



Bird Alliance

Central New Mexico

A Chapter of the National Audubon Society

BIRD ALLIANCE NEWSLETTER

May-June 2026



Morro Rock and Bay. Photo by Paulina Iñigo.

THE MORRO BAY, CALIFORNIA BIRD FESTIVAL

Good birds, good people and good weather: we would do it again

By Paulina Iñigo



Where do beautiful beaches, volcanic rock formations and birds come together? Morro Bay!

In the fall of 2025, our friends the Hunters—Susan and Jim—invited us to the Morro Bay Bird Festival in January 2026. Susan saw it announced in the ABA magazine. We (Paulina and Katherine Chavez) were in. I was assigned the task of signing us up for the events. The four of us reviewed the well-organized event list and chose one event per day so we could explore other venues on our own.

This turned out to be no easy task as there were 264 events. The sign-up opened at 8 a.m. on November 1. I clicked at 8 o'clock sharp and things already were filling up. It's good to be organized—we got all but one of the events we wanted.

The beautiful little seaside town of Morro Bay, in San Luis Obispo County, organizes the event as a community. The dominant feature on the shore is Morro Rock, a 576-foot-high volcanic rock. Beaches extend to the north and south. The volunteer leaders give their enthusiasm and knowledge to each event. The location offers a variety of eco-systems beaches, estuaries, woodlands, and ranches.

On arrival, we found the community center and signed in. The next day – **Day One** – at 8:30 a.m., the fun began at Montaña de Oro State Park. We met near the bluffs, walked into a campground and returned to the bluffs. The stars in the campground (42 species): Nuttall’s Woodpecker, Wrentit, Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Golden-crowned Sparrow, California Towhee and California Quail. At the bluffs (28 species): Black Oystercatchers showed off.

On **Day Two**, we headed inland to Atascadero Lake (52 species). We started in the park and circumnavigated the lake. We saw comical Acorn Woodpeckers everywhere, working hard filling their granary trees. We found ducks, herons, dove, grebes and others.

That evening, we attended the Welcome Reception, where we were treated to local wine, charcuteries and live music. The hosts were incredibly welcoming and nice.

Day Three, perhaps the best, brought a pelagic trip. From 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. we sailed the seas. Notable species included Pigeon Guillemot, auklets, Surf Scoters, murre, Black-legged Kittiwakes, Black-footed Albatross, Northern Fulmar, Pomarine Jaeger and Ancient Murrelet.

We stayed close to town on **Day Four**, visited Morro Rock and went on a harbor cruise with lunch included. Scott Weidensaul, the featured guest, came along and told delightful stories. The highlights: Peregrine Falcon and Lawrence

Goldfinches (on the rock) and the Whimbrels, curlews and

godwits (in the harbor). We also saw a neat egret and heron rookery. In the afternoon, we explored Morro Strand Beach looking for plovers but failed. It was still a beautiful afternoon.



Top to bottom images: Brown Pelican by Jim Hunter, Lawrence's Goldfinch by Susan Hunter, Heerman's Gull by Susan Hunter.



Day Five, our last day, we went to Oso Flaco Lake and beach. We saw more than 35 species—a Surf Scoter near the beach took the prize. Afterwards, we returned to Morro Strand Beach and found the Snowy Plovers!

It was a great festival: good birds, people and weather. We would do it again and attend some of the talks. 🌀

*Left: The ubiquitous Western Gull in its sort-of-native habitat.
Photo by Susan Hunter.*



NATIONAL AUDUBON RECERTIFIES THE BIRD ALLIANCE!



Earlier this year the Bird Alliance of Central New Mexico submitted its annual report to the National Audubon Society and our Chapter has been recertified.

We were congratulated for our community impact, including the sustaining management of the Melrose Woods Important Bird Area and the very successful Audubon Mural Project at the Albuquerque Zoo.



The Board of Directors of the Bird Alliance of Central New Mexico thanks our partners for their support and our generous volunteers for all they do to fulfill our mission of conservation through birding. 🌀

BALD EAGLE SIGHTING!

In February 2026 Perrienne Houghton photographed this majestic Bald Eagle at the Montañño Open Space on the west side of the Rio Grande in Albuquerque.

Nice picture Perrienne!

