



Bird Alliance

Central New Mexico

A Chapter of the National Audubon Society

BIRD ALLIANCE NEWSLETTER

March-April 2026

THE 2025 ALBUQUERQUE CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

*American Crows, Bushtits,
Lesser Goldfinches, weather and 105 species!*

By Asher Gorbet



Wilson's Snipe is a special bird on count day. Five were tallied on the ABQ CBC in 2025. Photo by Merri Rudd.

The Albuquerque Christmas Bird Count was conducted on Sunday, December 21, 2025 as part of the National Audubon Society's 126th CBC season.

One of the most striking features of the 2025 Albuquerque CBC was the extended warm weather leading up to the count with near-record-high temperatures on Count Day and during Count Week.

This seemed to keep some individual birds and some of our expected wintering species—notably gulls—to the north of us until the weeks following the CBC.



Western Screech-Owl. Photo by Susan Hunter.

Count Day was sunny and beautiful with many groups reporting slow birding. Perhaps the most astonishing feature of the 2025 Albuquerque CBC was the incredible participation rate: We had 88 counters in the field and at feeders throughout the count circle, the greatest number of participants documented for an Albuquerque CBC ever! We give a sincere thank you to each person who helped make this day a success.

American Crow was the species tallied in the greatest number: A whopping 12,962 crows were counted, which represents a recent historical high for the species. A very special shout out goes to Fiana Shapiro, the only counter who took photos of American Crows and uploaded them to their checklist on count day. Fiana and other counters managed to get some incredible photos from the day, which you can see in the [eBird CBC trip report](#) (also linked below) along with the species list, tallies, and all checklists. Say's Phoebe and Lesser Goldfinch each had their highest tallies for an Albuquerque CBC with 101 and 535 respectively. This follows last year's record-setting tally of Say's

Phoebe, which illustrates this species' increasing presence in our area in winter. Six Western Screech-Owls were encountered, tying the high mark set in 2018.

Some very special sightings were recorded on count day including a new species for the Albuquerque CBC: A Carolina Wren visited a feeder at a private residence. A Harris's Sparrow, which showed up in the Shining River Bosque area weeks in advance of the count and kindly hung around with a flock of White-crowned Sparrows, was tallied on Count Day. Other species for which only a single individual was tallied on Count Day included Bald Eagle, American Barn Owl, Williamson's Sapsucker, Red-naped Sapsucker, Peregrine Falcon, Chihuahuan Raven, Red-breasted Nuthatch, and Canyon Wren. Some interesting Count Week sightings included Ross's Goose, Burrowing Owl, Northern Saw-Whet Owl, Prairie Falcon, Merlin, and Black-throated Sparrow.

This was the first year of compilation duties for me (Asher Gorbet) and Jason Kitting, and while there are always growing pains and aspects to improve, we were very happy with participation rates and the feedback we received.

Both of us are eager to continue to build on the work of the excellent compilers who participated in previous years. Our goal is to grow the Albuquerque CBC and expand coverage throughout the city. We are grateful to all participants who spent part or all of their day helping us undertake the monumental task of counting all of the birds last December! We look forward to the 127th CBC. Stay tuned to the [Bird Alliance of Central New Mexico](https://birdalliance.org) website for information on how to participate. 🌀

Disclaimer: The tallies reported are still being verified and finalized. A final, full summary will be emailed to all participants and will be linked on the Bird Alliance webpage soon!

- ***Albuquerque Christmas Bird Count Summary (CBC #126)***
- ***Date: Sunday, 21 December 2025***
- ***Number of species: 105, plus six during count week***
- ***Number of participants: 88 (82 in field, six at feeders)***
- ***Start time: 5:54 a.m., End time: 5:45 p.m., 11 hours, 51 minutes***
- ***eBird trip report: <https://ebird.org/tripreport/448864>***
- ***Start temperature: 32F, High temperature: 68F***

WANT TO HELP MAINTAIN MELROSE WOODS?



