

# Burrowing Owl

March, April, May 2006 Issue

Volume 35 No. 2

Welcome to Central New Mexico Audubon Society! Come join us. All our meetings and field trips are open to the public.

## The 8th Annual CNMAS BIRDING ACADEMY



The more you know, the more you want to know. And the more you know about birds, their identification, their vocalizations, their behavior, and their habitat, the more you'll enjoy your birding trips with CNMAS and beyond! Join us as experts present these classes designed to encourage the beginner and challenge the experienced.

*Many thanks to Dr. Janet Ruth for her presentation on "Winter Sparrows" at February 16th's Birding Academy class!*

### March 16 - Hummingbirds

**Joan Day-Martin** will be back again to help us figure out who that is around our hummingbird feeders, starting with the hummers that we can expect to see flying through and into New Mexico beginning with this spring. She will also touch on bees and other feeder pests.

Joan resides in Lake Roberts, north of Silver City. She founded the non-profit organization Hummingbirds of New Mexico that allows her to carry out the work she does with HBNM and the public. She works with hummingbirds throughout the year in NM, the state being host to a small number of wintering hummingbirds that differ from our breeding population. From humble beginnings, the number of bird banders specializing in hummingbirds has grown to about 150 that volunteer in the continental US. Not all banders do public programming, but it is Joan's belief that this is a very important part of the project that HBNM strives towards as a whole. She wishes to share what she has learned and, with a passion, teach our young people to appreciate and protect this legacy. This July 22nd and 23rd HBNM will be hosting its 3rd Annual Hummingbird Festival at Lake Roberts (details, page 7).

### April 20 - Swifts, Swallows, & Martins

**Bruce Neville** will present us with a talk on Swifts, Swallows, and Martins. The three groups are among the most aerial of birds, vacuuming the air for the insects on which they feed. Swallows are familiar to all birders. Barn Swallows often nest around homes, Cave Swallows are the swallows of Carlsbad Caverns, and Cliff

## Birdathon! 2006

You have a quartet of choices for cheering on Birdathon! 2006 and our Birdathon! teams and individuals. (Yes, an individual can equal a 'team'!) All team reports will appear in the next Burrowing Owl, so you'll know if your favorite 'won'. With your support, Central New Mexico Audubon Society will continue tradition by holding its Annual Birdathon event with teams of dedicated birders who scour the New Mexico deserts, grasslands, mountains, and riparian areas, trying to find as many bird species as possible and trying to break their own, and each others', records.

Birdathon is an annual fundraiser and fun-raiser for CNMAS. We ask that you pledge an amount for one or more of the teams listed.

*See the pledge form on page 3 of this newsletter.*

### Team 1: Thursday Birders

The Thursday Birders Birdathon will be held May 11 and 12. The 24 hour count will begin at 10:00 a.m. on Thursday in the Manzanita Mountains and will conclude at 10:00 a.m. the next day in Water Canyon. Thursday afternoon will be spent at Bosque del Apache. Participants should plan to make reservations to stay overnight in Socorro. Contact Gary and Karen Boettcher at 505-281-6726 or nmkestrel@starband.net to sign up.

*Birdathon!... continued on page 2*



*Birding Academy... continued on page 2*

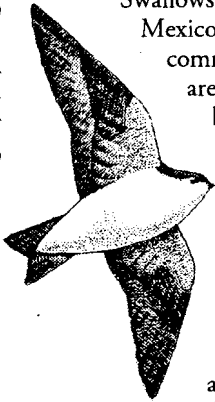
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*Birding Academy... continued from page 1*

Drawing by Andrew Rominger



Swallows are the species of Capistrano fame. New Mexico has 7 species of swallows, all of which are common at certain times and places. Martins are just big swallows. The Purple Martin has been called "America's most loved bird," thanks to its diet, which consists chiefly of mosquitoes and its fondness for artificial nest boxes. New Mexico's three documented species of swifts are less familiar to many birders, especially Albuquerque birders, as they have more restricted ranges and habitats than the swallows. Though unrelated to swallows and martins, they share many characteristics. When not nesting around

our houses, swifts, swallows, and martins can be difficult to identify as they zoom past and can be a source of frustration for beginning birders. The presentation will include information on plumage, behavior, and habitat to help birders identify these aerial wonders.

Bruce Neville has previously presented "Thrushes and Thrashers" and "Intro to Gulls" for the Birding Academy. A science librarian at the University of New Mexico by day, on the weekend, Bruce becomes a "hard core" birder. In 10-plus years in the Southwest, he has ventured to all counties and three of the four corners of New Mexico in pursuit of birds, butterflies, and other critters.

**All classes are held at St. Timothy's Lutheran Church, NW corner of Copper and Jefferson NE, 7:15 PM. Pay in advance or pay at the door. For information call Beth, 505-898-8514. Visit our website: <http://newmexicoaudubon.org/cnmas/>**

*Central New Mexico Audubon Society gratefully acknowledges the generosity of Stephen and Mary Pat Day and The Lannan Foundation for their financial underwriting of our chapter's mailing and publicity costs to promote the Eighth Annual Audubon Birding Academy.*

**Audubon Birding Academy Registration Form**

I/we would like to register for the following classes (check boxes):

- Hummingbirds (Mar. 16) \$6
- Swifts, Swallows, & Martins (Apr. 20) \$6

Send your check, payable to CNMAS to: Total: \_\_\_\_\_  
 CNMAS Birding Academy  
 PO BOX 30002 NAS chapter code Q51  
 Albuquerque, NM 87190-0002

Name/s: \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

I want to get the Burrowing Owl via the web -

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

CNMAS ABA 2006

**CNMAS Field Trip Reports**

compiled by Celestyn Brozek

**Sunday, November 13, 2005: Las Vegas NWR**

Leader: Sei Tokuda. There were 16 participants on a cold and windy day which kept the bird numbers relatively low. The most notable species were Canvasback, Hooded Merganser, Black-billed Magpie, Rough-legged Hawk, Ferruginous Hawk, Harlan's Hawk, Bald Eagle and at least half of the group had a good look at a Prairie Falcon.

**Saturday, December 3, 2005: Bosque del Apache NWR**

Leader: Sei Tokuda. There were 9 participants on this trip on a day with temperature barely reaching 40°F and marked with gusty winds. It was one of the lowest species counts (less than 50) in years. There were relatively few light geese and Sandhill Cranes and a few Bald Eagles.

**Saturday, January 21: Sandia Mountains**

Leader: Celestyn Brozek. A group of 12 participants visited Doc Long, Sandia Crest, and Three Gun Spring. All three species of Rosy-finches made a great show at the crest and became life species for several participants. Golden Eagle, Sage Thrasher, Western Bluebird, Townsend's Solitaire, Brown Creeper, and Juniper Titmouse were among the total of 22 species seen on the trip.



*Birdathon... continued from page 1*

**Team 2: Young Birders - Group Flight**

Fresh new faces, energetic teens, amazing young birders, faster than a speeding peregrine and sharper-eyed than an eagle, this year's Young Birder team includes at least Cole Wolf and Michael Hilchey. True to teen spontaneity, we don't know who all, what all, when, or where YET, but we do know that their volunteer driver will be one of the luckiest people in CNMAS to go birding with this blur of energy, our youthful Rosetta stones of bird knowledge!

**Team 3: Sei Tokuda - Semi Solo Flight**

You already know Sei is leading his annual trip to Bitter Lake NWR and Rattlesnake Springs on April 22-23. But we'll let you in on a secret: Sei has committed to this being his very own "personal" Birdathon, for his own satisfaction and for the benefit of the chapter. So come along on the field trip, and let Sei do the counting! See trip details on page 3.

**Team 4: Celestyn Brozek - Solo Flight**

When he's not leading CNMAS field trips, Celestyn Brozek loves to go birding alone. This year, in the period 20 April-20 May, he will be afield for days of solitary birding, some just for enjoyment and some for science, such as his participation in counting for International Migratory Bird Day. His high day is his Birdathon, and he will report in the next Burrowing Owl!

The Burrowing Owl newsletter is published quarterly in March, June, September, December, by Central New Mexico Audubon Society, PO Box 30002, Albuquerque, NM 87190-0002. Subscription is free to National Audubon Society members, \$12 to nonmembers.



March - April - May 2006

*TRIP LEADERS: Paul, Sei, Chris, Rebecca, Andrew, and Jim:  
THANK YOU! Thanks to you we were able to put together a great field trip schedule for the spring.*

**CNMAS Field Trip Schedule**

<http://www.newmexicoaudubon.org/cnmas/trips.html>

*Although it rarely happens, trips can be changed or cancelled due to unforeseen circumstances. Always check with the leader before the trip.*

**Sunday, March 26: Percha Dam SP**

Leaders: Celestyn Brozek and Paul Yoder (volunteer naturalist at the park). Paul will meet us at the Park at 7:00 AM and 10:00 AM (for latecomers) at the park entrance. He has spent the winter at the park and knows all wintering sparrows, resident owls, and early migrants. He will discuss (and practice!) sparrow ID including bird calls and many other interesting details about bird behavior. After a visit at Percha Dam, we will continue with Celestyn to Caballo Lake and Elephant Butte Lake. We will drive back to Albuquerque after sunset. Take proper clothing, food, and drink for the whole day. If you want to carpool, check with Celestyn: [cbrozek@unm.edu](mailto:cbrozek@unm.edu), home: 505-266-9225, work: 505-925-8611. You may consider staying in motel in TorC area on Saturday night. Camping at Percha Dam is available (although it is still cold!).

