

ROADRUNNER RAMBLINGS

Volume 22, No. 2. March/April 2000

Our Challenges: Help Us Meet Them

by Ed Mayfield, MVAS President

The world we love—our wilderness areas, parks, forests, wetlands, streams, lakes and rivers along with the life that inhabits them—faces many challenges, as well as possibilities for increased protection.

Our state public lands feature mountain ranges, desert landscapes, brush-covered hillsides, whitewater rivers, lakes and streams, deep caves, rugged lava beds, sand dunes and wide prairies. These lands are rich in cultural and natural resources. They are home to several 19th century forts and Spanish settlements, and they offer abundant recreational resources like the Valley of Fires Recreation Area, the Bisti and Gila Wilderness, Elephant Butte Lake, the Rio Grande and all its tributaries, White Sands National Monument and many other great wonders of this world.

All of these landscapes need to be protected and expanded upon. Our endangered species also need protection. Each state has the right and responsibility to manage, protect and conserve its wildlife. Twenty-five New Mexico vertebrate species are extinct. New Mexico's laws and programs are inadequate for preventing the continued decline of its native wildlife. In our state, game animals, sport fish, and furbearers are protected from unregulated harvest and possession by hunting and fishing laws. Some, but not all, songbirds, hawks, owls, and vultures and a few others are similarly protected, but amphibians, reptiles, and many birds, mammals and invertebrates have no state protection whatsoever. Several species are collected for commercial sale or killed as suspected predators, or at times killed only as convenient targets. Our endangered species are not protected because the state Game and Fish Department is not staffed or funded to protect them. This needs to be changed and needs your help.

Many of the state's agriculture and industrial organizations, and chambers of commerce, have opposed any implementation of New Mexico's meager endangered species program and have blocked its expansion. They fear that expansion of the program will lead to restrictions on the appropriate, and inappropriate, uses of our resources. It's time for the state to abandon its meager resources program and to recognize and live up to its responsibilities to support and enhance its environmental birthright for all New Mexico's people and future generations. This year you will be asked to support the reintroduction of the Mexican Grey Wolf to its range in the Southwest. You will be asked to support legislation that will protect our reptiles and amphibians from being trapped and sent out of state to supply pet shops around the country. Additional wilderness and wildlife conservation programs will be brought to your attention that beg your support. We have a window to help and preserve our natural heritage in New Mexico, so let's do it.

What's New?

☐ Check out MVAS' new website at www.cybermesa.com/~mvas/. Many thanks to Storm Sermay and Susan Beck for getting our site up and running.

☐ Make a note of our chapter's new mailing address:

P.O. Box 1645

Las Cruces, NM 88004.

☐ Take advantage of our renewed commitment to mid-week field trips.

Tuesday, March 21. Half-day trip to Holloman Lake. Meet at K-Mart on North Main at 8:00 AM. We should see American Avocets, grebes, Marsh Wrens, Great Blue Herons, Black-necked Stilts and many other species.

Tuesday, April 11. Caballo Lake State Park. Meet at K-Mart on North Main at 7:30 AM to join this trip which should include views of shorebirds, Ladder-backed Woodpeckers, and maybe a dowitcher or two. Depending on whether we decide to visit Percha Dam or not, we should be back by noon or in the early afternoon.

For further information on these mid-week trips, contact Carole Shirreffs at 521-0079 or its_herself@yahoo.com.

☐ Welcome New Members

Joe and Rose Slade

Diane Nelson

Danielle D'Auria

Johanna Ties



Programs

Programs and meetings are held on the 3rd Wednesday of each month, September–April, at the Village at Northrise, Hallmark Building, 2882 N. Roadrunner Pkwy, Las

Cruces. Programs begin at 7:30 PM. News, announcements, and information begin at 6:45, preceding the program.

678-0683

March 15. Reptiles of the Chihuahuan Desert.

After all, birds and reptiles are evolutionary cousins, so come listen to Doug Burkett discuss the habits and habitats of our cold-blooded brethren. Doug is a wildlife biologist at White Sands Missile Range and has been studying the herpetofauna of the Chihuahuan Desert for many years. Learn about lizards, whiptails, frogs, and turtles, and how all have adapted to our desert environment.

