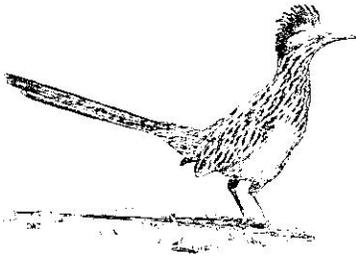


MESILLA VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY



ROADRUNNER RAMBLINGS

VOLUME 21, NO. 2 MARCH/APRIL 1999

MEXICAN WOLVES IN THE SOUTHWEST: CAN THEY SURVIVE?

By David Henderson

I really hadn't planned on writing about the Mexican wolf reintroduction effort except for the occasional update on the program's successes. Unfortunately, events have changed all that.

Early this spring, after years of constant pressure from those who believe that wolves belong once again in the wilds of the Southwest, 11 captive-bred Mexican Gray Wolves were released in three locations along the Arizona-New Mexico border. Most of you know the story. In the late 19th and early 20th century, the era of manifest destiny, the sparsely settled Southwest witnessed an enormous increase in free-ranging cows throughout the area. Initially the arid mountains and plains, blessed with what appeared to be a limitless supply of grass, beckoned Eastern "cowboys" and cows to this new Eden. Things apparently went okay until nature began to have an impact. First, the weather did what it often does in this part of the world: go dry. Drought in the 1890s imposed great hardship on those new livestock entrepreneurs, resulting in thousands of their hoofed investments lying dead or dying throughout New Mexico and Arizona. As nature would have it, the ranchers' loss became the predators' gain, and perhaps no predator was better adapted to this windfall than the Mexican Gray Wolf. Why chase down a fleet deer or elk when slow and ailing livestock are available?

With livestock dying by the millions, ranchers needed a scapegoat. Since they couldn't control the weather, another solution had to be identified. The wolf had been hunted down and annihilated in the East; why not blame it for problems in the Southwest? So with the help of the federal government, a program to systematically eliminate wolves was undertaken. Cattle ranchers and government trappers had set their sights on nothing short of total extinction of the Mexican Gray Wolf, and by the 1950s they had all but accomplished that goal.

Thank goodness that the latter half of this century has brought great enlightenment to the importance of the protection of wildlife, including predators. As a result of a monumental effort, Mexican Gray Wolves, totally extirpated from the U.S., have begun their comeback, the beginning of which was a captive-breeding program using wolves captured in Mexico. In the last quarter century the captive population has grown from the original five founder wolves to over 130 wolves today.

After years of planning and extensive public input, early in 1998 we were all able to witness the reintroduction of wolves to the Southwest, the first wolves to exist in the wild in their native territory in nearly half a century. For the Mexican Gray Wolf, the three family units were the hope of the future. In fact, they were the hope for a more complete and healthy ecosystem upon which we all depend. But then what we had most feared, but hoped would not happen, did happen. Wolves began to be shot. The first was shot by a camper, supposedly in defense of his family, yet the wolf was shot while fleeing. Since then, three more were

(Continued on page 2) See WOLVES

HUMMINGBIRDS ARE COMING!

Lorraine Schulte
will show slides and provide
information about hummingbirds and
other spring bird arrivals on
March 28 at 2:00 P.M.

at the
Enchanted Gardens Nursery
935 San Francisco Ave.
Las Cruces

A fundraising event for
Audubon Adventures

GIVE THE GIFT OF DISCOVERY

By Lorraine Schulte

Audubon Adventures is an exciting way to give teachers and students a program filled with good science, new resources and attractive design, which excites young minds with captivating stories and guided experiences in nature that makes learning fun.

Mesilla Valley Audubon Society's goal for 1999-2000 school year is to enroll at least 80 classrooms. This year we have 71 classrooms enrolled in Las Cruces, T or C, and Alamogordo.

You can make it possible to reach this goal with your donation. Thirty-five dollars will bring this program to one teacher and classroom for one year. Donations should be made to MVAS and mailed to Lorraine Schulte, Chairperson, Audubon Adventures, 1740 Mariposa, Las Cruces, NM 88001

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

May 8-9 is Birdathon Weekend

May 19 is our annual potluck

Details will be provided in the next newsletter.

