

ROADRUNNER RAMBLINGS

Volume 23, No. 6. November/December 2001

“Un-canalizing” a River

by Kevin Bixby, Executive Director,
Southwest Environmental Center

Ecologically, the Rio Grande can't function without curves, at least not in the lower elevations of New Mexico and Texas.

It turns out that the river's twists and turns create a variety of water velocities, which in turn produce a mix of slow and fast water habitats, which in turn sustain the aquatic life that comprise the river's ecosystem. Unfortunately, there is very little sinuosity remaining in the 200 miles of the river in southern New Mexico and west Texas.

Beginning in 1935, the International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC) straightened the river below El Paso as part of its "Rectification Project," reducing the river's length by nearly half in the process. Levees were built and the river's banks armored to confine the river to its new alignment.

Several years later IBWC did the same thing in southern New Mexico as part of its "Canalization Project." The purpose of these projects was to ensure efficient water deliveries, provide flood control and stabilize the international boundary.

These projects eliminated more than meanders. They destroyed essential fish habitat, and were a major reason (along with the annual dewatering of the river every winter since Elephant Butte Dam was built in 1916) for the disappearance of two-thirds of the native fish species in the river.

Management of the projects through the years has also been detrimental to the river. IBWC mows between the levees every year, preventing native (and non-native) riparian vegetation from becoming reestablished. In some areas it allows grazing of livestock. It also dredges the

(continued on page 6) See River

President's Message

Bill Jacobson

As you may have heard, our house is up for sale and we plan to move to Portland, Oregon. However, until it sells, we remain staunch members of MVAS. We feel fortunate to have connected with this group and will certainly have fond remembrances of the members and activities.

Back to the business at hand. I'd like to thank the Dolezal's for contributing the books which we sold at the last meeting. MVAS realized over \$70.00 from the sale. Speaking of fund-raising, Audubon has made gift memberships available for \$15.00. With the holidays approaching, Audubon membership might make a nice gift for a friend or family member. Our chapter receives the full \$15.00 from the membership (see page 2).

At the last Board meeting a Nominating Committee was elected. The members are Charles Townley, Nancy Stotz and Bill Jacobson. We are seeking two individuals to serve on the Board (a three year term), as Officers (one year), and for two State Council Representatives (a one-year and a two-year position). If you are interested or have a suggestion, contact one of the committee members.

Upcoming events include the annual Christmas Bird Count on Saturday, December 15. This is always a great event. If you wish to participate, contact Tim Lawton (tlawton@nmsu.edu). He will make sure you get placed on a team. The teams are finalized at the December meeting (12/12/01). Last year we had a great turnout. Let's do as well or better this year. Gordon wants to make sure we get all the White-winged Doves counted. You also do not want to miss the field trip to Barrenda Canyon led by Walt Whitford on November 17. It is a great area.

In case the house sells and this is my last column, I'd like to thank everyone we have been associated with and especially those who have volunteered for Palomas Marsh, Leasburg State Park and to help with the median. You are just a great group. Also I'd like to get in a short commercial message. Bill & Donna Jacobson are having an Open House Art Sale from 3 PM to 7 PM at their house (2424 Sunridge Dr.) on November 10. I mention this because the sale includes a number of 19th century bird prints, both framed and unframed. You are cordially invited.

At Press Time...

As I wrapped up this issue, I learned that the Jacobson's had sold their house, and will be leaving us very soon. MVAS is sorry to lose such good friends and valuable members, but we wish you the best in the Northwest. Adios y buena suerte.

Field Trip Reports

Percha Dam. September 22. Ten enthusiastic birders showed up for the Percha-Animas Canyon field trip. At Percha we were treated to long looks at male and female Belted Kingfishers, a tree full of Yellow-rumped and Townsends Warblers, and other warblers: Lucy's, Grace's, Wilson's, and Yellow scattered in the vicinity. A Sharp-shinned Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Lesser Goldfinch, Red-naped Sapsucker, and Green Heron added some interesting diversity. Late morning we left Percha for a slow drive up Animas Creek Canyon. Here we were treated to female Blue Grosbeak, Hairy Woodpecker, and a controversial empidonax flycatcher that may have been a Willow Flycatcher.

