



ROADRUNNER RAMBLINGS

Volume 28, No. 5. Sep-Oct 2006

President's Message

by Gill Sorg, MVAS President

Welcome back, members, to another birding season and an interesting Audubon year. The board has been planning a fun-filled year of programs and field trips. With the increased moisture in the valley we may find some interesting species! It's green in New Mexico!!

I'd like to call your attention to the superbly written article in the last *Roadrunner* by Bob Tafanelli about the conservation efforts presently happening in the region. A lot has been occurring concerning the Otero Mesa, Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park and Wilderness in Doña Ana County this year. And I encourage everyone to visit the web site www.doñaanawild.org and support efforts for wilderness. Also, the BLM should have released its preliminary proposed draft Resource Management Plan for Doña Ana, Sierra and Otero Counties for the public to comment. This process is done about every 20 years. You're welcome to look at it and give your input.

All the programs that MVAS does take lots of time and effort. If you are able, you can help out. I hope when you're asked, you will give some of your time to make the programs successful. Thank you.

Intermediate Birdwatching

MVAS will be teaching an Intermediate Birding class through the community college this fall.

The class will emphasize Vocalizations, Form and Structure, Bird Behavior and Migration. Learning to listen to bird's calls, visualizing their shapes and recognizing their behaviors will be invaluable to the birder wanting to further develop their skills.

Participants are requested to bring portable tape recorders and blank tapes. Handouts and materials will be provided.

Classes will meet on 10/24, 10/31 and 11/25 in the conference room of the East Mesa campus of NMSU-DACC from 7-9 PM. Field trips will take place on 10/28, 11/04, and 11/11. Cost of the program will be \$40.00. The class will be limited to 8 people.

For registration information, contact the E. Mesa Campus of DACC (phone: 527-7527).

Birding Hot Spot: Upper Soledad Canyon

by Tim Lawton

Soledad Canyon, in the Organ Mountains just east of Las Cruces, offers fine birding and hiking, especially during the fall migration. It is nearby, and you never know what might turn up. You can sharpen your skills on *Empidonax* flycatchers, pick up five types of wrens, and there are buntings and vireos in abundance. During and after the monsoon, the canyon is a riot of wildflowers, and right after rains, the upper canyon resembles the Rocky Mountains. This article is a guide to how to get there, and what to look for. The road log starts on University Avenue, just east of Interstate 10, on the edge of Las Cruces.

Reset odometer at traffic light at Telshor and University Avenues. The numbers below are cumulative miles from this point. Proceed straight east toward the Organ Mountains on University Avenue, which becomes Dripping Springs Road about here.

1.2 miles—Pass entrance to Farm and Ranch Museum

2.1 miles—Road skirts A Mountain. Sometimes there are Golden Eagles here.

4.5 miles—Turn right on Soledad Canyon Road.

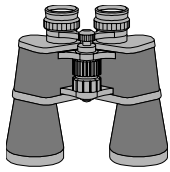
5.1 miles—Turn left to continue on Soledad Canyon Road. There is a fire station on the corner here, and Achenbach Canyon Road continues straight at this point.

8.2 miles—Pass parking area for Sierra Vista Trail on right. After rains in the spring and summer this is a good place to stop and listen for Cassin's Sparrows singing; once you hear the song, you should be able to see them flying up to flutter down in their courtship displays.

9.1 miles—Pavement ends.

9.5 miles—Gate at end of Soledad Road. The parking lot lies just beyond the gate. The hours for the area are 8:00 AM—7:00 PM seven days a week. At other times, this gate is locked. If you arrive earlier in the morning, there is nowhere to park, because the land up to the gate is private.

(continued on page 3) See **Soledad**



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.

September 16. Soledad Canyon. With luck, migrants will abound on this trip to the foothills of the Organ Mountains. Meet at the Bank of the Rio Grande on Telshor and University at 7:45 AM. We will

caravan to the end of Soledad Canyon Road and walk through the arroyos and grasslands of upper Soledad Canyon. The entire trip will consist of walking on good trails, with some moderately strenuous rocky parts, which we will take slowly. See article in this newsletter for more description of the terrain. We will plan to be back at the cars at 11:30 or 12:00 noon, so plan on spending about 4 hours away from the car. Bring sturdy walking shoes, hat, water, sunscreen and snacks. For more info, contact Tim Lawton 522-2056, or tlawton AT nmsu.edu.



Programs

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

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

September 20. Getting Acquainted. New to Las Cruces? New to MVAS? Or just looking for a way to get more involved? Join our chapter leaders for conversation, snacks, and an opportunity to find out more about the activities and programs of Mesilla Valley Audubon Society. Board members and committee chairs will be on hand to explain their projects and to listen to your ideas about activities and issues that are important to you.

