

ROADRUNNER RAMBLINGS

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Crisis in the Boardroom: MVAS Faces Financial Challenge

By Tim Lawton, MVAS Board Member

The political winds in the National Audubon Society have shifted, and as a result, our chapter, the Mesilla Valley Audubon Society (MVAS), faces a new financial challenge. The problem is of sufficient severity that it threatens the continued existence of MVAS. The essence of the problem is that the National Audubon Society (National) has changed the formula for the amount of each member's annual dues that is returned to the chapter. National formerly returned \$5.50 of each member's dues to the chapter for the purpose of partially financing chapter activities such as field trips, conservation initiatives, chapter meetings, newsletters, and community education. Over the last few years, the dues share, or amount of money returned to the chapters by National, has dropped dramatically.

By the new formula, the amount of dues returned is initially higher if a new member of MVAS is recruited through the chapter. A new member is considered to be a chapter recruit only if he uses the membership form provided in our chapter newsletter. In any event, and this is the clincher, after two years a member is absorbed into national roles and thereafter contributes NO dues share whatsoever to the chapter. Ironically, our longest-term and most active members therefore contribute no money to the chapter through their dues!

This situation is by no means restricted to this chapter. It is affecting all chapters across the country and has hit larger chapters, such as Portland and Denver, harder and earlier. The problem lies in a fundamental change in the way that National regards its relationship with the chapters. The National Audubon Society has historically been somewhat unique among conservation organizations in that it has operated

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Bird ID Course, Now Basic Bird Watching

It's back-to-school time, and, once again, experienced birders from the Mesilla Valley Audubon Society are offering an adult course on the fundamentals of bird watching through the Community Education Program at Doña Ana Branch Community College. The title of the course has been changed from "Bird Identification" to "Basic Bird Watching" to more closely reflect its content. Topics will include bird identification complete with slides of southwestern birds, viewing equipment, birding books and backyard birding.

The four classroom sessions will be held on Tuesday evenings, October 21 & 28, and November 4 & 11, from 7-9 PM, in Room 183, Gerald Thomas Hall, on the NMSU campus. Please note the new location. Gerald Thomas Hall is next door to the north of the Jornada Building, on Knox Street. There will be two half-day Saturday field trips to local birding "hot spots" on October 25 and November 1, and our customary, all-day adventure to the Bosque del Apache on November 8.

The course is #HL103, and the cost is \$40 per person. Class size is limited to 15, so register early. Call DABCC (527-7527) for registration information or MVAS Education Committee Chairman Wendy Davis (527-4551).

Come experience the fun of this popular hobby, and learn about our fascinating, southern New Mexico birds.

Wildlife Crop Proposal

Sandhill Cranes could get a free lunch this year in the Mesilla Valley courtesy of Harris Farms of Mesilla. As many birders have observed, a satellite population of cranes has wintered near Las Cruces for several years foraging in farm fields adjacent to the river. This year Harris Farms hopes to create more Sandhill Crane habitat by planting a 35-acre field of oats, a 6- to 8-inch forage grass. Although barley is more typically planted as forage for cranes, the Harris Farms General Manager has observed cranes foraging in oat fields on his family's farm.

Harris Farms is a key partner in the proposed Mesilla Valley Bosque Park and is interested in increasing habitat value for wildlife on their farm. The oats will be sowed around October and left in place as forage for the cranes until mid-February. The field is located immediately southeast of the Calle del Norte bridge.

Harris Farms is seeking donations to offset production costs totaling about \$4500. If you are interested in making a tax-deductible donation through MVAS or would like more information contact Nancy Stotz at 521-8087 or nstotz@zianet.com.

Expanded Web Site

The MVAS web site (www.cybermesa.com/~mvas/) now has a new education section to highlight all the great projects that we do to help foster environmental education among the children and adults of Las Cruces. You will find this year's winner of the Lorraine Schulte Teaching Award, photos from programs that our Education Committee did in the elementary schools, and winning pictures from our local area from this year's Federal Junior Duck Stamp Program and Scholarship Competition. You will also find the latest information on the Basic Bird Watching Course held in conjunction with the Doña Ana Branch Community College. Please take a look and if you have any comments or suggestions (they will be most appreciated), send them to the webmaster, Rob Davis.

JOIN NOW!

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

Name _____
Address _____
City _____
State _____ Zip _____
Email _____

Q54
7XCH

Send this application and your check to:

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



7:30 PM News, announcements, and information begin at 7:00, preceding the program.

Programs

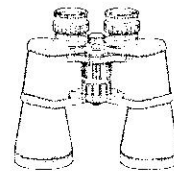
Programs and meetings are held each month. September April, at the Village at Northrise, Hallmark Building, 2882 N. Roadrunner Pkway, Las Cruces. Programs begin at

Reptiles of Southern New Mexico.

