



# ROADRUNNER RAMBLINGS

## MESILLA VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY

<https://www.mvasaudubon.org/> Vol. 43, No 3, Fall 2021 Part I



### MVAS breaks out of isolation with a Keep Las Cruces Beautiful Adopt-A-Spot celebration and bird walk at Sagecrest Park

We had a great turnout July 10 for the unveiling of our official Adopt-A-Spot sign at Sagecrest Park (601 Roadrunner Pkwy, at Frontier and Roadrunner) and a bird walk after. As you know, the Mesilla Valley Audubon Society (MVAS) has adopted Sagecrest Park as part of the Keep Las Cruces Beautiful Adopt-A-Spot program!

Birders know that litter is both ugly and bad for wildlife. Discarded food might not seem like a big deal, but it can attract birds—and predators that are dangerous to birds. Tiny plastic pieces can be mistaken for food, but a bird cannot digest plastic, and even a small piece can block a bird's digestive tract and lead to starvation. Sharp edges on plastic or glass can cut birds inside and out.

Wildlife can also get their heads stuck in discarded food containers, and even discarded cans and bottles can trap lizards and other small creatures that have no way out. Birds and wildlife can become tangled in ribbon, kite string, plastic bags, six-pack rings, and fishing line.

Stay tuned for information on how you can take part in our Sagecrest Park Adopt-A-Spot obligations and help us Keep Las Cruces Beautiful for the birds! Until then, good birding!

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## MVAS Schedule: August, September, October 2021

**August 7 (Saturday):** BLM photography workshop at Dripping Springs (see below)

**August 11 (Wednesday):** Program “Leading a Bird Walk” via Zoom, 6:30 p.m. meet ‘n greet, 7 p.m. program starts. This will be a panel discussion of MVAS bird walk leaders with time for questions from members and friends. It is an important, timely topic! Audience participation will be encouraged for what should be a lively program. Registration information was sent to the MVAS email list. If you did not receive it, email mesillavalleyaudubon – at – gmail dot com (please put bird walk panel discussion in subject line).

**August 28 (Saturday):** 8 a.m. Bird walk at Leasburg Dam State Park. Meet at visitors center. CJ Goin to lead.

**September 1 (Wednesday):** 8 a.m. Tellbrook Park bird walk. Meet at park entrance. Mark Pendleton to lead.

**September 15 (Wednesday):** Program “Birds of Cave Creek, AZ” via Zoom, 6:30 p.m. meet ‘n greet, 7 p.m. program starts. Details to follow. This is in preparation for an **October field trip to Cave Creek**—date and details to be determined.

**September 25 (Saturday):** 8 a.m. Bird walk at Leasburg Dam State Park. Meet at visitors center. CJ Goin to lead.

**October (date TBD):** Birds, No Boys! Women’s bird walk led by Judy Wilbur

**October 6 (Wednesday):** 8 a.m. Tellbrook Park bird walk. Meet at park entrance. Mark Pendleton to lead.

**October 20 (Wednesday):** Program “Making Your Yard Bird & Pollinator Friendly” via Zoom, 6:30 p.m. meet ‘n greet, 7 p.m. program starts.

**October 30 (Saturday):** 8 a.m. Bird walk at Leasburg Dam State Park. Meet at visitors center. CJ Goin to lead.

### Photography workshops!



MVAS member and bird photographer *par excellence* **Dr. Khandan Nirmalakhandan** led MVAS-sponsored workshops in July on the art of attracting hummingbirds and capturing them on film. Held at Dripping Springs Natural Area, Khandan worked in conjunction with the Bureau of Land Management. Those of us who attended had a wonderful time, learned a lot, and came home with some beautiful pics. A two-part workshop is to be held on 8/7/2021.

This workshop will have **two** sessions - first in a classroom from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. at the BLM Las Cruces District Office (1800 Marquess St.) followed by hands-on photography activities in a field setting at Dripping Springs Natural Area from 4:00 – 6:30 p.m.

The classroom session will cover artistic and technical aspects of photographing hummingbirds in action and the field session will provide opportunities to apply the techniques by photographing 3-4 species of hummingbirds in action from about 15-20 feet.

Participants are expected to be fully familiar with their photographic gear. To get the most out of this workshop, DSLR or mirrorless body with a 300 mm or longer lens and a tripod are suggested. More details will be provided to registrants in advance of the event.

Pre-registration is required by 8/4/21. Please email [dbarraza@blm.gov](mailto:dbarraza@blm.gov) or call 575-525-4487 to register.