**Saturday-Sunday, April 22-23: Bitter Lake NWR and Rattlesnake Springs**

Leader: Sei Tokuda. This is a great time for spring migrants and residents at these top NM birding sites. The trip will require an overnight stay at Carlsbad, NM, and the first day's driving time of at least 5 hours. We leave Albuquerque Saturday and have birding stops on the way to Roswell/Bitter Lake where we will have lunch. In the afternoon, we will drive to Rattlesnake Springs for an hour or two of birding before sunset. We will return to Rattlesnake Springs early Sunday morning with the trip ending around noon. Please bring food/snacks and drinks for Saturday lunch and for Sunday breakfast. Dress appropriately with hat and sunscreen. On Saturday, meet at 6:30 AM in the Four Hills Shopping Center (Tramway and Central Ave. SE) parking lot directly east of Hollywood Video. Please note that there is no overnight parking at the shopping center. Please contact Sei at 505-266-2480 or at [stokuda@juno.com](mailto:stokuda@juno.com) for details.

**Saturday, May 6: Tucumcari (eastern NM) area**

Leader: Christopher Rustay. Meet at the Tucumcari McDonald's (immediately north of I-40 at the First street or Hwy 209 exit) at 7:30 AM. We will visit Tucumcari lake, and other sites in the Tucumcari area looking for, among others, Chimney Swift, Red-headed Woodpecker, Mississippi Kite, Painted Bunting, Northern Cardinal, Blue Jay and potentially Least Bittern. Both driving and some walking will be required, but walking should not be too difficult, on pavement much of the time. Please contact Chris at 505-255-7786 or [chrustay@aol.com](mailto:chrustay@aol.com) for details.

**Saturday, May 20: Stanley, NM, and the White Lakes playas**

Leader: Rebecca Gracey. Meet at 7:00 AM in the Four Hills Shopping Center (Tramway and Central Ave. SE) parking lot directly east of Hollywood Video or at the McDonald's in Moriarty at 7:40 AM. We will be looking for breeding Burrowing Owls, Long-billed Curlews, and Mountain Plovers. We should finish by noon. Please contact Rebecca at

505-242-3821 or [mrgracey@earthlink.net](mailto:mrgracey@earthlink.net) for more details.

**Friday-Saturday, June 2-3: Water Canyon Bird Count (west of Socorro)**

Leaders: Jim Black and Andrew Rominger. Meet Friday evening at 6:30 PM at the Water Canyon Campground. Owling will start at 8:30 PM till 10:30 PM or when ever you want to go to bed. Camping is available in Water Canyon. The bulk of the count will be on Saturday starting at 6:30 AM. If you prefer to meet on Saturday morning, come to the campground between 6:00 and 6:30 AM. Participants will be divided into 6 groups covering everything from Sixmile Canyon (south of Water Canyon), to the campground and all the way to Magdalena Ridge. We try to give people their first choice in terms of area assignment, but if some areas are lacking counters, we might have to do some shuffling around. Please contact Andrew at 505-239-7948 or [rominger@stanford.edu](mailto:rominger@stanford.edu) or Jim Black at [chupaflor@msn.com](mailto:chupaflor@msn.com) for details.

*All Central New Mexico Audubon Society meetings and field trips are open to the public.*

**Thursday Morning Birding Group**

Weekly birding outings every Thursday. Meeting time and location, as well as duration, vary. Call Margaret Wallen at 505-341-0928 for details of outings.

*Central New Mexico Audubon Society assumes no responsibility for injuries, personal or otherwise, incurred while attending society-sponsored activities and will not be held liable for such accidents. You attend at your own risk.*

**Central New Mexico Audubon Society**

**Birding For Dollars**

For every bird species the team identifies during Birdathon, CNMAS benefits!

<b>10¢</b>	<b>25¢</b>	<b>50¢</b>
<b>\$1</b>	<b>\$2<sup>50</sup></b>	<b>\$5</b>
<b>\$7<sup>50</sup></b>	<b>\$10</b>	<b>\$20</b>

**Circle your pledge & Audubon can WIN!**

\$

*Or if you are feeling extra generous, fill in your Birdathon pledge here*

**THIS PLEDGE CAN BE DESIGNATED FOR TEAM/INDIVIDUAL**

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY & ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL \_\_\_\_\_

To make a pledge or to make your tax-deductible donation, return this form with your payment made out to:

CNMAS  
PO Box 30002  
Albuquerque NM 87190-0002



## Learning Look-Alikes: White Herons and Egrets

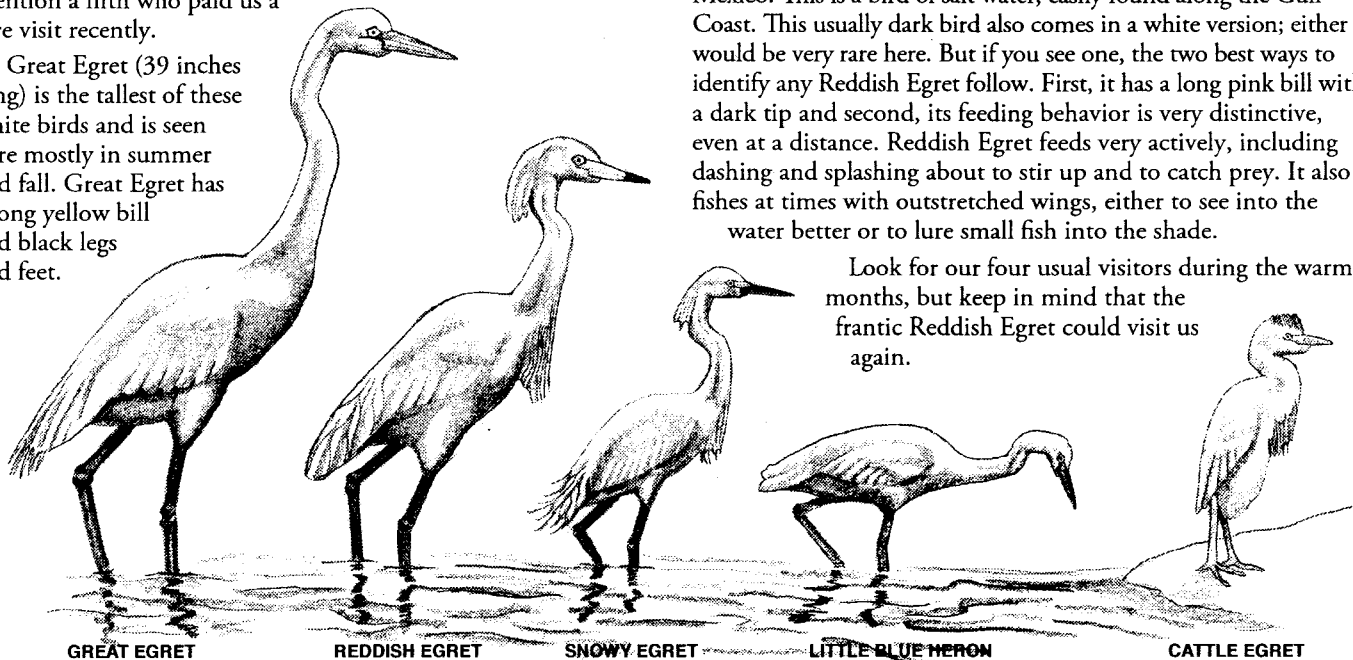
by Art Arenholz, drawings by Andrew Rominger

One hundred years ago, white herons and egrets came close to annihilation in the U.S., because it was fashionable to adorn hats with their beautiful white feathers. Conservationists saved the birds, and today these long-legged waders are relatively plentiful.

Hérons and egrets have long necks and legs, and long, pointed bills. (Egret is the name given to white, medium-sized herons). Most feed on fish and other aquatic animals, and most wade in shallow water, usually in small, scattered flocks.

The keys to identifying these similar-looking birds include overall size, bill color, color of legs and feet and foraging behavior. We will describe four white herons who appear here regularly and mention a fifth who paid us a rare visit recently.

Great Egret (39 inches long) is the tallest of these white birds and is seen here mostly in summer and fall. Great Egret has a long yellow bill and black legs and feet.



GREAT EGRET

REDDISH EGRET

SNOWY EGRET

LITTLE BLUE HERON

CATTLE EGRET

*Andrew Rominger 2/06*

When foraging, it leans forward with an outstretched neck, either standing still or moving in slow motion in quiet water. At night, these birds roost in trees in or near water, often with other herons.

