

## The Banded Crane and Robert Kruidenier

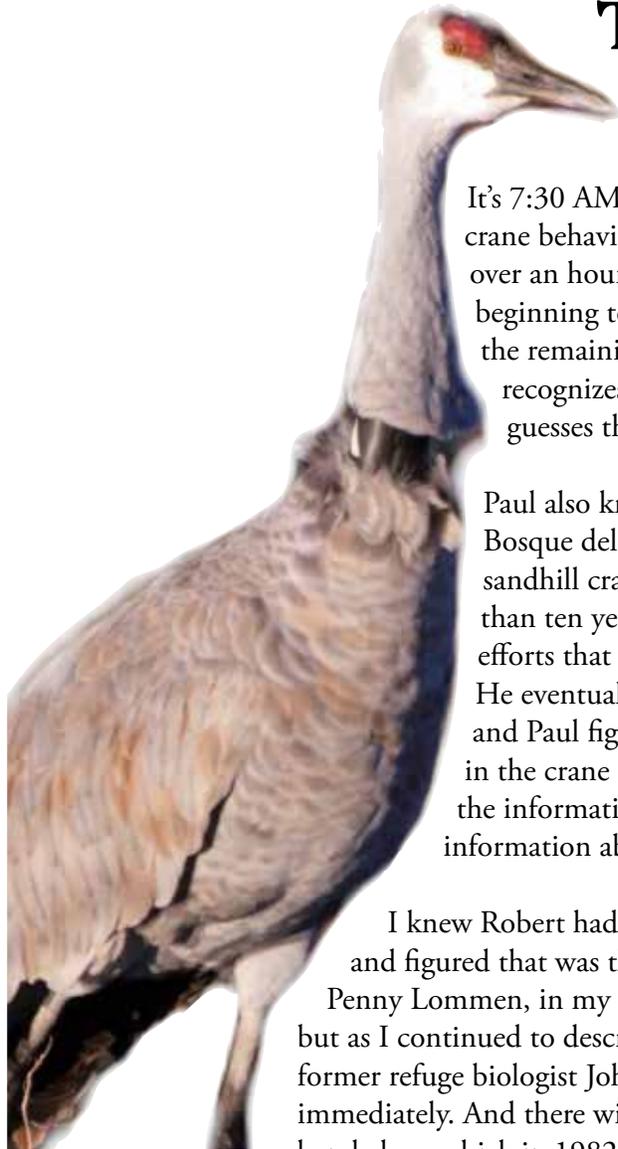
It's 7:30 AM, cold and still on the Friday of the 2015 Festival of the Cranes. Our crane behavior class has been standing quietly by the Crane Ponds along Hwy 1 for over an hour watching the sandhill cranes wake up and take flight. The sun is beginning to warm everyone up when our leader, Paul Tebbel, notices that one of the remaining cranes is sporting a black collar with a white "Λ" on it. Paul recognizes that this is a type of collar used for a few years in the late 80s and guesses the bird is around thirty years old.

Paul also knew that Robert Kruidenier, a friend and for many years a volunteer at Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, had tracked information on banded sandhill cranes and light geese he found on the refuge. Kruidenier spent more than ten years volunteering as a roving naturalist at the refuge. It is through his efforts that there are snags (dead trees) in the ponds to serve as perches for raptors. He eventually published his observations in a small pamphlet that Paul had seen, and Paul figured a copy might be around some place. As the resident volunteer in the crane behavior class I was charged with finding this pamphlet and sharing the information with the class. And so began an interesting three days of pursuing information about this crane with the black collar.

I knew Robert had donated his entire library to the Friends of Bosque del Apache last year and figured that was the place to begin. I quickly enlisted the Friends volunteer librarian, Penny Lommen, in my search. She was pretty sure there wasn't such a book in the library, but as I continued to describe the small pamphlet she remembered seeing something similar in former refuge biologist John Vradenburg's office. Sure enough, she located it on a shelf almost immediately. And there with the entry for 16 December 2001 was the information on crane "Λ" – banded as a chick in 1982 at Grays Lake, Idaho, by Rod Drewein and Wendy Brown. This crane is now 33 years old, and Robert had seen it on the refuge in 2001 when it was nineteen.

