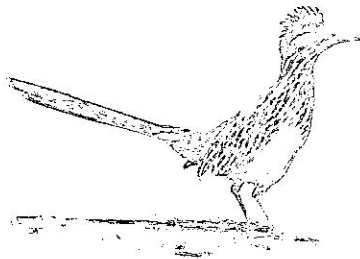


MESILLA VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY



ROADRUNNER RAMBLINGS

Celebrating
20
Years

Volume 20, No. 4 July/August 1998

NEWSLETTER OF THE

The SAN PEDRO River - A NAFTA TEST CASE

by Al Anderson (Huachuca Audubon Society)

and

Naomi Mudge (Southwest Center for Biological Diversity)

The San Pedro River is a 140-mile-long, green "ribbon of life" running through a semi-arid desert. Host to mesquite bosque and the Southwest's largest remaining stand of cottonwood/willow riparian forest, this river is a virtual highway for animals. This wildlife corridor supports more than 400 bird, 100 butterfly, 83 mammal, and 47 amphibian and reptile species, including the second highest land/mammal diversity in the world, second only to the montane forests of Costa Rica. It is the principal recovery area for many endangered species including the jaguar and Southwestern willow flycatcher, as well as endangered native fish and plants. Riparian areas (where water is at or near the surface) are virtual oases of life in the desert and more than one-half of all bird species found in the United States frequent the San Pedro River. With headwaters in Cananea, Mexico, the San Pedro has international significance.

Because of the biological importance of the San Pedro, in particular its importance to migratory birds, the U.S. Congress created the San Pedro National Riparian Conservation Area in 1988. Since then it has been named as the first "Globally Important Bird Area" in North America (American Bird Conservancy.)

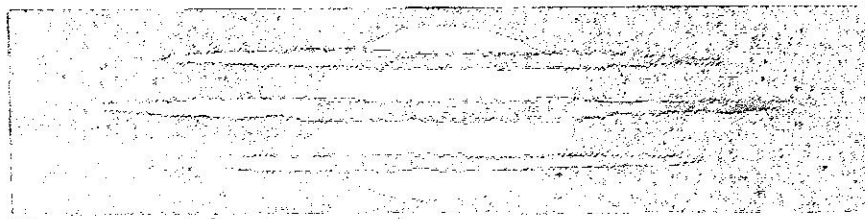
The San Pedro River receives much of its water from the Sierra Vista sub-watershed regional aquifer. Sierra Vista, a growing southwestern city, also uses this aquifer, as does nearby Ft. Huachuca. The area's inhabitants ground-pump water before it reaches the river. Decreased flows of the San Pedro have led to an increase in dry sections of the streambed. Hydrologists predict dire consequences for the river's survival if the trend continues; the base-flows have decreased 75% in the last 50 years. Growth from the U.S. Army's Fort Huachuca remains the greatest short-term threat to the river. Uncontrolled growth remains the greatest long-term threat.

Because both the San Pedro and the wildlife that depend on it cross the U.S./Mexico border, threats to the river have international implications. The Montreal-based Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC) has been established as part of an environmental side-agreement to the North American Free Trade Act (NAFTA.) For the first time the CEC has examined an environmental issue originating in the U.S.: the threat to the San Pedro River. Their draft report, titled "Sustaining and Enhancing Riparian Migratory Bird Habitat on the Upper San Pedro River," was released June 15 and they are now in the process of collecting public comment on the report. Ultimately the report is intended to promote cooperative efforts to recognize and protect habitats of special continental importance, to catalyze and call attention to existing efforts to protect such resources, and to educate more North Americans about the importance of the sustainable management of valued trans-boundary resources.

Comments on the San Pedro report will be taken until August 14. Please write and tell them why the river is important. To receive a copy of the report or to submit comments: write to Udall Center for Studies in Public Policy, University of Arizona, 803/811 E. First St, Tucson, AZ 85719, call 520-621-7189, or e-mail moote@u.arizona.edu. The Southwest Center for Biological Diversity has set up a web page with links to the report and to comment via e-mail. Please visit at: <http://www.sw-center.org/swcbd/activist/sanpedro.html>

Editor's Note: The San Pedro Riparian Conservation Area, in southeastern Arizona (very close to "home") is between Benson and Bisbee, east of Sierra Vista. The visitor center is just off highway 90, as it crosses the river. If you haven't visited this area, put it on your list of places to go.

