

Burrowing Owl

December 2006, January, February 2007 Issue

Volume 36 No. 1

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

Audubon Program

Thursday, January 18, 2007

Peter Shannon, Curator of Birds at the Albuquerque Biopark

Musings of a Phoenicopterophile

Peter Shannon has been working in the zoo profession for nearly 30 years. One of the groups of birds he is most passionate about are the flamingos. He will talk about the natural history of this unique family of birds and the many things that make them a fascinating group.

Desolate habitat, nest mounds made of mud, group displays, upside down feeding, the sexual strategies of captive flocks, conservation issues, and even the age old question of why they stand on one leg will be among the topics covered.



Join the Central NM Audubon Society for an evening in pink.

Free! Doors open 6:45PM, program starts 7:15PM.
St. Timothy's Lutheran Church, 211 Jefferson St. NE
1 block north of Central, 4-5 blocks west of San Mateo

Mark your calendars: the next Audubon Birding Academy is coming soon! See page 2 for details!

A Special Message From Audubon President John Flicker

The implications of this election go far beyond partisan score-keeping. Though some Congressional races remain too close to call, it appears that voters rejected extremism in national policy and restored the balance that promises full and open debate on crucial issues, including environmental protections. That bodes well for the health of resources we all depend upon.

The challenge now is to rise above partisanship and enact policies that protect our natural resources while addressing critical energy problems. Voters want solutions and an end to a special interest-dominated energy policy that has consisted of little more than drilling, despoiling and denial. Lawmakers on both sides of the aisle can meet voter expectations by blazing the trail to a clean energy future that protects human health, wildlife and treasured places.

We look to the new Congress and its leaders to offer constructive dialog over dogma, and solid solutions over sound bites. Now is the time for real and lasting progress on energy and other priority conservation concerns:

- Combating global warming, while preparing for its already escalating consequences;
- Safeguarding the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge;
- Ensuring protection of our endangered species;
- Adequately funding enforcement of federal environmental regulations and legislation, conservation programs, and essential, overdue upkeep of national parks and refuges; and
- Protecting and restoring wetlands vital to environmental and economic health.

Audubon is eager to work with the new Congress to bridge partisan divides and support the forward-looking policies needed to protect our natural heritage. Conservation is a cherished part of America's values - with the new balance in Congress, our lawmakers have a chance to show that they share those values with the voters they serve.

Let me add my personal thanks to our activists and chapter leaders for your dedicated efforts on behalf of birds, wildlife and their habitats. We need you now, more than ever, as we forge ahead on new initiatives to safeguard our environment.

— John Flicker, President of National Audubon Society
Audubon Advisory, November 8, 2006, Vol 2006 Issue 11

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Panama! Costa Rica! Alaska!

The Ninth Annual Central New Mexico Audubon Birding Academy takes us far afield. From the tropics to the tundra, this Birding Academy will awe, inspire, teach, and entertain.

February 15: Terry Dunn

What's So Special About Tropical Rainforests & Tropical Birds?

Tropical rainforests are not just another pretty place. These forests function in unique, important, and amazing ways. They house countless species of plants and animals. They impact the global environment. And once you've seen the birds, you'll be spoiled for life!

In this slide show/lecture, Terry Dunn will give an overview of tropical rainforests, share some of her experiences working and visiting rainforests in Central and South America, describe some of the uncommonly beautiful birds that live there, and even give you an opportunity to travel to Panama in 2008.

Terry Dunn is a wildlife scientist, environmental educator, writer and artist. After working on bird research in Panama in the mid-1980s, Terry lived briefly in Costa Rica where she created paintings and drawings of tropical birds. She has returned to Central America six times since and has traveled to the Amazon regions of Peru and Bolivia. She has written about topics ranging from hummingbirds to wildlife forensics.

March 15: Gerry Goffe on Costa Rica

April 19: Bonnie Long on Alaska

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 Ninth Annual Audubon Birding Academy.