## Spring Birds at Tellbrook Park



*In addition to finding the Pyrrhuloxias and Black-chinned Sparrows (top row), it was fun watching a family of American Kestrels (bottom row) whose home appeared to be the two large palm trees on the park trail during walks there this spring. Photos by Sid Webb.*

## Featured Bird: American Kestrel — *Falco sparverius*

by Mark Pendleton

Among birders, a common icebreaker is “What’s your favorite bird?” Well, mine is the American Kestrel. Soon after I started birding more than 60 ago, North America’s smallest and most widespread falcon captured my imagination and has held it ever since.

Why? Birds of prey have long excited and fascinated humans, so obviously that’s part of the answer. Also, when my brother and I — aged eight and 12 — started birding, we had no binoculars. We mowed lawns, shoveled snow, cleaned my dad’s dental office and did other odd jobs to earn money to buy our first pairs. Until we got them, we were limited to watching birds that were easily observed and identified without the aid of optics. American Kestrels and Chipping Sparrows (I’m also very fond of them) were two of the ones we saw most often.

And when we got our first “binos,” it made sense to look more closely at birds we already knew. Not surprisingly, the Chipping Sparrows and American Kestrels looked even better seen through our new optics.

Although they’re our most common falcon, there’s nothing “common” about American Kestrels. The female is a striking bird with her rufous brown and barred upper parts and pale underparts with their light spotting. The male is even more of a standout with his gunmetal blueish-grey wings and occasional rosy-blushed chest and underparts similar to the female’s. The two vertical slashes across each side of the pale face complete the most arresting — possibly second only to the Apolomado Falcon — falcon plumage in North America.

Something else about *F. sparverius* that appeals to me is that it’s a habitat generalist. In all seasons, American Kestrels may be found in a diverse set of open to semi-open habitats. From barrens to short-grass grasslands, any habitat with perches from which to hunt will attract them. During mating season, pairs look for cavities in (usually dead) trees. However, they also nest on rocky cliffs, buildings, bridges with protected nooks and in purposely built nesting boxes. Meadows, power line rights of way, prairies, deserts, bogs, abandoned land returning to a wild state, and even interstate rest areas and medians will attract these graceful falcons. In winter, females are usually found in more open habitat than males.

A good rule of thumb when looking for Kestrel habitat is to look for habitat that also appeals to Red-tailed Hawks and Northern Harriers. Another similarity with Red-tails is that Kestrels spook easily. Just as Red-tailed Hawks are among the more skittish of buteos, even taking off from their perch when you stop your vehicle to look at them, Kestrels almost invariably will do the same thing.

One often notices American Kestrels perched on roadside utility lines. Another bird of the same size with a similarly slender profile also perches on utility lines — the Mourning Dove. Kestrels have larger heads and shorter tails, though.

When hunting, another of the American Kestrel’s favorite perches is at or near the tops of trees on springy branches. Whether hunting from utility lines or treetops, Kestrels habitually raise and lower their tails, apparently to keep their balance. This habit easily distinguishes them from Mourning Doves and Merlins, neither of which do so. Where perches are lacking, a common hunting technique is to hover 4 – 6 meters or so above the ground.

After capturing its prey (principally insects and small mammals), most often on the ground, an American Kestrel will take it to an elevated perch to eat. Less commonly, it consumes prey in the air in the fashion of

Merlins. While insects and small mammals make up much of a Kestrel's diet, they also will take small birds — even up to quail size — and bats, earthworms, frogs, lizards, mice, spiders, and other edibles. Grasshoppers and dragonflies are among the commonest insects Kestrels take. It is also not unusual for individual birds to specialize in one particular type of prey.

In flight, an American Kestrel appears to be a slender wisp of a falcon, with long, slender wings and an equally long narrow tail. In good light, it's easy to distinguish the sexes in flight by color. When they soar, however, both look like they have a beaded string of white pearls on the trailing edge of their wings.

An easy way to distinguish between perched American Kestrels and Merlins is to look for the tail being raised and lowered (Kestrel yes, Merlin no). Swallow behavior in the presence of flying Kestrels and Merlins is a useful way to distinguish between the two in flight. During migration, swallow species show little agitation when Kestrels are about, not adopting drastic measures to avoid them. In nesting season, swallows will even mob them. Not so with Merlins. A small falcon in the distance that doesn't cause swallows to ball up in small defensive clusters is a Kestrel. If they ball up, it's a Merlin.

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## COOL BIRDING

by Jay Wilbur



**BLUFF SPRINGS WATERFALL, CLOUDCROFT, NM**

The American Crow is a very intelligent bird. Some say its reasoning ability rivals that of a 7-year old human. As a result, crows successfully exploit virtually all habitats within the United States. They're found just about everywhere. But during the summer months they leave Doña Ana County.

