



ROADRUNNER RAMBLINGS

MESILLA VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY

<https://www.mvasaudubon.org/> Vol. 44, Fall 2022



Hermit Warbler, along the Rio Grande. An infrequent summer migrant. Photo: Dylan Osterhaus

President's Letter

Dear MVAS Members and Friends:

I hope everyone is having a lovely summer! It's funny how so many people agree with me that August brings with it that feeling of anticipation . . . many of us are long past high school but never quite escaped the rhythm of the academic calendar. (Of course, in this group, that feeling of anticipation might be for migration season!)

I've said before that Thanksgiving is my favorite holiday, but I don't want to wait until then to express gratitude for some people who have gone above and beyond and have been the movers and shakers of MVAS this year. Every board member contributes significant time and effort, but this year Trish Cutler and Dana Loy in particular have upped our conservation game, taking on native plant and "Lights Out" initiatives that are ongoing. Annie Mitchell has taken on the additional role of membership coordinator. MVAS member Dr. Nirmal Khandan continues to generously offer his time and expertise in the form of photography workshops, as well as sharing his photos. We have a fabulous bunch of members who are NMSU grad students – Kelley Boland, Joel Gilb, and Dylan Osterhaus – who are leading bird walks, coming out for Adopt A Spot cleanups, and have given great presentations for our monthly programs. Thank you to Sid Webb for his ongoing efforts at our bird blind!

When I started watching birds about 20 years ago, I quickly learned how special the birding community is. I feel very lucky to have "found" birding and privileged to be a part of the flock that loves birds, watches them, and wants to make the world a better place for them.

Do you have a skill you'd like to bring to the group? A program you'd like to present? An activity you'd like to lead? Reach out and let's figure out a way to make it happen.

Happy migration, and good birding!

Elaine Stachera Simon

Prez



Migrating snow geese. Photo by Khandan.

Lights Out Las Cruces — Fall Update

Fall migration is here. We will probably begin to see a few Northern Harriers and Red-tailed Hawks, and, if we're lucky, some Loggerhead Shrikes and Yellow-rumped Warblers. It is a good time for birding. Being on the Central Flyway, southern New Mexico can expect a high density of migrating birds, day and night (60% of migrating birds do their flying at night). Some of them will stop and spend the winter here.

It is also time for an update from the MVAS committee "Lights Out Las Cruces," our migratory bird initiative.

Since the MVAS Lights Out for Birds proclamation was presented to the City Council and County Commission in April, the committee has been communicating regularly. We have taken nighttime rides around town looking for aberrant lighting that distracts birds from their mission and in too many cases can lead to their deaths. A meeting with a Las Cruces City Codes Enforcement representative informed the group how city light codes are enforced. Letters to birders in other regional cities have been sent asking them to join a regional Lights Out campaign with their own proclamations, using ours as a template.

The main goal for the committee now is to raise public awareness of the risks to birds during their biannual migrations. It has been shown that when people are aware of what they can do to help, good things happen.

The main contribution we can all make is to control our own night lighting. Most steps are easy and most of the time they save us money.

Do an audit of your home lighting and follow best practices:

- Don't over light with excessively bright lights. Use only the minimum number of lumens needed for the application.
- Make sure outside lights aim down and are well-shielded (using full cut-off fixtures) so that they don't create light trespass or glare.
- Turn off outdoor lights when not in use or install motion sensors

- When converting outdoor lights to LED, choose “warm” color temperature bulbs (3,000 Kelvins or less).

If you are a building manager or business owner, make sure your night lighting is in compliance with city or county codes and that you do all you can to minimize nighttime glare.

In the coming months, the committee will have a booth at the Las Cruces Saturday Market to inform a broader audience of our Lights Out mission. We would like to coordinate with others in Las Cruces and elsewhere in southern New Mexico to maximize our impact on all the stray lighting that imperils birds at night. For more information, visit the MVAS website Conservation Page, where we are posting additional suggestions about this topic and where you can send us your comments and suggestions via website messaging. [Lights Out Work page | mvas.audubon.org \(mvasaudubon.org\)](https://mvas.audubon.org)

Bird Migration Study Tool: Birdcast.info

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology has added a new tool, in addition to eBird.com, to help birders.

