

MESILLA VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY



ROADRUNNER RAMBLINGS

Volume 20, No. 3 May/June 1998

MESILLA VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY: A BRIEF HISTORY

by Eleanor Wootten

August 1977 brought a dozen like-minded individuals together to look into the feasibility of once again starting an Audubon chapter in the Mesilla Valley (there had been one once before in the 1920's.) By June 1978 the required 35 members were on board and a provisional charter was granted. The permanent charter followed a year later.

The beginning may have been small, but the chapter grew steadily over the next 20 years. Although even now our membership is not large, our attitude has never been small and we can proudly count our accomplishments as many. Conservation, education, field trips, and the chapter's heartbeat, the newsletter have been our biggest strengths. They developed slowly, gradually becoming stronger over time.

Our field trips began modestly with day trips, then overnight trips, and eventually, out of state trips to Texas and California. Fortunately for us, our birding identification skills were well honed by some very fine experts along the way. (We continue passing along those skills through Doña Ana Branch Community College with bird identification classes.) Although Christmas Bird Counts are not field trips, they were under the guidance of the field trip chair and are an important part of our chapter activities.

Our conservation efforts began in tiny steps, but grew in strength to make our chapter the strongest in the state for many years. Holloman Lakes was an early joint project with

Bureau of Land Management - the first of its kind for National Audubon Society and Bureau of Land Management. It gave us credibility and standing for later developments with Holloman Air Force Base. We took the lead in the state on the Spotted Owl issue. We sent several members to "boot camp" in Washington, D.C. for activism training. Now we are embarked on the Palomas Marsh project with Bureau of Land Management and Bureau of Reclamation.

Education has been a large part of our chapter's working.

It began with displays at Brantigan Library and two classroom programs about birds and mammals reaching hundreds of students. Then came Audubon Adventures in the classroom. It began with our sponsoring a modest four classrooms and has now grown to our sponsoring 69 classrooms in Las Cruces and Truth or Consequences. This has been made possible in large part by our annual Birdathon fundraiser.

Early newsletters were simple, one or two pages with little or no graphics, evolving into the more sophisticated one you are now reading.

All of these accomplishments have happened because

we have caring, interested members who are willing to give their time and their resources for the care of our planet and more especially our community. All the while we were having a delightfully fun time watching birds with kindred spirits. ☺

Celebrating
20
Years

"Are these not kingbird days, when, in clearer first June days full of light, this aerial, twittering bird flutters from willow to willow and swings on the twigs, showing his white-edged tail?" — Henry David Thoreau

LIFE AND DEATH IN THE BIRDING WORLD

by Victor Burgett

The other day I was leaving Aguirre Springs in the Organ Mountains after a pleasant afternoon's birding, when a pair of noisy Cactus Wrens fussing in a tall yucca by the roadside caught my attention. I could see their globular nest placed deep within the spiky depths of the plant, and it was around this that the two birds were hopping, obviously greatly agitated. They were scolding continuously at full volume, raising their crests, and fanning their tails. I felt compelled to investigate more closely. I could just make out a dim shape inside the nest, and I thought it might be eggs or young birds, so I approached carefully. And then, suddenly, I realized I was witnessing something I had only seen in nature documentaries; a slice of nature in action. A snake was raiding the nest.

Kicking myself for not having my camera, I hurried over to watch the drama unfold. A beautifully patterned Gopher Snake (*Pituophis melanoleucus*) approximately three feet long, was partially coiled up within the nest, although part of it would not fit inside and was wrapped around the back of the nest. Even as I stood mere feet away, the parent wrens were too upset by the snake to heed my presence. They continued to land on and around the nest, screaming like car alarms with rage and distress. Their attempts to save their young were ineffectual. As I could tell from a downy feather protruding from the reptile's mouth, the young had already been consumed. Moreover, the snake seemed uninclined to leave; the nest made a perfect place to rest and digest its meal. It just lay staring at me, flicking its tongue lazily once in a while, entirely unperturbed by the frantic wrens or me.

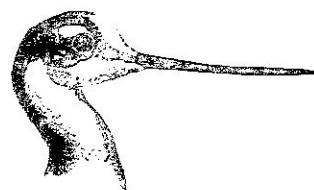
Afterwards, I could not help but pity the poor birds who had lost their brood, but neither could I be angry at the snake which was simply fulfilling its role in nature. Most of all, I felt extremely privileged to have such a rare glimpse into the lives of these two species, to have seen this portrait of the constant struggle for life. Not every birding outing provides me with a big list or a rare sighting, but the important thing is I am out looking. I know there is always something remarkable around the corner! ☺

MEET A NEW BOARD MEMBER



Ed Mayfield, a native of Las Cruces, has been elected to the board and named membership committee chairperson. He recently retired from New Mexico State University where he headed the Southwest Center for Codes and Standards. Ed graduated from NMSU in 1958 when it was known as New Mexico A&M. Most of his working life has been in the aerospace industry. He comes to us as a beginning birder but has had a love of birds for a long time. He says he was a "closet birder" when he was young because "guys just didn't watch birds."

