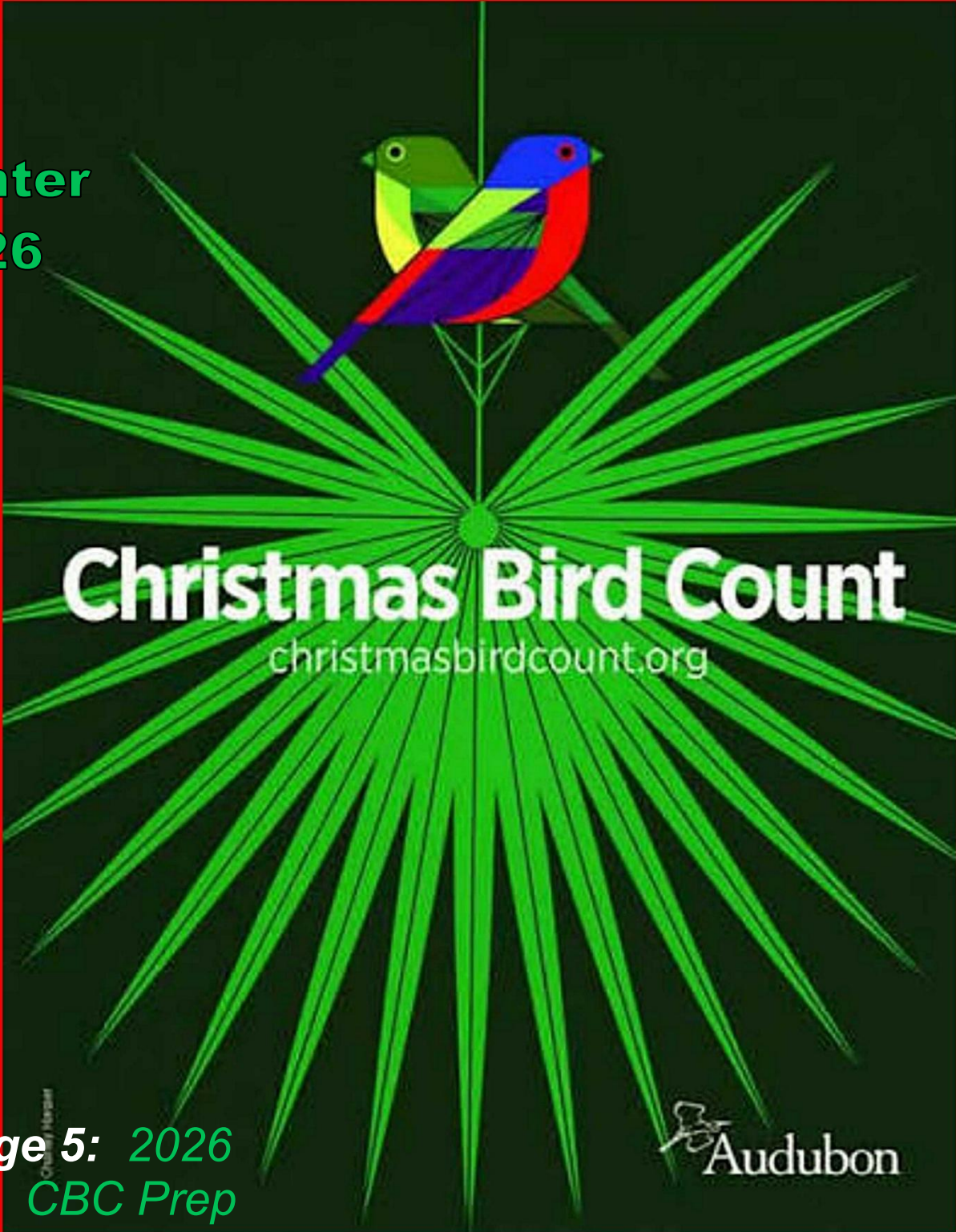


Roadrunner Ramblings

Winter
2026



Christmas Bird Count

christmasbirdcount.org

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CBC Prep*

 Audubon

President's Page

Time is flying faster than a rare bird hiding from an excited birder! With the end of the year rapidly approaching, I want to focus this column on some of the many ways you can support our nonprofit organization by volunteering.

We are now heading into Christmas Bird Count (CBC) season. Our new CBC compiler, Jay Wilbur, is looking for team leaders and participants to scour our circle for every bird we can count. His article on page 5 provides information on how you can join us for this annual icon of citizen science. It's easy and fun to be a part of the action. There are many ways to contribute, including just counting birds at your backyard feeders.

Have you thought about volunteering for MVAS in other ways? I'd love to create a list of folks who are willing to help with activities such as outreach tables at local events or educational programs for schools. If you'd like to be on a list of potential volunteers for these and other activities, please email me at president@mvasaudubon.org.