Snowy Egret (24 inches long) is smaller than its cousin, and is seen during spring, summer and fall. Snowy Egret has a long black bill, and black legs, but its feet are bright yellow, and are called "Golden Slippers". This shorter wader is more active when feeding and sometimes shuffles one foot to stir up prey. Instead of an outstretched neck like Great Egret, Snowy Egret usually coils its neck tightly just before striking at a fish. A good identification mark: yellow lores, the area between the bill and the eyes.

Cattle Egret is about the same size as Snowy Egret, but its neck is shorter and its body is stockier. Seen most commonly in small flocks during spring migration, Cattle Egret has a shorter yellow bill and shorter black legs, and black feet. Surprisingly, these herons do not feed in water. They feed in dry upland fields searching for insects. They often stand on cattle, catching insects stirred up as the cattle graze, hence the name. In Texas, many farmers call them "Tractor Egrets" because they have learned to

follow the tractors that have replaced cattle on some farms. Look for the buff-orange patches on the head, neck, back and breast of breeding birds. A caution: a juvenile Cattle Egret's bill is black, but it is stubbier than the Snowy Egret's.

Our fourth white heron is a juvenile Little Blue Heron. It is all white during its first year and is similar to Snowy Egret in size and shape. But here are some differences to look for: greenish (not black) legs, blue bill with a dark tip (not all dark), pale blue-gray or green lores (not yellow), and forages with neck stretched out (not coiled). Also, it is often off by itself (not in a scattered flock). But sometimes you have to say: "I am not sure which bird that is." Juvenile Little Blue Heron is not as common as Great, Snowy and Cattle Egret here, but a few are here every year.

Two years ago, a Reddish Egret (30 inches long) visited New Mexico. This is a bird of salt water, easily found along the Gulf Coast. This usually dark bird also comes in a white version; either would be very rare here. But if you see one, the two best ways to identify any Reddish Egret follow. First, it has a long pink bill with a dark tip and second, its feeding behavior is very distinctive, even at a distance. Reddish Egret feeds very actively, including dashing and splashing about to stir up and to catch prey. It also fishes at times with outstretched wings, either to see into the water better or to lure small fish into the shade.

Look for our four usual visitors during the warm months, but keep in mind that the frantic Reddish Egret could visit us again.

### SUMMARY: WHITE HERONS AND EGRETS

BIRD	BILL SHAPE & SIZE	LEG LENGTH & COLOR	FOOT COLOR	HEIGHT	BODY COLOR	DISTINCTIVE BEHAVIORS
Great Egret	Long, heavy yellow bill	Long, black legs	Black feet	39 in	All white	Moves slowly, leans forward
Snowy Egret	Long, slim black bill	Medium black legs	Bright yellow feet	24 in	All white, Yellow lores	Coils neck before striking
Cattle Egret	Short, heavy yellow bill juvenile bill is dark	Short, red-orange legs juvenile legs are dark	Same as legs	20 in	Buff-orange on crown, chest, back in spring	Feeds in fields, not ponds
Little Blue Heron - Juvenile	Long, slim blue bill, black tip	Medium length greenish legs	Same as legs	24 in	All white, blue gray lores	Extends neck before striking
Reddish Egret (white morph)	Long, heavy pink bill with black tip	Long, blue-gray legs	Same as legs	29 in	All white	Lurches about as if drunk Extends wings Often comical



March - April - May 2006



MAR CARIBE

CARIBBEAN SEA

# Planning For Panama

Interested in a wildlife-watching trip to Panama with fellow Auduboners? I am a wildlife biologist who used to work in Panama. I've been in touch with Karen Boettcher and Central New Mexico Audubon Society to plan a trip for 12 or more folks from Audubon who would be interested in a 6- or 7-day trip early in 2007. We would love to share this beautiful place with you. If you're interested, please contact Terry Dunn at 505-821-8901 or [Dunn27@juno.com](mailto:Dunn27@juno.com). It's not too early to start planning - that's how to fulfill the dream of birding in this exotic place!

OCEANO PACIFICO

PACIFIC OCEAN



## Sandia Mountains - HawkWatch Observations & HawkWatch 20th Anniversary!

<http://www.hawkwatch.org/>

Observation began on February 24 at the Sandia hawkwatch, and the blind should be up and running by March 11. Observers will be at the site daily, weather permitting, until May 5. HawkWatch will celebrate its 20th anniversary this year, and our educators are trying to set up raptor ID presentations on Saturdays at some of the branch libraries to be followed by field trips to the hawkwatch (check the CNMAS online calendar).

The HawkWatch garage sale to raise money for food for the HawkWatch crew will be at Helen Haskell's home at 1806 Palomas NE on March 18. Please call Bobbie at 505-255-7622 if you would like to schedule a field trip or donate any items for the garage sale.



# HawkWATCH

HawkWatch International's mission:

*To monitor and protect hawks, eagles, other birds of prey and their environment through research, education and conservation.*



## ABA Convention in Bangor, Maine

June 19 - 25

Registration for the ABA Convention is now open!

The Maine American Birding Association Convention is timed to coincide with the best month to see resident breeding birds, including nesting alcids and terns. The Pine Tree state is a must visit for birders, offering a beautiful rugged rocky coastline, sandy beaches, salt marshes, deciduous woodlands, boreal forest, peat lands, inland waters, and freshwater marshes. Maine is the most sparsely populated state east of the Mississippi, and Bangor, Maine's third largest city, only has a population of approximately 32,000. Maine is geologically young, having been sculpted by glaciers, most evident on its breathtakingly beautiful coastline. Seeing and hearing breeding warblers in their brightest plumages is always a treat, while boat trips to view Atlantic Puffins, Razorbills, and Arctic and Roseate Terns will be thrilling. A great opportunity to study the differences, side-by-side, between the two saltmarsh sparrows will be provided. ABA Sales, our favorite exhibitors, and artists will be there along with the birds. Maine's Magical Mystery Tours are waiting to take you away... See you in Maine!

<http://www.americanbirding.org/mtgs/conventions/2006bangor/index.html>

## Field Trips for Disabled Birders in Maine

The American Birding Association has become aware of the need for modified field trips designed for birders with limited



mobility or limited endurance. Therefore, for the first time ever, the 2006 convention in Bangor, Maine, through the Physical Limitations Track, will offer three such trips. Two of these trips will focus on land birds that can be found in accessible "hot spots" near Bangor, and in the stunning Acadia National Park. The leaders for these trips will include Victor Emanuel and Barry Lyon from Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, and Rick Wright of Aimophila Adventures. The disabled birders will join the rest of the ABA group for the third trip, which will be a boat trip to the waters surrounding Petit Manan, a breeding island used by Atlantic Puffins and other seabirds. During this trip, we will have the expertise of Wayne Peterson of Field Guides Incorporated and Massachusetts Audubon, to guide our smaller group.

For detailed information about this June 19-25, 2006, Bangor, Maine, convention, please visit the official website at <http://www.americanbirding.org> (click on Bangor convention, then field trips, then scroll down to the Physical Limitations Track), or contact me, Darlene Smyth at [smythd@comcast.net](mailto:smythd@comcast.net) or 520-297-2315. I hope to see you there!



## Percha Dam & Caballo Lake State Parks

### Saturday and Sunday Bird Walks

Percha Dam State Park has stationed interpretive naturalist Paul Yoder at its visitor center this winter weekends and many weekdays. One hour bird walks will start at the Percha Dam State Park visitor center every Saturday at 2:00 p.m. and every Sunday at 10:00 a.m. in February and March. "We'll use a computer program at one of the stops that names and plays many of the vocalizations we'll be hearing", Paul said.

### Birder's Mini Self Course Available

Two bulletin boards in the visitor center window will be updated, which are viewable driving by. The first has a list of current bird sightings and their locations. The second bulletin board, Birder's Self-Course, lists brief challenges for three levels of avian identification. Beginning, intermediate and advanced observers can note the pairs of recently sighted, similar looking species, and then find them in the park for comparison. For those wishing a more intrepid hikes or drives, Paul Yoder can point you towards daily fly-outs, fly-ins, and roosts of many of the riparian birds.

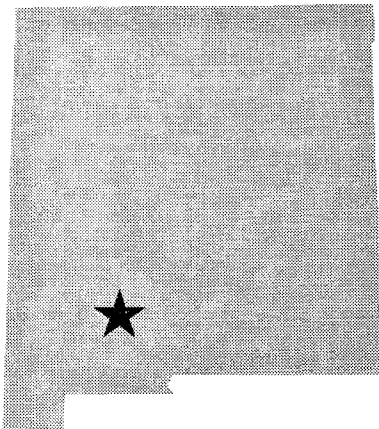
### Hiking, Geology, Plant and Historical Info Onsite

The visitor's center has local topographic and land status maps for viewing to help plan hikes along the remote east shore of Caballo Lake and into the stunning Caballo Mountains. The interpretive naturalist can help with plant ID and geological interpretation; plus, the visitor center has interpretive exhibits on the area history.