We welcome Ed's organizational skills and willingness to work on building our membership. ☺



AUDUBON ADVENTURES NEWS

by Lorraine Schulte

AUDUBON ADVENTURES has had extra help from Audubon members in getting sponsors for this program in classrooms in Alamogordo and T or C. Thanks to John Mangimeli at White Sands National Monument, a 4th grade teacher in Alamogordo will receive this program for her classroom during the 1998-99 school year.

Also, Richard Bischoff secured donations from VFW Post 3224 to fund six classrooms in the T or C municipal schools during the 1998-99 school year.

These efforts by our members are most appreciated.

The subject matter of AUDUBON ADVENTURES for the 1998-99 school year will include: "Nature Goes to School" (information about habitats), "Home Sweet Tree - What Animals Call Home", "Mississippi River - Force of Nature", "Birds of a Feather Nest Together", and "Alaska, A Naturally Cool Place".

We appreciate all the donations we have received to keep this excellent program coming to the classrooms during the next school year.

ANNIVERSARY POTLUCK

May 20, Wednesday. 6 p.m.

Our annual potluck dinner, which is usually held to celebrate Birdathon, will also be celebrating our chapter's 20th anniversary. We welcome all members and encourage you to attend. David Henderson, the director of our state office in Santa Fe, will be there and we hope many old and new members will have an opportunity to get better acquainted.

Location: the home of Lorraine and John Schulte, 1740 Mariposa, Las Cruces. Bring a "covered dish". Drinks and table service will be provided. Please let the Schultes know if you will be attending. 505-524-7029

FIELD TRIPS



New Mexico weather is changeable. Please be prepared with layered clothing, good walking shoes, water, sunscreen, and a hat.

May 9, Saturday. Birdathon Weekend. Many people will be participating in our Birdathon fundraiser sometime during the weekend. If you would like an interesting birding experience (and perhaps like to raise some money) contact Tim Lawton 522-2056 to see about joining a Birdathon team.

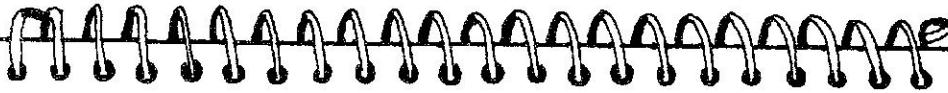
June 13, Saturday. Ladder Ranch. This superb trip, lead each year by Ken Stinnett, gives us access to a private ranch with great birding opportunities. Bring lunch for a picnic. We will meet at Kmart on Highway 70 at 6:30 A.M. Call Ken at 522-2919 for more information.

ADDRESS CHANGES

Mailing labels for the newsletters are generated by National Audubon from their membership lists. Please send all changes of address to: NAS, Membership Data Center, PO Box 51001, Boulder, CO 80322. You can call National Audubon with membership questions at 800-274-4201.

DONATIONS MADE BY MVAS

Mesilla Valley Audubon has donated some bird books to the Branigan Memorial Library. (We would like to thank Waldenbooks for making their discount program available to us for these purchases.) In April, our president presented the library with a variety of identification guides: *Warblers of the Americas*, *Woodpeckers of the World*, *Hummingbirds of North America*, *Birds of Zion National Park*, *The Hummingbird Book*, *Hummingbird Gardens*, *Field Guide to the Birds of Mexico and Northern Central America*, *Seabirds of the World*, *Birders Handbook*, *Field Guide to Hawks*, and *Birding*. We hope everyone with an interest in birds will take advantage of these new reference books. ☺



BIRD NOTES

March -April 1998

Eastern Phoebe	March 1	Percha St. Pk.	TL
Swamp Sparrow	March 1	Radium Springs	TL
Rough-legged Hawk	March 1	Percha St. Pk.	TL
Bullock's Oriole	March 11	Las Cruces	DT
Black-necked Stilt	March 14	Old Refuge	TT
Hooded Oriole	March 14	Las Cruces	HH
Rough-legged Hawk	March 17	Las Cruces	SH
Black-chinned Hummingbird	March 18	Las Cruces	SH
White-tailed Kite	March 21	Palomas Marsh	HH
Scott's Oriole	April 12	Las Cruces	BJ
Lucy's Warbler	April 13	Percha St. Pk.	LS,EW
Wood Duck	April 13	Percha St. Pk.	LS,EW
Great Horned Owl	April 13	Percha St. Pk.	LS,EW
Scrub Jay	April 13	Percha St. Pk.	LS,EW
Orange-crowned Warbler	April 13	Percha St. Pk.	LS,EW
MacGillivray's Warbler	April 13	Percha St. Pk.	LS,EW
Lincoln's Sparrow	April 13	Percha St. Pk.	LS,EW
Wilson's Warbler	April 13	Percha St. Pk.	LS,EW
Hooded Oriole	April 14	Percha St. Pk.	LS,EW
American Bittern	April 17	Las Cruces	BJ
Bank Swallow	April 17	Mesilla	VB
Merlin	April 17	Mesilla	VB
Pine Warbler	April 17	Mesilla	VB
Rose-breasted Grosbeak	April 18	Las Cruces	BG
Scott's Oriole	April 19	Las Cruces	BG
Grace's Warbler	April 20	Dripping Springs	LS,JS
Black-throated Gray Warbler	April 20	Leasburg St. Pk.	*Group
Wilson's Warbler	April 20	Leasburg St. Pk.	*Group
Swainson's Hawk	April 20	Leasburg St. Pk.	*Group
Bronzed Cowbird	April 24	Leasburg St. Pk.	*Group
Western Kingbird	April 25	Las Cruces	LS
Lazuli Bunting	April 25	Las Cruces	SS
Cassin's Finch	April 26	Radium Springs	MO
		Radium Springs	MO