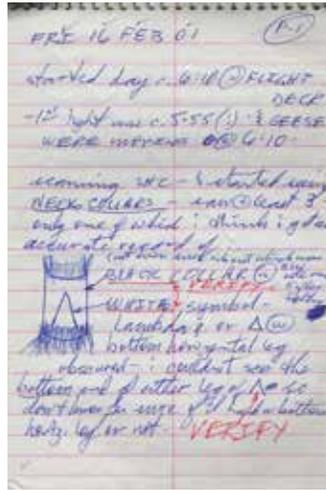
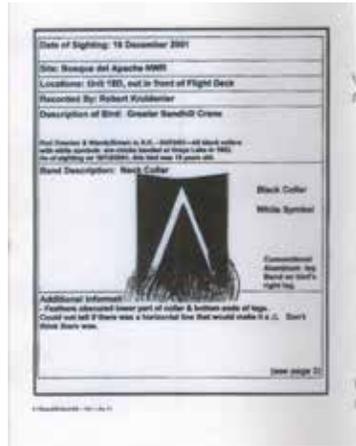
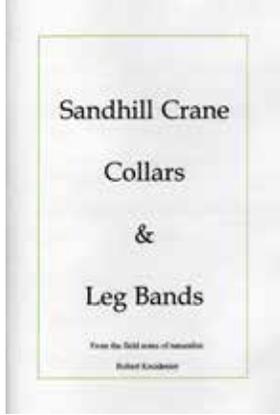
I immediately shared the information with Paul, and then spent the rest of the day telling everyone I ran into, including refuge manager Kevin Cobble, about this 33 year old crane. I also left a photocopy of the band information at the Visitor Center desk for all who were interested. Around noon on Saturday Kevin caught up with me and mentioned that one of the people who had banded crane "Λ" was at the Festival of the Cranes. Wendy Brown was now retired from the Fish and Wildlife Service and was volunteering at a booth on Saturday. She was very interested in talking with me about this crane especially after seeing the photocopy of the band I had left at the

*Kruidenier, cont'd pg. 2*



**Banded crane at Festival, fall 2015 (Photo by Clay Taylor)**

Kruidenier, cont'd



Kruidenier's original field notes, with his record of "Λ" crane observation. Note the date discrepancy\*.

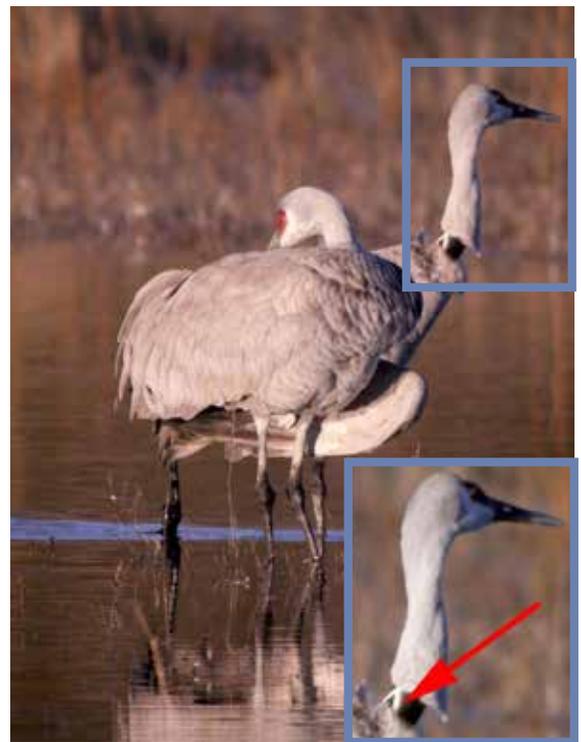
Printed version of Kruidenier's field notes, with record of "Λ" crane observation

Visitor Center. When we finally caught up with each other she asked me if I had seen the memorial to Robert that was in the Expo Tent. I had not.

Robert had died in 2015, and former Friends President Lise Spargo had put together a display as a tribute to all the years he had been involved with the refuge and the Festival of the Cranes. Wendy said I should go look at it as it would give me chills. I headed over to the Expo Tent to see for myself. The memorial covered a large table and included photos, mementos, and a box of Robert's field notebooks from many years. There were probably twenty or thirty notebooks in the box all neatly stacked. One was lying open on top of the rest. There on the only opened page in the box was a large black square with a white "Λ" in the middle – the very band we had seen Friday morning. How had Lise decided to open that book to that page? It really did give me chills.

Wendy mentioned that she was putting together a follow-up report on all the cranes that she had banded and would be interested in any additional information or photos. Paul had mentioned that one of the optics reps had gotten a photo of the crane so I went looking for Clay Taylor in the Swarovski booth. It was Sunday before I finally found him. Yes, he did have photos and was glad to send me a few after hearing the story of the collared crane. He sent them from his camera to his phone and then emailed it to me – technology is amazing! I sent one on to Wendy and you can see a copy in this article.

