

ROADRUNNER RAMBLINGS

Volume 30, No. 6. Nov-Dec 2008

President's Message

by David Griffin, MVAS President

As I write this over the last days of October, our yard is quickly filling up with returning wintering birds such as Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Lesser Goldfinches, Green-tailed Towhees, and White-crowned Sparrows. These little winter birds are sharing the half-acre with ever-growing coveys of Gambel's Quail. A Cooper's Hawk or two, almost daily now, are raising avian concerns and scattering all of the above-mentioned species. Sandhill Cranes have been flying overhead nearly every day for the last week or so - one group had 85 birds in it. They're probably heading for Wilcox, Arizona or perhaps even Mexico. These observations are sure signs that winter is not too far off. Yet as I looked out my office window a short while ago, I noticed an Inca Dove sitting on a nest high on a bending branch of a white thorn acacia tree. When she moved, I could just make out two tiny, scruffy-feathered heads under her breast! Perhaps no one informed her that summer has passed. Perhaps she knows something about the oncoming winter season that I don't. In either case, it sure seems late to have a couple of nestlings. But the weather has been beautiful with warm days and cool nights, dry air and slight breezes, and recently I've heard more than one Las Cruces resident mention, "this is my favorite time of year." I'd have to agree.

Hopefully by now we've all found out who our new president will be (of the USA, not MVAS!), and I hope the best choice(s) was (were) made for all national and local elections. I'd rather not comment further on the subject just yet, because Election Day is still a week away and I don't own a crystal ball - and if I did, I wouldn't want to spoil it for anyone! November brings us more than just elections, and one thing I'd like to mention is the 21st Annual **Festival of the Cranes**, which will take place November 18 through 23. This year MVAS will have a table and display set up at the Festival from Friday through Sunday (Nov 21-23). We're still looking for volunteers to help staff the table and share MVAS's mission of education and conservation with Festival visitors. Please contact me if you're interested in helping out for a few hours. For more general information about the Festival contact Friends of the Bosque del Apache at 575-835-2077 or visit their website at: www.friendsofthebosque.org/crane.

In December we'll not only have the official beginning to winter to look forward to, but a few things that we've all been waiting for like the Grand Opening of New Mexico State Park's **Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park** on December 13th and our annual Christmas Bird Count. Keep your eyes and ears peeled for local notices announcing the opening of MVBSP; we'll let you know of any news at our monthly chapter meeting in November.

I'm already looking forward to and planning for the New Year. We have some great field trip ideas that might include interesting and productive birding areas in New Mexico, Texas, Arizona, and southeast California. Some of these trips may include some "working" volunteer weekends to help other conservation groups with restoration and/or outdoor education projects.

Conservation Update: Selden Canyon

by Bob Tafanelli, MVAS Conservation Chair

The Trust for Public Land (TPL) has signed an agreement to purchase the Broad Canyon Ranch in Selden Canyon located about 15 miles north of Las Cruces. This ranch borders the Rio Grande for about 1.25 miles and includes Swan Pond as well as about 4,800 acres of Federal and State permitted grazing land. The closing is scheduled for November and the lands will be administered by New Mexico State Parks.

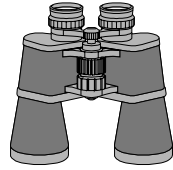
TPL was able to secure funds from the Land and Wildlife Fund, National Park Service, The Nature Conservancy, NM State Parks and capital outlays from Senator Mary Jane Garcia and Representative Jeff Steinborn. In addition, several conservation groups contributed to the fundraising efforts, including Beth Bardwell of World Wildlife Fund.

Selden Canyon is very important bird habitat, especially to the few pairs of Southwestern Willow Flycatcher that attempt to breed there every year. Hopefully this is a step toward additional habitat protection in Selden Canyon as well as bird habitat protection throughout the Rio Grande valley. This is an example of what can be accomplished when we can work together. A big "Thank You" to all involved.

(continued on page 4) President

Welcome New Members

Patty Woodruff
Aldo's Attic



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.

Las Cruces Fall and Early Winter Birds. November 22.

Come practice up for next month's Las Cruces Christmas Bird Count by looking for fall and early winter birds in areas around town. We'll visit familiar places sure to hold cool season birds like NMSU's Lyendecker farm, Mesilla Park, and areas around Mesilla. The trip will depart at 7AM from the Arroyo Plaza parking lot at 2001 E. Lohman Ave (meet near Wild Birds Unlimited). For more information, contact contact David Griffin at 382-2080 or griffinbio@gmail.com.

Winter Sparrows at LC Dam. December 10.