Birdcast.info is an online program that was developed to help us to find birds in our county as they migrate in the spring and fall. It is available at no cost to anyone with a computer or iPhone.

Birdcast is based on the same radar technology that allows weather forecasting around the U.S, as the 160 terminals that provide meteorologists with information used to predict rain or snow can also detect night flying birds. The tower nearest us is in Sunland Park. The radar terminals can document the number of birds flying in any area of the country, with numbers in the millions of birds per night, broken down by hourly totals. It gives data on the elevation of the flying birds and the direction of flight. Cornell can use the data provided by radar, along with its own stored data from many years of recorded, citizen science submissions, to predict the most likely species involved in the migration and what a birder may find the morning after, when doing his own exploration. The most recent version, released in 2022, provides a **Birdcast Migration Dashboard**, with all the data summarized on one page. The dashboard is live during seasonal migrations, from March 1 to June 15 in spring and August 1 to November 15 in fall. Check it out!

Editor’s note: This is the first article Mark has submitted to Roadrunner Ramblings. We hope it is not the last.

Birdwatching and Bird Watching©

by Mark Ryan

Make no mistake — I love birdwatching. Especially since retiring and moving to Las Cruces where I have enjoyed seeing birds I haven’t seen in years (decades even!) and the thrill of finding NEW bird species. I have enjoyed keeping bird lists again—New Mexico list, backyard list, year list . . .

But I’m also enjoying sitting on my patio and bird *watching*. This warm July afternoon I am watching doves . . . Mourning Doves and White-winged Doves (yeah, I know . . . nothing new here!). Even in the heat of the day, the doves are busy! My goodness. Flying back and forth, this direction and that, high above the desert, low, just skimming the creosote. Where are they going in such a great hurry? For what purpose are they expending such energy? I see lone birds, pairs, small flocks (family groups?), larger groups— headed in all possible directions, with what looks like urgency! Too early in the day to roost, some maybe back to a nest, some disappearing out of sight, and not time to migrate for those that do. And, they don’t dawdle! No serene

gliding to a perch, just full out fast flight to . . . somewhere, some important dove work. Who knew doves had such consequential tasks?

As I contemplate the vital work of being a dove, my attention is drawn to a Black-chinned Hummingbird. This little despot sits on his throne, low in the shade of the live oak, at the side of the yard controlling access to my backyard nectar feeders. From his perch, he watches for intruders intent on stealing his treasured sugar water! (For you *Hobbit* fans, think Smaug under the Lonely Mountain). If another thirsty male appears, he is off like a shot, wings whirring and voice a loud chattering to defend his trove. I want to tell him to chill. I will refill the liquid sustenance as needed. But, I don't speak hummingbird. Occasionally a female will come for a drink. Out he zooms, but not to evict! No, he launches into his courtship dance with vigor, his flight a U-shaped pendulum of whirring wings and flashing iridescence on his throat.

Alas, despite his energetic display, she seems unimpressed; drinking deeply, she ignores him. After a dozen U's have been flown, he seems to realize that she is just there for the food and drink; no socializing is on her mind. His wooing for naught, he dives at her and chases her as just another interloper (although what they might be up to on the other side of the house is business I am not privy to). Regardless, he is soon back, on his throne, vigilant as ever.

While the hummingbird and I await the next round of nectar wars, I note a bird soaring in front of the Organ Mountain peaks. Huge, even at great distance: Golden Eagle! Most likely hunting, but then again, maybe not. Could it be just a late afternoon joy ride? Riding the upwelling warm air in lazy spirals, sure looks fun!

Nothing else stirring. Too early for the quail to roost in the Live Oak (a story for another time); much too early for the Lesser Nighthawks to dance on the air, hooting as they go; not time for the Scott's Oriole to settle in for the night atop a viga. So, my eyes drift to the mountains. Now I am mountain watching. That may sound strange to those who have lived their lives in the shadows of mountains, but to a transplanted Midwesterner the peaks are hypnotic. And, they need watching! They might run off to Mexico, or journey north to join the Rocky Mountains of northern New Mexico. Someone has to keep an eye on them, I think. And, today that's my job.

Not *much* bird watching today, but very *satisfying* bird (and mountain) watching.