I have not seen this sandhill crane again but, if you run across it during one of your visits to the refuge, be sure and let me or one of the refuge biologists know date and place and I will send the information on to Wendy Brown. A photo would be great too if you have the equipment and interest in obtaining one.



Banded crane at Festival, with inset showing "Λ" on collar (Photo by Clay Taylor)

There is an old adage, "It takes a village to raise a child." Well, it took almost that many people to complete the story of sandhill crane "Λ." My thanks to all involved, it was a fun three day project.

-- Cathy Sandell  
Volunteer

\*Editor's Note: From other evidence, including this and others of Kruidenier's original entries, it appears that the date of the printed entry was transcribed in error. The sighting was on 16 February 2001 (16/02/2001), and not on 16 December 2001 (16/12/2001).



## FROM THE PRESIDENT

# Cranes – Worldwide Ambassadors

Who among us does not respond instinctively to the rattle of a crane? Whose head doesn't turn to that resonant sound overhead, to that rolling bugle in a distant field? I've seen those sounds take hold of people all over New Mexico and southern Colorado, but especially along the Rio Grande valley. Cranes have been following this migratory path every fall and every spring for millennia. And almost everyone responds to the sound and the sight. Our reactions seem universal, almost visceral.

Cranes range over five continents, come in fifteen species, and their family is very old – tracing their ancestry back some 20-30 million years. So, perhaps our connection with these magnificent birds is a very primitive one – we share space now, on all but two continents around the globe, and we have shared this space for a very, very long time. And perhaps our common, reflexive response has other roots as well. All species of cranes around the world share behaviors with which we resonate. Cranes are monogamous, bonding for life. They share nest-building and incubation responsibilities. And they dance! Oh, do they ever dance. As they dance to bond with each other, we cannot help ourselves. We also bond with them.

This connection with our *gruidae* friends is part of what the Festival of the Cranes is about. It is our chance to see, hear and photograph cranes in a winter habitat. As we observe them in the field, we also better understand the fragility of the food and water resources that comprise this habitat. And we also bond with each other – sharing our love of these magnificent creatures and our concern for the future of their living space.

This year's Festival was also an opportunity for some organizational bonding. The Friends renewed its relationship with the International Crane Foundation (ICF). Our Festival Keynote Speaker was Rich Beilfuss, ICF President and CEO. We set aside a 'booth' in the Expo Tent for ICF, and this space was staffed for much of the week by Jen Stewart, the ICF Development Officer. We toured the refuge together with Kevin Cobble, Refuge Project Leader, comparing notes on our favorite birds. We shared memories and visions. ICF is headquartered in Baraboo, WI. I visited there several times in the 60s and 70s, and have been an ICF member for years. During the 1990s, the refuge and ICF



worked together on foster parenting and ultralight guided migration, trying to establish a whooping crane population along the central flyway. This project was abandoned when efforts were focused on sustaining the existing whooper populations that winter in Texas and Florida. ICF "works worldwide to conserve cranes and the ecosystems, watersheds, and flyways on which they depend." ([www.savingcranes.org](http://www.savingcranes.org)) The Friends' efforts are focused on the Bosque del Apache NWR, and on sustaining habitat for the cranes that winter here. So, our missions are not identical, but they overlap. We have so much in common – water, food, habitat and, oh yes, the cranes.

All around the world cranes are symbols, and have been for millennia. Crane dances are featured in Oriental and Middle Eastern mythology. They are guardians, and dancing incarnations of joy. They are symbols of good fortune and long life and peace. Cranes represent something very old, very widespread, and very meaningful.

So, I invite you to remember when cranes came into your lives, and to recount your experiences with others. Share the joy with friends and neighbors. Invite them to join with us and become Friends ([www.friendsofthebosque.org](http://www.friendsofthebosque.org)). And I invite you to join with us in common purpose with the International Crane Foundation ([www.savingcranes.org](http://www.savingcranes.org)). Join the dance!

--Paul White



**Sarus crane: the tallest flying bird in the world**

# Welcome To New Refuge Staff!

With the start of a new year the refuge is finally getting back to full staffing after a tough year of personnel turnover. Since January 2014 the refuge experienced the loss of 8 permanent staff. All of these positions are critical to the operation of the refuge and we are slowly getting back up to speed. I would like to introduce our new staff.

