

ROADRUNNER RAMBLINGS

Volume 30, No. 5. Sep-Oct 2008

Conservation News

by Bob Tafanelli, MVAS Conservation Chair

Chihuahua Grasslands - Several organizations and individuals in Chihuahua have been unsuccessful to stop the massive loss of grassland to agriculture in Chihuahua. To date more than 800,000 acres of grasslands has been illegally converted to agriculture in the state of Chihuahua. This is an important wintering area for grassland birds, which is of interest to Canada and the United States as well as Mexico.

In addition to the grassland loss there are thousands of illegal water wells being drilled. Most studies have indicated that the water was already being removed at a faster rate than it was being replaced before the additional wells were drilled. This could result in the drying up of seasonal playas that are important to waterfowl. It is going to take an international effort to stop this destruction.

Border Fence - MVAS attended a workshop held at the Farm and Ranch Museum on July 8, 2008 to address the effect of the border fence on wildlife. The pedestrian wall, a solid metal barrier at least 10 feet high, is the most devastating to wildlife as it stops all land movement. This wall will seriously impact feeding/watering areas as well as the gene pool of many border species. Stadium lighting may also be used in some areas which would especially bad for nocturnal wildlife. There are several other types of barriers, including electronic surveillance, that can be used in certain areas.

In addition to violating numerous local laws by not getting permission to put the fence on private land this action has no EIS or EA. Instead Homeland Security has developed an "Environmental Stewardship Plan". This plan has been sent out to a limited number of people (MVAS not included) with a short window to comment, which ended June 30th. The two border patrol agents that attended the workshop were interested in hearing about the wildlife problems and agreed to work with the New Mexico Wildlife Society to try to work out compromises. However, most of these decisions are made in Washington D. C., not locally.

Spaceport - Comments on the Draft EIS on the Spaceport were due in mid-August. The EIS was seriously lacking when it came to wildlife and habitat concerns. More concern was noted for ranching than for wildlife. There was mitigation offered for ranching losses but none for wildlife, even though some species of concern were found. Only 40 species of birds were found in the surveys but the portion of the surveys done by one group were done in February; I don't know when the other part of the property was surveyed. Surveys should include wintering, spring and fall migration, and

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Bird Identification Course

New to the area, or just retired? Think about joining us for our fall Basic Bird Watching Class.

The course is a great opportunity to learn more about the birds that are year-round residents of our area, as well as migratory visitors that are just here for the winter months. The course field trips reinforce concepts presented in classroom sessions, and they provide an introduction to some of our local birdwatching hotspots and our gorgeous Southwestern landscapes.

You will learn to identify birds by their shapes, sizes, sounds, behaviors, and habitat. You'll also get some tips for attracting and identifying birds, information on optical equipment, and a review of various birding publications.

Our classes will be on October 21 and 28 and November 4 and 11 from 7-9 PM with field trips on October 25, and November 1 and 7. The first three classes will be held at the Doña Ana Community College, East Mesa Campus. The final class will be a trip to the Vertebrate Museum on the NMSU campus in order to get a close up look at skins and skeletons of some of the birds sighted on field trips.

For registration information contact the DACC Community Education program at 527-7527, and be sure to mention our Course Code, HL101.

Welcome New Members

Brigitte Chiat
S.D. Schemnitz
Lance Smith
Belle & David Smith
William Hilinbothem



Dottie La Bree
Angie Unruh
Pat Cassidy
James Brown



Programs

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

Programs begin immediately following the business meeting and announcements.

Sandhill Cranes. September 17. To help build excitement for November's annual Festival of the Cranes, Aaron Drew, Deputy Project Leader at Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, will talk to us about the life history of the refuge's magnificent winter visitors.

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

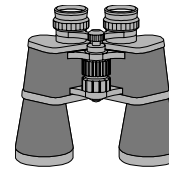
RENEWALS

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.

Gray Vireos in Southern New Mexico.

October 15. NMSU graduate student Charles Britt will discuss the distribution and nesting success of Gray Vireos in the Organ Mountains and Sacramento Mountains. Charles was part of a team hired by the Department of Defense in 2007 to survey and monitor Gray Vireos on Fort Bliss. The species is listed as "Endangered" by the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish and is a "Species of Greatest Conservation Need" under New Mexico's Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy.



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.

Rio Grande Riparian Sites. September

18. NOTE: Thursday, not Saturday trip. We'll start the day by traveling to Leasburg Dam State Park. This should be a prime time to observe migrant birds on their southbound journeys. The riparian vegetation should be full of passerines with many regularly occurring flycatchers, warblers, and vireos and perhaps a few unusual birds too – anything could show up during this time of year! We'll next make our way north along the Rio Grande to Swan Pond and check for waterfowl and waders. Next we'll turn south and head for the Mesilla area and revisit a few of our springtime migration locations, again looking for migrants and waterbirds.

