



ROADRUNNER RAMBLINGS

MESILLA VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY

mvasaudubon.org Vol. 47 May, June, and July

President's Message

Spring migration is upon us, and it has been exciting already! Many of us, plus birders from northern New Mexico and Arizona, had several days to see a Tufted Flycatcher, along with some Painted Redstarts, hanging out at Young Park. The eBird Rare Bird Alert emails are filled with exciting announcements of birds not usually seen in our area. This is a great time to grab your binoculars and camera and do some birding!

Remember that this is an important time to dim your outdoor lights to help prevent confusing migrating birds, who do most of their travels at night. Lights off for migration!

Mesilla Valley Audubon Society will offer our usual four guided bird walks in May as well as our monthly meeting (this time about Kestrel nesting boxes), clean-up at Sagecrest Park, and nature journaling activity. On May 10, we'll also celebrate Migratory Bird Day at Dripping Springs with bird banding (starting at 7 a.m. in Ice Canyon), a bonus guided bird walk (8 a.m.), nature journaling (10:30 a.m. in Ice Canyon), and a hummingbird talk (12:40 p.m. in the native plant garden). We'll also have an information table from 7:30 to 1 p.m. Let me know if you'd like to help staff it!

Another special activity in May will be collaborating with Jean-Luc Cartron of the University of New Mexico for a survey of nesting birds at Holloman Lake. We recently sent out details from Dr. Cartron about the first survey on May 18 so you can sign up if you're interested in helping with this project.

Then, before we know it, summer will be upon us! In June and July, we take a break from our guided bird walks and monthly meetings and instead take the opportunity to mix and mingle at Birds & Beer functions. Join us on Wednesday, June 18, at 6 p.m. at Icebox Brewhouse on Locust (the former Spirit Winds) for a special Birds & Beer. The New Mexico Brewers' Guild asked us to join them in celebrating the launch of their special glass for 2025, as it features one of our favorite birds: the Greater Roadrunner. So, come enjoy good company, refreshing food and beverages, and purchase a roadrunner glass to commemorate the occasion (and support the nonprofit Brewers' Guild)! On July 16, we'll gather at The Game II.

One activity that doesn't take a break over summer is our service project: keeping Sagecrest Park clean. This pocket park is the launching point for one of our bird walks and is home to a wide variety of birds. Join our park clean-up leader, Aaron Lucas, for an hour of light labor picking up trash around the park. Think of it as paying it forward for the birds! Upcoming clean-up dates are listed in the calendar.

Continued on back

Las Cruces 2024/2025 Christmas Bird Count

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On the 26th of February, MVAS President Cheryl Fallstead sent out the preliminary CBC report I provided her. Here are the highlights of that document:

With 2/3 of the team reports in here are some numbers from the CBC:

Observers in the field. 32
Maximum # parties in the field. 17
Minimum # parties in field. 11
Miles driven in private auto(s) 117.22
Hours driven in private auto(s) 17.00
Miles driven in golf cart 5.00
Hours driven in golf cart. 2.00
Feeder watching. 5 minutes
Number of species seen at feeder. 5



Loggerhead Shrike photo by
Robert Shantz

Bird Numbers

Number of individual birds seen. 9,334
Number of "Real" species (not sp. sightings) seen. 79
Number of "other taxa" (sp. sightings) 6
Total species seen. 85

In general, the trends are downwards. This is the least observers we have had in a while. I would have to look back at previous years, but it seems that while the number of species seen is about what I'd expect, the numbers of many of the birds are down.

Some examples will illustrate this:

<u>SPECIES</u>	<u>2024/2025</u>	<u>HIGH COUNT</u>
Mallard	13	470 (2023)
Northern Shoveler	4	249 (2010)
American Kestrel	17 (new low)	149 (2015)
Black Phoebe	1 (new low)	135 (2006)
Loggerhead Shrike	2 (new low)	62 (1978)

Dove/Pigeon numbers are declining as well. Rock Pigeons (Feral Pigeons) are down from a high two years ago of 3,534 to 1,529 (almost a reduction by half). White-winged Dove numbers dropped from a high of 42,521 in 2003 to 2,617 this year.

As the final report has gone to the regional editor, it's time to expand on this a bit. So the update for the first set of numbers above shows a slight increase in most to:

Observers in the field. 34
Maximum # parties in the field. 19
Minimum # parties in field. 13
Miles driven in private auto(s) 157.90
Hours driven in private auto(s) 18.85
Miles driven in golf cart 5.00

Christmas Bird Count

continued

Hours driven in golf cart. 2.00
Feeder watching. 5 minutes
Number of species seen at feeder. 5

Not in the preliminary report were 73.35 total party hours (walking plus driving) spent in the field and the 213.41 thus miles traveled.

Updated Bird Numbers:

Number of individual birds seen. 10,861
Number of "Real" species (not sp. sightings) seen. 85
Number of "Other taxa" (sp. and such things as
Western/Eastern Meadowlark sightings) 5
Total species seen. 90

We had record numbers of 20 species in 2024. New lows outnumbered new highs by a count of 17 to 3.