But it looks as though the bird is contemplating something, doesn't it?

Go to Page 8 to see what caught the eagle's attention! 🌀



My Spark Bird Story

By Connie Jo Baca

Always having had a deep love and admiration for birds (and the invertebrates that selflessly support them—insects, being essential for the survival of about 96% of terrestrial bird species), I set out to discover why birds hold such fascination for me. One bird memory in particular captivated my attention—she was an American Robin chick.



Juvenile American Robin.

Photo by Kari Douglass/Audubon Photography Awards.

During one summer when my twin daughters were about 10 years old, they had an opportunity to help out a dear family friend Deb, who was a volunteer at NM Wildlife Rescue. An orphaned baby robin needed to be nurtured to be released back into the wild. This chick's mother, unfortunately, had become an essential (albeit brutal) part of the food chain. Deb asked my girls if they were up to the job of mothering a baby robin. Without hesitation, they enthusiastically volunteered.

The girls and I quickly came to realize that being a surrogate bird mother is a daunting and demanding task! For two weeks, during the daylight hours, we took turns feeding this chick

every 20 to 30 minutes, carefully squirting nutritious mush past its gaping mouth and into her crop. "Gotta get it into the crop or you can choke her" was the warning Deb gave us during our training session. Being so up close to such a beautiful and helpless creature that seemed to be smiling back at us with that yellow beak, it was impossible for us to ignore a deep sense of compassion and admiration.

As the days passed this *chiquita* grew fatter and her chirps became louder. She was ready for more solid food. Worms were now on the menu. Still not ready to fly, she was making some substantial fluttering leaps. She was awkwardly getting used to her growing body.

From the onset of this bird parenting task, my girls were specifically, if not emphatically, instructed to keep from bonding with this "wild bird."

OOPS! They had loved her too much!

I would come home shortly after my girls returned from school to find white, runny splotches on most horizontal surfaces throughout the living room. This bird was now flying! The time had definitely come for her release. We took this bird, now a full fledgling, into the backyard where I gently tossed her into the air. We all said our tearful goodbyes. She made it as far as the power line where she perched for few moments. Then suddenly and unexpectedly, she flew back to the porch, landing on my daughter's head! "Boomerang" had simply refused to leave!

We left Boomerang alone, outside on the back porch, with access to both water and earthworms. We tried to ignore her incessant peeping as she perched on the threshold of the sliding glass door and

Our mission was to nurture this robin to the point where she could be independent enough to enjoy the freedom that only her wings could bring.

peered into the living room. I kept explaining to my girls that Boomerang needed to stay outside to make her bird connections. Our mission was to nurture this robin to the point where she could be independent enough to enjoy the freedom that only her wings could bring.

Boomerang stayed close to home. We would see her perched in our apple tree and hear her singing from time to time. Some days the worms were left untouched, indicating that she was foraging on her own. I did find out that in those few weekday hours, when my girls were left unsupervised, Boomerang had become a frequent houseguest. I knew this, not because of my twins' admission but because of the telltale signs left behind (or more specifically, from her behind). This went on for some time. But through it, Boomerang learned to differentiate between human and bird habitats.

Boomerang ventured farther and farther from the backyard; as fall approached, we saw her less and less. And then—not at all.

Fall ended, winter came, then spring arrived. One Sunday morning we heard Boomerang's familiar song, loud and clear! She was perched just outside our kitchen window. We opened the

window to greet her as she sang so sweetly—her song was more like a trill with clear whistled notes that rise and fall in pitch.

We all had tears of joy and longing.

What an amazing creature we had the chance to nurture, to know and to watch grow! We stayed at that kitchen window listening and watching her. Then, suddenly, as if to say goodbye and lessen our sadness, she turned and chirped the robins' legendary "Cheer-up, Cheer-up"! Then Boomerang flew away into the Blue-T-Ful New Mexico sky. 🌀



