio Grande. A 1989 survey between Elephant Butte and Caballo Reservoirs shows that more than 91% of these lands had been lost from 1935 to 1989. In 1935 there were 12,051 acres of land temporarily or seasonally flooded by the Rio Grande. By 1989 this had been reduced to 1041 acres.

Palomas Marsh had been a birding destination of MVAS for a number of years. Through the efforts of Tom Wootten, of Mesilla Valley Audubon and David Henderson, director of Audubon's state office, MVAS signed an agreement for the exclosure with BLM and the Bureau of Reclamation in August 1996. This agreement stated that in exchange for their fencing 40 acres of these wetlands, Audubon would agree to monitoring the area and keeping a record of bird species. Hot Springs High School biology class also signed the agreement. The fence was completed in January 1997.

Palomas Marsh varies from completely flooded to dry depending on the lake level. At this time of year, when the lake level is low, the marsh is completely dry and you can walk the entire 40 acres. In the two years since it has been fenced the marsh has made a spectacular recovery. Stand on the hillside and look at the vegetation inside and outside the fence. An amazing contrast. Outside the fence there is nothing but low grass. Inside the fence is a world of cottonwood and willow saplings, cattails, and long thick grasses. So far we have recorded 63 bird species within the exclosure and expect to see more as the vegetation matures. As I walked through the marsh on Thanksgiving Day, I heard at least a dozen Marsh Wrens in the cattails. There were also Northern Harriers, Red-winged Blackbirds, Bewick's Wrens, Say's Phoebe, and Sandhill Cranes.

The acreage we originally proposed for fencing was 100 acres; U.S. Fish & Wildlife proposed 200 acres of this endangered habitat. Although BLM had originally agreed informally to 100 acres, the amount of land was reduced in the final agreement because of protests by the rancher. Hopefully, in the future, we will be able to increase the exclosure to protect more of these wetlands. Over the past couple of years we have had various articles in the newsletter asking for help on monitoring the bird species at the marsh. If you are not familiar with this area, I encourage you to go and become part of an important project. Contact Bill Jacobson, 382-6877, to help with monitoring.



NOTES FROM THE PRESIDENT

by Bill Jacobson

As my term of office comes to a close, I would like to thank all the members, board members, and the other officers for their hard work during the past year. You have certainly helped make my job easier and more rewarding.

Our chapter has monthly meetings with programs and field trips, but what else do we do? To answer this I'm going to mention some of the events and projects of the past year. We sponsored Audubon Adventures, a national education program, in 71 fourth grade classrooms in Las Cruces, T or C, and Alamogordo. At \$35 per classroom, this is a significant part of our budget. Much of this comes from monies raised by Birdathon in the spring. We placed second nationally for chapters of our size in terms of the amount of money raised. Half of the money raised is donated to the state office in Santa Fe with the rest staying in our chapter. Congratulations to all involved. Another educational activity was the donation of \$500 worth of books to Brannigan Library. In April, we celebrated Hummingbird Awareness Day with an informational display at Natural History Museum at the Mesilla Valley Mall. Also in April, we had a booth at the Earth Day festivities where we distributed information and had a "hands on" table where, working with the kids, we made and gave away over 100 pine cone bird feeders.

This past year, three of our members received awards from National Audubon: Tom and Eleanor Wootten and Tim Lawton. Congratulations. The chapter presented the second annual *Lorraine Schulte Excellence in Teaching Award* to Marilyn Bush from T or C.

(Continued on page 3) See PRESIDENT

HELP THE HERPS! A TIME FOR ACTION

The cornerstone of North American wildlife conservation, eliminating or tightly controlling commercial uses of wildlife, has never been applied to New Mexico's native amphibians and reptiles. New Mexico protects most of its wildlife from private commercialization for personal profit. Amphibians and reptiles have not been given this protection and are being collected and sold in alarming numbers. Most of this activity is for the pet trade and is not regulated in our state, as it is in adjoining states.

All other states in the southwest protect their reptiles and amphibians.

For that reason, many collectors come to New Mexico to take our reptiles and amphibians for sale elsewhere. In Silver City, collectors ship between 200 and 300 live lizards and snakes each month to pet stores in the East. Grant Co. airport has reported that collectors ship out two to three boxes of reptiles each week. And in Deming, collectors checked by the Game Department had collected over 100 lizards for resale in less than half a day.

The ecological impacts of this activity are large. Although some species commercially exploited are common, others are becoming scarce, and in the absence of any controls, even the common populations will eventually be decimated.

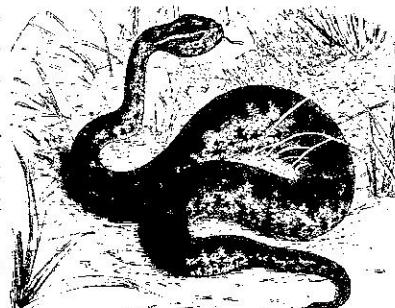
The New Mexico Audubon Council, a coalition of the chapters around the state, began a campaign for a "Herps Bill" in the 1997 New Mexico Legislature. Although the bill failed, we are gearing up again for

the 1999 legislature. The statute we are proposing would prevent private individuals from commercially exploiting wild-caught native amphibians and reptiles for profit. This will not prevent killing of rattlesnakes for personal or public safety or keeping of reptiles or amphibians as pets.

