

ROADRUNNER RAMBLINGS

Volume 31, No. 1. Jan.-Feb. 2009

President's Message

by David Griffin, MVAS President

"This song of the waters is audible to every ear, but there is other music in these hills, by no means audible to all. To hear even a few notes of it you must first live here for a long time, and you must know the speech of hills and rivers. Then on a still night, when the campfire is low and the Pleiades have climbed over rimrocks, sit quietly and listen for a wolf to howl, and think hard of everything you have seen and tried to understand. Then you may hear it—a vast pulsing harmony—its score inscribed on a thousand hills, its notes the lives and deaths of plants and animals, its rhythms spanning the seconds and the centuries."

This excerpt is from Aldo Leopold's "Song of the Gavilan," an essay he wrote describing his experiences in the Sierra Madre in Chihuahua, Mexico (pg. 149 in *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There*, 1949, by Aldo Leopold). Leopold's first sentence refers to the actual physical sound water makes as it flows down a river. He then expands on that theme and describes how a true appreciation of the natural world can quite literally open up our ears and minds. This part of Mexico, just south of our New Mexico Bootheel, was at the time of Leopold's visits still a very wild place compared to the mountains in Arizona and New Mexico where he worked as a forester. The rivers and streams ran free, wildlife was abundant: birds such as Thick-billed Parrots ("Guacamaja") were found in the pine forests, jaguars traveled the dense vegetation along the rivers, wolves roamed throughout the forests and oak woodlands, and small groups of people lived from the land. Leopold chose to use "Song" as a metaphor for everything a wild place consists of—the "music" is our interpretation and appreciation of that place.

Fast forward to January 2009 in the Mesilla Valley and we all know there are no wolves, jaguars, Thick-billed Parrots, or free flowing rivers. But we all can still enjoy the wild and not so wild places around us to listen for our own songs. For the last year or so, that's what I've tried to expose you to on our monthly field trips and through the varied natural history topics presented at our monthly chapter meetings. I've hoped that many of you have begun to further appreciate our natural world and wild places in southern New Mexico. I've also hoped you've ventured out to so far-flung place and heard your own songs of the deserts, grasslands, or mountains. Here in southern New Mexico we are fortunate to have such wild places left. And while I just mentioned the lack of wolves, jaguars and Thick-billed Parrots in the Mesilla Valley, there is an ongoing effort to restore Mexican gray wolves to the Gila area (3 hours away), there have been a number of jaguar observations in southwestern New Mexico during the past 15 years, and yes indeed, we even had a single Thick-billed Parrot show up at a remote spot in Engle, NM in 2003! In this centennial year of Aldo Leopold's arrival to the southwest let us all celebrate his life and work. And with continued support and appreciation for our natural world, let's hope we and all others will continue to hear the "Song of the Gavilan" long into the future.

Editor's Note: To learn how the economic power of birders can help protect a valuable forest in the southern Sierra Madre from logging, see page 4.

Intermediate Birdwatching

MVAS will be teaching another bird identification and appreciation course through the community college this winter. The class will emphasize vocalizations, form and function, and bird behavior. Saturday field trips will reinforce skills learned in classroom sessions. Handouts and materials will be provided.

Classroom sessions will be Tuesday nights, from 7-9 PM, **February 17 and 24** and **March 3**. Field trips will be on **February 21, 28, and March 7**.

For registration information contact the Doña Ana Community College Community Education program at 527-7527.

Save the Date!

April 4, 2009

All New Mexico Audubon Party
at Bosque del Apache

Conduct bird monitoring, learn about Audubon initiatives statewide, and enjoy a catered dinner with a guest speaker (tentative topic: Aldo Leopold)

For more info contact David Griffin
(382-2080 griffinbio@gmail.com)

Electronic Newsletter

Help MVAS save resources by signing up to receive *Roadrunner Ramblings* electronically, instead of in printed form. To sign up, email Nancy Stotz at

nstotz1@comcast.net

As each issue goes to press, you will receive an email indicating that a PDF version of the new issue is available for download at our website

www.mvaudubon.org

JOIN NOW!

- National Membership (one year): Join **both the National Audubon Society and Mesilla Valley Audubon Society** for the introductory rate of \$20 (a \$15 savings!). You'll receive both *Audubon Magazine* and *Roadrunner Ramblings*. Make check payable to National Audubon Society (NAS).
- Chapter Membership (one year): Join just **Mesilla Valley Audubon Society** for \$15. You'll receive *Roadrunner Ramblings*. Make check payable to Mesilla Valley Audubon Society.

