

ROADRUNNER RAMBLINGS

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Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park Planning Update

Steve Cary, Park Planner, New Mexico State Parks

MVAS members have been strong supporters of the Mesilla Valley Bosque Park (MVBP) proposal from the beginning. As 2004 appears in our rearview mirror, State Parks offers MVAS this report on progress toward making this new state park happen on the west side of the Rio Grande between Mesilla Bridge (SR359) and Mesilla Dam.

Efforts to establish a park at the Old Refuge go back several years and the Southwest Environmental Center (SWEC) was a key player. Working with New Mexico Department of Game & Fish (DGF), International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC), Harris Farms, Elephant Butte Irrigation District, City of Las Cruces, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge and New Mexico State University, SWEC established the Picacho Wetland at the Old Refuge.

By the time State Parks got involved in planning efforts in 2001, most of the political front-end work had already been done. That year, the New Mexico Legislature asked us to evaluate the feasibility of a park at the Old Refuge site. In 2002, after visits to the site and 2 public meetings, we issued our Feasibility Study. We concluded that the park was feasible, but 3 key issues needed to be resolved:

- (1) Lands owned or managed by at least 6 different federal, state and private entities must be consolidated under one management authority;
- (2) A route for public vehicle access must be identified; and
- (3) Who would operate the park?

Since then, the New Mexico Legislature has resoundingly supported efforts to make this our 33rd state park by appropriating more than \$2 million for park planning, land acquisition and infrastructure development.

State Parks concluded that public access to the park must be linked to the levee road. We are negotiating with IBWC for a long-term lease permitting park visitors to exit SR359 onto a widened levee road. After about 1000 feet, access will transition to a strip of land adjacent to the levee on property

9th Annual Lorraine Schulte Excellence in Teaching Award 2005

It's time again to nominate an outstanding teacher for this award. Teachers in grades kindergarten through 12th grade are eligible. Please take the time to nominate an educator who cares about our environment and promotes conservation with their students. Individual teachers can also be encouraged to nominate themselves. A \$200.00 cash award for first place and a \$50.00 second place award will be given. Applications are available by contacting Donna Wood at donnacamino at yahoo.com.

Applications should be mailed to Donna Wood at 6812 Camino Blanco, Las Cruces, NM 88007, no later than March 1, 2005. The Mesilla Valley Audubon Society will determine winners and the awards will be presented at our April 20th meeting.

Basic Bird Watching Class

Keep watch in January for our springtime class which will be listed in the upcoming Doña Ana Branch Community College brochure. If you have just moved to the desert southwest and want to learn about our desert birds, this class is for you.

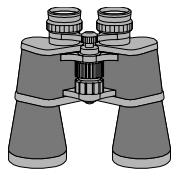
We will meet three Tuesday evenings beginning February 15th through March 8th. We will take you on three exciting field trips in and around Las Cruces on Saturdays and also journey to the Bosque del Apache. While at the Bosque del Apache you will encounter thousands of wintering Snow Geese and Sandhill Cranes. You will get close-up views of many water fowl and, we hope, Bald Eagles.

Consider enrolling in the class and meeting some of our premier birders who will instruct you in bird behavior and habitat, leaving you with an ongoing love of birding.

(continued on page 4) See **Bosque Park**

Welcome New Members

Sarah Jackson
Roberta Beyers
Rafaelita Chavez
Sharon & Robert Cline



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.

Percha State Park. January 22. We'll explore some typically productive river-side habitats along the Rio Grande north of Hatch. Wintering cranes, raptors, and sparrows are likely, as are a variety of waterfowl. We'll leave from the K-Mart along Highway 70 at 7 AM. Contact Harold Harrison (hharrison at zianet.com or 522-6199) for more info.

Brownsville, TX and Vicinity. February 19-20. Join us for 2 full days of birding at birding hotspots near the terminus of the Rio Grande, including Santa Ana Wildlife Refuge, Bentsen State Park, and Laguna Atascosa Wildlife Refuge. This area of Texas is home to interesting birds such as Chachalaca (Mexican turkey), Great Kiskadee, Green Jay, Whistling Ducks, Green Kingfisher, Ringed Kingfisher, Black Vulture, Caracara, Grey Hawk and White-tailed Hawk.

We plan on flying to Harlingen, Texas on Friday the 18th, birding the 19th and 20th, and depending upon return flight schedules, we may squeeze in birding the morning of the 21st. Depending upon the number of participants, the plan is to rent one or more vans to travel to the birding locations.

Recommended accommodations: (1) Howard Johnson Inn (956) 425-7070; price \$52-\$67/night depending upon occupancy (2) Ramada Limited, book at aaa.com or phone (956) 425-1333; price \$67-\$72/night. It is recommended that you book a room at least 3 weeks in advance and the same with airline reservations.