**Bernard Lujan, Assistant Project Leader.** Bernard came on duty in June, 2015 after we went five months with no Deputy. Bernard was Assistant Refuge Supervisor in the Regional Office in Albuquerque, where he was stationed for five years. Prior to that, Bernard had been the Refuge Operations Specialist and Water Manager here at Bosque del Apache for nearly ten years. Bernard will be in charge of daily operations for the refuge and will be taking the lead in managing the refuge farm program and in supervising the Biology, Visitor Services and Maintenance programs. We are extremely happy to have Bernard back at the refuge.

**Jeff Sanchez, Supervisory Wildlife Biologist.** Jeff started work on January 12, 2016. Although he has big shoes to fill in replacing John Vradenburg, Jeff brings a lot of experience and a proven record of getting things done in his last position. Jeff comes to us from Bitter Lake National Wildlife Refuge in Roswell, NM, where he was the refuge biologist for about eight years. He has done some large, innovative restoration projects at Bitter Lake and was responsible for management of nine endangered species. Early in Jeff's career he worked as a student here at the refuge.

**Shane Weigand, Refuge Wildlife Specialist.** Shane comes to us from Charles M. Russell NWR in Montana where he was a term employee working out of the Jordan field station managing about 200,000 acres with one other staff member. Shane's first week was during Festival, and he handled it like a pro. Shane will be involved in all aspects of refuge management with emphasis on the farm program and safety.

**Megan Goyette, Wildlife Biologist.** Megan started at the refuge in February, 2015 after graduating from New Mexico State University. Megan was a Pathways student who had worked at San Andres NWR, Texas Chenier Plains refuge complex, and Laguna Atascosa NWR while getting her degree. Since the transfer of John Vradenburg in June, Megan has been essentially running our biology program.

**Amanda Walker, Park Ranger.** Amanda comes to us from Chincoteague NWR in Maryland where she worked in the Visitor Services program. Prior to that she worked at Necedah NWR in Wisconsin and Silvio O. Conte NWR in New England. Amanda started here in early November, was a great asset during Festival, and is now involved in running the Visitor Center. With Amanda on board our Visitor Services staff expands to two and we look forward to using her talents in our visitor programs.

**Richard Kimball, Maintenance Worker.** Richard transferred to the maintenance program from the New Mexico Fire District where he was a Senior Firefighter. Richard started

in August and has easily fit into the maintenance program due to his experience with heavy equipment and his maintenance skills. Richard will be responsible for maintaining most of the headquarters buildings and will be an integral part of our field crew on numerous projects throughout the year.

**Eric Krueger, Fire Management Officer.** Eric comes to Bosque del Apache from Balcones Canyonlands NWR in Texas where he has been Assistant Fire Management Officer. Eric has a lot of experience with prescribed burns, as a member of a National Fire team for wildfire response, and on the Gila Hotshot crew in the Gila National Forest prior to joining the USFWS. Eric will be responsible for running the NM Fire District, which is housed here at Bosque del Apache but serves the needs for all the refuges in New Mexico. Eric started January 11, 2016.

The refuge has done well in being able to replace key personnel despite the difficult budgets we have seen in the last few years. We have been able to hire a great cadre of people to fill our vacant positions and I am excited about the future of the refuge. Our visiting public will continue to see positive changes to the refuge as we upgrade our visitor facilities and signage, start new habitat restoration projects, maintain what we have, and continue to improve our farm program. With ongoing assistance from the Friends, 2016 should be one of our best years ever! Please welcome our new employees as they learn what a truly special place this is.

*--Kevin Cobble  
Project Leader*

## 2016 Martha Hatch Award

A highlight of the Friends' Dinner during the Festival of the Cranes was the presentation of the Martha Hatch Award. This Award is given annually to the person who best exhibits the characteristics of an ideal volunteer and who has made outstanding volunteer contributions to the Friends and the refuge. The Award is named after Martha Hatch, who was the Friends' first newsletter editor, and who gave six years of dedicated service in that capacity.

In a break with tradition, the 2016 Award was given jointly to Penny and Jim Lommen, a couple who together epitomize what it means to be volunteers in support of the Friends and the Bosque del Apache NWR - real worker bees of the highest order. For more than six years Jim, with Penny's able assistance, has coordinated the Wildlife Zone during Festival, offering special educational and conservation experiences for families and kids. Penny also has been working tirelessly to organize the biology research library of the refuge, bringing order to a mass of randomly collected and donated material. She also has been helping the Friends maintain its membership database. We are indebted to both Penny and Jim, who truly exhibit the spirit of the Martha Hatch Award.



