



# ROADRUNNER RAMBLINGS

MESILLA VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY

[www.mvaudubon.org](http://www.mvaudubon.org) Vol. 40, No. 4, Fall 2018

## Scheduled Events: Oct, Nov, Dec

### October:

**Saturday, October 13:** *Bird Walk* at Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park. Meet at 8:00 AM, Visitors' Center. CJ Goin guides.

**Wednesday October 17:** *Bird walk.* Beginning Birding at Tellbrook Park, 7:45 AM. Wayne Treers to guide.

**Wednesday, October 17.** *Monthly MVAS Meeting.* Screening of movie *The Big Year*, with Meet and Greet starting at 6:30 PM and movie at 7:00 PM (see Fall Monthly Meetings).

**Saturday, October 20,** *Field Trip* to Percha Dam State Park. Meet at 6:00AM at old Kmart parking lot (off 70) to carpool.

**Saturday, October 27.** *Bird Walk* at Leasburg State Park. Meet at Visitor's Center at 8:00 AM. CJ Goin to guide.

### November:

**Saturday, Nov 10:** *Bird walk* at Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park. Meet at 8:00 AM, Visitors' Center. CJ Goin to guide.

**Wednesday, November 21,** *Bird walk.* Beginning Birding at Tellbrook Park. 7:45 AM. Wayne Treers is your guide.

**Wednesday, November 21:** *Monthly MVAS meeting* 6:30 PM, Southwest Environmental Center. Bird ID presentation for upcoming field trip to Bosque del Apache.

**Saturday, November 24:** *Bird walk* at Leasburg State Park, meet at Visitor's Center at 8:00 AM. CJ Goin is your guide.

**Saturday, November 24:** *Field Trip* to Bosque del Apache Wildlife Refuge. See details under Field Trips

### December:

**Saturday, December 8:** *Bird walk* at Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park. Meet at 8:00 AM, Visitors' Center. CJ Goin is your guide.

**Wednesday, December 12:** *Monthly meeting.* Discuss Christmas Bird Count, MVAS election nominations.

**Saturday, December 15:** *Field event: Christmas Bird Count.* See details below.

**Wednesday, December 19:** *Bird walk.* Beginning Birding at Tellbrook Park 7:45 AM. Wayne Treers is your guide.

**Saturday, December 29:** *Bird walk* at Leasburg State Park, meet at 8:00 AM at visitor's center. CJ Goin is your guide.

**Drama at Dripping Springs:** see page 6 for details...



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## Fall Monthly Meetings:

MVAS **October** Monthly Meeting

Our October general meeting is on Wednesday the 17th at the Southwest Environmental Center (SWEC) 275 N. Main St. Las Cruces. We begin at 6:30 pm with a meet & greet period with light refreshments and socializing. At 7:00 pm, we will conduct a short business meeting. After that, the main event of the evening is a screening of

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The Big Year starring Jack Black, Steve Martin and Owen Wilson. Great movie!

We invite you to come and enjoy good food, good wine, good conversation about birds and good friendship all rolled into one! You could hardly come up with a better way to spend a Wednesday evening!



Main St and Las Cruces St). The meet and greet begins at 6:30 PM, the meeting itself will begin at 7:00 PM and will feature a bird identification center to help us with some of the lesser known migrating birds that will enlighten our birding in Dona Ana County.

**December 12** (a week early!), we will meet at the Environmental Center to discuss the Christmas Bird Count, which will follow three days later. For full details, please see the article later in this newsletter.

Also, very importantly, at the December monthly meeting the MVAS Board of Directors will present a recommended slate of Officers and Directors for the 2019 term. This is in preparation for our Annual General Membership Meeting on January 16, 2019, at which our annual election is held. Open positions include president, vice-president, and two directorships. Conservation committee chair, publicity chair, and programs chair are open, and they are filled by appointment or volunteering. In this volunteer organization, we all need to contribute to make it work!