The trip will depart at 7 AM from the Arroyo Plaza parking lot at 2001 E. Lohman Ave (meet near Wild Birds Unlimited). The trip may last until late afternoon so bring water, snacks and/or lunch, and sun protection. Walking will be easy.

Grassland Raptors and Sparrows.

October 18. On this trip we'll visit grasslands in Doña Ana and possibly Luna counties. We'll expect to see a wide variety of raptors including Golden Eagle, Ferruginous Hawk, Merlin, and Prairie Falcon. Later, walking swaths of grassland should produce a variety of sparrows like Brewer's, Savannah, Vesper, and maybe even the secretive Grasshopper and Baird's Sparrow; Chestnut-collared Longspur, Horned Lark, and possibly the elusive Sprague's Pipit.

The trip will depart at 7 AM from the Arroyo Plaza parking lot at 2001 E. Lohman Ave (meet near Wild Birds Unlimited). The trip may last until early afternoon so bring water, snacks and/or lunch, and sun protection. Walking will be easy, but terrain may be uneven in grassland areas, so wear appropriate/suitable footwear.

For more information on either field trip, contact David Griffin at 382-2080 or griffinbio@gmail.com.

Upcoming Special Events

Live raptors, September 20, 9 AM to 5 PM, at Wild Birds Unlimited, 2001 E Lohman (Arroyo Plaza). To help mark WBU's first year anniversary, representatives of Hawks Aloft will be present with a few of the birds they use for educational programs. For more info call WBU at 523-5489.

Migration Sensation, October 3, Percha Dam State Park. This annual event features bird walks, presentations, and educational displays. For more info, check the state park's website at www.emnrd.state.nm.us/PRD/index.htm or contact Ranger Specialist Abdon Aguirre at 505-743-3942.

Wild Film International Wildlife Film Festival, October 24 & 25, Albuquerque's Kimo Theatre. Soar with Andean Condors, meet the elusive Ivory-billed Woodpecker, and cheer baby mergansers as they take their first flight. In this year's festival, ten films will be presented in two evenings. These visually stunning films raise awareness of wildlife conservation issues. All proceeds benefit Rivers and Birds conservation education for public school children. For further information, contact Rivers and Birds at 575-776-5200 or www.riversandbirds.org.

Field Trip Reports

Grant County Hotspots. July 19. Seven people traveled to the Pinos Altos Mountains and the Mangas Creek area look for southwestern specialty birds. During the past weeks, the Silver City - Pinos Altos area had received rain, so the creeks were flowing, and the bubbling and gurgling sound lent itself to the beautiful surroundings in the coniferous forest. Although the bird life in the mountains was very quiet and not very abundant, we were able

to get brief glimpses of some specialty species like Red-faced Warbler, Painted Redstart and Olive Warbler. Many montane species were lacking, but we did see a few Cordilleran Flycatchers and Dark-eyed Juncos ("Red-backed" variety), and we heard or saw quite a few Hermit Thrushes, Spotted Towhees, Warbling Vireos, Steller's Jays and Band-tailed Pigeons.

On the way down Signal Peak Road,

the occupants in the lead vehicle were treated to a very brief look at a Black bear. The bear appeared to be tearing into a log, but once it saw our stopped car it quickly sprang upward and turned 180 degrees and within about 2.5 seconds was gone over the slopes!

Late in the day at Mangas Creek we observed many birds such as Northern Cardinal, Yellow-breasted Chat, Common Yellowthroat, Brown-crested Flycatcher, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Phainopepla, Bridled Titmouse, Summer Tanager, Lesser Goldfinch, Blue Grosbeak, and a Common Ground-dove.

Sacramento Mountains. August 23.

Nineteen people traveled to the Sacramento Mountains to look for southwestern specialty and high elevation birds. Overall, we observed very few birds and the bird life seemed very quiet, but we did get to observe a few interesting species like Red-faced Warbler, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Cordilleran Flycatcher, and Western Bluebird.