That's not because of a food shortage, there's plenty available. Nor is a lack of water their motive, there is enough. My guess is they leave to escape the heat. After all, their black feathers must keep them rather warm

during the many hours of sunshine we enjoy. Being smart, they've found the perfect answer. While all our Great-tailed Grackles stand around with their mouths hanging open, the crows of Doña Ana County head for the mountains.

So, if you want to see a crow around here in summer, you're going to have to gain some altitude, and the more the better. Aguirre Spring isn't high enough. It's only 5 – 10 degrees cooler. Emory Pass, next door in Sierra County, offers a better chance. But even there you'll only find 15 – 20 degrees of relief. Ahhh, but Cladocroft, in neighboring Otero County and only a couple of hours away as the crow flies, routinely drains 25 – 30 degrees off the thermometer. Now we're talking.

Like the American Crow, my brain frequently operates on the level of a 7-year old. Whenever June rolls into Las Cruces, an innate wanderlust points my heart toward the refreshing Sacramento Peaks where Cladocroft nestles. I'm drawn to the many enjoyable activities the area offers. But foremost of these is cool birding.

Mountain birding in and around Cladocroft can be pretty special. An early morning hiker might encounter the

echoing sound of a bugling elk, the sweet odor of honeysuckle, and a distant view of White Sands National Park framed by cerulean skies and evergreens. Is that a bear crossing our trail!? Whew, no, just a Wild Turkey. Wait! I think I hear an owl. Wrong again, see? It's a Band-tailed Pigeon.

Experiences similar to these are found in several birding hotspots near Cladocroft. One of my favorites is the **Rim Trail**. This 20-plus-mile trail system connects Cladocroft with Sunspot, a solar observatory that is itself a great place to visit and bird. Sections of the Rim Trail range from easy to very strenuous in difficulty. There are at least four trailheads and many spur trails. All can produce birds lowlanders like me seldom get to see.



*Nesting Pygmy Nuthatch*

Another beautiful spot is **Bluff Springs National Recreation Area**, a Forest Service campground 14 miles south of Cladocroft on the Rio Peñasco. The trailhead here is next to a scenic, 30-foot waterfall. Walk up a connecting trail through mountain meadows, groves of aspen, oak, spruce, and fir, and then as far as you want into a vast network of linked trails.

North of Cladocroft, off of Highway 244 toward Ruidoso, the hiking trails that start near the

**Silver/Saddle/Apache campground complex** offer some of the most productive birding in the area. Woodpeckers, flycatchers, tanagers, orioles, nuthatches, grosbeaks, juncos, and others abound. Don't forget to occasionally search the sky above. You might get lucky and see an eagle or a Northern Goshawk.



*Western Tanager*

After a full morning of birding, be sure to stop at **Rebecca's at the Lodge** for lunch. The water feature near the front entrance attracts many species, especially swallows, so you'll want to submit an incidental report to eBird for this location as well. Oh, and the food is great too.

Finally, walk off your meal along the streets of Cloudcroft. Many businesses and residents put out bird feeders. If you've never been buzzed by a Broad-tailed Hummingbird, get ready. This unique sound is a defining part of the Cloudcroft birding experience, as is the familiar cawing of crows.

So if the heat is getting you down this summer, take a heads-up from the American Crow and head for the mountains. Don't forget your binoculars, hiking stick, appetite, and perhaps a light jacket. Did I mention it's 30 degrees cooler in Cloudcroft today?

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## **Merlin Phone App Bird Sound ID: It Works!**

**by Tom Johnson**

As I write this, I am up north at 7,600 feet elevation walking a hillside amongst pines and oaks within Coyote Creek State Park (Mora County). I hear a bird singing that I don't recognize. I look with my binoculars, but cannot find it. No problem. I pull out my smartphone, open the Cornell Merlin Bird app, select Sound ID, and tap the green microphone symbol to start recording. I wait for the bird to call again, holding the phone in the direction of the bird, and finally it sings. The app records the song and immediately shows a match, a Virginia's Warbler. Hmmm. I don't trust it, so I get closer and try to see it, but it keeps out of sight. So, I use the same Merlin app to play back the song of a Virginia's Warbler and what flies in but a little gray bird with a bright yellow butt and chest with a bright, white eye ring — a Virginia's Warbler. Wow!

