

Roadrunner Ramblings

**Fall
2026**



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Classes Offered*

President's Page

As we finish slogging through the heat of summer here in the Mesilla Valley, we can look forward to some of the best birding of the year in fall. August is when our regular bird walks and monthly meetings begin again. Here's the schedule for our recurring events:

- **New Day!** First Saturday of the month, 8 a.m.: Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park bird walk with Dana Parsons
- Second Saturday of the month, 8 a.m.: Sagecrest Park bird walk with David Coalson
- Third Wednesday of the month, 6:30 p.m.: monthly meeting at NMSU/Zoom
- Third Saturday of the month, 8 a.m.: Keep Las Cruces Beautiful Adopt-a-Spot clean-up at Sagecrest Park with Aaron Lucas
- Last Saturday of the month, 8 a.m.: Leasburg Dam State Park bird walk with Daniel Horton

We have our monthly presentations all lined up for the rest of the year. Here's what you can expect:

- August 19: Birding by Ear with Ben Guo
- September 16: Protecting Otero Mesa with speakers from New Mexico Wild and Friends of Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument
- October 21: NMSU student research presentations
- November 18: Palomas Marsh survey project with Conservation Chair Jennifer Montoya
- December 16: Holi-birdy photo show (online only)

Other activities include our birding classes and nature journaling outings with the MVAS Nature Journal Club. Birding classes for this quarter are described on page 4.

The nature journaling club is for those who want to combine observation, art, and writing to deepen their connection to nature. It meets monthly at a variety of locations and days. Beginners welcome!

On Saturday, August 22, the club will meet at the Baylor Canyon windmill to journal the birds and plants making use of this little oasis.

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the newsletter of

Mesilla Valley Audubon Society

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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
editor@mvasaudubon.org

On September 12, we'll head to Aguirre Spring, and on October 10 we'll try something completely different by going to the Alameda Park Zoo in Alamogordo to journal the animals there. If you'd like to be added to the email group for the MVAS Nature Journal Club, shoot me an email.

We look forward to seeing you at an upcoming MVAS event!

- Cheryl Fallstead



A Personal Reflection

In 1994, Tom and Eleanor Wootten warmly welcomed me to Las Cruces and my new job with The Nature Conservancy (TNC) of New Mexico. Tom was a TNC board member and Eleanor was the president of MVAS. They were a force to be reckoned with, and their work on local conservation issues reverberates to this day.

Tom documented roadless tracts that are now Wilderness areas within the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument. Eleanor advocated for the protection of Las Palomas Marsh in Sierra County and later the passage of the Protection for Amphibians and Reptiles Act. These are just two of their many important accomplishments.

Tom passed suddenly 20 years ago, and Eleanor, at age 87, passed in April of this year. I have been reflecting on their remarkable lives and wanted to highlight Eleanor's work with MVAS and how it continues to make a difference for birds.

First and foremost, Eleanor was a fantastic birder. She was quick to verify any potential Aplomado Falcon sightings in the region, and was the local authority we relied on for all our birding questions.

The MVAS chapter was established in 1977. Along with Lorraine Schulte, Eleanor was a charter member. Their tireless efforts sculpted MVAS into an important voice for bird education, appreciation, and advocacy in our area.

One of the reasons Eleanor's work was so long lasting and meaningful is that she loved to laugh. To do that, she needed to be surrounded by others who shared her joy of the natural world. Her hearty guffaws and snickers were legendary and made the people around her laugh as well. Her searing political commentary was especially well enjoyed.

She never worked alone, enlisting MVAS members to do things like drive to Santa Fe to lobby the governor, wear a sequined hummingbird costume at Earth Day, or walk into a classroom with a box of owl pellets. She thrived on the energy of those around her, and she used the strength of the Audubon framework to gather us together and give us direction and purpose.

Eleanor laid the groundwork for the organization we are today. MVAS reaches hundreds of people every year through our education programs, bird walks, website, litter pick-up, scholarship, and conservation programs.

Our dedicated members and volunteers have continued to involve themselves in the hard work of ensuring bird habitat is protected and appreciated. And I think we do it not just for the birds, but for ourselves as well, because we all like to laugh and enjoy the company of others who share our passion.