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Send this form and your check to:

Membership, MVAS
P.O. Box 1645
Las Cruces, NM 88004

RENEWALS

National Members: NAS will send you renewal notices.

Chapter Members: Check your mailing label. If you see a C followed by a month and year code, you are a Chapter Member. The month and year code indicates the month your membership expires.



Programs

Membership meetings and programs are held each month at the **Village at Northrise, Hallmark Building, 2882 N. Roadrunner Pkwy.**

Meetings begin at 7:00 PM. Programs begin immediately following the business meeting and announcements.

Cuba Libre!—Enchanting Cuba. January 21. MVAS member Storm Sermay had a unique opportunity to visit Cuba for 10 days on a licensed trip for bird surveys in January 2008. She will show slides of the country and of the many endemic bird species, and she'll talk about her experiences in Cuba.

Raptor Surveys in the Chiricahua Mountains. February 18. Presented by Helen Snyder. The Chiricahua Mountains' Cave Creek Canyon is already the ABA members' favorite birding destination and is a major ecotourism destination, as well as the site of many long-term research projects based at the American Museum's Southwest Research Station. But a new fact has just emerged about this special place: Cave Creek Canyon's nesting raptor density is the highest known in the US, and among the highest measured anywhere in the world, due in large part to the number of small owls. The much-sought-after Whiskered Owl is the commonest raptor. The surprising raptor concentration, only recently confirmed, is five times that of the world-famous Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area managed by the BLM in Idaho. Cave Creek Canyon is an urgent candidate for a US Forest Service Special Area designation as a Research Zoological Area to be managed for birding and ecotourism, and as a world-class area for long-term scientific research.

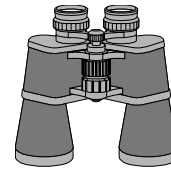
Welcome New Members

O. Baker
C.J. Goin
Ann Loman
Marcia Clark
C. S. Buckingham
Annette C. Slater
Susan D. Stevens
Daniel Appleton
Anne Andersen
Tracie DiGregorio
Zabelle K. Hazen



Field Trips

Field trips are free and open to the general public. Entry fees to some areas may be required and driving costs are shared. On all field trips wear appropriate clothing and bring water and binoculars.



Broad Canyon Ranch. January 24.

Explore New Mexico State Parks' newest acquisition. North of Radium Springs, this area includes desert scrub uplands, Swan Pond, and about 1 mile of river frontage. Because of the varied terrain, the field trip will be divided into two time periods. The morning period (8 AM to 11 AM) will entail walking around the ranch headquarters and in riparian vegetation along the river, and we'll also spend some time birding Swan Pond. The second period (11:30 AM to 3 AM) will entail traversing more rugged terrain, and the walking will be difficult to strenuous — only those willing to walk cross-country on steep, unstable terrain should consider this portion of the trip. Meet at 7 AM at Wild Birds Unlimited (in Arroyo Plaza, 2001 E. Lohman Ave). We'll car pool to the site. Bring food and water, wear appropriate footwear (level to steep terrain, dry to muddy conditions) and be prepared for variable winter weather.

Percha & Caballo State Parks. February 21. These sites almost always holds some wonderful surprises during winter; on last winters' trip we had over 70 species for the day! Meet at 7 AM at Wild Birds Unlimited (in Arroyo Plaza, 2001 E. Lohman Ave). Bring food and water, wear appropriate footwear (level terrain, dry to muddy conditions) and be prepared for variable winter weather. This trip will last until mid/late afternoon. *Note:* this trip includes Point #'s 34 & 35 along the Southwest New Mexico Birding Trail.

For more information on either field trip, contact David Griffin at 382-2080 or griffinbio@gmail.com.

ANNUAL ELECTIONS

Prior to the January 21 program, MVAS will hold its annual meeting to elect officers and board members. At press time, the slate of nominees was still being finalized. We also welcome nominations from the floor at the January meeting.

Field Trip Reports

Leyendecker and Mesilla Park, November 22.

Sixteen people headed out on a chilly morning to search for fall and winter birds south of Las Cruces. We were joined by *Las Cruces Sun News* reporter Ashley Meeks, who was there to report on what it's like to be on one of our trips. Ms. Meeks was not a birder, but she thoroughly enjoyed seeing some of our local birds and learning about their names and sounds. (See the November 23, 2008 *LC Sun News* for a feature story: "Eagle Eyes?" by Meeks).

Our first stop was NMSU's Leyendecker Plant Science Research Center south of Hwy 28, where we searched for

birds in and near agricultural fields along the Rio Grande. We were treated to outstanding looks at common wintering birds like White-crowned Sparrows, Black and Say's phoebes, Greater Roadrunners, and some brilliant Savannah Sparrows.

