

ROADRUNNER RAMBLINGS

Volume 24, No. 2. March/April 2002

President's Message

by Walt Whitford

I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself to many of you who don't know me and to many of the new board members with whom I will be working during this next year. This is the second time that I have served as president of the Mesilla Valley Audubon Society. I served two terms as I recall in 1990 and 1991 before leaving the Las Cruces area to work with the Environmental Protection Agency.

I have been a professional biologist-ecologist for more than 40 years. I moved to Las Cruces from the University of Rhode Island. During the 1960's and 1970's my research focus was on amphibians and reptiles, and I gradually moved into mammals, arthropods, soil organisms, and plants. While on the faculty at New Mexico State University, I taught introductory biology, principles of ecology, and an honors course in "the global environment." I have done research in Australia, Brazil, southern Africa, and Israel. While on sabbatical in Australia, I discovered the challenges and satisfaction of birding. I don't believe any visitor to Australia can avoid being intrigued by the colorful parrots and cockatoos. Soon after returning from Australia, I joined the Mesilla Valley Audubon Society and took advantage of the many opportunities to learn from the seasoned "birders" of our chapter.

I retired from New Mexico State University in 1992 and served as a senior research ecologist with the Environmental Protection Agency for seven years before retiring and joining the USDA-Jornada Experimental Range as a collaborating scientist. I continue to work part-time at the Jornada and with graduate students in Geography and Wildlife with grant funds from the International Arid Lands Consortium. Hopefully this brief biographical sketch will help you understand where I am coming from when discussing conservation and environmental issues.

It is my hope that the MVAS will continue to contribute to environmental education of our young people and to provide a voice of reason in debates about local environmental issues. A review of the history of the Audubon Society provides a good blueprint to follow. The effective conservationists and environmentalists have been able to compromise with "the other side." We will have to learn where the other side is coming from if we are to be effective. There are no easy answers to biodiversity issues, global climate change, exponential increases in human population numbers, food security—natural resource degradation, etc.. An integral part of every environmental issue is "whose ox is being gored" and "what are the available options." One facet of environ-

(continued on page 4) *See President*

Birdathon: May 4-5

Mark your calendars! Spring is nearly here and the time is coming for **Birdathon**, our yearly fundraiser. This event, which will be held the weekend of May 4th and 5th, raises the money to support our local educational projects such as Audubon Adventures. Also we have purchased bird books for the library and helped fund Randall Davey Audubon Center in Santa Fe (our State office and educational center). **Birdathon** is more important to the Chapter this year than ever before. This is because of a reduction in the share of membership dues that local Chapters receive from National Audubon.

How does **Birdathon** work? Each participating birder collects pledges from sponsors. The sponsor can pledge an amount of money per bird species or pledge a flat amount. (All contributions are tax deductible.) Then on **Birdathon** weekend the birder has 24 hours to count as many species as possible, either birding alone or with a team. Sponsors in the past have pledged \$1.10 to \$1.00 a bird. And many teams see more than 100 species! Don't want to ask friends or co-workers for money? Pledge to yourself or ask relatives. A surprising number of people are happy to have been asked.

Although we have set the above weekend as the official **Birdathon** date for our chapter, you can do your count either before or after if it is more convenient. Also, **Birdathon** can be done in any location. If you expect to be traveling at that time, plan to set aside a few hours to bird. You probably will anyway. Right?

Please help support your chapter by birding and raising funds, or by pledging to someone you know. Contact Storm Sermay, 382-3348 if you would like to participate or if you want more information. Teams are forming now! Don't be left out!

Programs


Programs and meetings are held each month, September through 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 7:00, preceding the program.

March 20. The Biology and Conservation of the Chukar in the Negev Desert, Israel. Dr. Phil Alkon, currently an adjunct professor in the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife Science at NMSU, will share some of his research on this Eurasian partridge which has become established in parts of western North America. Dr. Alkon studied the bird in its native habitat when he was at the Desert Research Institute in Sede Boker, Israel.