### Both Parks Are 20 Minutes South of T or C

Camping areas have been quiet and mostly vacant for primitive campers and large RVers alike. You can find fuel, dining, groceries and more off I-25 from Arrey (exit 59) to Caballo (exit 63) along the access highway, NM 187. For more shops and services, Truth or Consequences with its many hot springs spas is just 20 minutes north on I-25 at exit 75. Caballo Lake State Park campgrounds and visitor center is just east of I-25 exit 59 about 1.5 hour's drive south of Bosque del Apache NWR and about 1 hour north of Las Cruces. The current northern limit of Caballo Lake is at exit 63 (opposite the scenic route to Silver City).

Percha Dam State Park turnoff is about 1 mile south of I-25 exit 59, then left off NM 187 just past a large green roofed metal building on about a mile of dirt road. You can phone to arrange a guided tour (free with state park admission) between 8:00 a.m. to noon and 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. daily. Call 505-743-3942 for more information.



# FLYING

## 5th Annual High Plains Prairie Chicken Festival April 7 - 9, Milnesand, NM

The New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, in cooperation with the Nature Conservancy of New Mexico and the Grasslands Charitable Foundation are inviting you to join a flock of grouse enthusiasts for the 5th Annual High Plains Prairie Chicken Festival April 7-9 in Milnesand, New Mexico.

Participants are encouraged to register early, as the event is limited to the first 100 individuals who pay the \$80 registration fee. Signup deadline is April 1, but available spots usually are filled before then. Registration is limited because of the sensitivity of the lesser prairie chicken during the breeding season. The \$80 per person fee covers all field trips, five meals and a commemorative poster.

Registration forms and more information about the festival can be downloaded and printed from the Department Web site at [http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us/recreation/prairie\\_ckn/index.htm](http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us/recreation/prairie_ckn/index.htm)

Milnesand is a small crossroads community in the heart of New Mexico's prairie grasslands about 30 miles south of Portales. Each spring, lesser prairie chickens congregate on traditional booming grounds called leks. To witness these birds during their mating ritual is an unforgettable experience.

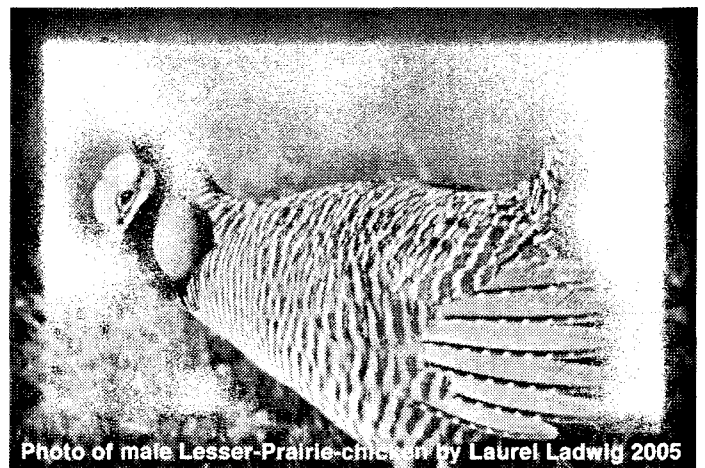


Photo of male Lesser-Prairie-chicken by Laurel Ladwig 2005

Festival participants will have opportunities to:

- Observe and photograph the mating rituals of the lesser prairie chicken
- Get hands-on demonstrations from professional wildlife biologists
- Birdwatch with some of the best birders in New Mexico
- Talk with ranchers and biologists working to conserve prairie chickens
- Learn about the Southern Great Plains ecosystem
- Enjoy good food and Western hospitality

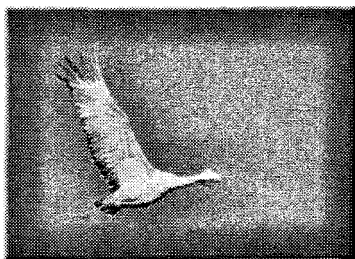
For more information, contact Dawn Davis, lesser prairie chicken biologist, New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, (505) 762-5127 or [dawn.davis@state.nm.us](mailto:dawn.davis@state.nm.us), or (505) 476-8000.



March - April - May 2006

# FARTHER AFIELD

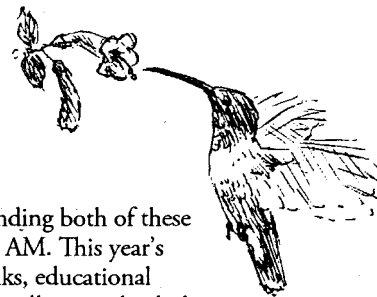
**23rd Annual Monte Vista Crane Festival**  
**March 10 - 12, Monte Vista, Colorado**  
**"Majestic Migration"**



Why is it that virtually the entire population of Sandhill Cranes that follow the Rocky Mountain Flyway call this remote high-desert valley home in spring and fall? A free lecture will inform you. Also featuring sunrise and sunset tours, workshops, tours of Baca

National Wildlife Refuge (the largest in Colorado), birders' breakfast and more. For information and reservations, call 719-852-3552 Monday-Thursday 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Visit <http://www.cranefest.com> - reservation/payment deadline is March 6.

**3rd Annual Hummingbird Festival**  
**July 22 - 23**  
**Lake Roberts, NM**



There will be hummingbird banding both of these weekend mornings from 7 - 10 AM. This year's programming offers guided walks, educational programs on hummingbirds as well as area birds, bats, local geology, native plants and Native American history.

Work created by local artists will be available to purchase and local authors will be offering recently released books for sale. Baked goods and Native American food will also be available throughout the festivities.

Guided walks for both days are offered:

Canyon Bird Walk, Lake Bird Walk, Geology of the area  
 Saturday only: Native Plant Walk

Event and guided walk times will be posted as soon as they become available. Walks will be limited to 10 people each. Sign ups for the guided walks are recommended and may be done so now by contacting Joan Day-Martin:

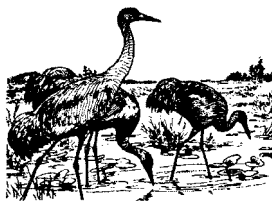
<http://www.hbnm.org> or  
<http://www.hummingbirdsofnewmexico.com>  
 888-536-4266

HBNM, HC 68, Box 169, Silver City, NM, 88061-9311



## "Spring-Wing Ding" In Nebraska

Consider a field trip to see the Sandhill Cranes migration. Every spring central Nebraska experiences a spectacular invasion. Hundreds of thousands Sandhill Cranes migrate up from the South. These birds spend about three weeks feeding in Nebraska before they move on to



northern Canada and the Alaskan tundra. 500,000 plus Cranes will pile up in a strip 40 miles long and 6 miles wide along the Platte River between Grand Island and Kearney.

Garry Husk works with Rowe Sanctuary (National Audubon Society) and Crane Meadows Nature Center to organize group tours for crane watching. Consider coming to Nebraska for our spring migration.

For a complete itinerary, visit:  
<http://www.horizon-tours.com/cranes3.htm>

Tour Scheduling: March and the first part of April



**You're Invited! FeatherFest 2006**  
**Galveston Texas Birding Nature Festival**  
**March 30 - April 2**

Travel to bird the Upper Texas Coast, out of Galveston, TX., during the City's annual celebration of nature, FeatherFest 2006, March 30th through April 2nd. It is Upper Texas Coastal birding at its best!

Interested persons should go to: <http://www.galvestonfeatherfest.com>  
 Mort Voller, Houston Audubon member and Chair of the Galveston Birding Festival: 409-392-0841, [vollernature@juno.com](mailto:vollernature@juno.com)

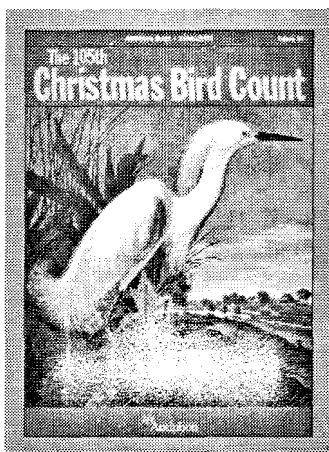


**Ute Mountain Mesa Verde**  
**Birding Festival, May 4-7**

Tours to Ute Mountain Tribal Park, Mesa Verde, McElmo Canyon, Bradfield Bridge, Owl Hoot, Talk Turkey, Greeting the Creator, Joe Moore Reservoir, Raptor tour, Eagle tour on Ute Reservation, Outdoor

Photography tour and class, lectures, Bird Artists Show, Keynote dinner with Catherine Ortega. Great Festival. Contact Deb Avery, 970-565-1151, [director-cultural@fone.net](mailto:director-cultural@fone.net)  
<http://www.utemountainmesaverdebirdingfestival.com>

Logo by Carolyn Gunn



**The Numbers Are In For the 106th CBC!**

This current season's Christmas Bird Count compilations can be found at National Audubon's website:

[http://cbc.audubon.org/cbccurrent/current\\_table.html](http://cbc.audubon.org/cbccurrent/current_table.html)

The website listings are better than ever!

