



# ROADRUNNER RAMBLINGS

## MESILLA VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY

<https://www.mvasaudubon.org/>

Vol. 42, No 2, Summer 2020 Part II – Just for the Fun of It!

*Editor's note:*

This is **Part II** of the **2020 Summer Edition** of *Roadrunner Ramblings* newsletter for the Mesilla Valley Audubon Society. Our theme is “Just for the fun of it!” and we will accordingly be presenting bird photos, articles, and references about birds that will hopefully bring a smile to your face during these troubling times of **COVID-19** and social turmoil. In a couple months, we will return to the more serious, issue-oriented newsletter. Thanks to all who contributed your beautiful photos and fine text for this issue. Good birding from your co-editors: Sid Webb, Mark Pendleton, Elaine Stachera Simon, and Annie Mitchell.

## Just for the fun of it!



Three photos by **Jay Wilbur** were all taken in Doña Ana County this year. A pretty noisy group! I think they're all singing just for the fun of it. Clockwise: Verdin, Barn Swallow, Pied-billed Grebe.

## Wayne Treers' Suggestions for Virtual Birding

Since we are hanging around the homestead during the pandemic, here are some suggestions for virtual birding:

1. Go to **YouTube.com** and search for **Bird Cam** or **Bird Cam for Cats**. There are a dizzying number of live bird cams to view. One of my favorites is the Cornell Lab Feeder Watch Cam at Sapsucker Woods near Cornell University at Ithaca, NY. This is a great way to learn your eastern North American birds. Another favorite of mine is the bird cam for cats that shows European birds at various feeders. This is a great way to learn your northern European birds (if you happen to have a European birds field guide). Oddly, my cat (Sparky) is not as interested in the cam video as I am. Oh well, once a birder, always a birder!
2. Try Cornell University's eBird program <https://ebird.org/home> and click on the **Explore** tab at the top. Click on the **Explore Regions** tab and you can enter any county, state, or country in the world and see the latest bird lists that birders have submitted to eBird. Scroll down to the very bottom of the Explore page and click on **Arrivals and Departures** to see when your favorite species arrive and depart your area. Also on the Explore page you can click on **Alerts** and sign up for e-mail notification regarding any species that interests you in any area. Lastly, back on eBird's home page, at the top you'll find the **Science** tab—on **Explore eBird Status and Trends** a great visual tool allows you to observe time-lapse videos of the locations and abundance of 610 of your favorite species in North America throughout the year. Data for these videos comes from the last 15 to 20 years of bird lists submitted to eBird!
3. Finally, check out the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's home page <https://www.birds.cornell.edu/home> and click on the **Get Involved** tab, and then the **Lifelong Learning** tab to view options for online courses about—what else—birding! One is free, the others range from \$30 to \$130. Also on the home page, the **All About Birds** tab leads to the **Bird Academy** tab that gives a more extensive look at the courses available, including an array of recorded open lectures. Lastly, on the **All About Birds** tab, click on the **Macaulay Library** tab and find a great resource. You can enter any species in the world and discover photos, audio clips of songs/calls, and videos of that species.

Happy virtual birding!!

## Hardware Store Hummingbirds

By Tom Johnson

Last year, I was talking to hummingbird researcher Ned Batchelder who told me that he was investigating hummingbirds nesting inside the Myers Ace Hardware Store in Canutillo, TX. WHAT? INSIDE THE STORE! I had to see this for myself.

I drove down and was amazed at the number of tiny hummingbird nests throughout the store. They are easy to overlook, since most are up high near the ceiling on chains that hold fluorescent lights, wire cables that hold signs, or on top of electrical conduit.



May 19, 2020: Fixing up a new nest on top of an old one. Photo by Tom Johnson

The Black-chinned Hummingbirds were first noticed nesting in the store in 2015. Each year since, a female or two have had two or three broods of chicks. Store staff member and hummingbird enthusiast Janiece Ward maintains sugar water feeders in the store and look after the birds. The store employees created a small opening on a door that is open 24/7, which the birds have learned to use to go in and out.

In 2018, a local news station covered the spectacle: <https://kfoxtv.com/community/carpe-diem/carpe-diem-hurricanes-hummingbirds-and-hammers>

In 2020, Janiece, my wife Sarah, and I have been monitoring the nesting in the store. In April, a female showed up and built a new nest on top of an old nest, laid two eggs, and now has two hungry fledglings flying around the store!



May 31, 2020: Momma feeding 1 of 2 of her chicks. Photo by Tom Johnson.

Before her chicks fledged, she had already built three new nests for a second brood (she chose the third). She is now incubating eggs again in addition to feeding the new fledglings! So far, we have seen only one female momma on nests, and she will soon have four fledglings!