CNMAS Field Trip Reports

compiled by Celestyn Brozek

TRIP LEADERS: Sonia, Chris, and Bob: THANK YOU!

Saturday/Sunday, August 26/27: Southwestern New Mexico

Leader: Sonia Santa Anna. Fifteen trip participants traveled to Sierra, Grant, Valencia, and Catron counties. The total count of the birds seen by one or more group members was an impressive 139. Highlights (there were really too many) were Zone-tailed Hawk and Common Black-Hawks, N. Pygmy-Owl in the daylight, Painted Redstart, Red-faced and Olive Warbler, and Lewis' Woodpecker.

Saturday, September 30: Clayton Lake State Park

Leader: Christopher Rustay. Fifteen trip participants observed the total of 55 species including Eared Grebe, Double-crested Cormorant, Osprey, Ring-billed Gull, Red-naped Sapsucker, Eastern Phoebe, Hammond's Flycatcher (knockout looks at the flycatcher allowing for an excellent review of field marks), Sage Thrasher, Nashville Warbler, Clay-colored and Field Sparrows and Lazuli Bunting. The trip concluded with viewing the dinosaur tracks near the dam.

Saturday, October 28: Bosque del Apache NWR & Socorro Area

Leader: Bob Merkel. Fifteen trip participants saw over 60 species. The weather was wonderful and the trees were a riot of yellows and orange shades. The groups checked out Turtle Bay and the other pond on campus above the golf course. They noticed an interesting behavior of American Wigeons which on several occasions would swim toward where a Coot had just dived and then grab some of the Coot's pondweed from its bill when the Coot surfaced! Driving along the Farm-Market Road from Luis Lopez to US 380, the participants spotted the only Avocet of the day in a temporary pond that also yielded 5 ducks, 2 killdeer, and a snipe. The Bonaparte's Gull was unusual for the Bosque del Apache and the 5 White-fronted Geese were life birds for some participants and the leader.

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.

The 9th Annual Audubon Birding Academy Registration Form

To register for the following classes check circles:

- (Feb 15) Tropical Rainforest - Panama ----- \$6
 - (Mar. 15) Costa Rica ----- \$6
 - (Apr. 19) Alaska ----- \$6
 - ALL 3 CLASSES (preregistration only) ----- \$15
 - I want to be a new Audubon Society Member and get 3 free Birding Academy classes ----- \$20
- NAS chapter code Q51

Total Enclosed: _____

Name/s: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Phone: _____

I want to get the *Burrowing Owl* via the web - Email: _____

Send your check, payable to CNMAS to:

CNMAS Birding Academy
P.O. Box 30002
Albuquerque, NM 87190-0002

Feel free to make copies of this registration form.



December 2006 - January - February 2007

CNMAS Field Trip Schedule

prepared by Celestyn Brozek

Check <http://www.newmexicoaudubon.org/cnmas/trips.html> for field trip updates. Although it rarely happens, trips can be changed or cancelled due to unforeseen circumstances. Always check with the leader before the trip.

Sunday, January 7, 2007: Sandia Mountains

Meet at 6:30 AM at the Four Hills Shopping Center parking lot in front of Dion's Pizza (SW corner of Central SE and Tramway Blvd) to drive to the Sandia Ski area in search of Pygmy Owl and other montane species. The trip up the mountain will conclude at 9:00 AM at the Crest House where you can have a hearty breakfast and watch Rosy-Finches. If you rather skip the early morning birding you can join the group and participate in Rosy-Finch banding until 2:00 PM at the House. Leaders: Laurel Ladwig and Raymond Van Buskirk. Contact Raymond at (505) 217-8514 or e-mail trogon282000@yahoo.com

Saturday-Sunday, January 20-21: Las Vegas & Maxwell NWRs

This will be an overnight trip to search for wintering raptors, waterfowl and passerines. We will start birding at the Las Vegas NWR on Saturday morning and ending the day at the Maxwell NWR. We will overnight in Raton and return to the Maxwell on Sunday morning. Birding will end at about Sunday noon. Bring scopes, lunch and snacks and dress appropriately for very cold weather. Reservations for a Raton motel must be made individually. Meet at 8:00 AM at the Far North Shopping Center behind the Village Inn (NE corner of Academy and San Mateo Blvd.). Call Sonia (505)688-0688 or Sei (505)266-2480 for details.