September 17. The onset of the fall bird migration in southern New Mexico also sees increased movement of our indigenous reptile population, come rain or not. Frank Bryce (US Fish & Wildlife Service, retired) and Vanessa Bryce (NMSU student) will offer their insight into reptile ecology and safety, and will illustrate their comments with living snakes and lizards. If you're planning to be out in the field birding this fall, this is a must-see program. Come learn what might be underfoot while you're looking skyward!

San Andres National Wildlife Refuge.

October 15. Surrounded by military lands which preclude unescorted public access, the existence of this refuge, just northeast of town, is a surprise to many Las Cruces. Since its establishment in 1941, this 57,215-acre refuge was managed to sustain healthy populations of desert bighorn sheep. More recently, this focus was expanded to preserve the unique Chihuahuan Desert ecosystem for variety of species including mule deer, mountain lions, and golden eagles. Refuge Manager Kevin Cobble will update us on refuge activities and brainstorm with us about potential outreach activities to help more Las Cruces learn about this refuge in our own backyard.



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.

Katfish Kove. September 20. This privately owned site along the Mimbres River northeast of Deming used to be a gravel quarry; now it has some small marshy ponds and numerous cottonwood trees that should host a good collection of migrants this time of year. We'll be leaving from Guacamole's (3995 W. Picacho/Hwy 70) at 7 AM, returning after lunch. Given the size of the site, walking will be limited. For more information, contact Harold Harrison (522-6199 or hharrison@zianet.com).

San Andres Mts. October 11. Dr. Kris Havstad, of the USDA Jornada Experimental Range will be lead us into this mountain range where desert and foothill habitats merge, and natural springs provide riparian oases. To participate, meet at the stone pillars denoting the entrance to the Jornada Experimental Range (6 miles north of Highway 70 on Jornada Road) at 6:30 AM. Four-wheel drive vehicles, lunch and water are encouraged; we'll carpool and return to the pillars by 1 PM. For more information, contact Kris Havstad (646-4842 or khavstad@jomada.nmsu.edu).

Welcome New Members

Dave Flowers
Mark Aspelin
Walter R. Kazmier
Michelle Santisteban



State Board To Host Las Cruces Reception

The board of directors of Audubon New Mexico invites you to a reception on Friday, October 3 from 5:00 to 6:30 PM in the Cottonwood Gallery of the Southwest Environmental Center, 275 North Downtown Mall, Las Cruces. Refreshments will be served.

David Henderson, Executive Director of Audubon New Mexico, will speak about the progress being made to create the Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park and the role Audubon could play in providing education programs in the Park.

For more information, please contact Kim Straus at Audubon New Mexico in Santa Fe, (505) 983-4609 or kstraus@audubon.org. For directions to the Southwest Environmental Center, please call (505) 522-5552.

Field Trip Report

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Chiricahua Mts. August 15-17. The trip was very good. We saw 39 species, including the Short-tailed Hawk that had come up from Mexico. People came from far and near to view the hawk. The weather was hot and the whole area was very dry, without many birds around because of the lack of water. We did see Couse, Whitetail and Mule deer plus javelina and a cute camp skunk.

Ed Mayfield

through local organizations called chapters. The chapters have operated some what autonomously, determining through negotiation with state offices and National the types of conservation and educational activities they will undertake. National in turn has asked that each chapter hold a certain number of field trips and meetings each year. Now National is moving toward a more centralized, top-down style of management. In this format, members are essentially relegated to the status of donors through the dues they pay and money they bequeath to the organization. In addition, National is more actively

determining what kinds of activities take place in chapter regions. For example, it has mandated that there will be a certain number of regional Audubon Nature Centers in place by 2020.

Without really realizing it, I have always preferred the chapter style of management. It provides a social setting in which to interact with people who have similar interests. This interaction takes place on birding trips, bird counts, monthly meetings, and occasional dinner events. Over the 40-odd years that I have been a member of the National Audubon Society, chapter activities in various parts of the country influenced my interests as a youngster and got me through some hard personal times during the sometimes stormy ride toward middle age.

Who will lead bird trips if the chapter disappears for lack of funding? Who will pay for the printing and mailing of the newsletter? Who will run the monthly meetings? The short answer is that chapter activities and products will likely disappear. They might be replaced by a nature center and affiliated activities operated by National or the State office in Santa Fe. Such a center would have definite benefits for the community, but it is hard to imagine that facilities operated from a larger bureaucracy will be highly responsive to the wishes of current chapter members.

What can we do? There are a couple of potential solutions to the impending financial crisis in the chapter. Some members of the board have become chapter-only members, paying their dues directly to the chapter (using the newsletter form) each year. These members no longer receive *Audubon* magazine, but all of their dues money goes directly to the chapter. The second solution is to donate directly to the chapter each year. If you want to remain a member of National, but also provide financial support for our local chapter, you could renew with National when they send you a renewal notice, and also send a donation directly to MVAS at the same time to support our local activities.

