



# ROADRUNNER RAMBLINGS

www.mvaudubon.org

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## 48 Birders in Las Cruces CBC Collect Some Records

Mesilla Valley Audubon Society Newsletter

Many thanks to the 48 people who participated in our Las Cruces CBC on Dec. 20. We now have 40 years of early winter bird data for the whole world to see (1975-2014)! You can peruse the historical data of our past CBC's via the Christmas Bird Count link at the National Audubon Society website (www.audubon.org).

We had a beautiful, clear, warm day for the CBC – a huge improvement over last year's cold, windy, cloudy and wet weather. It appears that because of the nice weather, birders walked more than last year. This year's total bird count (35,117 individuals) and total species count (117) were both up significantly from last year's numbers (30,739 and 107, respectively).

Ten unusual species were recorded on this year's count: Blue-winged Teal, Harris's Hawk, Broad-billed Hummingbird, Broad-tailed Hummingbird, Lewis's Woodpecker, Hammond's Flycatcher, Plumbeous Vireo, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Fox Sparrow and Bullock's Oriole.

Continuing scarcity of water in the Rio Grande, which was dry for much of its length through the count circle, may have contributed the lowest count of American Pipits we've ever recorded (11 birds vs. an all-time high of 1,148 individuals), as well as an unusually low number of Least Sandpipers (25 vs. an all-time high of 264).

Probably because of the good monsoon rains last year, we set a record for Gambel's Quail (720 individuals). Sparrow numbers were way up last year – 3,547 sparrows of all species (vs. 1,575 last year). Looking at just White-crowned Sparrows, the jump was from 885 during the 2013 count to 2,090 last year. This in spite of the fact that several sparrow species may have been undercounted this year, since one team who birded the foothills, canyons and arroyos of the Organ Mountains reported many sparrows in side canyons and arroyos that they did not have time to walk and count.

### Round 2: Digital Photography Contest & MVAS Calendar

Since our 2015 MVAS calendar was a big hit, we've decided to do it again! Our 2016 calendar will again feature the winners from a digital photography contest focusing on the birds of Doña Ana, Otero, and Sierra counties.

You can submit up to three photos for the contest, anytime prior to the submission deadline of July 15, 2015. All submissions should include information about when and where the photograph was taken. Please email your photos and accompanying details to Mark Pendleton at [mpndltn@gmail.com](mailto:mpndltn@gmail.com).

### NM State Parks Looking for Help with Bird Walks

Both the Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park and the Percha Dam Unit of Caballo State Park are looking for birders who might be willing to lead an occasional bird walk. Scheduling can be flexible, depending on your availability and level of interest. No regular, long-term commitment is required.

To volunteer at Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park, contact Jan Kirwan at [janet.kirwan@state.nm.us](mailto:janet.kirwan@state.nm.us) or 575-523-4398. For Percha, contact Ken Abalos at [ken.abalos@state.nm.us](mailto:ken.abalos@state.nm.us) or 575-520-5770.

### More highlights of the 2014 CBC

1. White-winged Doves count: 8,947 vs. 11,359 in 2013 -- we're still the No. 1 CBC circle in US
2. American Crow count: 9,530 vs. 6,505 a year earlier -- word must be getting around about wintering in Las Cruces' surrounding pecan groves
3. Green-tailed Towhee count: 49 vs. 22 – another record for our CBC
4. House Finch count: 1,671 vs. 1,118 – yet another record
5. Chestnut-collared Longspur count: 120 vs. 80 – which ties a previous record high
6. Yellow-headed Blackbird count: 2 vs. 12 in 2013 – it ties a record low.





## MVAS Scholarship Retrospective

# Kathy Whiteman: Where is She Now?

In 2008, Kathy Whiteman won Mesilla Valley Audubon Society's Richard Bischoff Memorial Scholarship, which provides support for graduate students at NMSU doing conservation-related research as part of their graduate work. Kathy finished her PhD in 2010, and is currently a faculty member at Western New Mexico University in Silver City.

Kathy's dissertation research focused on juniper encroachment in riverside plant communities, and she said, "I am very grateful to MVAS for the scholarship, which funded my dissertation research on plant-water relationships within Gila River riparian areas. As a graduate student, the financial support gave me the opportunity to complete my research and become keenly aware of the importance of connecting people to place."

Though she has written several articles and technical reports relating to native plant conservation, Kathy's primary focus since completing her PhD has been on education and environmental literacy. Prior to starting her position at WNMU,



Kathy was executive director of the Gila Conservation Education Center, which reaches out to students of all ages through classroom visits, field trips, student-centered restoration projects and teacher workshops. In addition to the annual Children's Water Festival, in 2011, under Kathy's leadership, the Center's programs were experienced by over 5000 residents of Grant, Catron, and Hidalgo counties.

As part of her current faculty position at WNMU, Kathy is director of WNMU's Outdoor Program, which exposes a wide range of students to experiential and adventure-based education. WNMU has a high proportion of non-traditional students, ranging from high-school students in dual-enrollment programs to older students, many of whom have had little to no prior experience in nature. The mission of the Outdoor Program is to instill an environmental ethos among students. To this end, Kathy also helped WNMU develop a new minor in Outdoor Leadership Studies to train others how to engage students in hands-on conservation and nature-based experiences.

The MVAS Richard Bischoff Memorial Scholarship was established and gave its first \$1,000 grant in 2007. The scholarship supports graduate student research at New Mexico State University that is consistent with the MVAS mission and promotes natural resource conservation.