Saturday, February 3: Elephant Butte Lake

Meet at 8:00 AM at the McDonald's at Truth or Consequences, found by going east from the Truth or Consequences exit off I-25 about 1/4 mile on the left. We will visit several areas surrounding Elephant Butte Lake. This is a good time for unusual gulls or other waterbirds to be at the lake. This is a New Mexico IBA and one of the reasons are the large number of *Aechmophorus* grebes that can winter here. There shouldn't be any long or hard walking (though conditions could change). Contact Christopher Rustay (505)255-7786.

Saturday, March 3: Bernardo Refuge & Bosque del Apache NWR

Meet at 6:30 AM at the UNM Department of Physics parking lot on the NE corner of Yale and Lomas Blvd. We will drive to Bernardo Wildlife Refuge (I-25 exit 175) which is good for wintering sparrows, cranes, and waterfowl. Then, depending on the current bird reports, we will visit area(s) in and around Socorro and end up at the Bosque del Apache. This is a whole day trip. Contact Celestyn Brozek at (505)266-9225 or (505) 925-8611 or email cbrozek@unm.edu

Sunday, April 29: Bitter Lake NWR

Meet at the Bitter Lake Headquarters at 7:00 AM. This should be the height of shorebird migration, we may even find a Least Tern or two. This is a New Mexico IBA and generally has the largest number of shorebirds of any place in the state. Contact Christopher Rustay (505)255-7786.

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

Local Christmas Bird Counts

Albuquerque: Sunday, December 17

Hart R. Schwarz (505)266-1810, hschwarz@fs.fed.us
Meet Hart at Corrales Shopping Center, NW corner of Coors and Alameda, between 7:00 & 7:15 AM. Participation fee remains at \$5.00. Bring cash or make out your check to Hart Schwarz. The compilation party will be hosted by Hal & Amy Wagnon at their Montgomery & Juan Tabo area home, (505) 298-7350, at 6:45 P.M. They will provide some beverages as well as relish trays (vegetables, fruits, cold cuts) and desserts. Bring your bird list, a dish to share (optional) and your own beverage if you wish. Maps to their home will be handed out on the morning of the Count.

Bosque del Apache NWR: Friday, December 15

Dave Hawksworth (505)507-5343, dlhawksworth@fs.fed.us

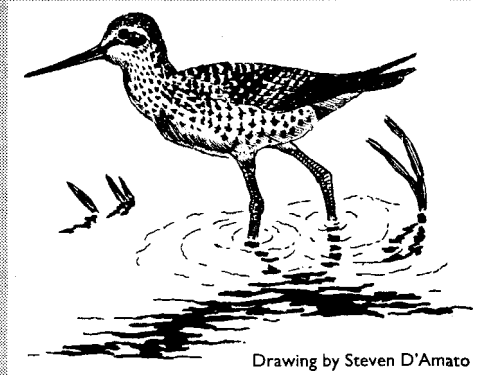
Sandia Mountains: Tuesday, December 26

Rebecca Gracey (505)242-3821, mrgracey@earthlink.net
Nick Vaughn nickvaughn2000@yahoo.com
Meet outside Dion's Pizza in the Four Hills shopping center on Central, west of Tramway, at 7:30 a.m. We will regroup at Dion's at 5:00 p.m. to eat and go over the results of the count. Contact Rebecca Gracey if you wish to participate: 505-242-3821, mrgracey@earthlink.net

Sevilleta NWR: TBA

Steve and Nancy Cox (505)345-2385, sora@spinn.net

Not all information about the local CBCs was available at press time. Please contact the leaders above for details about their counts and compilation parties.