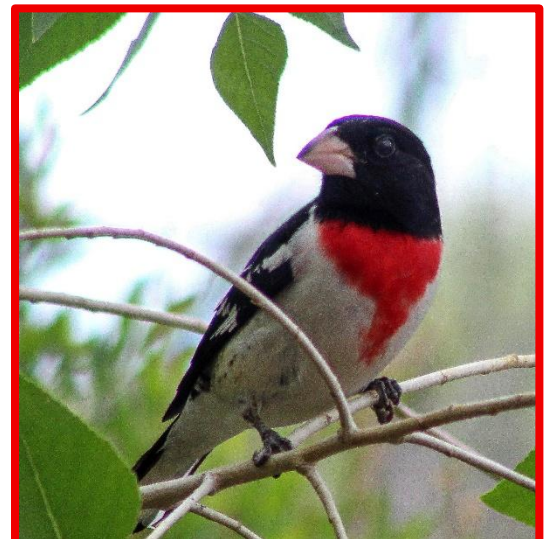
Want to hear an American Robin's songs and calls? Click [here](#) to go to All About Birds.



Since it's May and June is on its way...



We thought we'd look for some New Mexico birds seen during May and June, such as Lefty Arnold's images of a male Rose-breasted Grosbeak at Bosque del Apache in May 2019 and a Scaled Quail at Embudito Canyon in Albuquerque in June 2021.



Please join us at these events



Bird Alliance of Central New Mexico Annual Members Meeting



This year's annual meeting is scheduled at the Sandia Mountain Natural History Center in Cedar Crest. The day starts with a bird walk at 8:30 a.m., followed by the meeting at 9:30 a.m.

We'll discuss updates of activities from the past year and plans for the future. And we will provide snacks!

If you have any questions about our annual meeting, please email us at contact@bacnm.org. 📧

SEE YOU THERE!

Saturday, June 27

BIRD WALK: 8:30 a.m.

MEETING: 9:30-11:00 a.m.

Sandia Mountain

Natural History Center

60 Columbine Lane, Cedar Crest

Please carpool if possible.

Directions.

World Migratory Bird Day at Salinas Pueblo Missions National Monument

Saturday, May 9, 2026, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

The Bird Alliance and the National Park Service are excited to welcome visitors of all ages to the Quarai Unit (Torrence County) for World Migratory Bird Day. Several bird count hikes are scheduled throughout the day, plus an educational presentation on "Bird Migration and Bird ID" by the Bird Alliance, and Junior Ranger activities, giveaways and more! The day will be a special event for both new and experienced birders. For more information, please visit the Salinas Pueblo Missions National Monument [website](#). 📧



Celebration of Life for Kathy Carlson

Thursday, June 11, 2026, 1:00 p.m.

Albuquerque Garden Center

10120 Lomas Boulevard NE, Albuquerque

Kathy Carlson was a treasured member of the New Mexico birding community and a long-time member of our Board of Directors. She had moved to Seattle to be nearer to her family and sadly passed away last year. Please join us to celebrate her life and her passion for birds and the environment.

IMPORTANT: Please email the Volunteer Coordinator (volunteer@swcp.com) if you plan to attend so we can prepare for the total number of folks to expect. 📧

WHAT BIRD IS THAT?

Hint: It's a mystery! Or is it? Can you identify this bird?



Photo by Rodney Reinhardt.

Who doesn't love a mystery? If you have an interest in identifying birds, we've put together some fun bird facts from the Cornell Lab's [All About Birds](#) website about a bird that nests in Albuquerque and elsewhere in New Mexico.

- **FUN FACT 1:** The MYSTERY BIRD is one of only two warblers that breeds in cavities. (The Prothonotary Warbler is the other.) When using a woodpecker hole, the warbler may fill the cavity nearly to the top with debris and put the nest on top so it can see out.

- **FUN FACT 2:** In 1861, ornithologist and

surgeon James Graham Cooper found the MYSTERY BIRD along the lower Colorado River near Fort Mojave, Arizona—the site where present-day Arizona, California, and Nevada come together.

- **FUN FACT 3:** Although many naturalists had traversed this Fort Mojave region in previous decades, they had overlooked the tiny MYSTERY BIRD.

- **FUN FACT 4:** The MYSTERY BIRD was named in honor of the daughter of ornithologist Spencer Fullerton Baird, the second secretary of the Smithsonian Institution. The species sometimes also is called “mesquite warbler” and “desert warbler” to indicate its preferred habitat.

