



Central New Mexico Audubon Society

Autumn 2023

The Burrowing Owl



The Central New Mexico Audubon Society is committed to inclusion, equal access and diversity, and we encourage all individuals to join us to learn more about birds, to promote their well-being and the health and future of the environment that

Audubon Study Report: Power Lines and Birds

By John Hayes

In mid-August the National Audubon Society released our Bird and Transmission Report, presenting our strategy for how to build out needed renewable energy infrastructure while avoiding the worst impacts to birds. In the report is a discussion of the Sunzia Transmission line that serves as a case study for how a project can be designed to achieve this goal.

Since the release of the report, we have heard concerns from Audubon members in New Mexico and Arizona about our support for this controversial project. The concern is a demonstration of the care and compassion that our members hold for bird life in the Southwest, and we applaud it. Therefore, we feel it is only fair to explain how we came to our position. The following will hopefully provide background on the most sensitive aspects of the project and shed some additional light on our position.

continued on the next page

Statement from the CNMAS Board

At a board meeting on August 9, the CNMAS Board voted unanimously to create a new chapter name. We have taken this step in order to choose a name that better reflects our focus on birds and conservation, and that encourages and inspires action.

Since the National Audubon Society, a powerful lobbying group for environmental and climate policy, decided in early 2023 not to change its name, chapters around the country have been struggling with their own decisions. Many chapters are still deliberating on this issue while others, including New York, Seattle, Detroit, Chicago, San Francisco and Madison have taken the step to disassociate from the Audubon name due to the growing knowledge about the troubling actions and philosophies of John James Audubon.

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Part 2: Sunzia Agreed to Reduce Danger to Waterfowl

Rio Grande Crossing: In its early days, the proposed route for the line would have seen it cross the Rio Grande in New Mexico immediately north of Bosque del Apache refuge. Based on observed crane movements in the region, we felt strongly that this location presented a high risk of collision for Sandhill Cranes and migratory waterfowl, causing us to oppose the route.

When the Department of Defense requested the line move north to avoid White Sands Missile Range, the new proposed location (north of Bernardo) was in an area with much less frequent crane usage and much lower collision risk. Combine this with the commitment by the company to deploy advanced avian collision avoidance systems on the lines as they cross the river corridor, and the risk of collision has been greatly reduced.

An additional benefit of this new crossing location is the opportunity it provides to parallel the line with the existing Western Spirit Transmission right of way, in effect widening an existing transmission corridor across the Rio, rather than creating a new one.

At our urging, Pattern Energy (the owner of the project) also compared the impact of using an overhead crossing rather than putting the line underground and came to the conclusion that maintaining the cleared right of way (a requirement for an underground line) would

have significant impact on critical habitat designated for the endangered Southwestern Willow Flycatcher and threatened Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo. Our assessment concurred with this decision.

Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge Crossing: Moving the route north to the less impactful crossing has the unfavorable result of forcing the line to traverse the Sevilleta Refuge as it travels south to connect to the remaining route. Luckily there is an existing smaller power line that already follows the same route across Sevilleta.



The 155-mile Western Spirit Transmission line is expected to collect up to 800 megawatts of wind power from central New Mexico for the electric grid managed by Public Service Company.

Western Spirit was developed by Pattern Energy Group and the New Mexico Renewable Energy Transmission Authority.

Name Change

continued

Our decision was taken after researching this issue for the past year and a half, at the same time NAS and other chapters debated a name change. We have surveyed our own chapter members and community partners, and have consulted several other chapters in the region, Audubon Southwest and the New Mexico Audubon Council. We have concluded that a new name is in the best interest of birds, our community and our region.

The Board recognizes that we all want what is best for birds and the environment. We strongly believe what is best for birds is to be inclusive and respectful of diversity so that everyone can have an opportunity to know the joy of birds and understand the importance of conserving habitat and protecting the environment.

We and many other Audubon chapters believe that more people will feel welcome in chapters whose names reflect their mission, rather than an individual. Our work has just begun. We welcome our members' input into a new name and look forward to sharing more information soon.

more on the next page

Part 3: Sunzia Pledges Land and Water to Wildlife Refuges

By upgrading the existing poles, Pattern will be able to co-locate the current line with the existing one. In doing so they are also able to reduce the number of poles needed to support the line, in effect lessening the area disturbed by the footprint of poles.

