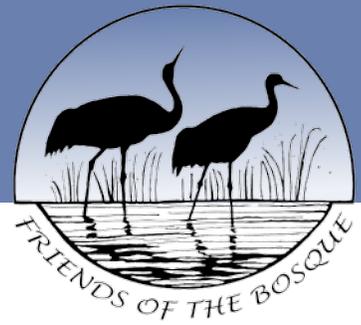


# BOSQUE WATCH



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The Friends of the Bosque have been honored with the **2015 Molly Krival Friends Group of the Year Award** presented by the National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA). The NWRA annually recognizes four outstanding service awards in the National Wildlife Refuge System: Manager, Employee, Volunteer, and Friends Group.

“**The Friends of the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge is a force to be reckoned with,**” said David Houghton, President of the National Wildlife Refuge Association. “In the spirit of Molly Krival, who was herself a powerhouse, **this Friends group makes an enormous difference for Bosque and the community.**”

The Friends were nominated by Refuge Manager Kevin Cobble based on criteria including our work advancing the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System, our promotion of the partnership between the refuge and the local community, our advocacy for the protection of natural resources, and our cooperation with the refuge and other Friends groups. Of note was the breadth of our work, including staffing support of the refuge maintenance program, fundraising for refuge water infrastructure improvements, environmental education and special programs for local youth such as Field Day, mentoring of other Friends groups, and outreach through the Festival of the Cranes.

With more than 230 Friends groups nationwide, this is a tremendous honor that completes the grand slam for Bosque del Apache:

- ★ John Bertrand – Volunteer of the Year (2008)
- ★ John P. Taylor, Jr. – Refuge Employee of the Year (2004)
- ★ Phil Norton – Refuge Manager of the Year (1996)

Bosque del Apache is the first refuge to have received all four awards, and this year we received additional recognition for **★John Vradenburg★ as the 2015 Refuge Employee of the Year.**

Despite the challenges of budget and drought, or maybe because of those challenges, Bosque del Apache remains a stronghold for our wildlife because of our committed staff and volunteers. We share this award with all of our members and donors!



## Bosque Love Story

The sunny blue sky and sparkling clean air on that very chilly December day in 1993 marked the beginning of a love story, a love story between Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge and me. My late husband and I had rented an RV to see if we liked that mode of travel. We had decided to take a trial run to a destination not too far out of Albuquerque. Bosque del Apache was, at 90 miles, a reasonable distance and within our AAA towing range if the need arose. We discovered that the RV life was not for us but that Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge was.

What was it about this magical, spiritual place that moved me so? Was it the sound of the multiple birds calling and ducks quacking? I wondered if this was what Eden's garden looked and sounded like. Thanks to a kind volunteer, I learned about 16 different species of ducks that awe-inspiring day. I saw ducks with fresh eyes. Why hadn't I noticed the varieties of ducks before? Other than rather common and numerous mallards, the world of ducks was new to me. My heart delighted in the tiny bufflehead ducks in their black and white feathered uniforms and their graceful swan dives. The blue winged teal were in their breeding colors. The large billed shovelers filtered water through their shovel type bills to obtain food.

I watched a great blue heron try to swallow a fish that was a little too big for her gullet. She would pick the fish up after spitting it out and slap it on the ground. I watched her for a good fifteen minutes that day until finally success was in sight. The fish stayed down!

Was it the silent wings that arose over the refuge as nighttime drew near and hundreds of sandhill cranes and thousands of snow geese flew in to spend the night in the safety of the ponds? Though the wings were silent the honks of the geese and the trilling calls of the cranes were not. This wonderful cacophony of bird sounds, the rosy winter sunset and full moon reflected on the ponds resulted in a conversion experience for me. At that point I turned from nature appreciator to bird lover.

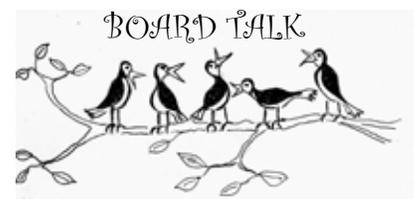
I go to Bosque del Apache in times of joy and mourning. Some of my late husband's ashes blew in the wind near there. In a moment of mourning I went to the refuge on the day that would have been our 50th wedding anniversary. The only place I wanted to be on that particular day was at the Bosque. I loaded up the car and went down to the refuge to help with a birding tour. Somehow my heart came from unspeakable sadness to peace. This passage was aided by helping other people experience the dawn of creation. Perhaps they too fell in love with this beautiful place.