Travel to Harlingen: Driving to Harlingen requires about 16 hours and is not recommended for individuals with time constraints. The best air travel connections are probably via Southwest Airlines. Senior citizen fares are around \$260.00 roundtrip, advance purchase fare is \$358 roundtrip, but Southwest often has specials if you check their web site <http://www.southwest.com>. Southwest does have internet specials as low as \$60 one-way.

If you plan on participating in this trip to Texas, please contact Walt Whitford at 521-1358 to allow us to adequately plan transportation.

Programs

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

Programs begin at 7:30 PM.

News, announcements, and information begin at 7:00, preceding the program.

Why Prairie Dog Colonies are the Best Habitat for Burrowing Owls. January 19. NMSU graduate student Ben Duval will describe the foraging behavior of burrowing owls during the critical stage in their life cycle - when they are raising chicks. He will explain time comparisons of hunting forays on and off prairie dog colonies and what kinds of potential prey for burrowing owls have larger populations on the prairie dog colonies. He will also discuss how prairie dogs modify the environment to benefit species that are preferred prey of burrowing owls.

Australia North to South: Birds, Rocks and Rock Art. February 16. Tim Lawton will present slides from a trip to Australia in June 2004. Featured will be the natural history and rock art of Kakadu National Park in northern Australia and the wine country and Flinders Ranges north of Adelaide in the south. We'll see a few birds, some geology, and big crocodiles.

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. To renew, please fill in your name and address above, check the renewal box below, and send a \$15 check and this form to the MVAS address listed above.



Membership Renewals

We are attempting to simplify renewal for our Chapter Members. Please see the renewals section in the box to the left, and check your mailing label.

If your membership expired in 2004, or if it is scheduled to expire in January or February of 2005, please consider renewing in order to continue receiving this newsletter and supporting MVAS's local efforts as a Chapter Member.

Questions about your status? Call Nancy Stotz at 521-8087.

Burn Lake Update

by Paul Turner

In October the Las Cruces City Council approved the basic concepts in the \$4.6 million Burn Lake Master Development Plan for enhancing the lake and surrounding 30 acres. The Burn Lake Citizens' Steering Committee met with city personnel on Nov. 9 to discuss priorities for implementing the plan. Cathy Mathews, CLC Landscape Designer., chaired the meeting and she and Robert Garza are coordinating project implementation and grant preparation for the city. Although several projects have already been approved for city funding, the timing and complexity of many other improvements will depend on the availability of funds from state and federal sources.

One of the projects likely to receive state funding is a multi-purpose, all-weather trail around the lake. At the November meeting attended by Sue and Wally Hill, we discussed plans to develop this trail for walking, jogging, bicycling, and runoff regulation. State funds earmarked for trails are available and the city plans to submit a Burn Lake proposal for their share. Other aspects discussed in November included plans for a new parking lot east of the existing soccer fields and opportunities to enhance water supplies in coordination with Elephant Butte Irrigation District. EBID is interested in using Burn Lake for irrigation water storage. Any new river water delivered to the lake and subsequently pumped out on a regulated basis could improve water quality and help increase

water levels at Burn Lake. A joint grant proposal with EBID has been submitted to bring EBID water to the lake and provide for pumping it back into existing delivery ditches. This proposal would also address bank erosion issues and plans to regulate the water level; funding of this project could be approved this spring.

Burn Lake was reopened to the public on December 6 after several improvements and cleanup work by the City Parks Dept. The New Mexico Dept. of Game and Fish is stocking the lake with catchable rainbow trout again and plans to assist in efforts to improve the fishery and reduce the potential for future outbreaks of avian botulism. All domestic geese and ducks were removed from the lake and moved to other waters. The city has banned the release of domestic waterfowl there and plans to discourage feeding by the public. Seven mallards are using the lake regularly this winter; other waterfowl seen recently include redheads, lesser scaup, Mexican ducks, northern shovelers, common mergansers, gulls and one white pelican. Great blue herons and killdeers are regular visitors. The water level has dropped in the last month and several small islands were exposed which are being used by birds.

A Burn Lake meeting will be held within 1-2 months to review funding requests and plan for several improvement projects this year. I plan to evaluate opportunities for pole plantings of cottonwoods and willows this winter or spring. Anyone interested in attending this meeting and participating in potential projects can reach me at 523-6880.