There is a dangerous precedent that could be set if we open our National Wildlife Refuges to any and all industrial development. Which is why the Fish and Wildlife Service conducted an assessment of the compatibility of the project with the purpose of the refuge and found that by allowing the project, the footprint of the poles would be reduced, thereby increasing the amount of habitat available for the refuge to manage.

In addition to the co-location with an existing line, Pattern Energy has agreed to purchase over 700 acres of prime bottom-land immediately adjacent to Sevilleta that also includes senior rights to 500 acre feet of Rio Grande water. Ultimately the property and water will be transferred to the National Wildlife Refuge system for management. Considering the co-location of the lines and the addition of new land and water to the refuge system, this project will put Sevilleta Refuge in a better position to support the area's ecology and wildlife.

Lower San Pedro River Valley:

Many of our members have expressed concerns with the proposed route through the Lower San Pedro Valley in Arizona.



These concerns have been primarily focused on two issues, the ecological impact of the line on an otherwise intact landscape and the process by which the original route was proposed and conceived.

We share the concern for any loss of habitat or habitat fragmentation that results from a large-scale industrial project such as the construction of a new transmission line. The impacts of this line through the San Pedro Valley are broader and more widespread than a single river crossing, therefore, since the early days of the project we have advocated for a robust mitigation package. We have been pleased with the work Pattern has done with Arizona Department of Game and Fish to develop a plan to create habitat for birds, bats and other wildlife

which includes plans to replace any non-salvageable Saguaro or Agave at a 3:1 ratio or higher.

Given the importance of river canyons to the natural hydrology of the San Pedro River and as high-value wildlife corridors for threatened and endangered species we feel that it is vitally important that consideration be given to the adverse ecological impacts that construction and maintenance of the line could cause in these areas. Specifically, we advocated that impacts to Buehman, Edgar, and Paige Canyon must be avoided by using hilltop placement of towers or sufficiently tall towers to span them without the need for vegetation clearing and maintenance, not running parallel down canyons, thereby avoiding opening the length of canyons to recreational off-road vehicles and utilizing helicopter to installation avoid the need to create or increase use of new or existing roads. These best practices have all been included in the plans to mitigate the ecological impact of the project.

Routing Process: While we chose not to include an in-depth discussion of the 17-year journey towards approval in our case study, we do recognize that the process had many flaws.

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Part 4: The Lesson: Environmental Permitting Reform Is Needed

In the beginning the Sunzia Corporation (the original owner of the line before it was sold to Pattern Energy) proposed a route with little consideration for environmental impacts and with little local stakeholder input. The result was a proposed route that would have crossed the Rio Grande in New Mexico in a very sensitive area for Sandhill Cranes and in Arizona there was little consideration of the environmental impacts that the line would have as it traveled through the Lower San Pedro Valley.

At the time we opposed the route and submitted multiple public comments to that effect. Meanwhile, we have seen four different presidential administrations, complete turnover of Bureau of Land Management (BLM, the permitting agency) leadership, and a change in ownership of the project.

The history of government and industry mismanagement of the process is the primary reason for the 17-year delay in permitting, but the decision-makers, mandates and circumstances have changed dramatically since then and we have found both the company and BLM to be more than willing to consider our concerns and discuss plans in good faith.

Nonetheless, Audubon recognizes there are problems with how we permit these projects. This is why we are remaining active in current discussions in DC

that are exploring options for environmental permitting reform. We must make better decisions quicker. We believe this to be possible and necessary.



It is the position of the National Audubon Society that climate change provides a clear and imminent threat to almost two thirds

of bird life in North America (see *Survival by Degrees: 389 Bird Species on the Brink*, 2019). Transitioning away from a carbon-based economy in time to limit the worst impacts of the climate crisis requires immediate action if we are going to save America's bird life. While some have suggested to us that strategies such as reducing household energy consumption, rooftop solar and a complete transition to electric vehicles would be preferable strategies to industrial-scale renewable projects like Sunzia, there simply is not the political will, policy mechanisms or any realistic strategy for achieving these at the needed scale in the time we have. We can and will advocate for these strategies as appropriate, however we feel it is undeniable that industrial scale renewable energy projects will be the primary way we move the renewable energy transition forward.

