



ROADRUNNER RAMBLINGS

Volume 28, No. 4. July-Aug 2006

Conservation Updates: Otero Mesa, Mesilla Valley Bosque, and Doña Ana County Wilderness

by Bob Tafanelli
MVAS Conservation Chair

If you are not already aware, there are several conservation items on the front burner in southern New Mexico.

Otero Mesa. The Otero Mesa saga continues. There is overwhelming support for the conservation position of no oil and gas drilling on Otero Mesa, which has now become a national issue.

There are two lawsuits pending against the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) decision to allow oil and gas drilling on Otero Mesa. One suit was brought by several conservation organizations claiming that the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) prepared by BLM is flawed and failed to adequately evaluate several environmental factors including increased sightings of aplomado falcons in the area. BLM proposed to set aside about 30,000 acres of no drilling as aplomado falcon habitat. That seems like a big area except that work being done in Chihuahua suggests that a breeding pair of aplomado falcons use between 6,000 and 11,000 acres as a breeding territory. The area proposed to be set aside is good aplomado falcon habitat but BLM ignores many tens of thousands of additional good habitat that has been identified by a New Mexico State University study. This study was funded by BLM.

The governor's office has filed a second law suit against BLM's decision to allow drilling mostly based on the protection of the vast aquifer beneath Otero Mesa from contamination. The question becomes: which is more valuable, the possibility of some small unknown quantity of oil and gas, or water in an arid state like New Mexico? And further, who benefits from oil and who benefits from water, local people or large companies?

Judge Black is scheduled to rule on both lawsuits any day.

Mesilla Valley Bosque. The Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park continues to develop. Work on an entrance road is in progress and the visitor's center will begin soon. I think for the first time in their history the New Mexico Parks Department has hired a consultant to propose a management plan for the park. A few weeks ago a public scoping meeting was held for all interested parties. Neither Gill Sorg, Alan Krueger nor myself was able to attend the scoping meeting so we set up a special meeting with the consultant and gave them some

of our thoughts and concerns about issues that needed to be addressed in the management plan. Although work on the plan has started if anyone has particular concerns or issues please let us know and we will pass them on to the consultants. The management plan is due in November.

Doña Ana County Wilderness. Wilderness and land deposition continues to be a hot topic in Doña Ana County. This issue has brought this community together in a way rarely seen. Special interest groups that are sometimes at odds with each other are united in principal in this case.

Senator Domenici initially proposed legislation that would sell off 65,000 acres of BLM land on the West Mesa to be developed. That is an area twice the size of Las Cruces today. That would allow uncontrolled growth of the city in the hands of national developers that have moved into the city leaving local developers out of the picture.

The proposed legislation also called for 220,000 acres to be designated as Wilderness, under the Wilderness Act, in Doña Ana County and a small National Conservation Area in the Organ Mountains. This sounds like a lot but it only includes Wilderness Study Areas that were proposed by a very conservative BLM twenty years ago.

Conservation groups, sportsmen's organizations, backcountry horsemen, Las Cruces Home Builders Association as well as other groups united to come up with a better plan. They were joined by resolutions from the Las Cruces City Council, Doña Ana County Commission, City councils of Hatch and Sunland Park and the Village of Mesilla to endorse a new plan.

This new plan calls for about 330,000 acres of Wilderness, including Broad Canyon and the East Potrillo mountains, plus 100,000+ acres of National Conservation Area in the Organ Mountain foothills, Doña Ana Mountains and Tortugas Mountain. It also asks that any land disposal follow the BLM land disposal process, the new Resource Management Plan that BLM is currently preparing, and both the city and county comprehensive plans. This would allow the citizens in this community to participate in the entire process and have some control in how the city and county grow.

Because part of this issue deals with federal legislation and the other with management issues, in late June the coalition of interested parties divided into two coalitions, one focuses on Wilderness and National Conservation Areas and the other public land management issues including land

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disposal. Negotiations continue on both fronts and hopefully from this will come a good Wilderness bill and planned, controlled development of our city and county with abundant opportunity for citizen input.

All of these issues need your help. If you would like to help or just give your opinion you can contact the Southwest Environmental Center at 522-5552, the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance at 527-9962 (website: www.nmwild.org), or me at 526-9380.

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.

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Send this form and your check to:

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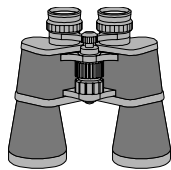
RENEWALS

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.

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.



Bosque del Apache. August 26. We plan a trip to the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge the last Saturday of August in order to catch migratory species moving from the northern latitudes to the tropics. We will meet at the K-Mart parking lot off Hwy 70 at 7:30 AM in order to car pool to the Bosque. Please call Walt Whitford at 521-1358 if you are interested in this trip and/or for additional information.