**November's** meeting on Wednesday November 15 will be back at the Environmental Center (at the corner of

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### **Scheduled Bird Walks sponsored by the Mesilla Valley Audubon Society: Fall 2018**

MVAS has several excellent, dedicated, and experienced members who have committed to keeping up with the birds of Dona Ana County with their scheduled bird walks at three of the county's best birding hotspots. Anyone is welcome, whether or not he/she is a member of the Audubon Society.

To prepare for a walk, one should wear clothing appropriate for the season. Also, a hat and a bottle of water are nearly essential. If you have a pair of binoculars be sure to bring them. The group leader will have an extra pair or two for loan during the walk from the Mesilla Valley Audubon Society if you don't have a pair of your own.

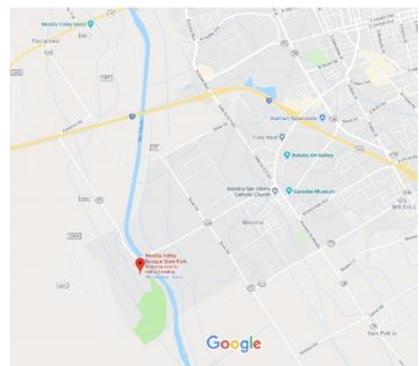
Some people like to check in advance for the birds they might encounter on the walk. This can be done by visiting the eBird website (<https://eBird.org/explore>) and checking the region (Dona Ana County, NM), and the specific hotspot that applies to that day's bird walk..

Finally, prepare to have fun!

#### **#1 Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park**

The second Saturday of the month, Mesilla Valley Audubon Society has scheduled bird walks at Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park. *eBird* reports there have been more species of birds found there than anywhere else in the county. The park encompasses multiple habitats along the Rio Grande and in the desert.

Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park



It has more trails than the other walks. Meet your guide, CJ Goin, at the visitor's center at 8:00AM.

### #2 Tellbrook Park

Tellbrook Park



The second scheduled walk comes the third Wednesday of the month at Tellbrook Park, starting at 7:45 AM at the park entrance. Tellbrook is interesting because it offers several habitats for our birds, with the multiple trees and shrubs leading to a large grassed in area, leading to a more desert oriented area overlook by the nearby arroyo. All birders, but especially beginning birders, are welcome and will find the birds change dramatically with the season. Wayne Treers leads these walks and knows the park very well.

### #3 Leasburg Dam State Park

The Leasburg Dam State Park walk is scheduled for the last Saturday of the month at 8:00 AM, beginning at the park visitor's center.

Leasburg Dam State Park is 20 miles north of Las Cruces (exit #19 on I-25) and is where an exciting array of birds may be found. It contains the only section of the Rio Grande in our region that has some water year-round, made possible by a natural hot water spring just below the dam. It too has a varied environment that is home to many birds, with the riverside area blending in with the picnic area, Mogollon Trail, and a cliffside walk as well.



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## Upcoming MVAS Field Trips

### October

On Saturday, October 20th, the MVAS heads to **Percha Dam State Park** in Arrey NM. We will meet at the parking lot of the old K-Mart off US 70 at 06:00 hours to leave at 06:15. Sunrise in Arrey that day is 07:17, so this will give us time to get there in time for some good morning birding without having to get up too egregiously early. Bring more water than you think you'll need, sunscreen, maybe insect repellent, a broad-brimmed hat plus comfortable walking clothes and shoes are all pretty much requisite. If you need binoculars, MVAS has some that I will bring along. For lunch, we can stop at either the Arrey Café or Sparky's in Hatch. More Info: mpndltn@gmail.com (OCT Field Trip in subject line) or call him at 575.635.8711

### November

On the 24th (the Saturday after Thanksgiving), our Field Trip will be to the **Bosque del Apache NWR** in San Antonio NM. The trip leader will be Jay Wilbur who will concentrate on waterfowl. This is the weekend after the Festival of the Cranes, so there still should be lots of waterfowl and Cranes about, but fewer people. For anyone going up the day before, meet us at the Visitor Center at 08:00 hours. For those making a long day trip of it, meet in the old K-Mart parking lot at 05:00 to leave at 05:15 hours. Carpooling arrangeable on spot. I suggest lunch at either the Owl Bar and Café or the Buckhorn Tavern (both in San Antonio.) More Information: jay@jaysplanet.info 512.632.4196

## December—LAS CRUCES CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT ON DEC. 15<sup>TH</sup>

Our Las Cruces Christmas Bird Count (CBC) will be held on **Saturday, December 15, 2018** from sunrise to sunset.

