

# ROADRUNNER RAMBLINGS

Volume 31, No. 5. Sep.-Oct. 2009

## President's Message

by David Griffin, MVAS President

*"By September, the day breaks with little help from birds."*

- The Choral Copse, by Aldo Leopold

Leopold's reflection on Wisconsin's birdlife in fall was astute and rang true—in northern latitudes the birds are silent when the fall comes and many have begun to migrate away, silencing the woods. In southern New Mexico however, we have birds that sing and call and make noise all year long. Lately I've noticed a big increase in pre-dawn flight calls of Yellow and Wilson's warblers, and Chipping and Brewer's sparrows, and during mid-day my yard harbors one or two calling Black-headed Grosbeaks, and a small contingent of chattering hummingbirds. No, here in September, the day still breaks with much help of birds.....

Summer in the Mesilla Valley this year gave us all of the heat without any of the rain—at times making for miserable conditions—was I being tested for something? I kept very busy with summer field work in the Big Burro Mountains and even there at 8,000', very little summer rain fell. And seemingly in the blink of an eye we now have cooler mornings, grand sunsets, the smell of roasting chiles in the air, school back in session, and an upcoming legislative session. It must be fall.

Last week I noticed the first school buses on my road picking up neighborhood kids, some eager and others reluctant....could it be fall already? Yes, and our MVAS education committee has been working for months to prepare the Audubon Adventures program for local classrooms. Speaking of school, NMSU students returned to classes soon after unloading their belongings into dorm rooms and getting settled in, and I'm sure that deserving graduate students won't waste too much time applying for our Richard Bischoff Memorial Scholarship. And let's not forget the students who don't necessarily fit into either of those categories above—MVAS will again be offering our "Beginning Bird Watching" course to the general public through the Doña Ana Community College. This class has been successful with many students in the past several years and we urge to you learn more about it. And what better way to use those new-found birding skills then by joining us on one of our monthly field trips? Our September trip will be to Carlsbad Caverns National Park for some hands-on birding and our October trip will be to local grasslands. See inside for details on all of these items.

During this Legislative season we'll continue our efforts with our conservation partners on issues such as Doña Ana County Wilderness, Climate Change initiatives, and other local conservation and policy issues. And if after listening to non-stop debate about various national policies and programs all summer has you worked up and ready to speak out on a particular conservation issue, let us know and we'll be happy to help you set up a meeting with your local representatives, make a phone call, write a letter or even join you for a meeting. If you feel strongly about one or all of our conservation issues, such as Wilderness protection in Doña Ana County and you want your representatives to know, now is a perfect time. What those interested in outdoor wilderness recreation needed, Aldo Leopold said, was "some logical reconciliation between getting back to nature, and preserving a little of nature to get back to." Our elected representatives have local Las Cruces offices that are

(continued on page 4) See **President**

## Birdwatching Course

Are you new to the area, or perhaps just mystified by the birds you see in your yard and neighborhood? Come join us for our fall Basic Bird Watching Class!

The course, offered through Doña Ana Community College's Community Education program, provides a great introduction to the birds of our region. Through classroom sessions and field trips, we'll help you start identifying local birds by their shape, size, sound, behavior, and habitat, and you'll get an introduction to some of our local birdwatching hotspots.

We'll also give you some tips for attracting birds to your yard, information on optical equipment, and a review of various birding publications. The final class will be a trip to the Vertebrate Museum on the NMSU campus in order to get a close-up look at specimens of some of the birds seen on class field trips.

Our classes will be on October 27 and November 3, 10 and 17 from 7-9 PM, with field trips on October 31, and November 7 and 14. For registration information contact the DACC Community Education program at 527-7527, and be sure to mention our Course Code, HL101.

## 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](mailto: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

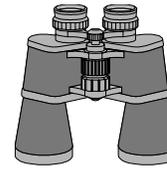
[www.mvaudubon.org](http://www.mvaudubon.org)



## 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.



## 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.

### Carlsbad Caverns & Vicinity, September 18-20.

This month's trip will be combined with our monthly chapter meeting, a presentation by Steve West (see Program description). Some of us will carpool to Carlsbad Caverns NP on Friday afternoon and have an early opportunity to help Steve with mist-netting and banding, and others will come on Saturday. Participants could return to Las Cruces late Saturday night, or relax and stay a night and enjoy some fabulous birding the next day. Excellent birding can be found at Rattlesnake Springs and the Black River, in Walnut Canyon, and many other sites in the Carlsbad area.