The new lows were Great Blue Heron (1); Sharp-shinned Hawk (49); Northern Flicker [red-shafted form] (4)*; American Kestrel (25); Black Phoebe (49); Loggerhead Shrike (1); raven sp. (1); Marsh Wren (1); Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (1); Brown Thrasher (1); Black-throated Sparrow (11); Vesper Sparrow (1); Song Sparrow (3); Canyon Towhee (1); Spotted Towhee (1); Brown-headed Cowbird (2) **; and finally Pine Siskin (1).

Two new high records for species were for woodpeckers, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker with 2 and Hairy Woodpecker with 3. The third species with a new high in 2024 was Hutton's Vireo with 5 seen.

* This may reflect a decline in the numbers of NOFL that observers were able to positively identify as the red-shafted form than an actual drop in the numbers of these birds, as most NOFL seen here are likely to be r-s, but unless one sees the red on the bird, a cautious and prudent approach is to call it simply NOFL.

** Maybe a good sign for birds whose nests are parasitized by BHCO (?)



Great Blue Heron photo taken by
Sara Kay at Percha Dam on
05/01/2024 using Cool Pix p1000.

April is Scholarship Time at MVAS!

2025-2026 MVAS Richard Bischoff Graduate Scholarship Award

About the MVAS Richard Bischoff Graduate Scholarship

The Mesilla Valley Audubon Society tracks the National Audubon Society mission of education, advocacy, and conservation. Our biggest education event is awarding the MVAS Richard Bischoff Graduate Scholarship each April for the upcoming academic year, and hearing from both the new and past year's awardees about their respective upcoming and completed research.

Eligible students are in a master's or doctoral program in the NMSU departments of Biology, Geography, or Fish, Wildlife, and Conservation Ecology. Applicants submit their proposal to the MVAS Scholarship Committee, and a rubric plus lively debate and discussion are used to determine which proposal is deemed to best further the MVAS mission. The awardee receives \$2,000, half during each semester of the academic year, to use as needed to help further their research.

At the monthly meeting on April 16, we met Daniel Horton, this year's outstanding Bischoff awardee for the 2025-26 academic year. An M.S. candidate in the NMSU Fish, Wildlife, and Conservation Ecology Department, Daniel is originally from Jacksonville, FL, and did his undergrad at Colorado State University. At NMSU he is advised by Drs. Martha Desmond and Fitsum Gebreselassie, and the title of his research topic is "Using Autonomous Recording Units to Study Pinyon Jay Habitat Use and Avian Community Structure in Pinyon-Juniper Forests of the Sacramento Mountains." His research questions are: (1) How do forest management practices (mechanical thinning, herbicide, and fire) affect Pinyon Jay habitat use over their annual cycle? (2) How can passive acoustic monitoring enhance the understanding of pinyon-juniper avian community structure in the southern Sacramento Mountains?

We also heard from Alexander Allison, the excellent 2024-25 Bischoff awardee who just completed his master's in biology at NMSU. His advisor was Dr. Tim Wright and he earned his bachelor's at University of Massachusetts-Amherst. Our scholarship assisted Alexander in completing his master's thesis regarding conservation efforts for the Great Green Macaw through reintroduction programs in Costa Rica: "Conserving the Critically Endangered Great Green Macaw: From First Word to First Flight," for which he studied geographic vocal variation, vocal development, and post-fledging movements.

You can support conservation education and research

If you would like to support graduate students who are committed to conservation research through the MVAS Bischoff scholarship, you can make your gift through our website, mvasaudubon.org.

If you would like to be part of the MVAS Scholarship Committee, reach out to committee chair Dr. Carol Campbell at geobird@nmsu.edu. This year's Scholarship Committee was Annie Mitchell, Elaine Stachera Simon, Gil Sorg, Bob Tafari, and Ken Ward.



Committee chair Dr. Carol Campbell and Daniel Horton. Daniel Horton is this year's Bischoff awardee for the 2025-26 academic year. He is an M.S. candidate in the NMSU Fish, Wildlife, and Conservation Ecology Department.

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New Mexico Senate Bill 5

by Mark Ryan

Highlights of New Mexico Senate Bill 5 (passed by the NM legislature and signed by Governor Lujan-Grisham on 20 March 2025).

In essence the new law modernizes the existing Game and Fish Department with legal mandates limited to harvested game and fish, and to expand management responsibility to all “wildlife” (see below for definition). Additional funding to meet the expanded responsibilities is not specified in the new law, but subject to appropriations via the normal legislative process.

Reforms the state Game Commission (and renames as State Wildlife Commission)

7 member commission of the newly constituted State Wildlife commission.

Among other requirements the bill specifies that one position is filled by “a conservationist... [from] a non-profit wildlife or habitat conservation organization, the primary focus of which is not game species.”

