

ROADRUNNER RAMBLINGS

Volume 31, No. 6. Nov.-Dec. 2009

President's Message

by David Griffin, MVAS President

"Out of the clouds I hear a faint bark, as of a far-away dog. It is strange how the world cocks its ears at that sound, wondering. Soon it is louder: the honk of geese, invisible, but coming on....When the flock is a blur in the far sky I hear the last honk, sounding taps for the summer."

- November in *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There*, by Aldo Leopold

As I was walking back from the mailbox recently I too heard a faint sound coming from faraway and high in the northeastern sky. I stopped in my tracks and instinctively cupped my hands behind my ears to help locate and amplify the sound. I swung to the right, and then slightly back to the left, lifted my head a bit higher and there—coming from the northeast the sound grew louder—I remained still and after a very difficult search of miles of open blue sky located the pattern: a pointed and inverted "V" coming right toward our house. One side of the "V" was shorter than the other, and there was no mistaking the birds making that guttural rattling sound: Sandhill Cranes! At once I began to count the birds as they slowed their flight and circled three times right over me, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5...as if answering my wish for them to slow down so I could all the more enjoy their passing...23, 24, 25..., beginning to continue their flight to the southwest, 61, 62, 63, 64...and as the last bird (#86) trailed nearly out of sight I could only faintly hear their bugling calls. For me, the migration of Sandhill Cranes marks the beginning of fall and winter in the Mesilla Valley. During the next two days I counted 191 cranes passing over and heading southwest, and there may still be a few more to follow. These cranes are likely heading to wintering grounds in northern Mexico or perhaps near Wilcox, Arizona.

For us in southern New Mexico, November and December on the MVAS calendar means we're heading into the Christmas Bird Count season. This year marks our 32nd year for conducting the Las Cruces CBC and we hope to make it one of the best. See CBC article for more information about this years' count.

It's been a good year for MVAS; we've kept busy focusing on our mission to be a conservation and natural history organization that promotes the appreciation and conservation of birds and other wildlife, and their habitats, through environmental education, issue advocacy and natural history experiences. We've accomplished a lot with our education programs and had great field trips and monthly presentations, and I'd just like to say thanks to the MVAS Board and officers, and to the MVAS members who've volunteered their time or shared their expertise with us in 2009.

Christmas Bird Count

Join Citizen Scientists from all over the western hemisphere and participate in Audubon's 110th Christmas Bird Count. This will be MVAS's 32nd year conducting the Las Cruces Christmas Bird Count. This years' Las Cruces CBC will take place on Saturday, 19 December 2009.

CBCs are simple: we count all birds seen or heard within a 15-mile-diameter circle. The Las Cruces CBC covers all areas from Dripping Springs in the east to the Rio Grande in the west and from grasslands near Jornada Road in the north to agricultural fields in the south. Our count is consistently within the top 5 in the state in terms of number of species observed (about 120+ species). If you think birding all day may be a bit too much, you can always opt to stay home and count birds at your feeders or in your yard. We typically have between 30 and 40 participants whose skills range from rank beginners to well-seasoned birders. Upon completion of the day we'll meet for a nice dinner and begin to tally our results.

If you think you might be interested in participating or for more information contact David Griffin a.s.a.p. at GriffinBio@gmail.com or 382-2080.

Also, a few MVAS members will be participating in other regional CBCs, and organizers of these CBCs may also be looking for additional participants. **The Caballo CBC** will be **2 January 2010**; contact John Douglas (541-0133, jlddouglas@zianet.com). The Caballo CBC typically ranks #1 as far as number of species in NM, and is an exciting way to spend a chilly winter day. The **La Luz CBC** takes places on the western slopes of the Sacramento Mtns, north of Alamogordo and has some beautiful scenery and can have some interesting mountain birds. The date of this count is not known yet, but for more information contact John Mangimeli at mangimeli@zianet.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.

Name _____

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City _____

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C9ZQ540Z

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.



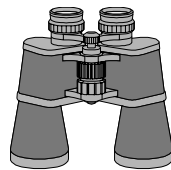
Programs

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.

Habitat Fragmentation and Burrowing Owls. November 18. Monique De Vries, NMSU Master's Student in Geography and 2009 recipient of the MVAS Richard Bischoff Memorial Scholarship will discuss her research on the effect of habitat fragmentation on Burrowing Owl nest productivity in grasslands across the Great Plains.

Las Cruces CBC and Winter Birds. December 16. David Griffin, MVAS President and Las Cruces Christmas Bird Count Compiler, will briefly explain the history and methods of the CBC and go through an extensive collection of bird photos of likely species for the count. We'll organize CBC teams, receive information packets with maps and checklists, and prepare for the upcoming count.



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.