A moment of joy was seeing a rare species such as smooth billed Ani blown off course from its Texas home. I had stellar moments of joy pointing out specific sights to visitors. "Look behind that berm. See those two points across the field. They are coyote ears. A coyote is looking for lunch."

For over twenty years this vibrant yet peaceful place has sustained and nurtured me.

**--Cheryl Learn-Hill**

*(Editor's note: Cheryl is a long time member of the Friends and served often on the Board of Directors where she is currently a member-at-large. Have you got a story? Can you remember the first time you visited the refuge? Can you recall how you felt the first time you saw a cloud of snow geese leap into the sky? What's the most interesting animal you have seen at the Bosque? What was the impact on your children or grandchildren when you first brought them to see the cranes? We would like to hear your stories.)*



As of 21 March, and with the recommendation of our Finance committee, the final annual audit had been approved by the Board and is now available on the Friends website. Although the Board has opted to have an audit every three years, this year it was mandatory because of the increase in funds raised this past year by the Friends.

Plans for the May 2nd Field Day are going well. This year's topics

are: outdoor photography, archery, animal tracking and turkey ID and calling. In addition to funds provided by the Friends, website pages were developed asking for donations which have resulted in an additional \$1,555 in contributions.

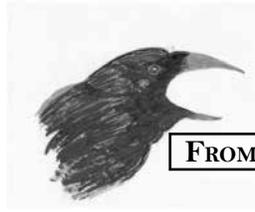
Environmental Educator Andrea Brophy will be leaving us in May. The Friends Board has formed an Education Committee that will consider options for filling this position. We will miss Andrea and her husband Sean (FWS Refuge Operations Specialist), and wish them well at their new assignment in California.

Store staffing is an ever-evolving process. There will be some staff changes this summer and given FWS staffing shortages it has been agreed that the Nature Store (and Visitor Center) will be closed Tuesday and Wednesday, June through August. This is traditionally our slowest time and is the best way to deal with staffing issues with the least impact on Friends revenues.

The biggest news of the last two months is our national recognition as Friends group of the year. See our cover article for details.

### **Development Priorities**

Development Director Michael Hanauer has provided the Board with a list of development priorities for the next fiscal year. A Development Committee has been created that will review Michael's proposals and report back to the full Board. Potential programs include continued support to green issues related to energy use on the refuge, water control projects, further development of our 'Legacy Club' outreach, sustained corn production and additional software upgrades and integration.



FROM THE EDITOR

## Signs of Change?

According to the National Weather Service, Bosque del Apache received 400% of its normal winter rainfall this year, which may explain why the hedgehog cactus in the arboretum are already in bloom and the claret cup are covered with deep red buds. The javelinas have visited the garden and hopefully are there only to admire the flowers though there are some suspicious bite marks on some of the prickly pears.

Though the additional rainfall is welcome, there is no sign yet of any major change in the pattern of drought that has dominated for eight years now. Last year was the driest year on record for New Mexico--ever. The javelinas' presence in and around the visitor center in recent weeks is a mobile reminder that, with climate change, these southern Chihuahuan critters have rapidly extended their range northward. Usually shy, they seem to have gotten used to the activity at the refuge and have been strolling around chewing on the quail blocks pretty much oblivious to human comings and goings.

On another note, if you are feeling up to a bit of bureaucratic linguistics you might visit the Department of Interior website which has just put out the prospectus and proposed budget numbers for 2016. The formal title of this document is 'Budget Justifications and Performance Information, Fiscal Year 2016.' This document was prepared for the Interior, Environment and related Agencies subcommittees. You can find it at [http://www.doi.gov/budget/appropriations/2016/upload/FY2016\\_FWS\\_Greenbook.pdf](http://www.doi.gov/budget/appropriations/2016/upload/FY2016_FWS_Greenbook.pdf).

Depending on your tolerance you can plow through the whole thing, but I only made it through the Executive Summary. Page 4 provides a very short summary that suggests only modest increases in funding and staffing for the NWR system. Have I got that right? Don't they know refuges pay their communities back a national average of five dollars for every one dollar of budget?

As you may have noted, our lead story this spring is that fact that the Friends of Bosque del Apache won the national award for the best Friends group in the country. We have a great Board of Directors and Friends staff, and an incredibly hard working bunch of Fish and Wildlife officers at the refuge, but lest we rest on our laurels, the challenges of 2016 are pretty much the same as they have been the last few years: fewer staff, less budget and less rain.