Our hope in elevating Sunzia as a case study is to encourage the adoption of the best practices employed in this project in future projects and to let the industry know that we are willing and able to negotiate with them in good faith and get to "yes" should they develop projects that don't sacrifice the habitat birds need to achieve the climate birds need. This project will bring 3.5 gigawatts of renewable energy onto the western grid and because of our involvement will do so with minimal impact to local bird life. We consider this a "win" and hope to see other projects follow the same example.

Survival by Degrees

Across the state of New Mexico, without substantial climate change mitigation . . . average temperatures during the warmest months are expected to increase approximately 5.8°C (10°F) [and] average annual precipitation is expected to decrease by approximately 32 mm (1.3 in). . . .

Highly and moderately vulnerable birds may lose more than half of their current range. . . as they are forced to search for suitable habitat and climate conditions elsewhere.

Raptors, The Regional Office and Climate Change

Autumn Programs for CNMAS Members

September 21, 7:00 p.m.

Raptors and Their Role in the Environment

Laura McCann, New Mexico Raptors

Join us for a discussion with Laura McCann, director of New Mexico Raptors, about the important role raptors have in the New Mexico ecosystem and various habitats. Laura holds federal and state permits to house non-releasable birds for educational purposes. She will bring live birds to demonstrate their adaptations and strategies for survival. New Mexico Raptors is a non-profit organization based in Peralta, New Mexico.



October 19, 7:00 p.m.

All About Audubon Southwest

Jon Hayes, Executive Director, Audubon Southwest

Audubon Southwest is a regional office of the National Audubon Society, covering Arizona and New Mexico. Jon will discuss the structure and mission of Audubon Society regional offices and the projects they work on.

A wildlife biologist, Jon worked for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service before joining the regional office in 2017.

He oversees operations in the two states, including two nature centers, a research ranch and a team of scientists, educators and advocates working to advance bird conservation in the Southwest.



November 9, 7:00 p.m.

Climate Change In The Southwest: Recent Responses and Future Impacts For Bird Populations

Dr. Megan Friggens, U.S. Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Research Station

Dr. Friggens is a research ecologist who models and assesses responses of ecosystem and species to climate change and other disturbances. Her thesis is that changes in bird communities depend on the capacities of species and the characteristics of their habitats. Changes in habitat availability, altered community interactions and shifts in the timing of resources affect both resident and migrant species. In turn, these changes can drive the collapse of entire communities—a phenomenon that may already be realized with recent declines in bird species richness across the globe. Research indicates that responses to climate change are a function of species' physiology, ecology and adaptive capacity.



Programs Available in Person or Virtually

In person: Bernalillo County Extension Office, 1510 Menaul Blvd. NW, Albuquerque

Zoom: a reminder and a Zoom link will be sent via e-mail one week before each program

Birds “Reflect and Enhance the World,” Says President Glenda Morling

I was raised in the Midlands in England. Birds have always been an integral part of my life: my dad was a keen birder, keeping meticulous lists for the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. We often had to stop on our many walks while he birded; I had no binoculars so as I child I was not very excited about birding. However, when I was about ten my dad took a group of children and parents on an early-morning bus ride from our elementary school to the woods. It was that first experience of watching the sun rise and hearing so much beautiful bird song that opened my eyes.

My husband, Jim, has also been a birder since childhood, and we have birded in many parts of the USA and Great Britain. Birds reflect and enhance the world around us in different habitats and through changing seasons; they are in some ways predictable, but they also surprise and delight us.

I joined the board of Central New Mexico Audubon Society two years ago after I got involved in helping to re-organize Thursday Birders in 2021. I began to understand the importance of the conservation and education work our chapter is engaged in throughout central New Mexico.

Last June I was elected president of our chapter and am lucky to be working with two new vice presidents as well as board members both new and experienced, and we are all excited to start our year.

I am taking on this role at a crucial time for our community, our country and our planet. Human activity and subsequent climate change have had a huge impact on bird habitat. A study published in the journal *Science* in 2019 showed that 30 percent of birds



in the US and Canada have been lost since 1970. In addition, the National Audubon Society recently published *Survival by Degrees*, with research showing that two-thirds of American birds are now at increased risk of extinction and 389 species are on the brink of extinction.

