

ROADRUNNER RAMBLINGS

Volume 32, No. 3. May-June 2010

Spotlight on a New Mexico Ornithologist

by David Griffin, MVAS President

Four things only are necessary—a scrupulous conscience, unlimited patience, a notebook, and an opera glass....

Florence Merriam Bailey

Florence Merriam Bailey wrote this statement in her 1898 book *Birds of Village and Field: a Bird Book for Beginners*. This, her fourth book, was written specifically for the beginning birdwatcher. When it comes to birdwatching, what was true 112 years ago is still true today.

Florence was born in 1863 and raised in upstate New York. Growing up in a beautiful place she gained a fondness for the natural world. Florence wanted to be a writer and enrolled at Smith College to pursue her dream. While there she became concerned with the plight of colonial waterbirds, populations of which were being decimated for use of their feathers in the women's millinery trade. This concern spurred her to write articles for *Audubon Magazine* and to found the Smith College Audubon Society. She later revised her collection of articles and published them as her first book, *Birds Through an Opera Glass* (1889). Later she wrote the first popular American bird book *A-Birding on a Bronco*— which was one of the first bird books for use in the field. Her writing talent and genuine concern for birds were highly regarded, and she quickly was accepted as one of the best naturalist writers of the time.

Florence had tuberculosis and traveled the west to help overcome the illness. While traveling she developed a keen sense of western birds. She married Vernon Bailey, who worked for the U.S. Biological Survey. Florence accompanied Vernon on many trips including an extensive survey of New Mexico. Florence published nearly 100 articles in ornithological journals and following Frank Chapman's classic *Handbook of Birds of Eastern North America* (1895), decided to write her own and in 1902 published her *Handbook of Birds of the Western United States*—a huge success that was revised and updated many times. Her reputation grew and in 1908 she was recognized by Joseph Grinnell with the naming of a subspecies of Mountain Chickadee in her honor: *Parus gambeli baileyi*.

Florence became a founding member of the Audubon Society of Washington D.C. and began to publicize Audubon's role in conservation. She initiated one of the first basic bird classes that focused on instructing teachers in the field and laboratory.

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Birdathon 2010

Birdathon is Audubon's largest annual fundraising event, and the world's largest bird-watching competition with thousands of people participating. MVAS members join to count birds, have fun, and raise funds for our mission of conservation, education, and advocacy.

Here's how Birdathon works: people count birds and collect pledges from sponsors based on the number of species they see in a 24-hr period. All you have to do is choose a date and time in May, and start counting. You can do it alone, with a friend, or as a team. You don't have to be an expert—some people do Birdathon from their yard, others drive dozens of miles, while others choose to "Go Green" and do their Birdathon by bike. Depending on your effort you may end up seeing 35 to 50 or more species, or rack up over 150 species! The key is to have fun and raise money for MVAS programs.

For more information visit our website (www.mvaudubon.org) or contact David Griffin.

State Land Commissioner Forum

MVAS, along with the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance, Southwest Environmental Center, and several sportsmen's groups will co-host a candidate's forum for the office of New Mexico State Land Commissioner.

The forum will be held in the theater at the **New Mexico Farm and Ranch Museum** on **May 20** from **6:30 to 8:30 pm**. Five candidates have indicated that they will attend, and the hosting groups will develop questions that will be asked of each candidate.

The public is encouraged to attend to learn more about their State Land Office and what it does. There will be media announcements with further information.

Electronic Newsletter

Help MVAS save resources by signing up to receive *Roadrunner Ramblings* electronically, instead of in printed form. To sign up, email Nancy Stotz at

nstotz1@comcast.net

As each issue goes to press, you will receive an email indicating that a PDF version of the new issue is available for download at our website

www.mvaudubon.org

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 _____

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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.



Programs

Membership meetings and programs are held each month 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.

Unspoiled: The Natural Side of White Sands Missile Range. May 19. Presented by Dave Anderson, Range Ecologist, White Sands Missile Range. Come learn why this 2.2-million-acre military base has so much biodiversity.

Broad Canyon Ranch Restoration Project. June 16. Presented by Bret Beseley, Restoration Specialist, US Fish and Wildlife Service. We'll get an update on ongoing work at Swan Pond and other riparian habitats in Selden Canyon.

Annual MVAS Potluck

**Saturday, May 22
5 pm to 8 pm
at Lorraine Schulte's
residence,
1740 Mariposa Drive
575-524-7029**

Even if you can't come birding with us on our May field trip, why not join us that evening for our annual get-together and potluck dinner? This is a great way to meet and talk with other chapter members, MVAS Board members, and officers.

