



# ROADRUNNER RAMBLINGS

MESILLA VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY

<https://www.mvasaudubon.org/> Vol. 43, No 1, Spring 2021

## 2021 Election Results for MVAS

Thank you to everyone who voted in the 2021 election for MVAS officers and board members! Results? Cheryl Fallstead has moved from board member to Secretary, and we are pleased to introduce two new board members, Trish Cutler and Tracy Patrick!

Trish is a wildlife biologist with a B.S. in Wildlife Science from Oregon State University and an M.S. in Wildlife and Fisheries Science from the University of Arizona. She has worked on the management and conservation of birds and other wildlife for 25 years, and co-chairs New Mexico Avian Conservation Partners.

Tracy is a student affairs professional at the University of Texas-El Paso (UTEP), and mom to two awesome kids, a dog, and a parakeet. She has lived in Las Cruces for 12 years. She started birding about three years ago, and enjoys hiking, porch sitting, reading, writing, and baking. She's currently a full-time graduate student at UTEP seeking a master's of education in higher education leadership.

The board would love to appoint an MVAS member to finish out Cheryl's board term (one more year). Interested? Email us at [mesillavalleyaudubon@gmail.com](mailto:mesillavalleyaudubon@gmail.com)!

## President's Letter

Dear MVAS Members and Friends:

So, it's February 1. How are those New Year's resolutions going?

I love New Year's Day. New year, new calendar, new adventures, new possibilities, and—hopefully—new birds! I also am a believer in New Year's resolutions. I have quite a few (!), but there's one I'd like to share.

We are all part of MVAS because we love birds. Some of us are listers, some of us are environmentalists, some of us are a combination, and probably some have other reasons altogether.

Regardless of your "why," you know that birds face tremendous challenges. Habitat loss, climate change, and stripped legal protections are tremendous threats. Last year, mass mortality events occurred not only here in the Southwest, but globally. (For example, Iran recorded the loss of 15,000 migratory birds at a nature reserve in early 2020, and in spring 2020, 255,000 birds in Iran succumbed to avian influenza.)

Which leads to my resolution: Every single month I will write a letter advocating for bird protection, habitat protection, and/or climate change action. My letter might be reactive or proactive with regard to state or federal legislation, a letter to the editor, or to our city council or county commissioners with regard to local issues. (My January letter went to our councilors and commissioners and addressed habitat preservation. Six friends signed on, too.)

About 150 MVAS members and friends receive this newsletter. If each of us wrote one letter per month (or made a phone call) from February to December advocating protection for birds and habitat, we would produce 1,650 actions to help birds over the course of just one year!

On behalf of the officers and board members, best wishes for a safe and happy 2021—and good birding!

Elaine Stachera Simon

I hope you'll consider joining me in my resolution!

#### **Robins at the bird bath by Molly Molloy**



Photographer's comment: "I poured some hot water to thaw out the frozen solid bird bath since it was about 25 degrees. Apparently, these young American Robins did not get the social distancing memos, nor are they aware that bars are closed in New Mexico. I didn't see them again all day. It seems they just showed up for a drink. Enjoy!"

More member photography on page 5.

#### **Events for Your Calendar**

We know that bird walks with our excellent leaders are a highlight of MVAS, and we are so fortunate and grateful for their expertise in helping us find and identify birds. However, because Doña Ana County remains "extremely high risk level" for COVID transmission based on cases per capita and test positivity, MVAS programs will remain on Zoom and bird walks are cancelled until further notice.

But spring migration is around the corner, as is butterfly season! To keep our identification skills sharp, both February and March monthly programs will be bird identification classes:

February 17: Jay Wilbur's bird identification class will include beginning and general principles and techniques of bird identification using locally found waterfowl and sparrows to apply those techniques.

March 17: CJ Goin and Wayne Treers's bird identification class will include those frustrating flycatchers.

Also, Mark Pendleton has added a new bird ID feature for the newsletter, Name the Bird, that is a lot of fun! For the butterfly aficionados, CJ Goin's Facebook page (Doña Ana County Butterflies and Moths) and the MVAS BAM (Butterflies and Moths) listserv will provide opportunities for identification and discussion.

Finally, on April 21, we'll have the final presentation from last year's Bischoff Scholarship recipient and introduction to this year's recipient. There may be a couple other programs as well! Stay tuned.

