

ROADRUNNER RAMBLINGS

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Otero Mesa: Drilling Threatens an Important Bird Area

by Glenn Landers, Southwest Environmental Center

Otero Mesa has the distinction of being listed by the National Audubon Society as an Important Bird Area for its large breeding population of Burrowing Owls; its winter and migration habitat for Baird's Sparrows, Grasshopper Sparrows, Sprague's Pipits, and Ferruginous Hawks; and for the grassland birds, like the Long-billed Curlew and Upland Sandpiper, that pass through the area during migration time. In addition, Otero Mesa provides excellent potential habitat for Aplomado Falcon and Mountain Plover.

But, Otero Mesa is a land under siege. Oil and gas interests are pressuring the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to open the area to oil and gas drilling. And the agency, which manages most of Otero Mesa on behalf of the federal government, has been all too willing to go along. Indeed, if the BLM has its way, Otero Mesa will be opened to drilling at a rate of 5% at a time, until, over the course of 20 or 30 years, 95% of the mesa has been drilled. It is a plan that experts say will fragment habitat, disrupt wildlife, and most likely reduce the area to scrubland, as invasive plant species inevitably displace grassland plants.

Conservation groups have taken the BLM to federal court to protect Otero Mesa. So too has Governor Richardson. But a recent decision by the court, though not all bad, has moved the BLM a step closer to implementing their disastrous plan for development of Otero Mesa.

In the lawsuit, conservation groups had asked the court to stop the BLM from moving forward with their resource management plan for Otero Mesa, arguing that the agency did not give due consideration to the environmental impacts that would result from drilling.

The good news is that the judge agreed the BLM's planning was inadequate. The bad news is that the judge decided the BLM can correct deficiencies in the plan as the agency moves to the leasing stage of development. The public will thus have a chance to challenge how development occurs, but it will be lease by lease. One big battle will become many smaller, but critical fights in the effort to save Otero Mesa.

Conservation groups plan to appeal the decision, but the decision underscores the need to find an alternative, permanent means of protecting Otero Mesa, such as might be achieved through federal legislation.

What you can do

Like all special places, Otero Mesa deserves special protection. Senator Bingaman has consistently said he will not consider introducing legislation with the lawsuit still pending. Now that the lawsuit is decided, we need to tell Senator Bingaman that it is time to act!

Whether or not you've done it before, call or write Senator Bingaman. Tell him the threat to Otero Mesa has never been greater, and that we need him to commit to introducing legislation that will permanently protect Otero Mesa. The address and phone number of Senator Bingaman's Washington office is:

Senator Jeff Bingaman
703 Hart Senate Office Bldg.
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510
(202) 224-5521

If you'd like more information, or would like to help out on the campaign to protect Otero Mesa, call Glenn Landers of the Southwest Environmental Center at 505/522-5552 or email him at glanders@wildmesquite.org.

President's Message

by Gill Sorg, MVAS President

The November membership meeting will be very important. We will have an Otero Mesa expert from the NM Wilderness Alliance (of course, some of our members are experts too), to give us the update on the legal and legislative status of the mesa area. If you haven't been to Otero Mesa this year, since the rainy season, I encourage you to go. The grass is knee- to thigh-high and all going to seed. By the time of this mailing it may be brown, but it will still be just as lush as it can be.

Bring a friend with you, and encourage fellow members to come. Let's fill the room.



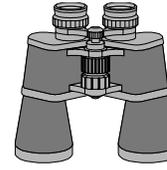
Programs

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.

November 15. Otero Mesa. This program will be presented by Nathan Newcomer, Media Director and Grassroots Organizer for the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance.

Nathan has promised lots of beautiful photos to illustrate the scenery, birds, and wildlife of this important area: a slide collection which now includes the amazing grass growth following this year’s rains. His presentation also will review the history and current status of efforts to protect this area from oil and gas development, and what individuals can do to help.



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.

November 17. SPECIAL FIELD TRIP to Armendaris Ranch. In early August, 11 young Aplomado Falcons were released on the Armendaris Ranch near Truth or Consequences. Angel Montoya, of the Peregrine Fund, has offered to take MVAS members on a special field trip to the ranch. Participants will have an opportunity to see the birds as they return to a supplemental feeding station in the evening, and to talk to Angel about some of the issues related to this release and the birds’ status as an experimental population in New Mexico. We’ll leave from the K-Mart on Highway 70 at 2:30 PM.

November 18. Holloman Lakes. Meet at the K-Mart on Highway 70 at 7:30 AM to car-pool to Holloman Lakes near Alamogordo. There should be lots of waterfowl at the lakes by the end of November. For more info, contact Walt Whitford (521-1358, wlawhit@zianet.com).

December 6. Winter Birds and the Las Cruces CBC. Christmas Bird Count fanatics Lorraine Schulte and Nancy Stotz will share their enthusiasm for this annual event by reviewing some of the interesting population trends and the most abundant birds and surprising rarities that have been documented over the past three decades of Las Cruces CBCs. We’ll make sure that everyone who wants to participate in this year’s count has been assigned to an appropriate team, and a winter bird quiz, appropriate for birders of all levels of expertise, will give everyone a chance to Win Fabulous Prizes!

PLEASE NOTE the modified date of our December meeting—the second Wednesday of the month instead of the third.

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 16

Last year, there were over 1500 Christmas Bird Counts in the continental United States. The Las Cruces CBC came in first place, reporting 16,503 White-winged Doves, the most of any count in the nation. Not too shabby, when you consider that White-winged Doves didn’t even show up on our count prior to the mid 1980’s.