Signs of change? Ask the javelina.

--Lise Spargo

# *Bosque del Apache's Wilderness Areas*

Did you know that more than half (30,000 of just over 57,000 acres) of Bosque del Apache NWR is fully legislated wilderness? The vast majority of visitation and active management takes place in the heart of the refuge, a central core of approximately 8,000 acres along the old Rio Grande flood plain. The rest of the refuge is desert grassland and rolling hills.

When proposed for wilderness status in the mid 60s by Refuge Manager Dick Rigby, three virtually undisturbed areas of Chihuahuan desert were set aside to preserve native plant and animal species, a key part of the refuge mandate. In an interview with Bosque historian John Bertrand, Rigby shared his opinion that wilderness units would also protect the refuge from the continuing encroachment of roads, power lines and pipelines.

Following the long process of study and public hearings, Little San Pasqual, Indian Well and Chupadera were officially legislated “wilderness” in 1975. Rigby’s legacy is a refuge where undeveloped desert habitat will always compliment its wetland oasis.

Little San Pasqual is the largest and most remote of the refuge’s wilderness units and has no hiking trail. It comprises the entire eastern border of the refuge with dome-shaped San Pasqual mountain rising 250' near its southwest corner. San Pasqual Mountain and Mesa are quite visible from the south auto tour loop. Hunting of deer, small game species and occasionally the non-native African gemsbok (oryx) is its primary recreational utilization.

Indian Well was named for rock formations in the foothills that trap and hold rainwater, used by both Native Americans and settlers. Like the other two wilderness units, it is predominantly Chihuahuan desert and has no permanent water source.

This wilderness area is easily accessed via the Canyon National Recreation Trail. The trail enters the wilderness past the power lines and wanders through “Solitude Canyon” offering a good sample of the desert landscape and geology. As is true of all wilderness areas, once you cross the wilderness boundary you are free to leave the trail and explore on your own - being mindful, of course, to protect this fragile arid landscape and maintaining awareness of potential dangers such as snakes, drop offs, etc.

Adjacent to Indian Well on the southwest boundary of the refuge is the Chupadera Wilderness and Chupadera National Recreation



A view from the Indian Well wilderness unit on the refuge's west boundary looking east toward Little San Pasqual



Refuge panorama on ascent to Chupadera Peak



Wilderness boundary marker

Trail divided by I-25. Towering above is 6,200' Chupadera Peak, highest point in the refuge. The peak was added to the original wilderness unit in 2007 following an intensive fund raising campaign by the Friends of the Bosque which raised \$63,000 to purchase the summit (protecting it from development) and then presented the land to the refuge specifying that it be added to the Chupadera Wilderness.

The 9.5 mile Chupadera National Recreation Trail is challenging but rewards hikers with panoramic views of the refuge and Rio Grande Valley. The trail traverses 2.5 miles of Chihuahuan desert, passes under I-25 and continues another 2+ miles within the wilderness with a total 1,800' elevation gain. The changes in topography and geologic features are unique.



Unique Chupadera geology

I urge you to explore Bosque del Apache's wilderness units that offer, like all wilderness areas, opportunity to reconnect with nature and reflect on the larger community of life - an interconnected web in which we are but a single strand.

*--Sandra Noll*

Prickly pear blossom





## Peregrine Falcons on Bosque del Apache

I was late for a meeting at the visitor center on a beautiful early fall morning. When I was about to cross the railroad tracks near the big pond, I spotted a flock of a dozen white faced ibis that was acting rather strangely. They were acting uncharacteristically nervous, bunching up, and periodically hugging the shore of the pond. I immediately pulled over knowing from experience that an avian predator of some sort was most likely causing the flock to react in this way. Within a minute or two I spotted the magical silhouette of a peregrine falcon circling high above the pond. Every time the flock tried to leave the safety of the water (water birds when hard pressed by a falcon will splash into the nearest water where a falcon will instinctively not follow) the peregrine soaring high above would go into a stoop, the impressive power dive characteristic of a hunting peregrine. The flock of ibis would instantly bunch up and dash for the water before the peregrine arrived. The peregrine would then drift up and away and the whole process would repeat. Half an hour later the drama before me was still going on without resolution! I had to pull myself away finally, but I still think of that magnificent predator.

