

# ROADRUNNER RAMBLINGS

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## ***Analysis of Proposed Animal Care Ordinance: A Wildlife Perspective***

*by David Griffin, Marcy Scott, Ken Stinnett, Nancy Stotz, and Bob Tafanelli*

Sometime in the next few weeks the Las Cruces City Council and the Doña Ana County Commission will be voting on an extensive revision of the animal care and control ordinance. Though there are many positive elements to the proposed ordinance, it includes the establishment of legally authorized, free-roaming, feral cat colonies, which is a concern to many conservationists.

This is an emotionally charged issue that pits the lives of native wildlife against the lives of feral cats. In the analysis that follows, we have tried to remove the emotion from the issue, and simply analyze the ordinance from a wildlife perspective. We are advocating on behalf of the welfare of wildlife.

To read the draft ordinance for yourself, visit the animal shelter's website at <http://www.ascmv.org> (click on "Resources" on the left side of the screen and then click on "Recommendations"). For more details on the wildlife impacts of feral cats, check out the references listed at the end of the analysis below. To contact your city councilor and county commissioner, visit the City's website at [www.las-cruces.org](http://www.las-cruces.org) and the County's website at <http://www.co.dona-ana.nm.us/>.

### **Selected Pros & Cons of Proposed Ordinance**

#### **Pros:**

- The proposed ordinance contains many positive elements that could help reduce cat overpopulation and the impacts of free-roaming cats on wildlife, including stringent licensing requirements, sterilization incentives, and restraint requirements limiting pets to the owner's physical control or enclosures on their premises.
- The proposed ordinance authorizes the creation of catteries (secure enclosures for the maintenance of cat colonies), which could help reduce the impacts of free-roaming feral cats, and which would provide individuals and organizations opposed to euthanasia a tool for feral cat population management.

#### **Cons:**

- The proposed ordinance allows for the establishment of unrestrained feral cat colonies in rural areas.
  - Feral and free-roaming cats pose a significant threat to wildlife. Because hunting behavior is not triggered by hunger in cats, even well-fed cats hunt.<sup>1,2</sup> A US study documented individual free-roaming cats killing between

3 and 9 vertebrates (including birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians) per month,<sup>1</sup> and an English study found that free-roaming pet cats killed on average more than 3 vertebrates per month, with the most prolific hunters killing more than 30 prey items per month.<sup>3</sup> These are minimum estimates because they only count prey items captured and returned to the cats' homes, not prey eaten or left outdoors. In urban and suburban environments, free-roaming cats have been found to be responsible for the majority of predation suffered by nestling and fledgling birds, representing as much as 70% of the predation observed in one Florida study.<sup>4</sup>

- Predation by feral cats is not a natural part of our environment, and native wildlife species are not adapted to it. Feral and free-roaming cats occur at much higher densities than native predators ever would, occurring in numbers 10 to 100 times higher than native predators.<sup>1,2</sup> This creates unnatural levels of predation for prey species,<sup>2</sup> and unnatural levels of competition for native predators.<sup>1</sup>

- The maintenance of unrestrained feral cat colonies is likely a violation of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act,<sup>5,6</sup> an international agreement that makes it illegal to "take" migratory birds (including their eggs and nests). More than 390 species of birds protected by this legislation have been observed in Doña Ana County.

- The proposed ordinance does not include any benchmarks to evaluate the effects of unrestrained colonies. The stated purpose of the colonies is to "reduce the population of feral and other free-roaming cats" in the city and county (line 713), but the ordinance includes no details about how populations will be monitored or evaluated. Measurable outcomes, such as changes in feral cat population sizes, must be included. In addition, provisions for monitoring and evaluating the effects of unrestrained colonies on native wildlife must be provided in the ordinance.

- Though the proposed ordinance limits the number of unrestrained colonies to two during the first 36 months of implementation, without careful experimental design, a pre-implementation period for the collection of baseline data, and the participation of qualified scientists to collect data

*continued on page 4 see **Feral Cats***

## 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

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As each issue goes to press, you will receive an email with a PDF of the new issue attached. The PDF is also available at our website  
[www.new-mexico-birds.com](http://www.new-mexico-birds.com)

## 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.

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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.



## MVAS Programs

*Membership meetings and programs are held each month at the Village at Northrise, Hallmark Building, 2882 N. Roadrunner Pkway.*

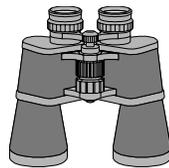
*Meetings begin at 7:00 PM. Programs begin immediately following the business meeting and announcements.*

### Monitoring and Training in Tanzania.

**November 16.** Mara Weisenberger, Wildlife Biologist at San Andres National Wildlife Refuge, was selected as a team member for the Resource Monitoring training effort in Tanzania during September 2010. Mara and another teammate from the USGS trained village game scouts working on the MBOMIPA Wildlife Management Area in southwest Tanzania near Ruaha National Park. She will talk about the training program and a few additional days spent traveling in northeastern Tanzania.

