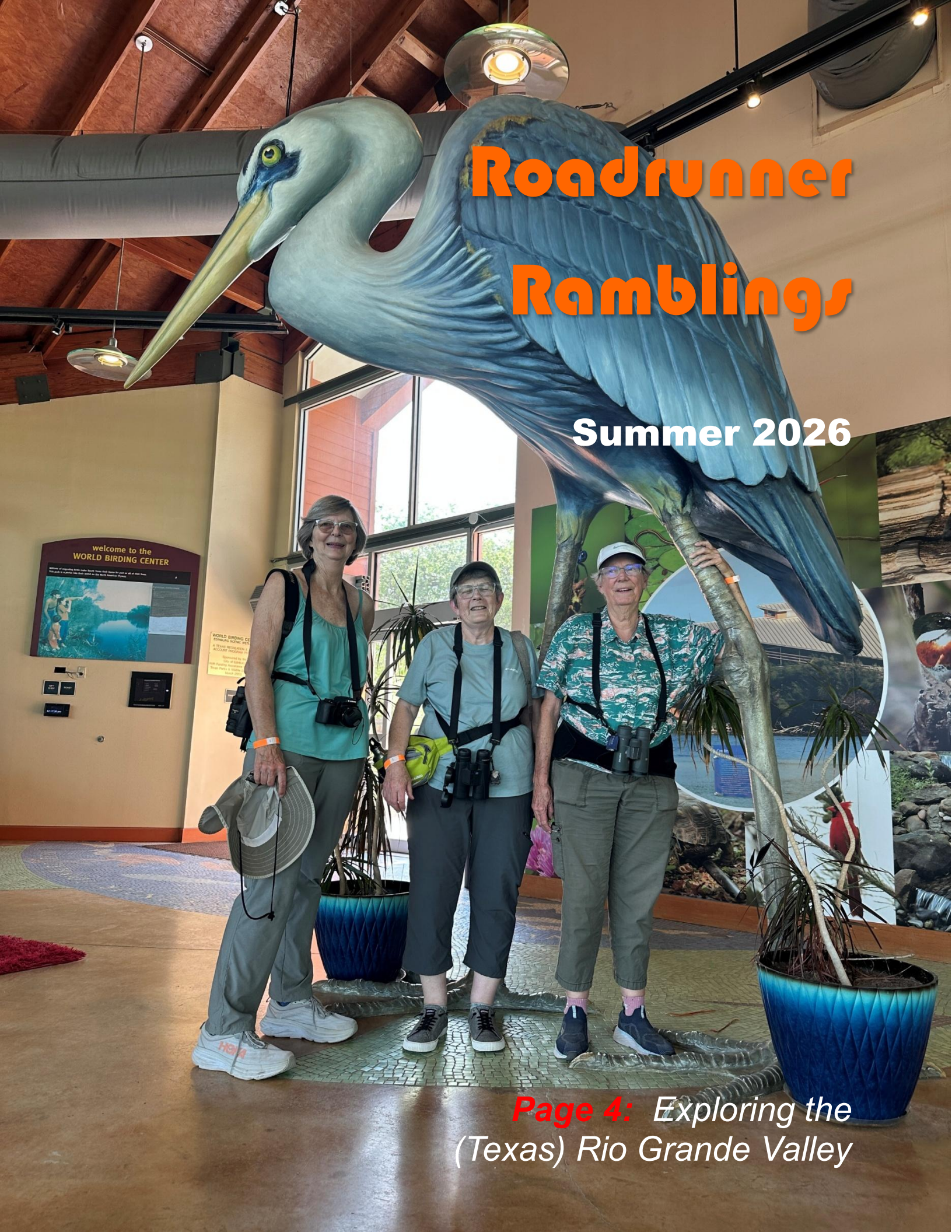


Roadrunner Ramblings

Summer 2026



Page 4: Exploring the
(Texas) Rio Grande Valley

President's Page

Birds are busy with migration and nesting this time of year, allowing birders opportunities to observe many species searching for food, mates, and shelter. It's a great time to get outdoors on one of our expert-led bird walks, either with friends or for a solo nature adventure. No matter if you walk your local trails or head into the mountains, you're sure to find something that piques your interest!