#### **National Audubon Webinars**

The National Audubon Society has a monthly Zoom webinar, "I Saw a Bird," the last Wednesday of each month. Each webinar features a topic, such as bird migration, plants that attract birds, conservation, or bird photography. Guests are often leaders in the field and are interviewed as they show some of their work. The webinar also highlights common bird families with descriptions and identification tips. Resister for new episodes and watch older ones on YouTube at <https://www.audubon.org/news/i-saw-bird>.



Sid Webb: Great Blue Herons. La Mancha, 11/17, 11/22/2020. Same bird?

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### **The Great Backyard Bird Count** by Mark Pendleton

Has the pandemic gotten you down? Are you going into withdrawal from lack of birding? There's a great antidote just around the corner: the Great Backyard Bird Count, or GBBC for short.

This annual citizen science opportunity falls during the Presidents' Day holiday weekend. You can do as the name suggests and count the birds in your backyard, or you can count them in your front yard. You can also count in your favorite non-yard spot. In fact, you can count birds just about anywhere and submit an eBird list. Each time you do on Friday the 12th through Monday the 15th of February 2021, you will be participating in the GBBC.

It has become something of a tradition for MVAS to have a bird walk starting at Sagecrest Park on the Saturday of GBBC. With COVID-19 still in full swing, though, that would be at best irresponsible. So, instead, we're encouraging folks to adhere a bit more to a literal interpretation of the event's name.

If you do get out for birding, please be sure to follow CDC guidelines for wearing a mask and maintain a safe distance from those you meet. Some suggestions for places to go are listed below.

- A) Your favorite city** (Alamogordo, Las Cruces, T or C) park: I've been to parks with great birding in all of these municipalities.
- B) Your favorite State Park:** Ones that come to mind are Mesilla Valley Bosque SP, Leasburg Dam SP, Percha Dam SP, Oliver Lee SP, Caballo SP, Elephant Butte SP, and I'm sure you can think of others (please note COVID and hours of operation restrictions).
- C) Your favorite federally managed outdoor area:** It could be Dripping Springs in the Organ Mountains, it could be another spot in the Organ Mountains Desert Peaks National Monument, there certainly are lots of them. It might be somewhere in White Sands. You might even take a day trip to Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge up in San Antonio NM.
- D) Any of a number of other birding "hotspots" you know of:** Some of my favorites are: La Mancha Wetlands in Las Cruces, the human-made wetlands southwest of Sagecrest Park (east of Las Cruces Dam), the Village of La Luz a bit North of Alamogordo, Mountain View Cemetery in Deming, and the list goes on.

The point is that GBBC is once again upon us, and for folks who are staying at home, it's a perfect event. It's also a perfect chance get out and visit some old favorite standby spots, or to find some new ones. For birders who want a mix of both, it's also perfect. What more could a birder want? So, sit there or get out there and bird!

For more information on the Great Backyard Bird Count, visit [www.birdcount.org](http://www.birdcount.org).

## MVAS t-shirts



The MVAS board thanks Cheryl Fallstead for creating a fabulous design that the whole board easily agreed upon (wow!). Instructions for ordering will come to you soon via email.

## Follow-up to Bird Survey of 2020

As noted in the Winter 2020 *Roadrunner Ramblings*, the MVAS Bird Survey is complete but there are delays in riparian rehabilitation of the bird survey area. The USIBWC, which owns the floodplain, delayed a decision to go forward at least until the winter of 2021-22. Also, it was discovered that a lease with the City of Las Cruces for management of the 4.5 miles of floodplain around La Llorona Park had expired and needed renewal.

This expiration left open an opportunity for MVAS to lobby the City to improve the environmental characteristics of the plain to make it into more like a native habitat than is currently the case. With input from Elaine and Sid, MVAS member Beth Bardwell presented a beautiful PowerPoint outlining changes to the lease renewal requested by MVAS to promote better habitat for birds and other wildlife. Gill Sorg was already on board, both as an MVAS board member and city councilor, and was key to organizing the meeting with the City. The result is a well-considered proposal the City is making to USIBWC for lease renewal. Final results are pending.

Finally, as we had unspent funds because COVID shut down the outreach part, MVAS board members along with some of our most experienced bird walk leaders are working with Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park to facilitate the construction of an ADA-accessible bird blind! As the project progresses and we get the official go-ahead to proceed, we will be able to report more details.

We'd like to give special thanks to Steven Prager, our Audubon Southwest liaison and phenomenal MVAS cheerleader, who advised and encouraged us to apply for an additional \$1,000 for an Audubon Collaborative Grant in order to make the bird blind a reality (and we were successful in obtaining the grant).