Editor's note: Usually the MVAS board of directors develops plans for three months of MVAS educational meetings (still via Zoom) before publication of this newsletter. This edition is published without the benefit of a July MVAS board meeting and the plans for Zoom or other meetings for chapter members are not yet scheduled. Accordingly, It has been shortened to one month of scheduled events, most of which are bird walks.

MVAS Activities: August

If the school kids have to go back to class in mid-July, the bird walkers must end their summer holiday and return to birding on August 1. The MVAS summer break is over and bird walks begin the very first day of the month. Checking with all the bird walk leaders and their substitutes (Mark Pendleton, Joel Gilb, CJ Goin, Wayne Treers) indicates they are ready, willing and able. CJ is even considering adding a butterfly walk or two, if his fluttery friends increase their numbers in the next month. We're all hoping it cools down and COVID doesn't become any more prevalent than it is at the time of this writing.

Judy Wilbur is developing plans for field trips, with announcements forthcoming.

The schedule listed below is just for the month of August. A complete, up to date, three month calendar appears on the website. When field trips and Zoom meeting plans become finalized, it will be updated and MVAS members will be notified by email.

August

August 1, 8:00-10:00 AM, Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park

1st Monday of the month bird walk. Meet at the visitor center. Walk leader will be Mark Pendleton. Contact Mark at mpndltn@gmail.com (please put 1st Monday bird walk in the subject line) or call 575.635.8711 by the preceding Friday to let him know you are coming.

August 13, 8:00-10:00 AM, Sagecrest Park / East of Las Cruces Dam

2nd Saturday of the month bird walk. Walk leader will be Joel Gilb. Meet at Sagecrest Park by the MVAS “Keep Las Cruces Beautiful” sign. The group will proceed to the trail leading west.

August 17, 7:45-10:00 AM Tellbrook Park

3rd Wednesday of the month bird walk. Your walk leader is Wayne Treers substituting for Mark Pendleton. Meet at the park entrance. Please contact Wayne by telephone (575-528-8696) at least 2 days before the walk to be sure there are still spaces available.

August 21, 2022, 8:00 a.m.-10:00 a.m. Keep Las Cruces Beautiful (for the birds!) Adopt A Spot Cleanup | Sagecrest Park @ Roadrunner Parkway and Frontier

Trish Cutler is clean up leader. Meet at the entrance on Frontier. Grabbers and trash bags provided.

August 27, 8:00-10:00 AM, Leasburg Dam State Park

Last Saturday of the month bird walk. Your walk leader is CJ Goin. Meet at the park visitor center at 8:00 AM and plan to carpool to the picnic area on the Rio Grande. Walk the Mogollon Trail for approximately one mile. Return to picnic area via upper road or trail.

For the most up-to-date schedule and for the upcoming September and October schedule, go to our Activities page: [MVAS Activities Detailed | mvas.audubon.org \(mvasaudubon.org\)](https://mvas.audubon.org).



A view of the Rio Grande as seen from Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park, on June 30, during the one month it was not a dry riverbed.

A Dry Season for the Rio Grande

The Elephant Butte Dam water level is at 6.1% of capacity. The U.S. delivered only 20% of the water to Mexico that is promised by treaty obligations. Texas and New Mexico are said to be close to settling their lawsuit regarding water flow between the states, but, as this is published, no announcement has been forthcoming. El Paso has been struggling since March 2020 to repair a broken wastewater pipeline that has led to sewage flowing into the Rio Grande south of the state line. This distraction was in part responsible for the USIBWC's cancellation of a conference on progress of projects attending to the riparian health of the Rio Grande in the New Mexico sector south of Elephant Butte Reservoir.

A very interesting article addressing the problems confronting New Mexico's Rio Grande appeared in the Audubon Southwest newsletter. In "Notes from the Rio, June 2022" Paul Tashjian blames climate change for the widespread crisis with New Mexican rivers. He advocates an Environmental Flow Program for all New Mexico's rivers to provide an equitable statewide response to a problem that is not going away. Let's hope his solution includes our section of the Rio Grande. The article is highly recommended. It can be found at: [The New Audubon Southwest | Audubon New Mexico](#)

Audubon Supports RAWA!