Another position must be “a scientist who holds at least a master’s degree in wildlife biology, wildlife science, or management or a comparable wildlife field.”

The nominating committee for the members of the commission includes “...the chair of New Mexico State University’s department of fish, wildlife and conservation ecology or the chair’s designee.”

The commission makes rules related to “...when, where, by what means and to what extent, if at all, wildlife may be hunted, taken, captured, killed, possessed, released, bartered, sold, purchased, shipped and imported or exported from the state.”

Renames the Dept. of Game and Fish to Department of Wildlife

Expands the management of wildlife

“...the commission is authorized to extend management and protection by rule to *any species of wildlife* (emphasis added by author)

“When determining whether and how to protect a species of wildlife, the commission shall consider: whether the species qualifies as a species of greatest conservation concern; the science based reasons for protection of a species; and the rules and management programs that would potentially accompany protected status.”

...”wildlife’ a nondomestic mammal, bird, reptile, amphibian, fish, or invertebrate species, including a living animal, or any part, egg, spawn, offspring, or the dead body or parts thereof.”

There is much more information in the enacted Bill (you can google New Mexico SB5 for the entire text).

A Rarity Thrills at Las Cruces Park

By Jay Wilbur



Birdwatching offers many rewards, but surely one of the best is the excitement of finding a rare bird. That's especially true when the discovery is practically in your own backyard. Early this spring, MVAS member Dana Parsons got to experience this thrill in spades.

On the afternoon of March 27, Dana was birding one of his regular haunts, Young Park. This urban setting isn't known for hosting rare birds, but that

reputation was about to change. Dana noticed something rather different about an Empidonax flycatcher perched in one of the park's trees.

First off, it was kind of early for an Empid to be in the area at all, at least a couple of weeks early. That alone made the bird worthy of special attention. But when Dana saw that this Empid had a noticeable crest, and sported a rich cinnamon hue over most of its body, he knew he had found something extraordinary.

Dana quickly posted his observation, along with a photo, on the New Mexico Birding Rarities page that is hosted on Discord. The response of the state's birding community was an immediate confirmation of Dana's suspicion. OMG it's a Tufted Flycatcher!

The Tufted Flycatcher is a non-migratory resident of Central and South America. Its range runs from northern Mexico down to Ecuador. The sub-species that inhabits Mexico is called the Northern Tufted Flycatcher.

Although the Tufted Flycatcher doesn't migrate and is seldom found outside its range, it has occasionally been seen in the United States. There are a handful of observations in the Chisos Mountains of Texas and a few more sightings in the Huachuca Mountains of Arizona. All of these records occurred at rather remote locations and at high elevations.

Indeed, the preferred habitat of the Northern Tufted Flycatcher is high altitude pine forest. Its feeding behavior within this environment is typical of most Empids. It perches on a mid-level branch next to an open space, waits for some hapless insect to buzz into range, jets out and snatches it mid-air, then returns to its perch.

Tufted Flycatcher *continued*

That's exactly what Dana saw this bird doing, but in very, very much the wrong place! What the heck was a high altitude mountain bird doing in a relatively low elevation city park!? For that matter, what was it doing in New Mexico at all? It turned out Dana's observation was the first sighting of a Tufted Flycatcher ever recorded in the state.

Fortunately, over the next several days this record was confirmed by dozens of others. Birders from all over the country were able to claim their next lifer. Even for those few who had seen a Tufted Flycatcher before at some other venue, it was a state bird.

The rarity that Dana found not only stuck around for a week, it was easily relocated each morning and provided good looks throughout each day. A beautiful bird, it was a dream target for photographers. So, thank you, Dana, for finding and reporting this amazing bird, and thank you to whatever unique set of circumstances brought it to Young Park for all to see and enjoy.



Name That Bird

by Mark Pendleton

See next newsletter

Exciting Thrasher Sightings at Ice Canyon

by CJ Goin

Ice Canyon, at the Dripping Springs Natural Area, has a number of Hackberry trees and this winter there's been a good crop of Hackberries which has attracted many birds. Among other birds, two uncommon, for our area, thrashers have spent much of the winter there eating Hackberries. Both a Brown Thrasher and Sage Thrasher have been seen there repeatedly. The Brown Thrasher (L photo) is considered rare in New Mexico, defined by the New Mexico Bird Finding Guide as < 1 per day but at least 5 reports per year. I was pleased to get several good photos because it was a difficult bird to photograph. Brown Thrashers are known as skulkers and this one was especially so, but by spending time in Ice Canyon and being patient I succeeded in getting several good photos. The Sage Thrasher (R photo) is not common in our area. Their preferred habitat in New Mexico is sagebrush in the west and north but they do sometimes spend the winter in wooded areas to eat berries. There may have been more than one but I know this one spent most of the winter there. It was easier to see and photograph than the Brown Thrasher but I was glad to get good looks and photos. I hope other MVAS members will submit articles and photos because it's always nice to see results of successful birding by MVAS members.