Otero Mesa. November 21. We'll spend a long day out visiting one of southern New Mexico's crown jewels: the Chihuahuan Desert grasslands of Otero Mesa. Come along and see the incredible scenery and biological diversity that MVAS and other conservation groups have been working to protect. Explore extensive grasslands as we look for rare wintering species like Grasshopper and Baird's sparrows, and Sprague's Pipits. We'll be sure and scan the far reaches for glimpses at raptors and Pronghorn. We'll also visit the ruins of an historic stage stop along the old Butterfield Trail at the foot of Alamo Mountain.

Note: this will be a long day of driving (approximately 3 hours each way) with bouts of walking on dirt roads and through

open grasslands, as well as some hiking across rocky slopes. Be prepared with sturdy footwear, warm garments (think layers), and bring food and water. High clearance vehicles recommended.

To register for this trip or for further information, contact David Griffin by Thursday November 19 at 575-382-2080, or GriffinBio@gmail.com.

32nd Annual Las Cruces CBC. December 19. Join your team to survey and count birds in your Christmas Bird Count circle area. Meet for an end-of-the-day compilation dinner to learn about count results (time and location of dinner to be determined and will be announced at the November and December chapter meetings). See article on page 1 for more info and for details on other regional counts.

Welcome New Members

Ann Schvaneveldt
M.J. Flynn
Shirley Rice
Diane Taylor
Mary McGarry
Brenda Mitchell
Paula Johnson
Mary Baugh
Jo E. Flint
Geri Jackson
Linda Sanchez
Sylvia Hacker
Valerie Cloud
Rudolph Sandoval
Yolanda Alexander
Trista & Wesley Fussner



Steven D'Amato

Festival of the Cranes Bosque del Apache NWR

November 17-22



www.friendsofthebosque.org/crane
or
575-835-2077

Field Trip Reports

Bird Notes

Species	Date	Location	Observers
Calliope Hummingbird	8/26; 10/01	Las Cruces	LS; JD
Eastern Kingbird	8/27	MVBSP	CJ
Townsend's Warbler	8/29	MVBSP	CJ
Bell's Vireo	9/04	Las Cruces	SWH
Costa's Hummingbird	9/05	Las Cruces	SWH
Barn Owl	9/05; 9/30	MVBSP; Lake valley	BR; AT
Macgillivray's Warbler	9/08	Percha	BJ
American Goldfinch	9/08	Percha	BJ
Cassin's Vireo	9/08	Las Cruces	CJ
Scott's Oriole	9/09	Las Cruces	AS
Warbling Vireo	9/09	MVBSP	CJ
Peregrine Falcon	9/10; 9/27	MVBSP	CJ; LS,EW
Anna's Hummingbird	9/11	Las Cruces	LH
Vermilion Flycatcher	9/12; 10/16	MVBSP; LC Dam	CJ; NS
Olive-sided Flycatcher	9/20	Las Cruces	LS
Pine Siskin	9/21; 10/13	Las Cruces	LH; DG
Western Scrub-Jay	9/03; 9/21	LC Dam; Las Cruces	NS; LH
Eurasian Collared Dove	9/23; 9/30	Las Cruces	CK; MB
Northern Goshawk	9/23	MVBSP	CJ
Western Scrub-jay	9/23; 9/30	MVBSP; Buena Vida Park	CJ; HH
Dickcissel	9/24	LC Dam	NS
Solitary Sandpiper	9/24; 10/4	LC Dam; Swan Pond	NS; DG
Hermit Thrush	9/24; 10/03	Las Cruces	SWH; LH
Northern Parula	9/27	MVBSP	CJ
Western Kingbird	9/27	MVBSP	LS, EW
Dusky Flycatcher	9/27	MVBSP	LS, EW
Cassin's Kingbird	9/30	MVBSP	AT
Common Ground-Dove	9/30	Tortugas Dam	AT
Ovenbird	9/30	Percha Creek	AT
Hutton's Vireo	9/30	Lake Valley	AT
Clay-colored Sparrow	9/30	Las Cruces	AT
Anna's Hummingbird	10/01; 10/02	Las Cruces	JD; NS
White-faced Ibis	10/02	LC Dam	NS
Black-necked Stilt	10/02	LC Dam	NS
Snowy Egret	10/02	LC Dam	NS
Dark-eyed Junco	10/02	LC Dam	NS
Red-headed Woodpecker	10/02	Rincon / Hatch	JD
Red-breasted Nuthatch	10/03	Las Cruces	LH
Violet-crowned Hummingbird	10/04	Las Cruces	DG
Vaux's Swift	10/04	Swan Pond	DG
Greater Yellowlegs	10/04	Swan Pond	DG
Bank Swallow	10/04	Swan Pond	DG
Gray Catbird	10/08	Las Cruces	JMRH
Long-billed Dowitcher	10/09	Swan Pond	LS
Virginia Rail	10/09; 10/16	Swan Pond; LC Dam	LS; NS
Black-crowned Night Heron	10/09	Swan Pond	LS
Lesser Yellowlegs	10/09	Swan Pond	LS
Blue Grosbeak	10/09	Swan Pond	LS
White-throated Sparrow	10/13; 10/24	Las Cruces; MVBSP	DG; CJ
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	10/13	Las Cruces	DG
Black-tailed Gnatcatcher	10/13	Las Cruces	DG
Anna's Hummingbird	10/13	Las Cruces	DG
Western Scrub-jay	10/13	Las Cruces	DG
Brown Thrasher	10/15	Las Cruces	SWH
American Bittern	10/18	MVBSP	CJ
Ferruginous Hawk	10/18	MVBSP	CJ