Dear MVAS Membership:

The Recovering America's Wildlife Act (RAWA) passed in the U.S. House on 06/14/2022 (231 to 190) and is now with the U.S. Senate. Now is the time to act and keep the momentum going by contacting your senators in support of this bill! RAWA was introduced by New Mexico's Senator Martin Heinrich and is co-sponsored by Senator Ben Ray Lujan (NM). RAWA has received broad bi-partisan support, and would provide \$1.4 billion to states, territories and tribes for the restoration and conservation of essential habitat as described in each state's wildlife action plan. 15% of funds would be used to recover species listed as threatened or endangered. If passed, the bill could generate some \$28 million in new funding for species in New Mexico that currently lack funding under the state's Wildlife Action Plan. With the ongoing threats caused by habitat loss, climate change, invasive species, and severe weather, the funds that could be provided by this bill are needed now more than ever.

You may view the bill here: [View the bill by clicking here](#)

Audubon is urging members to contact their senators in support of this important legislation, and you may do so here: [Audubon Action Center](#).

The MVAS POC for RAWA is Dylan Osterhaus (dylano@nmsu.edu; 785-338-0800).

It is important for our New Mexico senators to know we are supporting them. THANK YOU!

MVAS Conservation Committee

Attention: All MVAS Photographers



Bird photos are needed for multiple projects, including a new MVAS brochure, posters at the Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park bird blind (see photo), future newsletters, and probably a 2022 Zoom presentation of MVAS bird photography. All your photos in the past have been super and very much appreciated. If you have any you would like to share, send them to sidwebb@gmail.com. Please include a note of where they were taken, bird species, and any other description that might prove interesting for the viewer. In advance, thank you very much. Sid Webb

Poster at MVBSP — updated quarterly

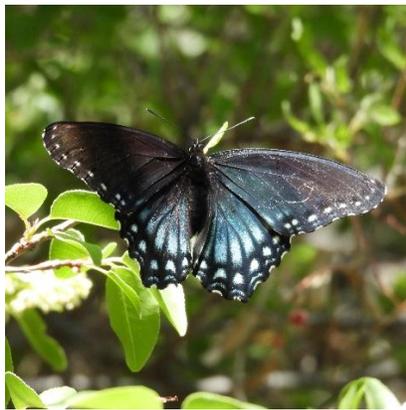


Birding in the backyard: A Cactus Wren, House Sparrow, and Curve-billed Thrasher on a very hot July 4, 2022..

Butterflies! by CJ Goin



Black Swallowtail (L)
(R)



Red-spotted Purple Swallowtail (center) **



Two-tailed Swallowtail

Swallowtails are our largest butterflies, most with "tails" on the hindwings. They are popular for their beauty and the ease with which they can be attracted to gardens. Three of the most common in our area are the Black (L), Red-spotted Purple Swallowtail (center) and Two-tailed (R). If you keep your eyes open during warm weather, you may see all three and possibly a less common species.

**this is a correction from earlier version



Where is this sign located?

Name That Bird © 2022

by Mark Pendleton

Welcome back to **NTB**! Thanks to today's photographer, Sara Kay, for reminding me about getting this feature back up and running again. The last installment was before the CBC, and now it's time to end the hiatus and get back to identifying bird photos.

For those of you for whom this is your first exposure to **NTB**, here's how it works. You submit a bird photo or photos (.jpg or .gif format please) that you want identified and your panel of three experienced MVAS birders does our best to oblige.

All this is a good lead-in to the next point: We need you to send in photos. They can be expertly composed and in sharp focus or completely devoid of artistic merit. The panel doesn't care. Just as long as the subject is a bird and we have a sporting chance of identifying it, we'll give it our best shot. Send photos to mpndltn@gmail.com and put **NTB** in the subject line. Please also include any other information about the photo — such as where and when taken, weather conditions when taken, any unusual circumstances surrounding it, and type of camera/lens, f stop, aperture, exposure time and ISO — that you deem interesting and relevant to the identification.

And now for the birds!

Bird #1



All the panelists agree that the first photo is of a meadowlark. Panelist 3 said: "I'd say the first one is an Eastern Meadowlark — note not even a hint of yellow in the malar and the cheek pattern is pale."

Panelists 1 and 2 couldn't have said it better, although at the time of this writing, Panelist 1 still wasn't certain and wanted study the photo some more.