We started off at Karr Canyon where we heard many birds, but only saw a few. We next spent time watching hummingbirds at the US Forest Service Trestle Site near Cloudcroft, while some fortunate members of the group encountered a large mixed species flock of MacGillivray's and Grace's warblers, Mountain Chickadees and a few other species near the picnic area. We made our way to Bluff Springs, where we found very few birds, but enjoyed the beautiful meadows and waterfall. The most enjoyable aspect of the Bluff Springs visit was the time we spent watching a family of Western Bluebirds in one of the open meadows near the old railroad trestle. A short stop at Cathy Canyon Trailhead and Overlook provided stunning views of the Tularosa Basin and a few additional birds. It was here that the group split up, and most headed back to Las Cruces or other destinations. The remaining people continued on a short tour of the mountains.

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
Swainson's Hawk (nest)	6/30	Young Park	JMRH
Barn Owl	7/03	High Range	GW
Rufous Hummingbird	7/04	Radium Springs	MS
Pine Siskin	7/07	Radium Springs	MS
Snowy Egret	7/08	LC Dam	GW
Vermilion Flycatcher	7/08; 26	Radium Spgs; Percha	MS; LS/SWH/BR
Burrowing Owl	7/12	NMSU Golf Course	GW
Bullock's Oriole	7/15	Las Cruces	SB
Black-headed Grosbeak	7/14; 16	Radium Spgs; Las Cruces	MS; LS
Hooded Oriole	7/17	Las Cruces	LS
Calliope Hummingbird	7/1; 20; 24	Radium Spgs; Las Cruces	MS/JZ; LH; LS
Summer Tanager	7/24	Percha	GW
Bell's Vireo	7/24	Radium Springs	MS/JZ
Bank Swallows	7/26	Percha	LS/SWH/BR
Bewick's Wren	7/26	Percha	LS/SWH/BR
Clark's Grebe	7/26	Caballo	LS/SWH/BR
Lucy's Warbler	7/26	Percha	LS/SWH/BR
Spotted Sandpiper	7/26	Caballo	LS/SWH/BR
Willet	7/26	Caballo	LS/SWH/BR
Blue Grosbeak	7/26; 8/14	Percha; La Mesa	LS/SWH/BR
Yellow Warbler	7/26	Percha	LS/SWH/BR
Yellow-headed Blackbird	7/30	Mesilla Park	BP
Great Blue Heron	7/31	LC Dam	GW
Broad-Tailed Hummer	8/01	Las Cruces	LH
American Kestrel	8/14	La Mesa	LS/SWH
Painted Buntings	8/14	La Mesa	LS/SWH
Pyrrhuloxia	8/14	La Mesa	LS/SWH
Western Wood Peewee	8/14	La Mesa	LS/SWH
Yellow-breasted Chat	8/14	La Mesa	LS/SWH
Cattle Egret	8/20	NMSU	GW
Green Heron	8/20	LC Dam	NS
Solitary Sandpiper	8/21	LC Dam	NS
White-Faced Ibis	8/26	LC Dam	GW

Observers: Sylvia Bizzell, Landy Hinesley, Sue & Wally Hill, Jackye Meinecke & Robert Hull, Bruce Pearson, Barb Rodriguez, Lorraine Schulte, Marcy Scott, Nancy Stotz, Gerri Wood, Jimmy Zabriskie

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/.

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breeding season. MVAS spoke and submitted comments.

Feral Cats - The Las Cruces city government and the Doña Ana County government have recently taken over the responsibility of managing the animal shelter. One of the issues they are seriously considering will have a grave impact on wild birds.

The practice being considered is Trap/Neuter/Release (TNR). This involves trapping of feral cats, neutering them and then releasing them back where they were captured. Whether this practice will eventually reduce the population depends on who you talk to. As most birders know, cats are one of the greatest, if not the greatest, causes of wild bird mortalities. Most bird experts oppose TNR as ineffective. For further information on this issue as it relates to wild birds see the American Bird Conservancy website (www.abcbirds.org; click on Bird Conservation Issues; A to Z Index; Cats Indoors). In addition you can check the Department of Defense website, where they have a pamphlet called "Don't Let Your Cat Go AWOL" (from the DoD's Defense Environmental Network and Information Exchange website, www.denix.osd.mil, click on Natural Resources; click on DoD Partners in Flight, and scroll down to Guidance to find the link to the brochure). You can also visit the web site of The Wildlife Society, a professional organization of wildlife biologists, at: http://www.wildlife.org/policy/TWS_testimony_feral_cats.pdf. All of these groups oppose TNR.

I would encourage all Audubon members to contact their City Councilor (via www.las-cruces.org/council/ or 541-2066) or County Commissioner (via www.co.dona-ana.nm.us/commissioners/ or 647-7201) about this issue.

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: October 22.** Printed by **insta-copy printing**. Image credits: roadrunner, Dale Zimmerman; clip art, IMSI's Master Clips/Master Photos® Collection.

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