If you visit Myers Hardware Store, you must wear a face mask to go inside. You can walk around the store and take pictures. Staff members are friendly, and if you can find Nancy Meeks to give you a tour you'll save a lot of time locating nests. Please thank them for caring for the hummers by buying something when you visit!



May 31, 2020: A new fledgling inside the store. Photo by Tom Johnson.



**More photos from Tom Johnson** taken in Doña Ana County. Three of the birds were hungry!



Row 1: Ash-throated Flycatcher, Black-throated Sparrow, Roadrunner with frog

Row 2: Scrub Jay, Cactus Wren

## **Susan Keller's trip to Galveston, TX for FeatherFest**

Susan says:

I attended the 2018 Galveston FeatherFest with my sister, who lives in the area. Not only does Galveston have awesome birding, it was named for my ancestor Bernardo de Galvez.

Despite being the town's namesake, Bernardo de Galvez never once set foot on the island or in the town itself. Galvez was a colonial governor who commissioned a survey of the Gulf Coast of what is today Texas all the way to present-day New Orleans. The man commanding the survey, Jose de Evia, charted what was later called Galveston Bay in July 1786 and named the nearby island the same, both in honor of Bernardo de Galvez. Later the same year, Galvez died.

For a side trip during the festival, we went to High Island-Smith Oaks Sanctuary and took the Port Bolivar ferry out of Galveston. Not only was I able to add 30+ life birds to my list, I also got some awesome photos.

Bernardo de Galvez





Roseate Spoonbill



Snowy Egret



Tricolored Heron



## Judy Lazarus Yellon's eye-catching travel photos



"The photo below is of a **European Robin** I noticed on 4-29-2016 the first time Fred and I visited our son and his family in Hamburg, Germany. We had taken our granddaughter who was then 14 months old to a nearby park, a very large park with woods, a lake, and several playgrounds. I happened to notice this bird which went ahead despite our presence and kept collecting leaves and debris that it took to a nearby tree to help in the construction of its nest."

"This photo is from last summer taken during our second visit to our son and his family in Hamburg, Germany. I took a series of photos of some **Great Crested Grebes** that were nesting not far from shore in the Outer Alster (a large lake) fairly close to the downtown city hall. If you look carefully you can see not only a parent delivering a fish to eat, but 3 of the babies. To the right of the parent on the nest you can see black and white stripes and a bit of red. That is one baby. There is a bit of fluff from a second just behind the parent just past its neck, and the third looks like fluff to the left by the parent's tail feathers. We spent a picture-perfect day walking leisurely around perhaps a third of this large lake."



"After spending 2 1/2 weeks with our son and his family in Hamburg, Germany, Fred and I took trains and spent two weeks in the four main cities in Belgium. Although we didn't travel with binoculars, I always had my camera with me. We always stopped to look at any birds we spotted and were glad to find some species that were entirely new to us."



"It took awhile to track down the **Western Jackdaw**, since early contact was primarily by sound. Eventually we found several of these on part of a dike with windmills in Bruges. I did not learn their identity until we returned home. The photo was taken on 5-17-2019."



“The second photo I took in Ghent, Belgium on 5-20-2019. Our timing was perfect for finding this **Gray Heron** (that certainly looks like the great blue herons we have at home). We were walking around the city taking in as many local sights as possible. This bird was patiently fishing in a narrow canal, and we watched it for approximately 10 minutes before we thanked it for the photo op and continued on our way.”

## Recording Birdsong, Working with Spectrograms, and Uploading to eBird

By Tom Johnson

I want to get better at recognizing bird calls and songs, so this spring I am working on ways to learn and remember bird sounds. This led me to start recording audio of bird songs when I am out birding. This can be done with a simple smartphone or a handheld audio recorder. I also wanted to add the audio files (.WAV) to eBird. Here are the tools that I have found helpful.

The three best sources for information are:

- 1) Cornell/ Macaulay Library Full Audio resource guide link: <https://www.macaulaylibrary.org/resources/>
- 2) *Peterson Guide to Bird Sounds of Western North America* by Nathan Pieplow (this book is a visual guide to spectrograms [visual representations of sound])
- 3) <https://academy.allaboutbirds.org/peterson-field-guide-to-bird-sounds/>

Ok, let's get started with what you need to record your first songs:

Recording device (.WAV file type):

- audio Recorder
  - cell phone with app
  - portable audio recorder (e.g., Tascam DR-05x)
- optional: microphone (phones have built-in, but you can add external shotgun or parabolic type microphone to all)
- optional: headphones, if you want to listen while recording (for portable recorder only)