This feature is a recent update to the already great Merlin bird identification phone application. I tried the app every day for a week to help me ID birds unseen and also confirm what I see. I found the Sound ID to be amazingly good at identifying birds **BUT** sometimes *it will give matches that are completely wrong*. For example, it told me it heard both a Common Yellowthroat and a Greater Pewee. I was near a stream and recognized the song of the correctly identified Yellowthroat, but a Greater Pewee was wrong. The Sound ID can detect multiple birds and will highlight the bird it just identified on the list (if more than one). One interesting thing occurred as I was listening to a Robin. A Rufous Hummingbird flew by and the app identified the hummer!

I found the Merlin Sound ID to be a dream come true. Go forth and use the Merlin Sound ID with confidence but *verify before reporting*. Try it on birds you know to gain confidence in it. The app can be used on live or recorded bird songs and calls, so don't worry how the sounds are captured. You can also share the recordings via email or text from the Merlin app. If you have unknown bird songs or calls or just want to verify one, please contact me (1tom2go@gmail.com) and/or go to this great website of sounds: <https://academy.allaboutbirds.org/peterson-field-guide-to-bird-sounds/>. Happy birding!

## Merlin Sound ID App: A Companion Piece

By Judy Lazarus Yellon

My introduction to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology (CLO) came in my early years through my growing friendship with Lorraine Schulte from our local MVAS group back in May 2008. She taught me that CLO was a terrific resource and shared examples of how she used it. I initially turned to CLO during the first of five years that my husband and I had a pair of Greater Roadrunners mating and nesting in our backyard. Accessing the CLO website taught me the average longevity of this species, about their mating behaviors, and information about broods, etc. The information helped me know better what to look for and anticipate.

At some point I learned that I could contribute my sightings to the CLO at eBird. After years of keeping a running list of bird sightings using pen and paper, I was introduced to the possibility of keeping such a list using the eBird app downloaded to my smartphone. I sometimes need help getting started with technology, and fortunately my friend Tom Johnson has been a willing and excellent teacher. He taught me enough of the basics to be able to use this app independently with success. I have appreciated how this app will use GPS to actually track where I walk or drive and tally the total distance, which alleviates my previous need to estimate that information.

Before much longer, I added the CLO Merlin app to my cell phone and have found it to be quite helpful with its various functions. AND I recently received an email from CLO announcing that the Merlin app was now making available an additional function in regard to sounds. Tom contacted me to make certain that I knew of this and then came over and taught me how to update apps on my phone, including the Merlin app. (I had not been doing this.) The immediate result was the appearance of another choice when I clicked on this app. Now the opening page includes a link to "Sound ID." Tom and I experimented with this using both of our phones while inside. We used one phone to have Merlin give us the sounds of a backyard bird familiar to us. Sure enough the other phone, using the Sound ID option, began to show waves of lines going across the top of the screen. Then a photo of our bird, along with its name, popped up. The recording is saved, but can easily be deleted.

I have been using this app during the past five or six times that I have gone out birding. I AM IMPRESSED AND GRATEFUL! This is a marvelous tool that can help me find and identify birds. The app can ID as many birds as it hears. The list will then highlight whichever bird is singing/calling at a given moment. I continue to fine-tune my understanding of all I can do with this app, but it has already enhanced my birding experiences.

I recommend it highly!

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## Holloman Lakes closed to public

Since the discovery of contamination of Holloman Lakes with a poisonous substance, they have been closed to the public. The poisons, per-and polyfluoroalkyl, also known as PFAS, are used to combat fires. There is a report that ongoing evaluations by personnel at Holloman Air Force base will be complete in 2022. There is no plan for reopening Holloman Lakes before then, if ever.



Holloman Lakes have been designated as an Important Bird Area by state and national Audubon Societies. In the past, they were a favorite destination for MVAS field trips during the migratory season, with several articles in previous newsletters documenting their popularity.

For more information, see

<https://www.stripes.com/theaters/us/2021-06-25/New-Mexico-epa-crack-down-water-contamination-Holloman-Air-Force-Base-1835021.html>

<https://www.alamogordonews.com/story/news/local/community/2021/01/20/state-environment-department-begins-work-addressing-pfas/4227795001/>

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### **Update on the Rio Grande**

**by Sid Webb with help from the USIBWC and**

**Paul Tashjian, director of Freshwater Conservation, Audubon New Mexico**

Because of the drought, the 2021 water release from Elephant Butte Dam was only 20% of the standard allotment, and water ran for only a month. Water release decisions are made based on data collected by the Bureau of Reclamation. A full allocation is 790,000-acre feet, and 20% of that gets diverted to Mexico by virtue of the U.S.-Mexico treaty of 1908. According to the U.S. International and Boundary Water Commission (IBWC), this year's allotment was:

May 25, 2021	Allocation (acre-ft)
EBID	51,330
EP1	121,387
Mexico	12,129

Elephant Butte Irrigation District (EBID) is the entity that divides the water to shareholders in New Mexico and EP1 serves the same function in Texas. The U.S. and Mexico delegates meet bi-monthly to be sure Mexico receives its fair share of water, and there has been good cooperation between the two countries for longer than a century. Texas and New Mexico have had a terrible relationship trying to agree about distribution of water. There have been multiple lawsuits, federal interventions, and much animosity regarding this issue. It has become more complex and contentious over time as we have come to understand how limited this life-providing resource is.