Note: Mid-week trip. We'll bird the north end of the Las Cruces Dam, which is a good place to practice identifying winter sparrows: White-crowns, Lincoln's, Song, Savannahs, Vespers, and Brewer's. The dam's floodpool also supports plenty of wintering raptors including Northern Harriers; Red-tailed, Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks; as well as Kestrels and

resident Burrowing Owls. Meet at the old Tee-Time driving range parking lot (intersection of Del Rey and Telshor/Northrise) at 7:30 AM, and be prepared to walk a couple of miles, some of it in soft sand. We'll be out for about 3 hours, max. For more info, contact Nancy Stotz at 521-8087 or nstotz1@comcast.net.

Programs

Membership meetings and programs are held each month, at the Village at Northrise, Hallmark Bldg., 2882 N. Roadrunner Pkwy. Meetings begin at 7:00 PM.

Programs begin immediately following the business meeting and announcements.



Kangaroo Rats. November 19. Martin Moses, a graduate student in the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife Science at NMSU, and winner of the MVAS Richard Bischoff Memorial Scholarship, will talk about how he is using the banner-tailed kangaroo rat's habitat use and distribution to develop a model of Chihuahuan Desert grassland habitat quality.

Winter Birds and CBC. December 17. We'll spend the evening getting organized for the Christmas Bird Count: reviewing the methods of the count and the species we're likely to encounter.

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 _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

Q54
7XCH

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.

Las Cruces Christmas Bird Count: December 20

This year marks Audubon's 109th year of doing Christmas Bird Counts in North America and MVAS will be conducting our 31st Christmas Bird Count. CBCs are simple: we identify and count all birds observed in a 15-mile diameter circle.

The Las Cruces CBC covers all areas from Dripping Springs in the east to the river on the west, and from the 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 (118 last year). If you think birding all day might be a bit too much, you can always stay at home and count the birds in your yard or at your feeder. Last year we had over 40 people participate in the count whose skills ranged from rank beginners to well-seasoned birders. Upon completion of the count we'll meet for a nice dinner and begin to tally our results for the day.

If you think you might be interested in participating or for more information, please contact David Griffin asap (382-2080 or griffinbio@gmail.com). I'd like to have as many participants registered at least 1 week prior to count day as possible.

Also, some MVAS members will be participating in two other CBCs this year: the **Caballo CBC** will be on Saturday, **December 27th** and the **La Luz-Otero CBC** will be on Tuesday, **December 30th**. The Caballo CBC is centered just west of Caballo Reservoir and typically ranks highest in the state for the number of species observed. The La Luz-Otero CBC covers La Luz Canyon and takes in both desert and mountain canyons in the foothills of the Sacramento Mountains north of Alamogordo. If you're interested in participating in either of these counts, or for more information, contact John Douglas at 575-541-0133 or jiddouglas@zianet.com.

Field Trip Reports

Leasburg and Swan Pond. September 18.

About 15 people were able to join us for a Thursday field trip to look for fall migrants. At our first stop, the south day use area of Leasburg Dam State Park we heard and saw most of the birds of the day: Cliff and Barn Swallows; a few Black Phoebes; Eurasian Collared-, White-winged, Mourning, and Inca Doves; and colorful species like Summer and Western Tanagers, Bullock's Oriole, Wilson's Warbler, and Blue Grosbeak. As we walked north, we caught a glimpse of a Great Blue Heron in the Rio that had caught a very large catfish and was having trouble getting the fish down its throat. At the northern part of the day use area on sandbars downstream from the dam, we saw Killdeer,

Spotted Sandpipers, and an unidentified shorebird. We also had two juvenile Hooded Orioles, Green-tailed Towhee, House Wren, and Gray Flycatcher.

After a quick drive north we spent 45 minutes at Swan Pond. Here we saw about 16 species, including Pied-billed Grebe, Mallard, Blue-winged Teal, Green Heron, Great Blue Heron, Spotted Sandpiper, and Red-winged Blackbird. Our highlight, we all agreed, was the fantastic looks at two Black-crowned Night Herons. One was an adult, the other a young of the year, both spectacular to watch!

West Mesa Grasslands. October 18.

Sixteen eager souls headed west from Las Cruces to explore the grasslands north of

I-10. At the Corralitos Ranch, we stopped to look closely at a Red-tailed Hawk that was feeding on a kangaroo rat, which was evident when the hawk flew from its perch still carrying the prey item (the tail of which was hanging below the hawks' talons). At our next stop we heard the distinctive calls of Sandhill Cranes and saw Loggerhead Shrikes, a Scaled Quail, Western Meadowlarks, and grassland specialty birds like Horned Lark, Vesper Sparrow, Lark Buntings, and a small group of Chestnut-collared Longspurs passing overhead. Before long we spotted a couple of Northern Harriers, including a beautiful adult male that was foraging low over the grasses tilting back and forth, "giving us a show" as one observer noted.

Later, a few of us had a seemingly endless look at a nearby Sage Thrasher, and before too long we had spotted Cassin's, Brewer's, Chipping, Clay-colored, Savannah, Vesper, and White-crowned Sparrows, plus a small group of Lark Buntings.