MVAS charter members Eleanor Wootten (right) and Lorraine Schulte (left) at the 25th anniversary banquet in 2003.

I know we can't all devote every moment to conservation like Tom and Eleanor did, but I am certain that, as MVAS members, we can be proud of our accomplishments and hopeful for the future of birds in southern New Mexico.

- Jennifer Montoya

New Birding Classes Available

by Jay Wilbur

End of summer brings together birders of all experience levels to prepare for fall migration. It's time to brush up on birding skills, rusty from summer doldrums, and to learn new techniques from local experts. MVAS is pleased to announce that a new identification class, as well as our beginners class targeted at absolute newbies, will be presented this quarter.

First up, on Tuesday, August 25, Daniel Horton will review the intricacies of raptor identification, including hawks, eagles, and owls. (**Cover Photo:** *Great Horned Owl* by Jay Wilbur.) Hawks are especially confusing, exhibiting dramatically different field marks as they mature over as many as four years from a fledgling plumage through multiple molts into adulthood. Daniel will help sort out these subtleties from 6:30 to 8 p.m. in the Creative Arts room of Las Cruces Village Senior Living, 3011 Buena Vida Circle, Las Cruces.

On the following three consecutive Tuesdays, September 1, 8, and 15, at the same place and time, MVAS will present our Birding Basics I class designed to introduce birding to those who have never hefted a pair of binocs in their lives but can no longer resist being part of the fun. Jennifer Montoya, Nichole Palacio, Dave Coalson, and Dana Parsons will tag-team teach you everything you need to know to get started. It's also a great way to brush up on basic techniques if you haven't been in the field for a while.

Both of these classes are free, but please register. We're trying out a new registration method for these two classes, Google Sheets. Go to the links below to provide us your sign up information. If you run into problems, just sign up at the door.

- [Raptor Identification Class Registration](#)
- [Birding Basics I Class Registration](#)

Look for two more classes later this year, a sparrow review on December 8, and a hands-on, in-the-field class on using eBird. This November class will help us get ready for new Christmas Bird Count reporting guidelines. You'll use your own copy of the app so a smart phone is required.

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Cave Creek Canyon Explored

Story and photos by Cheryl Fallstead

In early June, a group of enthusiastic MVAS birders spent several days exploring Cave Creek Canyon in the Chiricahua Mountains just over the border in Arizona. This is one of the premier birding locations in the country due to the confluence of multiple ecosystems and the opportunity to see birds usually not spotted anywhere else in the U.S.

Take, for example, the Coppery-tailed Trogon (previously called the Elegant Trogon). It's the target bird for most birders visiting the area. On this trip, he was heard much more than he was seen. One morning, I heard his call before I even got out of bed!

Some other visitors, including a group of young birders at a nearby camp, spotted him near a bridge on South Fork Road (which is the general area where trogons are most often seen). Some of us hiked the trail at the end of the road in hopes of spotting the loud yet elusive bird, but the only ones who did were those who hiked the farthest: my husband, Brian, along with Trevas and John Younger. They were rewarded for taking on a more challenging hike by a good look at this spectacular bird. The rest of us had to be content with only hearing his barking call.



The Trogon formerly known as Elegant, Cave Creek Canyon, Arizona. Photo by Jay Wilbur.

When I first arrived to scout for the group, another birder showed me a Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher nest with parents actively feeding a fledgling, so I was sure I'd be able to show everyone an entire family. However, the young bird must have fledged the very next morning and they were nowhere to be seen . . . until the day everyone else left, when I spotted one of the adults! It was my only lifer of the trip and I'm the only one in the group who got to see them.

However, many of our participants were newer birders, so for them, lifers were regularly spotted! We visited three private homes that open their yards, filled with feeders and water features, to both birds and birders, plus Cave Creek Ranch with their lovely bird-watching area. On the last day, we took the drive up to Paradise, Arizona, and the George Walker House. We were treated to a "guided" bird-watching activity by the owner of the guest house. There, we saw birds as large as turkeys and as small as busy hummingbirds.