--Paul White

## John Taylor Trail Dedicated

On a warm morning this past October, friends, family and staff met to dedicate the John Taylor Trail at Bosque del Apache NWR. Taylor's imagination, skill, and vision as a wildlife scientist were instrumental in the transformation of Bosque del Apache into one of our nation's premier wetland refuges. But this day was one for stories and remembrances of John Taylor the man – son, husband and father, teacher, mentor, and colleague. He was a man of wit and humor, whose intelligence and dedication touched the lives of many at the refuge, in his community and within a vast network of friends and colleagues. It was a beautiful day.

For more information about the John Taylor Trail, see *Bosque Watch*, Volume 22, Number 4, October 2015 - [www.friendsofthebosque.org/BWOct2015web.pdf](http://www.friendsofthebosque.org/BWOct2015web.pdf).

--Lise Spargo  
President Emeritus



John's wife Maggie Griffin-Taylor



Family and friends at the trailhead, 10 October 2015



John's father, J. Paul Taylor



## Annual Meeting

The Friends' Annual Meeting was held at the refuge on 17 October, with 31 members participating. Participants heard reports from Kevin Cobble, Refuge Project Leader, on the State of the Refuge, and from our new Executive Director, Deb Caldwell, who spoke about the State of the Friends. Jill Buckley, Treasurer, summarized the financial state of the Friends (sound), and Tom Sizemore, Finance Committee Chair, described the rationale behind the Friends' proposal to shift the start of its Fiscal Year from 1 October to 1 April. The move will ensure that heavy book-keeping chores won't fall right on top of Festival. The motion to implement this shift was approved unanimously.

One highlight of the meeting was the election of new Officers and Directors for the Board. Our new Vice President is Ed MacKerrow, a professional photographer from Nambe. Jill Buckley of Socorro was reelected for another two-year term as Treasurer. We are pleased that Matt Mitchell, from San Antonio, will return for another two-year term as a Director-at-

Large. In something of a first, we are delighted to welcome six new Directors-at-Large to the Board. They are Jane Foraker-Thompson of Silver City, Jim Lommen of Socorro, Sigfredo Maestas of Espanola, Jon Morrison (returning after several years absence) of Socorro, David Policansky of Nantucket, MA (but wintering in NM), and Lesley Urquhart of Santa Fe. A listing of the full Board can be found on the Friends' web site ([www.friendsofthebosque.org/contactus.html](http://www.friendsofthebosque.org/contactus.html)). With this election, we now have not only the full complement of Board Members allowed by our by-laws, but also one of the most talented and geographically diverse groups in memory. We look forward to a rich and productive year.

## Board Orientation

During December the Friends conducted an Orientation session to help acquaint Board Members – both new and old – with how the Friends conducts its business in cooperation with the refuge. The meeting included background information about the refuge and the history of the Friends, as well as reviews of Festival, Nature Store, and general financial operations.

## Festival

During the 2015 Festival of the Cranes (FOC), the weather delivered

lots of sun, and naturally some wind as well. Participants reported this was one of the most successful Festivals ever. Festival Coordinator Michael Hanauer added even more new events for birders and photographers, for a total of 165 event sessions in six days. FOC remains predominately a birding festival with 2.5 times more seats sold and 1.5 times the dollars. Total revenue topped \$162,000 with registration contributing more than \$116,000 of this total. The Expo Tent did a brisk business. Exhibitors continue to support festival events strongly, sponsoring professional photographers and leaders for tours and workshops that provided the bulk of the revenue. Canon USA continues their endorsement and very visible participation, naming FOC as a premier Wildlife Photography Festival in the country. Festival of the Cranes also continues to be recognized as a premier Birding Festival in the country. Kudos to Michael for his exceptional efforts! As noted below, we need your help for the 2016 festival – please call 575-835-2448.

## Volunteer Opportunities

We continue to seek committed volunteers to help achieve our mission to support the refuge. Here are just some of the opportunities:



Kevin Cobble explains refuge policy during the Friends' Board Orientation.

## **Festival of the Cranes**

Though this annual event is of limited duration, it requires months of preparation. Volunteers are needed before and during Festival to set up and run events, work with vendors, facilitate banquet preparations, organize the silent auction, and a host of other activities.