I believe we can have an impact on bird survival if we join forces as lovers of birds, wildlife and our environment: we can provide bird-friendly habitats in our backyards and encourage others to do the same; we can continue to nurture Important Birding Areas such as Melrose Woods; and we can take bigger, bolder steps with other environmental organizations.

My goals for this year are to work with the board to bring in more people to support our projects and to add outreach activities that will raise awareness of concerns that can positively impact birds and conservation efforts. We can't do this without the help of our amazing volunteers, other environmental organizations, community partners and chapters around our region.

We will soon send out information on how you can help. In the meantime, if you have questions or suggestions, please e-mail me at gmorling@cnmas.newmexicoaudubon.org. or complete the “contact us” form at <http://cnmas.newmexicoaudubon.org/about-us/>

Reaching Future Birders

CNMAS is planning birding activities for youths, says chapter vice president Laura Banks.

Volunteers are needed to help with basic skills and birding appreciation.

Young participants will check out loaner binoculars for the sessions. “We plan to purchase some (thanks to the support of generous donors) but if you have functional 8 x 32 or higher binoculars that you are willing to donate it would be much appreciated,” says Banks.

She can be reached at LBanks@cnmas.newmexicoaudubon.org.

Feds Agree Pinyon Jay to be Considered for Endangered Species List

Reprinted with permission from Defenders of Wildlife

Washington, D.C. August 16, 2023

Defenders of Wildlife applauds the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's determination that there is substantive evidence that the pinyon jay may warrant Endangered Species Act (ESA) protections. The finding comes more than a year after the Service's 90-day requirement to review Defenders' petition for species listing under the ESA.



"Now that this critical finding is made, Fish and Wildlife will begin a scientific review of the species' status to determine if listing the bird is warranted," said Bryan Bird, Defenders of Wildlife Southwest program director. "This charismatic

bird will now receive the full attention of the federal government."

"This decision moves us one step closer to reversing the trend of one of the fastest declining birds in North America," said Peggy Darr,



Defenders of Wildlife New Mexico representative. "Without pinyon jays, we stand to lose iconic Southwestern landscapes, cultures and cuisines intimately tied to piñon pine nuts. As someone who lives in pinyon jay country, I would eternally miss seeing and hearing exuberant pinyon jay flocks flying overhead as they conduct their daily business, as well as the survival of an entire ecosystem."

In April 2022, Defenders of Wildlife formally requested the Service to protect the pinyon jay through an ESA listing petition. Under the ESA, the Service has 90 days to determine whether a petition offers substantial evidence that listing may be warranted. Since the Service determined that Defenders had offered substantial scientific evidence that the

pinyon jay may warrant protections, it will now conduct a thorough status review of the species and make a final determination as to whether listing is warranted. Per the ESA, the Service has to make the listing determination within 12 months of the date of the petition, which has already passed.

Over the past 50 years, the pinyon jay population has declined by 85 percent, and without ESA intervention, half of its remaining global population is expected to be lost by 2035. The precipitous decline throughout the western U.S. is due, in part, to the loss and degradation of its piñon-juniper woodlands habitat. "If we lose one, we lose the other," said Darr "If we lose pinyon jays, we erase from our Earth a species that has evolved to be one of the most genetically distinct and ecologically important species in North America."

Background

The pinyon jay is a unique, social bird that travels in large flocks and plays a significant role in maintaining the biodiversity of the West. The range of the pinyon jay includes 13 states. It facilitates piñon pine tree regeneration by extracting and burying the tree's seeds, commonly known as pine nuts. The birds do not retrieve all their cached seeds, allowing the seeds to germinate and replenish the woodlands. Without pinyon jays, it's unclear if the piñon pine tree will continue to persist.

Loss of piñon pine will disproportionately affect Native American and Hispanic communities in the Southwest, which have cultural connections with pine nuts. For generations, Native Americans in the Southwest have harvested and consumed the seeds. During the fall harvest, families collect the nutritional seeds and store them for the winter. This important cultural tradition will be lost if the pinyon jay goes extinct.



Photos by Joe Schelling

Jason Kitting of Rio Grande Bird Research Reports on Two Favorites

Blue Grosbeak

It's always a special treat to have a striking After Second Year male Blue Grosbeak in the hand! These gorgeous birds are one of the most common breeding birds along the middle Rio Grande valley, particularly where there is still an intact shrubby understory.