In the hot months of June and July, we scale back our activities. Our monthly bird walks go on hiatus and our monthly member meeting is replaced with Birds & Beer. However, our Adopt-a-Spot clean-ups at Sagecrest Park and our nature journaling activities continue. Check the calendar on page 7 for details.

Birds & Beer is simply a way to allow us to connect in an informal way other than during a bird walk or meeting. Come hang out with fellow birders, compare your recent sightings, and make new connections. Food and drink are on your own, but the fellowship is free of charge!

Speaking of Birds & Beer, last year we held a silent auction of bird-related items at one of them and raised enough money to pay for bird-strike prevention film that was installed at Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park. We're going to try it again this year, with the goal of raising funds for improving our bird blind at that same park.

If you have bird-related items that you no longer need or use, consider donating them to our auction project! (Email for more information then be sure to attend and bid on items to replace your donations!) This year, the Birds & Beer silent auction will be on Wednesday, July 15, at Sunset Grill at the Sonoma Ranch Golf Course in the private lounge. Come ready to eat and bid at 6:00 p.m.!

I'm sad to report that our vice president and Christmas Bird Count compiler, Julia Osgood, is moving back to the Texas Lower Rio Grande Valley (where I can attest there is excellent birding). She has agreed to continue serving as VP for the rest of this term (through 2026) and will collaborate with a new CBC compiler (or team) to help them hit the ground running for the 2026 CBC.

Roadrunner Ramblings

Roadrunner Ramblings
the newsletter of

Mesilla Valley Audubon Society
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mesillavalleyaudubon@gmail.com
P. O. Box 1645
Las Cruces, NM 88004

a chapter of the
National Audubon Society

Mesilla Valley Audubon Society, a 501c3 conservation and natural history organization in southern New Mexico, promotes the appreciation and conservation of birds, wildlife, and habitat through education, advocacy, and community engagement.



President: Cheryl Fallstead
Vice-President: Julia Osgood
Secretary: Jennifer Montoya
Treasurer: Judy Wilbur
Board: Carol Campbell, Daniel Horton,
Dana Parsons, Whitney Watson,
Nichole Palacio, David Coalson, Linda
Miller, Susan Singley, Randy Gray
Editor: Jay Wilbur

Submit newsletter material to
mesillavalleyaudubon@gmail.com

The compiler begins work in October to start organizing section leaders and teams and continues through February when the report is submitted. If you're the organized and computer-literate type and want to help coordinate this important community science project, email Julia at juliaosgood@mvasaudubon.org

The sharp-eyed among you (and what birder isn't?) will notice something different about the email address I just mentioned. We've been approved for Google for Nonprofits, which allows us, among other things, to have specific email addresses for our board members and committee chairs. We're still working out the kinks, but you'll soon be able to reach out to chapter leaders directly. The email addresses established so far are listed on page 6.

I want to express special thanks to Jennifer Montoya for conducting three online training sessions for those interested in helping with the Palomas Marsh survey project. She wasn't able to record the training, so if anyone missed the opportunity and would like to help, reach out to Jennifer at conservation@mvasaudubon.org so she can walk you through it.

Lastly, we're finalizing plans to offer t-shirts for sale. Watch for emails about how to order.

I hope to see you at an MVAS activity soon!

- Cheryl Fallstead

In Memoriam: MVAS is greatly saddened to learn of the passing of charter member, Eleanor Wootten. In 1979, Eleanor and her good friend Lorraine Schulte founded MVAS because they saw the need for a nationally recognized organization to represent the conservation needs of birds in Southern New Mexico. Eleanor was instrumental in establishing Audubon in the Classroom throughout Las Cruces Public Schools, and creating the Las Palomas Marsh in Sierra County. In 1995, she and her husband, Tom, founded T and E, Inc., a non-profit dedicated to the study and preservation of our native flora and fauna. Eleanor's guiding philosophy and grit helped MVAS become an important voice for conservation and education in our region. She will be greatly missed.



The Rio Grande basin is still gripped in drought, and snowpack feeding the river is critically low. This year's delivery of water to the El Paso Irrigation District starts April 28, and the Elephant Butte Irrigation system first receives water May 29.