WOLVES

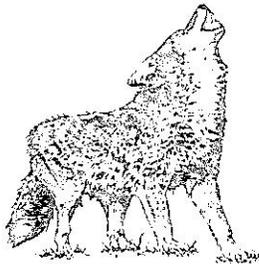
shot, three recaptured to protect them after their family unit had been disrupted, and one has disappeared. With four wolves shot over the last four months, there is little if any question that some one or some group of people is trying to bring the program down. Even the Fish & Wildlife Service and Secretary Bruce Babbitt are calling the killings an attempt to sabotage the program. This has happened despite, or perhaps because of, the program showing success. Success is measured in the form of wolves behaving like wolves once again in the wilds of Arizona and New Mexico. No wolf or wolves have to date killed any livestock, instead relying on natural prey for survival. Ironically, they have relied on man in an interesting way, occasionally feeding on wounded deer or elk, the product of an errant shot from a human hunter.

Despite the success of the program, someone is not happy. Wolf supporters blame detractors of the program for these senseless acts, while others accuse environmentalists. Eric Ness, spokesperson for the New Mexico Farm and Livestock Bureau, suggests that maybe environmentalists are the saboteurs; their motive: to point the finger at ranchers. Would that really be necessary? The leadership in the livestock industry has been predictable in not pointing a finger at themselves.

Regardless of who is committing the crimes, what is important is to continue to move toward a restoration of the natural balance in the wildlands of the Southwest. The program must move forward. The release of two more females to the acclimation pens is a show of commitment that is biologically correct and should become socially acceptable eventually. Yet it is clear, that rifle-toting wolf-haters need to be identified and screened from the wild wolf population. That is why the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and conservation organizations, like National Audubon/New Mexico, have joined together to offer a minimum \$35,000 reward for information leading to the conviction of the current wolf killers. You can be a part of the effort to support Mexican Gray Wolves and bring to justice those who would, without provocation, kill them. You can participate in this reward effort by sending a check to National Audubon/New Mexico, Randall Davey Audubon Center, PO Box 9314, Santa Fe, NM 87504, and noting that the contribution is to be a part of the Mexican wolf reward.

Our world is richer because wolves are a part of it. Predators like them play a critical role in maintaining the balance inherent in healthy ecosystems. Our world is diminished by the senseless killing of these animals. Let us hope that we can accomplish what is right and necessary in order to live in a healthy natural community.

David Henderson is the Director of the Randall Davey Audubon Center in Santa Fe.



HERPS BILL MAKES PROGRESS

The herps bill became stalled in the New Mexico House Judiciary Committee because the NM Department of Game & Fish opposed it. The reason for the opposition was that the bill created too much work for them with no funding. An amendment has been added to give Game & Fish enforcement authority but they are not required to act. With this amendment, the bill is expected to get moving again. Please call your representative and let him/her know this bill (H.B. 410) is important. If you do not know who your representative is, you can call the County Clerk's office.

PROGRAMS

PROGRAMS

Programs and meetings are held on the 3rd Wednesday of each month, September through April, at the Las Cruces High School Library, 1755 El Paseo Rd. Programs begin at 7:30 P.M. Announcements, news, and information begin at 6:45 PM preceding the program.

Nicaragua and Its Birds: Predictable Extinctions and Conservation. March 17. Bryan Bird, a conservation biologist with Forest Guardians, will discuss his past research in Nicaragua. The birds of Nicaragua and Central America offer beautiful and diverse rewards for adventuresome birders. However, many resident species are locally extinct in Nicaragua and others survive only precariously. This presentation will discuss the avian communities and provide an opportunity to become acquainted with the avifauna of Nicaragua.

April 21. Our April program has not been confirmed. Please watch your newspaper for announcements or call Ed Mayfield at 382-0715 for information closer to the time.



FIELD TRIPS

Please be prepared for field trips with comfortable shoes, layered clothing, a hat, sunscreen, and plenty of water.

March 13. Hatch and Uvas Valley. For this, now-annual event, we will start at the bridge on the Rio Grande at Hatch, then head west to the Uvas Valley, where there are ponds and expansive grasslands. The trip is great for winter waders, ducks, and raptors. Possible sightings are two kinds of longspurs and Rough-legged Hawks. Bring lunch. Meet at 7 A.M. in the KMart parking lot at Hwy 70 and I-25. Return by mid afternoon. Call Tim Lawton at 522-2056 for more information.