Drawing by Steven D'Amato

For the complete list of New Mexico Christmas Bird

Counts held between December 14, 2006 and January 5, 2007 visit: <http://www.audubon.org/chapter/nm/nm/rdac/cbcschedule2006-2007.html> or <http://nmosbirds.org/>

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.



Rosy-Finches At Sandia Crest!

by Nancy Cox

The Rosy-Finches are back earlier than ever this year. Last year they arrived early (November 7th) but this year they arrived even earlier (November 2nd). Steve and I, together with Raymond VanBuskirk, Michael Hilchey, Cole Wolf, and all our other volunteers, plan to start our banding schedule Sunday, November 12th (I know! You don't even have your newsletter yet). But we'll be there most every Sunday through the spring, with the exception of some Christmas Bird Count dates. Please come up and join us. We hope to see many previously banded birds, since we banded 299 Rosy-Finches last winter. We look forward to breaking that record.

Visit www.RosyFinch.com or www.newmexicoaudubon.org/cnmas for our finalized banding schedule, updates, personal accounts, Rosy-Finch history, photos, and, of course, tributes to the founder of the Rosy-Finch project, Ryan Beaulieu. Please check the road conditions before going to the Crest House. If the Crest House employees cannot make it to work, the Crest House will not be able to open.

If you get to the Crest in person, you'll be impressed with the beautiful memorial artwork installed this August by Ryan's family in celebration of his love and presence. Dedicated by Ryan's family and designed by sculptress Sharon Fullingam, it has the same dynamics of flight as the birds you'll be watching out the Crest windows! Watch the above Web sites, also, for more information and the application to be used by young people from the New Mexico community to apply for a grant from The Ryan Beaulieu Memorial Education Fund (we expect the grant to be open nationwide in years to come.)

The fund has been established and will start accepting applications in March 2007, for use by the winner in summer 2008. The fund provides scholarships for youth between the ages

of 13 and 20, or educators of youth, to attend a specific program, camp or course pertaining to the candidate's interest in the natural sciences. CNMAS wishes to thank the Lannan Foundation for its generous support of the fund, as well as the family and friends of Ryan, our young ornithologist, environmentalist, conservationist friend whose life continues to infuse us with joy.



This photograph of a Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch, Hepburn's form, was taken on December 11, 2005 at Sandia Crest, east of Albuquerque, New Mexico. The large gray cheeks characterize the Hepburn's form.

Hepburn's Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches breed in the Cascade Mountains of Oregon and Washington states, the mountains of western British Columbia, the Yukon Territory, and southern Alaska. They winter in

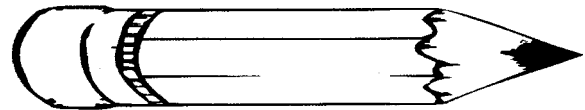
the mountains and high-elevation valleys of the intermountain west of the United States. Northern New Mexico is the southeastern most part of their winter range. Thus, Gray-crown Rosy-Finches are one of our true avian signs of winter in the southwest.

The photo is by Stephen Fetting. The photo was made possible by the banding and trapping efforts of Steve and Nancy Cox, and Raymond VanBuskirk.



By the Way ...

CNMAS is looking for someone with a passion for conservation issues that we like to sink our talons into: Sandia Mountain Forest Ranger District plans, IBAs, River Otters in New Mexico, the Valle Vidal and Otero Mesa, Tijeras Canyon Safe Passage Coalition, HawkWatch Land protection in Tijeras Canyon, to name a few. We invite you to become **our Chapter's representative to the State Audubon Council**, filling the vacancy that Andrew Rominger left when he went off to Stanford. The Council meets four times a year, usually at Sevilleta NWR (almost always with an impromptu birding trip before or after!), and their effectiveness is felt year-round, statewide. Besides attendance at the meetings, we'd ask that you write a summary of their quarterly meetings for the *Burrowing Owl*, which would be easily prepared from their minutes. You don't already have to know the issues – just come and learn! Please respond to Beth or Ruth (see Directory). One person CAN make a difference, and you'll have a whole Audubon network behind you!