Next we chose not to walk our regular route along the drainage ditch adjacent to Leyendecker, as newly-posted "No Trespassing" signs encouraged us to move to another area. So instead we drove to the western outskirts of Mesilla Park to search for birds at the intersection of Snow Rd. and Union Ave. "Why look for birds at an intersection?" you may ask? Because at this location a large wall is covered by huge *Pyranantha* plants, which are typically covered in thousands of bright

orange fruits. These fruits and dense foliage make for a great wintering site for many species. This morning however, we saw only a few species like Yellow-rumped Warbler and American Robin.

We next hopped into our vehicles and moved our convoy east toward Mesilla Park. Birds were very active and easily observed along McDowell Road—most were Yellow-rumped Warblers. Early on we spotted the 'best' bird of the day, a Plumbeous Vireo. We were also treated to Orange-crowned Warbler, Pine Siskin, Inca Doves, a soaring Sharp-shinned Hawk, and a lone Rufous Hummingbird.

Thanks to those who attended and shared their vehicles. A full list of species observed is available. Just contact David Griffin: 382-2080 or GriffinBio@gmail.com.

David Griffin

Las Cruces Dam, December 10. Five hardy souls gathered on a frosty, mid-week morning to search for wintering sparrows and raptors. We didn't find many different species of sparrows, but we were treated to excellent looks at several Lincoln's Sparrows and eventually encountered a Song Sparrow, Green-tailed Towhee and a flock of a couple hundred White-crowns. Raptors included Red-tailed and Cooper's hawks, as well as Northern Harrier, American Kestrel, and Burrowing Owl. Among the 35 species we tallied, other highlights included an Anna's Hummingbird at Sagecrest Park and 4 Black-necked Stilts that have been hanging around behind the south end of the dam since Thanksgiving.

Nancy Stotz

Christmas Bird Count (December 20) Highlights

Number of observers: 58 (new all time high)

Number of feeder watchers: 11

Number of total hours in field: 100.25 (new all time high)

Number of species observed: 119

Number of individual birds counted: 41,809

Number of White-winged Doves: 18,502

New species added to count: 3

Number of species with high counts: 7

For full report, visit the MVAS website at www.mvaudubon.org

Bird Notes

Species	Date	Location	Observers
Black-chinned Hummer	10/24	Las Cruces	LS
Rufous Hummingbird	10/24, 12/15	Las Cruces	LS, SWH
Scott's Oriole	10/26	Las Cruces	DG
Belted Kingfisher	10/27	MVBSP (Bosque Park)	GP
Black-crowned Night-Heron	10/27	Mesilla Dam	GP
Gray Catbird	11/01	"A" Mountain	AT/HZ
Osprey	11/01	Río @ Picacho	PT
Scaled Quail	11/01	Las Cruces	DG
White-throated Sparrow	11/01	Las Cruces	DG
Peregrine Falcon	11/04	Las Cruces	DG
Orange-crowned Warbler	11/10, 22	Las Cruces, Mesilla Park	DG
American Goldfinch	11/11	Las Cruces	DG
Anna's Hummingbird	11/15, 30	Las Cruces; High Range	DG, NS
Golden-crowned Kinglet	11/15	Radium Springs	MS
Western Bluebird	11/15	Radium Springs	MS
Broad-billed Hummingbird	11/17	Radium Springs	MS
Eastern Bluebird	11/17	Radium Springs	MS
Plumbeous Vireo	11/22	Mesilla Park	DG
Rufous Hummingbird	11/22	Mesilla Park	DG
Aplomado Falcon	11/27	Jornada	NS
Black-necked Stilts	11/30-1/6	LC Dam	NS
White-tailed Kite	12/01	Burn Lake	TM
Black-tailed Gnatcatcher	12/15	Las Cruces	SWH
Slate-colored Junco	12/15	Las Cruces	SWH
Yellow-headed Blackbird flock	12/25	Swan Pond	RH/JM
Trumpeter Swans	12/28	LC Dam	NS, DG, CL
Sora	12/29	Swan Pond	AT/HZ
Swamp Sparrow	12/29	Swan Pond	AT/HZ

Observers: David Griffin, Sue & Wally Hill, Robert Hull & Jackye Meinecke, Carl Lundblad, Tim McKimmie, Guy Powers, Lorraine Schulte, Marcy Scott, Nancy Stotz, Al Trompler & Helen Zagona, Paul Turner

Please report early, late, or unusual sightings to Robert Hull at 575-523-8009 or rwhull@zianet.com

New Mexico Rare Bird Hotline
<http://www.nmbirds.org>

Rare Bird Alerts for NM and other states: www.birder.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.