Get the 105th CBC in book form at: <http://audubon.org/bird/cbc/105thSummary.html>

**Herbfest at RGNC  
a spring celebration**

Saturday & Sunday, May 6th and 7th

The Friends of the Rio Grande Nature Center offer speakers, guided walks, plants for sale, kids' crafts, and garden tours. Admission is free!

2901 Candelaria NW  
Albuquerque, NM 87107  
(505)344-7240

Need more information? Call (505)898-4226.  
Visit: <http://rgnc.org/>

**Start A FLOCK**

Want to meet Audubon members in your neck of the woods? Start a FLOCK!

Our chapter is widespread and diverse, covering mountains to lavalands. Finding a meeting location and time that is convenient for everyone is nearly impossible. The Thursday Birders have been inspiringly successful at attracting "birds of a feather" and organizing themselves into a group that plans their own outings and that attracts and meets fellow birders. They're the Thursday Birders flock!

Judging from the calls and inquiries we've gotten, it sounds like you birders in the East Mountains might be wishing you could make new Audubon friends and go on outings together. If any one or group of you would like to be the contact person and make connections with folks, plan some outings, meet socially and swap bird stories, we'd love to hear from you. We'll publish your contact info both on the web and in the newsletter, so it will make it easier for you to make contacts and get connected. Birds of a feather flock together, so let us know if you want us to help you spread the word about the East Mountain birding FLOCK!



**Connecting: New Mexico and Paraguay**

Betty Davis sounded thrilled when she sent us her first letter and check for the CNMAS fund for "Project Paraguay." All the way from Connecticut, Benjamin Olewine wrote, "Guyra Paraguay is an excellent conservation organization, and I'm glad to see that you have a partnership with them on this project."

Our contact in Paraguay is Paul Smith, an ornithologist from Britain who is now living in Paraguay and working on a number of initiatives, including development of the first-ever *Guide To The Birds of Paraguay*. He is traveling country-wide and collecting data until December of 2006. It is our goal to raise funds to help Paul cover the mere \$5,000 that will cover his travel and documentary expenses of gathering data while in Paraguay. Betty is even hoping to host Paul on a visit to New Mexico, collecting her free travel miles to extend to Paul for a trip here. Of course, when that happens, we will invite him to speak at a special CNMAS meeting!

Any amount is welcome. The funds should be made out to CNMAS, specified for "Paraguay Project." For \$100, your name will appear on the acknowledgment page of the first-ever bird guide to Paraguay as a donor and supporter (together with Central New Mexico Audubon Society's name.) Send your donation to CNMAS, Paraguay Project, c/o Betty Davis, 3420 Vista del Sur NW, Albuquerque, NM, 87120. Thank you, and Pura Vida!

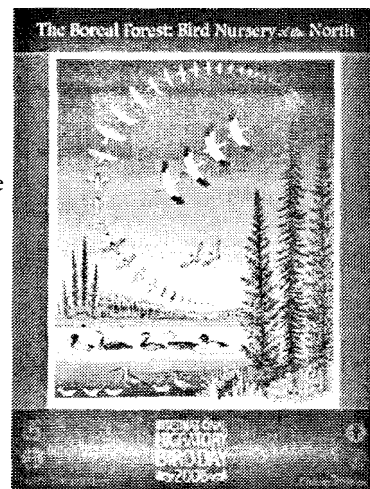


**International Migratory Bird Day: May 13, 2006**

International Migratory Bird Day (IMBD) was created in 1993 by visionaries at the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center and the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. Now under the direction of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, IMBD continues to focus attention on one of the most important and spectacular events in the life of a migratory bird—its journey between its summer and winter homes.

Each year features a particular theme, and the 2006 theme is "The Boreal Forest: Bird Nursery of the Americas." North America's boreal forest encompasses about 1.5 billion acres and stretches from Alaska to Newfoundland. Billions of birds of over 270 species migrate long distances from these locations to the Boreal, where they nest and raise young in what is known as North America's Bird Nursery.

IMBD belongs to all who celebrate it! To find out more information on IMBD, call 703/358-2318 or visit <http://birds.fws.gov/imbd>. To purchase IMBD products, call 1-866/334-3330 or visit <http://www.BirdDay.org>.



Art for poster - Copyright Radeaux





March - April - May 2006

# Land of Endangerment

by Nathan Dinsdale

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Published February 1, 2006,  
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## New Mexico faces the greatest environmental challenge of all—politics.

John Horning is a predator.

You can tell by the conviction of his words and the intensity of his eyes. But he is also prey, evidenced in the hair disappearing from his forehead and reincarnating in the unshaven stubble along his jaw line. He possesses the sinewy features you might expect of someone who runs endurance marathons for fun, but sprinting beyond exhaustion also happens to be good practical experience for his day job.

Horning is the executive director of Forest Guardians, an organization that advocates on behalf of the environment with the same fervor it repels those bent on ravaging it. There is no such thing as downtime in this line of work. There is always a petition to be filed, a politician to fight or a prairie dog to save.

The familiar suspects on both sides of the divide—environmentalists and groups representing ranchers and property-rights advocates—have geared up numerous times over the years, in the media and the courts.

But with the Bush administration leaving no stone unturned or tree uprooted in its battle to render environmental regulations impotent, the conservation struggle has evolved into an all-out war in which New Mexico environmentalists have found themselves caught behind enemy lines on multiple fronts.

“Legislatively, New Mexico—while not being ground zero—has critical political players,” Horning says. “Administratively, New Mexico really is ground zero.”

Indeed, the state hosts both numerous habitats under debate and, more critically, prominent federal players.

The fiercest fighting currently resides on the bloody ideological battlefield of the most revered and reviled environmental legislation in American history: the Endangered Species Act.

“There is absolutely no question that the Endangered Species Act is on the chopping block,” Nicole Rosmarino, conservation director for Forest Guardians, says. “It’s been around for 32 years now and it’s had the consistent, overwhelming support of the American public. But now it’s the closest it has ever been to being eviscerated.”

*It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the...*



Hold that thought, Chuck.

This is pretty much just the worst of times for environmental activists. An age of foolishness. An epoch of incredulity. A season of darkness. A winter of despair. This is *A Tale of Two Dicks*.

The first is Richard Nixon. Among other things, he signed the Endangered Species Act into law in 1973 with the purpose of protecting threatened and endangered species and the ecosystems upon which they depend.

The second is Richard Pombo. The Republican congressman from California is at the forefront of the most comprehensive and controversial legislation to ever shake the ESA’s core. Precisely what his “Threatened and Endangered Species Recovery Act of 2005” portends for the statute depends on who you ask.

While the nation watched in horror as New Orleans waded in its own putrid morass, Pombo’s bill won House approval in a scant 10 days last September, due in large part to a clandestine push enabled by the Republican stranglehold on power. At the time, US Rep.

Tom Udall, D-NM, was one of the few who mustered any opposition to the legislation, calling the bill a “rocket docket” with helpless disdain.

“If you look at the legislative history of this bill it had very little time for public input,” Udall says. “The purpose of a lightning schedule like this—which has been established by the Republicans—is to prevent public input.”

Udall ultimately voted against the bill while the rest of the New Mexico delegation, Republicans Heather Wilson and Steve Pearce, voted for it. A single witness was called to give testimony on the bill in the one House hearing on the subject. The witness was Craig Manson.

Manson is an Air Force veteran raised in New Mexico and California before becoming a lawyer, first for a private Sacramento firm and then as general counsel for the California Department of Fish and Game. Manson eventually rose to California Superior Court judge before he was nominated

**\* According to the Center for Biological Diversity, there have been 40 species listed under the Endangered Species Act during the first five years of the George W. Bush administration. In contrast, there were 234 listings during George HW Bush’s four years in the Oval Office and 521 under the Clinton administration. The CBD reports that the 286 species currently awaiting an ESA listing is the largest amount in history.**



by George W Bush to become an assistant secretary with the Department of the Interior in charge of overseeing Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

When Manson appeared before the House to testify to the merits of the Pombo bill, he noted the bill had been introduced

**\*The Pombo bill, which passed the House last September, has been referred to the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works. The chairman of that committee, Sen. Lincoln Chafee, R-RI, has said he will await analysis from the Keystone Center in Colorado (expected in February) before and if the committee moves to approve the bill.**

just two days prior and that his agency had not had "sufficient time to fully analyze the legislation or to develop a formal administration position on the bill."

The bill passed eight days later.

"The one witness that came forward in the short hearing that we had was an administration witness [who] hadn't even had time to review the bill," Udall says.

Which may have been the intent. Udall says that Manson's boss, Department

of Interior Secretary Gale Norton, gave a "scant" statement in support of the bill but failed, in Udall's estimation, to give any compelling reasons why.

"This is an ideological agenda," Udall says. "This is an effort to ram something through without giving it serious thought and consideration. That's because I think they're very scared of the response they would get if they had open hearings and took time to listen."

Not that Udall didn't try. He says his staff worked feverishly with the House minority committee and called in experts to help analyze the bill. Experts such as Jaime Rappaport Clark, the former national director of the Fish and Wildlife Service during the Clinton Administration, who told *Mother Jones* magazine that provisions in the Pombo bill would create an atmosphere where ESA enforcement would be "like the fox watching the chicken house." But it was too little, too late.