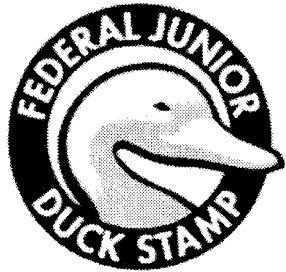
CNMAS Education Committee

Helen Haskell, Lynn Schuler, Bill Talbot & Lee Hopwood

Great news! We have received response and applications for the scholarship for a teacher to attend the Institute of Desert Ecology in Tucson. Watch for announcement of the awardee in the next *Burrowing Owl*.

Further good news: We are extending the application date for the CNMAS Educator Resource Grant to December 31. Please! Send the application on the following page with your child to his/her teacher at school. Post it in your library. Take it to your church. This is such a valuable opportunity for teachers—but we need YOU to help get the word out. Have a wonderful holiday season, and we'll see you next year!

Audubon: Conservation  Audubon: Research  Audubon: Education



Friends of the
Rio Grande
Nature Center

Audubon: Outreach  Audubon: Advocacy  Audubon: Birds!



Central New Mexico
Audubon Society
Supporting New Mexico
and our environment

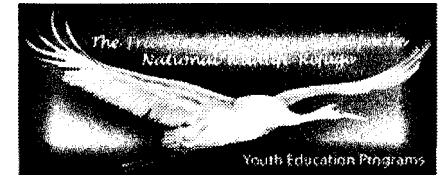


Rio Grande
Bird Research, Inc.

 Audubon: Partnerships  Audubon: Young Naturalists 

Sevilleta LTER
Long Term Ecological Research

Environmental Education Association of New Mexico



Audubon: People!  Audubon: Inspiration  Audubon: Networking

CNMAS Educator Resource Grant

The brand new Educator Resource Grant is available to all educators in New Mexico. The grant is available for purchase of resources to the classroom/lessons that school or personal budgets do not cover. The supplies must be used for a natural history/science lesson, project or experience.

This grant is open to all educators of students age 18 and under. At the end of the school year, grantees must supply Central New Mexico Audubon Society with a short report on how the money was used and an itemized budget with receipts. A short article written by the educator and students involved will be published in the *Burrowing Owl* Newsletter for our members.

Amount available: up to \$250

Application deadline: *December 31st 2006* (for money awarded by January 2007).

Application process: complete the application form in this newsletter, or download the application from the website:

<http://www.peacocklaw.com/nmac/cnmas/>

Mail the application to: CNMAS, c/o Helen Haskell, PO Box 36741, Albuquerque, NM 87176.

Questions? Email Helen Haskell at helennm@yahoo.com - title the email 'CNMAS Educator Resource Grant'.

Audubon Adventures

Do you know of a classroom that could benefit from an Audubon Adventures Kit? If so, become a classroom sponsor. The kit is best suited for grades 3-6. For more information on the 2006-07 kit, visit <http://www.audubon.org/educate/aa>



*Connect a child to nature with
Audubon Adventures
2006-2007*

Enclosed please find my check for \$ _____
(Each \$45.65 will sponsor one classroom in the Audubon Adventures Program. Any amount you contribute will benefit our educational activities.)

I choose to designate _____
Elementary/Middle School for my sponsorship (designation is optional)

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Send your check payable to CNMAS with this form to:
Audubon Adventures, c/o CNMAS,
PO BOX 30002, Albuquerque, NM 87190-0002

CNMAS Educator Resource Grant Application

Educator Name _____

School/Work _____

Grade and subject taught _____

Address: _____

Phone # day: _____ evening _____

Email _____

Fax# _____

Principal* (unless home schooled, etc.) _____

* If no principal, please provide name and contact information of one reference.

List below or attach a list of what you need and the cost of the supplies (budget)

Describe why you need these materials, how you will use them and how they will benefit your students

Eligibility & requirements

This grant is open to all educators of students age 18 and under. Funding can be used for supplies for a project/lesson/unit about natural history/sciences, such as bug boxes, books, lab supplies. At the end of the school year, the grantee must supply CNMAS with a short report on how the money was used and an itemized budget with receipts. A short article will be placed in the *Burrowing Owl* Newsletter for our members written by the teacher/students involved.