Blue Grosbeaks are found in a variety of shrubby habitats throughout much of the southern half of the U.S. and up through the central plains. Here in central New Mexico, they are most abundant in the riparian zone along the Rio Grande but are also known to breed in young and stunted oaks, shrubby desert washes and mesquite forests. Because we are so far south in their breeding range, Blue Grosbeaks regularly have two or more broods here. Even though the males spend much of their time singing from high perches, their nests are close to the ground in dense shrub.

Warbling Vireos

Something we have always found fascinating is birds' ability to change their behavior in



response to different situations. Warbling Vireos vary the way they build their nests according to the habitat and the type of tree. They breed in a variety of habitats that have some kind of deciduous tree

component. In the western part of their range deciduous woodland is limited to the mountains and riparian zones. Here in central New Mexico they can be found breeding in cottonwoods, willows, oaks and aspens.



At left is the nest style seen at lower elevations in the oaks. Like most vireo nests, it is a tightly woven basket made mostly of dry grasses. Interestingly, birds nesting in these oaks made almost no attempt to camouflage the nests.



This contrasted sharply with the birds nesting at higher elevations in the aspens who make a grassy basket and decorate the sides with Spanish Moss, which breaks up the shape of the nest as well as gives it a greenish color. It should be noted that multiple birds nesting in oaks at some of the higher elevation sites had easy access to Spanish Moss but still chose not to camouflage their nests.



We Found a Bird— Now What?

Each year between 365 million and 1 billion birds die from collisions with windows across the United States. The overwhelming majority of those window strikes occur at residential and low-rise buildings, with fewer than 1 percent caused by skyscrapers.

Sooner or later window strikes will likely hit close to home. When they do, try these tips to help injured birds.

Check for life: Even when a bird survives a strike, it is often stunned and may appear dead or injured. Gently move its legs. If they move the bird is alive but unconscious.

Handle with care: Approach the bird slowly, perhaps from behind. Pick it up and put it into a paper bag or a shoebox.

Call in the pros: Hitting glass often leaves birds with concussions. Some might have pelvic injuries from sticking their legs out toward the window in a last-second attempt to avoid collision. The best thing is to get the bird to a wildlife rehabber who can provide expert care and anti-inflammatory medication.

Excerpt from a Nov. 18, 2021,
National Audubon Society report.

Lights Out for Migrating Birds

By Sara Jayne Cole

Every year in North America, more than 3.5 billion birds move north in the spring and 4 billion birds fly south in the fall. More than 80 percent of them travel at night, navigating with the night sky.

However, as they pass over towns and cities on their way, many become disoriented by artificial lights and sky-glow. Drawn off course, birds often die from window collisions or circle buildings until exhaustion overcomes them.

Reducing light pollution across the country can make migration safer for birds. Luckily the solution is simple: reduce the amount of light that reaches the night sky:

- Turn off exterior decorative lights
- Extinguish spot and floodlights
- Substitute strobe lighting where possible
- Reduce lobby and atrium lighting
- Turn off interior lights, especially on upper floors
- Substitute task and area lighting for workers staying late
- Down-shield exterior lighting or limit it to ground level



Audubon's Lights Out program is a national effort to reduce the problem. The strategy is simple: convince building owners and managers to turn off excess lighting during known migration times.

In New Mexico these Lights Out dates are approximate: during spring migration

from March 15 to May 31 and fall migration from August 15 to October 31.

In addition, most Lights Out programs call for dusk to dawn.

While all unnecessary lighting should be reduced, exterior decorative lights and lighted upper stories are priorities.

Just one building can cause major problems for birds. For example, within one week in 2017, nearly 400 songbirds were caught in the floodlights of a 32-story Texas skyscraper and died in window collisions.

You are right to question how reducing light around your home will impact the city glow. I like to believe every action, no matter how small, is a step forward for birds. It's also important to remember where these migrating birds will rest and feed during the day. The answer is where there is shelter, food and water. Yes, that could be your bird-safe yard.

The flyer on the next page, created by CNMAS and Friends of Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge, illustrates ways to keep birds safe.