Bird Notes

| Species | Date | Location | Observers |
|--------------------------|------------|--------------------------|------------|
| Lawrence's Goldfinch | 10-28;30 | Radium Spgs;Aguirre Spgs | MS/JZ; MLS |
| Golden-crowned Kinglet | 10-29 | Fillmore Canyon | MB |
| House Wren | 11-6 | Old Refuge | CL |
| Hooded Warbler | 11-7 | Mesilla Park | CL |
| Townsend's Warbler | 11-9 | Las Cruces | SWH |
| Lesser Scaup | 11-9 | Burn Lake | PT |
| Slate-colored Junco | 11-18;12-3 | Las Cruces | LS;SWH |
| Eurasian Collared Dove | 11-21 | Arrey | WW |
| Krider's Red-tailed Hawk | 11-21 | Percha | WW |
| Sandhill Cranes | 11-21 | Derry/Arrey | WW |
| Common Grackle | 11-27;29 | Las Cruces;Radium Spgs | SWH; MS/JZ |
| Red Crossbill | 11-29 | Radium Springs | MS/JZ |
| Eastern Bluebird | 11-29 | Radium Springs | MS/JZ |
| Long-eared Owl | 12-5 | Las Cruces | RP,NS |
| Cedar Waxwing | 12-8;12 | Las Cruces;North Valley | BSC;GP,LS |
| Rufous Hummingbird | 12-8 | Las Cruces | BHH |
| Anna's Hummingbird | 12-9 | Talavera | DTL |
| Black-chinned Hummer | 12-9 | Las Cruces | NS |
| Broad-tailed Hummingbird | 12-9 | Las Cruces | TM |
| American Redstart | 12-11 | Radium Springs | MS/JZ |
| Ruddy Ground Dove | 12-15 | Radium Springs | MS/JZ |

Observers: Matt Brook, Bob and Sharon Cline, Barbara and Harold Harrison, Sue and Wally Hill, Diana and Tim Lawton, Carl Lundblud, Tim McKimmie, Guy Powers, Ralph Preszler, Michelle and Lenny Santisteban, Lorraine Schulte, Marcy Scott and Jimmy Zabriskie, Nancy Stotz, Paul Turner, Walt Whitford

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

ANNUAL MEETING

Prior to the program at our meeting on January 19, MVAS will hold its annual meeting, to elect officers and board members. The Nominating Committee has developed the following slate of nominees:

President - Gill Sorg
Vice President - Walt Whitford
Secretary - Nancy Stotz
Treasurer - Barbara Rodriguez
Board 2005-07 - Richard Bischoff
Board 2005-07 - Robert Hull
Board 2005-06 - Valerie Endruweit

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 | | vacant |
| Vice-president | Guy Powers | 373-3843 |
| Secretary | Donna Wood | 525-8704 |
| Treasurer | Barb Rodriguez | 523-1548 |
| Board (02-04) | Harold Harrison | 522-6199 |
| Board (02-04) | Richard Bischoff | 894-6083 |
| Board (03-05) | Alan Krueger | 532-1036 |
| Board (03-05) | Sue Hill | 382-9758 |
| Board (04-06) | Tim Lawton | 522-2056 |
| Board (04-06) | Nancy Stotz | 521-8087 |
| Past President | Walt Whitford | 521-1358 |

COMMITTEE CHAIRS

| | | |
|--------------------|------------------|----------|
| Audubon Adventures | Lorraine Schulte | 524-7029 |
| Audubon Council | Richard Bischoff | 894-6083 |
| Delegates | Guy Powers | 373-3843 |
| Conservation | Bob Tapanelli | 526-9380 |
| Education | Donna Wood | 525-8704 |
| Field Trips | Walt Whitford | 521-1358 |
| Programs | board at large | |
| Membership | Harold Harrison | 522-6199 |
| Newsletter Editor | Nancy Stotz | 521-8087 |
| Publicity | Jacky 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 1) **Bosque Park**

being acquired from Harris Farms. On behalf of New Mexico State Parks, the Trust for Public Land (TPL) is negotiating the acquisition approximately 13 acres of the Harris Farms property. The New Mexico Department of Transportation is helping us design the road.

It will take several years to assemble all the necessary land parcels under State Parks authority. Arrangement for properties at the north end of the Park should be completed in 2005. In addition to the agreement with IBWC and purchase of Harris Farms property, discussed above, State Parks and TPL are also negotiating a conservation easement for an additional ~130 acres from Harris Farms. The Old Refuge property will be included via a Joint Powers Agreement (JPA) between State Parks and DGF. Negotiations between DGF and State Parks for this JPA are currently underway.

Our goal is to open this park, with some staff but no facilities, in the first half of 2005. All infrastructure, including access road, visitor center and trails, must await mandated environmental evaluations, the first of which should be completed by the end of 2005. Meanwhile, State Parks will begin to consolidate management authority for Bureau of Reclamation and Bureau of Land Management lands at the south end of the Park. This 2- or 3-year process will add ~630 acres and excellent trail opportunities.

A public meeting for the draft Park Master Plan is slated for early 2005 in Las Cruces at a time and place to be announced. MVAS members are core park supporters—come and tell us what you think.

Roadrunner Ramblings is published six times a year: January, March, May, July, September, and November. Submissions are welcome; please email copy to nstotz at zianet.com, or call for mailing information. **Next deadline: February 23.** 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.

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

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