April 24. Roswell and the Pecos River. We will venture to one of NM's best-kept birding secrets on the banks of the Pecos River north of Roswell. We hope to see early arriving breeding birds such as Vermilion Flycatcher and, with patience, identify some eastern warblers. This is an overnight trip that will convene in Roswell on Sat. morning at 6 A.M. Call Jennifer Atchley at 525-9537 to sign up and for more information and details on where to stay.

BIRD NOTES

| | | | |
|-------------------------------|--------|------------------|------------|
| Orange-crowned Warbler | Jan 2 | Las Cruces | BJ |
| Brown Thrasher | Jan 9 | Caballo Dam | JH |
| Clark's Grebe | Jan 9 | Caballo Dam | JH |
| Bald Eagle | Jan 9 | Caballo Dam | JH |
| Ferruginous Hawk | Jan 9 | Caballo St. Pk. | JH |
| Eastern Bluebird | Jan 9 | Percha St. Pk. | JH |
| Gadwall | Jan 11 | Burn Lake | LS |
| Neotropic Cormorant | Jan 11 | Burn Lake | LS |
| Goldeneye (sp) | Jan 11 | Leasburg Dam | LS |
| Black-crowned Night-Heron | Jan 11 | Leasburg Dam | LS |
| Bald Eagle | Jan 17 | N. of Las Cruces | VH |
| Barn Owl | Jan 23 | Ft. Bliss | Field Trip |
| Great Horned Owl | Jan 23 | Ft. Bliss | Field Trip |
| Harris Hawk | Jan 23 | Ft. Bliss | Field Trip |
| Ring-necked Duck | Jan 30 | Burn Lake | SH, WH |
| Double-crested Cormorant | Jan 30 | Burn Lake | SH, WH |
| Ferruginous Hawk | Jan 30 | Rio Grande | SH, WH |
| Common Goldeneye | Jan | Burn Lake | HH |
| Black-chinned Hummingbird | Feb 2 | Las Cruces | TL |
| Horned Lark | Feb 3 | Picacho Bridge | SH, WH |
| American Pipit | Feb 3 | Picacho Bridge | SH, WH |
| Sandhill Crane | Feb 3 | Picacho Bridge | SH, WH |
| Common Merganser | Feb 5 | Burn Lake | LS |
| Green-winged Teal | Feb 5 | Burn Lake | LS |
| Vermilion Flycatcher | Feb 24 | Picacho Bridge | KS |
| White-throated Sparrow | Feb 27 | Las Cruces | HH |
| Northern Rough-winged Swallow | Feb 27 | Las Cruces | LS |
| Painted Redstart | Feb | Las Cruces | Anonymous |

OBSERVERS: Harold Harrison, Sue Hill, Wally Hill, Vince Hernandez, Jeanne Howard, Bill Jacobson, Tim Lawton, Lorraine Schulte, Ken Stinnett, MVAS Field Trip.

Please report any early, late, or unusual sightings to Tim Lawton
e-mail: tlawton@NMSU.edu or phone: 505-522-2056

New Mexico Rare Bird Hotline 505-323-9323

FIELD TRIP REPORTS

Feather Lake Sanctuary and Ft. Bliss Sewage Ponds. A thin layer of ice covered the shallow water at Feather Lake, but Great Blue Herons, White-faced Ibis, Great and Snowy Egrets, American Avocets, and Black-necked Stilts were looking for breakfast. Twenty-one New Mexico birders were welcomed by John Casada of the El Paso/Trans-Pecos Audubon Society. After spending some time birding the north end of the lake where we concentrated on Long-billed Dowitchers, and Common Snipe, we walked around the lake to see Northern Shovelers, Mallards, Gadwalls, Green, Blue-winged, and Cinnamon Teal, Northern Pintails, and Lesser Scaups. Upon our arrival at the sewage ponds later in the day, we found three Harris' Hawks and a Red-tailed Hawk bickering in a single tree as a Northern Harrier flew overhead. A Barn Owl and a Great Horned Owl posed for us as Common Yellowthroats, Verdins, and a variety of sparrows flew about in the bush.
Ann Heying, Trip Leader

South Valley. The field trip to the South Valley was a good and new experience for many of the participants; twelve of the 29 who went were students from the bird identification class. We saw and identified 32 species of birds. One of the highlights was an immature Black-crowned Night-Heron sighted about 75 feet away in a hunting stance. He remained motionless for about 30 minutes while everyone got to view him through a scope. We also saw American Pipits, Phainopepla, Pyrrhuloxia, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Cactus Wren, Horned Lark, and many waterfowl.
Ed Mayfield, Trip Leader

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

David & Pamela Smith
Carter Clary
Constance Lyons
Kelly Gallagher
Ivan & Patricia White

Mesilla Valley Audubon Society, a chapter of the National Audubon Society, is a conservation and natural history organization in southern New Mexico that promotes appreciation and conservation of birds, other wildlife, and habitat, through environmental education, issue advocacy, and natural history experiences.