At various times throughout the year, Bird Alliance volunteers visit [Melrose Woods](#), the remarkable migrant habitat that attracts more species of warblers than almost anywhere else in the United States, to survey and perform routine maintenance. We plan on a visit to the habitat—which is a few miles east of Melrose—in the near future **and we could use your help.**

Please email Asher Gorbet at AsherGorbet@gmail.com for details of this important effort. The date has yet to be determined. 🌀

THE IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTIONS OF CITIZEN SCIENTISTS

Book review by Sara Jayne Cole

All around the world, in fields ranging from astronomy to zoology, millions of everyday people are choosing to participate in the scientific process. To learn more about the many fields of research that have been impacted by volunteer data collecting, I recommend reading *Citizen Science How Ordinary People are Changing the Face of Discovery* by Caren Cooper.

Cooper begins by explaining that you don't need a degree in science to contribute to important scientific discoveries: It is not possible for scientists alone to collect enough data to be able to make many discoveries.

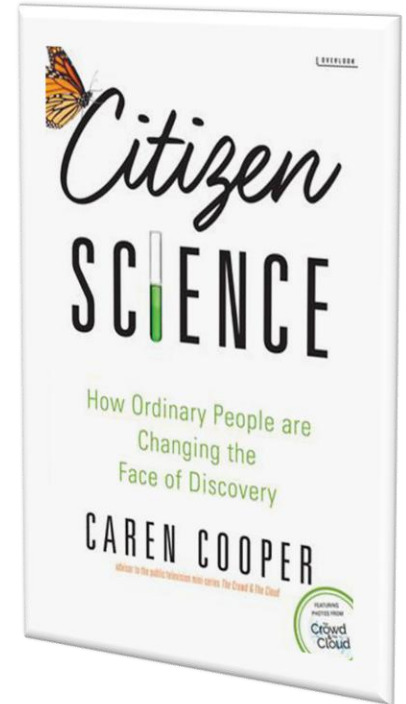
Citizen Science uncovers how video gamers, from solving biochemistry puzzles to helping find cures for diseases such as Alzheimer's, and mothers advocating for healthy drinking water and clear air for their families and communities, are using their potential to make scientific discoveries that lead to positive change.

To document how volunteers have collected data and facilitated discoveries, Cooper has taken a close look at different disciplines from

ornithology, meteorology and entomology. She shared the amazing work of volunteers tagging monarch butterflies beginning in the 1940s that led to solving one of the biggest mysteries in the field of entomology: Where do monarch butterflies throughout the eastern U S and Canada go during winter?

After decades of this volunteer effort, a tagged monarch was found in central Mexico. The year was 1976. This would not have happened if not for years of volunteers coordinating with schools, scouts and others to tag thousands of monarchs. To better understand the western population of monarch's migration, it was necessary to raise masses of butterflies in captivity that could be tagged and released. One program Cooper mentions used inmates raising, tagging, and releasing monarch butterflies to track their migration from the prison yard.

Avian citizen science has had a broad impact, with studies of reproductive timing, migration, abundance, and population trends in response to climate change. All of which were made possible by the years of data generated even before the internet with hundreds of birders sending lists to the Christmas Bird Count.



Remember the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill disaster and the horrible negative impact the oil slicks

Check the data-collecting opportunities in the following list to see how you can participate as a citizen scientist.

BIRD ALLIANCE SURVEYS

Email each individual for more information

- Climate Watch (Bluebird and Nuthatch Surveys) Angela Hawthorne
avhawthorne@gmail.com
- Isleta Reach Bird Surveys: Tucker Davidson, Audubon Southwest
tucker.davidson@audubon.org
- Pinyon Jay Survey: Cathy Wise, Audubon Southwest
cathy.wise@audubon.org
- Albuquerque Christmas Bird Count
albuquerquecbc@gmail.com

CORNELL LAB OF ORNITHOLOGY CITIZEN SCIENCE OPPORTUNITIES

Click on each link to go to the website

- [Great Backyard Bird Count](#)
- [Feeder Watch](#)
- [Nest Watch](#)

U.S. Geological Survey's [Breeding Bird Survey](#) 🌐

had on the ecosystems of the gulf waters? Have you thought of how many volunteers went into action to mitigate the impact? At the time, there was a media blackout and people desperately wanted information.

