

ROADRUNNER RAMBLINGS

Volume 22, No. 5. September/October 2000

Conservation Corner

The chapter would like to give a hearty thanks to the following people who responded to last issue's Conservation Classifieds: Jack Davis, who has started to move forward with expanding the Palomas Marsh enclosure and Phil Alkon, who will represent Audubon on the open space committee for Las Cruces.

We are still seeking a good **Arm Twister** to help with gathering input for the New Mexico Important Bird Area project and the **Minnow Minder**, a person who can stay abreast of developments in the saga of the silvery minnow.

Ed Mayfield and Beth Bardwell are contributing time and expertise to the development of the wetlands park at the site of the Old Refuge. Instigated three years ago by the Southwest Environmental Center, the wetlands park will be a restored native habitat of marshes, cattails, willows, cottonwoods, and more. The project is early in the planning stages and there is still time to participate in its design. The City of Las Cruces is contributing to the plans, as are the Village of Mesilla and local landowners. Thanks to Ed and Beth for carrying the Audubon message to this exciting and visionary project.

Audubon Council News: The Council will contribute \$300 to the NM Breeding Bird Atlas, being spearheaded by Steve Fettig of Bandolier National Monument. The Atlas will create a permanent record of the bird species breeding in the state that provides baseline data for monitoring future changes and assessing habitat needs. It will also help in land use planning by local and state governments.

Council president, Tom Jervis, is a candidate for the Valles Caldera Trust (the trust is the body that will provide guidance on the management of the Baca Ranch). Tom is a resident of Los Alamos and a retired physicist from Los Alamos National Laboratory.

Dave Henderson, the director of the Randall-Davey Audubon Center in Santa Fe, presented the Herp Bill to the NM Game Commission this month. The latest version of a reptile and amphibian protection bill first needs support of the Commission and then the Governor. The commission did not vote on including the Herp Bill in their package of bills they will forward to the Governor but they did indicate support for such a bill. Their final vote will take place at the next commission meeting on September 28th and 29th in Albuquerque. The intent of the bill is to have the NM Game and Fish Commission set possession limits for each species, beyond which a permit would be required. This should allow for future regulation of commercial take if species numbers drop below sustainable levels.

Continued on p. 4, see *Conservation*

Visit Us on the Web!

You may have noticed our web address <http://www.cybermesa.com/~mvash> in the last several issues of *Roadrunner Ramblings*, but have you visited us lately? If you haven't, you may want to stop on by. Here are some features that you will find there:

- Announcements of special events, such Hawk Watch, Northern Goshawk Survey as well local initiatives (Palomas Marsh Bird Survey, Christmas Bird Count and the annual Birdathon held in May);
- MVAS Membership information and a ready-to-print membership form;
- Current list of our field trips, with complete descriptions of possible sightings and trip leader contact information;
- Birding hotspots in Doña Ana county and environs;
- Links to birding hotspots in and around El Paso, and in Southeast and Southwestern New Mexico;
- Current list of bird sightings in our region;
- Detailed descriptions of our monthly programs;
- Past issues of *Roadrunner Ramblings*;
- Links to national and regional Audubon groups; and
- Links to many other birding sites of interest (Cornell Ornithological Laboratory, Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, and Southeastern Arizona Birding Trail to name a few).

In the future, our web site will continue to grow and reflect the interests of the membership. What we're currently missing is a photo gallery of our local birds. If you have close-up or medium-distance photos of local species that you would like to share, please send them along with a self-addressed, stamped envelope to: Susan E. Beck, 1918 Rosedale, Las Cruces, NM 88005. If suitable, I will scan your photos to showcase on the web site and return your originals. If your photos are already in electronic format, you can send them as attachments to: susabeck@lib.nmsu.edu. If you have ideas on how to improve our chapter's web site, please let me know.

Please visit the web site. I'd like to hear your thoughts.