Bird #2



Along with the photographer, the panelists recognized this as a hawk. Panelist 1 wasn't sure, but said he'd guess it was a Ferruginous Hawk if he had to make a call. All the pictures were taken in the Las Cruces area, and Panelist 1 wondered what time of year the hawk photo was taken. If he knew, he said, he'd submit it to the Facebook bird ID group to see what the consensus there was.

Panelist 2 called this bird a Ferruginous Hawk from the start. Evidence? The overall light coloration that's a blend of grey, whitish and pale rufous red on the wings, in combination with the light grayish white head and throat were the first clue. Then, there is the white line that extends from the throat towards the back of the neck. Also, the tail feathers have a reddish tint, but not so much as some Red-tailed Hawks while whites, grey and browns are also present. In addition, the lack of scapular mottling suggests this is not a Red-tailed Hawk. However, Panelist 2 would like the ID of FEHA better

if the wing tips extended further along the tail. These seem a bit short. Overall, though, he sticks with his first impression. Panelist 3 was less certain and suggested maybe a Red-shouldered Hawk.

Bird#3



Panelist 3 was the first to express an opinion about this photo. Right from the start, he was convinced that the photo is of a Western Wood-Pewee. In his words: “The third one is a Western Wood-Pewee (note that the vest on the breast is pale gray and pale yellow up through the middle of the breast; Olive-sided has a darker, well-defined vest and white up the middle of the breast; also note the pale whitish wing bars, which are more common with the pewee, whereas the Olive-sided has very dusky to non-existent wing bars).” Panelist 1 agreed and Panelist 2 looked at the picture again, re-read Panelist 3’s reasoning and concurred.

So, first a possibly female — if so, non-breeding plumage — Eastern Meadowlark, or it might be an immature bird of either sex, but an Eastern Meadowlark nevertheless. Then a light morph (by far the more common) Ferruginous Hawk, followed by a Western Wood-Pewee. Thanks to Sara Kay again for sending in these photos. And thank you for reading these lines.

Remember to send in your photos of birds to identify to mpndltn@gmail.com and be sure to put **NTB** in the subject line. Tell us where and when the photos were taken and give us any other info that might help to identify the bird.

We’ll see you next time, when we Name That Bird!

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Rufous Hummingbird from Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park. Photo by Dylan Osterhaus

Avian Respiration

by Sid Webb

Have you ever wondered how birds breathe and exchange air in their lungs? It is a fascinating topic with lots of surprises. The bird respiratory system is very different from the mammalian respiratory system we humans have and take for granted. It allows birds to achieve a metabolic rate many times that of humans. This serves them well whether they are hummingbirds at your feeder or migrating cranes flying over the Himalayas at elevations of 26,000 feet.

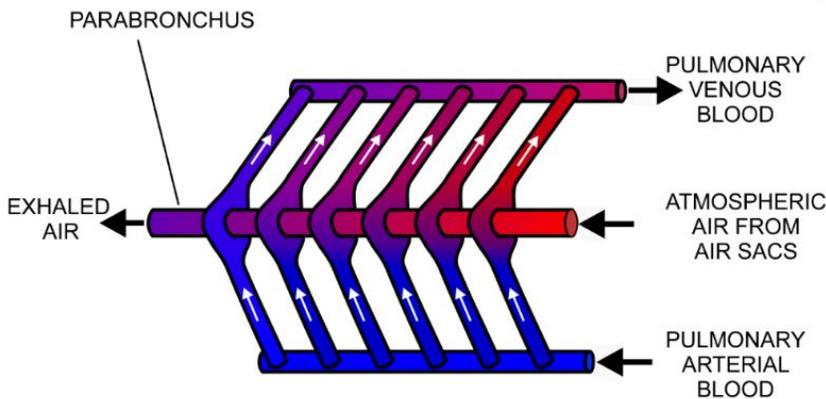
While bird and mammalian anatomy are similar in many respects, their respiratory systems work very differently. In birds, oxygen enters the lungs via one set of bronchi and exits via a second set, with no in-and-out bellows-like motion, just unidirectional flow. This allows for continuous oxygen exchange, not a start-and-stop process like mammals.