April 17. Aplomado Falcons of Northern Chihuahua. Alberto Macías-Duarte, a student at the University of Chihuahua, has spent over five years researching the breeding behavior and habitat use of these falcons in northern Mexico. His presentation will focus on connections between vegetation structure, grassland bird populations, and the reproductive success of these endangered falcons.

JOIN NOW!

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

Name _____

Address _____

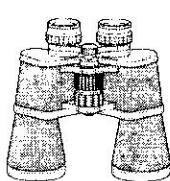
City _____

State _____ Zip. _____
Q54
7XCH

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 Trips

Field trips are free and open to the general public. Entry fees to some areas may be required and driving costs are shared. On all field trips wear appropriate clothing and bring water and binoculars.

March 9. La Luz/Tularosa. John Mangimeli will lead this trip to a couple of birding hotspots near Alamogordo. In May of last year, this trip included plenty of waterfowl and shorebirds at the sewage lagoons, and a variety of desert and mountain species at La Luz. Las Cruces participants will leave from the K-Mart on Highway 70 at 6 AM and meet up with the Alamogordo birders at 7:30 AM at the Tastee-Freeze in Tularosa. This trip won't involve much walking, and we should be home by mid-afternoon. Contact Ed Mayfield (mayfield@zianet.com or 382-0715) for details.

March 23. Jornada Experimental Range, New Well. Dr. Kris Havstad, of the USDA's Jornada Experimental Range will lead us into the western and northern areas of this research area north of Las Cruces, which is closed to unescorted public access. We'll visit some desert shrub and grassland habitats and pass several sites where ecological research is ongoing. Meet at the Shell Station at the corner of Highway 70 and Jornada Road at 7 AM. We'll car-pool from there; bring a high-clearance vehicle if you've got one.

We should return to the Shell station by about 2 PM.

April 6. Percha State Park, Animas Creek, Caballo Dam. Percha features a cottonwood-lined stream and Animas Canyon is full of large sycamore and velvet ash trees as well as desert habitats. Birds could include early migrating warblers and tanagers. In addition, Animas Creek generally produces Acorn Woodpeckers, jays, various sparrows, and possibly chickadees, titmice, and Lucy's Warbler. Meet at the K-Mart on Highway 70 (the northeast corner of the parking lot near the Texaco station) at 6:30 AM. There will be minimal walking on this trip. Bring a lunch and water. We will start home around 1:00 PM. Contact Harold Harrison (hharrison@zianet.com or 522-6199) for more info.

April 20. Ladder Ranch. This is a great opportunity to visit one of Ted Turner's vast holdings in New Mexico. Tracy Mader will take us into some southwestern riparian habitats near the Black Range (think Wild Turkey, Bridled Titmice, and Summer Tanagers) as well as desert grasslands (Cassin's Sparrow, Scaled Quail, and Burrowing Owl). We'll be leaving from the K-Mart on Highway 70 at 6:30 AM, returning by late afternoon. The trip is limited to 20 participants; contact Ed Mayfield (mayfield@zianet.com or 382-0715) to reserve your space.

International Migratory Bird Day

It's bird watcher's visual feast – hundred of different kinds of birds flying across New Mexico's Tularosa Basin to their summer homes. This year everyone can join the fun at the International Migratory Bird Day Event, Saturday, April 20 at White Sands National Monument. All events are free and open to the public. This year's Bird Day theme is "Special Places," focusing on the importance of habitat for migratory birds.

Talks and poster presentations, highlighting the unique ecological role of the Tularosa Basin, will be held at the Monument throughout the day. In addition, participants can enjoy guided field trips to nearby Lake Holloman. The Lake has been named an "Important Bird Area" by the National Audubon Society in recognition of its significant conservation value – over 180 species have been observed there. Field trips are scheduled for 7:30 AM, 10:30 AM and 4:30 PM. Participants are encouraged to bring binoculars.