Keep Backyard Birds Safe

Windows



It is estimated that collisions account for 1 billion bird deaths in North America each year. Residential windows can be just as deadly for birds as tall office-building. American Bird Conservancy

Birds fly into windows because they see the reflection of nature on the glass or a clear way through a window on the other side

- Relocate feeders to within three feet of or more than 30 feet from windows
- Move house plants away from windows
- Place any stickers, decals or plexiglass on the outside of the glass, every 4 inches vertically and every 2 inches horizontally
- Use Low-cost solutions such as designs on the outside of the window, washable glass markers, bar soap or tempera paint

Pets

Trails where people walked with leashed dogs had 35 percent less bird biodiversity than the trails where dog walking was forbidden. Audubon Magazine 2020

The presence of a cat interrupts nesting birds and reduces feeding their young, decreasing nest success. American Bird Conservancy

- Make sure pets do not have access to feeders, birdbaths, or birds' nests
- Keep cats indoors or in an escape-proof outdoor area like a Catio
- Put out orange peel to discourage cats, since they avoid citrus scents
- Use fencing or motion activated sprinkler to discourage roaming animals
- Keep dogs on a leash when hiking or taking walks
- Support enforcement of ordinances aimed at keeping pets safe



Pesticides



Birds can swallow pesticide directly, such as when a bird mistakes a pesticide granule for a seed, or indirectly, by consuming contaminated prey. US Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of Migratory Bird Management Jan. 2002

- Use homemade or natural pesticides like diatomaceous earth or boric acid
- Buy organic seeds or packets that are non-neonic certified
- If you must use a commercial insecticide, ensure it has no neonicotinoids
- Use exclusion and sanitation tactics to get rid of rodents safely and cost-effectively
- Refer to the *Safe Rodent Control Resource Center* <http://saferodentcontrol.org/site/> for more information

Lighting

70% of birds in North America migrate and more than 80% of them make their seasonal flights at night. Artificial light at night (ALAN) can disrupt bird migration in a variety of ways, including disorienting birds from their routes and causing collisions with buildings, resulting in millions of bird fatalities each year.

International Dark-sky Association, May 9, 2019

- Install or cover porch lights so they cast light on the ground
- Use yellow light bulbs to keep from attracting night flying insects
- Use motion-activated security lights
- Close shades or blinds at night



Central New Mexico Audubon Society
<http://cnmas.newmexicoaudubon.org>

Friends of Valle de Oro NWR
Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge
www.ABQbackyardrefuge.org



Leaders of Regional Audubon Chapters Weigh in on Name Change Issues



Sangre de Cristo

Chapter members were asked to assist the board by answering the name change question and suggesting alternative names that “make it clear that we are about conservation and birds.” Replies were due September 1.

The message to members described Audubon’s support of slavery and added:

Less well known is the realization that in his time, Audubon was an active participant in what can only be called a racist endeavor to “prove” the superiority of white people and the inferiority of all others . . . This belief was expressed in the pseudoscience of phrenology, an idea, originating in the early 19th century, that the size and shape of the skull was indicative of the mental capacity and capabilities of the individual.

Belief in this premise was widespread in the 19th century but phrenology, and indeed the concept of race itself, has long since been shown to have no scientific validity.

Central New Mexico

See page 1: The board voted unanimously for a new name.

Southwest New Mexico

The board met in June and decided unanimously to recommend a name change for our chapter.

We are in support of working with NM/AZ chapters in identifying a unified naming approach, strengthening our message of inclusion and any advocacy efforts for the Southwest region.

Arizona Council of Chapters

The council established a committee to research the details of a name change.

Arizona chapter leaders who attended the Silver City gathering as well as some NM leaders have suggested that we might be seen as stronger advocates for birds if we had a common element in our names across the Southwest region.

Northern Arizona

I wish National had taken on the responsibility of changing the name. But since they didn’t, now we all have to scramble and it will become a disjointed effort instead of an inclusive one. A sad part is that on-the-ground bird conservation will suffer because pathways for more diverse involvement feel shut down.

Desert Rivers

We are nowhere close to a consensus about this issue.

It’s my understanding that a committee has been formed to put together a webinar with all of the chapters in AZ to discuss [the issue]. There is support for a name change [that would] unify the chapters and that we would work together with the NM chapters to do likewise.