April 19. Prairie Partners: Burrowing Owl Ecology in Prairie Dog Systems. Dr. Martha Desmond, Professor of Wildlife Sciences at NMSU, has conducted 10 years of research on the life history of the Burrowing Owl including diet, behavior, the bird's relationship to prairie dog colonies in the Great Plains, and genetic differences across the western hemisphere. She will present various aspects of her past research, as well as plans for future grassland bird research here in the Chihuahuan Desert.

JOIN NOW!

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

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Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

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

Send this application and your check (made payable to National Audubon Society) to:

Membership, MVAS
P.O. Box 1645
Las Cruces, NM 88004

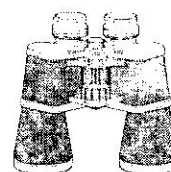
Field Trip Reports

Feather Lake and Ft. Bliss Twelve Mesilla Valley birders enjoyed the hospitality of hosts Beth and Bob Garcia at the Trans-Pecos Audubon Society's Feather Lake. We saw American Avocet, Greater Yellowlegs, Black-necked Stilt, Green-winged Teal, Long-billed Dowitcher, Black-crowned Night-Heron, White-faced Ibis, and Cinnamon Teal. At the Fort Bliss sewage ponds, we saw 10 Red-tailed Hawks, Northern Harrier, Horned Lark, Marsh Wren and Swamp Sparrow. High wind and numerous raptors kept down the numbers of smaller birds that might be seen on a less windy day. The day's totals were twenty-five species at Feather Lake and nineteen species at the sewage ponds. *Ann Heying*

Old Refuge. Fourteen enthusiastic birders enjoyed a beautiful Saturday morning and saw more than 50 bird species between NMSU's Alumni Pond and the beaver-dammed drain that dissects the Old Refuge. A chilly stop at the small college pond near Pan Am generated an up close and personal, no binoculars necessary, lesson in the head shape, bill color, and female differences between Canvasback and Red Head ducks.

A Great-horned Owl, Phainopepla, and singing Western Meadowlarks were enjoyed west of the Rio Grande, while the river produced Western Sandpipers, Greater Yellowlegs, Common Mergansers, and American Pipits. Passing through the desert we saw Pyrrhuloxia, Cactus and Rock Wrens, Scrub Jay, and several sparrow species.

The drain banks treated us with Verdin, Marsh Wrens, and displaying Ruby-crowned Kinglets. On the water we were amazed by literally hundreds of ducks, predominately Mallards with a scattering of Northern Shoveler, Gadwall, American Wigeon, and Green-winged Teal. In conclusion, we had a day that was just ducky. *Harold Harrison*



Field Trips

New Mexico's spring weather is variable. Please be prepared with layered clothing, sunscreen, and plenty of water.

March 11. San Andres Mountains. This trip will begin in the Jornada del Muerto Basin and travel through 5 major vegetation types into the San Andres Mountain Range. This mountain range is home to 142 bird species, 45 species of amphibians and reptiles, and 45 mammal species. Those wishing to join us should meet at the Shell Station at the corner of Jornada Road and Highway 70 at 7:00 AM. Because of road conditions, the number of people will be limited by the number of four-wheel-drive vehicles with high clearance. Each person should bring his or her own food and water and be prepared for cold windy, or warm sunny, weather. We should return by 3:00 or 4:00 PM. For more information, contact Ed Fredrickson at efredric@nmsu.edu or 646-1301.

April 15-16. Greyfeathers Lodge. The planned outing to Greyfeathers Lodge near the Gila Wilderness includes a Saturday evening program and a Sunday morning bird walk. Saturday at 6:30 PM the program will feature bird stories moderated by Harold Harrison. Guests are encouraged to bring a story to tell (not mandatory) and Harold will interject a limited selection of his 29 bird calls. Sunday morning, we will take a 2-3 hour bird walk on the stream and areas adjacent to the Lodge at 8:30. Jim and Linda Galloway are excellent hosts and serve dinner from 5-5:30 PM daily and breakfast between 7:30-8:30. Meal times will allow time for story telling and bird watching. For more information and reservations call 505-536-3206 or visit their website at stay@greyfeathers.com. Call Harold Harrison, 522-6199, with story ideas and for additional information.

Mid-Week Field Trips. See page 1.