**Thank you, Steven!**



## MVAS Member Photography

Our December MVAS Zoom Holi-birdy Party featured loads of great photos from chapter members, but several were set aside for publication in this edition of *Roadrunner Ramblings*. We thank all MVAS members for their submissions. Enjoy!



Marcia Corl: Lazuli Bunting



Elena Espinosa: Sandhill Cranes



Marcia Corl: Black-headed Grosbeak



CJ Goin: Lark Bunting



Elena Espinosa: Great Horned Owl



Cheryl Beymer: Wilson's Warbler



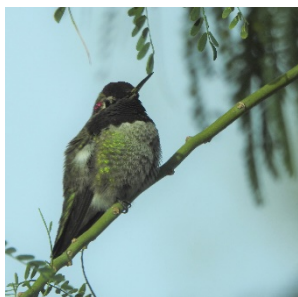
## Introducing “Name That Bird” by Mark Pendleton

Starting with this issue, *Roadrunner Ramblings* will have a new occasional column: “Name That Bird.” You, the reader, will be able to send in photos of birds you couldn’t identify and our panel of experienced birders will offer their thoughts on what they are.

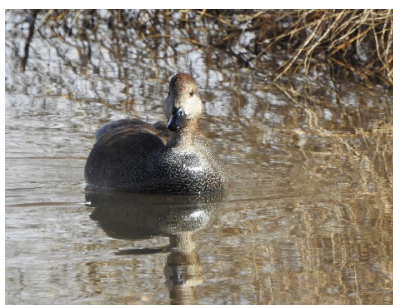
Please send your photos and any pertinent info about them to [mpndltn@gmail.com](mailto:mpndltn@gmail.com) and be sure to put NAME THAT BIRD in the subject line. Also, please indicate in your email whether or not you want to be mentioned by name in the column.

### Name That Bird by Mark Pendleton

***Spoiler alert: This article identifies the birds in the photos.  
If you want to identify them on your own, do so before you read the article!***



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Our first Name That Bird photos come from MVAS member Sara Walker (thank you, Sara!), who sent in five pictures of birds that she wasn’t able to positively identify. Our three panelists agreed on the first three of them. When it came to the sparrows, though . . . well, you’ll see what happened.

#1 The first photo is a “hummer,” taken in Phoenix, AZ. Sara thought it was an Anna’s Hummingbird. All three panelists agree. (So, already you’re doing better than you thought you were, Sara!)

Several clues point to this identification. The first is the bill. For a hummingbird, it’s noticeably short. Next, the under-parts. They’re grey with large areas of green tinge, typical for both sexes in Anna’s. We can tell that this bird is a male by the gorget. In this photo it looks black because hummingbird feathers contain no pigment—any color we see comes from refracted sunlight. There’s a tiny spot of what the whole gorget will look like in the sun just behind the bird’s eye, and that’s another indicator of the species. Anna’s males have brilliant rose crowns and gorgets.

#2 The second photo, a duck, is a male (or drake). If it were side-on you'd probably see a black butt (tail coverts) and white inner secondaries. These will identify both sexes when you see them in flight. As it is, the black bill, brown head, lighter brown cheek, light chestnut just visible on the wings, scalloping on the chest feathers, and the area of grey on the right side are signs that this is one of our more conservatively feathered male ducks. If you identified it as a Gadwall, you're correct.

#3 The third photo is a "peep." This group of small sandpipers, called peeps for the sound of their vocalizations, can give many birders—including our panelists—fits. The one pictured here has yellowish green legs and a black bill, characteristic of a Least Sandpiper. Sara was fortunate to get a bird with these clearly visible. Many times, the legs or the bill or even both are obscured by mud, which makes the ID more difficult.

# 4 & 5 Now, for the sparrows. Sara took the first sparrow photo on New Year's Day 2021 at the Rio Grande. As I hinted earlier, all three panelists had different ideas here.

**Panelist A** identified both sparrows as Song Sparrows.

**Panelist B** looked at the first sparrow's grey nape and eyebrow, white "moustache" stripe, and grey crown flanked by brown, and called it a Clay-colored Sparrow. They identified the second sparrow as a Lincoln's Sparrow, based on the light coffee-colored wash and brown streaking on the bird's chest, plus whitish moustache stripe and generally darkish overall color.

**Panelist C** thought neither was a Song Sparrow because there are no lateral throat stripes, which all field guides show on even the palest of Song Sparrow subspecies. After zooming in on the first photo, this panelist detected a faint yellow tint to the area directly in front of the eye and wondered if it was a Savannah Sparrow. Then **Panelist A** responded that the first sparrow was too streaky for a Clay-colored, and the second one's tail was too long to be a Savannah, but it could be a Lincoln's.