October 18. NM Habitat Stamp Program. Dale Hall, Manager of the NM Habitat Stamp Program will introduce us to some of the habitat improvement projects being accomplished through this state-federal partnership. This program invests over 1 million dollars per year in projects that benefit many different types of wildlife, including birds.

October 28. El Paso Rio Bosque Park. We will meet at the Bank of the Rio Grande parking lot at the corner of University and Telshor at 7AM in order to car-pool to El Paso. The last MVAS trip to the Rio Bosque Park treated participants to a Sora, lots of ducks and wading birds, Harris Hawks and a nice variety of songbirds. The Bosque Park will require a moderate amount of easy walking. Bring water and a snack. This will be a half-day trip. For more info, contact Walt Whitford (521-1358, wlawhit AT zianet.com).

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.

Future Field Trips by Walt Whitford, Field Trip Chair

One of the most important activities of MVAS is field trips. Field trips provide a venue for members to get to know each other and to enjoy the favorite outdoor activity of millions of people (birdwatching). We endeavor to schedule trips to areas where participants can see a variety of different birds. Last year we scheduled a couple of overnight trips that were either cancelled for lack of interest or attended by very few participants. In order to better serve the membership, the field trip committee has developed a list of suggested trips for 2006-2007. Those trips are

November – Holloman lakes at Holloman AFB, near Alamogordo (half-day trip)
December – Christmas Bird Counts – Doña Ana Co., Alamogordo, & Caballo are counts that a number of our members join.

January – Arrey-Derry, Percha State Park and Animas Creek (good winter birding locations)

February – Uvas Valley, Nutt Grasslands, Macho Creek (half day trip to areas west of Hatch, NM)

March – La Luz Canyon and Karr Canyon in the Sacramento Mountains

April – Border Highway and Pancho Villa State Park (Columbus, NM)

May – Silver City Area/Gila (full day trip)

Other possibilities include: Dripping Springs/La Cueva, Aguirre Springs, Oliver Lee State Park south of Alamogordo, White Oaks north of Carrizozo, Otero Mesa.

Longer overnight or multiple-day – Lower Rio Grande (McAllen Texas area) South Padre Island or Rockport/ Port Aransas Texas area.

I will have the suggested list of field trips at the sign-in table at the monthly meetings for members to indicate interest in trips or to make suggestions for alternate sites for the field trips.

The birding is good right away. Walk through a gate near the windmill and start up the trail. Canyon Wrens call from the cliffs here, and the hillside on the right (south) is good for Black-chinned Sparrows. Two hundred yards of steady climbing brings you to a fork in the trail; go left (north). In another 50 yards, there is a densely vegetated arroyo. In summer, this is good for residents like Blue Grosbeak; in migration, beginning about mid-August, look for Cassin's Vireo, Lincoln's Sparrow, Green-tailed Towhee, and various flycatchers, including Western Wood-pewee.

After the trail crosses the arroyo, it climbs steeply (this is the only rough part of the trail) to a sloping bajada with mixed shrubs and cactus. During the summer, there are Cassin's and Black-throated sparrows and Canyon Towhee here. The bajada slopes steadily toward the mountains, and after about one-half mile, you will reach a sign and a fork in the trail.

The trail to the left is a three-quarter mile loop through recovering grassland. You can skip the grassland loop by continuing straight up the trail, but the loop is sparrow country and the wildflowers can be distracting late in the monsoon season. Resident birds include Gambel's

Quail, Scott's Oriole, Cactus Wren and Black-chinned Sparrow (on the hillside to the north); migrants in the early fall include Chipping, Vesper, Lark, Brewer's and Clay-colored sparrows, House Wren, Loggerhead Shrike, and Lazuli Bunting. This loop returns to the main trail about 250 yards up the bajada from where you left it; turn left and continue toward the mountains.

At 200 yards, you will pass an old stone house and then cross the main drainage through a broad expanse of Apache plume. After crossing the creek bed, which will be dry except during the height of the monsoon, turn left into the narrow canyon. Rufous-crowned Sparrows nest in this stretch, but keep going for a real treat. The trail bends around right, enters a very narrow canyon, and soon arrives at a small maple grove in a box canyon. There is a splendid waterfall here during the monsoon, but just a trickle visited by migrating warblers and flycatchers in the early fall. There is an old cattle tank built of concrete here, but it leaks, so it is filled with shrubs that harbor more secretive migrants.