The Christmas Bird Count (CBC) is a census of birds in the Western Hemisphere, performed annually in the early Northern-hemisphere winter by volunteer birdwatchers and administered by the National Audubon Society. The purpose is to provide population data for use in science, especially conservation biology, though many people participate for recreation.

Mesilla Valley Audubon Society (MVAS) has been sponsoring this CBC for 44 years. Our CBC circle encompasses a varied habitat for birds – from a riparian corridor to agricultural fields to suburb areas to desert scrubland. This diverse habitat has often yielded over 130 species during the CBC.

MVAS will hold a pre-CBC meeting on Wednesday, December 12<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 PM at the Southwest Environmental Center (SWEC) facility at 275 N. Main St. The meeting provides an opportunity for team members to discuss final arrangements for the count day.



We have 13 teams of birders that cover the Las Cruces CBC circle. Please consider joining us in locating and counting birds on Dec. 15<sup>th</sup> and make a big contribution to citizen science. If you are new to the CBC, we will find a team that you can bird with. If interested, contact Wayne Treers (coordinator and compiler for the Las Cruces CBC) at [way1mike@yahoo.com](mailto:way1mike@yahoo.com) or phone him at 575-528-8696.

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## Las Cruces is for the (migrating) birds

By **ELAINE STACHERA SIMON**

For birdwatchers (aka “birders”), migration season means the heart beats a little faster and binoculars are always close to hand!

Spring and fall are the migration seasons, and about 50-60 percent of bird species migrate. In spring, birds follow the temperate weather for breeding and finding newly abundant food in northern climates.

In the fall, birds head to the tropics to escape severe winters and the accompanying lack of food.



According to Wayne Treers, Mesilla Valley Audubon Society (MVAS) board member, Las Cruces is on the Central Flyway, one of four major flyways in North America: the Pacific, the Central, the Mississippi, and the Atlantic. New Mexico is one of 10 states and two Canadian provinces along the Central Flyway, which begins in Canada extends roughly the width of Texas from the northern to the southern U.S. borders. Bird migration is one of the wonders of the natural world (beautifully presented in the Academy Award-nominated film, “Winged Migration”). Treers notes that both physiological and environmental signals trigger the migratory instinct in our feathered friends. Shorter days prompt

migratory restlessness, caused by hormone production, dwindling food (fewer insects), and cooler weather, and birds store fat on their bodies in preparation for a long flight.

Some species travel in family groups, and the young learn where they can stop, rest and feed. Others rely on instinct alone, their internal “clock” that tells them when to go, the way to go, and for



how long to fly. Migrating birds orient themselves using the sun, the stars (for night-migrating birds), natural and man-made landmarks, sound (for example, the sound of wind in the mountains and waves on the coast), and the Earth’s magnetic field. The bright colors and beauty of migrating warblers make them especially sought-after sightings during migration season. What warblers can we expect to see here in Doña Ana County? Wilson’s, Yellow-rumped, and Yellow Warblers are the most common autumn visitors, but also be on the lookout for Common Yellowthroats, Yellowbreasted



Chats, Blackthroated Gray, Virginia’s Warblers, Black and White Warblers, American Redstarts, and Cassin’s and Warbling Vireos. To take advantage of migration season, the best advice, according to Mesilla Valley Audubon Society board member CJ Goin, is to go on a bird walk led by an MVAS member. Goin regularly leads bird walks the second Saturday of the month at the Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park (MVBSP) and the last Saturday of the month at Leasburg Dam State Park (meet at the visitor center at 8 a.m. at both locations). On the third Wednesdays of each month, Wayne Treers leads beginner bird walks at Tellbrook Park (7:45 a.m.).