Bird Lungs and Heart

A bird's lung occupies less than one-half the volume of its chest but is approximately the same weight as the mammalian lung in comparably sized species. Unlike the mammalian lung, it neither expands nor contracts. Birds have no diaphragm. The bird lung comprises a network of "capillary airways" and vascular capillaries that together are responsible for gas exchange, with acquisition of oxygen and release of carbon dioxide. The oxygen in the "capillary airways" is picked up by red blood cells in the vessels coming from the left side of the heart. The reason for the increased weight of the lung in birds is the increase in blood volume circulating in the lung's capillary network.

The increased blood flow is made possible by a heart that is approximately two times as large as the mammalian heart in comparably sized species. Like the mammalian heart it has four chambers and directs oxygenated and deoxygenated blood similarly to mammals. It has capacity to beat much faster than any mammalian heart with a resting heartbeat in hummingbirds of 500 – 600 beats per

minute (bpm), increasing to 1200 bpm with extreme effort. Larger birds have slower rates. For example, crows resting heart rate is 150 – 350 bpm, with maximum rates of 500 – 600 bpm. The bird respiratory function is dramatically more efficient, and they can extract oxygen to feed their metabolic rate much better than mammals can.



Air circulation through bird lung, showing unidirectional flow.

Blue = low oxygen level
 Red = high oxygen level
 ([Bird anatomy - Wikipedia](#))

Birds have a much more complex way of inhaling and exhaling air than mammals. In the setting of a lung that does not expand or contract and in the absence of a diaphragm and with a rib cage that does not move like ours, how do they breathe? Answer: air sacs.

Bird Air Sacs and Bronchi

Birds have “air sacs” in their chest and abdomen. There are between seven and nine air sacs, depending on the species. Air sacs are balloon-like structures that are surrounded by smooth muscle that contracts and relaxes simultaneously for all of them. The posterior and abdominal air sacs accept incoming air. The anterior thoracic air sacs accept air after it has passed through the lung.

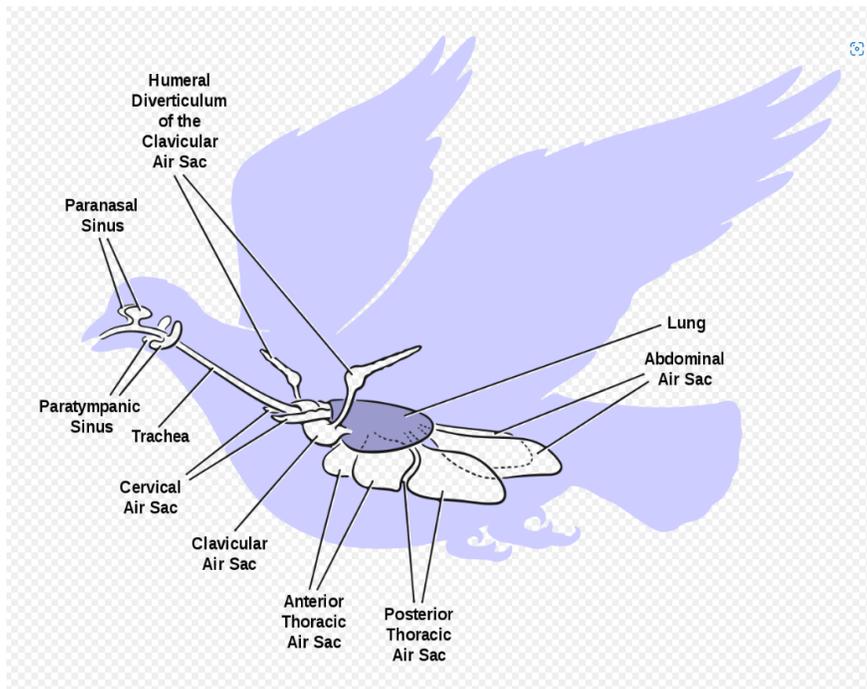
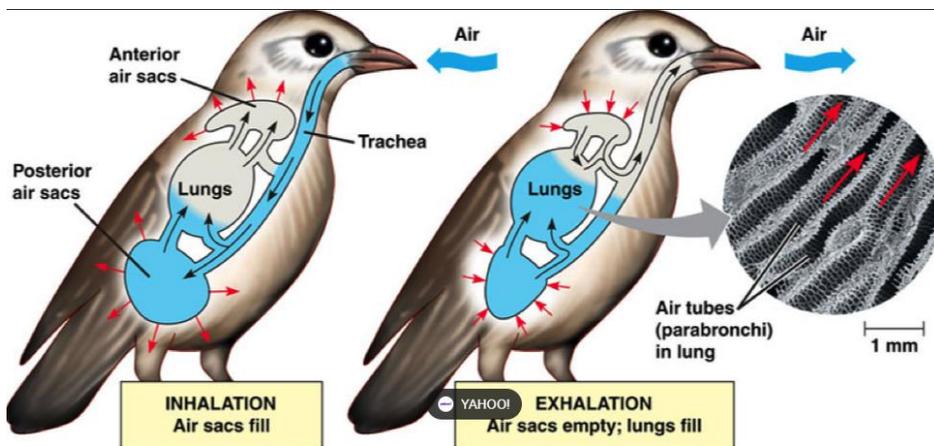