Susan E. Beck, Webmaster

Programs

TICKETS

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

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

San Andres National Wildlife Refuge, September 20. Kevin Cobble, refuge manager, will show a video and speak about programs at this nearby refuge. The refuge is home to the last indigenous population of bighorn sheep in the Chihuahuan Desert, and in addition to monitoring animal populations, the refuge staff participates in invasive plant removal and a prescribed burn program.

The Lesser Prairie Chicken in New Mexico... Going, going, gone? October 18. Jim Bailey, Ph.D., will discuss the alarming trend in declining Lesser Prairie Chicken numbers on our eastern plains. Dr. Bailey recently retired from his position as Assistant Chief of NM Game and Fish Conservation Services Division. Learn more about why oil & gas exploration, grazing, and hunting have combined with poor rainfall years to push this beautiful and unusual bird to the brink of extirpation in our state.

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 Trip Reports

South Valley, July 15. Nine birders met at 6:30 AM and went on the South Valley field trip. We stopped at five sites and got a variety of birds at each place. Tim Lawton gave us a good lesson in swallows. At a place Tim knows about we were able to see Cliff, Cave, and Barn swallows all at the same time. Other highlights included Blue Grosbeak, Great Blue and Green-backed Herons, Black-crowned Night Herons, Cactus Wrens, Scott's Orioles, Western Kingbirds, and hummingbirds, along with several other species. The trip was completed by 11:30 AM.

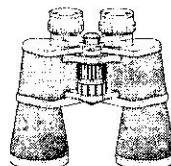
Ed Mayfield

Dripping Springs, August 19. We had a glorious morning for our trip to Dripping Springs. Sue Hill graciously acted as co-leader. Eileen Rogers, Lorraine Schulte and a delightful couple, Nancy and Ed Stonick of Pasadena, CA rounded out the group. Ed and Nancy found us on the internet and called me last week. He is quite a good birder.

We had a successful day with 23 species, including Blue Grosbeak, Canyon Towhee, Black-chinned Hummingbird, Mourning Doves, Red-tailed Hawk, Canyon Wren, Cowbirds, Black-throated Sparrows, American Robins, Rufous-crowned Sparrows, Mockingbirds, Black-headed Grosbeak, White-winged Doves, Cactus Wrens, Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, Gambel's Quail, Scaled Quail, Warbling Vireo, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Bewick's Wren, Verdin, Phainopepla and a Curved-billed Thrasher. All in all, it was a lovely trip: good birding and good company.

Carole Shirreffs

Field Trip Reports continued on page 3



Field Trips

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

La Luz Canyon, 23 September. In honor of the large number of MVAS members living in and around Alamo-gordo, this field trip will explore an area tucked into the base of the Sacramento Mountains. La Luz Canyon contains both desert and riparian habitats, and is sometimes frequented by montane species sneaking down from the mountains. Potential highlights include Lazuli Buntings, Band-tailed Pigeons, and Common Yell-throats. We will start from the K-Mart on Highway 70 in Las Cruces at 6:30 AM, arriving at the Texaco at the intersection of Highway 82 and the road to La Luz at 7:45. We'll leave the Texaco by 8:00, and bird until early afternoon, so bring a lunch. This won't be a strenuous field trip, as private land along most of the route will limit us to birding from the roadway. Contact Harold Harrison (522-6199) for further information.

Chiricahua Mountains, 14 October. We did a spring trip, we did a summer trip, now it's time for a fall trip. If you missed out on the previous trips, this is your last chance this year to visit one of the best birding spots in the country. We should see Scrub and Mexican Jays, Bridled Titmice, White-breasted Nuthatches, Acorn and Ladder-backed Woodpeckers, and many other species. This will be an overnight trip. Contact Ed Mayfield (call 382-7016 or email emayfield@mvpisp.com) for more information. See the field trip report on page 3 for a taste of what our summer trip was like.

Mark Your Calendars!

✓ This year's Christmas Count will be on December 16. Once again, Tim Lawton and Gordon Ewing will be coordinating our efforts to document wintering birds in the Mesilla Valley. More details will be forthcoming in the next newsletter and at upcoming meetings.

