

ROADRUNNER RAMBLINGS

Volume 29, No. 5. Sept-Oct 2007

Chihuahuan Aplomado Falcons Facing New Threat

by Bob Tafaelli, Conservation Chair

For the past 15 years or so a small group of Mexican and American researchers have been studying the Aplomado Falcon in the Mexican state of Chihuahua. This previously unknown population in Chihuahua was discovered by Angel Montoya (now with the Peregrine Fund) with direction from Manuel Bujanda, a Mexican biologist. I was fortunate enough to be involved with this study from the beginning.

This study involved two areas in the state of Chihuahua. The larger one has had as many as 27 pairs of Aplomado Falcons and the other, smaller one, has had up to 12 pairs. There may be Aplomado Falcons in other parts of Chihuahua, but most seem to be concentrated in these two areas. For the past two years Gill Sorg, Mesilla Valley Audubon President, has helped in locating breeding pairs to continue this study.

Until 2002, the last nesting pair of Aplomado Falcons in the U. S. was seen near Deming, NM in the early 1950's. Since the 1950's, the U. S. has had only occasional Aplomado Falcon visitors; the species was listed as endangered in the United States in 1986. In 1999 one young Aplomado Falcon, which we banded in Chihuahua that same year, was seen on Otero Mesa. In 2002 a pair fledged three young from a nest southwest of Deming. Although Aplomado Falcons are being re-introduced in west Texas and New Mexico, the Chihuahua populations are essential to the overall health and stability of this species in northern Mexico and the southwestern U. S..

Now this Chihuahuan population of Aplomado Falcons is being threatened. First, there has been prolonged drought which has reduced their numbers by about 25% because of the drought's negative impact on the falcons' prey, which includes many grassland bird species. Then, about three years ago Mennonite farmers began buying out financially stressed ranchers. To date almost half of the ranches in the larger study area have been sold and half of the others are negotiating. The farmers are plowing the land to raise crops, specifically corn for biofuel. This, of course, destroys the land for grassland birds, Aplomado Falcons, pronghorns, and many other native species.

Mesilla Valley Audubon Society is spearheading the effort to stop this activity. We have gotten great support from National Audubon's International Alliance Program and the Director of Bird Conservation as well as ProNatura, the Mexican sister organization. We also have support from a couple of other non-governmental agencies and are speaking to others.

We are hoping to call a meeting of groups from both sides of the border to plan a strategy. However, this is not an isolated problem. It is occurring in other places in Chihuahua as well as throughout northern Mexico. It is a smaller version of the plowing of the Great Plains in the U. S. many decades ago. So, it will take the efforts of many people and a long time to solve.

Stay tuned for further developments. If you would like to help please contact Gill Sorg (sorg@zianet.com) or Bob Tafaelli (btafanel@zianet.com).

President's Message

by Gill Sorg, MVAS President

Welcome back for another exciting season of birding and fun!

The MVAS Board of Directors is planning several interesting programs for the year, from NMSU research on birds to Alaska and in-between.

We have lost 2 great partners in conservation and Audubon, Richard Bischoff and Tom Wooten. The short time that I knew them I learned that they were champions of our environment. They will be missed greatly.

As I write this I am in Northern Idaho visiting my family. I haven't had much time to do any birding; I have seen Red-breasted Nuthatch, Mountain Chickadee and Mountain Bluebirds. There is a mystery bird that I can't seem to find in Sibley. It has a blue tail, blue leading edge of wing, slate back and head, and streaked dark brown on lighter breast. The closest one I can find in the book is a juvenile Mt. Bluebird. The streaked breast is the puzzler. Can anyone help me out?

Directions...

...to our meeting place in the **Hallmark Building** at the **Village at Northrise**. The Village is at the corner of **Northrise** and **Roadrunner Parkway** and the Hallmark Building is the building closest to Roadrunner. If the entrance gate is closed, pull up close and wait for the automatic sensor to open the gate. There is a small parking lot next to the building and additional parking on the south side of the street. We meet in the **Activity Room**, which is one floor up from the entrance on the south side of the building.

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.



Programs

Membership meetings and programs are held each month, September–April, at the **Village at Northrise, Hallmark Building, 2882 N. Roadrunner Pkwy.**

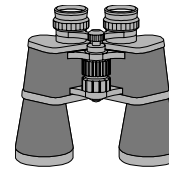
Meetings begin at 7:00 PM. Programs begin immediately following the business meeting and announcements.

Reintroductions of Endangered Species: the Case of the Thick-billed Parrot.

September 19. In the last several decades, reintroductions of endangered species have become a popular wildlife management tool. The majority of these reintroductions are not successful though, and most shortcomings can be attributed to a disregard of animal behavior. Thick-billed Parrots are a species where past attempts have failed, but insight and new precautions may allow for a successful transfer of parrots back into their original northernmost habitat of the Arizona Chiricauhuas. Presented by NMSU Biology students Anna Young and Jaime Guerra.