### Christmas Bird Count Organization.

**December 14.** Las Cruces CBC Compiler David Griffin will make sure teams are organized and review methods and data from this annual event.



## Field Trips

*In November and December, special birding events will replace MVAS's normal monthly field trips.*

**November 19. Festival of the Cranes.** This will be a self-organized field trip, in which we say "we encourage you to drive up to the Bosque del Apache for this outstanding birding event!"

**December 17. Las Cruces Christmas Bird Count.** See article on page 3. To volunteer, contact David Griffin at 575-640-0029 or [griffinbio@gmail.com](mailto:griffinbio@gmail.com).

**December 28. La Luz Christmas Bird Count.** If you're interested in helping out with this CBC in the foothills of the Sacramento Mountains northeast of Alamogordo, contact John Douglas at 575-541-0133 or [jlddouglas@zianet.com](mailto:jlddouglas@zianet.com).

**January 2. Caballo CBC.** This count encompasses Caballo Lake and surrounding desert and agricultural lands. For info, contact John Douglas at 575-541-0133 or [jlddouglas@zianet.com](mailto:jlddouglas@zianet.com).

## Access Update: Leasburg Dam State Park

The Leasburg Dam State Park riverside day-use areas are closed to vehicle traffic from September 15, 2011 to March 15, 2012. Visitors may park by the entrance gate and walk in, but please ensure your vehicle is parked on the shoulder and not blocking the gate. Also, note that the footbridges and restrooms are not available for use. Restroom facilities are only available at the main campground.

This is the second year that we have closed the area for the winter in order to allow the area to recuperate from the busy summer season. Many deer, javelina, coyote, fox, and bobcats have been seen wandering the day-use areas and river bed. We also plan to eradicate much saltcedar and plant many pole cuttings of native cottonwoods and willows this winter. Eventually, the goal is to restore the area with native vegetation, limit recreation, and enhance the area for wildlife.

Visit [www.nmparks.com](http://www.nmparks.com) for more information about the park management plan.

*Evaristo Giron, Park Manager*

## eBird: Let Your Obsession Fuel Conservation

eBird is an on-line tool launched in 2002 by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society that allows birders to enter when, where, and how they went birding, and what birds they saw or heard. Your information along with tens of thousands of other participating birders gets integrated into the eBird database. The result—an electronic personal bird record with interactive maps, graphs, and bar charts—is one of the largest and fastest growing biodiversity data resources in existence. Cornell Laboratory eBird staff, Brian Sullivan, is available to visit our area to provide you with a hands-on tutorial. Our birding neighbors from the Trans-Pecos Audubon Society want to join us. If you are interested in participating, please call Beth Bardwell at 522-5065 or send her an email at [bbardwell@audubon.org](mailto:bbardwell@audubon.org) before November 15<sup>th</sup> so we can get on Brian's calendar and have sufficient time to advertise the event.

## 2011 Las Cruces Christmas Bird Count

Do you like to watch birds? Do you have a favorite place that you visit? Would you like to find new places to explore? Would you like to spend the day having fun, hanging out with your old friends and meeting new ones? Do you want to make a difference and help conserve birds and their habitats? If you answered "yes" to any of these questions then you should consider participating in the Las Cruces Christmas Bird Count.

The Las Cruces CBC takes place on one day and is a survey of all birds found within a 15-mile diameter circle. This year we'll be conducting our 36<sup>th</sup> Las Cruces CBC! Participants select one of our survey areas that include diverse habitats such as riparian woodlands and floodplains along the Rio Grande, lush city parks and neighborhoods, agricultural fields, canals and ditches, desert scrub, arroyos, and remnant Chihuahuan Desert grasslands. We typically have about 50 participants and for the past several years have found about 120 species of birds. Last year we counted 122 species of birds.

Highlights from 2010 include hummingbirds such as Rufous (we usually have 1 of these each year), Anna's (we had 5 of them last year, including 1 that ended up nesting in Las Cruces, which was the first time for New Mexico!), and 1 each of Costa's and Broad-billed Hummingbird. We also counted over 13,000 American Crows—a species that is a relative newcomer to Las Cruces, and one that seems to be outnumbering our swarms of White-winged Doves!