Within New Mexico there is also a divide. North of Elephant Butte Dam, the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District allocates resources to the northern 3/4 of the state. There are many stakeholders besides agriculture, and these include a large array of not-for-profit, conservation-oriented organizations, including New Mexico Audubon (now part of Audubon Southwest). In 2018, Audubon collaborated with several municipalities and Isleta Pueblo and two large corporations to secure water rights large enough to direct 324 million gallons of water along 35 miles of the middle Rio Grande to avoid it drying out and to keep wildlife in and along the river from dying. Despite this and other efforts, Wild Earth Guardians recently announced their intent to sue various state and federal governmental agencies for negligence in their duty to maintain the natural environment along the Rio Grande, stating a failure to abide by rulings related to the Endangered Species Act [http://pdf.wildearthguardians.org/support\\_docs/6-9-2021-CVR-Letter-RG-NOI-FINAL-CVRLTR.pdf](http://pdf.wildearthguardians.org/support_docs/6-9-2021-CVR-Letter-RG-NOI-FINAL-CVRLTR.pdf).

In southern New Mexico, where dry riverbeds are standard most of the year, there has not been as much political activity as in the northern part of the state. The USIBWC continues with its Rio Grande Project interventions, which are directed toward maintaining a viable and safe river that can handle both drought and flood and directed at improving the riparian habitat where there is an obvious need and opportunity. Most recently, USIBWC attention has been directed to the El Paso area, where much clearing of silt has been required. Improved signage along the river alerts the public to illegal activities in the riverbed and flood plain areas that careless citizens ignore too often. Other projects are under consideration, including several in New Mexico. There are voices locally advocating for much more attention to saving our riparian environment and asking why it is OK for us in the south to have a dry riverbed 10 – 11 months a year when northern New Mexicans decry even a brief interlude of a visible sandy river bottom.

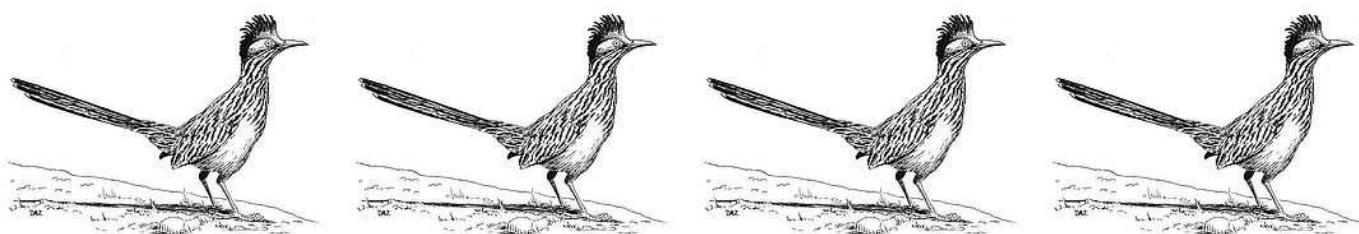
Regarding MVAS advocacy for riparian development in the area surrounding the City of Las Cruces' water effluent canal just north of the I-10 bridge, there are no new announcements from USIBWC, but it would appear the project is on track. An underappreciated year-round oasis has already resulted from the effluent canal. Flowing every day of the year at 80 gallons per minute (129 acre-feet per year), the canal creates a channel for approximately one mile before the river runs dry. This area is green and supports ducks and other birds 12 months a year. It is estimated that riparian development will subtract six acre-feet per year from the canal flow into the Rio Grande, meaning minimal impact on the flow into the riverbed.



Photos of the Rio Grande taken 5/28/2021, prior to any 2021 water release from Elephant Butte and far into the dry season since the 2020 release. The red spot in the third figure shows where the photos were taken, south of the I-10 bridge.

Data from USIBWC can be found on its website (<https://www.ibwc.gov/home.html>). On the home page, go to the menu on the left to the Citizens Forum section and click Upper Rio Grande section. Data is from a PowerPoint presentation 6/24/2021.