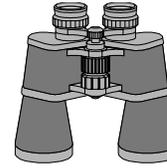
Bring a dish of your choice to share. Coffee, tea, and other drinks will be provided. Also, bring a folding chair and TV table if you can.

MVAS Congratulates

**Larry Sedillo
Mesquite Elementary School**

Winner of the 2010 Lorraine Schulte Excellence in Teaching Award, for helping his students to appreciate and protect the natural world.

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.

Dams, Ditches and Driveways: May Migrants in Mesilla. May 22. On this trip we'll visit local migrant hotspots near Mesilla. Spring migration will be nearing the end of its peak here in the Mesilla Valley, but we shouldn't have a problem finding some great birds such as Summer Tanagers around Mesilla Dam, and migrant warblers and vireos along a lushly-vegetated canal in Mesilla. We'll finish the morning with a nice stroll through Mesilla Park, one of the Mesilla Valley's shadiest and greatest places to find birds in the spring.

The trip will last until early afternoon, so bring snacks and a lunch, water, sun protection and be prepared for possible warm weather conditions. Easy walking. **To register** for this trip or for further information contact David Griffin by May 20 at 575-382-2080 or GriffinBio@gmail.com. Trip is **limited to 20 participants**.

Pine Tree Trail, Aguirre Springs. June 19. On this trip we'll beat the heat by going up in elevation and visiting some unique plant communities in Doña Ana County. The area around Aguirre Springs, Point #41 along the Southwest New Mexico Birding Trail, is a mix of oaks and evergreen shrubs and trees, and it provides habitat for breeding birds not typically found in the surrounding desert lowlands, including Gray Vireo, Rufous-crowned Sparrow, Acorn Woodpecker, Mountain Chickadee, Grace's Warbler, and Hepatic Tanager. This trip will be a moderate to strenuous 5-mile hike with an elevation gain of about 1000'.

Trip will last until mid-afternoon. Bring snacks and/or a lunch, plenty of water, sun protection, sturdy/appropriate footwear, and be prepared for warm weather. Moderate to strenuous walking. Note: Aguirre Springs NRA has a \$3/vehicle day use fee. **To register** for this trip or for further information contact David Griffin by June 17 at GriffinBio@gmail.com or 575-382-2080. Trip is **limited to 10 participants**.

Field Trip Report

White Sands National Monument & Holloman Lakes. March 20. The morning started out very cool and crisp as we hiked 1.5 miles on an old road along the face of the gypsum dunes to a place called The Big Pedestal. Our destination was a small grove of cottonwood trees, little-leaf sumac, and other shrubs that are able to survive here because of the very shallow water table. We didn't see many birds, but our highlight was a small group of Mountain Bluebirds we watched through Wally's

scope. A few of us took some time to examine a multitude of animal tracks in the gypsum. We identified tracks of woodrats, pocket mice, deer mice, coyotes, and a few birds.

Back at the Visitor's Center I found one of the park staff who would accompany us to our second destination: Garton Lake. This lake is located southeast of Highway 70 and used to be a picnic area and swimming hole. Today it is a mere trickle and small wetland that park staff is slowly

trying to restore. We didn't expect to see many birds here, as it was more of an historical exploration for most of us, but we did have a few highlights including two each of Loggerhead Shrike, Sage Thrasher, and Sage Sparrow. The big surprise for most was the small group of Oryx that stood off in the distance, keeping a wary eye focused on us.

We next went to Holloman Lakes, which has become our traditional March birding location. Here we saw about 35 species including 10 species of waterfowl, four Bonaparte's Gulls, four species of shorebirds (including 13 Snowy Plovers), three species of raptors (including a pair of Peregrine Falcons), two species of swallows, and other passerines such as Loggerhead Shrike, Crissal Thrasher, and Savannah Sparrow. Lagoon G remained closed to the public, so we missed out on observing the fine emergent wetland and species typically found there. Thanks to all who participated and for the use of personal vehicles!