Walt Whitford

Dripping Springs/La Cueva, October 6. Six participants enjoyed perfect fall weather from 8:30 AM to 1:30 PM, birding in the vicinity of the A.B. Cox Visitor Center and between the picnic area and La Cueva. We saw 40 species, with highlights including Lewis's Woodpecker, Indigo Bunting, and Dusky Flycatcher. A small flock of White-throated Swifts turned out at La Cueva to bid us farewell.

Tim Lawton

Chiricahua Mountains. October 20. This overnight trip was one of great beauty, from the birds we saw to the colors of fall everywhere, including the Arizona Sycamores and the wild vines growing on both the cliffs and the trees. The weather cooperated with us and we recorded 42 varieties of birds. The Trogons had gone south, but we did see Dark-eyed and Yellow-eyed Juncos, Acorn and Gila Woodpeckers, Red-shafted Flickers, Red-naped Sapsuckers, Painted Redstarts, Tufted and Bridled Titmice, Brown Creepers, Black-chinned and Broad-tailed Hummingbirds, Crissal and Curved-billed Thrashers and some raptors. The Arizona Highway Dept. is paving a lot of the roads in the Chiricahuas and that is going to make the area very easy for people and campers to spend time in the campgrounds in the area. Six people went on the trip.

Ed Mayfield

BIC Alumni. October 13. It was a perfect fall morning: sunny and clear with a typical autumn nip in the air. Eleven former students of the Mesilla Valley Audubon Society/DABCC Bird Identification Course joined Sue and Wally Hill, Harold Harrison, and Wendy Davis for the first Bird Identification Course Alumni Field Trip. The species count at Caballo Lake State Park was rather small due to campers in the area and the low water level in the reservoir. The most notable sightings on Caballo were large flocks of

white pelicans. At Percha a greater variety of birds was seen. The biggest thrill of the day was seeing large flocks of white pelicans flying overhead. None of us will ever forget the sight of those big, graceful birds, their black-tipped, white wings brilliant against the intense blue, New Mexican sky. As if that were not enough, numerous flocks of noisy Sandhill Cranes also flew over us. We ended the day with 43 species of birds, ate a picnic lunch together, and shared birding stories.

Wendy Davis

Gift Memberships

by Harold Harrison, Membership Chair

Mesilla Valley Audubon Society (MVAS) and other Audubon chapters are undergoing major changes in the way that National Audubon is allocating our annual dues. Under the new formula MVAS received approximately \$1200 of the anticipated (budgeted) \$1,800 for 2001. The Board uses the money for newsletter distribution, conservation projects, and carrying on "business as usual." Our Chapter must recruit new members in order to finance our quality activities.

The most recent National promotion is a "Gift Membership" drive. The gift membership costs \$15.00, of which our Chapter receives all \$15.00. Please consider this offer by providing one or more one-year gift memberships to family or friends, no matter where they live. Please complete and mail the following forms.

Send the money and forms* to:

National Audubon Society
Membership Department
700 Broadway
New York, NY 10003

*Photocopy forms if necessary.

<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <th colspan="2" style="text-align: left; padding: 2px;">Member Info</th> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;">Name:</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">(please print)</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;">Address:</td> <td style="padding: 2px;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;">City:</td> <td style="padding: 2px;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;">State:</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">Zip:</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2" style="padding: 2px; text-align: right;">Chapter Code: Q54</td> </tr> </table>	Member Info		Name:	(please print)	Address:		City:		State:	Zip:	Chapter Code: Q54		<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <th colspan="2" style="text-align: left; padding: 2px;">Gift To:</th> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;">Name:</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">(please print)</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;">Address:</td> <td style="padding: 2px;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;">City:</td> <td style="padding: 2px;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;">State:</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">Zip:</td> </tr> </table> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <th colspan="2" style="text-align: left; padding: 2px;">Gift To:</th> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;">Name:</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">(please print)</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;">Address:</td> <td style="padding: 2px;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;">City:</td> <td style="padding: 2px;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;">State:</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">Zip:</td> </tr> </table>	Gift To:		Name:	(please print)	Address:		City:		State:	Zip:	Gift To:		Name:	(please print)	Address:		City:		State:	Zip:
Member Info																																	
Name:	(please print)																																
Address:																																	
City:																																	
State:	Zip:																																
Chapter Code: Q54																																	
Gift To:																																	
Name:	(please print)																																
Address:																																	
City:																																	
State:	Zip:																																
Gift To:																																	
Name:	(please print)																																
Address:																																	
City:																																	
State:	Zip:																																



Programs

Programs and meetings are held each month, September-April, at the Village at Northrise, Hallmark Building, 2882 N. Roadrunner Pkwy, Las Cruces. Programs begin at

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

Decanalization: The Key to Restoring the Rio Grande. November 14. The Rio Grande is one of the most important centers of biological diversity in the Chihuahuan Desert, yet, ecologically speaking, it is on death's door. Can it be restored? Kevin Bixby, Executive Director of the Southwest Environmental Center, will talk about current restoration efforts, including an intensive effort to convince a federal agency to "decanalize" the river in southern New Mexico and why that's important. He'll also give an update on the proposed Mesilla Valley Bosque Park.