An app to use that records the bird song as a .WAV file:

- Sound Recording Apps:
  - [iOS]
    - SpectrumView (I use this with iPhone 8)
    - Voice Record Pro
    - RØDE Rec
    - Song Sleuth
  - [Android] (I don't use an Android, but this is what I could find that might work. I think these are free, but research before buying any Google Play store apps.)
    - RecForge II

- Voice Recorder/Voice Recorder Pro
- Hi-Res Audio Recorder
- Song Sleuth

Smartphone recording tips can be found on eBird:

[https://support.ebird.org/en/support/solutions/articles/48001064305-smartphone-recording-tips?\\_hstc=60209138.f183e2274a946a66d1f204f75a790b0b.1521382402277.1588104832144.1588167248618.874&\\_hssc=60209138.41.1588167248618&\\_hsfp=558735220](https://support.ebird.org/en/support/solutions/articles/48001064305-smartphone-recording-tips?_hstc=60209138.f183e2274a946a66d1f204f75a790b0b.1521382402277.1588104832144.1588167248618.874&_hssc=60209138.41.1588167248618&_hsfp=558735220)

After you record the sounds, export them to your computer for a little editing (you may be able to edit on a phone app as well).

Editing and preparation for final version ( and/or eBird download) :

- Free WAV file editing Software:
  - Audacity (I use this and is easy to work with)
  - Ocenaudio (I have not used this)
  - Raven Lite By Cornell (Not as easy to use as Audacity)

Basic eBird editing software guide:

<https://support.ebird.org/en/support/solutions/articles/48001064341-audio-preparation-and-upload-guidelines>

Audacity how-to guide:

<https://www.macaulaylibrary.org/resources/audio-editing-tutorials/editing-in-audacity/>

When you are done editing, export the .WAV file to a place on your computer as a signed 24 bit PCM.

Now, you can upload to one of your eBird lists:

eBird guide: <https://support.ebird.org/en/support/solutions/articles/48000825713-uploading-media>

Use the same method as uploading photos to your eBird list by going to Manage Media, then to species and Add Media, then add the .WAV audio file.

Please email me with any questions at [1tom2go@gmail.com](mailto:1tom2go@gmail.com)

Happy Earbirding!

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## Online references

**National Audubon Society:** The National Audubon Society has actively developed material for us to peruse during these troubled times.

[https://www.audubon.org/events?field\\_online\\_location\\_based=All&field\\_event\\_type=All&event\\_months=All&event\\_sites=All](https://www.audubon.org/events?field_online_location_based=All&field_event_type=All&event_months=All&event_sites=All)

**Bird Physiology: Breathing:** I always assumed a bird lung was not much different from a human lung. How wrong I was. Birds have a multifunctional trachea, no diaphragm, and no alveoli. Air flows in only one direction (no bellows). It is wild! If this is as intriguing to you as it was to me, check out the sites below.

<http://www.fernbank.edu/Birding/respiration.htm>.

General approach to bird physiology, with diagrams

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Respiratory\\_system#Birds](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Respiratory_system#Birds) (encyclopedic description)

**International Crane Foundation** (for “craniacs”). A great website that has been featuring weekly webinars:

<https://www.savingcranes.org/> You may have to register for the mailing list to learn about the webinars.

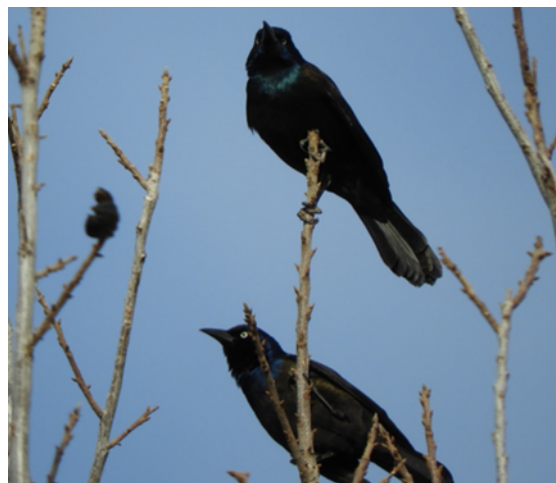
+++++

Thank you very much **CJ Goin** for sharing a couple photos!