Cooper tells how a group formed to float balloons holding cameras over the coast to get high-resolution aerial photographs tracking the progress of the oil slicks. The creation of the Gulf Coast Oil Spill Tracker as a module within eBird was another valuable source of timely information. The eBird program also modified its web data-entry system to allow observers to report specifically on oiled and sick birds.

A quote from Caren Cooper's book: "Given that participation in citizen science, and perhaps even being an onlooker, has the power to change peoples' views on conservation priorities and policies, why not foster those connections with people driving the types of economic development that often lead to disruptive environmental change? Given how citizen science can change opinions of crowds, could it change the view of climate change deniers in pivotal positions?" To learn Cooper's answer to this question, read the book.

Would you like to participate in Citizen Science?

Many of us do by submitting our bird observations on eBird. By the way, the theme for the 2026 World Migratory Bird Day (Saturday, May 9, 2026) is "Every Bird Counts," which puts an emphasis on Citizen Science. 🌐



The Bird Alliance of Central New Mexico is a not-for-profit chapter of the National Audubon Society. Its mission is to protect and conserve birds and wildlife habitats in our region, support responsible stewardship of land, promote environmental education, and welcome all communities to join us in the love and appreciation of birds.

Please visit these websites: [Bird Alliance](#) and [National Audubon Society](#)



■ Associate Editor Asher Gorbet (left) poses with Editor Michael Retter (right) upon completion of their first jointly produced issue of *North American Birds*. Bachechi Open Space, Bernalillo Co, New Mexico. 2 Sep 2025. Photo © Michael L. P. Retter.

“North American Birds” *Adds Asher Gorbet as New Associate Editor*

Congratulations to Asher Gorbet—the new Associate Editor of *North American Birds*! The publication—from the American Birding Association—serves as a journal of ornithological record by documenting and examining changes in avian range, populations and taxonomy.

Asher’s new assignment is one of many others, including working on the Christmas Bird Count, monitoring Melrose Woods, the vitally important migrating bird habit, arranging bird-related programs, and serving on the Board of Directors of the Bird Alliance of Central New Mexico.

Thank you, Asher, for all that they do, which gives us something to *CROW* about (pun intended)! 🐦

How to tell the difference between a Raven and a Crow

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Distinguishing the Common Raven from the American Crow can be a challenge for new birders. They are similar in many ways, but show key differences in size, shape and behavior.

Most ravens appear to be a part of a middle-aged, happily married couple that have begun to look exactly like each other. Their kids have gone off to college and now they have secret fun adventures

not appropriate for their age or station, tumbling together high in the sky or swooping low near the ground.

They travel faster than the posted speed



Common Raven.
Photo by Andrew Lunt,
Audubon Photography Awards.



American Crow.
Photo by Matthew Leaman,
Audubon Photography Awards.

limit because they have the resources to pay the fines. Ravens are not interested in interacting with anyone other than their spouse and have little need for couple friends or crafting groups. When one dies, the other makes lonely visits to the same places they went together and swirls around in the sky alone.

The scientific name for the Common Raven is *Corvus corax*. The word *corvus* is Latin for raven or crow and the word *corax* is Greek for raven or crow, which doesn't provide much help in the way of remembering the scientific name of the species. But useful anagrams for the common name include Cave Roman, Acorn Mover, and Macro Oven.

Common Ravens are found on the outskirts of towns or in forests and scrubland. They are very willing, however, to come to town and have a look around, maybe get a bite to eat, or even rent a short-term flat. They remember who does them wrong and they remember who tricks them. They can make you a fair trade that benefits both parties when they want to. If you deserve it. So be careful, because they can also mimic human speech, use tools, and are smart enough to figure out your passwords.