There are more ways to volunteer with MVAS, of course. One very satisfying way is to join our Adopt-a-Spot leader, Aaron Lucas, on the third Saturday of every month at 8 a.m. at Sagecrest Park off Roadrunner Parkway. Spend an hour picking up trash from park grounds. We provide buckets and grabbers, you provide the energy! It feels great to leave the park looking better than when we came.

You can also volunteer to help with a project headed up by our Conservation Chair and Secretary Jennifer Montoya, the Palomas Marsh Exclosure survey. Our goal is to bird three specific transects near Truth or Consequences twice each month. We're partnering with the BLM to collect data to see how excluding cattle (but not deer and other wildlife) from specific areas affects bird populations, including Yellow-billed Cuckoos. New volunteers are always welcome! Contact Jennifer at conservation@mvasaudubon.org to learn more.

Volunteers with more time to contribute may want to consider joining MVAS leadership as either an officer or board member. Officers serve one-year terms while board members serve three-year terms.

Roadrunner Ramblings

Roadrunner Ramblings
the newsletter of

Mesilla Valley Audubon Society

mvasaudubon.org

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
editor@mvasaudubon.org

We meet monthly, usually on Google Meet, but a few times a year in person. Board members generally focus their efforts on one or more areas such as conservation or education. Email me at president@mvasaudubon.org if you're interested and we can talk about opportunities. Our next elections are in January 2027, so it's not too early to start thinking about nominating yourself.

If you have another idea of how you can help protect birds and their habitat, or support our other activities, please let me know. Maybe you want to talk to local businesses about making their windows bird friendly or get involved in legislative advocacy. We can help you find a way to serve that fits your interests and talents!

Don't have much extra time or energy but feel you can support MVAS financially? That's always welcome, too! You can donate directly on our website at mvasaudubon.org/donation. Funds are used for everything from conservation projects to supporting our annual Bischoff scholarship for NMSU grad students.

As we get closer to the end of the year and the holiday season, I want to thank all of you for being the backbone of Mesilla Valley Audubon Society. We appreciate you!

- Cheryl Fallstead

Treasurer's Note

It's that time of year again when we ask you to renew your membership in MVAS. By renewing, you contribute to vital conservation initiatives, educational programs, and community events.

If you joined or renewed through our website and selected to renew automatically, thank you. Otherwise, you can renew using this link: <https://mvasaudubon.org/membership-and-donations/>

You can also pay by check. Please go to the above site for directions, or send your check to: MVAS, P.O. Box 1645, Las Cruces, NM 88004.

Thank you for supporting the Mesilla Valley Audubon Society!

- Judy Wilbur



On October 3, 2026, MVAS joined Friends of the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks, Doña Ana Consolidated Sportsmen, and New Mexico Wild to co-sponsor "Coffee with Your Congressman," a forum to hear from our elected US Representative, Gabe Vasquez, on measures he is taking to protect habitat within federal lands.

The forum was appropriately held at the La Cueva Group Site at Dripping Springs Natural Area, a section of the Organ Mountains – Desert Peaks National Monument managed by the BLM. Both the NMSU Department of Fisheries, Wildlife, and Conservation Ecology and MVAS were well represented in the crowd of about 35 attending constituents.

Representative Vasquez spoke on five topics:

- current attempts to sell off public lands
- the Endangered Species Act
- Roadless Rule in national forests
- environmental degradation caused by the border wall
- reductions of national monument acreage

He kicked off his remarks by noting that when Congress works in a bi-partisan manner, public lands and the environment win. He and a Republican congressman from Montana have co-founded the Public Lands Caucus to successfully oppose the sale or transfer of federal public lands.

Vasquez then said that the Endangered Species Act (ESA) has been an important safeguard in protecting important ecological values and that he planned to vote against any measures to weaken it. He reminded us that in 1973, the ESA passed by 92 to 0 in the Senate, and 355 to 4 in the House. The high regard that Americans hold for wildlife is a common national value he will protect.



MVAS members chat with U.S. Representative Gabe Vasquez about protecting habitat on federal land.

The congressman sits on the Agriculture Committee and has been able to track the progress of the U.S. Forest Service Roadless Rule, regulations that currently preserve wilderness areas in places like the Gila National Forest. The current administration is pushing to weaken the rule and allow more roads to be built for energy production, logging, and mineral extraction. Representative Vasquez encouraged everyone who has not submitted comments yet to do so because when lawsuits take these actions to court, the voice of the American public will be taken into consideration.

Attendees appreciated the detailed, first-hand update from the frontlines of Washington, D.C. And thanks to the friends group, we also had some delicious coffee and pan dulce. Staying informed on these highly consequential changes to our nation's laws and regulations that impact bird habitat is an essential part of the Audubon mission.