Welcome New Members

Edith Hartshorne
 Sharon Lingerfelt
 Donald Florence
 Annette Froehlich
 Dick & Debra Tallent
 Kathy Nickodemus
 Edith M. Avallone
 Cheryl Johnson
 Mildred Miles
 Virginia Shelton
 Alison Lee Bills
 Wilma J. Stout
 Lilyen Chesser
 Emery Peterson
 Chris Burnham
 Alice Gagnon
 Arden Dormann
 Kris Karsteadt
 Eli H. Mabry
 Gracie Bickle
 Ed Busby
 William Little
 Marion Stout
 Philip Chandler
 Susan Walker
 Betty G. Meade
 Ernestine Gorman
 Lynn & Jane Zimmer
 Alexander & Katherine Fernald

Steven D. Amato



Bird Notes

Species	Date	Location	Observers
White-tailed Kite	2/13	MVBSP	CJ
Burrowing Owl	2/15	MVBSP	CJ
Sandhill Crane	2/21	MVBSP	CJ
Rufous-crowned Sparrow	2/21	Mesilla Park	BLP
Aplomado Falcon	2/26	MVBSP	CJ
Yellow-headed Blackbird	2/27	Mesilla Park	BLP
Cave Swallow	3/1	MVBSP	BLP
Yellow-rumped Warbler	4/8	Las Cruces	LS
Mountain Bluebird	3/1	MVBSP	BLP
American Goldfinch	3/2	Las Cruces	JMRH
Lincoln's Sparrow	3/11	Las Cruces	SWH
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	3/15	Leasburg Dam	LS/EW
Gadwall	3/15	Leasburg Dam	LS/EW
Bufflehead	3/15	Leasburg Dam	LS/EW
Cinnamon Teal	3/15	Leasburg Dam	LS/EW
Turkey Vulture	3/16	Las Cruces	SWH
N. Rough-winged Swallow	3/18	Las Cruces	LS
Violet-green Swallow	3/23	Leasburg Dam	BR
Western Sandpiper	3/23	Swan Pond	LS
Black-chinned Hummer	3/23	Las Cruces	LS
Western Grebe	3/25, 4/10	MVBSP	CJ, BR
Swainson's Hawk	3/25	Las Cruces	SS
Eurasian Collared Dove	3/26	Las Cruces	JMU
Zone-tailed Hawk	3/29	MVBSP	CJ
Merlin	4/3	MVBSP	LS/BR
Pine Siskin	4/6	MVBSP	CJ
Pine Grosbeak	4/10	MVBSP	CJ
Black-headed Grosbeak	4/10	Rio @ Mesilla	BR
Western Kingbird	4/10	Mesilla	BR
Bronzed Cowbird	4/18	Las Cruces	LH
Bullock's Oriole	4/18	Las Cruces	JMRH
Summer Tanager	4/18	Rio @ Mesilla	BR/LS/MP/WT
Wilson's Warbler	4/21	Las Cruces	JMRH

Observers: CJ Goin, Sue & Wally Hill, Landy Hinesley, Jackye Meinecke/
 Robert Hull, Jim Mulhauser, Bruce & Linda Pearson, Mark Pendleton, Barb
 Rodriguez, Lorraine Schulte, Wayne Treers, Eleanor Wootten

Please report interesting sightings to Robert Hull at
 575-523-8009 or rwhull@zianet.com

New Mexico Rare Bird Hotline
<http://www.nmbirds.org>

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

OFFICERS AND BOARD

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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.mvaudubon.org

(continued from page 1) **Prez**

With these major accomplishments and her star rising amongst the ornithological elite, her best work was yet to come. In 1916 Wells W. Cooke died before he could complete a project on the birds of New Mexico. Because of her background, Florence was asked by the Biological Survey to complete the work, and in 1928 her *Birds of New Mexico* was published. This work became an instant classic and is regarded as one of the best North American natural history books ever compiled. In 1931 Florence was awarded the Brewster Memorial Award, the highest honor bestowed by the American Ornithologists Union, and she was the first woman ever to receive the honor! Florence's magnum opus stood alone for over 30 years, until another book covering New Mexico's birds was published. It is still probably the best bird book addressing New Mexico's birds.

My interest in Florence began when I learned that she and Vernon did considerable bird work in the Guadalupe Mtns and the Big Burro Mtns in the exact areas where I've worked, and I realized that we've walked and camped on shared ground nearly 105 years apart! If you've never read any of Florence's books, I encourage you to do so—especially *Birds of New Mexico*. Her books are a pure joy to look through.

Among the many accomplishments of FMB through her career are

- one of the 1st birding field guides for the United States
- 1st woman associate member of the AOU (1885)
- 1st woman elected as a Fellow of the AOU (1929)
- 1st woman awarded the Brewster Memorial Award by AOU (1931)
- published her last book when she was 75 years old.

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: June 15.** Printed on 100% PCW recycled paper by **insta-copy printing**. Image credits: roadrunner, Dale Zimmerman; clip art, IMSI's Master Clips/Master Photos® Collection.

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