Want to help us count doves? (...and the 100+ other species we typically record.) Then make plans to participate in this much-anticipated annual tradition. The Las Cruces CBC is an all-day event that involves counting birds within geographic areas of a count circle that extends from the river to Dripping Springs and from the Jornada to the South Valley. We finish up with a no-host dinner at the end of the day, when everyone goes over their list and we figure out the day’s total number of species and individuals.

This is a fun, low-pressure outdoor event; the only prerequisite is enthusiasm. You can even do a partial day if it better fits your schedule.

We currently seek team leaders to lead groups into the various areas, as well as team members. If you would like to be involved as a leader or participant, please contact Tim Lawton (522-2056).

Field Trip Reports

"Bird Notes" Compiler Changing

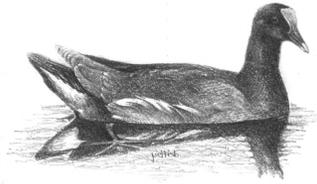
Regular bird sightings contributors please note: Our compiler is changing. Please submit future sightings to Robert Hull at rwhull@zianet.com or 523-8009.

Many thanks to Sue Hill for several years of dedicated service as our previous compiler.

September 16. Bar Canyon. A group of 21 birders visited Bar Canyon, at the end of Soledad Canyon Road, in the Organ Mountains. It was a warm fall day, and we saw about 20 bird species, with highlights including Cassin's and Rufous-crowned Sparrow, Scott's Oriole, and Townsend's Warbler. Abundant summer rains resulted in thick grass and some wildflowers along the trail. The entire group made it all the way (about 1.5 miles) up the hill to a cascading waterfall in the upper part of the canyon.

Tim Lawton

Daniel S. Kirby



October 28. El Paso Rio Bosque Park. This outing proved to be very good for the 6 relatively novice birders who went on the trip. We recorded 26 species which was better than expected because the wetlands were all dry. Birders got good looks at Great Egrets and Snowy Egrets plus Great Blue Herons in the canal bordering the east side of the park. Other good birds that everyone had good views of were: Common Moorhen, American Coot, Spotted Sandpiper, Black Phoebe, Least Sandpiper, Killdeer, Belted Kingfisher and Mexican Mallards. Several Red-tailed Hawks, N. Harriers, Am. Kestrels and Harris Hawks provided a good group of raptors. Singing Western Meadowlarks, White-crowned Sparrows, and Red-shafted Flickers gave the birders some really good looks at local winter species.

Walt Whitford

Bird Notes

Species	Date	Location	Observers
White-crowned Sparrow	9-16; 23	Sevilleta NWR; Las Cruces	NS
Sandhill Crane	10-2;18	Isaack's Lake; Las Cruces	JH,SWH;DG
Grasshopper Sparrow	10-2	Isaack's Lake	JH,SWH
Downy Woodpecker	10-5	WSMR Main Post	CL
Vermilion Flycatcher	10-5	WSMR Main Post	CL
Vermilion Flycatcher	10-7	Percha	SWH,BR,LS,JW
Anna's Hummingbird	10-8-20	Las Cruces	DG
Calliope Hummingbird	10-8	Las Cruces	DG
Am. White Pelican	10-11	Las Cruces	BP
Horned Grebe	10-12	Holloman Lakes	CL,CB
Semipalmated Plover	10-12	Holloman Lakes	CL,CB
Cassin's Vireo	10-15	Mesilla Park	CL
Rough-legged Hawk	10-17	Mesilla	JN
Chestnut-collared Longspur	10-17	Mesilla	JN
Rufous Hummingbird	10-18-26	Las Cruces	SWH
American Bittern	10-19	Mesilla Valley Bosque Park	JD
Scott's Oriole	10-19	Las Cruces	SWH
Broad-billed Hummer	10-24-26	Las Cruces	LS,SWH
Black-chinned Hummer	10-26	Las Cruces	LS
White-tailed Kite	10-29	Isaack's Lake	JKB

Observers: Judy/Kirby Benson, Charles Britt, John Douglas, David Griffin, Jannette Hale, Sue/Wally Hill, Carl Lundblad, Josh Nemeth, Bob Pennington, Barbara Rodriguez, Lorraine Schulte, Nancy Stotz, Gerri Wood

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>

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

Festival of the Cranes

Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge

November 14-19



For information about lectures, field trips, and exhibitors, visit the Friends of the Bosque website at

www.friendsofthebosque.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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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/.

Audubon Adventures Update

by Lorraine Schulte, *MVAS Audubon Adventures Chair*

Joy McFarland and I want to thank those who participated in getting the latest edition of Audubon Adventures and the New Mexico supplement on hummingbirds assembled and delivered to local schools and ready to mail to out-of-town schools. Those who helped were Valerie Endruweit, Elaine Marpel, Wally and Sue Hill, Alan Krueger, and Barbara Rodriguez.

Percha/Caballo Christmas Count

This year's Caballo CBC will be held on Saturday, December 30.

The count circle includes Caballo Lake, the Percha Dam unit of Caballo Lake State Park, Animas Creek, and other locations in Sierra County, New Mexico.

If you would like to participate, please contact Brad Vaughn by e-mail as soon as you can, using the information below:

E-mail: bradvaughn@prodigy.net or
bradvaughn@picavaughn.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: December 30.** 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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