Diagram of bird's air sacs ([Bird anatomy - Wikipedia](#))



Inhalation and Exhalation
 (from [How a Bird Breathes](http://sliderbase.com)
sliderbase.com)

Like humans, birds have nostrils (on the top of the beak) and a trachea that leads into the chest cavity. Upon entering the bird's chest, the trachea branches into two main bronchi with very different functions. An upper branch is called the dorso bronchus and a lower branch is called the ventro bronchus. We will deal with each bronchus individually.

The **dorso bronchus** collects the incoming air and directs it to the posterior and abdominal air sacs, which are located behind the lung (remember, birds have no diaphragm). When the smooth muscle around the air sacs relaxes, the air sacs expand, and air is sucked into that space by the negative pressure. When the smooth muscle contracts, the air is pushed forward and into the lung via "parabronchi," which branch off the dorso bronchus. In the lung the parabronchi lead to the "airway capillaries" described above and oxygen exchange occurs. After contraction, the muscle again relaxes and the air sac expands again, sucking in more fresh air as part of the next cycle.

The **ventro bronchus** helps complete the breathing cycle. After fresh air passes into and through the lung with its "airway capillaries" and becomes depleted of oxygen and loaded with carbon dioxide, it is collected by a second set of parabronchi and sucked into the anterior and clavicular air sacs located in front of and alongside the bird's lung. This happens during smooth muscle relaxation. When their musculature contracts again, the air is forced from the air sacs into the ventro bronchus and then the trachea as it is exhaled from the bird's body. The next cycle begins with relaxation and more air being sucked into the anterior/lateral air sacs from within the lung.

Control of Breathing

Clearly, the timing of air sac contracture and relaxation must be coordinated for this to work. Also there must be sequential, functional opening and closure of the two bronchial systems to be sure incoming fresh air is directed through the dorsobronchi to the posterior/abdominal air sacs, and the oxygen-depleted air is allowed to escape to the outside via the ventro bronchus. This control is provided by the central nervous system and carotid bodies, which are the nerve centers in the neck with connections to the central nervous system. They also control the rate and depth of respiration based on the bird's oxygen levels in the blood, bird activity level, and other factors. Bird breathing takes place at the subconscious level and is based on multiple metabolic and physical factors interacting with its nervous system.

Now that you understand how birds' respiratory systems work, try breathing like a bird...Impossible!

References.

1. [Bird anatomy - Wikipedia](#) This is a good place to start if one is interested in this topic.
2. *The World of Birds*, 2014. Author: Jonathan Elphick. A comprehensive book at Branigan Library with a chapter on anatomy and physiology that annotates its descriptions with references to various birds with very different needs.



Officers and Board MVAS 2022

President: Elaine Stachera Simon
Vice-president: Mark Pendleton
Secretary: Cheryl Fallstead
Treasurer: Diane Moore

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Director 2020–2023: Annie Mitchell
Director 2021–2024: Trish Cutler
Director 2021–2024: vacant
Director 2019–2022: Sid Webb
Director 2019–2022: Gill Sorg
Director 2020–2022: Dana Loy

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Education: vacant
Field Trips: Judy Wilbur
Programs: vacant, currently managed by president
Newsletter: Sid Webb
Website: Sid Webb
Membership: Diane Moore
Christmas Bird Count: Mark Pendleton
Facebook admin: 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 photograph recently taken. Please email your contributions to sidwebb@gmail.com. To be added to the distribution list, contact Elaine Stachera Simon at 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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