



ROADRUNNER RAMBLINGS

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Doña Ana County Big Year Challenge 2007

by David Griffin, MVAS Board & Big Year Challenger

Starting on January 1, 2007 a group of local birders began a year-long adventure to observe as many species of birds as they could within Doña Ana County. From the start, this small group of friends realized they didn't want to make it a contest or competition, so decided to downplay the appearance of a true competition by instead referring to it as a "challenge." Hence, the Doña Ana County Big Year Challenge 2007 was born.

The group is made up mostly of Las Cruces residents, but some are from Radium Springs and a few are plying their luck from home bases in El Paso. The members come from various walks of life including college students and professionals, and represent various skills and levels of bird identification. Their rules are simple and easy to follow: record all native or naturally-occurring birds seen or heard within Doña Ana County during 2007.

Each member keeps a running list of all the birds they've seen, dates, and the locations where they observed them. Some members keep dedicated electronic databases with the above information. In addition to recording species, date, and location information, one intrepid member is even tracking their hours, miles traveled by car and miles traveled by foot! They all keep in touch frequently by e-mail and share "hot tips" and travel directions to special or rare birds.

All areas in the county are "open" for the challenge; most places visited are on public property such as BLM land and city and state parks, and most are well-known to local birders. Some locations are on private lands and are only searched with the land owners' permission. Some of the well-known locations they frequent include: Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park, Leasburg Dam State Park, Aguirre Springs Recreation Area (Pine Tree Trail), Dripping Springs Natural Area, Burn Lake, and along the Rio Grande. Other local search areas regularly include the NMSU agricultural pens, Fillmore Canyon, Bar Canyon, and Isaak Lake/Jornada Grasslands. Areas as far away as Garfield, Rincon and the grasslands in the Uvas Valley have also been visited.

Some members spend considerable time "chasing" birds or regularly visiting prime birding locations, while others only spend a couple of hours per week looking for birds. Results so far have varied, but by mid-February some members of the group have observed about 115 species,

while others have already surpassed 155 species! How many species might they be able to find throughout the year? It's hard to say for sure, but approximately 380 species are known to occur in the County and some members have previously documented about 250 species in one year.

Periodically, members of the group plan on sharing their adventure and results with MVAS members at monthly MVAS

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Migration Sensation at Percha State Park

Final planning is not complete, but the third annual Migration Sensation at Percha Dam State Park is scheduled for **April 20 and 21**.

On April 20, a ceremony is planned to recognize Percha Dam State Park along with Elephant Butte State Park and Caballo Lake State Park, which all have been designated as Important Bird Areas by Audubon New Mexico.

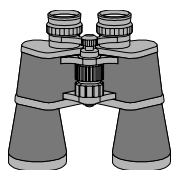
Other events will include

- Kid's workshops (on Friday, April 20) including building birdfeeders and building bird nests from construction paper

- Birding events (both days) including a birding breakfast, bird identification talk, guided bird walks, and bird rehabilitation demonstration by Wildlife Rescue group on how birds no longer able to survive in wild are rehabilitated.

- Additional events (both days) including Annual Day Use pass giveaway, Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park guided tours

As final plans are made, more information will be available by contacting New Mexico State Parks at 888-NMPARKS (888-667-2757), or calling Percha Dam State Park at (505) 743-3942. Visitors can also find information on the New Mexico State Parks website at www.nmparks.com.



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.



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.

Holloman Lakes. March 24. Meet at the east end of the parking lot of K-Mart on Hwy 70 at 7 AM. On this trip we should see some migratory shorebirds such as phalaropes plus several species of ducks. Half-day trip returning to Las Cruces around noon. Bring drinks and sun-screen.

La Luz Canyon in the Sacramento Mts. April 28. Meet at east end of the parking lot of the K-Mart on Hwy 70 at 7AM. Expect to see neotropical migrants such as Wilson’s Warbler, tanagers, grosbeaks, and a variety of flycatchers. Bring drinks and sun-screen. We will probably stop for lunch in Alamogordo.

For additional information on either field trip, please contact Walt Whitford at 521-1358 or email wlawhitATzianet.com.

Rio Bosque at 10 Years. March 21. Ten years ago, a project to create a shallow-water emergent wetland launched a long-term ecological restoration effort at Rio Bosque Wetlands Park in El Paso. The landscape at this 372-acre park has seen dramatic changes since then. But there is still no emergent wetland. UTEP’s John Sproul, the park manager, will join us and give us an update on Rio Bosque, its changing landscape, its birds and its ongoing challenges.