SEE "YOUR COMMENTS ARE NEEDED" PAGE 3



NOTES FROM THE PRESIDENT

by Bill Jacobson

I hope your summer is going along nicely and filled with lots of good birds. Many things of interest have transpired since our April meeting. Victor Burgett, who has served on the board of MVAS since 1996, resigned in April. Victor has also been field trip chair. We thank him for all his hard work in keeping our field trips running smoothly and for his input on the board. Although no longer on the board, Victor is still in the area and we look forward to continuing contributions from him for the newsletter.

Lorraine Schulte has filled Victor's position on the board. A big thanks to Lorraine and John Schulte for hosting this year's potluck. It was a delightful affair, highlighted by the presence of a number of charter members of the chapter as well as David Henderson, Executive Director of the New Mexico State Office at the Randall Davey Audubon Center.

I heard that the field trip led by Ken Stinnett to the Ladder Ranch was very successful, with a large number of participants and some good sightings. In July, Jennifer Atchley will lead a trip to Leasburg State Park. In August, the chapter will continue a tradition with an overnight trip to Arizona. More information about these trips is listed in the Field Trip section of the newsletter. Volunteers to lead trips are always needed. Contact me or any board member if you are interested.

Our meeting time and place have changed! We will begin meeting in the library of Las Cruces High School. The business meeting will start at 6:45 PM. This is 15 minutes earlier than in the past and hopefully will allow us to proceed at a more leisurely pace giving time for greater member participation. Jennifer Atchley is the board member in charge of programs for the upcoming year. One program she has already scheduled is a speaker on White Pelicans.

Thanks again to Tim Lawton for organizing a successful Birdathon. We had a good year both in terms of numbers of participants and total dollars collected. Half the money collected goes to help support the Randall Davey Audubon Center in Santa Fe. We use the rest to help fund Audubon Adventures and other educational activities of the chapter.

Anyone willing to spend an hour or two surveying birds at Palomas Marsh please contact me at 382-6877. We had a willing group of volunteers last year. The surveying went smoothly and the BLM is pleased with the job we are doing.

The board is presently developing a letter to be sent to new members and a questionnaire to survey the membership concerning the chapter and its activities. These should be finalized soon.

I look forward to seeing you at the next meeting on September 16.



FIELD TRIP REPORT

by Harold Harrison - trip leader

On April 25, seven enthusiastic birders, who were relatively new to Mesilla Valley avian life, joined me on a very productive trip toward the Old Refuge. The combination of migration and irrigation produced passing ducks, shorebirds, warblers, and newly arriving summer residents to the tune of approximately 66 species in less than five exhilarating hours.

The highlights were many and often, among them: a trio of White-faced Ibis undisturbed by excited birders; nervous Wilson's Phalaropes; yakking Mallards, and midsized sandpipers. Nine duck varieties included all three teal species in one field of view with the drakes in full breeding plumage. Abundant Roadrunners led our tour to the "living Christmas tree ornament", the Summer Tanager, and several colorful warblers: Wilson's MacGillivray's, Black-and-White, and a singing Common Yellowthroat. Green Herons, Bullock's Oriole, Green-tailed Towhee, singing Western Meadowlarks, Ash-throated Flycatchers, Scrub Jays, and amorous Ladder-backed Woodpeckers were other good birds that were heard, seen, and studied prior to the wind kicking up. Everyone enjoyed the morning and the birds.

PROGRAMS



Programs and general meetings are held on the 3rd Wednesday of each month. September

through April. Beginning with our September 1998 program, the meetings will be at the Las Cruces High School library beginning at 6:45 PM. The program will start at 7:30 PM.

We have some exciting programs lined up for the fall with a talk and slide show about White Sands National Monument in September and Feather Lake Sanctuary (El Paso) in October. Details will be in the next newsletter.