MVAS is advocating for implementation of two habitat restoration plans that will benefit birds and wildlife alike along the Rio Grande. Both plans were developed by the City of Las Cruces, the International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC), and New Mexico State Parks, and have been under consideration for 15 years.

The first plan involves the outflow of the Las Cruces Wastewater Treatment Plant. This project diverts water from the concrete canal into a meandering stream. This not only provides habitat for wildlife, it improves the quality of water entering the Rio Grande.

The second project removes salt cedar and other exotic vegetation at Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park, creating riparian vegetation and forests.

IBWC federal funds for fiscal 2027 could fully realize these important plans to manage the river for greater biodiversity. We are working with the NM congressional delegation to emphasize the urgent need for these projects.

- Jennifer Montoya

An RV Adventure in the RGV

by Julia Osgood

Pat Bowen and I started our Rio Grande Valley (RGV) adventure in early March. We used to live down there, so the raucous calls of the Chachalacas and Great Kiskadees were familiar and welcoming to us. We settled into an RV park in Weslaco, Texas, and checked out birding hotspots while we waited for Cheryl and Brian Fallstead to join us.

Cover Photo: Cheryl Fallstead, Julia Osgood, and Pat Bowen check out the artwork at the Edinburg World Birding Center. Photo by Brian Fallstead.

When they arrived and parked their Casita camper, they were welcomed by a Golden-fronted Woodpecker that regularly checked out a park oak tree. It was the first lifer Cheryl got on our trip, but many more followed as we toured various state parks and refuges in the RGV.

Our first stop was the nearby Estero Llano Grande State Park. We walked around the park, which has two sections. The first has several ponds full of ducks and shorebirds. There is also a tropical section where we saw White-tipped Doves, Clay-colored Thrushes, Green Jays, Carolina Wrens, and several other birds.

In the first section, Alligator Pond is true to its name. A large female sunned on the shore, while several of her babies were visible near the edge of the pond. Near that pond, an Eastern Screech Owl poked its head out of an owl box, and, with help from a park ranger, we spotted a Common Pauraque almost completely camouflaged just off the trail.



A Common Pauraque hides in plain sight at Estero Llano Grande State Park. Photo by Jay Wilbur.

We also visited Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge, where we saw Least Grebes and a Common Yellowthroat in and near the pond. During a stop on our tram ride, we spotted a Black-crested Titmouse. On our way out of the refuge, a Gray Hawk flew overhead. (Cheryl, unfortunately, was on the side of the car with no view of this potential lifer!)

Other hotspots included Resaca de la Palma, the Edinburg Wetlands, Bentsen-Rio Grande State Park, the National Butterfly Center, and, of course, South Padre Island.

It was at Edinburg Wetlands where we all got a lifer, a Crimson-collared Grosbeak. When we entered the park, we ran into a couple of birders who told us where they had seen it. We immediately went to the location they mentioned, but didn't see it. Just before we left, Cheryl suggested we look again, and she found it in a potato tree. Pat, Brian, and I rushed over, and we all got a good look at it. This particular female had been there for months and was well outside her usual range in Mexico.

We stopped by a hawk watch at Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park. We missed the hawks that had been spotted earlier from the viewing platform, but Turkey and Black Vultures circled steadily overhead. At one of the feeding stations, groups of Green Jays showed off their bright colors. Nearby, large turkeys strutted and fanned their tails to attract females.



A Green Jay bristles on a feeder pole at Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park. Photo by Jay Wilbur.

We went straight from that state park to the National Butterfly Center in Mission. There we saw both Hooded and Altamira Orioles (Cheryl also spotted an Audubon's Oriole for an oriole three-fer), and White-eyed Vireos, which were at most of our stops. These small birds have a loud, distinctive call and are heard more often than seen.

Our visit to Resaca de la Palma was short. The entire area is in a drought, and there was no water in the *resaca* (an oxbow lake). Still, it's an interesting area with Texas Ebony trees that are doing fine despite the drought. Since we were close to Brownsville, we headed over to the Joe & Tony Olivera Park to see if we could catch the fly-in of the locally famous Red-crowned Parrots.