Sage Sparrow Study. April 18. Historically, vast desert grasslands covered much of the Chihuahuan Desert. Over the past couple of centuries, shrublands dominated by plants such as creosote and mesquite have replaced many of the grasslands. NMSU graduate student Cara Joos will share with us the results of her masters research, which focused on the question “Are shrub encroached grasslands sub-optimal habitat for wintering sage sparrows (*Amphispiza belli*)?”

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.

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Field Trip Report

Uvas Valley and Vicinity. February 24. Fourteen intrepid birders disregarded the cold north wind and had a great day of birding. We recorded 63 species of birds—most in the Macho Creek area west of the Nutt grasslands. We had the closest and longest looks I have ever had at a Ferruginous Hawk. Startling everyone was a Summer Tanager that flew by us in Macho Creek canyon. Everyone had an opportunity to watch Horned Larks in the Macho Creek road through the grasslands. After a great lunch at the Barber Shop Cafe in Hillsboro, we made a brief trip through the lower half of Animas Creek Canyon and made a brief stop at Percha Park before heading back to Las Cruces.

Walt Whitford

Helpful Hint: Feeder Funnel

Tired of making a mess with spilled bird seed (not to mention wasting those precious, costly thistle seeds)? Consider this hint from MVAS Board Member Richard Bischoff:

A quick way to fill your tube feeder—use plastic containers from quart to gallon size. Cut the bottom out of one to use for a funnel and enlarge the cap opening to fit the top of a complete jug. Cut one (quart) size for a scoop. Fill the whole container with appropriate bird feed. Pour directly into the feeder with the filled jug. Works well.

**Las Cruces
Christmas Bird Count
a Big Success**

Bird Notes

<i>Species</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Observers</i>
Prairie Falcon	12/30	Calle del Norte bridge	BR/DW
Peregrine Falcon	12/30	Mesilla Dam	BR/DW
Horned Larks	12/31	White Sands Natl Mon.	BLP
Black Headed Grosbeak	01/05	Spring Canyon (Deming)	AK/GP
Chipping Sparrow	01/05	Spring Canyon	AK/GP
Rufous-crowned Sparrow	01/05	Spring Canyon	AK/GP
Mountain Bluebirds	01/07	Broad Canyon windmill	RHJM
Lesser Goldfinches	01/10	Las Cruces	LS
American Crows	01/10	Fairway	LS
Cattle Egrets	01/10	Burn Lake	LS
Canada Geese	01/11	Burn Lake	PT
Black-crowned Night-Herons	01/13	Leasburg S. P.	LS/BR
Red-naped Sapsucker (f)	01/13	Leasburg S. P.	LS/BR
Sandhill Cranes (1200)	01/14	Garfield	MS
Ruddy Ground-dove	01/15	Radium Springs	MS
Anna's Hummingbird	01/15	Radium Springs	MS
Iceland Gull	01/16	Sunland Park	KS
Great Egrets	01/16	Sunland Park	KS
Snow Geese	01/16	Sunland Park	KS
Double-crested Cormorant	01/16	Sunland Park	KS
Eared Grebe	01/16	Sunland Park	KS
Pied-billed Grebe	01/16	Sunland Park	KS
Buffleheads	01/16	Sunland Park	KS
N. Rough-winged Swallows	01/16	Santa Teresa	KS
Greater Yellowlegs	01/16	Santa Teresa	KS
Least Sandpipers	01/16	Santa Teresa	KS
American Pipits	01/16	Santa Teresa	KS
Wood Ducks	01/16	Keystone wetlands	KS
Cinnamon Teal	01/16	Keystone wetlands	KS
Green-winged Teal	01/16	Keystone wetlands	KS
Ruddy Ducks	01/16	Keystone wetlands	KS
Hooded Merganser	01/16	Keystone wetlands	KS
Bufflehead	01/16	Keystone wetlands	KS
Savannah Sparrows	01/16	Berino	KS
Green-tailed Towhee	01/27	Valles Canyon	JA/GS
Spotted Towhee	01/27	Valles Canyon	JA/GS
Double-crested Cormorant	01/27	Burn Lake	LS
Common Moorhen	01/28	Mesilla Dam	LS/GP
Greater Yellowlegs	01/28	Mesilla Dam	LS/GP
Western Sandpipers	01/28	Mesilla Dam	LS/GP
Least Sandpipers	01/28	Mesilla Dam	LS/GP
Mountain Bluebirds	01/28	Mesilla Dam	LS/GP
Western Bluebirds	01/28	Mesilla Dam	LS/GP
Lark sparrows	01/28	Mesilla Dam	LS/GP
Hermit Thrush	02/11	Las Cruces	JH
Long-eared Owls	02/10	Randall's Pool	CL
Common Yellowthroat	02/10	Mesilla Bosque (MVBP)	CL
Blue-winged Teal	02/10	Mesilla Bosque (MVBP)	CL
Red-shouldered Hawk	02/11	Rio Grande	CL/JZ/MS
Bald Eagle	02/11	Rio Grande	CL/JZ/MS
Ferruginous Hawk	02/11	Rio Grande	CL/JZ/MS
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	02/11	Leasburg S. P.	CL
Bufflehead	02/11	Leasburg S. P.	BR/DW