- Jennifer Montoya

Chapter News

Bird Blind Extension

MVAS has made substantial progress extending and improving the bird blind at Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park. As the photo below shows, framing and paneling are complete. Final steps include staining the panels and adding more native plants to the viewing area.



The newly extended and modified blind at Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park.

Birding Basics Class Presented

Our annual adult education class, Birding Basics 1, was present on three Tuesday evenings in September. Sixteen students shared their appetite for learning about birds and birding with instructors Dana Parsons, David Coalson, Jennifer Montoya, and Nichole Palacio. They also shared some great stories about their own experiences with birds, like a flock of pelicans flying down Spruce Street!



The class learning about local avian habitats.

The class covers a wide range of topics that lay a foundation for birding. From the fundamentals of binoculars to the differences between a field guide and a specialty bird book, the beginner curriculum demystifies birding techniques, making the hobby approachable and fun. In addition, bird walks were conducted on the two Saturdays sandwiched by the Tuesday lectures, letting participants practice newly learned techniques in the field.



Class instructors take a bow for a job well done!

If you missed it this year, Birding Basics 1 will be taught again next fall. You're always welcome to join!

Christmas Bird Count 2026

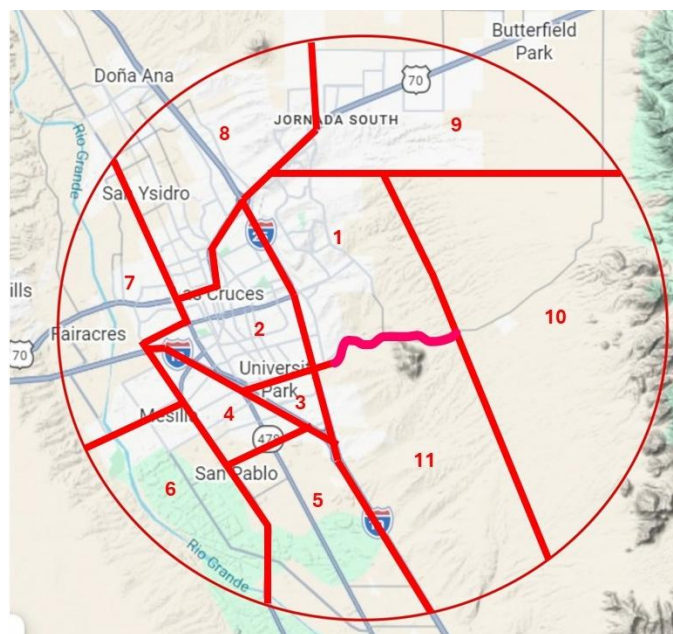
by Jay Wilbur

The 2026 Las Cruces Christmas Bird Count (CBC) will be held on Saturday, December 19. National Audubon has made some changes to CBC processes this year and participants will want to become familiar with the new approach. This article summarizes a couple of key changes. These and other changes are also detailed on the Audubon website, www.audubon.org.

First, however, I want to mention that our 2025 CBC compiler, Julia Osgood, has moved back to Texas. She will be sorely missed. In Julia's absence, MVAS President, Cheryl Fallstead, has asked me to take on the compiler role. I'm hoping you'll help make our 2026 CBC on Saturday, December 19, the most successful one yet.

Let me also mention the other CBC circle in our area, the Caballo circle. The CBC for that circle will be held January 2, 2027. Wayne Treers is the compiler for Caballo. Contact Wayne via his email, way1mike@yahoo.com, for information about that circle.

The first of the two key changes I want to cover in this article is that the number of sectors in the Las Cruces circle has been reduced from 14 to 11. This will make managing the circle easier. In addition, some sector boundaries have been changed to better distribute birding locations within the circle. Hopefully, this will make our sectors easier and more fun to bird. The new sectors are shown in the accompanying map.



Sector map for the 2026 Las Cruces CBC.

Key:

1. *High Range*
2. *City Parks & Center*
3. *NMSU Campus*
4. *Mesilla Park*
5. *South Valley*
6. *Rio Grande South*
7. *Rio Grande North*
8. *North Valley*
9. *North Foothills*
10. *East Foothills*
11. *Las Alturas*

Here's the other significant change. After years of requests from participants, National Audubon has aligned CBC data collection with eBird. They have released a completely new computer platform to support this change. New procedures and training material have also been released on the Audubon website. The bottom line is that count data will now be submitted by sector leaders to the compiler in the form of eBird checklists rather than on paper or spreadsheets.

In past years, CBC day saw teams visiting a set of locations within each sector and counting the birds at each location. Sector leaders would then combine the counts for all the locations visited and submit total counts for their sector to the compiler on some type of spreadsheet, usually an Excel file or even paper.