Audubon Adventures: Thanks for Another Great Year

by Lorraine Schulte, MVAS Audubon Adventures Chair

Many members have contributed to Mesilla Valley Audubon's very important Audubon Adventures program, which provides an environmental education curriculum for schools in Las Cruces, Alamogordo, Arrey, and Truth or Consequences. Several members donated time to deliver kits to elementary schools in Las Cruces at the beginning of the 2005-2006 school year. This year students have studied Turtles and Tortoises, Waterbirds, Dragonflies and Damselflies, and Spiders.

Numerous organizations and individuals have contributed funds to support this program for the 2006-2007 school year: the Elks Lodge, Enchanted Gardens, Hi Hopes Garden Club, Hoop-T-Dudes, Las Cruces Tour of Gardens, VFW Post 1389 (Elephant Butte, NM), Fern Allan, Laurie Beougher, Sylvia Bizzell, Patrick Carr, Jennifer Cordova, Wendy and Rob Davis, James Dawson, Clifford Edwards, Linnea Egbert, Richard Estell, John Ewbank, Neil Fuller, Ann Goode, Janet Greenlee, Patricia Hackler, Greg Hall, Harold and Barbara Harrison, Ann Heying, Sue and Wally Hill, Phil Hosford, Karen Huggins, Keith Killingbeck, Marlys Kleppe, Alan and Barbara Krueger, Judith Lapointe, Jacqueline Lay, Janice Ludtka, Katie McLane, Diane McLaughlin, Helga



Programs

Programs and meetings are held each month, September-April.

See you in September!

If you would like to volunteer to give a program, or if you have any suggestions about speakers or topics you would enjoy learning more about, please contact one of the board members listed on the back of the newsletter.



Mendoza, Roberto (Tito) Meyer, Lori Minnick, Ernesto Morales, Darrell and Marilyn Mott, Peggy Odette, Bobbie Pegueros, Mary Pierce, Albert Rango, Bobbie Raub, Raymond Reynaud Barbara Rodriguez, Joan Russell, Michaela Sanchez, Lorraine Schulte, Nena Singleton, Richard Spellenberg and Naida Zucker, Nancy Stotz, Robert Tafaneli, Marilyn Thomas, Leslie Thornberry, Lynn Unagnt, Mary Lou and John Wallace, Walt Whitford, Mary R. Williams, Ruth Wiser, and Donna Wood

These donations have made it possible for Mesilla Valley Audubon Society to provide eighty kits in the elementary schools of Las Cruces, Alamogordo, Arrey and Truth or Consequences for the school year 2006-2007. Subjects students will study in 2006-2007 will be Bees, Bats, Birds at Home, and John James Audubon.

Joy McFarland and several other members of Mesilla Valley Audubon Society spent time making phone calls, sending e-mails and making personal contacts with teachers, and checking on orders.

Thanks to everyone's support, this program continues to be our most important education project.

Birdathon Report

by Walt Whitford

Bird Notes

Painted Buntings were reported by several people, two birds in Las Cruces, the others in La Mesa: RB, BD, JaH, SWH, JoH, BR, LS, GS

Species	Date	Location	Observers
Barn Owl	4-24	Las Cruces	LS
Painted Redstart	4-24	Anthony	HB
Indigo Bunting	5-1	WSMR Golf Course	C/CHB,CL
Lazuli Bunting	5-1	WSMR Golf Course	C/CHB,CL
Gila Woodpecker	5-8	Palomas	FL/RB
Buff-breasted Flycatcher	5-8	Mesilla Park	CHB
Pied-billed Grebe	5-10	Burn Lake	PT
Snowy Egret	5-10	Burn Lake	PT
Rose-breasted Grosbeak	5-11	Las Cruces	BD
Cassin's Vireo	5-11;6-2	Las Cruces; WSMR	BD; CB, CL
Double-crested Cormorant	5-14	Burn Lake	PT
American Avocet	5-14	Burn Lake	PT
Snowy Egret	5-14	Burn Lake	PT
Black-crowned Night-Heron	5-14	Burn Lake	PT
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	5-27;6-8	La Mesa; Holloman	JaH,SWH; CL
Hermit Thrush	5-27	La Mesa	JH,SWH
Varied Bunting	5-27;28	La Mesa	JH,SWH; KS
Warbling Vireo	5-27;29	La Mesa	JaH,SWH; BR,LS
Dusky Flycatcher	5-27;29	La Mesa	JaH,SWH; BR,LS
Olive-sided Flycatcher	5-27;29	La Mesa	JaH,SWH; BR,LS
Plumbeous Vireo	5-29	La Mesa; Aguirre Spgs	BR,LS; C/CHB
Acorn Woodpecker	5-29	Aguirre Springs	C/CHB
Hepatic Tanager	5-29	Aguirre Springs	C/CHB
Zone-tailed Hawk	5-29	Aguirre Springs	C/CHB
Hutton's Vireo	5-29	Aguirre Springs	C/CHB
Grace's Warbler	5-29	Aguirre Springs	C/CHB
Short-eared Owl	6-1	WSMR	CB,CL
Vermillion Flycatcher	6-2	WSMR	CB,CL
Bell's Vireo	6-2	WSMR	CB,CL
Scarlet Tanager	6-5	La Mesa	RB
Black Tern	6-8	Holloman	CL
Long-billed Curlew	6-2;8	Las Cruces;Holloman	JaH; CL
Baird's Sandpiper	6-8	Holloman	CL
Lesser Yellowlegs	6-23	Swan Pond	CL
Cassin's Sparrow	6-23	Radium Springs	CL
Lucy's Warbler	6-23	Radium Springs	CL
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	6-23	Radium Springs	MS/JZ
Broad-tailed Hummingbird	6-23	Radium Springs	MS/JZ
Barn Owl	6-25	Las Cruces	RA
Rufous Hummingbird	7-13	Las Cruces	SWH
Calliope Hummingbird	7-13	Las Cruces	SWH