Winter Birds of the Mesilla Valley.

December 12. To help us prepare for the upcoming Christmas Bird Count, Lorraine Schulte will review some common, and not so common, winter residents and visitors to southern New Mexico. Tim Lawton will also be on hand to organize teams and leaders for this year's count.

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
TXCH

Membership includes the publications *Audubon* and *Roadrunner Ramblings*.

Send this application and your check, (made payable to National Audubon Society) to:

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

Christmas Bird Count December 15

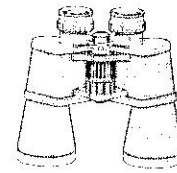
Make plans to participate in our annual tradition. The CBC is an all-day event in which teams count birds within geographic areas of a count circle that extends from the river to Dripping Springs. We are currently looking for team leaders to lead groups into the various areas, as well as team members. If you would like to be involved as a leader or participant, please contact Tim Lawton (522-2056) or Gordon Ewing (522-3934). We finish up with a no-host dinner at the end of the day, when everyone goes over their list and we figure out the day's total number of species.

Thanksgiving Bird Count

If you're looking for an excuse to take a break and stare out your window on Thanksgiving Day, you might consider volunteering to be an observer for the Thanksgiving Bird Count. Established in 1966, this count requires only a one-hour commitment. Pick a circle, 15 feet in diameter (such as the one surrounding the feeder or water bath in your yard), and tally up the maximum number of individuals of each species seen in the circle (or passing through the imaginary cylinder suspended above it) during the hour.

Last year, in the western states, 449 people participated, and judging from the species listed on their reporting form, the southwestern deserts are not well-represented among the observation locations. If you'd like a copy of the report form and explanatory letter, contact me at 521-8087 or nstotz@zianet.com and I'll send you what information I have.

Nancy Stotz



Field Trips

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

Barrenda Canyon/Macho Creek.

November 17. Meet at 7 AM at the K Mart parking lot on Hwy 70. The entrance to Macho Creek is approximately 5 miles north of the turn-off from Hatch-Deming highway to the Hillsboro-Lake Valley road. It takes approximately one hour to reach the grasslands at the Macho Creek Road. The birding will be mostly from the vehicle with stops on the road to allow the group to observe birds - not much walking. We'll proceed along Macho Creek to Barrenda Canyon and bird along the canyon road into the U. S. Forest Service part of the canyon; this part of the trip will require high clearance vehicles. Plan on reaching the Forest Service part of the canyon around 11:30. Anyone wishing to return at this point can drive directly out Barrenda Canyon to the Hillsboro road at Lake Valley. I would plan on another couple of hours of birding in the canyon and return to Las Cruces around 4 PM. Contact Walt Whitford at 521-1358 or wawhitfo@nmsu.edu for details.

Bosque del Apache. December 1.

Bosque del Apache means "woods of the Apache," named for the Apaches who routinely camped alongside the riverside forest. Today, thousands of people travel to hear the honking of the snow geese and guttural call of the sandhill cranes. Many other species of waterfowl make their winter home at the bosque. The trip will depart at 6 AM from the K-Mart on Highway 70, returning about 5 PM. Plan to enjoy a day of birding with us. For more information contact Donna Wood at 525-8704 or donnacamino@yahoo.com.