Sponsors for the 2002 Tularosa Basin International Migratory Bird Day activities include The Nature Conservancy, Holloman Air Force Base, White Sands Missile Range, San Andres National Wildlife Refuge and the Mesilla Valley Audubon Society. For more information call White Sands National Monument at (505) 679-2599 ext. 230.

Council Corner

by Storm Sermay

As new delegates from our Chapter to the New Mexico Audubon Council, Jack DeLong and I attended our first meeting on January 26th at Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge. The Council is made up of delegates from all the Chapters in New Mexico.

Christopher Rustay, who is heading up the Important Bird Area (IBA) project in NM, reported that 56 sites had been accepted as IBAs. Thirty additional sites need more information. The list of additional sites will be reported in the Chapter newsletter. Help is needed in gathering more information about these sites.

The Council voted on priority issues for the Council to work on over the next year. We decided on four categories with three priorities in each category. 1) Endangered Species: Lesser Prairie-Chicken, Rio Grande Silvery Minnow, and the Southwest Willow Flycatcher; 2)

Partnerships: Rio Grande Alliance, NM Game & Fish Issues, and Valles Caldera National Preserve; 3) Habitat Issues: Otero Mesa, Salt Cedar removal, and ORV limitations in National Forests; 4) National Audubon Initiatives: IBAs, NM Birding Trail development, and NM Hummingbird Connection.

The Council is participating in two lawsuits and has voted to join another. The first suit involves the Rio Grande Silvery Minnow. The judge in Albuquerque has heard the case but has not made a ruling on how to remedy the problem of keeping the Rio Grande wet and preserving the minnow.

The second suit involves the Peregrine Falcon and the implementation of a plan in the Pacific Northwest for the "take" of birds for falconry. The plan is being challenged because there is no provision for monitoring.

The third suit involves the Lesser Prairie-Chicken and its listing as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act. So far the U.S. Fish &

Wildlife Service has not listed the bird.

The next two meetings of the Council will be April 6th and September 7th, probably at Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge. All Audubon members are welcome to attend the meetings.

• •

Field Trip Reports

Rio Bosque. 19 January. On a cold, clear, blustery morning 10 of us gathered to make the trek down to Rio Bosque, a wetland area being restored in the lower El Paso Valley, with various side trips on the way home to visit either the historic missions or Keystone and Crossroads Ponds. We ended the day with 56 species, including wonderful looks at lots of waterfowl: Common Moorhen, Green-winged and Cinnamon Teal, Northern Shovelers, American Wigeon, Gadwall, and Northern Pintail at Rio Bosque; Wood Ducks, Buffleheads, and Ring-necked Ducks at Crossroads Pond. We had plenty of birds around the edge of the water too: Great Blue and Green Herons, Great and Snowy Egrets, Common Snipe, Greater Yellowlegs, Least and Western Sandpipers, and Long-billed Dowitchers. Best bird of the day—Peregrine Falcon. A life bird for some, a life experience for all, since we saw not one, but two, perched together in a cottonwood, both visible in the same field of view. Obviously, the productive habitat at Rio Bosque had treated them well, since both boasted full crops indicating a recent meal.

Nancy Stotz

Rock Hound State Park. February 23. Seven of us went to the City of Rocks and the Rockhound State Park near Deming on Saturday, Feb. 23rd. The places were very nice and the scenery beautiful. We got Canyon Towhees, Rock & Cactus Wrens, Say's Phoebes, Loggerhead Shrikes, Silky Flycatcher, Black-throated Sparrows, finches, Red-tailed Hawk, Northern Harriers, magpies and jays. We returned shortly after noon.