Udall helped draft a substitute to the Pombo bill that put greater emphasis on species recovery plans, established a stronger definition of how a species can be jeopardized and still included an incentive program for private land owners. The substitute was soundly rejected and the Pombo bill passed through the House virtually unscathed. Land owners and wise-use advocates—to say nothing of industry lobbyists—rejoiced.

"I think the key component of the bill is that it's written from the perspective of trying to balance the needs of protecting the species as well as protecting human rights," Nancie Marzulla, president of Defenders of Property Rights, says. "The current ESA is an old statute. It really needed a good overhaul and it needed to be recut with the perspective of focusing attention on steps taken to protect species as well as protecting the rights of land owners."

Environmental activists, however, bemoaned the bill's passage as grossly negligent of due process and a de facto stamp of approval

for gutting the ESA.

Further, the Pombo bill is not alone.

In December, similar ESA reform legislation was launched by Sen. Mike Crapo, R-Idaho. His name is pronounced *cray-po*, not *crap-ob*, but "oh crap" is precisely what environmentalists are saying about the senator's bill. Like the Pombo bill, it has a fairly innocuous title, the "Collaboration and Recovery of Endangered Species Act." But Liz Godfrey, for one, doesn't buy it.

Godfrey is the Santa Fe-based program director for the Endangered Species Coalition, an organization that bands together some 360 separate organizations—including Forest Guardians. Godfrey says the bills are couched with the same subtle audacity of Bush administration policies like the "Healthy Forests Initiative," pushed through as a Trojan horse for the deregulation of environmental protections.

"Both bills would take critical decisions about protecting endangered species out of the hands of scientists and put them into the hands of political appointees," Godfrey says. "Rather than a scientific decision it becomes a political science decision."

Bad news for scientists such as Brian Nowicki, a conservation biologist for the Center for Biological Diversity in Tucson, Ariz.

"Really I can't think of it being much worse than the Crapo bill," Nowicki says. "The few things that Pombo's bill forgot to beat up on, forgot to gut, forgot to undermine, Crapo does. If you put them together in committee you have basically a perfect all-out attack on the ESA."

Even some ESA reform advocates are not completely comfortable with Crapo's bill. Howard Hutchinson, a Pleasanton rancher and executive director of the Coalition of Arizona and New Mexico Counties, says the bill's incentive program is filled with tax credits that benefit large land owners and not small-time ranchers like those he represents.

Hutchinson also serves on the board of the Environmental Conservation Organization, which advocates for ESA reform on behalf of rural communities

and private land owners. He also takes issue with provisions in both bills that would make the designation of critical habitat—which boasts the ESA's most stringent prohibitions—up to the discretion of political appointees.

Political discretion is of concern to both sides in the battle. ESA advocates such as Godfrey also admit the law could use revision—in the form of strengthening. But not, she says, "in today's political climate."

The forecast for today's political climate: scattered mushroom clouds with a 100 percent chance of acid rain. At least according to the more apocalyptic environmental activists who say that Bush administration policies have set the cause back decades.

**\*New Mexico congressional representatives Heather Wilson and Steve Pearce, R-NM, voted for the passage of the Pombo ESA "reform" bill, while US Rep. Tom Udall, D-NM, voted against. Pearce also is listed by the Library of Congress as being one of 95 co-sponsors of the Pombo bill.**



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Well, they are wrong. It's more like a century.

Then again, in 1906 the Forest Service had just been created and the nation's first prominent environmentalist was in the White House. And if old Teddy Roosevelt could see what the Bush administration is doing to his beloved wilderness now, he might be spinning in his grave fast enough to make a posthumous charge up San Juan Hill.

David Parsons worked for the Fish and Wildlife Service—the primary ESA enforcer—for 24 years before resigning in 1999 to open Parsons Biological Consulting in Albuquerque. Parsons served under four presidents—Carter, Reagan, Bush I and Clinton—but says the current administration has carved out its own inglorious niche on environmental issues.

"In my opinion, this is the worst administration ever for conservation, protection of endangered species and biological diversity," Parsons says.

During his tenure at the FWS, Parsons worked as a field biologist and co-ordinator of the Mexican wolf recovery team, a program that has since been suspended under the Bush administration. He says the political climate in the FWS always shifts with each change in the Oval Office, but the collateral effects for the grunts on the ground has gradually increased over time.

"When I started, the biologists were free to do their work and to support their findings with the best available science," Parsons says. "The political trading off was done at very high levels. Over time, I've seen the politicization of the agency move down, first to the regional directors, then to state directors and now getting pretty close to the biologists themselves."

The trickle-down effect has had a severe impact on the enforcement of the ESA in New Mexico, according to environmentalists and current and former employees of the FWS, the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management.

Henry Gifford was an employee of the Forest Service for more than a decade before his contract as a wildlife research biologist was not renewed last November. The fact that Henry Gifford is not his actual name—he requested his real name not be used—underscores the fear and paranoia that many say permeates the country's environmental agencies.

The primary role of agencies like BLM and the Forest Service in enforcing the ESA is to monitor susceptible habitats and species and conduct official consultations, required by law, with FWS biologists to determine if activities such as logging are putting species and habitats in peril. Gifford says the consultation process in New Mexico has been relegated to a mere informality during the Bush presidency.

"I wouldn't say that the Forest Service has totally ignored consultations, but they are consultations that get shaped in a way that it becomes ineffective," Gifford says. "Basically what happens is if those people that know the most about a particular issue come out against the stance of those driving the process—which is primarily the department supervisors—they're shut out. They are not necessarily fired or transferred but they're just not invited to the next round of meetings."

Gifford says he raised the ire of management when he wrote an internal Forest Service memo alleging that Forest Service biologists were manipulating research in order to skirt court-



ordered restrictions placed on logging and livestock grazing in the Lincoln National Forest, birthplace of the original Smokey the Bear.

At the time he wrote the memo, Gifford was in the middle of an extensive research study to determine how the effects of forest thinning and livestock grazing were affecting the habitat and prey of the Mexican spotted owl. Gifford says that Forest Service range conservationists were required by court order to monitor grazing pastures to ensure that a minimum grass height was being maintained to provide adequate prey cover for the spotted owl. While conducting experiments, Gifford discovered that his measurement samples vastly differed from those reported by agency conservationists.

"The results were so bad," Gifford says. "They were basically telling Fish and Wildlife that they were meeting the guideline when in fact they were not. They weren't even close, but it was the way they were measuring it and sampling it in a biased fashion that allowed them to say that. When they were called on that it raised a lot of feathers."

Gifford says forest thinning guidelines also have been interpreted liberally, to the benefit of the timber industry, under the guise of protecting communities from wildfire. He says the stretching of regulations is largely a result of political pressure exerted by local government and special interest groups emboldened by provisions within the Healthy Forests Initiative.

"Part of the Healthy Forests Initiative crafted by the Bush administration was to give more power to local governments," Gifford says. "The Otero County commissioners have taken full advantage of that attitude and have put a lot of pressure on the Lincoln National Forest supervisor and, through Congress and to some degree Domenici, on both Fish and Wildlife and the Forest Service."

Gifford says the internal memo he wrote led to his experiment effectively being shuttered after it had consumed more than three years of his time and \$1.5 million in taxpayer dollars. But not before the Forest Service arranged a consultation with the FWS regional director. The study was discussed and then axed.

The regional director at the time was Dale Hall, now national director of the Fish and Wildlife Service.



Ending the Mexican wolf recovery team was one of the hallmarks of Hall's tenure as FWS regional director.

But the most controversial event was an agency memo he wrote in January 2005 supporting a new genetics policy. The policy stated that any genetic information not included in a species' initial listing couldn't be altered with subsequent science. That means if an animal was listed in 1984 as a single species

**\*On Jan. 27, FWS Director Dale Hall announced he had reassigned or promoted several members of the FWS' senior executive staff. Mitch Kind was announced as the new director of the Mountain Prairie Region, replacing Ralph Morgenweck, who was demoted to senior science advisor less than a year after criticizing Hall's controversial genetics policy in the Southwest Region.**

and was later discovered to be a member of a wider subspecies or population of endangered animals, its initial ESA protections could not be extended to improve conservation efforts of those additional populations and subspecies. The policy also prohibited FWS biologists from issuing official determinations that an unlisted species was being jeopardized.

The policy earned Hall fiery criticism from the scientific community, including a June 2005 letter of condemnation endorsed by more than 160 scientists, biologists and university professors from across the country.

But while the policy infuriated many of the nation's top biologists, it apparently didn't hurt Hall's career prospects. Little more than a month after that letter was sent, Hall was nominated by the Bush administration to head the FWS.

Hall's critics also point to a February 2005 survey of FWS employees conducted by the Union of Concerned Scientists and Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility in which, during Hall's tenure, the Southwest had the lowest employee morale and the highest lack of confidence in leadership out of any region.