Lodging is available in hotels/motels in Carlsbad, and/or in a bunkhouse-style cabin at the Camp Washington Ranch southwest of Carlsbad (and right next door to Rattlesnake Springs!). Note there is a \$6 entry fee to the park for adults (children under 15 are free); lodging costs at Carlsbad hotels are approx. \$90-100/night, and our shared costs at Camp Washington Ranch would be approx. \$15-25/night.

**To register** for this trip or for further information, contact David Griffin by September 11 at 575-382-2080, or [GriffinBio@gmail.com](mailto:GriffinBio@gmail.com).

### Grassland Raptors and Sparrows, October 24.

On this trip we'll visit grasslands in western Doña Ana County. We'll hope to see a wide variety of raptors including Golden Eagle, Ferruginous Hawk, Merlin, American Kestrel and Prairie Falcon. Later, walking swaths of grassland should produce sparrows like Brewer's, Savannah, Vesper, and Lark Bunting or maybe even a secretive Grasshopper or Baird's Sparrow; Chestnut-collared Longspur, Horned Lark, and possibly Sprague's Pipit. This trip may last until mid-afternoon so bring water, snacks and/or lunch, and sun protection. Walking will be easy, but terrain may be uneven in grassland areas, so wear appropriate footwear.

**To register** for this trip notify David Griffin by October 22 at 575-382-2080 or [GriffinBio@gmail.com](mailto:GriffinBio@gmail.com).

**Cave Swallows, September 19.** This month's program will be in conjunction with our September field trip to Carlsbad Caverns National Park (see Field Trip section) - please note the date and time for this program is Saturday 9/19 at 3:00 PM. Join us at the Carlsbad Caverns NP Visitor Center auditorium as local biologist and conservationist Steve West tells us about Cave Swallows and the research he's conducted over the past 30 years to learn more about the ecology, natural history, and migratory patterns of this fantastic bird. Immediately following the presentation, we'll join Steve for a late afternoon/early evening of mist-netting and banding Cave Swallows at the mouth of Carlsbad Cavern. Get a chance to see these wonderfully colorful birds close-up as they make their way to their roosts for the night, and we'll be sure to finish up just before the hundreds of thousands of Brazilian free-tailed bats emerge for their nightly foray, which is quite a sight to see!

**TBA, October 21.** To be announced; please check our website for further information: [www.mvaudubon.org](http://www.mvaudubon.org)

## Special Events

### September 12: Live Raptors at Wild Birds Unlimited.

Representatives from Hawks Aloft will be on hand to help WBU celebrate their anniversary with birds of prey from their educational program.

10 AM to 4 PM

Arroyo Plaza (2001 E. Lohman)

### September 12-13: Dragonfly Festival

at Bitter Lake National Wildlife Refuge, home to more than 90 dragonfly & damselfly species.

9 miles NE of Roswell, NM.

[www.friendsofbitterlake.com](http://www.friendsofbitterlake.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.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

C9ZQ540Z

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.

## Field Trip Reports

**Sacramento Mountains. July 18.** Ten people spent a full day in the cool air and mixed conifer forests of the Sacramento Mountains, east of Alamogordo. Our trip coincided with the height of the breeding season, and we had many examples of recent fledglings being fed by adult birds.

Our first stop was in Karr Canyon, just northeast of High Rolls. We encountered a

great deal of bird activity in the lower part of the canyon and saw Mountain Chickadee, Cordilleran Flycatcher, Grace's Warbler, Brown Creeper, Hermit Thrush and Plumbeous Vireo. We drove on to the Cathey Canyon parking area and spent 45 minutes there observing a family of MacGillivray Warblers near the parking lot, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Warbling Vireo, Cooper's Hawk, and possibly a single Magnificent Hummingbird.

From here we made the short trip to Apache Point Observatory where, as we stepped from the vehicles, we were greeted by a singing male Cassin's Finch. One member found a strange sapsucker, and we all tracked it down and realized we were looking at two young Williamson's Sapsuckers! Western Bluebirds fed their recent fledglings, Pygmy Nuthatches foraged in the tree tops, and a family of Hairy Woodpeckers moved about.