Peregrines are very special raptors. Unlike the highly visible northern harriers on the refuge that masterfully work the breeze while hunting close to the ground, or the abundant opportunistic red tails that hunt from the tops of power poles and cottonwoods, the peregrine often hides in plain sight high in the sky waiting for birds to fly out from the cover of trees or open water. For this reason peregrines are not often seen by visitors to Bosque del Apache. Often, visitors who are lucky enough to see a peregrine on the refuge are first warned by large numbers of ducks or shore birds splashing into the water in panic. Then you hear the amazing sound of the fastest creature on earth ripping through the atmosphere at 200 miles an hour. Breaking out of the dive the peregrine often “pitches up” and is seen to look back over its shoulder to see where its quarry went. Peregrines demand respect from the birds of the Bosque with good reason.

Bosque del Apache, with the large number of birds it supports year round, is like a magnet to peregrines. In the fall, migrating peregrines stop off at the refuge to refuel on their way south. More experienced

peregrines are known to actually winter over at the refuge during the milder winters. Recently peregrines occupied a nesting site in the Chupadera Mountains just west of the refuge. Peregrines characteristically nest on cliffs in higher terrain with nearby pinon/juniper forest canopy over which to hunt. The Chupadera site has no such forest canopy and it is a fair assumption that they are only nesting there because of the prey base the refuge offers them. Little did the Friends of the Bosque del Apache realize that the great effort of protecting Chupadera Peak would be an invitation to peregrines. Protect it and they will come!

I have been privileged to help rehabilitate many injured or orphaned peregrines with Wildlife Rescue of NM over the years. After months of treatment and exercise in flight pens, the birds are released from my home, which happens to be about ten miles from the refuge as the falcon flies. Not surprisingly many of my released birds end up on the refuge. Refuge biologist John Vradenburg told me a story of a day when he was giving a tour of the refuge to a group of dignitaries. Every time they moved to a new spot a fresh group of ducks would flush ahead of them. At one spot, just as the ducks were flushing, they all heard a whoosh and a peregrine came out of nowhere and bound to a duck! Coincidentally I had released a rather tame peregrine a few days prior. I like to think it was my rehab bird. I also had one of my captive bred peregrines trained for falconry drift on to White Sands Missile Range. She had a radio transmitter on her



leg so I knew exactly where she was. Unfortunately the military staff would not let me on the range to retrieve my bird and I never saw her again. A year later I started hearing reports of a peregrine on the refuge with an antenna on its leg. It could have been my bird, but it could just as easily have been a lost falconry bird from anywhere in the Rocky Mountains. The refuge draws them all in.

Peregrines have been migrating through what is now Bosque del Apache since long before humans arrived on this continent and will continue to be an integral part of the Bosque ecosystem long into the future provided threats to the population, in particular pesticides, are closely monitored. Though often difficult to see in the wild, visitors to Bosque del Apache will be richly rewarded if they take the time to scan the skies for the most magnificent of raptors, the fastest living thing, the most aerial of falcons, the peregrine.

*--Matt Mitchell*



*(Editor's note: Matt is a long time member of the Friends and is currently a member-at-large on the Friends Board of Directors. You can view the photos provided by **Ed MacKerrow** in color in our online newsletter at [friendsofthebosque.org/newsletter.html](http://friendsofthebosque.org/newsletter.html) or at Ed's website at [www.mountainhorizonphotography.com](http://www.mountainhorizonphotography.com))*



PHOTO OPS

## ...After the Cranes Leave

by Ed MacKerrow

By the end of March the cranes have left their wintering grounds at Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge to points northward. For many photographers the refuge is synonymous with sandhill crane and snow goose imagery. Other photographers realize that the magic of Bosque del Apache NWR is the whimsical light, which illuminates it all year long.



Mountains on the horizon cast shadows against a Bosque del Apache sunrise.  
Photo: Ed MacKerrow.

Spring and summer welcome new migrants to the refuge. Songbirds, raptors, and resident mammals provide ample photographic opportunities at this time. I often find a quiet solitude while looking and listening for wildlife to photograph.

Find a quiet spot to park and wait for wildlife to appear. You will be amazed how well this works. I call it the “20 minute rule” – usually if I wait patiently for 20 minutes I will see interesting wildlife to photograph.