According to the survey, nearly 30 percent of respondents reported being "directed to inappropriately exclude or alter technical information from a USFWS scientific document." In addition, 95 percent did not regard the FWS as effective in its efforts toward recovery of listed species.

"That survey is quite compelling in showing that the folks in the trenches—the biologists with integrity within the FWS—have an uphill battle on a daily basis in trying to just do their job and enforce the law to protect these species on the brink of extinction," Rosmarino says.

But the battle over the Endangered Species Act isn't fought

## Under the Gun

Numerous threatened species in New Mexico are in danger of having their Endangered Species Act protection diminished. Here are a few of the high-profile animals, where they're found, and the threats they face.

### Aplomado falcon

Otero Mesa, considered by environmentalists to be a prime recovery area, is where the falcon is under threat by prospective oil and gas drilling as well as livestock grazing, military operations, and pesticides.

### Black-footed ferret

Virtually extinct from New Mexico, the black-footed ferret exists in only a few small, reintroduced populations in the West and is jeopardized by the dwindling prairie dog population, its primary food source.

### Black-tailed prairie dog

Historically located throughout the Southwest and Great Plains states, the black-tailed prairie dog has dwindled in New Mexico, occupying only about 60,000 acres from several million a century ago. Limited populations can be found in eastern New Mexico. Like the Gunnison's prairie dog of northern New Mexico, the black-tailed prairie dog is threatened by agriculture, development, extermination, and human plague.

### Lesser prairie chicken

According to Forest Guardians, the lesser prairie chicken population has dwindled by more than 90 percent in the last century. It remains in southeastern New Mexico but is imperiled primarily by oil and gas drilling and livestock grazing.

### Mexican spotted owl

Located in all 11 national forests in Arizona and New Mexico, the spotted owl is threatened by logging and agriculture.

### Mexican wolf

Calling central New Mexico home, the wolf has seen its numbers dwindle through development and agriculture.

### Rio Grande silvery minnow

The last of five native fish of its kind in the Rio Grande, the minnow is under assault from water consumption feeding agriculture and development.

### Sand dune lizard

Found in western Texas and southeastern New Mexico when it's found at all, the lizard has been decimated by herbicides and oil and gas operations. According to Forest Guardians, the sand dune lizard may not be recoverable, even though it is still not listed under the ESA.

on mesas or in forests. It's been fought in courtrooms since its birth. On this particular day, Jan. 24, US District Judge Bruce Black listens to arguments pitting the State of New Mexico and a coalition of conservation groups against the federal government and representatives of industry.

This bout of legal wrangling has prospective national implications, but the literal battleground is really a couple hundred miles south in and around Otero Mesa, a vast expanse



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in southern New Mexico.

The fight began soon after BLM announced in January 2005 an aggressive plan to allow oil and gas development speculation on public lands in New Mexico. Following the direction of Gov. Bill Richardson, the state filed suit in April 2005, claiming the plan violated both the ESA and the National Environmental Policy Act. The case was subsequently consolidated with a similar action brought by a coalition of conservation groups that includes the NMWA, Forest Guardians and the Sierra Club.

At issue is a drilling lease sought by the Harvey E Yates Company, a subsidiary of the Artesia, NM company Yates Petroleum Corporation, one of the nation's largest holders of oil and gas leases and one of the biggest individual donors to New Mexico Republicans.

The state argues that BLM put forth its plan without proper analysis, public input or consultation with state government. The defendants—led by DOJ attorney Andrew Smith—dismiss predictions of environmental catastrophe as “fantasy” and shrug off the fact that the BLM contradicted its own analysis in submitting the new leasing plan.

There is a slightly ironic twist of fate in the fact that the state's case has landed in the Pete Domenici Courthouse.

As chairman of the Senate's Energy and Natural Resources committee, Domenici [who did not respond to interview requests] has been at the forefront of the nation's push to increase energy production on American soil.

But while Domenici has given indications that he would be in favor of amending the ESA, his counterpart US Sen. Jeff Bingaman, D-NM, has been a long-time advocate for the law.

“The Endangered Species Act has been instrumental in helping protect many of our country's plant and animal wildlife, and their habitats,” Bingaman says in an e-mailed statement. “There is a movement by the Republicans to seriously weaken the act and I believe the Senate will resist any extreme changes to it.”

Yates Petroleum (and its subsidiaries) is the largest holder of oil and gas leases in the western United States. It also happens that Yates Petroleum's desire to drill in Otero Mesa has been rebuffed largely by concerns centered around the Endangered Species Act.

Yates Petroleum and its subsidiaries also are significant benefactors for Domenici, who has received thousands in campaign donations from the Yates family.

Many of New Mexico's most endangered species (see sidebar, page 12) are directly threatened by the push to drill the Land of Enchantment into a cribbage board. The primary ESA provision that keeps industry ambitions in check is critical habitat designations, which provide the law's stingiest restrictions. Such areas also happen to routinely harbor the biggest fossil fuel honey pots.

**\*According to the Environmental Working Group, Yates Petroleum and its subsidiaries hold the most oil and gas leases out of 8,608 active lessees in 12 western US states, with more than 4,000 individual leases covering more than 3.5 million acres.**

Both the Pombo and Crapo bills would leave the designation of critical habitat up to the discretion of the Bush-appointed Department of the Interior.

**\*According to the Center for Responsive Politics, during the 2000 election cycle, Sen. Pete Domenici received funds from more than 30 oil and gas interests, including \$9,000 from Enron, \$4,000 from Halliburton, and at least \$8,000 from Yates Petroleum and its subsidiaries. Sen. Jeff Bingaman, D-NM, received \$2,000 from Yates Petroleum.**

“One of the criticisms of the ESA is that it's an emergency room statute,” Horning says. “To some degree, that is true. It is a crisis to ensure that species don't go into the dark night of extinction. But critical habitat is the part of the statute that's not only about getting species out of the emergency room, but getting them out of the hospital altogether.”

Howard Hutchinson agrees that critical habitat is important. But he says the way that critical habitat has been implemented under the current ESA—without proper consideration paid to social and economic impacts—is at the root of the problem.

“It's a very cynic-generating formula in our current system,” Hutchinson says. “That's how phrases like ‘Shoot, shovel and shut up’ have come about. When you're creating a disincentive for harboring a species—whether it's listed or not—you're going to create that kind of an atmosphere.”

The battle over the ESA traditionally has been a war of attrition, but now the camps have circled their wagons.

The Forest Guardians headquarters is a command center in a combat zone. The offices and hallways are cluttered with bookcases filled with briefs, laws, legal filings, field reports, scientific research and national forest maps. These are the indispensable tools of desperate times.

“I think the current atmosphere has been demoralizing for a lot of people,” Rosmarino admits. “But if anything it's made our focus clearer. Our work is more important than ever.”

Despite the divide created by the Pombo/Crapo legislation and Bush administration policies, Hutchinson says its not too late to reach a compromise between the two sides.

But the contentious nature of the current legislation and the enforcement of Bush administration policies has hardly been conducive to achieving a communal philosophy. Judge Black, citing more than 20,000 pages of records submitted in the Otero Mesa case, says he isn't likely to reach a decision until March at the earliest, well past the Feb. 15 deadline after which BLM issues its leases.

It's unlikely the divorced parties on both the state and national level will reconcile their differences any time soon. For now, compromise is a mere pipe dream.

“I think we should take a hard look at how the [ESA] has worked over the last 30 years and that requires a deliberative approach,” Udall says. “I think we've lost our ability to deliberate. That means we need to reach out to all the stakeholders to get their points of view. I think [industry] should



be consulted in this process. I think they have some good suggestions and I think if we handled this in a deliberative way we would be able to find some common ground with them."

For now, at least, common ground on the issue will likely remain the most endangered species of all.

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**Reminder to write one important letter, make one important phone call...**

For thirty years the Endangered Species Act has been our nation's front line defense against extinction. This Act is one our most important stewardship tools and the reason we have saved magnificent creatures like the California Condor, the Manatee, and the bald Eagle, our nation's emblem of freedom and courage.

You already know that Representative Richard Pombo (R-CA) bullied legislation through the House that guts the Act, while disregarding serious bipartisan negotiations that would have actually made the bill function better for landowners without eviscerating the standards that prevent extinction.

NOW is the time to call or write both Senator Jeff Bingaman and Senator Pete Domenici to let them know that you expect better stewardship from the Senate and how important the Endangered Species Act is to you.

See the "Whom To Contact" list on back page, and do it NOW.

**The Ryan Beaulieu Memorial Youth Scholarship Endowment Fund**

Thanks to your generosity and the fulfillment of a matching grant from The Lannan Foundation, Central New Mexico Audubon Society has established a permanent endowment to give testimony to Ryan's living legacy. The endowment is being invested so that its proceeds will fund at least one youth or youth leader scholarship per year. Central New Mexico Audubon Society is currently developing eligibility criteria for scholarship awards, with consideration beginning in fall 2006 for the first award to be presented in 2007.