Ravens are predators and scavengers, which is not something to be valued or something to be scorned. They eat things that we would never eat, but it's really none of our business.

The American Crow differs from the Common Raven in several ways. All crows belong to a local chapter of the same college fraternity. Not one of the fraternities where all they do is party and drink, but one of the good ones where they do community service and study hard, then party and drink.

American Crows are not known to be more patriotic than Common Ravens. The scientific name for the American Crow is *Corvus brachyrhynchos*. Like with the Common Raven, the first part of the name provides no memory help at all. The second part, however, which means short-snouted or short-billed, is also no help unless a crow and raven are standing next to each other for comparison.

Useful anagrams of the common name include Camera Wino, Aroma Wince, Armenia Cow. Crows are city kids. Not born on the mean streets and ready to rumble but rather born on the park playground and ready to stumble—onto your picnic and steal your lunch.

They have a complex social structure that includes mourning their dead and long-term caregiving of the other members of their group. They take care of each other like a family (in fact they are a family, right Kevin?). They have no intention of murdering anyone, but they won't take crap from you or a raven or anyone else, okay? Unlike humans, American Crows commonly work cooperatively and solve complex problems together.

But like humans, crows love to join each other in large, extended groups in the winter months. In December, the streets are full of holiday shoppers, and the trees are full of crows. Then, in the spring, crows go off on family vacations presumably using websites called WeNest or Tree4U to find the best locations. In summary, the Common Raven and the American Crow are both large, active and vocal birds with striking black plumages. They really don't care if you can tell them apart or not. But they will have some of your peanuts. 🍥

Although we have no scientific proof, we suspect that after reading this article, a group of heretofore unnamed gulls became known as Laughing Gulls!

And while Laura Banks' tongue-in-cheek story provides creative humor, it also is based on SOME true-to-life facts about these delightful birds.

For another look at the differences between ravens and crows, check out this link from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's All About Birds.

Bird Alliance Members Tour the Recycling Center

by Dana Loy

One bright November afternoon last year a group of Bird Alliance members toured the BARCO Albuquerque Recycling Center to learn more about the city's recycling program.

With hard hats and bright safety vests in place, we gathered in the administration office to hear about the recycling process and what we can do. We want to be responsible consumers and recyclers and have questions about our own practices. Which plastics really get recycled? Which of those little numbers on the bottom of plastic containers can help us make smart decisions?

The answer depends, we learn, not on using fewer harmful products or reducing our use of plastics, but on the shifting market conditions. That is the perspective of BARCO, which seeks the plastics most valuable for resale: Hefty laundry detergent bottles, sturdy tubs, plastic water bottles. What? Was BARCO encouraging us to use *more* plastic water bottles?

We follow the plant manager to a looming metal building with barn-like doors. Inside, to the left, sits a gymnasium-sized mound of junk and kitchen-sized plastic bags bulging with mystery trash from people's recycling bins. The materials may be recyclable, but no one knows since the bags are tied and, by policy, cannot be opened. So, they'll go to the general landfill.

Don't bag your recycling!

Sorting is at the heart of recycling. Next to that landfill-bound junk pile is a jumbo pyramid of trash two stories

high that are rejects from the sorting line. Workers stand all day looking at discarded paper, metal, and plastic, mostly plastic, and decide which can be sold and reused as something else.

We follow the manager to a rumbling conveyer belt that carries the items from one end of the plant to the other, up and down, around corners, complete with workers who are standing every 20 feet or so beside the moving belt, removing rejects and sorting the rest. They wear headphones and pick through thing after thing.

Single-file, we wind along, next to the conveyer belt, on a long metal gangway like a surreal Candy Land path. The conveyer belts are deafening; it's too loud to talk. Big fans whirl. An occasional bird flies over.