At a small dip with a patch of giant sacaton grass we heard more calls from nearby Sandhill Cranes. They were only a few hundred yards away, flying upward in a loose circle. Mixed in with the cranes we noticed a Red-tailed Hawk, then another and yet another. David saw what he thought was another hawk flying even higher than all of the other birds and when he got his binoculars on it, the bird turned out to be a Short-eared Owl! There was a slightly chaotic period of excitement as members tried to locate the strange sight: a "ground owl" flying in ever higher circles, probably approaching 500 to 750 feet above the ground!

Our final stop was Valles Tank where there were many Chipping and Brewer's Sparrows, but we also saw or heard Gambel's Quail, Vesper Sparrows, Dark-eyed Juncos, Bewick's Wren, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Cactus and Rock Wrens, and Ladder-backed Woodpecker. Some members of the group were eventually treated to great views of flycatching Yellow-rumped Warblers.

Thanks to all who attended and shared the use of their vehicles on these 2 trips; we'll see you next time! A full list of species observed is available, just contact David Griffin at 382-2080 or GriffinBio@gmail.com.

David Griffin

Bird Notes

Species	Date	Location	Observers
White-Faced Ibis	8/26	LC Dam	GW
Anna's Hummingbird	9/01	Las Cruces	LS
Cattle Egret	9/06	Las Cruces	AP
Calliope Hummingbird	9/07, 13	Las Cruces	SB, LS
Spotted Sandpiper	9/13	Leasburg SP	LS/BR
Black Phoebe	9/13	Leasburg SP	LS/BR
Rough-winged Swallow	9/13	Leasburg SP	LS/BR
Barn Swallow	9/13	Leasburg SP	LS/BR
Vesper Sparrow	9/13	Leasburg SP	LS/BR
Olive-sided Flycatcher	9/13	Leasburg SP	LS/BR
Western Wood Peewee	9/13	Leasburg SP	LS/BR
American Kestrel	9/13	Leasburg SP	LS/BR
Blue Grosbeak	9/13	Leasburg SP	LS/BR
Black-chinned Hummer	9/13	Las Cruces	LS
Rufous Hummingbird	9/13	Las Cruces	LS
Osprey	9/29	Mescalero	BP
Pied-billed Grebe	9/29	Mescalero	BP
Northern Harrier	10/02	Mesilla	BP
Greater Yellowlegs	10/6-17	LC Dam	NS
Prairie Falcon	10/15	LC Dam	NS
Sage Sparrow	10/16	LC Dam	NS
Lark Sparrow	10/16	LC Dam	NS
American Pipit	10/16	LC Dam	NS
Broad-billed Hummer	10/19-23	Radium Springs	MS
White-crowned Sparrow	10/20	Las Cruces	SWH
Dark-eyed Junco (pink-sided)	10/22	Las Cruces	SWH
Bufflehead	10/24	LC Dam	NS

Observers: Sylvia Bizzell, Avis Payne, Sue & Wally Hill, Bruce Pearson, Barb Rodriguez, Lorraine Schulte, Marcy Scott, Nancy Stotz, Gerri Wood

Please report early, late, or unusual sightings to Robert Hull at 575-523-8009 or rwhull@zianet.com

New Mexico Rare Bird Hotline 505-884-3269
or <http://www.nmosbirds.org>

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

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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.cybermesa.com/~mvas/.

(continued from page 1) **President**

Another MVAS event we're already planning for is the **2009 Birdathon**. In 2009 we hope to have the best Birdathon ever and a few of us are already trying out ideas to increase effort and results. Maybe a competition with a direct challenge to another chapter: Team MVAS versus ???; or maybe local MVAS teams competing against each other? Be sure to stay tuned for more information in future newsletters and at monthly Chapter Programs.

Last, but certainly not least, I want to note that 2009 marks the Centennial of Aldo Leopold's arrival in the southwest. For those of you not familiar with this man, he was a ranger and forester in Arizona and New Mexico who became one of America's greatest conservationists. Leopold is best known for his development of the concept of a "Land Ethic," which was brought forth in his classic book "A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There" - which was published posthumously in 1949. If you haven't read this work before, I highly encourage you to find a copy (as of last week there were at least 3 used copies at COAS My Book Store on the downtown mall). A group of people from across the U.S. have recognized the importance of the coming year in terms of our past and future connection to the land and what role Leopold played in developing those connections. They have formally organized as the "**Aldo Leopold Centennial Celebration 2009**" and have scheduled monthly events in Arizona and New Mexico to celebrate. Be sure to check out their website for a schedule of events: <http://www.leopoldcelebration.org/> and for more information look to the Aldo Leopold Foundation's website: <http://www.aldoleopold.org/Programs/calendar.shtml>

Here's wishing you all a great fall and winter filled with good times and good birds!

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