Birds of an Oddly Colored Feather

by Dylan Osterhaus



pects of bird biology, including camouflage from predators and prey, communication within and between species, and are of high importance for mate attraction. Given the importance of the colors, I have always been interested in the genetic mutations and conditions that cause birds to have atypical colors.



The photos here show two oddly colored birds that I found recently in the Las Cruces area, a Mexican Duck from the Rio Grande (top), and a Canyon Towhee from Soledad Canyon (bottom). As these are species I am sure many of you are familiar with, you will no doubt notice that these birds are the “wrong” color for their species! Both birds are displaying a condition known as leucism, which is caused by genetic mutations that impact the genes that control the production and distribution of melanin within the birds body. Melanin is a pigment that plays an important role in the colors of bird feathers but is also important for maintaining feather structure and makes feathers more durable. If you look closely, you can see that the tail feathers of the Canyon Towhee are badly worn, likely due to this lack of melanin pigment in the feathers. Leucism differs from albinism, as “albino” critters display no pigmentation at all, unlike our Mexican Duck with a few streaks of brown on the breast, and the Canyon Towhee with the red undertail feathers. If you are interested in oddly colored birds, you may enjoy checking out a newly added feature available on eBird. When eBirders upload photos to their checklists, they now have the option to tag the photo as an “aberrant individual”! You can go into the explore media function through eBird, and filter the photos displayed to only include those tagged as “aberrant individual.” Scrolling through these photos, you will see a wide variety of color (and other!) abnormalities in many species of birds. Enjoy!



Bitter Lake National Wildlife Refuge MVAS Field Trip

A good time was had by all at the Mesilla Valley Audubon Society field trip to Bitter Lake National Wildlife Refuge (BLNWR) in Roswell, NM, on 12–13 April 2025!

Organized by MVAS vice president Elaine Stachera Simon, the exceptional itinerary was thanks to Patrick Collins, a Friends of BLNWR volunteer.

Early Saturday, Patrick first took our group out in the refuge's van for a morning of birding to areas inside the tour loop ordinarily inaccessible to the public. After a morning of birds, we headed back to the BLNWR Visitor Center to watch the refuge videos, check out the exhibits, and shop at the nature store. Those of us who brought a brown bag lunch enjoyed a presentation over lunch from Patrick about extraordinary bird sightings over the years at BLNWR, including, of course, the Lesser Sandhill Cranes.

After lunch, BLNWR biologist Marianne Kelso took our group out in the refuge van to visit the restricted areas to see the different types of sinkholes and learn about the activities the biologists are doing with regards to the endemic and endangered flora and fauna found at BLNWR.

That evening the group enjoyed dinner at Peppers Grill & Bar and heard from Friends of Bitter Lake President Merideth Hildreth about the good work of the Friends and how to join.

Sunday was an even earlier morning! Our group, along with MVAS board member Dylan Osterhaus's student group, went to a Lesser-prairie Chicken lek about 45 miles east of Roswell. The prairie chickens put on an exceptional show—and in a blink-and-you'll-miss-it moment, we even saw a copulation as a result of the dancing and the drumming and all the other sultry moves the males were using to get some attention from the ladies on the lek.

When the birds let us know they were done, we birded our way back to the meetup spot and Dylan generously offered for our MVAS group to join him and his students birding at Loco Lagoon and the Maljamar Rest Area.

Special thanks to Holly Thomas and Chris Benesh, who generously shared their extensive bird expertise throughout the trip, and to Dylan Osterhaus for his expertise, sharing his lek reservation, and allowing our MVAS crew to join him and his students for some bonus birding!

Winter in Yellowstone National Park

by Prachi Bhogan

This was our fourth trip to the Yellowstone National Park, but our first in winter. We were told by many people in the park, including the rangers, that the winters are brutal, but also the most beautiful time to visit the park. So, my husband and I planned a road trip from Las Cruces, New Mexico, to the park, and it was well... adventurous, thanks to all the snowstorms on the way! Suddenly, we went from 45 degrees to minus 45 degrees in a matter of three days! But the park indeed was beyond beautiful; it was truly a winter wonderland!



Frosted Lamar Valley at -45 degree shot at sunrise.

The idea was to find and photograph as many wild animals as possible in their natural habitat, but one species has mesmerized me as a wildlife photographer, and this entire trip was planned to capture that animal: wolves, particularly black wolves. The best time to see wolves is truly during winter, as they are most active. Because there are very few crowds at this time of year, they can sometimes be found close to the road.

Yellowstone *continued*

The second day of the trip was special as it marked the completion of 30 years of a wolf re-introduction project in Yellowstone National Park. After wolves were wiped out due to hunting, the ecosystem started crumbling down, as the herbivores like elk and bison started over-consuming vegetation, which in turn led to soil erosion, and so to keep their population in check, wolves were brought in from Canada and reintroduced in the park. The project was successful. Currently, approximately 120 wolves within the park are distributed across nine packs.