MVAS bird walks are a great way to become aware of the beauty and diversity of the natural world, but if you prefer to go it alone, take along a pair of binoculars and a field guide (you can borrow one at Branigan Library to get started), and head out to Leasburg, MVBSP, or Holloman Lakes (for migrating water birds). (Farther afield, the famous arrival of the easy-to-spot Sandhill



Cranes and many species of geese and ducks begins in October/November at the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, just south of Socorro).

For updated information on bird walks and other MVAS activities, like them on Facebook ([www.facebook.com/ MesillaValleyAudubon-Society](http://www.facebook.com/MesillaValleyAudubon-Society)) or come to a monthly meeting, every third Wednesday at 6:30 p.m. at the Southwest Environmental Center, 275 N. Main St.

Wishing you good birding!

*Elaine Stachera Simon is a Las Cruces freelance writer. Contact her at [goodwordforyou@ yahoo.com](mailto:goodwordforyou@yahoo.com).*

PHOTOS COURTESY CJ GOIN. In order of their appearance above: Cassin’s Vireo, Western Sandpiper, Hammond’s Flycatcher, and Olive-sided Flycatcher.

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## ANOTHER CITIZEN SCIENCE OPPORTUNITY! From Mark Pendleton

I don't know about you, but I get excited about C.S. (Citizen Science)! The idea that by getting out in nature, observing and reporting data, I can contribute to an improved understanding of the world around us gets my adrenaline going.

There is a C.S. opportunity coming in January that you know about. It's the National Audubon Society (NAS) Climate Watch Pilot Program. And you take part by going out and counting birds.

Here are the details. Given the rates of climate change, NAS predicts that in about 40-50 years, habitat in many areas will change so that it will not support the same species as it does now. They want to establish a baseline picture of what species are where now so that in 40-50 years, scientists can look back and track any changes.

Two groups of birds, Bluebirds and Nuthatches have been selected as target species. Plotting how they are affected by habitat change can tell scientists much about how other species are as well.

Here's where the C.S. comes in. NAS has divided the country into 10 sq. km. grids. This will be the third year in which teams of MVAS volunteers have gone out and counted birds in some of those grids in our area. January and June are when these counts occur. In June, there are not enough Bluebirds or Nuthatches around in southern NM to make it worthwhile. But in January there are.

It works like this: A team goes out to their grid and spends a morning going to a dozen points they have already chosen and spends five minutes at each one identifying birds. They list all the birds they can positively identify by sight or sound. Then they move to the next point. This technique is called "point counting". At the end of the day, the team sends their results to the NAS Climate Watch Coordinators.

You may wonder if you only count Bluebirds and Nuthatches. The answer is "NO!" Although those are the target species in this survey, you count every bird you can identify.

The instructions are that all counts should be concluded by 12:00 noon. Some other stipulations are that each count point must be at least 100 meters away from any other points; teams also need to strictly adhere to the five-minute limit per count point; and the final requirement is that you must have fun!

This is a great way to get out and see some of the amazing outdoors that surrounds here in New Mexico. So, it's never hard to fulfill the last imperative!

If this appeals to you, or if you have any questions, please email me at [mpndltn@gmail.com](mailto:mpndltn@gmail.com) and put CLIMATEWATCH in the subject line. You can also call me at 575.635.8711 I look forward to hearing from you.



## Photos

We had a rush of photos as the publication date approached. Great work. Keep 'em coming! Send them to [SidWebb@gmail.com](mailto:SidWebb@gmail.com), and please provide your name, species, date taken, and general location, and a brief description.

For starters, check out these awe-inspiring photos by renowned photographer Nagamany Nirmalakhandan (Khandan). The drama captured is remarkable.

The setting for his shots was a bird walk at Dripping Springs Natural area, jointly sponsored by MVAS and Friends of Organ Peaks-Desert Monument as part of the annual "Monuments to Mainstreet celebration. Birders initially noticed two golden eagles perched on some rocks on a ridge above the valley where we were walking. An intern who had been working with Dripping Springs for the summer noted that the eagles had been "hanging around" all summer long. One of the hikers, Khandan, noted he had to leave early and headed for his car. However, Khandan lingered there just long enough to witness and photograph the excitement of the incoming eagle and then shared it with the rest of us. Thank you very much, Khandan!