## **Cactus Arboretum – Restoration and Education**

Created in the late 90s the arboretum houses over 100 species of Northern Chihuahuan and other desert plants. After three years of restoration and stabilization -- necessitated by climatic changes and conducted with limited funding -- an effort is being made to increase the arboretum's educational value and impact, and to increase species diversity in this plant refuge.

## **Landscaping – Restoration and Maintenance**

The areas around the Plaza and Visitor Center were last landscaped in 2007 with the completion of the Lannan Center. This area, which is often the first view Visitors have of the refuge, requires constant management and 'gardening' efforts.

## **Library – Cataloging and Archive Work**

The library was created two years ago when the family of Naturalist Robert Kruidenier donated his field notes, books and slides to the Friends. It now houses the refuge's research materials, books, maps and photos, including rare and historic documents. It is a work in progress and volunteers are needed to work with our volunteer Librarian to catalog and archive the materials.

## **Bosque Watch and Habitat Publications**

*Bosque Watch* is the Friends' quarterly newsletter, which includes articles and pictures, business reports, and artwork provided by Board members, Friends and refuge staff, volunteers and local artists. Volunteers with writing, photography and editorial skills are always in demand. *Habitat!* is a joint publication with the refuge, which highlights refuge rules and operations, seasonal wildlife information, trails and other information for refuge visitors.

## **Admin Support – Membership Database and Archives**

Volunteers are needed to assist our Executive Director in managing the Membership Database (i.e. entering new member data, renewals and renewal notices etc.) and the organization and archiving of business records.

## **Friends' House: Restoration and Maintenance**

This historic structure, built circa 1941 by WPA and CCC, is the Friends' headquarters,

representational and work area. Although recently repaired with a new roof, heating system and other renovations, this building still requires a lot of love and care.

## **Naturalist and Tour Group Leader**

The Friends are considering the re-creation of a Naturalist training program to provide tour guides for school groups and other visitors to the refuge. Whether such a program is instituted or not, there is an occasional need for knowledgeable volunteers to guide special school groups and other visitors.

## **Volunteer Coordinator**

A volunteer "volunteer coordinator" is needed to find volunteers for Friends' programs and activities, create a volunteer database and otherwise organize and oversee volunteer activities on the refuge in coordination with refuge staff.

If you're interested in any of the possibilities or want to know more, please call the Friends at 575-838-2120.



Photo courtesy David Policansky

## Digiscoping at Bosque del Apache NWR

Digiscoping is the art of taking photos with a camera or cell phone attached to a field spotting scope. All you need is a camera, a scope and an adapter that mounts your camera snugly against the scope eyepiece. You can also use a pair of binoculars. This is called, "Digibinning." A tripod will keep your rig steady. But you can also rest your rig on a bean bag or towel for support.



Deb Caldwell, Friends' Executive Director, with typical digiscoping setup (Photo by the author)

Bosque Del Apache National Wildlife Refuge is a digiscoper's dream. There are plenty of birds and mammals that are accustomed to humans and will allow a close approach. There is an abundance of dazzling New Mexico desert sunlight. And the holding ponds in the refuge provide lovely reflections of cranes and snow geese.

Along the self-guided vehicle tour loops there are several elevated decks that provide a high place to photograph subjects on the ground or the ponds. The Coyote Deck and Farm Deck on the North Tour Loop are two of my favorites. The advantage of a deck is that it gets you ten to twenty feet above the ground where flocks of sandhill cranes and snow geese are feeding. It allows you to include more birds in the foreground and also include the mountains in the deep background. Be aware, however, that the more people there are walking on the wooden deck, the more likely they will produce vibrations that cause blurry photos.

To counteract this, use a beanbag on top of your scope as a damper.

The easiest subjects to photograph at Bosque Del Apache are the big birds: sandhill cranes roving the grain fields, great blue herons stalking fish in the canals and bald eagles perched in the dead cottonwood trees. Some of the more difficult subjects include roadrunners dashing after lizards and ruby-crowned kinglets frolicking about in the mesquite trees. Any fast-moving subject that requires constant focus adjustment is going to be a challenge. For flight photography, you're better off using a traditional autofocus camera and lens. In fact, some professional digiscopers use autofocus cameras and autofocus lenses as a second field kit. For example Clay Taylor, a sales representative for Swarovski Optics, uses a Pentax digital SLR and telephoto lens for birds in flight.

*Camera settings:* It is best to use aperture priority, auto ISO and auto white balance. Use exposure compensation to brighten backlit subjects. For stop-action, use a shutter speed of 1/1000 second or faster.