Yellowstone *continued*



On this very special day (January 12, 2025), my dream came true, and we encountered a lone black wolf wandering across an endless white canvas of snow. I can't explain my feelings in words when this beast's eyes met mine while I was looking through my camera's viewfinder; I was just incredibly grateful for this experience.

Yellowstone *continued*



On the third day, we found a fox resting like a pet dog just outside a few houses in Cooke City, Montana. This cute little town is just outside the park entrance on the northeast. Some foxes here find easy food and hang around the area.



Pronghorns are pretty common here at any time of the year. They are mostly found near Gardiner, Montana, just outside the north entrance of the park. I found this one bathing in gorgeous golden light during sunset on a crisp, cold day.

Yellowstone *continued*



One day, while scouting for animals in the park, we came across a huge crowd of photographers, some of whom had climbed a small hill and had their lenses pointed at a tree top. I got down, tried looking in that direction, and found a tiny bird sitting on a tree top. It was hard to tell which bird it was, and when I pointed my lens at it, I saw that it was a pygmy owl. Owls are one of my favorite birds of prey to photograph. Oblivious to its environment, the owl remained in its own world.

Yellowstone *continued*



How can we talk about Yellowstone National Park without talking about the iconic American Bison? They endure brutal winters with courageous spirits. They use their heads to plow the snow and access the vegetation beneath to feed on. That's how they all get that snow on their faces.

Yellowstone *continued*



One day, I found a huge crowd of photographers during a morning scout along the river banks. I got down out of curiosity to see what they had found. Otters have always fascinated me. Sure enough, there was a river otter along the bank leaping through heaps of snow, and it gave us one last pose before disappearing into the glowing river water caused by the reflection of sunrise.

Yellowstone *continued*



Big horn sheep were on my “find list” during this trip, as I had never had a chance to photograph them. On one of the spots just outside the park, there was a big herd of sheep resting and grazing. They were not bothered by our presence, so I kept a respectable distance from them, like every other time, and took this picture.

Yellowstone *continued*



During one of the beautiful sunrises in the park, the sky lit up in pink and purple shades. I found a mama moose with her baby grazing, and I decided to make this an environmental shot, as in the photograph showing the animal in its natural habitat, instead of getting a tight portrait, as it was hard to eliminate the beautiful sky, mountains, and the frosted tree.

Yellowstone *continued*

I found this Stellar's Jay, flaunting its brilliant blue color, when I was busy working with a fox, and the branch it landed on made for a stunning frame.



These were the animals I was least excited to photograph. We find them here locally, and I often see them from my backyard and hear them barking almost daily at night or early morning. Do you have any guesses? I think you've figured out who I am talking about: coyotes, of course!

But these guys are way fluffier than the ones found here, which I think is because of the harsh winters. But as a wildlife photographer, it is hard to let go of an opportunity to get pictures of animals who are so cooperative and posing for you!

Yellowstone *continued*



I hope this article brought a cool breeze in this warm weather, and you enjoyed reading it as much as I enjoyed creating it. Here are some snippets of breathtaking sunsets in the park. I do have to remind myself at times to not just focus on animals but also to capture stunning nature and landscapes. My heart fills with gratitude when working in nature, and I feel incredibly lucky to be able to do what I do.

Please consider following me on Instagram (@prachibhogan) for more such pictures.

My Adventure with the Greater Roadrunner

by Danny Baracz

We moved from the mountains of Colorado to Las Cruces in January 2022. The first time I saw a Greater Roadrunner, it was in my front yard. I was so excited, I just had to take several pictures and send them to my friends in Colorado. These birds are fascinating to watch as they scurry along the ground, their head and tail in a line parallel to the ground.

I continued to see them several times a month, and in June 2024, I began seeing one particular roadrunner almost every day. I called him my “Little Buddy.” One day when I let my dog out, he startled the roadrunner, who immediately flew up into the rafters of my backyard pagoda. Of course, I put the dog back inside so as to not harass the bird.

Soon I realized my “Little Buddy” was actually roosting in the pagoda rafters every night, and he (or she) has a regular schedule. Little Buddy leaves the roost about an hour after sunrise, and just like clockwork, returns about two hours before sunset. It is such a regular schedule, we choose the times we let our dog out so as to not bother or harass the roadrunner.

Roadrunners, according to the literature, are territorial. They roam their territory looking for food and avoiding predators. Seems my Little Buddy’s territory is right here in Sonoma Ranch. Many articles describe them as being very tolerant of humans, and I’ve read that some people actually train them to eat out of their hands. I consciously chose not to try to do that. I don’t want the bird to lose its fear of humans, just in case he meets someone who isn’t very nice.

One leisurely day in August, I left the back sliding door open so the dog could go in and out. Before long I heard a commotion in the kitchen. I found that Little Buddy had walked into the house and was checking the place out. Not surprisingly, my dog noticed and gave chase. When I got there, the roadrunner was perched on top of the kitchen cabinets out of range from the dog. I put the dog in the back room and coaxed the bird out the sliding glass door, but not before he started to make clicking noises with his beak. It was very interesting to watch and hear his clicking from two feet away.