The bill will not prohibit the collecting of reptiles or amphibians for personal use. The bill will not prohibit the collection and use of water-dogs as bait, and the Department of Game & Fish may permit other uses of native reptiles and amphibians not adversely affecting or impacting wildlife populations. A scientific approach to regulation of commercial collecting can avoid the more stringent federal controls that come into force when species become threatened or endangered.

Regulating the taking of native reptiles and amphibians would have a negligible effect on New Mexico's economy, as the bill permits captive breeding in New Mexico of native reptiles and amphibians for the subsequent sale of the offspring.

Although the Legislature may not be in session when you read this, we do expect to see this bill introduced. Contact your State Representative and Senator (if you don't know who they are, call your county clerk.) and tell them you think this bill is important. We remain hopeful that a bill that allows regulation of commercial exploitation of reptiles and amphibians can be passed by the new Legislature and signed by the Governor.



WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Carter Clary
Constance Lyons
Nena Singleton

BIRDING CLASS OFFERED

Another birding class is being offered by MVAS through Doña Ana Branch Community College. The dates are February 2, 16, & 23 for classroom sessions and February 13, 20, & 27 for field trips.

Contact Doña Ana Branch at 527-7527 to register.

PROGRAMS

ADMIT ONE

Programs and meetings are held on the 3rd Wednesday of each month September through April at the Las Cruces High School Library, 1755 Paseo Rd. Programs begin at 7:30 p.m. Announcements, news, and information begin at 6:45 p.m. preceding the program.

Sex Lives of White Pelicans. January

20. Ann Janik, a wildlife biologist based in Albuquerque, worked for 8 years monitoring the White Pelican population in northern Nevada. She has worked on national wildlife refuges in Alaska, California, Nevada, and New Mexico, and has worked extensively with colonial nesting birds and shorebirds in California and Alaska.

Mexican Wolf Reintroduction.

February 17. Wendy Brown with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service will present a slide show and video about the reintroduction program in Arizona.

FIELD TRIPS



Please be prepared for New Mexico's variable winter weather with layered clothing, water, and sunscreen.

January 23. Feather Lake Sanctuary & Ft. Bliss Sewage Ponds.

Ann Heying will lead our first field trip to the sanctuary in El Paso where we can expect to see resident Pied-billed Grebes, American Coots, and Common Moorhens. Cormorants, Great Blue Herons, geese and swans have been seen in winter on the shallow lake favored by dabblers. On the way home, we plan to visit the Ft. Bliss sewage ponds, the single best birding spot in El Paso County. Over 280 species have been recorded in this area. Meet at the Bank of the Rio Grande branch, corner of Telshor and University at 7 A.M. Call Ann Heying, 521-4215 for more information.

February 20. South Valley. Led by Ed Mayfield, the trip will include areas in orchards, grasslands, horse stables, ponds, and desert for a large variety of winter birds. Meet at the K-Mart parking lot on N. Main St. at 7 A.M. Call Ed Mayfield at 382-0715 for more information.

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

by Storm Sermay with

Information supplied by Gordon Ewing

Our Christmas Bird Count statistics have been compiled and the results show that we had the third highest number of species (124) on record for the Las Cruces count. The highest year was 1996 with 139 species. Thirty-nine counters saw a whopping total of 42,755 birds, the largest number ever on our count. (The second highest was only a paltry 34,638 seen in 1996.) Two new species seen on this count, not recorded for any previous Las Cruces count, were the Broad-billed Hummingbird and Baird's Sparrow. The largest number of any one species seen this year was the Red-winged Blackbird with 7984 seen. The next most common birds were the American Crow (7320) and the White-winged Dove (5647).

The Las Cruces count covers 11 areas in a 15 mile diameter circle which has its center about one mile east of the Hilton. We were fortunate to have teams in all areas. Covering all areas is important, since this year about 1/3 of the species were seen only in one area.

After the count, we met at the Dynasty Restaurant for dinner for the all-important "bragging session" about what was seen during the day.

Thanks to all the counters who made this a very successful count.



GOODBYE TO OLD FRIENDS AND VALUED MEMBERS

As many of you already know, Tom and Eleanor Wootten have moved to Arizona. They will be missed by all of us for their contributions to MVAS and just for themselves.

Both Tom and Eleanor were charter members of MVAS and have been active with the chapter for 20 years. Eleanor was president of the chapter for a total of five years. She also served as vice-president, secretary, chairperson for hospitality, field trips (for over three years), programs, publicity, co-chair of the membership committee, compiler of Christmas Bird Count information for two years, and a delegate to the Audubon Council for two years. As part of our education program she developed the mammals program for the public schools as well as presenting the bird program. She also took care of the library display for two years. Always involved in conservation, Eleanor was the lead coordinator developing the arrangement with BLM for MVAS to adopt Holloman Lakes as a chapter conservation project.