OFFICERS AND BOARD

President	David Griffin	382-2080
Vice-president	Alan Krueger	532-1036
Secretary	Frankie Lerner	373-0857
Treasurer	Guy Powers	373-1891
Board (06-08)	Walt Whitford	521-1358
Board (06-08)	Sue Hill	382-9758
Board (07-09)	Barb Rodriguez	523-1548
Board (07-09)	Valerie Endruweit	373-0530
Board (08-10)	John Douglas	541-0133
Board (08-10)	Lorraine Schulte	524-7029

COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Audubon Adventures	Lorraine Schulte	524-7029
Audubon Council	Guy Powers	373-1891
Delegates	(1 vacancy)	
Conservation	Bob Tafanelli	526-9380
Education	vacant	
Field Trips	David Griffin	382-2080
Programs	board at large	
Membership	Guy Powers	373-1891
Newsletter Editor	Nancy Stotz	521-8087
Publicity	vacant	

Board meetings are held, September through May, on the Thursday before the 3rd Wednesday at 5:30 PM at the Southwest Environmental Center (on the downtown mall). All Audubon members are welcome.

Visit our website at www.mvaudubon.org

Tufted Jay Preserve

by Helen Zagona & Al Trompler, MVAS members

If you are looking for a fantastic birding destination, try the Tufted Jay Preserve (www.tufted-jay-preserve.org), in the Sierra Madre Occidental Mountains just east of Mazatlan, Mexico. The Preserve is pine and oak forest at an elevation of approximately 7,500 feet and was formed by the local community of El Palmito in hopes of preserving the lush habitat, home to many exciting species.

On a November trip, we saw flocks of Tufted Jays, along with Mountain Trogons, Yellow-eyed Juncos, Painted and Slate-throated Redstarts, the elusive Blue Mockingbird, Mexican Chickadees, a small flock of stunning Black-throated Magpie Jays, Tufted Flycatchers, a large number of warblers (including Olive, Black-throated Gray, Red-faced, Golden-browed, Red, and Crescent-chested), White-striped Woodcreeper, Rufous-capped Brush-Finch, Red-headed Tanager, Russet Nightingale-Thrush and Bumblebee Hummingbird. A rare sighting was Thick-billed Parrots, which gave us early morning flyovers on two different days.

Only three years in existence, the Preserve offers tents and primitive cabins with hot running water and small kitchenettes. The hope of the local community is that this preserve can withstand pressure by logging interests and protect the habitat long-term. Some funding has been provided by the Mexican government and the ecological group Pronatura Noroeste to develop an ecotourism resort.

Visits by bird enthusiasts from the U. S. could make the difference in continuing this important habitat preservation. In mid-January a bird festival in Mazatlan (www.mazatlanbirdfestival.com) will feature the Preserve. More information is also available from Sendero Mexico (www.senderomexico.com), an eco-tourism group that promotes visits to the Tufted Jay Preserve.

Roadrunner Ramblings is published six times a year: January, March, May, July, September, and November. Submissions welcome; please email copy to nstotz1@comcast.net, or call for mailing information. **Next deadline: February 25.** Printed on 100% PCW recycled paper by **insta-copy printing**. Image credits: roadrunner, Dale Zimmerman; clip art, IMSI's Master Clips/Master Photos® Collection.

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Thanks to the continuing support of many generous donors, students in 86 fourth-grade classrooms in Las Cruces, Alamogordo, Truth or Consequences, and Arrey have received Audubon Adventures kits to study during the 2008-2009 school year. These local students are among over seven million students using this material nationwide.

The subject matter covered in this year's kits includes *Creating a Nature-Based Learning Place; Plants Rule! ; Critter Construction; and Stink, Bite, Hide, Fight!*". A New Mexico supplement on Burrowing Owls has also been added to the kits for local schools by Mesilla Valley Audubon Society.

In order to provide these kits and supplements to local schools, MVAS continues to get generous donations from friends, MVAS members, and garden clubs. We have also received a grant from the Tour of Gardens in Las Cruces, and the funds raised during our Spring Birdathon go into our Audubon Adventures account.

In January, the cost of kits is being raised to \$50 per kit. We are looking for people who might be willing to sponsor an elementary school or middle school next year. Audubon Adventures is our primary education project. Any donation will be greatly appreciated. For more info, contact Lorraine Schulte at 575-524-7029.

Donations should be sent to:

Lorraine Schulte
Chairman/Advisor, Audubon Adventures
1740 Mariposa
Las Cruces, N M 88001

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Amount: _____