August turned into September, and the days were still hot and the nights warm. Everyday I’d see Little Buddy leave in morning and return in the late afternoon. In November and December, it was starting to get cold at night. Of course, I was worried about the roadrunner surviving in freezing weather. Then I read that roadrunners enter a state of torpor each night. Torpor is a short-term hibernation that allows roadrunners to conserve energy by lowering their body temperature. In the morning, they warm themselves by facing away from the sun and sunbathing with their feathers raised to warm up. Their skin is very dark and absorbs the sun’s energy. Sure enough, every morning Little Buddy was out there sunbathing to warm up.



Roadrunner *continued*

I decided to provide a little extra nutrition during the winter months, as I imagine food is scarce this time of year. Most experts advise against this, but if you must, they say to make it a healthy snack such as mealworms, super worms, or a dead mouse. Processed human food is definitely harmful to these birds. So, I give my Little Buddy some super worms a couple times a week.

Last week, Little Buddy came back at the regular time, but did not make it to his regular roosting spot. I assumed he had returned to the desert, maybe out looking for a mate. However, the next morning I set out a few worms just in case he returned and was hungry. Sure enough, the worms were gone within the hour. It turns out he had picked a different spot in the rafters, so he wasn't gone after all.

My next trick is to determine if Little Buddy is a male or female. Roadrunner plumage appears the same; the males are slightly larger than the females, but not by much. I don't have any other bird with which to compare Little Buddy, so this is a work in progress.

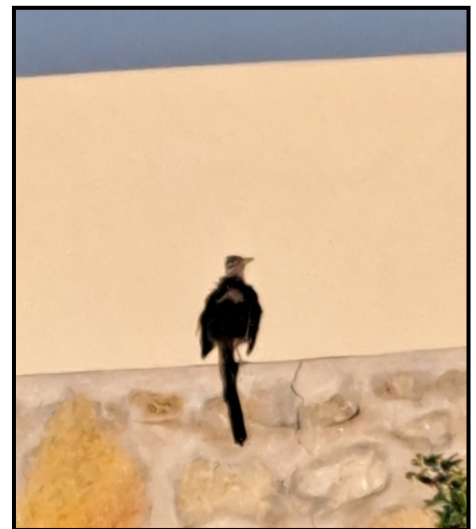
Wile E. Coyote never catches the Roadrunner in the cartoon, but in reality, the coyote is much faster (35–40 mph) and is one of the roadrunners' predators. Roadrunners can reach speeds of 15 m.p.h., while humans average 7–8 miles m.p.h. They are very fast ground birds, capable of catching and eating insects, snakes (including rattlesnakes), lizards, birds, and just about anything else it can catch.

Just think: This bird can outrun humans, kill and eat rattlesnakes, and is adapted to survive in a harsh desert environment. Roadrunners are members of the cuckoo family, and while they look nothing like their cuckoo relatives, one call of a roadrunner sounds much like "coo." I am amazed that watching and learning about this bird can be such an enjoyable experience.

Danny Baracz
Baracz@aol.com



Roosting spot in the pagoda



Absorbing sunlight to warm up in the morning

Know Your Seeds

by Deborah Downes

Trial and Error

When I first started birding, I didn't know a lot about what I was putting in the feeder. I just bought a bag of bird seed, dumped it in the feeder, and became a bird watcher. As birds started coming, I began to really study them. I watched how they ate and how they interacted with each other. I also noted what they rejected. Soon after, I started seeing the problems of feeding birds: I didn't know enough about the seed I was providing my lovely feathered friends. The food I put out was attracting some of the birds that were undesirable, namely sparrows, starlings, and cowbirds. I also noticed the feeders were being emptied quickly, sometimes only taking a few hours to empty, especially if a big group of White-winged Doves showed up. Then there were the squirrels to deal with that were eating all the expensive bird seed.

I soon discovered that my newfound hobby was growing more frustrating. With a lot of observance, patience, and research into the seeds I was buying, however, I started to understand what was going on in this complex bird world in my garden. I found that a variety of seed, and putting it in several locations, would yield more desirable results. So, I started looking at what each seed represented in quality to my garden birds.

I soon learned how each type of seed affected the birds. The cowbird, for example, is one you do not want in your garden. They are detrimental to our tiny songbirds' nesting season, as they throw out the songbirds' eggs and lay their own in the nest. Picture the poor tiny songbird, like the wren, trying to raise a large cowbird, three times its size. It takes all their strength and intense searching for food to satisfy the voracious appetite of the cowbird. I discovered that while white proso millet is a favorite among ground-feeding birds, it also is a favorite of the cowbird, therefore, I recommend you stay away from it altogether.