Observers: Victor Burgett, Bill Glenn, Harold Harrison, Sue Hill, Bill Jacobson, Tim Lawton, Mary Ann Owen, John Schulte, Lorraine Schulte, Storm Sermay, Donna Tate, Tom Tate, Eleanor Wootten. *Group consisted of Barbara Dolezal, Sue Hill, Lorraine Schulte, Eleanor Wootten.

Please report any early, late, or unusual sightings to: Storm Sermay
505-382-3348 or e-mail ssermay@zianet.com.

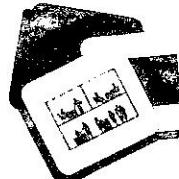
New Mexico Rare Bird Hotline 505-323-9323

FIELD TRIP REPORT

by Victor Burgett, Trip Leader

It was a perfect spring morning when we arrived at our first stop, the bridge over the Gila River between the towns of Gila and Cliff. This is my favorite hotspot for viewing Common Black-Hawk in the early spring and we were not disappointed. Within minutes we had located two Black-Hawks perched in cottonwoods downriver from the bridge. As I went back to the car for my scope, a third flew low over the group. One of the sitting hawks remained stationary for the entire time we were present and everyone got unparalleled views of it consuming a frog. We also enjoyed hearing their strange gull-like calls. Other birds in the vicinity included several Lucy's Warblers and a pair of bold Vermilion Flycatchers. Four species of swallow, including Tree Swallow, fed over the river.

By the time of our second stop at the catwalk in Glenwood, the wind had gotten quite fierce, and bird activity was greatly reduced. However, the wind did not prevent us from finding our main target here, the American Dipper. We watched one feeding for 20 minutes or so, and also got to see its uniquely placed nest in a cliffside cavity just above the stream. On the way out, some of the group got a special bonus when a Zone-tailed Hawk, flying low with several Turkey Vultures, provided an unusually long look.



SLIDE DONATIONS NEEDED

Mesilla Valley Audubon Society is making a plea for donations to its slide collection. Our goal is to have slides of all the species of birds that occur in New Mexico. We have a good start on this, but still have a long way to go. These slides will be used in programs, at meetings, and in school presentations. If you are willing to donate slides or loan slides that can be duplicated, please contact Bill Jacobson 382-6877, Ken Stinnett 522-2919, or Lorraine Schulte 524-7029. ☺

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)	Victor Burgett	521-7098
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	Victor Burgett	521-7098
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 _____

Q54
 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**

SECOND ANNUAL TEACHING AWARD PRESENTED

by Maxine Perkins

MVAS presented the second annual "Lorraine Schulte Excellence in Teaching Award" to Marilyn Bush at our April 15th general meeting. Mrs. Bush is a fourth grade inclusion teacher at Sierra Elementary in Truth or Consequences, NM.

Originally from Nebraska, Mrs. Bush and her family have been in New Mexico for some time. She first taught in Gallup, where her children graduated from high school, and then moved to T or C.

In 1997, she was awarded a grant for outdoor education and since that time has been working toward educating all students about our environment. The Outdoor Education Project has involved students in learning about Elephant Butte Reservoir and its impact on their community as well as the impact they have on Elephant Butte. Students have been able to incorporate mathematics, health issues, recreation, and other subjects into this project.

WELCOME TO CAFÉ AUDUBON!

Introducing the first certified shade grown organic coffee and the only coffee that contributes money directly to the National Audubon Society and Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center.

About a year ago, National Audubon, Smithsonian, and Eco Organic Coffee Co. joined together to create this unique product making an effort to protect biodiversity and delicate tropical ecosystems.

Coffee farming beneath shade trees can attract almost as many bird species as a natural forest. Unfortunately, in an effort to produce more and more coffee, farms in many areas have modernized by eliminating the traditional shade canopy and by using chemical fertilizers, insecticides, fungicides, and herbicides. All of this transforms coffee farms, alive with birds and a host of other organisms, into a biological desert. Traditional shade tree growing methods provide natural habitat for a diversity of migratory birds. With each sip of this coffee, you will know you're helping to maintain an equitable partnership between farmers, consumers, and the environment.

For more information about ordering, contact Eco Organic Coffee Company at 888-326-2633 or e-mail organic@ecocoffee.com. The web site can be found at www.ecocoffee.com.

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: June 20**

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**Mesilla Valley Audubon Society
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