Birding Hot Spot: Tularosa Sewage Lagoons

by John Mangimeli

Ten miles north of Alamogordo, the village of Tularosa, with its old-growth cottonwoods and acequias flowing through town, provides an attractive oasis for birds. The surrounding area provides a diversity of habitats in a relatively small area, including orchards, agricultural fields, desert shrub, overgrown abandoned fields, and open water at the Tularosa Waste Treatment Facility. The sewage lagoons attract migrating and wintering ducks, geese, gulls, terns and shorebirds. During the pecan harvest (November through January) there is plenty of food and many different species of birds can be seen in the orchards around Tularosa, including large flocks of ravens, blackbirds, cowbirds, and occasionally crows. Large wading birds—ibis, egrets, curlews—are attracted to irrigated fields. The trees of Tularosa provide a communal roost for scores of turkey vultures during the summer. Raptors are common in the area, including

Swainson's Hawks in summer and Red-tailed Hawks and Harriers in winter. For many years, Harris' Hawks have nested in the area west of Tularosa. Prairie Falcons hunt for pigeons that frequent the lagoons. Unusual sightings last winter included White-tailed Kite, Lewis' Woodpecker, and Least Tern.

Directions: From the village of Tularosa, drive south about 1/2 mile to Radio Road. Turn west and drive 3/4 mile on Radio Road until it meets Riata Road at a T-intersection. Turn right (North) on Riata. The sewage lagoons will be visible to the west. Finding a place wide enough to pull off the road is the hardest part of this trip, but there are a few. The lagoons are closed to the public and fenced, but a short walk across a weedy field will take you to the fence near the north pond. The south pond can't be approached closely and a spotting scope is helpful.



Festival of the Cranes at Bosque del Apache

November
15-18

Field Trips • Workshops • Presentations

Keynote Address: Pete Dunn, *Tales of a Low Rent Birder*. The Tales Behind the Stories. Saturday, 17 November, 7:30-9:00 PM. Cost: \$5.00

Advanced Registration ends November 10, 2001.

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

Or Call
505-835-2077

In Focus: LBJ's

The cool mornings we've had recently are starting to perk me up out of my summer doldrums. Not only do they herald the departure of that nasty summer heat, but they are also accompanied by the arrival of flocks of wintering sparrows. Though they often disparaged as "little brown jobs," the appearance of these flocks always invigorates my birding: they're challenging enough that a clear ID somehow becomes

more satisfying, and their arrival coincides with my favorite birding season of all, the Christmas Bird Count.

In preparation for the count, I've started scouting my territory and checking out all the sparrow spots to reacquaint myself with my seasonal friends. The table below summarizes some of the characters I find most helpful distinguishing between the most common winter

sparrows. It omits the Black-throated Sparrow, whose gorgeous head and throat pattern is unmistakable, and it also omits several other less common species including the Fox, White-throated, Harris, and Swamp Sparrows. Once you've got the more common species down, picking out the occasional rarity becomes a piece of cake (or should I say fruit cake...).

Nancy Stotz

Species	Breast Markings	Distinguishing Color Cues	Tail Length/Shape	General Impression/Behavior
White-crowned	Clear	Pale bill and distinct brown crown stripes in first-year birds	Relatively long & notched	Big & bold, flocker. Sometimes holds head feathers up like a crest.
Chipping	Clear	Head pattern dominated by dark line through eye, gray rump	Relatively long & notched	Relatively small bird, not secretive, flocker
Brewer's	Clear	Relatively non-descript. Thin white eye ring.	Relatively long & notched	Small with a small bill, flocker
Sage	Clear with a central spot	Gray head, white eyebrow and eye ring	Dark tail	Runs on ground with tail cocked, desert dweller
Lincoln's	Fine streaking ends in abrupt straight line across chest	Buffy chest and eye ring	Short & rounded	Delicate, small-billed, and somewhat secretive. Likes dense cover.
Vesper	Streaked (some with central spot)	White eye ring, white outer tail feathers (junco-like)	Short & notched	Likes grassy areas, moderate flocker
Savannah	Streaked (some with central spot)	Pink legs. Yellow lores and eyebrow in some.	Short & notched	Likes grassy areas, moderate flocker. Sometimes shows crest
Song	Streaked with central spot	Gray cheek and eyebrow	Long & rounded	Big, loner. Comes up to pishing, likes denser cover.
Lark Bunting	Heavy streaking	Lots of white in wing	Short and white-tipped (faint)	Big, stocky, heavy-billed. Flocker