Tom was vice-president for two years, and treasurer and council delegate for two years each. As conservation chair for six years he was extremely active in all areas of public lands preservation efforts. Under his leadership, MVAS appealed four timber sales and was upheld on those appeals three times. The Sacramento Mountain grazing plan was also appealed and upheld. Tom was lead coordinator on Palomas Marsh as a chapter project, and represented the chapter as co-initiator of the Aptomado Falcon Working Group.

TOM & ELEANOR,
WE WISH YOU THE BEST!

(Continued from page 1) **PRESIDENT**

We have seen a substantial increase in our membership during the year. In 1998 we celebrated the 20th anniversary of the chapter. The May potluck had several charter members of our chapter in attendance as well as special guest David Henderson of the state office.

Other chapter activities include the Christmas Bird Count, Palomas Marsh survey, newsletter, and the sale of our chapter patches. Again, a big "Thank You" to all who have participated in helping make this another successful year.

BIRD NOTES

are not available this month.

Please continue to submit your reports to Tim Lawton at 522-2056 or e-mail tlawton@NMSU.edu.

FIELD TRIP REPORT

by Ann Heying

Nine brave souls trekked to the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge on November 14 and were rewarded with the spectacle of over 9,000 Sandhill Cranes, countless Snow Geese and ducks as the first light coaxed them into flight. We saw an American White Pelican, Great Horned Owl, Hooded Mergansers, Western and Clark's Grebes, Buffleheads, Northern Shovelers, and Ruddy Ducks. Northern Harriers were soaring overhead. Our leader, Robert Kruidnier, a volunteer at the Bosque, was very informative as he pointed out changes made this summer to benefit the birds in the future.

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.

OFFICERS AND BOARD

President	Bill Jacobson	382-6877
Vice-president	Tim Lawton	522-2056
Secretary	Sue Hill	382-9758
Treasurer	Mary Lou Wallace	522-0684
Board (96-98)	Lorraine Schulte	524-7029
Board (96-98)	Margaret Morey	527-1155
Board (97-99)	Ann Heying	521-4215
Board (97-99)	Maxine Perkins	524-1529
Board (98-00)	Ed Mayfield	382-0715
Board (98-00)	Jennifer Atchley	526-1320

COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Audubon Adventures	Lorraine Schulte	524-7029
Audubon Council	Jennifer Atchley	526-1320
Delegates	Storm Sermay	382-3348
Conservation	Margaret Morey	527-1155
Education	Maxine Perkins	524-1529
Field Trips	Vacant	
Membership Records	Mary Anne Thibodeau	524-4126
Membership	Ed Mayfield	
Newsletter Editor	Storm Sermay	382-3348
Programs	Jennifer Atchley	526-1320
Publicity	Ann Heying	521-4215

Board meetings are held, September through May, on the Thursday before the 3rd Wednesday at 5:30 PM at the Southwest Environmental Center, 1494A S. Solano Dr., Las Cruces NM 88001. All Audubon members are welcome.

JOIN NOW!

I would like to join the **National Audubon Society** and **Mesilla Valley Audubon Society** for the introductory rate of \$20

Name _____
Address _____
City _____
State _____ Zip _____

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7XCH

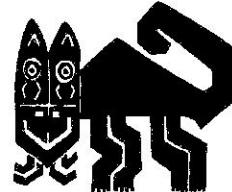
Membership includes the publications *Audubon* and *Roadrunner Ramblings*.

Send this application and your check (made payable to NAS) to:

**Membership, MVAS, PO Box 3127,
Las Cruces NM 88003**

NOTICE OF ANNUAL MEETING

The annual meeting of MVAS for election of officers and board members for the coming year will be Wednesday, January 20 (our regular meeting night). The slate proposed by the nominating committee is: President, Ed Mayfield; Vice-president, Ann Heying; Secretary, Sue Hill; Treasurer, Mary Lou Wallace; board members, Charles Townley, Harold Harrison, Bea Lambert, Wally Hill; Audubon Council Delegate, Ed Mayfield. Nominations will also be accepted from the floor. If you are interested in running for any office, or serving on any of the committees, please contact, Sue Hill, Ed Mayfield, or Storm Sermay (phone numbers at left). MVAS welcomes and encourages your participation.



HELP THE ENVIRONMENT GO TO AFRICA

The Southwest Environmental Center in Las Cruces is now taking reservations for a one-of-a-kind wildlife safari to Tanzania. The 13-day trip includes walking and driving forays to some of the world's greatest wildlife viewing areas, including Serengeti National Park and the Ngorongoro Crater.

Part of the cost of the trip will be tax deductible as this is a fundraiser for the non-profit Center. The trip is scheduled for July (exact dates to be determined). Call the Southwest Environmental Center at 505-522-5552 for more information.

Roadrunner Ramblings is published six times a year: January, March, May, July, September, and November. Contributions are welcome. Please e-mail copy to: ssermay@zianet.com, or call for mailing information. **Next deadline: February 20**

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