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Male Rufous Hummingbird



Female Rufous Hummingbird

## Rufous Hummingbirds are Here! by Tom Johnson

In early July, we get an addition to the hummingbird species in our area, the Rufous Hummingbird. This reddish-brown, orange, and green hummingbird is a boldly colored visitor when compared to our locally common Black-chinned Hummingbird.

The Rufous Hummingbirds are amazing long-distance migratory birds. Most of the Rufous winter in central Mexico and the Gulf Coast states of the U.S., and in early spring migrate up the western states such as California and Oregon. Their summer breeding destinations are in the Pacific Northwest, British Columbia, and even Alaska. As July approaches, the male Rufous Hummingbirds start to head east to the Rocky Mountains and then head south. Soon after, the females and juveniles follow this general path, returning to Mexico. Typically, we see the first Rufous here in southern New Mexico/El Paso during the first week of July. The Rufous continue south to the southern U.S. and central Mexico for the fall and winter. Their clockwise migration route is thousands of miles!

The male Rufous Hummingbird is easy to identify with his bright orange-to-red throat (gorget), green head, rufous back, flanks, and tail. Some Rufous males may have partial or even fully green backs. The female Rufous has a green back, rufous flanks, rufous tail, and a white throat with some spots, mostly in the center. The number and shape of spots vary with each female, much like a fingerprint.

One final note about Rufous Hummingbird migration: An increasing number of Rufous have been wintering in the southern U.S., primarily from Texas to Florida. This seems to be changing the typical timing Rufous Hummingbirds migrate through our area.

Sources: eBird species maps and *A Field Guide to Hummingbirds of North America* by Sheri L. Williamson

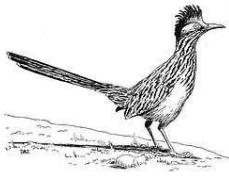
## Name That Bird!

by Mark Pendleton

*Spoiler alert: The birds shown in the photos below are identified in the Identification section of this article. If you want to identify them yourself, do so before reading it.*

**Call For Photos:** You could have your photo(s) in the next **Name That Bird** article! Just send your bird photo(s) — in jpg format — to [mpndlt@gmail.com](mailto:mpndlt@gmail.com) with Name That Bird in the subject line. Include where and when they/it were/was taken and any other information you deem pertinent (such as what you think the bird(s) is/are) or would help our panelists arrive at an identification.

### **Bird Number One**



Our first photo comes from prolific photographer Sara Walker, who correctly identified the bird. She took it on 21 July 2021 on the entrance road to Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park.

This is a great photo of an adult male. Adult females and immatures of both sexes are a warm *café au lait* or sometimes caramel brown, with lighter wing bars than the adult male. Immature males molting into their adult plumage can present a splotchy mix of blue and brown.

At first glance, this bird might possibly be confused with an Indigo Bunting during the spring and summer. In the fall and winter, though, adult Indigos of both sexes are brown, and commonly have finely streaked chests and blue-tinged tails, both of which are lacking on the adults of both sexes of the bird shown here. And, in all seasons, Indigo Buntings lack the obvious wing bars of “our” bird.

### **Bird Number One Identification**

If, as our panelists did, you identified it as a Blue Grosbeak, you were correct.

In addition to the differences between Blue Grosbeaks and Indigo Buntings noted above, the beaks are different. It may help to recall the differences in bills between Common and Chihuahuan Ravens. Both Indigo Buntings and Chihuahuan Ravens have respectable beaks. But when compared to those of Blue Grosbeaks and

Common Ravens, they are definitely minor-league affairs. Common Ravens have great honking meat cleavers for bills, and the triangular bill of a Blue Grosbeak is also one of its most prominent features.

The American Ornithological Society's common name for this bird is an example of what common names should be! The bird is obviously and unquestionably blue, and there is absolutely no doubt that that is one *gros* beak! Would that all common names were equally felicitous!

## Bird Number Two



Tracy Patrick took the photo of our second bird on Friday 23 July 2021 in Brownfield TX.

Just as Sara did, Tracy correctly identified her bird, which was a life bird for her! Congratulations, Tracy!

This bird's flight silhouette is reminiscent of a Peregrine Falcon — long and pointy-winged, with a similar size and shape. In fact, even very competent birders have more than once mistaken it for a Peregrine. Peregrine wings, however, taper evenly to points, while "our" bird has wings that are broader beyond the "elbow" than they are from the body to the "elbow." Also, the outermost primary on "Tracy's bird" is shorter than all the others and it looks almost stunted. It may seem as if this would be hard to see, but is often readily observable in the field.