So where do we go from here? I sent the two sparrow photos off to two experts for their opinions. Longtime MVAS member Nancy Stotz is a bird ID instructor who excels at sparrow identification. She now lives in Oregon. David Griffin was also an MVAS member for years (and a past president). His ID skills are superb and he now exercises them in Arizona.

Along with **Panelist C**, Nancy and David felt that the two pictures were of the same bird, which they both agreed was a Lincoln's Sparrow. (Thank you, Nancy and David!)

I hope you've enjoyed and profited from this exercise. I know I certainly have.

Remember to send in *your* photos to [mpndtn@gmail.com](mailto:mpndtn@gmail.com) with **Name That Bird** in the subject line and they might be in the next issue.

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From MVAS member Bob Tafanelli:

"I got this photo from a friend in Las Vegas, NV. Hummingbirds feeding in the snow! You can see two on the feeder and one hovering in the upper right of the photo. She has about 25 overwintering this year." (Photo credit to Diana Weigmann)

# Spark Bird!

**What was the bird that rocked your world and turned you into a birder,  
bird watcher, twitcher, lister, or bird nerd?**

## **Susan Radke**

I honestly never paid a lot of attention to birds back East. The cardinals were gorgeous, the robins plentiful, and each year you could count on the Cedar Waxwings to get a bit tipsy as they feasted on my neighbor's serviceberry tree. I went on a local birding hike and unfortunately was met with a lot of "shushes" and frustrated looks as I sneezed my head off from allergies . . . so I departed the hike and didn't think much about birding anymore.

I moved to Las Cruces in 2016. My house backed up to an arroyo and I noticed quite a few birds, again paying no particular attention until one day I was on the phone with a friend from back East. I mentioned to her that I kept seeing this bird in the back yard with "this funny looking black antenna" on its head and it sounded as though it was laughing. She quickly informed me it was a Gambel's Quail. Soon I bought a used bird identification book for \$3.99 and started to try to identify birds. A most frustrating task, given males, females, adolescents, molting, leucistic, and all the other variations that exist. I wished that the pictures in the book matched exactly to the birds I was looking at.

But despite the frustration of ID'ing birds and the shared interest with my sister-in-law, I began birding more often, having now visited Bosque del Apache a few times as well as the Tucson area. Bird feeders have now gone up in my back yard. Yes, I still find ID'ing birds a challenge but I never tire of the many Gambel's Quail in the arroyo with their black antennas and silly laugh. You don't forget your first love.

## **Evelyn Treiman**

Here's mine. (It was probably during my high school years.)

I was sitting in my bedroom at home, looking out the window at the pine trees. I noticed that several Steller's Jays raising a ruckus. As I looked closer, I found the object of their attention was a small, brownish bird perched on a branch. It was an owl. Later, I determined that it was a Pygmy Owl.

To me, birding is more than just identifying a bird, it's watching to see what it's doing, how it's doing it, where it's doing it, and how it's interacting with its environment and other birds.

## **Elena Espinosa**

I've been traveling back to Cuba for over 22 years now, and I think the bird that really rocked my world was the Cuban Trogon, or Toco-ro-ro as they call it. Their beauty and the calls they make out in the Cienaga de Zapata as they begin their morning routine of sitting high in the trees and calling out is amazing.

I still enjoy getting out early in the morning and listening to this vocalization of so many male birds.



*And now something for the MVAS Butterflies and Moths division (MVAS BAM)*

## Swallowtails



Black Swallowtail



Pipevine Swallowtail



Two-tailed Swallowtail

**by CJ Goin**

Swallowtails (family papilionidae) are the largest butterflies in North America. Most of them have "tails" on the hind wings. They are easily noticed because of their beauty and size. They are also easily attracted to gardens! Three swallowtails are commonly found in our area: Black, Pipevine, and Two-tailed. All three photos were taken by me last year in this area. It might also be possible to see a Western Tiger Swallowtail in the area, although I have never seen one here and I don't have a photo. We should start seeing butterflies in April, so keep your eyes open. I have a Facebook page called "Dona Ana County Butterflies and Moths," and any MVAS member is welcome to join and post information or photos and ask questions.

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## What is the USIBWC doing in New Mexico? Plenty!

**by Sid Webb**

The United States International Boundary and Water Commission (USIBWC) came to be after the United States and Mexico signed a treaty in 1889. The two countries set up commissions in each country to work together to address issues that might arise along the international border. In the United States, the State Department designates a commissioner (always an engineer) to work with his/her counterpart from Mexico. New Mexico entered the picture after the two countries decided in 1906 to allocate 60,000 acre feet of Rio Grande water to Mexico annually, to be delivered to Juárez. Elephant Butte Dam was built both to deliver the water and measure the flow. USIBWC has been in charge of our section of the Rio Grande ever since.