An important part of the scholarship requires the recipient to present their results at a regular MVAS meeting. This allows our members to share in some of the latest research in natural resource conservation. This year's winner will present on April 15 (see Program Announcements on page 4).

In order to maintain this scholarship contributions are always needed. Please consider helping MVAS support students engaged in important conservation research at NMSU. Donations can be sent to Mesilla Valley Audubon Society, PO Box 1645, Las Cruces, NM 88004.

### MVAS Richard Bischoff Memorial Scholarship Donation Form

Checks should be made out to  
Mesilla Valley Audubon Society,  
and sent to

Mesilla Valley Audubon Society  
Scholarship Fund  
PO Box 1645  
Las Cruces, NM 88004

Thank you.

Please consider donations in the following increments:

\$20.00  \$35.00  \$50.00  \$75.00  \$100.00

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# March 21 Field Trip to Sandhill Arroyo HOT! HOT!

By Mark Pendleton  
 MVAS Field Trip Coordinator

Discover a local "Hot Spot" for birds at the Saturday March 21 Field Trip to in-town Sandhill Arroyo.

"HotSpot" may be a bit of an exaggeration, but when Wayne Treers and I walked this area, twice recently, we had a list in excess of 30 species.

For the March 21, 2015, field trip, we'll meet at 6:30 a.m. in the cul-de-sac where Mohegan Trail dead ends into the desert beside 4186 Seneca Drive in Las Cruces. This is my address, so we'll be right next to the house which means rest rooms will be available for those who need such. We'll leave at 6:45 a.m. to get in as much time as possible. We'll head roughly SSW along the arroyo. Wear shoes that you don't mind getting sand in or ones that are sand-proof. We will probably be out for 3-5 hours.

This trip has the potential for you to see a wide variety of species; you will get a chance to see the biggest scorpion, if not in all of NM, then at the very least in Las Cruces. The bird species available to see are fairly easy to identify.

If you need more help with directions, please contact Mark for map and directions no later than the March 18 MVAS meeting.

## Upcoming April Field Trip

C.J. Goin will lead the April 18 field trip to a local birding hot spot, **Camp Robledo Primitive Area** at Leasburg Dam State Park. Meet in the SW corner (Nearest the Border Patrol Station) of the parking lot at Lowe's Home Improvement on N. Main at 6:45 a.m. to organize and leave by 7 a.m. We'll arrange carpooling on the spot. Water, snacks, broad-brimmed hat, sunscreen, insect repellent are all good ideas. We will return to Las Cruces by noon or early afternoon. Camp Robledo birding is usually quite good and the park is one of the consistently reliable spots for water in the entire county due to hot springs in the riverbed just below the dam.

*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, sunscreen, hats and binoculars. Announced trips subject to change. To receive updates and reminders, sign up for the field trip email list by contacting Mark Pendleton at mpndltn@gmail.com, 575-635-8711.*

## Say Hi! To Your New Board members

### Jay Wilbur

After retiring from a 40 year career in Information Technology, Jay Wilbur moved to Las Cruces last year with his wife Judy. Jay has a Master's degree in astronomy and originally planned to go into that field. However, the computer industry proved more lucrative. He became a birder about five years ago when Judy decided to rekindle her previous interest in birding. He likes to combine his interest in photography with his passion for birds and maintains a website with photos of the many birds he has seen, [www.jaysplanet.info](http://www.jaysplanet.info).

### Carl Coker

Carl retired as a professor of art and art history after 20 years of teaching at the University of Tulsa. He spent 40 years total in the classroom of multiple institutions of higher learning, including New Mexico State and Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes in Lima, Peru. His work has been exhibited widely and in permanent museum and private collections in several states in addition to NMSU, Las Cruces, Peru and Mexico. He has been a member for some year of national Audubon Society as well as the Cornell Ornithology Labs. Coker received his art education at the Art Students League in New York, the University of North Carolina and the University of New Mexico. He was a doctoral teaching assistant while working on his PhD in studio arts at Illinois State University.

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## MVAS Program Announcements

Mesilla Valley Audubon Society programs are free and open to the public. Our program meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month at 7 p.m. at the Southwest Environmental Center, 275 Downtown Mall. Join the board for refreshments at a 6:30 meet and greet. Presentations follow a brief business meeting.

### March 18 — Chihuahuan Desert Plants

Join us for the final presentation in a three-part series, Meet the Chihuahuan Desert. Patrick Alexander, PhD is a botanist with the Bureau of Land Management and is renowned for his understanding of the flora of our region. Patrick is also a superb photographer and will discuss the major habitats and key plants associated with them in the region.

### April 15 — Effects of Solar Energy Development

Our speaker will be **DeeAnne Meliopoulos**, the winner of last year's Richard Bischoff Memorial Scholarship. Her topic will be "Bird Impacts of Solar Energy Development," specifically the effects of a solar facility on breeding birds in the part of the Chihuahuan Desert Grasslands and Chihuahuan Desert Scrub known in southwest New Mexico as the Nutt Grasslands. She will discuss her findings on avian abundance, nest success and diversity.

Dee Anne earned her bachelor's degree in wildlife at the University of Georgia, her home state. She currently is a graduate student at NMSU.

**To receive newsletter via email,  
contact Judi Schultz, 647-1268  
or [judi626@earthlink.net](mailto:judi626@earthlink.net)**

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## 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 the Mesilla Valley Audubon Society for \$15. You'll receive *Roadrunner Ramblings*. Make check payable to Mesilla Valley Audubon Society.

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