Birdathon 2000 is scheduled for Saturday, May 6.

Birdathon is an all-day event in which you try to see as many birds as you can and get your friends and business associates to pay for them. The money we earn on this day finances roughly half of the MVAS operating budget and also goes to our state office and the Randall Davey Audubon Center. If you would like to participate, contact Tim Lawton (522-2056) or Bill Jacobsen (382-6877).

Birding Hot Spot: Old Refuge

by Harold Harrison

The area commonly known as the Old Refuge lies on the west side of the Rio Grande approximately half way between the Calle del Norte bridge and the Mesilla Dam. The area continues to produce a wide variety of bird life in spite of heavy use and abuse. Planning and caution are important ingredients before embarking on an avian adventure to this region. The following offers three options for exploring the various habitats nestled under the rim of the west mesa.

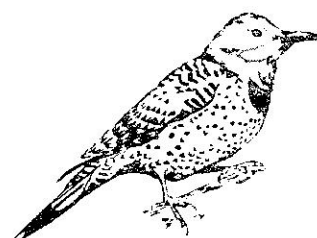
The three choices start in Mesilla at the Oñate Plaza. **Option #1:** Travel west on Calle del Norte (County Rd. 359) 2.0 miles until you cross the Rio Grande. Park near the yellow levee road gate on the south side of the road. This option affords a nice leisurely 3+ mile walk down the levee road with occasional side trips to peek into the river. This walk should produce several sparrows (in winter) with shorebirds and waterfowl on the river. Continue until the road crosses a large, beaver-dammed, drain. The ditch can generate Common Moorhens, ducks, Marsh Wrens, herons (Great Blue, Green), and occasional Soras. You have reached

what is commonly called the "Old Refuge." A nice round trip follows the drain down the rough road, south, to its confluence with the Rio. Next walk west on the most accessible path to the mesa, then turn right (north) and border the mesa back to an extension of the levee road and return to your vehicle.

Option #2 begins on the west side of the Calle del Norte bridge where County Rd 359 turns north and parallels the river. Drive approximately 0.4 miles north on the paved road and turn left (west) on Mesilla Hills Rd. Continue 2 miles, (1 mile on pavement, 1 mile on dirt) until you cross a large arroyo that washes into the valley. You can see the extension of the levee road and the drain from Mesilla Hills Rd. Walk down the arroyo to the drain and repeat the Old Refuge round trip discussed above.

Option #3 requires a bumpy ride with less walking. From Oñate Plaza take Calle del Norte west approximately 1 mile to the Snow Rd. intersection. Turn left and drive 2.4 miles to County Rd. 372; a right turn (west) leads you the river levee. At the levee turn left and cross the lateral canal bridge; then a quick right turn immediately crosses the Rio Grande on a one-lane bridge. Take the wooden bridge over the west-side canal toward the west. At an open area that looks like part road, part parking lot, start north and parallel the river on the best track available. About a mile north the road will meet the drain discussed above. Park and walk, don't drive, down the track that borders the drain. You can repeat or reverse the round trip discussed in the options above.

Preplanning hints include: pack a shovel and cell phone, let someone know where you are going and what time you are expected to return. In addition, due to the abundant weekend use, noise, and recreational toys, weekday or morning trips in the company of a companion or group are encouraged.