Nagamany Nirmalakhandan, Dripping Springs Natural Area, 9/26/2018

Other great shots:



C.J. Goin, Black Tailed Gnatcatcher, Dripping Springs.  
9/22/2018



C.J Goin, American Pipit, Dripping Springs, 9/22/2018



Mark Pendleton, Painted Redstart, 9/15/2018



Diane Moore. Red Tailed Hawk. Young Canyon, Cloudcroft 9/22/2019.



Sid Webb. Western Tanager. High Rolls, NM. 9/22/2018

For more Photos, updated Program announcements, Bird walk news, or for new information on Field Trips, visit us on Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/MesillaValleyAudubonSociety/>

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Finally, for anyone going to Albuquerque, a little side trip:

## Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge

Driving through greater metropolitan Albuquerque is enough to make any resident of Las Cruces happy he lives in Southern New Mexico. Driving there is no fun...unless you follow the sign that direct you to the Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge. This newest of NM's federal wildlife refuges is a 500-acre sanctuary on the east side of the Rio Grande, encompassing a vast section of an old dairy farm and an area of Rio Grande Bosque, with its huge, ancient cottonwoods. It lies just north of where I-25 crosses the Rio Grande as one approaches Albuquerque. This new wildlife preservation center came to be in 2014 when a long-term dairy farmer donated his land to the federal government and remaining local residents came together to form a Friends Group to make sure the beauty and richness of this area did not succumb to urban squalor. Audubon NM was one of the corporate sponsors for this project.

When I visited in September an energetic warden, just 2 days on the job, directed me through the vast fields to the Bosque. As I drove by, Canada Geese arose from the field, while a multitude of flycatchers were oblivious to me as they took care of the innumerable insects around them. A lonely cattle egret was nice enough to pose for a photo.

The Bosque itself was overwhelming. After passing through a gate, one has to walk 400 yards before seeing water (the Middle Rio Grande still has water in it year-round!). It was quite muddy after some recent rains. The Bosque itself was vast and offered hi cover to all the resident wildlife. At noontime, there was not a whole lot of activity, although along a canal there were still some gray vireos doing their thing. There was only one other person visiting at that time.

Since 2010 the Fish and Wildlife service has rededicated its National Wildlife Refuges. They are now looking for ways to conserve areas close to urban populations and invite everybody out to enjoy what they have saved. They especially want to include children in this effort, given their belief that developing their interest in conservation and wildlife will pay multiple rewards for the future.

Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge was a real surprise for me. It was well worth the stop. It's yours to enjoy.



Sid Webb

Sid Webb, Cattle Egret, Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge, 9/9/2018

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**Roadrunner Ramblings** is published quarterly and is distributed via the web. A copy is mailed to all MVAS members and a copy is posted on the MVAS website. All members of MVAS are encouraged to submit any article of interest to the group and any bird photograph recently taken. Please email a copy to [sidwebb@gmail.com](mailto:sidwebb@gmail.com) (tel: 575 915-5017). To be added to the distribution list, contact [dmoorelms@yahoo.com](mailto:dmoorelms@yahoo.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.

Board meetings are held on the Thursday before the 3rd Wed at 5:30 pm at the Southwest Environmental Center on the downtown mall. All Audubon members are welcome.

**JOIN AUDUBON NOW!**

- National Membership (special for new members only): Join both the National Audubon Society and Mesilla Valley Audubon Society for the introductory rate of \$20 for your first year of membership. This is a \$15 savings. You'll receive both *Audubon Magazine* and *Roadrunner Ramblings*. Make check payable to National Audubon Society.
- Local Chapter Membership: Join, or renew your membership in, Mesilla Valley Audubon Society for \$15 per year. You'll receive *Roadrunner Ramblings* and be eligible for member-only events such as bird identification classes. Make check payable to Mesilla Valley Audubon Society.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ email: \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Send this form with your check to

Membership MVAS

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Las Cruces, NM 88004