Our next destination was Bluff Springs and the Upper Rio Peñasco. We heard dueling songs from a pair of elusive Green-tailed towhees, and we watched a good-sized group of Violet-green Swallows foraging in the darkening afternoon sky. Downstream along an old railroad grade we saw Yellow-rumped and Grace's Warblers, and a family of House Wrens at the old collapsed trestle (Hey - we had them here last year too!). The last stop of the day was the U.S. Forest Service's Cloud Climbing Rail Trail visitor center near Cloudcroft where we watched the endless stream of hummingbirds visiting the quartet of feeders that hang here.

**Pitchfork Ranch. August 22.** Eleven birders got to explore this private ranch in southwestern New Mexico and were treated 76 species of birds and several mammals, including a white-nosed coatimundi. Bird highlights included Zone-tailed Hawk, Montezuma Quail, Vermilion Flycatcher, Dickcissel, Botteri's Sparrow, and Lazuli, Indigo, and Painted Buntings (plus a hybrid Lazuli x Indigo).

**Thanks** to all who shared the use of their vehicles we'll see you next time! A list of species observed is available from David Griffin at 382-2080 or GriffinBio@gmail.com.

## Welcome New Members



Daniel S. Kilby

J. Love  
Jerry Giles  
Donald Webster  
Carl Zimmerman  
Roberta James  
Florence Sheram  
Robert Thompson  
Michael Mihalco  
Carlos Cates

### Bird Notes

Species	Date	Location	Observers
Magnificent Hummingbird	7/4	Mayhill	JW
Rufous Hummingbird	7/7; 16	Las Cruces; Tularosa	JD; RB
Blue Grosbeak	7/10	Percha	BJ
Albino Hummingbird	7/11	MVBSP	CJ
Calliope Hummingbird	7/16	Percha; Las Cruces	BJ; LH
Black-chinned Sparrow	7/18	MVBSP	CJ
Chipping Sparrow	7/24	Las Cruces	DG
Peregrine Falcon	7/28	Las Cruces	SWH
Bronzed Cowbird	7/29	Las Cruces	LH
Sandhill Crane	8/1	Las Cruces	BC
White-faced Ibis	8/6	MVBSP	CJ
Black-crowned Night Heron	8/7	Las Cruces	NES
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	8/7	Las Cruces	JD
Lesser Yellowlegs	8/11	Tortugas Dam	AT
Spotted Sandpiper	8/11	Tortugas Dam	AT
Least Sandpiper	8/11	Tortugas Dam	AT
Semipalmated Sandpiper	8/11	Tortugas Dam	AT
American Avocet	8/11	Tortugas Dam	AT
Wood Duck	8/13	MVBSP	CJ
Long-billed Curlew	8/13	MVBSP	CJ
Broad-tailed Hummingbird	8/19	Las Cruces	LH
Virginia's Warbler	8/20	Las Cruces	SWH
Costa's Hummingbird	8/20	Las Cruces	SWH
American Avocet	8/20; 26	LC Dam; MVBSP	NS; CJ
Solitary Sandpiper	8/20	LC Dam	NS
Spotted Sandpiper	8/20	LC Dam	NS
Peregrine Falcon	8/20	LC Dam	NS
Lark Bunting	8/20	LC Dam	NS
Northern Waterthrush	8/20	Mesilla Park	PP
Merlin	8/21	MVBSP	CJ
Black-throated Gray Warbler	8/22	MVBSP	CJ
Yellow Warbler	8/22; 24	MVBSP; Las Cruces	CJ; SWH
Lark Sparrow	8/25	Las Cruces	SWH
Townsend's Warbler	8/25	Las Cruces	DG
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	8/25	Las Cruces	DG
Olive-sided Flycatcher	8/26	Las Cruces	DG
Western Wood-Pewee	8/26	Las Cruces	DG
Wilson's Warbler	8/26	Las Cruces	DG
Eastern Kingbird	8/27	MVBSP	CJ

Observers: Richard Ballew, Beth Chidester, John Douglas, CJ Goin, David Griffin, Sue & Wally Hill, Landy Hinesley, Barbara Jackson, Pat Penfield, Nena Singleton, Nancy Stotz, Al Trompler, Jon Wortley

Please report interesting sightings to Robert Hull at 575-523-8009 or, preferably by email: 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.