Bird Notes

Bird	Date	Location	Observer
Winter Wren	Dec 28	Pine Tree Trail	CB
Slate-throated Redstart	Dec 30	Old Refuge	BG, MR, ME, BE
Rufous Hummingbird	Dec 31, Jan 3	Las Cruces	JM, NS, LS
Black-thrt. Gray Warbler	Jan 8	Old Refuge	HH
Sandhill Crane (100)	Jan 8	Calle del Norte	HH
Bufflehead	Jan 13, Feb 12	Wt. Sands, Burn Lake	HH, BIC
Phainopepla	Jan 15	Organ Mountains	JM, NS
Western Bluebird	Jan 21, Jan 29	Organ Mountains	JM, LS, JS
Rough-Legged Hawk	Jan 22	La Union	MS, JZ
Sage Thrasher	Jan 22	La Union	MS, JZ
Varied Thrush	Jan 23	Socorro	LS, JS
Hairy Woodpecker	Jan 23	Percha State Park	LS, JS
Bald Eagle	Jan 23	Caballo Dam	LS, JS
Virginia Rail	Jan 23	Caballo State Park	LS, JS
Eastern Bluebird	Jan 29, Feb 19	Ladder Ranch, Doña Ana	KS, BIC
Eastern Phoebe	Jan 29	Ladder Ranch	KS
Townsend's Solitaire	Jan 29	Ladder Ranch	KS
American Dipper	Jan 29	Ladder Ranch	KS
Western Kingbird	Jan 30	Las Cruces	SS
Double-crested Cormorant	Feb 2	Burn Lake	BG
Neotropic Cormorant	Feb 2	Burn Lake	BG
Common Merganser	Feb 2	Burn Lake	BG
Common Grackle	Feb 2	Burn Lake	BG
Mountain Bluebird	Feb 12	Rio at Mesilla	BIC
Red-headed Woodpecker	Feb 12	Rio at Mesilla	BIC
Tree Swallow	Feb 12, Feb 19	Rio, Swan Pond	BIC
White-throated Sparrow	Feb 12	Old Refuge	CB
Swamp Sparrow	Feb 12	Old Refuge	CB
N. Rough-winged Swallow	Feb 19	Swan Pond	BIC
Cedar Waxwing	Feb 19	Doña Ana	BIC

Observers: Bird ID Class, Craig Benkman, Bruce Ernst, Moira Ernst, Bill Glenn, Harold Harrison, Sue Hill, Wally Hill, Tim Lawton, Ed Mayfield, Jim Mulhauser, John Parmenter, Minerva Rivera, Chris Rustay, Cathy Sandell, Lorraine Schulte, John Schulte, Nena Singleton, Marcy Scott and Jimmy Zabriskie

Please report early, late, or unusual sightings to Tim Lawton
505-522-2056 or tlawton@nmsu.edu

New Mexico Rare Bird Hotline 505-323-9323

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 advocacy.

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Board meetings are held, September through May, on the Thursday before the 3rd Wednesday at 5:30 PM at the Southwest Environmental Center, 1491A S. Solano Dr., Las Cruces, NM 88011. All Audubon members are welcome.

1999 Christmas Count Report

by Nancy Stotz, from information supplied by Gordon Ewing

Our 1999 Christmas Bird Count set many MVAS records. Forty-nine birders (a new record) tallied over 44,000 individual birds (another new record), representing 127 species. For sixteen of those species, we recorded more individuals than had been seen on any previous Las Cruces count: record numbers of Sandhill Cranes, Greater Roadrunners, White-throated Swifts, Mountain Bluebirds, Say's Phoebes, and several species of corvids and sparrows made it a productive day. Our White-winged Dove total, over 17,000 birds (more than twice our previous high of 7294 doves) will likely be the highest number recorded by any count in the country, ever. For a complete CBC report visit the Bird Source website at <http://birdsource.tc.cornell.edu/cbcddata>.

KRWG Fundraiser

KRWG-TV has asked us to be on their telethon on March 12, from 5:15 PM to 10 PM, to help them raise money. If you would like to support public broadcasting, promote the Mesilla Valley Audubon Society, or just be on TV, contact Ed Mayfield (at 382-0715 or mayfield@greatwhite.com).

Bird ID Class

by Lorraine Schulte

Sixteen people participated in another bird identification class during the month of February. Teaching others to identify birds leads the participants into an awareness of living things in our world, and promotes knowledge about the need for conservation and preservation of habitat. MVAS members leading instructions and handling arrangements were Tim Lawton, Bill Jacobsen, Storm Sermay, Ralph Raitt, Bill Glenn, Ken Stinnett, Sue Hill, Wally Hill, Joy McFarland, and Lorraine Schulte.

Roadrunner Ramblings is published six times a year: January, March, May, July, September, and November. Submissions are welcome. Please email copy to nstotz@zianet.com, or call for mailing information. **Next deadline: April 26.** Printed by **insta-copy printing** on 50% kenaf, 50% PCW recycled chlorine-free paper. Images, except Dale Zimmer's roadrunner, were obtained from IMSI's Master Clips/Master Photos® Collection.

Mesilla Valley Audubon Society
P.O. Box 1645
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