The endowment is permanently open to the generosity of donors and will remain active in perpetuity to help young naturalists in need of financial support. Ryan and his peers represent the future of conservation in our world, and with your help we shall do all we can to foster their passion as youth, that they may become Earth's advocates for a lifetime. Thank you for helping to give these young people the opportunity to grow, learn, explore, and teach by example.

Please be assured that we have been working in concert with the families of Ryan and that they are aware of, and deeply grateful for, your thoughtfulness. With deep appreciation, and to paraphrase Ryan's signature closing...

Cheers and Good Birding To You.

Kathryn Albrecht, Trina Altman, Art Arenholz, Bryan & Mary Lou Arthur, Eileen Beaulieu & Family, Leon & Natalie Beaulieu, Brave\_E, Inc. / Elizabeth Hurst-Waitz, Celestyn Brozek, Lorraine M. Burke, Patrick & Joan Burke, James & Deane Casciano, Central New Mexico Audubon Society, Dianne Cress, Rosemary DeYoung, Guy and Elisabeth Dicharry, Lois & Fred Doyle, Marc Fagan, Sylvia Fee, Patricia Folsom, Lesley Gasperow, Lucille Gentry, Julie & Jim Goodding, Joan & Fred Hashimoto, Helen Haskell, Melissa Howard, Larry & Margie Hutchinson, Mindy & Larry Koch, Kraig Kurucz, Laurel Ladwig, The Lannan Foundation, Donald & Jan Lewis, Bonnie Long, Manzano Day School, Philip Melnick, Karen and William Ordemann, John Parmeter, Jennifer J. Payne, Barbara Posey, Rio Grande Bird Research, Inc. / Steven & Nancy Cox, Roco Corporation / Roco Rescue, Sonia Santa Anna, Ken & Mary Lou Schneider, Jo Schuman, Tova Shifberg, William Talbot, Thursday Birders / Sally Burke, Sei Tokuda, Truman Middle School, John Tyson, Robert & Roberta Waite, Ron Waitz, James & Roberta Wick, Wild Bird Center Westside / Lee Hopwood and Nikki Love, Wild Bird Centers of America, Inc. / George Petrides, Wild Birds Unlimited Westside / Lynda Geron & Joseph Shumate



*Like music and art, love of nature is a common language that can transcend political or social boundaries.*

*- President Jimmy Carter*



March - April - May 2006



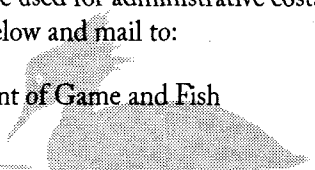
**Bird Class**

Celestyn Brozek will be teaching "Birds of New Mexico" course at the UNM-Valencia Campus in Tome (30 miles south of Albuquerque past Los Lunas). The course includes three classroom meetings 7-9 PM on Mondays: April 17, 24, and May 1, and two field trips on Saturdays: April 22 to Bosque del Apache NWR, and April 29 to Casa Colorada refuge in Valencia county. It is a perfect time for early spring migrants and shorebirds. Classroom meetings illustrated with slides and movies will provide fascinating details about bird biology as well as prepare you for bird identification. The cost is \$48 for NM residents (\$5 for seniors: 65 or older). To register call 925-8560. For more info contact Celestyn at 925-8611 or [cbrozek@unm.edu](mailto:cbrozek@unm.edu)

**You Can Help New Mexico's Wildlife**

You can help endangered species research and recovery, raptor migration counts, wildlife rehabilitation, and other wildlife projects. Your donation goes directly to wildlife projects across New Mexico. No contributions are used for administrative costs. Please complete this form below and mail to:

Share with Wildlife  
New Mexico Department of Game and Fish  
P. O. Box 25112  
Santa Fe, NM 87504



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[http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us/conservation/share\\_with\\_wildlife/](http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us/conservation/share_with_wildlife/)

**Electronic Burrowing Owl**

Just a short reminder that people who wish to receive the *Burrowing Owl* electronically should contact our Membership Chairman, Ed Dover, and let him know. Email him at [dover5427@msn.com](mailto:dover5427@msn.com)



**NOTICE:** The next issue of the *Burrowing Owl* will be incorporated into the statewide Audubon-New Mexico Newsletter. The next regular issue of the *Burrowing Owl* will be published in September 2006.

**JOIN AUDUBON TODAY**



- Get an Audubon Society membership
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- Subscription to CNMAS Burrowing Owl

- Yes, I want to join Audubon at the low introductory rate of \$20 for one year (a \$15 savings!)
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- Senior citizen or student rate - only \$15/year
- I want to download my Burrowing Owl newsletter from the website (fill in email address to get notice)
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Use this form for New Membership Subscriptions only

**Burrowing Owl Subscription Tidbits**

- For changes of address or correction to your Burrowing Owl subscription, contact the Membership Chairperson (see Directory on the back page of this newsletter).
- If you are in the CNMAS Chapter area, you can receive the Burrowing Owl by sending your name and address with \$12 to CNMAS, PO BOX 30002, Albuquerque, NM 87190-0002 - this does NOT include National Audubon membership or Audubon Magazine!
- You can also subscribe to our newsletter without being a member of our Chapter. If you live outside the CNMAS region, send \$15 to the above address.
- If you wish to receive notice of our downloadable PDF newsletter (instead of a hard copy) give us your email address in addition to your name and address.
- Members can call (800) 274-4201 to sign up for National Audubon's Paper-Free Renewal Program. Those who sign up will have their membership automatically renewed each year and will receive only one bill approximately 2 months in advance of your membership expiration date.

**Burrowing Owl Deadline**

Information and articles to be included in Summer 2006 issue of the State Audubon Newsletter, *Burrowing Owl* section, must be received by May 5th. Contact Turtle-Bear at 505-265-6094 or [turtlebear@jensenbear.com](mailto:turtlebear@jensenbear.com). We are not accepting commercial advertising at this time.

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*Our missions: "To appreciate, experience, and conserve birds, other wildlife and their habitats; and to encourage and support environmental education in New Mexico."*

#### WHOM TO CONTACT

National Audubon Society  
Membership Hotline  
(800)274-4201, [chadd@audubon.org](mailto:chadd@audubon.org)  
Activist Hotline  
(800)659-2622  
Audubon Take Action  
[www.capitolconnect.com/audubon/](http://www.capitolconnect.com/audubon/)

New Mexico Office  
David Henderson  
Randall Davey Audubon Center  
P.O. Box 9314 Santa Fe, NM 87504  
(505)983-4609, [dhenderson@audubon.org](mailto:dhenderson@audubon.org)

The President  
The White House  
Washington, DC 20500  
(202)456-1111  
[president@whitehouse.gov](mailto:president@whitehouse.gov)

Hon. Gale Norton  
Secretary of the Interior  
18th & C Streets, NW, Rm. 6151  
Washington, DC 20240  
(202)208-7351

Hon. Pete Domenici  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510  
(202)224-6621 (505)346-6791  
[senator\\_domenici@domenici.senate.gov](mailto:senator_domenici@domenici.senate.gov)

Hon. Jeff Bingaman  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510  
(202)224-5521 (505)346-6601  
[senator\\_bingaman@bingaman.senate.gov](mailto:senator_bingaman@bingaman.senate.gov)

Hon. Stephen Pearce  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515  
(202)225-2365

Hon. Tom Udall  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515  
(202)225-6190 (505)984-8950  
[tom.udall@mail.house.gov](mailto:tom.udall@mail.house.gov)

Hon. Heather Wilson  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515  
(202)225-6316 (505)346-6781  
[ask.heather@mail.house.gov](mailto:ask.heather@mail.house.gov)

Governor Bill Richardson  
State Capitol, Room 400  
Santa Fe, NM 87501  
(505) 476-2200

Bosque del Apache NWR  
(505)838-2120  
Friends of the Bosque del Apache  
(505)835-1828  
[www.friendsofthebosque.org](http://www.friendsofthebosque.org)

US Fish and Wildlife Service  
500 Gold Avenue, SW  
Albuquerque, NM 87102  
External Affairs Office (505)248-6911

Sandia Ranger District  
US Forest Service  
Clifford Dils, District Ranger  
11776 Highway 337  
Tijeras, NM 87059  
(505)281-3304

New Mexico Department  
of Game and Fish  
Villagra Building  
P.O. Box 25112  
Santa Fe, NM 87503-0001  
(505)827-6681  
<http://www.gmfsh.state.nm.us>

**Bat in Trouble? (Talking Talons)**  
Call before you intervene: 281-1133 or 281-1515

**Rare Bird Alert**  
Albuquerque: 884-3269, [Pinyonjay@aol.com](mailto:Pinyonjay@aol.com)  
<http://www.nmosbirds.org/hotline.html>

**Rosy Finch Project**  
Fran Lusso & Dave Weaver, [flusso@wfubmc.edu](mailto:flusso@wfubmc.edu)

**Wildlife Rescue**  
If you find a sick or injured bird, call 344-2500

#### DIRECTORY

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Webpage <http://www.newmexicoaudubon.org/cnmas/>  
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Bill Talbot  
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