OFFICERS AND BOARD

| | | |
|----------------|------------------|----------|
| President | Ed Mayfield | 382-0715 |
| Vice president | Ann Heying | 521-4215 |
| Secretary | Sue Hill | 382-9758 |
| Treasurer | Mary Lou Wallace | 522-0684 |
| Board (97-99) | Wally Hill | 382-9758 |
| Board (97-99) | Maxine Perkins | 524-1529 |
| Board (98-00) | Susan Beck | 524-6723 |
| Board (98-00) | Jennifer Atchley | 526-1320 |
| Board (99-01) | Harold Harrison | 522-6199 |
| Board (99-01) | Charles Townley | 526-8750 |
| Past President | Bill Jacobson | 382-6877 |

COMMITTEE CHAIRS

| | | |
|--------------------|---------------------|----------|
| Audubon Adventures | Lorraine Schulte | 524-7029 |
| Audubon Council | Jennifer Atchley | 526-1320 |
| Delegates | Ed Mayfield | 382-0715 |
| Conservation | Jennifer Atchley | 526-1320 |
| Education | Maxine Perkins | 524-1529 |
| Field Trips | Susan Beck | 524-6723 |
| Membership Records | Mary Anne Thibodeau | 524-4126 |
| Membership | Harold Harrison | 522-6199 |
| Newsletter Editor | Storm Sermay | 382-3348 |
| Programs | Board-at-Large | |
| Publicity | Ann Heying | 521-4215 |

Board meetings are held, September through May, on the Thursday before the 3rd Wednesday at 5:30 pm at the South west Environmental Center, 1494A S. Solano Dr., Las Cruces NM 88001. All Audubon members are welcome.

JOIN NOW!

I would like to join the **National Audubon Society** and **Mesilla Valley Audubon Society** for the introductory rate of \$20

Name _____
 Address _____
 City _____
 State _____ Zip _____

Q54
 7XCH

Membership includes the publications *Audubon* and *Roadrunner Ramblings*.

Send this application and your check (made payable to NAS) to:

**Membership, MVAS, PO Box 3127,
 Las Cruces NM 88003**

NEW MEXICO HUMMINGBIRD CONNECTION

It's time again for our annual New Mexico survey of hummingbirds. Newsletters and survey forms have been mailed to previous participants. If you think that you have participated before but do not receive the above mailing, please call Deanna Einspahr at 505-983-4609.

For those who have never participated in the program, this is an excellent time to join. Simply by observing in your own back yard, you can be part of a statewide survey of hummingbirds. To enroll in the program, send \$5.00 to Earl Harvey, 26 Dogwood Ln., Los Lunas NM 87031. Checks should be made payable to the New Mexico Audubon Council. You will receive a newsletter, instructions, a survey form to record your sightings, and a packet of seeds for flowers that are "hummingbird friendly".



MVAS ELECTIONS

As a result of our January elections, MVAS has new officers and new board members. Congratulations to Ed Mayfield, our new president, and Ann Heying, vice-president. Sue Hill and Mary Lou Wallace will continue another year as secretary and treasurer. Charles Townley and Harold Harrison were elected as board members, and Wally Hill and Susan Beck were appointed to fill the board positions vacated by the election of Ed and Ann. In the next newsletters you will learn more about our new board members.

As you can see, there were also some changes in committee chairs. Jennifer Atchley has volunteered to be our conservation chair, and Susan Beck (with assistance from Ann Heying) will help organize and schedule our field trips. Harold Harrison has agreed to head up membership. We welcome and encourage membership participation on all our committees. This is your organization and we can't do it without you! Please call any of the committee chairs if you would like to help out.

Your Audubon membership expires as of the month and year shown on your mailing label. If your mailing label shows the date, **September 98**, this is your last newsletter.

Roadrunner Ramblings is published six times a year: January, March, May, July, September, and November. Contributions are welcome. Please e-mail copy to: ssermay@zianet.com, or call for mailing information. **Next deadline: April 24**

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**Mesilla Valley Audubon Society
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