Two other characteristics separate this bird from a Peregrine. This diurnal raptor (hint! hint!) wingbeats are slow, stiff, and measured while a Peregrine has fast, continuous, whippy, and fluid wingbeats. Also, Peregrines don't ever hawk insects. This bird makes its living doing so.

In this, it's similar to the American Kestrel and Merlin. The similarity to Kestrels is that insects form the majority of their diets; the similarity to Merlins is that prey is caught on the wing.

Here's a final hint: I don't think this bird has ever been seen at Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park, but a related raptor usually shows up there every couple of years or so. That bird is a White-tailed

## Bird Number Two Identification

Our panelists were unanimous in their identification of this bird as well. If, as Tracy and they did, you opted for identifying it as a Mississippi Kite, you chose correctly.

Not only are Mississippi Kites master aerialists, pursuing and capturing insects on the wing, but most of the time they also consume them in flight.

Another insect-related fact about the Mississippi Kite concerns wasps. Many times, Mississippi Kites build their nests near or actually incorporate wasp nests into their own nests. (Editor's note: That is wild!) This probably helps defend Kite chicks against climbing predators.

Northern Mockingbirds, Blue Jays, House Sparrows, and other smaller bird species at times build their nests close to or actually on those of Mississippi Kites and coexist in peace. This seems to offer protection to the smaller birds.

In conclusion, I'm jealous, Tracy! A Mississippi Kite would be a life bird for me as well.

Someday!

### PHOTOS FROM CJ GOIN...



*Semipalmated Sandpiper, photo by CJ Goin*



*Gray Flycatcher eating a grasshopper, photo by CJ Goin*



## Duskywing Butterflies

by CJ Goin

### Mournful Duskywing



Duskywings are a genus of butterflies that can be difficult to identify, as many of them are similar. They are not brightly colored, but they can be attractive. They often perch with their wings open, unlike sulphur butterflies, so it is often possible to get a good look at the outerwings.

The most common duskywing in our area is the Mournful Duskywing (top photo). As with the Funereal Duskywing (bottom right photo), they have a white fringe on the hindwing, but they can be distinguished by the lack of an obvious pale patch on the forewing. The Funereal Duskywing is similar, but the obvious pale patch on the forewing is usually enough to make a distinction.

The Sleepy Duskywing (bottom left photo) is usually seen early in spring before Funereals and Mournfuls, and it lacks the white hindwing fringe seen on the other two. These are the most common duskywings seen in our area, and with luck you may see all three from spring to fall.

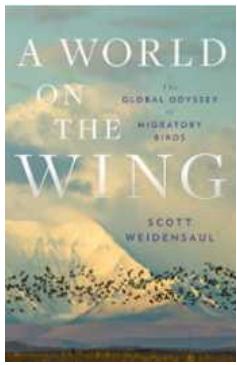


*Sleepy Duskywing*



*Funereal Duskywing*

***A World on the Wing: The Global Odyssey of Migratory Birds***  
**by Scott Weidensaul (2021)**



*A World on the Wing* is a fascinating account of the science of bird migration. Author and ornithologist Scott Weidensaul has updated this topic in a book that explains the new science while relating many stories of his own explorations across the globe.

Throughout the book he introduces the reader to migratory flyways through his travels. In an early chapter, he describes being part of a group in China visiting the mudflats along the coast of the Yellow Sea. They arrived early in the morning when all was still, only to be overwhelmed moments later by “dense clouds of birds lifting off from where they had been sitting” upon sunrise. The birds, migrants along the East Asian-Australian Flyway, were seen in all directions, and did not stop rising as they headed north toward Siberia, northern China, and Alaska.

Weidensaul describes the stresses to birds imposed by human developments and climate change, and what is being done to check that impact. There are many groups that are addressing this area’s problems, and other flyways have their own unique conditions and problems.

By way of his travels, he meets fellow ornithologists and describes what they are discovering with their bird migration research. We humans cannot imagine the myriad processes that allow birds to migrate: Where do they store their energy? How do their lungs provide enough oxygen to the body at high altitude? What brain functions guide the birds on their travels?

Technology helps the study of bird migration immensely. Bird banding used to rely on printing placed on the bird band and the good faith of the hunter or other person who encountered the bird at a later date to forward the data. Radio transmitters, as initially designed, were large and had a limited range for signal transmission. As of 2012, transmitters weighing less than an ounce (small enough to mount on a hummingbird) and with improved range have been in use in conjunction with receiver stations that can be mounted on a telephone pole to collect data from as far away as 20 miles. Entire regions in the northeastern part of the U.S. are covered with stations that provide data about smaller birds and their travels. Slightly larger transmitters emit signals that can be detected by satellite, with truly spectacular documentation of large-bird migration. Arctic terns have been documented to travel 57,000 miles in a year’s time!