Rio Bosque Update, Upcoming Tours

Bird Notes

Species	Date	Location	Observers
Eur. Collared Dove	8-15	Pearson's Tree Farm	MS, JZ
Gray Catbird	8-21	Randal's Pool	JZ
Willow Flycatcher	8-21	Old Refuge	BZ
Prairie Warbler	8-23	Ft. Bliss Ponds	MS, JZ, BZ
MacGillivray's Warbler	8-27,30	Las Cruces	TS, NS
Northern Waterthrush	8-30	Randal's Pool	MS, JZ
Ovenbird	8-30	Randal's Pool	MS, JZ
Prothonotary Warbler	8-31	WSTF	LH
Little Blue Heron	9-1	Holloman Lake	GE
Harris's Hawk	9-1	Holloman Lake	GE
Merlin	9-1	Holloman Lake	GE
Peregrine Falcon	9-1	Holloman Lake	GE
Sandhill Crane	9-1	Holloman Lake	GE
Marbled Godwit	9-1	Holloman Lake	GE
Eur. Collared Dove	9-3	Deming	TS
Yellow-green Vireo	9-4	Las Cruces	BJ
Swainson's Thrush	9-5	Canutillo	MS, JZ
American Redstart	9-6	WSTF	LH
Broad-billed Hummer	9-7	Las Cruces	MAO
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	9-8	Old Refuge	TL, BS
Gray Flycatcher	9-8	Old Refuge	TL, BS
Nashville Warbler	9-9	Old Refuge	MS, JZ
Virginia's Warbler	9-11	Las Cruces	BJ
Peregrine Falcon	9-11	Las Cruces	TL
Short-billed Dowitcher	9-12	Ft. Bliss Ponds	BZ
Sage Thrasher	9-12	Ft. Bliss Ponds	BZ
Bobolink	9-12,27	Ft. Bliss Ponds	BZ, MS, JZ
Vermilion Flycatcher	9-13	Caballo/Percha	TL, LS, SWH
Indigo Bunting	9-13	Percha	TL, LS, SWH
Cassin's Vireo	9-13	Percha	TL, LS, SWH
American Redstart	9-13,18	Percha/Leasburg	TL, TS, LS, SWH
Black-and-white Warbler	9-13	Percha	TL, LS, SWH
Brown Thrasher	9-22	Las Cruces	SWH
Lincoln's Sparrow	9-22	Las Cruces	SWH
Least Tern	9-23	Burn Lake	BR
Red-necked Phalarope	9-23	Ft. Bliss Ponds	JP
Sabine's Gull	9-23	Sunland Park Track	JP
Red-eyed Vireo	9-24	Ft. Bliss Ponds	BZ
Canada Warbler	9-24	Ft. Bliss Ponds	BZ
White-throated Sparrow	9-24	Ft. Bliss Ponds	BZ
Broad-winged Hawk	9-26	Ft. Bliss Ponds	MS, JZ, BZ
Zone-tailed Hawk	9-27	Rio Bosque	MS, JZ
Clay-colored Sparrow	9-29	Las Cruces	NS
Magnificent Hummer	9-30	Deming	CW
A. Golden Plover	10-2	AG Sod Farm	BZ, MS, JZ
Mountain Plover	10-8	Gardner Sod Farm	MS, JZ, BZ
Gray Catbird	10-11	Las Cruces	MLW
Black Tern	10-13	NMSU	HH, MC
Chestnut-sided Warbler	10-17	Ft. Bliss Ponds	BZ
Blackburnian Warbler	10-17	Ft. Bliss Ponds	BZ

Maury Craig, Gordon Ewing, Harold Harrison, Sue and Wally Hill, Landy Hinesley, Bill Jacobson, Tim Lawton, Jim Paton, Mary Anne Owen, Barb Rodriguez, Bill Seagar, Tara Shelton, Lorraine Schulte, Marcy Scott, Nancy Stotz, Mary Lou Wallace, Chris Williams, Jimmy Zabriskie, Barry Zimmer

Please report early, late, or unusual sightings to Sue Hill at
505-382-9758 or hillco@zianet.com

In one of our programs last spring, John Sproul, of the Center for Environmental Resource Management at UTEP, introduced us to the Rio Bosque Wetlands Park, a 370 site in southern El Paso. Managed by CERM, the park contains a historic channel where the Rio Grande used to flow before it was canalized, and restoration of this channel and associated wetlands is ongoing.

In previous years, the park received water from the El Paso County Water Improvement District No. 1 (EP#1) and a waste water treatment plant, but this water was available only during the fall and winter months. This spring and summer, thanks to the El Paso Water Utilities and EP#1, they were able to keep water flowing through the channel and flood 20-30 wetland acres during the warmer months. With water available, 200 new cottonwood and willow poles planted last winter grew quickly.