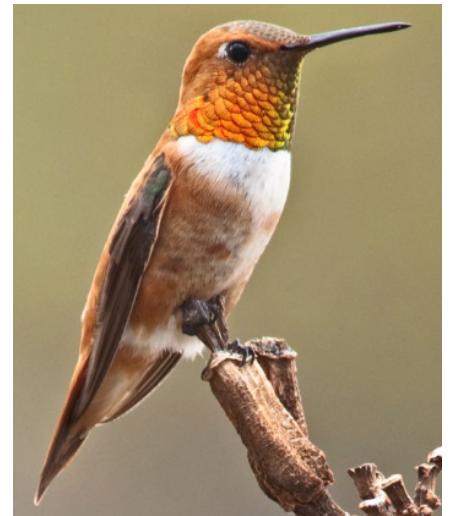
Rusty Blackbird

Common Grackle



## Ray Bowers' Birds:

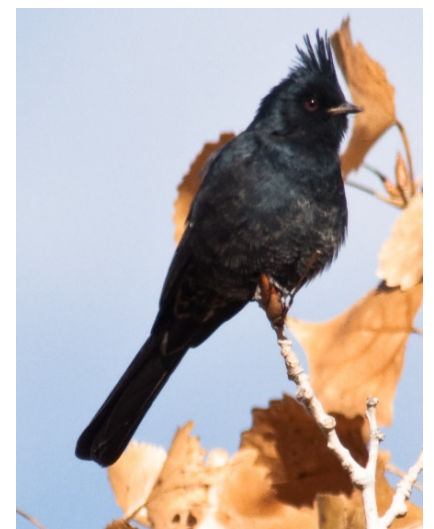
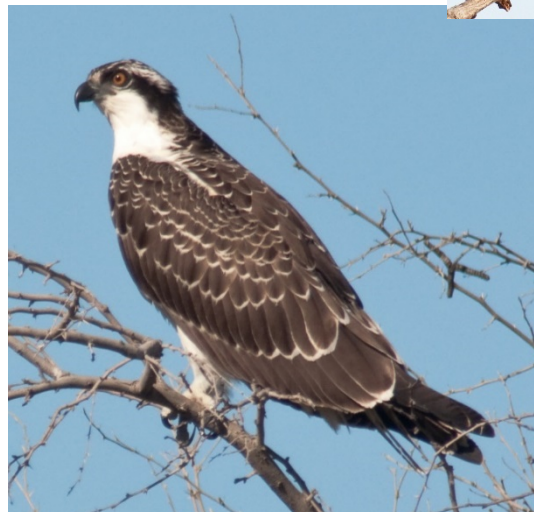
Ray Bowers is a naturalist who documented the wildlife at Leasburg Dam State Park and Broad Canyon in the northern part of the county. Ray lived in Las Cruces and was an MVAS member for many years. This photo of Ray at work comes from the MVAS web page, where there are PDF and PowerPoint files illustrating his excellent work. These may be accessed at <https://www.mvasaudubon.org/resources>. Here are a few samples of Ray's bird photographs.



Row 1: Cedar Waxwing, Blue Grosbeak, Rufous Hummingbird

Row 2: Loggerhead Shrike

Row 3: Painted Bunting, Osprey, Phainopepla,



## Finding Awe\*

by **Mark Pendleton**, MVAS Vice-president

*Birding in the Time of COVID-19, Part IV (Parts I, II, and III are on the MVAS web page)*

Here, in the grip of the worst global public health crisis in over a century, I wonder, as many of you likely do, how long it will be before there's a safe and effective vaccine against COVID-19. Even when there is though, severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 will still be with us. Most public health experts agree that the post-pandemic world won't be free of COVID-19, its disease. So, it appears that this scourge is here to stay. Those (experts and ordinary folk alike) who believe this fervently hope that we're wrong, but the evidence seems to point the other way.

Given this less-than-joyful thought, what can we do to not merely maintain our sanity, but foster our own mental health and that of those around us? Obviously, taking all sensible precautions—wear a mask, maintain a Turkey Vulture wingspread (about 6 feet) between people, wash hands frequently, avoid groups of more than five people, etc.—are first steps.

Not surprisingly, after this, one of the first strategies that comes to mind for me is to go birding. While birding, I'm reminded of the web of nature, of my place in it and of the perspective that gives me.

Recently I went birding with a couple of friends and on the way to our destination, I listened to two University of California professors talking on the radio about the positive health effects of daily seeking out experiences of awe and wonder. We never saw the Painted Buntings we hoped for that day, but the male Summer Tanager, the Cattle Egrets, the American Kestrels, and the other birds we saw were certainly awe-inspiring.

On the way home, thinking about the species we'd seen, I remembered a story I read years ago about Roger Tory Peterson. He was to speak about birds one evening in a large American city. The day of his lecture, a local Audubon member took him out birding. As they passed a street, Peterson quickly turned to look down it and insisted they turn around, as there was a bird he wanted to get a better look at. His host protested that he'd seen nothing but House Sparrows. Peterson said they were what he wanted to look at since it was always good to practice one's bird ID skills and he liked how the males' plumage was so crisply patterned. Just imagine, the "Father of American Birdwatching" enjoying the sight of so common a bird.