Here's a partial list of the birds we spotted on the trip:

- Acorn Woodpecker
- Arizona Woodpecker
- Ladder-backed Woodpecker
- Broad-tailed Hummingbird
- Broad-billed Hummingbird
- Blue-throated Mountain-gem
- Rivoli's Hummingbird
- Northern Yellow Warbler
- Painted Redstart
- Black-headed Grosbeak
- Blue Grosbeak
- Northern House Wren
- Bridled Titmouse
- Juniper Titmouse
- Scott's Oriole
- Hooded Oriole
- Northern Cardinal
- Cactus Wren
- White-breasted Nuthatch
- Inca Dove
- Bronzed Cowbird
- Mexican Jay
- Brown-crested Flycatcher
- Wild Turkey



Black-headed Grosbeak



Blue Grosbeak



Painted Redstart



Hooded Oriole

This list may give you an idea of why so many birders flock to the Chiricahuas! We didn't even explore the higher-altitude locations, but perhaps we will on our next trip. It's only a few hours away, so Cave Creek Canyon makes a great birding escape!



From left to right, field trip participants Bill Ross, Linda Miller, Annie Mitchell, Terri Pease, and Cheryl Fallstead enjoy a short rest between birding sessions. Photo by Brian Fallstead.

Birds and Beer, a Win for All

A mug of beer wasn't the only thing raised to celebrate local birds this summer. Our silent auction, held at our July 15 Birds and Beer event, raised over \$900 to fund MVAS programs such as the Bischoff Scholarship and conservation efforts.



Items donated to MVAS for auction ranged from books to feeders, sculptures to photos, and quilts to decoys. Gathering at Sunset Grill for a social hour in lieu of a chapter meeting, a fully-fledged flock of bird aficionados proved our community brings deep pockets to worthy causes.



Carol Campbell bids on one of the many items donated for the event. Photo by Elaine Stachera Simon.

A very big thank you to Elaine Stachera Simon and Cheryl Fallstead for arranging this festivity. Even more thanks to all you donors and bidders! A great time was had by all.

Calendar of Events

Monthly Meetings

August 19 (Wednesday):

- Knox Hall Room 142 and on Zoom
- 6:30 – 8 p.m.
- Ben Guo speaks on birding by ear at 7 p.m.

September 16 (Wednesday):

- Knox Hall Room 142 and on Zoom
- 6:30 – 8 p.m.
- Multiple speakers discuss protecting Otero Mesa at 7 p.m.

October 21 (Wednesday):

- Knox Hall Room 142 and on Zoom
- 6:30 – 8 p.m.
- NMSU grad students present their research projects at 7 p.m.

Bird Walks

August 1, September 5, October 3 (Saturday):

- Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park
- 8 – 11 a.m.
- Meet at the visitor center
- Dana Parsons, leader
- Park entrance fee may be charged

August 8, September 12, October 10 (Saturday):

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

August 29, September 26, October 31 (Saturday):

- Leasburg Dam State Park
- 8 – 11 a.m.
- Meet at the visitor center
- Daniel Horton, leader
- Park entrance fee may be charged

Sagecrest Park Adopt-a-Spot Clean-up

August 15 (Saturday), 8 – 9 a.m.

September 19 (Saturday), 8 – 9 a.m.

October 17 (Saturday), 8 – 9 a.m.



Classes

August 25 (Tuesday):

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

September 1, 8, 15 (consecutive Tuesdays):

- Birding Basics I
- Las Cruces Village Social Center, Creative Arts Room, 3011 Buena Vida Circle
- 6:30 – 8 p.m.
- Dave Coalson, Jennifer Montoya, Nichole Palacio, Dana Parsons, instructors

Nature Journaling

August 22 (Saturday):

- Baylor Canyon windmill
- 8:30 – 10:30 a.m.

September 12 (Saturday):

- Aguirre Spring
- 8:30 a.m. for “landscapito” mini-lesson
- 9 – 11 a.m. for nature journaling
- Entrance fee may be charged

October 10 (Saturday):

- Alameda Park Zoo, Alamogordo
- 10 a.m. – noon, followed by lunch
- Entrance fee charged
- Carpooling recommended

Parting Shots



Dan Wolf shares his amazing photo of an Osprey hunting near Albuquerque.