The Right Kind of Seed

A lot of people buy inexpensive mixes in big bags, and I was one of them. Unfortunately, these inexpensive bags contain a large portion of seeds that will attract cowbirds and squirrels. I learned that a lot of the inexpensive seed sold often contains fillers, such as golden millet, red millet, milo, and flax. You'll want to avoid these types of mixes, as most birds do not like these seeds, which go to waste, creating a breeding ground for bacteria and fungus.

Seeds *continued*

Multiple Feeding Stations

I used to have only one or two feeders out, but, over time, I realized even with the right seed, I had a crowding issue. Even though I wanted to feed all the birds that were coming to the feeders, the bigger birds were displacing the tiny birds. To remedy this, I now have three stations. The best investment I have made is getting some poles with baffles and hooks for the hanging feeders. You can add or take away hooks as you change what you offer, or move them altogether for a new location.

The feeder station closest to my house is nestled into the landscape and five feet from the closest tree, to keep the squirrels from jumping on. This pole has a hanging suet feeder, which the woodpeckers, wrens, jays, and goldfinches all share. I have a small feeder that contains Nyjer and tiny sunflower chips, which is the goldfinch's and chickadee's favorite. My main feeder is a platform feeder. Cardinals (here, desert cardinals) love safflower seeds and sunflower hearts, so they pretty much rule the platform feeder.

My second station of poles and hooks is 30 feet across to a natural area in the trees. I have another platform feeder with sunflower and safflower seeds. There is a peanut feeder, which is the Black-crested Titmouse's favorite place. And, I recently started buying seed blocks. They are great to have, because the blocks are loved by all and last the longest.

Finally, I have another pole with just one hook and a large platform feeder. This pole is positioned just close enough to the tree so the squirrels can jump on. I personally like feeding the squirrels and after many experiments, this works the best to keep them in harmony with feeding birds. I do not offer any shelled or cracked corn, because it attracts sparrows, starlings, and cowbirds. In this feeder, I place a bag of wildlife food with whole corn, pumpkin seeds, and large, shelled sunflower seeds. I also throw in some whole, shelled peanuts. This feeder not only satisfies the squirrels but also the jays, cardinals, and White-winged Doves. Even some of the smaller birds stop in on occasion. It also seems to work in keeping the bigger birds more concentrated to that feeder, limiting their visits to the expensive feed offered to the smaller birds elsewhere. I do take this feeder in at night, though, to keep the raccoons from emptying it overnight.

Note: The most important thing to remember is to keep your feeders clean. Mold and fungus can quickly grow in feeders, which can harm your feathered friends. After a long rain, remember to check your feeders and seed blocks for black mold. Be sure to discard them, if any is present.

I have been watching birds for many years now, and my garden has an array of different birds, from permanent residents to migratory beauties, like the male Painted Bunting. I now look forward to all the different birds that stop in my garden as they pass through our state. And you can, too, provided you know your seeds.

Seeds *continued*

1. a) Sunflower - Black Oil 	1.b) Sunflower - Striped 	2. Peanuts 
3. White Proso Millet 	4. Safflower seed 	5. Nyjer Thistle 
6. Cracked Corn 	7. Red Proso Millet 	8. Golden (German) 
9. Milo (sorghum) 	10. Oats 	11. Wheat 
12. Canary seed 	13. Flax seed 	14. Rape seed (canola seed) 

Calendar of MVAS Activities for May, June, and July 2025

Bird Walks

May 5 (Monday) Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park - Bird Walk, 8 —10:15 a.m. Meet at the visitor center. There is a \$5 day use (vehicle) fee unless you have a state park annual pass.

May 10 (Saturday) Sagecrest Park - Bird Walk, 8 —10:15 a.m.

May 21 (Wednesday) Tellbrook Park -Bird Walk, 8 —10:15 a.m. Meet at the park entrance, 4290 Winchester Road.

May 31 (Saturday) Leasburg Dam State Park - Bird Walk, 8 —10:15 a.m. Meet at the visitor center. There is a \$5 day use (vehicle) fee unless you have a state park annual pass.

June 2 (Monday) Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park - Bird Walk, 8 —10:15 a.m. Meet at the visitor center. There is a \$5 day use (vehicle) fee unless you have a state park annual pass.

June 28 (Saturday) Leasburg Dam State Park - Bird Walk, 8 —10:15 a.m. Meet at the visitor center. There is a \$5 day use (vehicle) fee unless you have a state park annual pass.

Nature Journaling

May 10 (Saturday) Nature Journaling 10:30 a.m. —12:30 p.m. at Dripping Springs in Ice Canyon part of Migratory Bird Day.

May 24 (Saturday) Nature Journaling 10 a.m. —12 p.m. at Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park in the native plant garden.

June 7 (Saturday) Nature Journaling 10 a.m. — 12 p.m. at NM Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum.

Sagecrest Park Clean-up

May 18 (Sunday) Sagecrest Park Clean-up 8 —9:00 a.m.

June 21 (Saturday) Sagecrest Park Clean-up 8 —9:00 a.m.

July 19 (Saturday) Sagecrest Park Clean-up 8 —9:00 a.m.