Initially, the Mesilla Valley was happy just to have relief from frequent floods and periods of dry riverbeds during summers of drought. However, an unintended consequence of the Elephant Butte and Caballo dams was the accumulation of sediment and vegetation in the river. This led to a study and eventual authorization by Congress in 1936 of the Rio Grande Canalization Project, which has been the basis for USIBWC activity in

New Mexico. The USIBWC conducts needed excavations to relieve excessive sedimentation of the riverbed and works with traditional stakeholders such as valley farmers (via EBID) and municipalities to allocate water as needed in this agrarian region whose population is growing every year.

Times changed in the 1960s when the public became concerned about water quality, wastewater systems, and other environmental issues. USIBWC added an Environmental Management Division to its team to implement new policies embedded in the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA). Biologists, geologists, engineers, and others studied our Rio Grande and made Environmental Impact Statements addressing its condition and the potential for damage or improvement with proposed interventions.

USIBWC operations in New Mexico are documented in its multiple reports on the “Rio Grande Canalization Project.” Beginning with its initial mission of water delivery and flood control, USIBWC studies the needs and impacts of its interventions between Percha Dam in Sierra County all the way to the American Dam in El Paso, Texas. The reports document potential management interventions from basic channel maintenance to vegetation management to accommodating public requests for bike trails, boating, and parks. These reports are presented to traditional stakeholders and to the public via well-announced meetings open to all interested parties, publication on its website, and via its own Citizens Forums. In the last decade, the results of this process have led to Rio Grande habitat restoration in Broad Canyon, Shalem Colony, Las Cruces, and several locations in El Paso.

Today, as a federal agency with its headquarters in El Paso, the USIBWC is well positioned to continue its work in southern New Mexico. Climate change and global warming will certainly lead to new federal environmental legislation from Washington, which the USIBWC can influence and help implement, and there will be local concerns about how we would like to see our river managed. Also, not to be minimized is the availability of federal funding for USIBWC projects for work here in southern New Mexico.

On a personal note, I became interested in the USIBWC during the Mesilla Valley Audubon Bird Survey on the Rio Grande last year. There were openings for new members of the USIBWC Citizens Forum, which meets three times a year, and my application was accepted. Members of the forum have no decision-making responsibility and receive no salary, but we are expected to stay informed and offer suggestions at our meetings. I will keep you posted.

Reference: <https://www.ibwc.gov/home.html>

Recent articles of interest on climate change and the Rio Grande:

<https://nmpoliticalreport.com/2020/07/03/a-river-runs-dry-climate-change-offers-opportunity-to-rethink-water-management-on-the-rio-grande/>

[https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/jan/12/rio-grande-new-mexico-river-water?CMP=Share\\_iOSApp\\_Other](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/jan/12/rio-grande-new-mexico-river-water?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other)

## **Officers & Board 2021**

President: Elaine Stachera Simon

Vice-president: Mark Pendleton

Secretary: Cheryl Fallstead

Treasurer: Diane Moore

Directors:

2019–2022: Sid Webb

2019–2022: Gill Sorg

2020-2023: CJ Goin

2020-2023: Annie Mitchell

2020-2023: open\*

2021-2024: Trish Cutler

2021–2024: Tracy Patrick

### **Committee Chairs 2021:**

Conservation: open\*

Education: CJ Goin

Field Trips: Mark Pendleton

Programs: open\*

Newsletter: Sid Webb

Website: Sid Webb

Membership: Diane Moore

Christmas Bird Count: Wayne Treers

Facebook administrator:

Elaine Stachera Simon

Climate Watch Coordinator: Mark Pendleton

Finance Committee: Diane Moore

\* MVAS members interested in filling an opening or joining a committee are encouraged to contact the president or any of the board members.



## **New Year, New Dues**

Behind on dues? The New Year is a great time to catch up! To make it easy, go to the webpage and follow the directions:

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


**Thank you!**

**Roadrunner Ramblings** is published quarterly and emailed to MVAS members and friends, as well as posted on the MVAS website ([www.mvasaudubon.org](http://www.mvasaudubon.org)). All MVAS members are encouraged to submit articles of interest and/or recent bird photographs for publication. Please email photos to [sidwebb@gmail.com](mailto:sidwebb@gmail.com). 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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