We had snacks and waited – and waited. It was getting close to dusk, and we feared we were in the wrong place at the wrong time, so we decided to leave. As we drove out of the park, Pat noticed some parrots on a high line. She barely stopped the car before we all piled out. About two dozen parrots entertained us with their loud chatter and playful antics. It was hard to tell if they were squabbling for position or just having fun, but we spent quite a while watching them.

No trip to the RGV would be complete without time spent at South Padre Island. We stopped first at the Land Trust on Sheepshead Road for songbirds, and then headed to the South Padre Island Birding, Nature Center & Alligator Sanctuary, where we saw Blue and Tricolored Herons, Snowy, Reddish, and Great Egrets, and Roseate Spoonbills. Lots of shorebirds like Black-necked Stilts and the confusing (to me) Dunlins poked around in the mud. Laughing Gulls were apparently having a good time. On an earlier trip, Pat and I saw Marbled Godwits and a white-morph Reddish Egret. There were plenty of White and White-faced Ibises, too.

Every morning at the RV park, a large flock of vultures lifted off from nearby trees and headed out for the day, searching for carrion. Purple Martins flew overhead, and we heard Chachalacas off in the distance. One of Brian's favorite birds was the Black-bellied Whistling Ducks that announced their presence as they flew by on their way to and from the ponds at Estero Llano Grande.



A Roseate Spoonbill mixes with a Laughing Gull and two Black-necked Stilts at the South Padre Island Birding and Nature Center. Photo by Julia Osgood.



A Black-bellied Whistling Duck makes a two-point landing on the main pond at Estero Llano Grande State Park. Photo by Jay Wilbur.

The RGV is a great place to see birds found only in that area of the U.S. Besides birds, you can see alligators, javelinas, lizards, and snakes, like the Texas Indigo Snake that we (not Cheryl!) saw at Santa Ana Wildlife Refuge. And, if you're into insects, you'll find plenty of butterflies and one of my favorites, the Leafcutter ants. The area is like Disneyland for birders and nature lovers!

New Mexico and Arizona Joint Leadership Conference

by Cheryl Fallstead

In April, board members Linda Miller, Jennifer Montoya, and I traveled to Phoenix to attend a meeting of chapter leaders and Audubon Society staff members. I served on the planning committee for this meeting so it was exciting to see it come to fruition at the Nina Mason Pulliam Rio Salado Audubon Center just outside of downtown.

The meeting is held once every three years and offers the opportunity to network with fellow Audubon leaders throughout the two states that make up Audubon Southwest. Several Audubon Southwest staff members, including Executive Director Jon Hayes and Senior Manager of Community Building Cathy Wise, were part of the meeting, plus National Audubon Society Director of Network Action and Leadership Development Gregorinah Hartman Ruh.

The gathering kicked off Thursday evening when some of us met up at a downtown watering hole. (To say parking was at a premium would be an understatement!) The main event was Friday with whole-group sessions and breakouts on a variety of topics, including updates from National on projects like the ranching program we heard about at a recent MVAS meeting, membership efforts, developing the next generation of conservation leaders, Motus Towers, conservation activities, and chapter operations (including updates from those that changed their chapter names).

On Saturday morning, participants had the opportunity to go birding at one of four local hotspots. As I was teaching a nature journaling class as one of the options, Linda and I were sure to check out the Gilbert Riparian Preserve on Thursday, which has six ponds and hosts a wide variety of ducks and shorebirds. We identified 41 species, including a couple of American White Pelicans, teals, other ducks, wading birds, and Linda's favorite, the Abert's Towhee. Interestingly, the only lifer I got that trip was a Common Poorwill we heard calling during the evening while we sat on the patio at my timeshare.

Collaborating with leaders from other chapters provides the chance to learn about other types of activities we can offer and projects we could take on. Stay tuned to see what evolves out of this meeting!