**OFFICERS AND BOARD**

President	David Griffin	382-2080
Vice-president	Alan Krueger	532-1036
Secretary	Frankie Lerner	373-0857
Treasurer	Barb Rodriguez	523-1548
Board (07-09)	Valerie Endruweit	373-0530
Board (08-10)	John Douglas	541-0133
Board (08-10)	Lorraine Schulte	524-7029
Board (09-11)	Carol Campbell	640-1660
Board (09-11)	Sue Hill	382-9758
Board (09-11)	Gill Sorg	541-0577

**COMMITTEE CHAIRS**

Audubon Adventures	Lorraine Schulte	524-7029
Audubon Council	Gill Sorg	541-0577
Delegates	Lorraine Schulte	524-7029
Conservation	Bob Tafanelli	526-9380
Education	vacant	
Field Trips	David Griffin	382-2080
Programs	board at large	
Membership	Guy Powers	373-1891
Newsletter Editor	Nancy Stotz	521-8087
Publicity	Storm Sermay	382-3348

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](http://www.mvaudubon.org)

(continued from page 1) **President**

there for you (see below), and if you've never met with them before, just let us know and we'll be happy to help guide you.

Senator Jeff Bingaman, 148 Loretto Towne Centre, 505 S. Main, Las Cruces, NM 88001, (575) 523-6561

Senator Tom Udall, 118 Loretto Town Centre, 505 S Main, Las Cruces, NM 88001, (575) 526-5475

Congressman Harry Teague, 125 W Griggs Ave, Las Cruces, NM 88001, (575) 522-3908

**Audubon Adventures Needs Volunteers**

Would you be willing to help MVAS and Audubon Adventures get better acquainted with the 4th grade teachers in Las Cruces schools who receive the kits MVAS purchases for them annually? We urgently need volunteers who would be willing to visit two or three elementary schools of their choice two times per year—in October to deliver the new kits and meet the contact teacher and again in April or May to see how things are going and determine needs for the following year. We will let you know what questions to ask and will keep records of the teacher responses. It is interesting to visit the classrooms and meet the teachers. They and their students really appreciate the materials we supply. If you would be willing to help, please call or e mail Lorraine Schulte, 524-7029, mljs@zianet.com or Joy McFarland, 522-7235, earljoymac@zianet.com.

*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: October 25.** Printed on 100% PCW recycled paper by **insta-copy printing**. Image credits: roadrunner, Dale Zimmerman; clip art, IMSI's Master Clips/Master Photos® Collection.

**RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED**

Las Cruces, NM 88004

P.O. Box 1645

Mesilla Valley Audubon Society

Nonprofit Organization  
US Postage Paid  
Las Cruces, NM 88004  
Permit No. 609

## ***Richard Bischoff Memorial Scholarship***

The MVAS Richard Bischoff Memorial Scholarship was established in 2007 and awarded its first \$1000 grant in 2008. Richard joined the board in 2004 and brought many new ideas to the board. One of those ideas was the creation of a graduate student scholarship at New Mexico State University. Because of his pivotal role in the scholarship and his many contributions to MVAS, the scholarship is called the Mesilla Valley Audubon's Richard Bischoff Memorial Scholarship.

The scholarship supports graduate student research at New Mexico State University that is consistent with the MVAS mission and promotes natural resource conservation. Not all recipients study birds. The first winner conducted a study on banner-tailed kangaroo rats to develop a conservation model for the Chihuahuan Desert. The second winner investigated the history and effects of the encroachment of junipers into riparian habitats in southwestern New Mexico. The 2009 winner is Monique De Vries. She is exploring the effect of habitat fragmentation on Burrowing Owl nest productivity in grasslands across the Great Plains and will use satellite imagery of nest sites to compare nest productivity with fragmentation measures in and around six grasslands from South Dakota to Janos, Mexico.

An important part of the scholarship requires the recipient to present their results at a regular MVAS meeting. This allows our members to share in some of the latest research in natural resource conservation and gives the student valuable public speaking experience.

In order to maintain this scholarship contributions are always needed. So please consider helping MVAS support students engaged in important conservation research at NMSU.

Donations should be sent to:

Mesilla Valley Audubon Society  
Scholarship Fund  
PO Box 1645  
Las Cruces, NM 88004



USDA Forest Service Collection, Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation, Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, PA.

---

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Amount: \_\_\_\_\_