White Mountain

The board discussed the issue and were in agreement that we had no desire to expend resources on a name change and believe the decision to retain a century-old identity was wise.



Notes from the Rio Grande

Windows into a Wild Past

Story and photos by Paul Tashjian
for Audubon Southwest

Many of us live along the Rio Grande and consider it our place, our home, our identity. Whether we live in South Fork, Colorado, Palomas, Mexico, or Brownsville, Texas, this river runs through our blood, our heart, our well-being. As we are intimate with the trees, the sand, the birds, the farms and the cities alongside our river, we are equally aware of the dry stretches, thickets of salt cedar, stressed farms and international barbed-wire boundaries. This balance of beauty and heartbreak is skewed towards both ends of the spectrum; in some reaches the Rio's beauty is a present-day solace, in others a distant memory.

Through restoration projects I have developed a deep appreciation for the natural history of the Rio Grande. In designing projects, I have learned to work with the historic processes and ecology as a blueprint for pushing a land-form back towards its natural condition. This is largely an exercise of fixing the unfixable since the majority of the formative processes have been disrupted beyond repair.

Herein lies a wish for the return of a wild past or a better future or, as the author Charles Bowden coined it, a "memory of the future."

This memory comes alive for me in certain places where the Rio Grande shouts, "I'm still here!"

I offer this list of places I have come to cherish in my three-decades-plus love affair with this river. All are publicly accessible though some require a boat, others a high-clearance vehicle.



The Rio Grande just upstream of the Red River confluence. Here the Rio Grande is wild and free, with characteristics of its historic conditions.

Where the Red River Meets the Rio Grande: The confluence can be accessed from Cebolla Mesa or the Wild Rivers section of the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument. The trail from the Wild Rivers section has been under construction and may be closed (check with the BLM); the road into Cebolla Mesa trail requires a high-clearance vehicle.

From Cebolla Mesa it's a one-mile drop into a yet-to-be-tamed river, with high-water wood debris lines, Cutthroat Trout, Ospreys, Pinyon Jays and mountain sheep. The river, prior to capture of Lake Alamosa between 400,000 and 250,000 years ago, was the headwaters of the Rio Grande.

Los Luceros Historic Site: This Spanish settlement along the Rio Grande near Alcalde is a gem. The site contains numerous historic buildings including a small church and a 5700-square-foot hacienda whose first-floor doors were opened during spring floods to allow Rio to flow through the building, preventing erosion. The multi-aged cottonwood gallery is remarkable, especially during the golden days of autumn.

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More on The Rio Grande: Windows into the Past

The Rio Grande just north of Lake Cochiti: This location requires a boat, preferably a low-draw boat such as a sit-on-top kayak or a light canoe, because the upper end of the lake can be shallow.

There are few places on the Rio Grande that retain the riparian complexity of old. Historically, the Rio Grande was dynamic and had a riparian forest that was regularly regenerated through flooding. This forest had multiple-age classes of trees and shrubs as well as grassland meadows and wetland habitats. The Rio Grande upstream of Lake Cochiti has many of these characteristics, largely due to the dynamic nature of the Rio as it enters the lake. You may witness the diverse birds, dense forests and beautiful canyon by paddling upstream a mile or two from the lake. This is best done during lower flows, when the Otowi Gage is less than 750 cfs.

Rio Grande from Siphon Beach (north Corrales) to Alameda Drive (Albuquerque): If you are interested in dipping your toe into the Middle Rio Grande, this is a great entry point. This eight-mile float has views of the Sandia Mountains and bosque habitat and is often flush with Cooper's Hawks, Great Egrets and American Crows. The best level, using the Rio Grande at Albuquerque Gage, is when flows are above 800 cfs.

Wear your life jackets and be careful around bank lines where jetty jacks lurk. Plan on five hours of floating time plus shuttle logistics.

San Acacia to San Antonio: The Save Our Bosque Task Force has been hard at Rio Grande restoration and protection since 1994. They have developed and maintained a series of riverine parks from San Acacia to San Antonio, accessible by driving the river levee road from San Antonio (high-clearance vehicles recommended). These parks give nice access to the Rio in wild and naturalized conditions.