Observers: Mildred Barton, John Douglas, CJ Goin, David Griffin, Harold Harrison, Sue & Wally Hill, Landy Hinesley, Barbara Jackson, Clare Kapner, Jackye Meinecke/Robert Hull, Barb Rodriguez, Lorraine Schulte, Nancy Stotz, Al Trompler, Eleanor Wooten

Please report interesting sightings to Robert Hull at 575-523-8009 or, preferably by email: rwhull@zianet.com

Carlsbad & Vicinity. September 18-20.

Three hearty MVAS members made the long journey to the Carlsbad area to assist Steve West in his 30th year of conducting research on Cave Swallows at Carlsbad Caverns National Park. We had a fantastic time helping Steve and his crew with mist netting and banding Cave Swallows. We captured about 50 birds, one of which turned out to be at least 9.3 years old— one of the oldest swallows in Steve's database! In addition to the banding effort, we enjoyed what we were told was one of the best EVER bat emergences from the cavern. We all watched in awe as at first hundreds, then soon thousands and then tens of thousands of free-tailed bats headed out into the night. We were engulfed in a living swarm of bats. The bats occupied the airspace from our knees to well over 50 feet in the air. The sound of their chirping and clicking was near deafening. After 20 minutes I could feel the temperature of the surrounding air increase a few degrees due to the presence of so many miniature bodies. Watching this natural phenomenon is truly incredible.

Prior to helping Steve we made sure to visit the local birding hotspots of Rattlesnake Springs, Camp Washington Ranch and the Black River Recreation Area. These were hotspots indeed and we had many highlights including Wild Turkeys, two Gray Hawks, a Willow Flycatcher, many Vermilion Flycatchers, Bell's Vireos, Summer Tanagers, a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, Northern Cardinals, an Osprey, Yellow-headed Blackbirds, Red-naped Sapsucker, Lazuli Buntings, Clay-colored Sparrows, two Dickcissels and a lone Ruddy Ground-Dove. On Sunday morning we stopped at Guadalupe Mtns NP and hiked the beautiful McKittrick Canyon, where we enjoyed flowing water, unusual plants such as Texas madrone and Chinkapin oak, and had a lovely chat with a young park intern from Hermosillo, Sonora.

Grassland Raptors & Sparrows. October

24. Fifteen people headed out of Las Cruces to stroll a bit in the grasslands of western Doña Ana County. Our first stop was near the Dona Aña/Luna County line north of I-10. We didn't see many birds

(continued on page 4) See Reports

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

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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

(continued from page 3) **Reports**

here, but what we did see was very nice, in fact our first bird of the day was a Golden Eagle! We walked about a mile into the beautiful grassland scanning in front of us for flushing sparrows (none!). There didn't seem to be much grass seed production and therefore not a lot of sparrows; however, we did manage to see many Horned Larks and quite a few Western and Eastern Meadowlarks. Other raptors included Northern Harrier, Ferruginous Hawk, American Kestrel and Prairie Falcon. A few high-flying Chestnut-collared Longspurs called, but were difficult for all to see.

Our next stop was the grasslands north of the Corralitos Ranch and west toward Magdalena Peak. As usual, this area was much more "birdy" than our first stop and we had many highlights such as Chestnut-collared Longspur (seen by most participants), Mountain Bluebird, Western Bluebird, Sage Thrasher, Pyrrhuloxia, Northern Harrier, Sage Sparrow, Horned Lark, Golden Eagle, Loggerhead Shrike, Sandhill Cranes, and a lone Hammond's Flycatcher. The addition of beautiful weather and one participant's close encounter with a prairie rattlesnake in the deep grass made for a splendid day.



Steven D'Amato

Thanks to all who shared the use of their vehicles we'll see you next time! A list of species observed is available from David Griffin at 382-2080 or GriffinBio@gmail.com.

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: December 15.** 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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US Postage Paid
Las Cruces, NM 88004
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