Mountain Lions in the Western US.

October 17. Kevin Hansen, author of *Cougar: The American Lion* (1992 Northland Publ), and *Bobcat: Master of Survival* (2007 Oxford Univ Press), was formerly the Science Director of the Mountain Lion Foundation in Sacramento. Kevin will talk to us about mountain lions in the west, including management issues such as hunting and the urban/wildland interface where lions and humans interact.



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.

Leasburg Dam/Swan Pond. September 22.

These hotspots near Radium Springs are always worth a visit, especially in late September when passerine migration will still be happening, and winter residents should be on hand; we could find some waterbirds too. Meet at the Hwy 70 K-Mart parking lot (east end near gas station) at 7 AM for this half-day trip. Walking will be along maintained trails and roadside on level terrain: easy.

Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park.

October 20. Meet at the Southwest Environmental Center parking lot (corner of Water St. and Las Cruces Avenue, on the downtown mall) at 7 AM for this half-day trip. Construction of the park's visitor center has begun; we'll be able to check out its progress as we bird the park's productive mix of wetlands, riparian habitats, and desert scrub.

For more information on either of these field trips contact David Griffin at 382-2080 or griffinbio@zianet.com.

Intermediate Birdwatching

MVAS will be teaching another bird identification and appreciation course through the community college this fall.

The class will emphasize vocalizations, form and function, bird behavior, and migration. Learning to listen to birds' calls, understanding how their shapes are adapted to their lifestyles, and recognizing their behaviors will be invaluable to birders wanting to further develop their skills. Saturday field trips will reinforce skills learned in classroom sessions. Handouts and materials will be provided.

Classroom sessions will be Tuesday nights, from 7-9 PM, **October 23 and 30 and November 6.** Field trips will occur on **October 27, and November 3 and 10.**

For registration information contact the Doña Ana Community College Community Education program at 527-7527.

In Memoriam

The MVAS board is sad to report the recent passing of two valuable supporters of our chapter and conservation in general: Richard Bischoff and Tom Wooten.

Richard joined the board in January of 2004 and also served as one of our New Mexico Audubon Council delegates. Richard was a very successful fundraiser for Audubon Adventures and he brought many new ideas before the board. One of those ideas was the creation of a graduate student scholarship at New Mexico State University. Because of Richard's pivotal role in the creation of this scholarship and to honor his many contributions to MVAS, the scholarship has been renamed in his honor: Mesilla Valley Audubon's Richard Bischoff Memorial Scholarship.

Tom Wooten was also a board member and conservation chair during the chapter's early years. Tom was an ardent native plant enthusiast, and the field trips he led for MVAS always gave participants an opportunity to learn about our local flora along with the birds. Tom and his wife, Eleanor, established T and E Inc., an organization which provides grants to support conservation research and projects throughout the Southwest.

Both Richard and Tom will be sorely missed.

Field Trip Report

San Andres Canyon. August 4. On a hot summer Saturday, ten people ventured into San Andres Canyon on the nearby San Andres National Wildlife Refuge for a birding field trip. San Andres NWR is generally closed to public access, but refuge staff organized a field trip for MVAS members.

Those MVAS members who made the trip were rewarded with a nearly 1-mile walk along a riparian corridor densely grown with cottonwood, willow, cattails and net-leaf hackberry, much of which was draped in canyon grape. This is certainly one of the longest mountain riparian corridors in Doña Ana County.

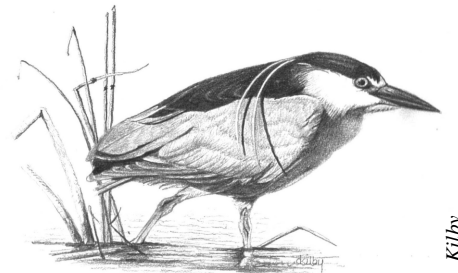
About 36 species of birds were observed, the highlight of which were 2 singing male Varied Buntings! This is one of the only areas to find this rare New Mexico species in Doña Ana County.

Other bird highlights include Indigo Bunting, Gray Vireo, Summer and Western Tanagers, and 3 species of warblers.

MVAS would like to give a special thanks to Mara Weisenberger and Kevin Cobble at San Andres NWR for organizing this special trip.

Because we had a very short planning window for this trip to San Andres NWR, we had to use our incomplete listing of email addresses and phone numbers to try and contact MVAS members. In case other opportunities for short-notice field trips arise in the future, please provide us with an email address (preferred) or phone number so we can be sure to have your most current contact information. To collect missing contact information, we'll have a sign-up sheet at our September meeting, or you can contact Nancy Stotz at nstotz1@comcast.net or 521-8087.