This year, teams will count birds at locations in their sector and submit a checklist electronically to eBird for each separate location. The easiest way to do this is by using the eBird smartphone app to collect data while the team birds each location. (There are some other ways to submit the checklists as well.) At the end of the day, the sector leader sends the compiler the set of checklist URLs that were submitted and accepted by eBird. Sector leaders can choose to combine all the day's checklists into an eBird Trip Report for the sector, but this isn't required.

This new process is much easier and less error-prone. It also allows the huge amount of CBC data collected each year to be added into the Cornell citizen science database on bird populations and migration. Another plus is that Audubon data will now automatically be in sync with the bird taxonomy updates made each year by the professional ornithology community.

Here's an example of how the new process might work. Imagine you're the leader of the NMSU Campus sector and you have three teammates. To cover your sector on December 19, you decide your team should bird the livestock fields, the Herdsman pasture, the Alumni Pond, and Stadium Wash, in that order. One of your team has eBird loaded on their phone and is familiar with how to use it to submit data. You've asked that person to be your recorder.

You convene your team at the livestock fields and ask your recorder to start a checklist. That's easy since eBird already has a hotspot listed for the NMSU livestock fields. Your team moves around the location spotting birds: 3 Mourning Doves, 6 Yellow-headed Blackbirds, 8 House Sparrows, 4 more Mourning Doves, 1 Bronzed Cowbird, 1 American Kestrel, 3 more House Sparrows, 2 House Finches, etc., etc., etc. With each sighting the recorder enters the number seen of that species. The app not only keeps a running tab of each species, it also tracks your effort, distance traveled and time expended for instance.

At some point you decide you've done enough at that location and ask the recorder to stop the checklist. You look over the draft checklist and ask the recorder to go ahead and submit it to eBird. A couple of seconds later, eBird accepts your team's checklist and you relocate to the Herdsman pasture where you repeat the process, creating and submitting your second checklist of the day.

After a well-deserved lunch break you move to your third location, the Alumni Pond. Since eBird doesn't have a pre-designated hotspot for the pond, your recorder simply defines a new one using the GPS coordinates the app provides. Finally, at Stadium Wash you complete and submit your fourth checklist. Each of your four eBird checklists is now in the Cornell database with its own individual URL.

After thanking your team and inviting them to the CBC social event that evening, you go online and look at the four checklists. You then copy the four checklist URLs into an email to the circle compiler and all that remains is bragging about your team's results at the social.

This example is an excellent way to cover a sector on count day, but certainly not the only way. Alternatives might work as well or better for different teams. I'll be reaching out to sector leaders prior to count day to review individual approaches.

In the meantime, most certainly ask me any questions you might have. Please contact me via email at cbc@mvasaudubon.org, or call my cell phone, 512-632-4196. Thank you for contributing your time and effort to this year's CBC!

Calendar of Events

Monthly Meetings

November 18 (Wed):

- Knox Hall Room 142 and on Zoom
- 6:30 – 8 p.m.
- Khandan presents Birds of Borneo at 7 p.m.

December 16 (Wed):

- Zoom only
- 6:30 – 8 p.m.
- Our Holibirdy Party

January 20 (Wed):

- Knox Hall Room 142 and on Zoom
- 6:30 – 8 p.m.
- TBD Topic at 7 p.m.

Bird Walks

November 7, December 5, January 2 (Sat):

- Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park
- 8 – 11 a.m.
- Meet at the visitor center
- Dana Parsons, leader
- Entrance fee free through April for NM residents

November 14, December 12, January 9 (Sat):

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

November 28, December 26, January 30 (Sat):

- Leasburg Dam State Park
- 8 – 11 a.m.
- Meet at the visitor center
- Daniel Horton, leader
- Entrance fee free through April for NM residents

Sagecrest Park Adopt-a-Spot Clean-up

November 21 (Sat), 8 – 9 a.m.

January 16 (Sat), 8 – 9 a.m.

Classes

December 8 (Tue):

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

Special Event

December 19 (Sat):

- Las Cruces Christmas Bird Count

Nature Journaling

November 14 (Sat):

- 1 – 3 p.m.
- Museum of Nature and Science

December 6 (Sun):

- 2 – 4 p.m.
- Make-and-take at Las Cruces Village

Parting Shots

This issue of *Roadrunner Ramblings* is my last as editor. It has been a great privilege and pleasure to serve in this role for the past year and a half (six issues.) I want to thank the MVAS board for trusting me to perform it.

My successor, Elaine Stachera Simon, brings professional level skills to the task. We are indeed fortunate to have her in this role. It will be exciting to see what she does with the next issue!

I'm also looking forward to my new role as CBC compiler for the Las Cruces circle. It will be a stretch for me, but no doubt a fun and fulfilling experience. Good things happen when you look for them.

- Jay Wilbur