- **FUN FACT 5:** The oldest recorded individual MYSTERY BIRD was a male, and at least five years, 10 months old when it was recaptured and rereleased during banding operations in Arizona. 🌀

▶▶ ▶▶ ▶▶ *The answer is on Page 8.*

Thursday Birders Donation Helps Bosque del Apache water project

By Mary Raje, Thursday Birder



carefully compiled by Bird Alliance treasurer Lee Hopwood.

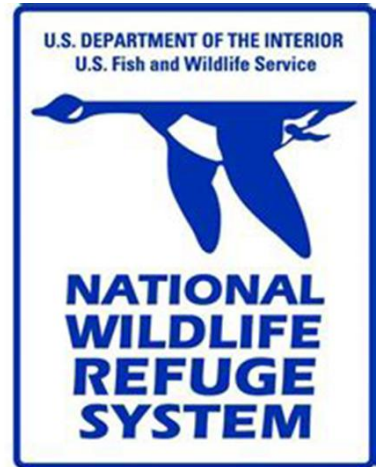
Since I currently collect the donations and send the money to Lee, she recently informed me that the account balance was \$1,445.89. Hmmm!

So, what should we do with that money? Various ideas were tossed around until I received an email from Friends of Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge (BdA) requesting donations to

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match a Water for the Wild grant to repair and update the aging water delivery systems at the refuge. Many Bird Alliance members visit BdA and have seen the need for repair and updating! It seemed like a timely and logical place to donate some of those funds.

The idea of sending \$1,000 to Friends of BdA for this matching grant was broached at the beginning of a few TB walks and was received with positive comments, so TB organizer Perrienne Houghton and I sent an email to the entire group requesting input. Again, lots of positive feedback. Perrienne informed the BACNM Board of Directors and they were very supportive of it too. In fact, the



MORE DONATION NEWS

In addition to the donation to the Bosque del Apache Water for the Wild project, the Bird Alliance also provided funds to the Rio Grande Nature Center in Albuquerque to support 10 full scholarships for its camp programs this June.

BACNM Board was then inspired to match the \$1,000 donation. So, Lee sent the checks before the April 1 deadline for the matching grant.

Early in April, as a member of Friends of BdA, I received a notice that not only had they met the matching requirements for the grant, but also, they had a nice cushion for the fundraising effort's second phase deadline in December.

Thanks to all Thursday Birders for your consistent donations. Those funds do develop into a useful amount. I hope in the next few years we see the much-needed repairs, improvements, and beneficial impacts on our visits to Bosque del Apache. 🌀



*From Page 3:
Perrienne captured
a Bald Eagle gazing
at an American Crow!*

**▶▶ MYSTERY BIRD
It's a Lucy's Warbler!**

BIRD ALLIANCE SCHOLARSHIPS ARE AVAILABLE!



If you know of a young person between the age of 6 and 20 who has their heart set on a camp, program or course to learn about birds, wildlife or conservation, please guide them to the [Ryan D. Beaulieu Youth Memorial Scholarship](#) information on our website. They'll be glad you did! 🌀

Joint Arizona/New Mexico Audubon chapters meeting

Leadership and hospitality mark a successful event

By Laura Banks

On April 3 in Phoenix, leaders and organizers from National Audubon chapters in Arizona and New Mexico met for the second time to foster fellowship and exchange. The first meeting was in Silver City in 2023.

Attendees at the beautiful Nina Mason Pulliam Rio Salado Audubon Center shared information and lessons learned about chapter management, fund-raising, and membership drives. Conservation projects being conducted by chapters were highlighted with tips on how to scale projects to match chapter resources. Attendees learned about Audubon on Campus and work that young birding leaders are doing and how Motus Wildlife Tracking stations can be established by chapters to help collect data on bird migration.

Representatives from Audubon Southwest and the National Audubon Society were there to provide insight into how the Audubon Flight Plan is being implemented and how chapters can work with regional and national partners on local issues.

Many of the more than 50 attendees participated in field trips to outstanding birding locations in Maricopa County. Bird Alliance of Central New Mexico board members Laura Banks and Asher Gorbet attended the meeting and thank the hosts from the various Arizona chapters and our regional and national organizations for their leadership and hospitality for this very successful event. 🌿



Nina Mason Pulliam Rio Salado Audubon Center/Audubon Southwest image