✓ The next NM Audubon Council meeting will be held at Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge on 21 October. For more details, contact Ed Mayfield (call 382-0715 or email emayfield@mvpisp.com).

Protect a Birding Hot Spot

The Army Corps of Engineers is collecting public input on potential recreational facilities east of the Las Cruces Dam, which runs for 3.5 miles paralleling Telshor, north of Lohman Ave. Two major arroyos (Alameda and Las Cruces, South and North Fork) run into this area, fill up several depressions and detention ponds, and provide excellent wetland/grassland habitat for waterfowl, shorebirds, neotropical songbirds during migration and wintering sparrows. Burrowing owls are prevalent on the escarpment; many other raptor species use the area exten-

sively. This site could be a great open space park for passive recreation (trails and wildlife viewing, as opposed to ball fields, tennis courts, etc.) and preservation of habitat.

Currently, the Corps is just producing potential recreation plans for the area; for anything to happen, the City would have to agree to a specific proposal and provide partial funding for its development (federal funding would also have to be approved by Congress). This is an excellent opportunity for the City to protect this area as the cornerstone for open space corridors along the arroyos of the East Mesa.

Please submit a brief comment on the desirability of an open space park at Las Cruces Dam. The Corps will be accepting comments for two more weeks. E-mail comments to the following individuals: Fritz Blake, Project Manager for the Corps fritz.j.blake@spa02.usace.army.mil; and George Radnovich, Sites Southwest (the planners for the project) gradnovich@sites-sw.com.

Better yet, help set the stage for Mayor Smith's and the City Council's support by sending a copy of your comments to your city councilor or Mayor Ruben Smith at City of Las Cruces, P.O. Box 20000, Las Cruces, New Mexico 88004.

Field Trip Reports (continued from p. 2)

Chiricahua Mountains, August 26-27.

A maximum of eight participants braved two nights of rain in southeastern Arizona to witness the onset of migration in the Land of Cochise. Bird specialties in Cave Creek included Sulfur-bellied Flycatcher, Violet-Crowned and Calliope Hummingbirds (eight hummingbird species in all), Juniper Titmouse, and Painted Redstart. At Rustler Park there were flocks of Hermit Warblers and Pygmy Nuthatches and at Willcox over 50 Long-billed Curlews and a Marbled Godwit. The grasslands of Sulfur Springs Valley sported a Zone-tailed Hawk as well as a dark morph (or possibly Harlan's) Red-tailed Hawk. The highlight of the trip was a pair of Montezuma Quail with their brood in the oak woodland above the research station. About 75 species total. Late rains this year bode well for birding on the upcoming October trip.

Tim Lawton

Bird Notes

Species	Date	Location	Observer
Brown Creeper	Jul 11	Cloudcroft	NS, JM
Painted, Indigo Buntings	Jul 14	La Mesa	SH, WH
Barn Owl	Jul 14	La Mesa	SH, WH
Rufous Hummingbird	Jul 24	Las Cruces	GE
Calliope Hummingbird	Jul 26	Las Cruces	LS
Western Sandpiper	Aug 4	Ft Bliss Sewage Ponds	WH, SH, LS
Least Sandpiper	Aug 4	Ft Bliss Sewage Ponds	WH, SH, LS
Spotted Sandpiper	Aug 4	Ft Bliss Sewage Ponds	WH, SH, LS
Wilson's Phalarope	Aug 4	Ft Bliss Sewage Ponds	WH, SH, LS
Yellow-breasted Chat	Aug 4	La Mesa	WH, SH, LS
Swallow-tailed Kite	Aug 6	NW El Paso	JP
Mississippi Kite	Aug 7	El Paso	WH, SH, LS
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	Aug 9	La Mesa	SH, WH
Painted, Indigo, Lazuli Buntings	Aug 10	La Mesa	SH, WH
Lark Sparrow	Aug 10	La Mesa	SH, WH
Virginia's Warbler	Aug 10	La Mesa	SH, WH
Cordilleran Flycatcher	Aug 10	La Mesa	SH, WH
Northern Bobwhite	Aug 14	Las Cruces	JM
Cassin's Kingbird	Aug 18	Las Cruces	SH
Black-tailed Gnatcatcher	Aug 19	Dripping Springs	MVAS Fld Trip
Blue Grosbeak	Aug 19	Dripping Springs	MVAS Fld Trip
Solitary Sandpiper	Aug 19	Ft Bliss Sewage Ponds	MS, JZ
Willow Flycatcher	Aug 19	Ft Bliss Sewage Ponds	MS, JZ
Snowy Plover	Aug 19	Holloman AFB	MS, JZ
Black Tern	Aug 19	Holloman AFB	MS, JZ
Yellow Warbler	Aug 20	Las Cruces	SH
MacGillivray's Warbler	Aug 21	Las Cruces	TL