Bobcats live on Bosque del Apache NWR all year long. Waiting patiently for photo opportunities like this leaves a lifelong memory for the lucky photographer.  
Photo: Ed MacKerrow [www.mackerrrowphoto.com](http://www.mackerrrowphoto.com)

After honing your bird-in-flight (BIF) photography skills on sandhill cranes and snow geese during the fall and winter you will be ready for the many songbirds, shorebirds, and raptors in the spring and summer. The autofocus systems of modern DSLR cameras are very capable with a little practice. Practice using the expansion focus points on any birds-in-flight. Ravens, gulls, and other birds you may not be that excited about provide practice opportunities – not to mention they too can be imaged nicely with the correct exposure.



The brilliant vermilion flycatcher is great photography subject in the early spring and summer at Bosque del Apache. Try to get an autofocus lock when the flycatcher flies up and away from background vegetation.



The light at Bosque del Apache is magical all year long. Spring and summer provide a beautiful canvas for the landscape photographer.  
Photo: Ed MacKerrow [www.mackerrowphoto.com](http://www.mackerrowphoto.com)

Landscape photography opportunities at the refuge in the spring and summer are some of the best in the Southwest. Reflections of sunrises and sunsets, the moon and the stars, from still quiet water provide many creative photographic settings.

I prefer stormy and cloudy days for photography to bright sunny and clear days. Weather provides interesting drama in your images. Once temperatures start to climb in June and July you can find beautiful light as thunderstorms build over the refuge. Cool mornings up early photographing the sunrise, followed by a cool beverage in town while editing photos, and capped off with late afternoon light on the refuge is a fun day!

*(Editor's note: Ed joined the Friends Board of Directors as a member-at-large in October 2014. This is his second contribution to Bosque Watch and we thank him for his beautiful pictures. To see these stunning photographs in color, go to our online newsletter at [friendsofthebosque.org/newletter.html](http://friendsofthebosque.org/newletter.html) or at Ed's website at [www.mountainhorizonphotography.com](http://www.mountainhorizonphotography.com))*

*The Friends of the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge is a registered 501 (c) (3) nonprofit corporation incorporated in New Mexico. The Friends promotes appreciation and conservation of wildlife and habitat through environmental education and natural history experiences at Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge.*

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in this newsletter, go to:  
[www.friendsofthebosque.org](http://www.friendsofthebosque.org)

**YOUR STORY MATTERS!**

For more information on sharing your story  
about Bosque del Apache with decision  
makers, please contact the Friends at  
[friends@sdc.org](mailto:friends@sdc.org).

**PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA**

The White House, Washington D.C.  
202/456-1111 [President@WhiteHouse.gov](mailto:President@WhiteHouse.gov)

**US Fish & Wildlife Regional Director**

500 Gold Avenue SW  
Albuquerque, NM 87102  
505/346-2545

**Hon. Sally Jewell**

Secretary of the Interior  
18th & C Streets NW, Rm. 6151  
Washington D.C. 20240 202/208-  
7351

**NEW MEXICO SENATORS**

**Hon. Martin Heinrich**

US Senate, Washington D.C. 20510  
202/224-5521  
website: [heinrich.senate.gov](http://heinrich.senate.gov)

**Hon. Tom Udall**

US Senate, Washington D.C. 20510  
202/224-6621  
website: [tomudall.senate.gov](http://tomudall.senate.gov)

**NEW MEXICO REPRESENTATIVES**

**Hon. Michelle Lujan Grisham**

House of Representatives  
Washington D.C. 20515 202/225-6316  
website: [lujangrisham.house.gov](http://lujangrisham.house.gov)

**Hon. Ben Ray Lujan, Jr.**

House of Representatives  
Washington D.C. 20515 202/225-  
6190  
website: [lujan.house.gov](http://lujan.house.gov)

**Hon. Steve Pearce**

House of Representatives  
Washington D.C. 20515 202/225-2365  
website: [pearce.house.gov](http://pearce.house.gov)

**Friends of the Bosque del Apache**  
Membership Application

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Family Members (for Family Membership) \_\_\_\_\_

Street \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

- I want to hear about volunteer opportunities at the refuge.
- I want to receive emails (<2/month) about currents events and issues at the refuge.
- Please contact me about planned giving.

**Please mail with your check to:**  
**Friends of the Bosque del Apache**  
**PO Box 340**  
**San Antonio, NM 87832**

Membership Level:

- Individual \$20
- Family \$25
- Student \$15
- Senior \$15
- Special Friend \$60 or more
- Best Friend \$100 or more
- Lifetime \$1000 or more
- Business Sponsor \$200

- I want to receive the newsletter electronically.

**Shop -- Renew -- Donate ON LINE [www.friendsofthebosque.org](http://www.friendsofthebosque.org)**