Observers: Robert Hull / Jackye Meinecke, John Hyndman, Al Krueger, Carl Lundblad, Bruce Pearson, Earle Pittman, Guy Powers, Barb Rodriguez, Lorraine Schulte, Marcy Scott, Gill Sorg, Ken Stinnett, Paul Turner, Donna Wood, Jimmie Zabriskie

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

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

The Las Cruces Christmas Bird Count, part of the larger 106th Audubon Christmas Count, appears to record slow recovery from the several years of drought that brought down species numbers in the past few count years. In all, 38 observers in 12 parties recorded 120 different species, with an aggregate of 34,272 individual birds.

The count took place on Saturday, December 16, a balmy sunny day in the valley. Highlights of the count included 2 Eastern Phoebes in the Mesilla Valley Bosque Park (MVBP, the Old Refuge), 2 Vermilion Flycatchers (1 in Mid-Valley and 1 adjacent to the MVBP), and a count week American Bittern, a species never before recorded on the Las Cruces count.

We achieved the highest count numbers recorded to date of the following species: Green-winged Teal (76); Cattle Egret (74); Cooper's Hawk (19); Sora (6); Spotted Sandpiper (6); Least Sandpiper (264); Wilson's Snipe (19); Western Screech-Owl (3); Northern Flicker (121); Black Phoebe (35); Say's Phoebe (78); Northern Mockingbird (64); Myrtle form of Yellow-rumped Warbler (15); Common Grackle (59); Bronzed Cowbird (30).

Of further note is that White-winged Doves were down from a high of 42,521 in 2004 to just 10,354. Sparrows, juncos and towhees continue to be present in reduced numbers compared to highs in the time interval between 1990 and 2001.

I thank everyone who participated in the count for their support and assistance, and invite new members to turn out for the 107th count next December.

Tim Lawton

Daniel S. Kilby



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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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/.

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meetings. Starting with the March meeting, and concluding with the December meeting – with final results – Doña Ana County Big Year Challenge group members hope to keep MVAS members interested and enticed with our local rich avian diversity, and to get people outside to go bird watching or just to take a hike in one of the fabulous natural areas Las Cruces and Doña Ana County have to offer.

Besides the more common or regular species observed, some highlights so far from the DAC Big Year Challenge include: Neotropic Cormorant, Canada Goose and Cackling Goose, Blue-winged and Cinnamon Teal, Hooded Merganser, Red-shouldered Hawk, Bald Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, Anna’s Hummingbird, Eastern Bluebird, Sprague’s Pipit, Common Yellowthroat, Sage Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, and Chestnut-collared Longspur. Who can say what they’ll find next month? Come to the next meeting to find out!

NM Audubon Council Meeting

The next meeting of the New Mexico Audubon Council will be March 31 at Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, starting at 10 AM. The main focus of the meeting will be setting conservation priorities for this year. All Audubon members are welcome.

Roadrunner Ramblings is published six times a year: January, March, May, July, September, and November. Submissions welcome; please email copy to nstotz1ATcomcast.net, or call for mailing information. **Next deadline: April 23.** Printed on 100% PCW recycled paper by **insta-copy printing**. Image credits: roadrunner, Dale Zimmerman; binoculars and ticket stub, IMSI’s Master Clips/Master Photos® Collection.

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