A few days later, I had my own moment of awe with another bird. I was sitting on the low wall beside my driveway watching my grandkids ride their scooters when I heard the sharp metallic "tscheep! tscheep! tscheep! tscheep! tscheep!" call of a Verdin. It sounded closer to me than I'd ever been to one of these lively desert sprites before. Sure enough, when I looked up, it was at the hummingbird feeder hanging in the Vitex tree next to me. It was maybe a meter away and seemed utterly unfazed by my presence. We eyed each other for maybe five minutes while my visitor gleaned bugs from the tree, took sips of sugar water, and continued its commentary.

I got some of the best views I've ever had of this bird's signature yellow head and chestnut shoulder patch. Even without these, though, it was an awe-inspiring experience. I can't speak to what went through the Verdin's mind, but I was moved to place my hands, palms together under my chin, incline my head, and wish it a silent "Namaste."

Well, that did it! The spell was broken and away flew the Verdin.



Since then, I've seen it and its mate (I presume) almost every day. Whenever I do, my heart is gladdened. Sometimes I look for them, but mostly I choose to preserve the randomness and chance nature of these encounters.

At one such recently, something caught my eye. One of the Verdins exhibited the classic "head-thrown-back-bill-gaped-open-wings-aflutter-shuffling-hopping" behavior of a begging baby bird. This was not a mated pair, but rather a parent and one of this year's young. I didn't get close enough to see whether the baby was being fed sugar water or insects, but it was being fed. I was grinning like an idiot!

I've mentioned before how, during this pandemic, we're watching our grandchildren three days a week, as their parents' jobs are considered essential. Eight-year-old Leena is the one who is "into" birds and I've had some awe-inspiring moments with her and birds.

My wife Deb and I have a daily ritual of bird of the day. We sit on our front porch, drink coffee, have a toasted English muffin, and read from *Pete Dunne's Essential Field Guide Companion* about the bird featured on the day's square on the Audubon songbird calendar in the kitchen. Well, of course the grandkids want to take part.

Their coffee is hot chocolate, and if we forget the ceremony, they are insistent about not missing bird of the day. Leena is quick to call out identifications for the Curve-billed Thrashers, Lesser Goldfinches, House Finches, White-winged Doves, Mourning Doves, Northern Mockingbirds, Gambel's Quails and Great-tailed Grackles, and Greater Roadrunners that visit the feeders while we're out there. Her enthusiasm is heart warming.

One day we were in the backyard and looked up to see a Swainson's Hawk harassed across the sky by a Northern Mockingbird. She ran in the house to get her binoculars, a child's pair I bought at White Sands gift shop. She was hopping up and down with excitement as we watched the one sided aerial brawl. It gave me a chance to explain the difference between buteos and accipiters, territoriality, and a few other avian matters. When her mom, our daughter, came to get them that evening, she was all a-chatter about the hawk and mockingbird we'd seen that day!

One evening they all came over to our house to sit in the driveway, Turkey Vulture wingspread apart, with our masks on—except when sipping beer—and visit. I went into the house for something and when I came back out, both Leena and her dad excitedly told me about a big black bird they'd seen soaring over the arroyo. They wanted to know what I thought it was. From their description of "big and black" I figured it was likely a Turkey Vulture, but before I could say so, Leena said she was pretty sure it was an eagle since it was so big. "An eagle or a falcon, but I think an eagle" were her words.

About a week later as we sat on the front porch for the bird of the day, Leena interrupted proceedings and ran down the sidewalk to the driveway. "Abuelo, come quick! Here's the bird Papa and I saw and I thought was an eagle!" she called. It was a Turkey Vulture. Her four-year-old brother immediately wanted to know if it would eat us, and I was happy to tell him that he had nothing to fear. They both thought it was completely gross and disgusting when I told them what TUVUs do eat!

I consider myself fortunate to have gotten a double dose of awe from these experiences. Observing the birds always inspires that emotion. Seeing the excitement and enthusiasm they elicit in my grandchildren gives me a sense of hope and cautious optimism for the future of our world.

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\*This first appeared in a shorter form as my column "Greater Words and Things" in the June 2020 issue of the monthly *The Ink* published in Las Cruces.

## The End.

We hope you enjoyed the read.

Mesilla Valley Audubon Society  
A Chapter of the National Audubon Society



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[www.mvasaudubon.org](http://www.mvasaudubon.org)