In addition, a new bird species was added to the park's list (which now stands at 182 species): 3 Fulvous Whistling-Ducks stayed in one of the flooded areas from May 28 through July 25. This summer they also documented breeding in Mexican Mallards, Cinnamon Teal, Common Moorhens, Black-necked Stilts, American Avocets, Cassin's Sparrows, and Painted Buntings.

UTBP offers free walking tours of the park twice a month. Upcoming Introductory Tours will be offered on Saturday, November 10 (9-11 AM) and Sunday, December 9 (3-5 PM). Bird Tours will be offered on Sunday, November 4 (3-5 PM) and Saturday, December 1 (9 AM-noon). The meeting place is a bridge crossing Riverside Canal. To get there from I-10, take Americas Ave. (Loop 375) to Pan American Dr., turn left onto Pan American and travel 1.5 miles to the bridge.

For more information, visit their website at www.cerm.utep.edu/projects.html.



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	Guy Powers	373-3843
Secretary	Barb Rodriguez	523-1548
Treasurer	Walt Whitford	521-1358
Board (99-01)	Harold Harrison	522-6199
Board (99-01)	Charles Townley	566-1268
Board (00-02)	Wendy Davis	527-4551
Board (00-02)	Sue Hill	382-9758
Board (01-03)	Donna Wood	525-8704
Board (01-03)	Nancy Stotz	521-8087
Past President	Ed Mayfield	382-0715

COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Audubon Adventures	Lorraine Schulte	524-7029
Audubon Council	Jennifer Atchley	526-1320
Delegates	Ed Mayfield	382-0715
Conservation	Board at Large	
Education	Wendy Davis	527-4551
Field Trips	Ed Mayfield	382-0715
Membership Records	Mary Anne Thibodeau	524-4126
Membership	Harold Harrison	522-6199
Newsletter Editor	Nancy Stotz	521-8087
Programs	Nancy Stotz	521-8087
Publicity	Charles Townley	566-1268

Board meetings are held, September through May, on the Thursday before the 3rd Wednesday at 5:30 PM at the Southwest Environmental Center (1494 S. Solano). All Audubon members are welcome.

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

(continued from page 1) **River**

channel and stabilizes the banks with riprap. All these actions are inimical to a healthy river system.

Now, for the first time in its history, the IBWC is thinking seriously about other ways of managing the Canalization Project. The impetus is two fold. A 1996 study suggests the project may not be able to convey its design flood, so the agency is proposing to raise or rebuild 56 percent of the levees. The agency also pledged in a 1998 agreement with SWEC to look at management actions that can support river restoration, including non-structural approaches to flood control.

An environmental impact study analyzing different management alternatives is currently under development. The public will have 45 days to comment on the draft EIS after it is issued (currently scheduled for November). The importance of this study cannot be overestimated. It will be impossible to restore the river to any significant degree of functionality and self-regulation without allowing it to reestablish a more natural meander pattern. It may be possible to do this within the existing levees in places, but more likely it will require setting back the levees or finding other ways to widen the effective floodplain, through the purchase of adjacent land or flood easements.

The Canalization Project EIS is a high priority for river advocates. We don't expect IBWC to restore the river by itself, but we do expect it to do its part. To date, IBWC has shown a reluctance to look outside the levees.

Although the agency is leaning towards a preferred alternative that calls for many ecological enhancements within the levees, it has yet to do the kind of analysis needed to understand what a restored Rio Grande would look like and how it would function. Nor has it done the hydrologic modeling needed to understand the potential for managing floods without raising levees, i.e. non-structural methods. Without these studies, any enhancements may end up being just expensive, short-lived band-aids.

[To learn more about this EIS and other river issues, attend our November 14 meeting; see page 3 for details.]

Roadrunner Ramblings is published six times a year: January, March, May, July, September, and November. Submissions are welcome. Please email copy to nstotz@zianet.com, or call for mailing information. **Next deadline: 31 December.** Printed by **insta-copy printing** on 50% kenaf, 50% PCW recycled chlorine-free paper. Images, except Dale Zimmerman's roadrunner, were obtained from IMSI's Master Clips/Master Photos Collection.

Mesilla Valley Audubon Society
P.O. Box 1645
Las Cruces, NM 88004

Nonprofit Organization
 US Postage Paid
 Las Cruces, NM 88004
 Permit No. 609