On May 1st MVAS members C.J. Goin and Annie Mitchell presented a birding program to 3rd graders at Leasburg Dam State Park. The students were enthusiastic and they learned bird identification and birding skills.

Upcoming Event and Meetings

Upcoming Event

May 10 (Saturday) Migratory Bird Day from 7 a.m.—1 p.m. It will be held at the Drippings Springs Natural Area, 15000 Drippings Springs Rd.



The poster features a blue sky background with clouds. At the top, there are four logos: the National System of Public Lands, Friends of the San Juan Mountains, a bird in flight, and the Mesilla Valley Audubon Society. The main title "WORLD MIGRATORY BIRD DAY" is in black, followed by "Shared Spaces" in large orange letters, and "Creating Bird-Friendly Cities and Communities" in smaller black text. On the left, a white box contains the event details: "Join us Saturday, May 10th at Dripping Springs Natural Area to celebrate World Migratory Bird Day!". On the right, a list of activities is provided with times in orange. At the bottom, there is a colorful illustration of yellow lilies, a green frog, and a black and orange bird.

Join us
Saturday, May 10th
at Dripping Springs Natural Area to celebrate World Migratory Bird Day!

All programs start out at the visitor center.
You will be directed from there to the location of your activity.

7am Observe and learn about our feathered friends up close as Master Bander Mara Weisenberger bands birds and collects data about their health and travels! Between birds, you can decorate your own bird band and join the flock!

8am Enjoy an easy bird walk with Mesilla Valley Audubon Society (MVAS) and BLM wildlife biologist Meredith. A limited number of binoculars will be available to borrow

7:30am - 1pm Swing by to chat with folks from MVAS and learn more about your local birds and how to protect them!

10:30-12:30pm Join the MVAS Nature Journal Club to learn about how you can deepen your connection to nature using words, pictures, and numbers. Bring a sketchbook and pens, pencils, or even a travel watercolor kit. Supplies will also be available to borrow. *No experience or artistic talent required!*

12:30-12:50pm Don Dapkus shares all about our tiniest feathered visitors to the Native Plant Garden in this 20-minute Hummingbird Chat!

World Migratory Bird Day in the Americas is coordinated by Environment for the Americas
Art by Annamaria Savarino Drago

Monthly Meetings are held every month except June and July at NMSU Knox Hall Room 142 and on Zoom. Meetings begin at 6:30 p.m. with a social time followed by a presentation from 7—8 p.m.

May 21 (Wednesday) Mesilla Valley Audubon Society Meeting 6:30—8 p.m. Megan Lemmon will speak on Kestrel Nest Boxes. NMSU Knox Hall.

June 18 (Wednesday) Birds and Beers 6—8 p.m. at Icebox Brewhouse (2260 S. Locust).

July 16 (Wednesday) Birds and Beers 6—8 p.m. at The Game II (4131 Northrise Dr.).

Officers and Board

President: Cheryl Fallstead

Vice-president: Elaine Stachera Simon

Secretary: Julia Osgood

Treasurer: Judy Wilbur

Board Members (elected with 3-year terms)

Board Member 2023-2025: CJ Goin

Board Member 2023-2025: Annie Mitchell

Board Member 2023-2025: Marcia Wilson

Board Member 2023-2025: Linda Miller

Board Member 2024-2026: Dylan Osterhaus

Board Member 2024-2026: Whitney Watson

Board Member 2025-2027: Randy Gray

Board Member 2025-2027: Vacant

Committee Chairs

Conservation: Vacant

Education: Cheryl Fallstead

Field Trips: Linda Miller

Programs: Cheryl Fallstead

Newsletter: Marcia Wilson

Website: Linda Miller

Membership: Annie Mitchell

Christmas Bird Count: Mark Pendleton, Wayne Treers

Facebook admin: Dylan Osterhaus

Climate Watch Coordinator: Mark Pendleton

Roadrunner Ramblings is published quarterly and is distributed via [the MVAS website](#), with a copy emailed to all MVAS members and friends. All members of MVAS are encouraged to submit articles of interest and any bird photograph recently taken.

Please email your contributions to Marcia Wilson at sleepingsafe@yahoo.com.

To be added to the distribution list, contact Cheryl Fallstead at mesillavalleyaudubon@gmail.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.

Mesilla Valley Audubon Society

A chapter of the
National Audubon Society



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Continued from page one of President's letter

Nature journaling will also continue over summer, and if you haven't yet tried it, May 10's event in Ice Canyon at Dripping Springs would be a great time to check it out!

I want to take this opportunity to thank our members for their support of our organization, with a special shout-out to our bird walk leaders, Aaron our park czar, nature journal club leaders, and, of course, the board.

Gracias!

Cheryl Fallstead, MVAS President



Sara Kay took this photo of a Greater Roadrunner having lunch in a tree by the roadside in Duncan, AZ 07/25/2024. She took this photo using her Cool Pix p950.