From here, retrace your steps, and bear left upon arriving at the beginning of the waterfall spur; the next part of the trail traverses a grassy slope with junipers and a few Mexican buckeyes, and completes a loop to the outbound trail after 300 yards. I have seen Dickcissel along here, and in the winter, this would be good for jays and Townsend's Solitaire. At any time, Golden Eagles or Peregrine Falcons may fly across

(continued on page 4) **Soledad**

Bird Notes

Species	Date	Location	Observers
Black Tern	7-27-8-6	Holloman Lakes	CL;DB
Baird's Sandpiper	7-27;8-6	Holloman Lakes	CL,CBr;DB
Audubon's Oriole	8-01	Las Cruces	JH
Red Knot	8-01	Wilcox, AZ	TL
Greater Pewee	8-01	Radium Springs	MS/JZ
Orchard Oriole	8-04	Radium Springs	MS/JZ
Purple Martin	8-04	Radium Springs	MS/JZ
Vermillion Flycatcher	8-05	Mesilla Dam	CBr
Painted Bunting	8-05	Holloman Lakes	DB
Stilt Sandpiper	8-06	Holloman Lakes	DB
Baird's Sandpiper	8-06	Holloman Lakes	DB
Painted Bunting	8-06	Picacho Hills;Leasburg	CK;JH
Solitary Sandpiper	8-17;19	Isaack's Lake; Las Cruces	Dam SWH;NS
Blue-winged Teal	8-17	Isaack's Lake	SWH
Hooded Warbler	8-21	Las Cruces	LS
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	8-22	Mesilla Bosque	DH
Scissor-tailed Flycatcher	8-23	Mangas Springs	E W
Red-shouldered Hawk	8-25	Rattlesnake Springs	RD
Zone-tailed Hawk	8-27	Radium Springs	MS/JZ
Dickcissel	8-27;29	Radium Spgs;Holloman Lakes	MS/JZ;CL
Eastern Kingbird	8-27	Holloman Lakes	C/CBr
Wilson's Plover	8-28	Holloman Lakes	JH
Clay-colored Sparrow	8-28	Holloman Lakes	CL
Cassin's Vireo	8-28	Holloman Lakes	CL
Willow Flycatcher	8-28	Holloman Lakes	CL
Lazuli Bunting	8-28	Holloman Lakes	CL
White Pelican	8-28	Holloman Lakes	CL
Hooded Oriole	8-29	Isaack's Lake	GS

Observers: David Beatty, Charles/Chandra Britt, Rob Doster, Jannette Hale, Dorie Hampton, Sue/Wally Hill, Clare Kapner, Tim Lawton, Carl Lundblad, Lorraine Schulte, Gill Sorg, Marcy Scott/Jimmy Zabriskie, Eleanor Wootten

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

NM Audubon Council Meeting

September 16, 10 AM
Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge

Agenda items include:
Statewide Newsletter
Audubon Advocacy

All Audubon members welcome.

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	Walt Whitford	521-1358
Secretary	Nancy Stotz	521-8087
Treasurer	Barb Rodriguez	523-1548
Board (03-05)	Alan Krueger	532-1036
Board (03-05)	Sue Hill	382-9758
Board (04-06)	Tim Lawton	522-2056
Board (04-06)	Valerie Endruweit	373-0530
Board (05-07)	Robert Hull	523-8009
Board (05-07)	Richard Bischoff	894-6083

COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Audubon Adventures	Lorraine Schulte	524-7029
Audubon Council	Richard Bischoff	894-6083
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/.

(continued from page 3) **Soledad**

the amphitheater, and Cooper's Hawks are possible in the arroyos.

You can retrace your route directly back to the parking lot (1 mile), or there is a southern loop that branches left from the main trail in a few hundred yards. There are faded signs that show these trails, so you can pretty much figure out how to get back using them. The southern loop is about 1.5 miles long, crossing south through sparse oak woodland and then following an arroyo westward back to the first fork you took before crossing that same arroyo. The lower part of the southern loop is good for migrating warblers and flycatchers, as well as Verdin and any sparrows you might have missed up to this point. On one day in mid-September, I have seen Cordilleran, Hammond's, Dusky and Gray flycatchers on the lower part of this walk. You can easily bird this part of the southern loop by simply walking a ways up the right fork, where you originally went left just uphill from the gate.

Aside from being good birding, the upper part of Soledad Canyon is one of the most beautiful places in the Organ Mountains. The views are breathtaking and the backdrop is formidable, formed of volcanic peaks and even a tusk-like butte. Remember as you walk, particularly during the summer rainy season, that this is rattlesnake country and that you need too watch the ground as well as the sky. You may be lucky enough to see a Black-tailed Rattlesnake, and if you are the first person up the trail in the morning, a Mountain Lion is also a possibility. Be sure to bring plenty of water and a hat and plan to stay an hour longer than you originally budgeted (three hours is reasonable), because the place is so arresting.

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: October 26.** 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.

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

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