*Scope settings:* Resist the impulse to zoom from 20X to 40X or higher to make the image larger. This reduces the available light coming into the lens and makes the subject darker and harder to see for critical focus. It also forces you to use longer shutter speeds, which may result in subject blur. Then again, it forces you to refocus and adjust exposure when every second counts.

Digiscoping requires patience. You have to force yourself to wait for the bird to present a pleasing composition. You have to focus and refocus as the subject moves. When you lose one opportunity, you need to recover quickly for the next.

Digiscoping requires fast reactions. It requires a thorough knowledge of your camera and scope. The mechanics of shooting need to come as easily as driving a car. So you must practice often to keep your edge. Dedicate yourself to improving your field craft.

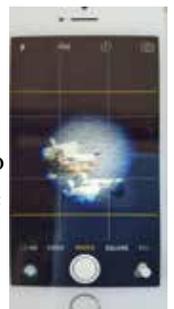
The advantages of digiscoping are that you get a two-for-one bonus: a combination of birdwatching plus digital photography. Digiscoping equipment is lighter and less expensive than traditional gear. A scope, adapter and cell phone together have about one third the total weight of a traditional super telephoto lens and camera. And digiscoping gear only costs about a third as much. Another advantage of digiscoping is that it keeps you a safe distance from potentially dangerous animals or physical hazards.

The disadvantage of digiscoping is that there is no depth of field control. For example, the effective aperture of a typical spotting scope is about  $f/9$ .

Here are some common Digiscoping problems and how to overcome them:

*Shadowing* – These are dark areas or shadows on the image caused by light leaking in between the camera and scope. Make sure the adapter mounts the camera or cell phone tightly against the eyepiece of the scope.

*Vignetting* – a black circle around the image caused by the camera photographing the inside of the scope. To eliminate vignetting, zoom in slightly to remove the black circle or crop it out during post processing on your computer.



## Festival of the Cranes Banners: a community project

Factors that affect image quality are haze, dust, rain and snow. All of these can degrade sharpness and color. The greater your distance from the subject, the greater are the factors that will affect the photo. Therefore, get as close as is safely possible to your subject.

Other factors that affect image quality are the optical glass and lens coatings used in scope manufacturing. Better lenses produce sharper photos. Finally, the size of the digital camera sensor also affects image quality. Professional digital SLR cameras have the largest sensors and produce the best results. Smaller cameras have smaller sensors and don't perform as well in low light situations.

Equipment vendors:

- Eagleoptics.com: spotting scopes, binoculars, adapters and tripods
- Apple & Samsung: cell phones & mobile devices
- Canon, Nikon, Panasonic, Sony, and other camera manufacturers
- Phone Skope: adapters
- Novagrade: adapters

Digiscoping websites:

- Facebook: "Digiscoping"
- Mike McDowell's digiscoping blog: "The Digiscoper"
- Swarovski Optics digiscoping page

--Wayne R. Pope



Wayne Pope – Self-Portrait

Wayne Pope is a volunteer with the Friends of Bosque. He teaches

digital photography at Lansing Community College in East Lansing, MI. Visit Wayne's website at: [waynerpope.com](http://waynerpope.com). Enjoy his photos on Facebook at: [Wayne Richard Pope](#)

The Friends of the Bosque Del Apache have always partnered with generous volunteers from the community to put on its acclaimed and well attended Festival of the Cranes. One not so well known but very visible partnership is with the students and staff of San Antonio Elementary in San Antonio. Those beautiful banners that every attendee of the Festival sees when driving through San Antonio and at the refuge are a testament to the creativity of the children at the local school.

Every fall the students of Ms. Romero's class (4th and 5th graders) take a field trip to the Bosque Del Apache to get to know the animals that live on the refuge. The students are encouraged to learn about and select their favorite animal from the field trip. In the following days the Friends supply the students with acrylic paints, brushes, and artist canvas to begin their project. The teachers use the school projector to project the students' chosen animals on to the canvas. The students trace

the outline of their animal in pencil and make note of the colors and markings of their animals. Then the painting begins under the supervision of the teacher and teacher aide. In a few days those amazing banners are completed and are ready to hang out in the community. The students seem to take real pride in their work and are quick to point out which banner they created! This year even the refuge manager Kevin Cobble rolled up his sleeves and helped us hang them. The banners truly are a community project. The best part is that after the banners hang through Thanksgiving weekend they are taken down and given back to each student artist to take home.