Twice during the tour everything halts, the resulting silence sudden and odd after so much noise. This happens when something very wrong is seen on the conveyer belt, such as a gun, or a dead animal, or an item possibly stolen.

After about 30 minutes, we come to the end. We step outside and squeeze together for a picture next to recycled stuff smashed into squares and stacked like bales of hay. One bale is made of the



Photo by Perrianne Houghton.

black plastic trash carts, now flattened, that we use for household garbage. When they break—and they do—they can't be repaired. Mine was replaced just last month.

Solid waste management is big business. BARCO Albuquerque Recycling Center is owned by Waste Connections, Inc., the nation's third-largest solid waste company. It's publicly traded, headquartered in Houston. In 2024, the CEO for BARCO took home more than \$6 million. (The CEO for Waste Management, Inc., the recycler for Bernalillo County, made \$17 million that year.)

Our tour served as a gritty reminder of one of the most critical problems—our throwaway culture, how it greatly profits a few, and the damage it brings to the Earth: To the birds, fish, mammals, plants, people, all of life. The tour didn't provide answers to our questions about recycling, except that it is both necessary and alarming.

I am grateful that some of our trash is being repurposed and not piled into our landfills, yet. But it is clear that as a society we must produce far less plastic and stop extracting the petroleum it requires. It's no wonder so many Bird Alliance members continue to meet, year after year, in forest and foothill for birding, looking for clean open meadows, the sweet call of bushtits and ravens, soaking in trash-free nature and hoping for solutions to make everything right again. 🌀

Photos from local birders

In December 2025, Sam Myers captured this male Western Bluebird enjoying New Mexico privet fruits at the Rio Grande Nature Center in Albuquerque.



In January 2026, Russell Dawson photographed this Sandhill Crane with what appears to be an injured leg at the Ladd S. Gordon Wildlife Area north of Socorro.

“Motmots To Quetzals” My Birding Trip in Southern Costa Rica

Story and pictures by Perrienne Houghton

In December 2025 my sister, Toni, and my friend, Kate, and I went on a 12-day Road Scholar Birding trip in southern Costa Rica. Road Scholar is a not-for-profit educational travel company, primarily for adults aged 50 and older. Toni and I went on Road Scholar’s northern Costa Rica trip in December 2022 and loved it. So, it wasn’t hard to go back to the wonderful land of *Pura Vida*, especially when two friends we had made on the first trip also were going.

The trip started in San Jose, Costa Rica’s capital. Kate, Toni and I arrived the night before, so we had an extra morning of birding in the Bougainvillea Hotel’s 10-acre grounds. We saw a pair of Lesson’s Motmots, Clay-colored Thrush (Costa Rica’s national bird, curiously), Mottled Owl, Squirrel Cuckoo, many other birds, plus two Green Iguanas, and many gorgeous flowering plants. That evening, we joined the rest of our group of nine and met David, our awesome, 25-year-old guide, for the Trip Orientation.

After early morning birding around the hotel, we traveled, with driver and assistant guide, Alberto, to the Central Pacific Coast. Along the way, David shared his wealth of information on Costa Rica’s history, ecosystems, and wildlife, interjected with hilarious wit. At the Tarcoles River we went by boat through mangroves and near open ocean and saw herons, spoonbills, terns, parakeets, and

American crocodiles up close! Then we drove to the Carara area, stopping to see a pair of Scarlet Macaws (at their nest cavity!) then checked into Macaw Lodge for two nights. Before dinner we started the daily checklist ritual for birds (90 species already!), and other wildlife.

Each morning, we met for pre-breakfast birding around the lodge grounds. We also birded along trails through tropical forest, visited an organic cocoa farm and small chocolate factory, and visited a local expert for an excellent lecture on Scarlet Macaw ecology. Walking back to the lodge in the dark one night we saw Giant Night Geckos, a rare Dusty Glass Frog, and a Giant Wolf Spider.