Deadlines

For application: DECEMBER 31st 2006
Money awarded by JANUARY, 2007

Mail the application to: CNMAS, c/o Helen Haskell, PO Box 36741, Albuquerque, NM 87176.

Questions? Email Helen Haskell at helennm@yahoo.com, and title the email 'CNMAS Educator Resource Grant'.



**Learning Look-Alikes:
Four Beautiful Diving Ducks**

by Art Arenholz

artwork by Andrew Rominger

During winter, we can see all four of these handsome diving ducks: the three mergansers and the perky bufflehead, which is a look-alike to one of them. First, we will compare the Common and Red-breasted Mergansers, which look a lot alike. Then, we'll review how to tell a Hooded Merganser from a Bufflehead.

But first, lets take a quick overview. Mergansers are large diving ducks with long necks and long, thin, serrated bills. The serrations, like the edge of a steak knife, help hold slippery fish, their favorite food. Female and male mergansers do not look alike. Most female ducks are dressed in muted colors to make them less visible on the nest. These female ducks all look similar, but luckily for us, male and female ducks are often seen together during winter.

Now we are ready to study our first pair of look-alikes. The Common Merganser is by far our most common and also our largest merganser (25 inches long), versus 23 inches for the Red-breasted Merganser. Not much difference, but enough for the smaller Red-breasted to catch your eye as you scan a floating flock of mergansers.

The male Common has a green head, a white body and a dark back. At the waterline, his chest is white. He has a long, thin red bill and red feet. The female Common has a red head, a gray body and a gray back. Her bill and feet are also red. She also has a bright, sharply defined white chin and neck which helps separate her from the Red-breasted female which does not have this sharp contrast in these two areas.

So in review, the male Common has a green head, and the chest is white at the waterline. She has a red head with two

sharply defined white areas in the chin and neck areas. Just remember New Mexico chile: green and red.

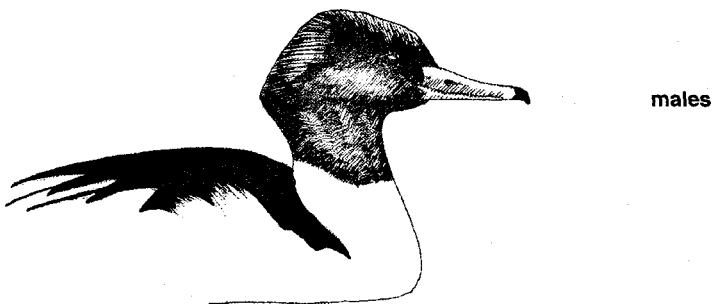
The Red-breasted Merganser is not seen very often in New Mexico, but it is worthwhile to look in every flock of Commons for a similar but smaller duck. Red-breasted male and female heads are also green and red respectively, but not exactly the same as those of the Commons. The heads of both the male and the female Red-breasted have a ragged, trailing crest, and the red of the female head is much paler than that of the female Common. Also, the female Red-breasted's chin and neck do not show the sharp color contrast seen on the Common female. Instead, where the colors change, they do so by gradually blending into each other with no sharp contrast line. Another useful difference is the wide white collar on the neck of the male, between the green head and the rusty chest. At the waterline, the male Red-breasted is a rusty color, not the white of the Common male.

So the main differences to remember: male Red-breasted has a shaggy, trailing crest on the head, a white neck collar and a rusty chest. (Male Common does not have these features.) The female Red-breasted head is a paler red with a shaggy, trailing crest and shows no sharp color contrast in the chin and neck areas. Look at Andrew's drawings to remember these key identification features. Also, we will have a summary at the end of this article.