This year has been one of the driest on record for all of New Mexico including Las Cruces. What effect will this long-term drought have on wintering birds this year? Open water in the Rio Grande and irrigation ditches is already hard to find in the Mesilla Valley—will there be waterfowl to count? What effect will the construction of the Rio Grande levees and removal of riparian vegetation have on winter birds? Will backyard feeders and bird baths be the most productive places? Will birds be concentrated along the Rio Grande, or will they be scattered across the desert scrub and arroyos?

Come join us for the 36<sup>th</sup> Las Cruces CBC to help answer these questions, and have fun, meet people, explore the Mesilla Valley, and help conserve birds.

For more information or to sign up please contact David Griffin, organizer & compiler ([griffinbio@gmail.com](mailto:griffinbio@gmail.com) or 575-640-0029) or Tim Lawton, co-organizer, ([tlawton@nmsu.edu](mailto:tlawton@nmsu.edu) or 575-522-2056).

**Volunteers Needed**

Looking for a way to help your local Audubon chapter? MVAS is looking for new board members and officers to begin serving next year. Elections are in January. If you're interested, or want more information, contact one of the board members listed on the back of the newsletter.

### Bird Notes

Species	Date	Location	Observers
Lazuli Bunting	8/19	Leasburg Dam SP	CJ
Virginia's Warbler	8/19	Leasburg Dam SP	CJ
Rufous Hummingbird	8/21	Las Cruces	LS
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	8/22	Santo Tomas Drain	CJ
Calliope Hummingbird	8/23	Las Cruces	SWH
Spotted Sandpiper	8/24	Leasburg Dam SP	LS
Yellow Warbler	8/24	Leasburg Dam SP.	LS
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	8/24	Leasburg Dam SP	LS
Black-throated Gray Warbler	8/31	Leasburg Dam SP	CJ
Dusky Flycatcher	9/4	Las Cruces	CJ
Forster's Tern	9/5	MVBSP	CJ
Brewer's Sparrow	9/5	Las Cruces	SWH
Tennessee Warbler	9/7	Leasburg Dam SP	CJ
Northern Waterthrush	9/8	T or C	LQ
Lark Sparrow	9/9	Las Cruces	SWH
American Crow	9/10	Las Cruces	LS
Hutton's Vireo	9/13	Leasburg Dam SP	CJ
Bobolink	9/15	LC Dam	NS
Dickcissel	9/15	LC Dam	NS
Red-necked Phalarope	9/15	LC Dam	NS
Common Black-hawk	9/15	Percha Dam SP	CJ
Western Wood Peewee	9/18	Leasburg Dam SP	LS
Lincoln's Sparrow	9/19	Las Cruces	SWH
Clay-colored Sparrow	9/19	Las Cruces	SWH
Green-tailed Towhee	9/20	Las Cruces	SWH
Orange-crowned Warbler	9/21	Las Cruces	SWH
Loggerhead Shrike	9/25	Percha Dam SP	BJ
Townsend's Solitaire	9/26	La Cueva	CJ
Acorn Woodpecker	9/27	Leasburg Dam SP	CJ
Grasshopper Sparrow	9/29	MVBSP	NS
White-crowned Sparrow	9/29	Mesilla Park	BLP
Common Moorhen	10/3	Santo Tomas Drain	DM
Warbling Vireo	10/4	Percha Dam SP	BJ
Brown Thrasher	10/8	Las Cruces	SAS
Sharp-shinned Hawk	10/11	Mesilla Park	BLP
Northern Harrier	10/11	Nesilla Park	BLP
Rose-breasted Grosbeak	10/13-14	Las Cruces	CM
Sandhill Crane	10/14	Las Cruces	GP

Observers: Lisa Giles, CJ Goïn, Barbara Jackson, Sue & Wally Hill, Charlotte Martens, Darrell Mott, Guy Powers, Sanford Schemnitz, Lorraine Schulte, Nancy Stotz

Please report interesting sightings to Robert Hull at  
575-523-8009 or [rwhull@zianet.com](mailto:rwhull@zianet.com)

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

**Mesilla Valley Audubon Society**, a chapter of the National Audubon Society, is a conservation and natural history organization in southern New Mexico that promotes appreciation and conservation of birds, other wildlife, and habitat, through environmental education, issue advocacy, and natural history experiences.

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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.new-mexico-birds.com](http://www.new-mexico-birds.com)

(continued from page 1) **Feral Cats**

before and after colony establishment, these "trial" colonies will produce no meaningful data to allow for adequate evaluation of their effects on cat populations or their impact on wildlife.

**References**

1. The Wildlife Society. January 2011. Ecological Impacts of Feral Cats. Available from [http://joomla.wildlife.org/documents/cats\\_ecological\\_impacts.pdf](http://joomla.wildlife.org/documents/cats_ecological_impacts.pdf)
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