Leaving Macaw Lodge, we drove to the Golfito area, birding on the way, including in Carara National Park, transitioning between Pacific lowland rainforest and dry, deciduous forest. We stayed at Esquinas Rainforest Lodge for two days, hiking and



Rosy Thrush-Tanager.



Birding near Esquinas Lodge.

birding in the wonderfully lush Rainforest Reserve, where local bird checklists include 362 species. On day five our list totaled 197 bird species.

Next, we traveled, with birding stops, toward Panama to Las Cruces Biological Station at 3,900' elevation in the Talamanca Mountains. We enjoyed great views, up-close baited birding—which resulted in Yellow-throated Toucans, Crested Oropendola, tanagers, warblers—and beautiful gardens, at this site where important tropical studies and environmental education are being conducted. We stayed two days exploring the premontane wet forest habitat's high diversity of wildlife and plants.

Our much-anticipated next destination was higher in the Talamanca Mountains. On the way, we stopped at a Del Monte Company banana plantation where we found a Rosy Thrush-tanager. And we listened to it sing! We then visited *Cerro de la Muerte*, a cold, misty subalpine stop at 11,346', where we found target species Volcano Hummingbird, Fiery-throated Hummingbird and Volcano Junco. This location has amazing blueberry, cranberry and heath shrubs and other subalpine plants!

Then we drove to the Savegre Hotel Nature Reserve, elevation 7,200'. The next morning, we hiked adjacent to Los Quetzales National Park, seeking our primary target species – Resplendent Quetzal—where we saw two—including one typically feeding in avocado trees. In the evening, we attended a great lecture by a local expert on the Resplendent Quetzal.

Our last day, we sadly left the Talamanca Mountains and headed toward San Jose. We stopped and birded along the way, visiting a tower and outside decks at a restaurant and saw several hummingbird species, Long-tailed Silky Flycatchers, saltators and others. We had a wrap-up meeting at the Bougainvillea Hotel and our final checklist review totaled 282 bird species for the group. 🌀



Resplendent Quetzal.

Out and About: Birding Opportunities in March, April and beyond

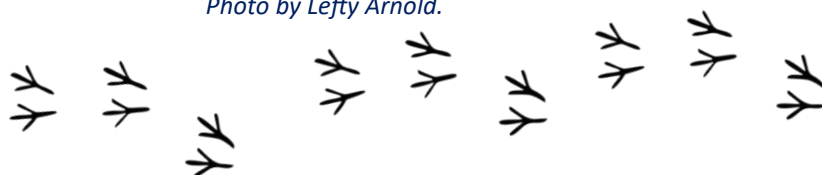


Interested in a birding field trip? The Bird Alliance has a couple of ongoing field-trip programs that not only welcome all levels of birders but also include seasoned veterans who can identify just about any bird and explain why it is what it is (or what it isn't).

Join us for a [Thursday Birders](#) outing or one of our mostly [monthly field trips](#) in conjunction with city or county open space programs. 🌀

This male Cassin's Finch was seen on a Thursday Birders trip to the Elena Gallegos Open Space in Albuquerque.

Photo by Lefty Arnold.



ENJOY BIRDING AND MORE AT SALINAS PUEBLO MISSIONS



National Park Service image.

still in the planning phase. Please check the [Bird Alliance website](#) or the [monument's calendar page](#) in early May. We hope to see you there! 🌻

Join us for a celebration of World Migratory Bird Day at the Salinas Pueblo Missions National Monument in Mountainair. We will join park rangers and volunteers for two bird walks, tours of the mission, and an educational presentation on migration by Bird Alliance President Laura Banks.

The event begins at 7:30 a.m. on May 9, but final details of all activities are

Phil Trine saw this *Curve-billed Thrasher* in Embudito Canyon in Albuquerque on October 2, 2025.



Tim Wallace saw these *Long-billed Curlews* near Estancia on February 12, 2026.



Share your bird images!

We'd love to feature your photographs.

Please send images to Perriane Houghton at phoughton@bacnm.org.

Include your name, the name of the bird, its location, and the date.