Radar was invented before World War II to locate airplanes, and subsequently was used for weather predictions, with tracking stations placed across the entire U.S. and elsewhere. It has been refined to the point that individual birds can be identified, with the discovery that during the spring and fall seasons, the night sky may be saturated with flocks of nocturnal migrants. By following the data, a birder can predict from the night’s information which mornings will provide him/her with the greatest number of birds and where they will be. All tracking stations are owned by the government, and the data is available to the public.

My only disappointment reading *A World on the Wing: the Global Odyssey of Migratory Birds* was that there is no mention of New Mexico and our migrant birds. No mention of our beloved Sandhill Crane! The author will just have to write another book.



## Birder as Gardener: Recipe for Homemade Weed Killer

by Mark Pendleton



It's that time of year again—weed season! There have been a few scattered rains and as they do when that happens, the weeds are busting out in force. The question is: What are you going to do about it?

You could just ignore them. But neighbors and spouses tend to take a dim view of that. Also, nasty goats heads and stickers are painful, plus weedy patches attract mosquitos, fleas, ticks and other pests.

You could get out and go at them with hoes and rakes. That can give you blisters and a sore back, though. You could buy any one of a number of petrochemical weed killers to spray on the weeds. But there are serious potential health risks there. Plus, weeds develop a tolerance for these products when they're widely used. And they can be expensive!

So, we're back at the same question: What are you going to do about those \*\$!@%#! weeds?

You could make your own homemade weed killer! It's really quite easy and inexpensive. Plus, you'll feel good that you're not poisoning the earth, and you likely have all or most of the ingredients in your pantry already.

Here's what you'll need:

Vinegar  
Salt  
Dishwashing liquid  
Water

Here's how you make it: In a gallon of water, mix a cup of vinegar, a cup of salt, and a cup of dishwashing liquid. Want to increase the strength? Instead of normal cooking vinegar (usually 5% acetic acid), go to a hardware or garden store and get industrial/agricultural strength (20% or 30% acetic acid) vinegar.

You can actually use straight 20% or 30% vinegar by itself to kill those weeds. But the dishwashing liquid helps the solution stick to plants better and the salt dries them out. So, mixing the ingredients together increases the liquid's lethality.

I bought a hard plastic two-gallon container with a hand pump and a spray wand to apply the stuff, as I have a large enough area that to treat that I do not want to use a mere spray bottle. If your patch is small enough, a spray bottle may be all you need.

Of course, don't get any of your brew on plants that you want to thrive. Likewise, read and follow the warnings and precautions on the vinegar and dishwashing liquid bottles. It's also a very good idea to wear chemical resistant gloves and protective eyewear when you apply your weed killer. Don't get the stuff in your eyes or on your skin, and if you do, follow the first aid instructions on the bottles.

## Last Minute Bird Blind Project Update

On 7/31/2021, the welded frames were placed in a trailer (see photo) ready for the trip to Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park where they will support the MVAS–MVBSP bird blind. Construction should be complete by 8/31/2021. Finally! Stay tuned!



## Officers and Board MVAS 2021

**President:** Elaine Stachera Simon

**Vice-president:** Mark Pendleton

**Secretary:** Cheryl Fallstead

**Treasurer:** Diane Moore

### Directors

Director 2019–2022: Sid Webb

Director 2019–2022: Gill Sorg

Director 2020–2022: open

Director 2020–2023: C.J. Goin

Director 2020–2023: Annie Mitchell

Director 2021–2024: Trish Cutler

Director 2021–2024: Tracy Patrick

### Committee chairs:

Conservation: Trish Cutler

Education: C.J. Goin

Field Trips: Mark Pendleton

Programs: Vacant, currently managed by president

Newsletter: Sid Webb

Website: Sid Webb

Membership: Annie Mitchell

Finance Committee: Diane Moore

Christmas Bird Count: Mark Pendleton

Facebook administrator: Elaine Stachera Simon

Climate Watch Coordinator: Mark Pendleton

**Roadrunner Ramblings** is published quarterly and is distributed via [the MVAS website](#), with a copy emailed to all MVAS members and friends. All members of MVAS are encouraged to submit articles of interest and any bird photographs recently taken. Please email photos to [sidwebb@gmail.com](mailto:sidwebb@gmail.com) (575) 915 5017. To be added to the distribution list, contact Elaine Stachera Simon at [mesillavalleyaudubon@gmail.com](mailto:mesillavalleyaudubon@gmail.com).

**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.

**Mesilla Valley Audubon Society**

A chapter of the National Audubon  
Society



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