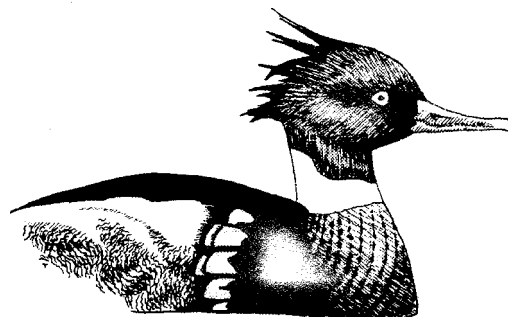
Let's move on to our second pair of look-alikes. You are not likely to confuse a Hooded Merganser with either of our first two ducks, but you might confuse it with a male Bufflehead duck. They are not related, but they do look alike.

Only 17 inches long, a Hooded Merganser (or "Hoody") is our smallest merganser. The male has a dark head with a large, fan-shaped white crest, which is bordered in black. Even when the fan is partly closed, this is still a strikingly beautiful bird. The male's chest is white with two vertical black bars and his flanks

Look-Alikes... continued

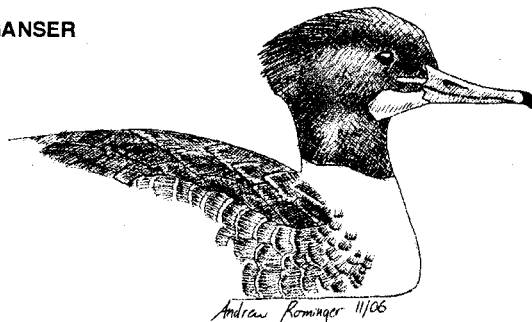


males

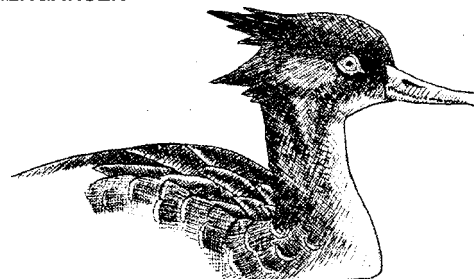


RED-BREASTED MERGANSER

COMMON MERGANSER



females





Look-Alikes...

are brown. His thin, long bill is dark, not red as with our other two mergansers.

A female Hoody is also quite different from the other mergansers. She has a dark head, dark chest and a dark bill. She has no white color; she is brownish overall, whereas the other merganser females are predominately gray. At the back of her head, she has a tawny brown, bushy crest.

Hoodies are here in winter in small numbers and are also seen during migration. It is unusual in winter to visit Bosque del Apache and not see at least one pair of Hoodies. A clue: Hoodies prefer small, often wooded, ponds and are not often seen in open water.

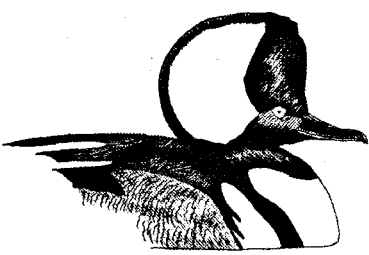
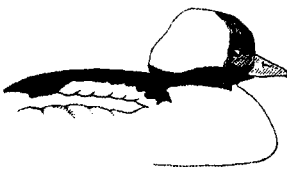
Bufflehead is our smallest diving duck at only 14 inches long. We include him here because he looks like a male Hoody. He also has a dark head which has a large white patch, which resembles the Hoody head when the fan-shaped white patch is fully expanded. But some important differences help us sort them out. First, the male Bufflehead's patch is not bordered in black, as the Hoody's is. Second, and more importantly, the male Bufflehead has white sides at the waterline, while the Hoody's sides are dark. Third, the Bufflehead's bill is short and stubby, the opposite of a merganser bill.

The female Bufflehead is dark overall with a distinct white oval patch below and behind her eye; this is often called an ear patch.

Look at Andrew's drawings to cement the differences between a Hoody and a Bufflehead.

These four diving ducks are among our most attractive waterfowl, and it can be fun to see them during winter. Now you can call each one of them by name.