Observers: Richard Allen, Roberta Beyer, Helen Bigelow, Charles/Chandra Britt, Barb Dickenshied, Jannette Hale, Sue/Wally Hill, John Hyndman, Frankie Lerner/Richard Bischoff, Carl Lundblad, Barb Rodriguez, Kathy Sandel, Lorraine Schulte, Marcy Scott/Jimmy Zabriskie, Gill Sorg, Paul Turner

Please report early, late, or unusual sightings to Sue Hill at 505-382-9758 or hillco AT 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

While the primary goal of the annual Birdathon is to raise funds for the Mesilla Valley Audubon Society's "Audubon Adventure Program" for elementary schools in the region, it also provides an opportunity for members to bird with experienced birders and to visit some areas of NM and/or Arizona with the highest avian diversity in the U. S. I hope that this account of our Birdathon's 24 hours will stimulate others to join one of the groups of regulars for Birdathon 2007.

Alan Kreuger and I chose a 24-hour period beginning on Tuesday afternoon on May 2nd and ending on Wednesday noon May 3rd. On Tuesday afternoon we drove to Bosque del Apache where we had lots of ducks and wading birds plus a number of migratory songbirds and residents. We started birding at the Bosque around 3 PM and by 6 PM we had 60 species of birds on our list of species seen in a 24 hour period.

Because many ducks, aquatic and wading birds stop over at the Bosque on their way north, we were able to see a number of birds that are only in New Mexico for short periods during spring and fall migration. Some of these included: Clarke's Grebe, Pied-bill Grebe, Western Grebe, Eared Grebe, Snowy Egret, Great Egret, Green Heron, Bufflehead, Blue-winged Teal, Green-winged Teal, Cinnamon Teal, Red-tailed Hawk, Swainson's Hawk, Ring-necked Pheasant, White-faced Ibis, Greater Yellowlegs, Least Sandpiper, Western Sandpiper, Spotted Sandpiper, Black-necked Stilt, American Avocet, Wilson's Phalarope, Long-billed Dowitcher, Semi-palmated Plover, Franklin's

(continued on page 4) See *Birdathon*

Hummingbird Festival, Lake Roberts, NM

July 22-23



for more info:
www.hbnm.org

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 3) **Birdathon**

Gull, Common Tern, Lesser Nighthawk, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Barn Swallow, Cliff Swallow, Violet-green Swallow, Northern Rough-winged Swallow, American Pipit, Wilson's Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Cassin's Finch, and Common Grackle.

On Wednesday AM we arrived at Percha State Park soon after sunup and were greeted by lots of birds feeding in the fruiting Mulberry trees north of the park entrance. We recorded Eurasian Collared Dove, Phainopepla, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat, American Goldfinch, Pine Siskin, and Chipping Sparrow in that area. We then walked through the park and the woodland south of the park where we added Common Nighthawk, Vermilion Flycatcher, Cordilleran Flycatcher, Say's Phoebe, American Robin, Plumbeous Vireo, Yellow Warbler, Lucy's Warbler, Summer Tanager, Bullock's Oriole, and Lesser Goldfinch.

We left Percha Park at 9:30 AM and drove to North Percha Creek between Hillsboro and Kingston where we were able to record Golden Eagle, Broad-winged Hawk, White-throated Swift, Acorn Woodpecker, Western Bluebird, Common Raven, scrub jay, Steller's Jay, White-breasted Nuthatch, Tufted Titmouse, Bushtit, Rock Wren, Canyon Wren, Painted Redstart, Townsend's Warbler, Black-headed Grosbeak, Swamp Sparrow, and Brewer's Sparrow. We pushed the count up to 121 species when we saw a Brown Towhee perched on a fence of my in-laws place in Hillsboro. We topped off our 24 hours of birding with lunch at the Barber Shop Café in Hillsboro.

In our 24-hour Birdathon we recorded 121 species of birds and enjoyed one of the most relaxing outdoor activities and beautiful landscapes of this part of the country.

Roadrunner Ramblings is published six times a year: January, March, May, July, September, and November. Submissions welcome; please email copy to nstotz1 AT comcast.net, or call for mailing information. **Next deadline: August 24.** Printed by **insta-copy printing** on 10% kenaf, 90% PCW recycled chlorine-free paper. Images, except Dale Zimmerman's roadrunner, are from IMSI's Master Clips/Master Photos® Collection.

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