Ed Mayfield

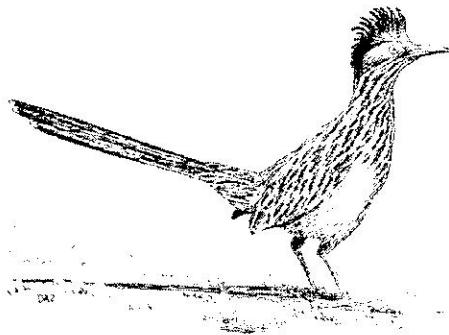
Welcome New Members



Robert V. Taylor
Ray Bowers
Ray and Bev Kolosseus

Please report early, late, or unusual sightings to Sue Hill at
505-382-9758 or hillco@zianet.com

New Mexico Rare Bird Hotline 505-323-9323



ROADRUNNER RAMBLINGS

Volume 24, No. 2. March/April 2002

President's Message

by Walt Whitford

I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself to many of you who don't know me and to many of the new board members with whom I will be working during this next year. This is the second time that I have served as president of the Mesilla Valley Audubon Society. I served two terms as I recall in 1990 and 1991 before leaving the Las Cruces area to work with the Environmental Protection Agency.

I have been a professional biologist-ecologist for more than 40 years. I moved to Las Cruces from the University of Rhode Island. During the 1960's and 1970's my research focus was on amphibians and reptiles, and I gradually moved into mammals, arthropods, soil organisms, and plants. While on the faculty at New Mexico State University, I taught introductory biology, principles of ecology, and an honors course in "the global environment." I have done research in Australia, Brazil, southern Africa, and Israel. While on sabbatical in Australia, I discovered the challenges and satisfaction of birding. I don't believe any visitor to Australia can avoid being intrigued by the colorful parrots and cockatoos. Soon after returning from Australia, I joined the Mesilla Valley Audubon Society and took advantage of the many opportunities to learn from the seasoned "birders" of our chapter.

I retired from New Mexico State University in 1992 and served as a senior research ecologist with the Environmental Protection Agency for seven years before retiring and joining the USDA-Jornada Experimental Range as a collaborating scientist. I continue to work part-time at the Jornada and with graduate students in Geography and Wildlife with grant funds from the International Arid Lands Consortium. Hopefully this brief biographical sketch will help you understand where I am coming from when discussing conservation and environmental issues.

It is my hope that the MVAS will continue to contribute to environmental education of our young people and to provide a voice of reason in debates about local environmental issues. A review of the history of the Audubon Society provides a good blueprint to follow. The effective conservationists and environmentalists have been able to compromise with "the other side." We will have to learn where the other side is coming from if we are to be effective. There are no easy answers to biodiversity issues, global climate change, exponential increases in human population numbers, food security...natural resource degradation, etc.. An integral part of every environmental issue is "whose ox is being gored" and "what are the available options." One facet of environ-

(continued on page 4) *See President*

Birdathon: May 4-5

Mark your calendars! Spring is nearly here and the time is coming for **Birdathon**, our yearly fundraiser. This event, which will be held the weekend of May 4th and 5th, raises the money to support our local educational projects such as Audubon Adventures. Also we have purchased bird books for the library and helped fund Randall Davey Audubon Center in Santa Fe (our State office and educational center). **Birdathon** is more important to the Chapter this year than ever before. This is because of a reduction in the share of membership dues that local Chapters receive from National Audubon.

How does **Birdathon** work? Each participating birder collects pledges from sponsors. The sponsor can pledge an amount of money per bird species or pledge a flat amount. (All contributions are tax deductible.) Then on **Birdathon** weekend the birder has 24 hours to count as many species as possible, either birding alone or with a team. Sponsors in the past have pledged \$.10 to \$1.00 a bird. And many teams see more than 100 species! Don't want to ask friends or co-workers for money? Pledge to yourself or ask relatives. A surprising number of people are happy to have been asked.

Although we have set the above weekend as the official **Birdathon** date for our chapter, you can do your count either before or after if it is more convenient. Also, **Birdathon** can be done in any location. If you expect to be traveling at that time, plan to set aside a few hours to bird. You probably will anyway. Right?

Please help support your chapter by birding and raising funds, or by pledging to someone you know. Contact Storm Sermay, 382-3348 if you would like to participate or if you want more information. Teams are forming now! Don't be left out!