Observers: Gordon Ewing, Sue Hill, Wally Hill, Tim Lawton, Jim Mulhauser, Joy McFarland, Earl McFarland, Jim Paton, Lorraine Schulte, Marcy Scott, Nena Singleton, Jimmy Zabriskie

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

New Mexico Rare Bird Hotline 505-323-9323



Festival of the
Cranes
at Bosque del
Apache

November
16-19

Field Trips • Workshops • Presentations

Advanced Registration begins
September 15, 2000.

Schedule of Events and Registration
Forms available at
www.friendsofthebosque.org

Mesilla Valley Audubon Society, a chapter of the National Audubon Society, is a conservation and natural history organization in southern New Mexico that promotes appreciation and conservation of birds, other wildlife, and habitat, through environmental education, issue advocacy, and natural history advocacy.

OFFICERS AND BOARD

President	Ed Mayfield	382-0715
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Board meetings are held, September through May, on the Thursday before the 3rd Wednesday at 5:30 PM at the Southwest Environmental Center, 1491A S. Solano Dr., Las Cruces, NM 88011. All Audubon members are welcome.

Visit our website at www.cybermesa.com/~mvash/.

Conservation, continued from p. 1

David Henderson and Tom Jervis are protesting Natural Resource Conservation Service plans to use government funds to kill shinnery oak on private lands in Eastern NM. NRCS proposes that the spraying will improve habitat for the Lesser Prairie Chicken, yet according to a number of scientific studies, it won't. Learn more about the plight of the prairie chicken at the October MVAS meeting.

Jennifer Atchley

Bird Identification Course

Whether you're a novice birder, an experienced birder who has relocated to Las Cruces from another state, or someone looking for a fun, new hobby, you are just the person who should enroll in the fall Bird Identification Course offered through the Community Education Program at Doña Ana Branch Community College. Taught by knowledgeable members of Mesilla Valley Audubon Society, the 3-week course will give participants a good introduction to the birds of southern New Mexico as well as general information about bird watching. The classroom portion will be held Tuesday evenings October 24, 31, and November 7, from 7:00-8:30 PM, at Good Samaritan Village. There will be 2 half-day Saturday field trips on October 28 and November 4, 7:00 AM to noon, and an all day trip to the Bosque del Apache on Saturday, November 11. Contact DABCC at 527-7527 for registration information or Wendy Davis (527-4551) for more details.

Open House at NMSU Vertebrate Museum

As a part of this year's homecoming festivities, the Vertebrate Museum in the Biology Department will be hosting an open house October 13 and 14. On Friday, the museum will be open 3-5 PM, and on Saturday, from 12-4. A wide variety of specimens will be on display, and Jeff Brown will demonstrate how he prepares study skins of birds. All are welcome; bring the kids!

Roadrunner Ramblings is published six times a year: January, March, May, July, September, and November. Submissions are welcome. Please email copy to nstotz@zianet.com, or call for mailing information. **Next deadline: 20 October.**

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Mesilla Valley Audubon Society
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