New Emails for MVAS

You can now email many of our board members and committee chairs directly with our new Google for Nonprofits account! At this time, these are the accounts that have been established:

Cheryl Fallstead, president

president@mvasaudubon.org

Julia Osgood, vice president and CBC compiler

juliaosgood@mvasaudubon.org

Judy Wilbur, treasurer

treasurer@mvasaudubon.org

Jennifer Montoya, secretary and conservation chair

conservation@mvasaudubon.org

Linda Miller, webmaster

webmaster@mvasaudubon.org

Randy Gray, bird walk coordinator

randygray@mvasaudubon.org

Nichole Palacio, board member

nicholepalacio@mvasaudubon.org

David Coalson, board member and bird walk leader

davidcoalson@mvasaudubon.org

Jay Wilbur, newsletter editor and education chair

editor@mvasaudubon.org



Calendar of Events

Classes

May 5 (Tuesday):

- Flycatcher Identification
- Las Cruces Village Social Center, Creative Arts Room, 3011 Buena Vida Circle, Las Cruces
- 6:30 – 8 p.m.
- Dana Parsons, instructor

Bird Walks

May 4 (Monday):

- Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park
- 8 – 11 a.m.
- Meet at the visitor center
- Led by Linda Miller
- Bring \$5/vehicle or your state park pass

May 9 (Saturday):

- Sagecrest Park/East of Las Cruces Dam
- 8 – 11 a.m.
- Meet at the park entrance
- Led by David Coalson

May 23 (Saturday):

- Leasburg Dam State Park
- 8 – 11 a.m.
- Meet at the visitor center
- Led by Daniel Horton
- Bring \$5/vehicle or your state park pass

Nature Journaling

May 17 (Sunday):

- Fabian Garcia demonstration garden
- 9 – 11 a.m.

June 27 (Saturday):

- Hope Road
- 9:30 – 11:30 a.m.

July 11 (Saturday):

- Sierra Vista Growers
- 2800 NM-28, Anthony, NM
- 9:30 – 11:30 a.m. (then lunch)

Monthly Meetings

May 20 (Wednesday):

- Knox Hall Room 142 and on Zoom
- 6:30 – 8 p.m.
- Ken Steigman speaks on native plants for birds starting at 7:00 pm

Birds and Beers Events

June 17 (Wednesday):

- Little Toad Creek Brewery and Distillery
- 119 N Main St, Las Cruces
- 6:00 – 8:30 p.m.

July 15 (Wednesday):

- Sunset Grill
- 1274 Golf Club Rd, Las Cruces
- 6:00 – 8:30 p.m.
- Silent auction fund raiser

Sagecrest Park Adopt-a-Spot Clean-up

May 16 (Saturday), 8 – 9 a.m.

June 20 (Saturday), 8 – 9 a.m.

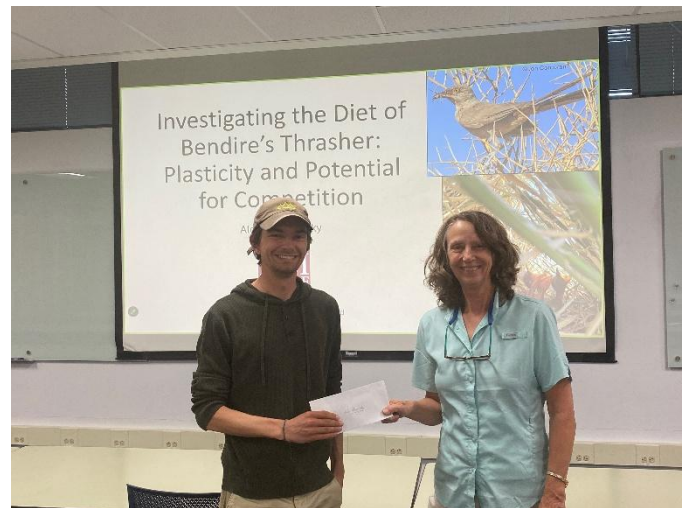
July 18 (Saturday), 8 – 9 a.m.

Field trip (members only)

June 4-7 (arrive Thursday, leave Monday):

- Cave Creek Canyon, Chiricahua Mountains, Arizona
- Email for more information

Parting Shots



NMSU student Alex Merchlinsky receives the MVAS Bischoff scholarship for 2026 from Carol Campbell at our April monthly meeting. Photo by Elaine Stachera Simon.