FIELD TRIPS

Weather in the Southwest is changeable. In the summer, please be prepared with plenty of water, sunscreen, and a hat

July 25, Saturday. Leasburg State Park
The park is about 20 miles north of Las Cruces. We will start birding in the Salcedars along the ditch road at the park and then may drive up the valley toward Hatch to bird the ponds and the river. We should see a variety of wading birds, riparian breeding birds, and desert species. The length of the trip will depend upon what the group wants and the weather, so you may want to be prepared with lunch for a picnic. Meet at the Kmart parking lot on N. Main St. at 7 AM. Call Jennifer Atchley at 526-1320 for more information.

August 1-2, Saturday and Sunday. Chiricahua Mountains, Arizona.
Our traditional Arizona field trip for members and guests! This year we will bird Cave Creek and Rustler Park in the Chiricahua Mountains of SE Arizona with a stop at the Spofford's yard for hummingbirds. This is an extremely bird-rich area. In the summer we can expect to see some area specialties: Sulfur-bellied Flycatcher, Painted Redstart, Elegant Trogon, Blue-throated and Magnificent Hummingbirds, and in the high country the Mexican Chickadee. We will meet on Saturday morning at the trailhead for the Southfork of Cave Creek. Motels and camping are available. Call Storm Sermay at 382-3348 for more information and meeting times.

ISSUES UPDATES FROM THE NEW MEXICO STATE OFFICE

by David Henderson, Executive Director, Randall Davey Audubon Center

Baca Location. A top priority for Audubon has always been the protection of premier wildlife habitat. Last winter Senator Jeff Bingaman introduced legislation to acquire the Baca Location Ranch (Valles Caldera) for inclusion into the public domain. This nearly 100,000 acre property, in the Heart of the Jemez Mountains (in northern New Mexico), is home to the largest elk herd in NM, supplies the headwaters of a number of Jemez Mountain streams, and provides habitat for a variety of birds and other wildlife. For the first time in years this jewel is available for federal acquisition. The sellers are willing and the Clinton Administration has included \$50 million dollars in their budget for acquisition. So what's the holdup? First, the land is currently being appraised to establish its value. In addition, both Senator Domenici and Congressman Redmond do not support the acquisition for reasons that are not entirely clear. This issue should begin to move more quickly this summer and fall, but we need to continue to urge our legislators to support this acquisition. (Senator Domenici's office can be reached at 505-526-5475 in Las Cruces.)

Prairie-Chicken. In May 1997, National Audubon-New Mexico, the Council, and all New Mexico Audubon Chapters petitioned the NM Department of Game & Fish to investigate the status of the Lesser Prairie-Chicken, the first step towards a potential listing under the Endangered Species Act. At that time, the Lesser Prairie-Chicken's numbers had dropped from 2500 birds in 1988 to 324 birds in 1996. That alarming decline led to our petition. Since our petition, another season of field investigations has been conducted on both BLM and State lands. Though the data has not been analyzed, the preliminary findings show little improvement in the bird's condition. Although a few more birds were found on leks, the Prairie-Chicken's nesting habitat remains in very poor, overgrazed condition, making the fledging of young next to impossible. We are pushing for both state and federal listing.

YOUR COMMENTS ARE NEEDED!

On June 15, NAFTA's Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC) released a public review draft of its scientific assessment of water depletion in the upper San Pedro River. The report concludes that the river will dry up, destroying the nation's first Riparian National Conservation Area if serious efforts are not taken to curtail urban sprawl, superfluous agriculture, and excessive water pumping. The CEC is only soliciting comments from within the river basin itself, which is dominated by developers and the military, thereby attempting to stack the weight of comments against major policy reforms.

Here are some points you may want to use in commenting on the San Pedro River National Conservation Area (SPRNCA) report.

1) Retire agriculture within the basin. Irrigated agriculture makes up a very small part of the local economy. BLM and the Nature Conservancy have already retired some agricultural lands.