Bernardo Wildlife Management Area: The crane is out of the bag—the Bernardo Wildlife Management Area is the winter home to the highest concentration of Sandhill Cranes in the Middle Rio Grande Valley (a spot once held by Bosque del Apache NWR). Over the past five years the state has done an amazing job of restoring salt grass meadows and marshes, a habitat that requires a shallow groundwater table. Salt grass historically made up roughly 30 percent of the land cover in the Middle Rio Grande, where today it is limited to less than 5 percent due to riverside drains that drop the water table.

Between early November and late January, visit early or late in the day to see the birds move and witness a spectacle on par with the pyramids of Giza!

Bosque del Apache NWR: Early in my career I had the good fortune to work with John Taylor at Bosque del Apache. From the mid 1980s to his untimely passing in 2004, John developed strategies to restore a mosaic of bosque habitats on the refuge through diesel power and creative water management. He used historic information including imagery, documents and hydrologic data as a guide. The is the closest proximity to what the entire Middle Rio Grande looked like pre-development.

From the east side of the southern tour loop, find a spot with meadows and wetlands and squint your eyes so that roads and levees become obscured. Herein you gaze into the Rio Grande of old.

San Marcial: If you want to wander into the outback of the Rio Grande and step upon a once-flooded lore-rich town, head to San Marcial. Despite the salt cedar forests and river engineering features such as the Low Flow Conveyance Channel, the views of Black Mesa and the Rio Grande habitat speak to a wild past.

Well-maintained gravel roads make this place accessible to all vehicles. The town of San Marcial was leveled by floods in the late 1920s.



Thursday Birder Trips

September, October, November, December 2023

September 7

Rio Grande Nature Center: 8:25–11:30 a.m.

Meet at the wetland blind in the northeast corner of the parking lot

Leader: Lefty Arnold

September 14

Manzano Pond and Quarai Ruins: 8:00 a.m.–3:00 p.m.

Meet at Tijeras Ranger Station

Leader: Barbara Hussey

September 21

Cienega Canyon: 8:25–11:30 a.m.

Meet at bottom parking lot

Leader: Glenda Morling

September 28

Tingley Ponds and bosque: 8:25–11:00 a.m.

Meet at north parking area

Leader: Mary Rajc

October 5

Calabacillas Arroyo: 8:25–11:30 a.m.

Meet at Calabacillas Arroyo parking location

Leader: Sara Jayne Cole

October 12

North Corrales Siphon Beach: 8:25 a.m.–12:00 noon

Meet at Boxing Bear parking lot

Leader: Ginny Davis

October 19

Albuquerque Bosque Open Space trails south toward Montañito bridge: 7:55–11:30 a.m.

Meet in the east parking lot of Sagebrush Church

Leader: Brian Anderson

October 26

Mariposa Basin Park trail: 8:25–11:00 a.m.

Meet at south parking lot

Leaders: Susan and Jim Hunter

November 2

Oak Flat Group Picnic Area: 8:25–11:30 a.m.

Meet in Pine (west most) Oak Flat parking lot

Leader: Glenda Morling

November 9

Copper Trailhead Open Space: 9:00–11:30 a.m.

Meet at parking lot

Leader: TBA

November 16

Los Poblanos Open Space: 8:55 a.m.–12:00 noon

Meet in parking lot off Montañito Road

Leaders: Deanna Nichols and Angela Hawthorne

November 23

Thanksgiving: no bird walk

November 30

Paseo del Bosque Trail: Alameda Trailhead: 8:30–11:00 a.m.

Meet at Alameda Trailhead location

Leader: Perrienne Houghton

December 7

Festival of the Cranes at Bosque del Apache NWR: 7:50 a.m.–3:00 p.m.

Meet at South Valley Railrunner station

Leader: TBA

December 14

Rio Grande Nature Center State Park: 8:55 a.m.–12:00 noon

Meet at parking lot

Leaders: TBA

December 21 and 28

Holiday season: no bird walks

Look for details about Thursday Birder trips—including last-minute changes—on the web site:

<http://cnmas.newmexicoaudubon.org/trips/thursday-birders/>

CNMAS Directory and Contacts

Central New Mexico Audubon Society is a 501(c)(3) non-profit chapter of the National Audubon Society Inc.

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

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The CNMAS membership form is on the web site:

<http://cnmas.newmexicoaudubon.org/about-us/>

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