David Griffin



Daniel S. Kilby

Bird Notes

Species	Date	Location	Observers
Long-billed Curlew	07/11/07	Isaack's Lake	SWH
Swainson's Hawk	07/11/07	Isaack's Lake	SWH
American Avocets	07/15/07	Holloman Lakes	CL
Baird's Sandpiper	07/15/07	Holloman Lakes	CL
Clark's Grebe	07/15/07	Holloman Lakes	CL
Least Sandpiper	07/15/07	Holloman Lakes	CL
Long-billed Curlew	07/15/07	Holloman Lakes	CL
Ruddy Duck	07/15/07	Holloman Lakes	CL
Snowy Plover	07/15/07	Holloman Lakes	CL
Black-necked Stilt	07/15/07	Holloman Lakes	CL
Western Sandpipers	07/15/07	Holloman Lakes	CL
White-faced Ibis	07/15/07	Holloman Lakes	CL
Calliope hummingbird	07/27/07	Las Alturas	RH/JM
Varied Bunting	08/04/07	SANWR	GS+
Barn Swallows	08/05/07	Leasburg	BR LS
Black-crowned Night Heron	08/05/07	Leasburg	BR LS
Black-headed Grosbeak	08/05/07	Leasburg	BR LS
Blue Grosbeak	08/05/07	Leasburg	BR LS
Brown-headed Cowbird	08/05/07	Leasburg	BR LS
Clay-colored Sparrow	08/05/07	Leasburg	BR LS
Rough-winged Swallow	08/05/07	Leasburg	BR LS
Spotted Sandpiper	08/05/07	Leasburg	BR LS
Swainson's Hawk	08/05/07	Leasburg	BR LS
Tree Swallow	08/05/07	Leasburg	BR LS
Violet-green Swallow	08/05/07	Leasburg	BR LS
Yellow-headed Blackbird	08/05/07	Leasburg	BR LS
Lark Bunting	08/17/07	Las Cruces Dam	NS
Solitary Sandpiper	08/27/07	Las Cruces Dam	NS

Observers: Sue & Wally Hill, Robert Hull & Jackye Meinecke, Carl Lundblad, Barb Rodriguez, Lorraine Schulte, Gill Sorg, Nancy Stotz

Please report early, late, or unusual sightings to Robert Hull at 505-523-8009 or rwhull@zianet.com

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

Audubon Adventures 2007-2008

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	Gill Sorg	541-0577
Vice-president	Alan Krueger	532-1036
Secretary	Nancy Stotz	521-8087
Treasurer	Barb Rodriguez	523-1548
Board (05-07)	Robert Hull	523-8009
Board (05-07)	Carl Lundblad	636-0465
Board (06-08)	Walt Whitford	521-1358
Board (06-08)	Sue Hill	382-9758
Board (07-09)	David Griffin	382-2080
Board (07-09)	Valerie Endrueit	373-0530

COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Audubon Adventures	Lorraine Schulte	524-7029
Audubon Council	Gill Sorg	541-0577
Delegates	Guy Powers	373-1891
Conservation	Bob Tafanelli	526-9380
Education	vacant	
Field Trips	Walt Whitford	521-1358
Programs	board at large	
Membership	Guy Powers	373-1891
Newsletter Editor	Nancy Stotz	521-8087
Publicity	Jackye Meinecke	524-1886

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/.

The 23rd season of Audubon Adventures begins in September. Mesilla Valley Audubon Society is sponsoring 83 classrooms this year in schools in Las Cruces, Alamogordo, Truth or Consequences and Arrey, N. M.

Students will study "Back from the Brink - Success Stories from the Endangered Species Act". They will learn about the successful recovery of the Bald Eagle, American Alligator, Grizzly Bear, Grey Whale and other species that have been brought back from the brink by the ESA. Each issue contains fun activities, high interest content, and hopeful messages.

Share Your Birding Data, Help the Rio Grande

World Wildlife Fund and partners will be submitting a grant to the North American Wetland Conservation Act to conserve wetlands in the Middle and Lower Rio Grande. To help justify the importance of wetland conservation on the Rio Grande below Caballo for migratory birds, World Wildlife Fund is looking to compile data on bird sightings (occurrence, abundance, and frequency) on the Rio Grande and in the adjacent riparian zone below Caballo. If interested in assisting this effort, submit your records (preferably in electronic format) to Beth Bardwell at bethbardwell@zianet.com.

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 26.** Printed on 100% PCW recycled paper by **insta-copy printing**. Image credits: roadrunner, Dale Zimmerman; binoculars, IMSI's Master Clips/Master Photos® Collection.

Nonprofit Organization
US Postage Paid
Las Cruces, NM 88004
Permit No. 609

Mesilla Valley Audubon Society
P.O. Box 1645
Las Cruces, NM 88004