2) Don't move the conservation area. One suggestion is to shift the riparian conservation area southward, away from the portion of the river most immediately threatened. This would "save" the conservation area but allow the continued destruction of the river. A better solution is to expand the SPRNCA to include more of the river, including the area that crosses the international boundary. This will provide an incentive to control water depletion in the entire upper river basin and provided better wildlife habitat and open space.

3) Create an Active Management Area (AMA.) Sierra Vista is one of the only metro areas in Arizona that doesn't have an AMA. Most AMAs state that you cannot drill a well or build a development unless you can demonstrate you have an assured water supply that will not negatively affect the aquifer.

4) Don't import water. This will be only a temporary solution that will cause water problems in other areas and fuel unsustainable growth.

BIRD NOTES

Due to a lack of recent bird sightings (summer is a slow time with lots of people on vacation) there are no birds listed for this newsletter.

Please continue to report any early, late, or unusual sightings to: Storm Sermay 505-382-3348, or e-mail ssermay@zianet.com.

Keep up with the most recent sightings for Arizona and New Mexico
Subscribe to the NM/AZ bird list by sending an e-mail message to:
listserv@listserv.arizona.edu with the message - sub birdwg05 your name

New Mexico Rare Bird Hotline 505-323-9323

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	Bill Jacobson	382-6877
Vice-president	Tim Lawton	522-2056
Secretary	Sue Hill	382-9758
Treasurer	Mary Lou Wallace	522-0684
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Board (96-98)	Margaret Morey	527-1155
Board (97-99)	Bill Jacobson	382-6877
Board (97-99)	Maxine Perkins	524-1529
Board (98-00)	Ed Mayfield	382-0715
Board (98-00)	Jennifer Atchley	526-1320

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Audubon Council	Jennifer Atchley	526-1320
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Field Trips	Vacant	
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Membership	Ed Mayfield	
Newsletter Editor	Storm Sermay	382-3348
Programs	Jennifer Atchley	526-1320
Publicity	Ann Heying	521-4215

Board meetings are held, September through May, on the Thursday before the 3rd Wednesday at 5:30 PM at the Southwest Environmental Center, 1494A S. Solano Dr., Las Cruces NM 88001. All Audubon members are welcome.

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 NAS) to:
**Membership, MVAS, PO Box 3127,
 Las Cruces NM 88003**

THANK YOU FROM AUDUBON ADVENTURES

by Lorraine Schulte

Many Audubon Adventures classrooms are supported by the money we raise through Birdathon. However, individuals and organizations also contribute directly to Audubon Adventures to sponsor one or more classrooms. We would like to thank the following for their sponsorship of classrooms for the 1998-99 school year: Elinore Herriman, Helen Barber, Bill and Donna Jacobson, Kiwanis Club of Las Cruces, Mary R. Williams, Jean Henry, Darrell Mott, Richard Bischoff, Las Cruces Area Catholic Schools, John Mangimelli, John and Lorraine Schulte, Robert Tafanelli, Tim and Diana Lawton, VFW Post 3224 (T or C), Las Sembradores Garden Club, Eleanor and Tom Wootten, Donald and Sheila Klug, Madeline Schroeder, Ann Heying, Mary Lou Wallace, Desert Daubers Garden Club, Hi Hopes Garden Club, Janice and Myron Bond.

NAS OFFERS NEW MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

Looking for a better value on your auto and homeowners insurance? National Audubon Society has made arrangements with *The Hartford* to offer a quality auto and home insurance program to Audubon members. This program features competitive rates, several discounts and credits, and convenient 24-hour claim service.

Find out how much you may save! For a free no-obligation quote, call *The Hartford* at 1-888-529-1797 and mention code 101 when you call.

A NOTE TO MEMBERS FROM YOUR EDITOR

This is your newsletter. MVAS welcomes contributions of birding and conservation articles for the newsletter. If you have an article to submit, please feel free to contact me at 382-3348 or email the information to ssermay@zianet.com. Contributions from a variety of sources makes our newsletter more interesting to all.

Roadrunner Ramblings is published six times a year: January, March, May, July, September, and November. Contributions are welcome. Please e-mail copy to: ssermay@zianet.com, or call for mailing information. Next deadline: August 22
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