There is also a longer-term solution taking shape. A nationwide movement called Take Back Audubon (TBA) has arisen in some of the chapters. This movement has the objective of electing a National Board of Directors sympathetic

Bird Notes

Species	Date	Location	Observers
Yellow-crowned Night-Heron	6-23	Las Cruces	JH
Varied Bunting	7-13;24	La Cueva	JoD; GE
Semipalmated Sandpiper	7-18	Deming	MS/JZ
Northern Harrier-male	7-18	Isaac's Pond	W/SH
Lark Sparrow	7-18;27; 8-25	Isaac's Pond;Las Cruces	W/SH;NS; LS
Hooded Oriole	7-27	Las Cruces	LS
Surf Scoter	7-30;8-3	Holloman	MS,JZ; JoD
Tri-colored Heron	7-31	Deming	MS,JZ
Eurasian Collared-Dove	8-3	Radium Springs	MS,JZ
Painted Bunting	8-4;7;8	WSMR;Radium Spgs;WSTF	MW; MS/JZ; JID,HH,AS
Chipping Sparrow	7-31;8-4; 25	Dripping Springs;WSTF	LS; JD,HH,AS; LS
Lark Bunting	7-28;8-4;21	Las Cruces;WSTF;WSMR	NS; HH; DG
Brown Pelican	8-5	Elephant Butte	MS/JZ
Reddish Egret	8-5	Elephant Butte	MS/JZ
Black-throated Gray Warbler	8-8	WSTF	JID,HH,AS
Yellow Warbler	8-8;23	WSTF;Las Cruces	JID,HH,AS;W/SH
Prothonotary Warbler	8-8	WSTF	JID, HH, AS
Willow Flycatcher	8-13;23	Talavera;Las Cruces	TL;W/SH
Western Wood-Pewee	8-14	Las Cruces	LS
Wilson's Warbler	8-19	Las Cruces	DG
MacGillivray's Warbler	8-11; 21	Talavera;Las Cruces	TL;DG
Orange-crowned Warbler	8-22	Las Cruces	DG
Townsend's Warbler	8-23	Las Cruces	DG

Observers: Jim Dawson, John Douglas, Gordon Ewing, David Griffin, Jannette Hale, Harold Harrison, Wally/Sue Hill, Tim Lawton, Amanda Scarsguard, Lorraine Schulte, Nancy Stotz, Mara Wisenberger, Marcy Scott/Jimmy Zabriskie

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

New Mexico Rare Bird Hotline 505-323-9323
or <http://mvar.nmsu.edu/nmos/>

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

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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	Walt Whitford	521-1358
Vice-president	Guy Powers	373-3843
Secretary	Donna Wood	525-8704
Treasurer	Barb Rodriguez	523-1548
Board (01-03)	Tim Lawton	522-2056
Board (01-03)	Nancy Stotz	521-8087
Board (02-04)	Harold Harrison	522-6199
Board (02-04)	Rob Davis	527-4551
Board (03-05)	Wendy Davis	527-4551
Board (03-05)	Sue Hill	382-9758

COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Audubon Adventures	Lorraine Schulte	524-7029
Audubon Council	Rob Davis	527-4551
Delegates	Guy Powers	373-3843
Conservation	Nancy Stotz	521-8087
Education	Wendy Davis	527-4551
Field Trips	Ed Mayfield	382-0715
Programs	board at large	
Membership	Harold Harrison	522-6199
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.cybermesa.com/~mvas/.

(continues on page 3) **Crisis**

to the needs of the chapters and supportive of a chapter-driven national organization. This will be done using proxy votes given to the chapters each year to elect the new board. The TBA group intends to use those proxy votes to elect a Board of Directors with an interest in preserving the National-Chapter relationship more or less as it has existed in the past. This solution appears to be the one that will ensure the future health of the chapters and will hopefully create a better relationship with National than currently exists. If you are interested in the TBA agenda, log on to its website: www.smbas.org/tba. The board of directors of MVAS has endorsed TBA and we hope to use our chapter's proxy votes at the next Annual Meeting of the National Audubon Society in December to vote for reform resolutions and to elect National board members who support reform.

MVAS is one of the most active chapters in the state. We support the largest number of Audubon Adventures educational classrooms in New Mexico, run monthly field trips and meetings, and we support and initiate local conservation programs that we feel are in the membership's and community's interests. We have come to take for granted the autonomy we enjoy and exercise in our decisions as a chapter. That autonomy and the very existence of the chapter are now on the line, and we, as members of the chapter, need to make our wishes for the future of the National Audubon Society known through our voices and our votes.

The MVAS board would like to know your views on this rather complicated matter. Please feel free to contact one of us at the phone numbers posted to the left for further information and to share your opinion on dues structure and the TBA agenda.

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: 27 October.** Printed by **insta-copy printing** on 50% kenaf, 50% PCW recycled chlorine-free paper. Images, except Dale Zimmerman's roadrunner, are from IMSI's Master Clips/Master Photos® Collection.

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