CHARACTERISTIC	HOODED MERGANSER	BUFFLEHEAD
<i>Male</i>		
Length in inches	17	14
Color of head	Dark	Dark
Large white patch on head?	Yes	Yes
Does head patch have black border?	Yes	No
Color of sides at waterline	Dark	White
<i>Female</i>		
Overall color	Brown	Dark
White oval ear patch?	No	Yes
<i>Male and female</i>		
Shape of bill	Long, thin	Short, stubby
Like open water?	No	Yes

CHARACTERISTIC	COMMON MERGANSER	RED-BREASTED MERGANSER
<i>Male</i>		
Length in inches	25	23
Color of head	Green	Green
Color of chest	White	Rusty
Shaggy crest?	No	Yes
White collar on neck?	No	Yes
Color of Bill	Red	Red
<i>Female</i>		
Color of head	Red	Pale red
Shaggy crest?	Yes, shorter	Yes
Color of chest	White	Gray
Sharp color change at chin and neck?	Yes	No
Color of bill	Red	Red

Thursday Birders Group Provides Companionable Birding

by Judith Liddell

We stood captivated watching the Great Horned Owl scrutinize us from its perch in a niche in the red sandstone ruins at Quarai National Monument. Its silence matched the stark walls of the desolate church remains. The fall air had warmed slightly, and the sky was a deep azure blue. I felt blessed.



Photo by Judith Liddell

I was on my weekly outing with the Central New Mexico Audubon Society's 'Thursday Birders.' We had gathered at 8 AM at the Four Hills Shopping Center and car pooled to the home of Gary and Karen Boettcher in the Manzano Mountains where we warmed ourselves with hot coffee and watched the activity at their myriad feeders from the windows that run the length of their home. It

was also a time to catch up. A newcomer was about to build a house in the mountains, someone had returned from spending the summer in Michigan, and another spoke excitedly about their upcoming Elderhostel birding trip to Ecuador.

"There is a Calliope Hummingbird on the right," someone exclaimed, as we watched hummingbirds buzz in and out at one



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Thursday Birders...

of the feeders.

"How can you tell?" someone else asked. "They all look the same."

"Watch the bill," Karen explained. "It is much shorter than the bills of the others."

Sure enough, I could see the difference. I learn something new every time I am with this group, many who are very accomplished birders. Regardless of where I have birded, I have experienced the generosity of helpful information from other birders.

After an hour, our car pool snaked its way south along State 357.

"We're watching a raptor circling," a voice announced over the walkie-talkie. We all inched our cars onto the shoulder and got out to ID the bird, a Red-tailed Hawk. A kettle of Turkey Vultures wafted on the thermals.

Further along, we could see small pale brown birds flushing from the bushes as we passed, and again, we pulled over to examine them. They were 'chippies,' or Chipping Sparrows, migrating in for the winter. Western Bluebirds and Western Kingbirds rested on the fence railing across the highway.

The scenic road passed through several old land grant villages, one with the oldest apple orchard in North America. At State 55, we turned west, and after a nonproductive stop at Manzano pond, we headed to Quarai.

Just beyond the ruins where the owl continued to sit, Lou spotted movement in a cactus, and we all gathered around. It kept flying out and then back, this time to some dead branches above the cactus, indicative of a flycatcher – but which one?

Rebecca, our bird call expert, recognized the sharp "whit," indicative of an empidonax type of flycatcher. "Its tail is flicking down," someone observed.

"Notice that its head looks largish for its body," noted Russell who was a visiting birder from Austin, Texas. "And its breast is pale. I would say that it is Least Flycatcher."

Sure enough, a glance at my National Geographic Field Guide to Birds, showed its migration route knifing through New Mexico. I would have had difficulty with a positive ID without the collective wisdom of my birding friends, enabling me to get a new life bird.

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.

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Information and articles to be included in Spring 2007 issue of the *Burrowing Owl*, must be received by March 5, 2007. Contact Turtle-Bear at 505-265-6094 or turtlebear@jensenbear.com. We are not accepting commercial advertising at this time.

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