The tradition of making banners for Festival is now well established in the community and I hope you will join me in anticipating next year's all new collection of locally produced art. Knowing all the effort that goes into their production only enhances the beauty of these unique creations.

--Matt Mitchell





## PHOTO OPS

# Optimal Photography Strategies for Dynamic Conditions at the Bosque del Apache NWR

Although most of New Mexico was blessed by a wet summer, the water delivered to the refuge via irrigation channels was low during the summer of 2015. The Bosque del Apache has some of the oldest water rights along the Rio Grande, but since it is located at the very south end of the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District, it can be adversely affected by upstream allotments to other farms. The result is that water levels in the main pond have been lower than normal this year.

Visitors to the Flight Deck at the main pond are not experiencing the large mass-ascensions of snow geese at dawn that they might be accustomed to. Additionally, reduced corn yields and different locations of the corn fields have modified the “usual” behaviors of migratory birds at the refuge. Many birds are wintering at the refuge though! Their daytime foraging patterns and nighttime roosting behaviors have adapted to the changes in water and corn locations. In order to optimize your bird photography it pays to understand how the birds are adapting to these abnormal conditions.

The cranes and other waterfowl like to roost at night in the safety of open water, and then feed during

the day where the grain and crops are located. Conditions are currently changing dramatically due to snowstorms and the aftermath of the holiday season blizzard that hit southern New Mexico hard.

In planning your visit to the refuge three important questions to answer are:

1. Where is any open water for birds to use as safe refuge for the night?
2. Which directions will birds fly out in the morning to forage, and which directions will they fly in the early evening to find safe open water?
3. What are the spatial relationships to the answers of these first two questions and the position of the sun, especially at sunrise and sunset?

Ideally you can scout the refuge conditions in daylight to answer these questions the day before your early morning photography outings. At a minimum please call the refuge Visitor Center the day before your visit to find where the open water pockets are and ask these experts for fresh advice on the current conditions.

In general, the “Crane Ponds” to the west of NM 1 have been good

for morning photography of cranes taking off and for cranes returning to this water roost in evening. This can change with local weather conditions as open water areas freeze and thaw.

The flooded fields in the middle of the South Loop, best observed between Audio Tour stops #5 and #6, were being used as a nighttime roost for cranes before the blizzard hit between Christmas and New Years. Any unfrozen pockets of water in this area are likely to continue as water roosting spots. Northern pintails, northern harriers, northern shovelers, wild turkey, deer, and red-tailed hawks have also been utilizing this area.

Another area for early morning photography has been on the Willow and Coyote Decks where pockets of open water are being used for evening roosts. Morning photography from these locations will have the rising sun to your back and front illumination of the wildlife in the fields. During periods of snowy and cold weather the fields to the west of these decks can become exciting when coyotes or eagles prey on the waterfowl in the fields. One cold and snowy morning I witnessed nine coyotes fighting over two sandhill crane carcasses while six bald eagles



Red sky at morning, sailor take warning -- The Flight Deck is on the left hand side of this panorama taken Dec 19, 2015 facing east. This image shows the water levels just before the blizzard. (Photo Ed MacKerrow)



**Why the waterfowl like the safety of a water roost at night. Coyote and northern harrier live off the gift of life provided by an unlucky snow goose. (Photo Box Leangsuksun)**

hovered overhead dive-bombing huddled Canada geese!

Nice morning lighting and compositions exist from these decks for both long-lens wildlife images and shorter lens landscapes. Allow plenty of time to drive safely to the Willow and Coyote Decks in the morning. Please turn off your headlights while parked at these decks in consideration of the wildlife and other photographers.

During very cold periods birds often seek open water nighttime roosts on the Rio Grande. At sunrise these birds fly from east to west towards the feeding areas on the refuge and to feeding areas further away in the valley.

To capture classic Bosque del Apache images of silhouetted birds against the deep red pre-dawn light try shooting east from the side of the refuge road between the four-way stop at the refuge entrance and the parking lot for the flight deck. Sunrise images have also been good looking east just south of the Bosque Road on the South Loop and north

of the Dabblers Deck. Look for water and ice in the foreground to reflect the colors of the pre-dawn sky.

This past year I have been surprised at how many visitors seem only to visit the Flight Deck at dawn. Unfortunately I have seen a majority of visitors wake up in the dark, drive to the Flight Deck, bear the cold and then realize the majority

of birds are elsewhere on the refuge. With the abnormal conditions this year it really pays to call the Visitor Center the day before your visit and ask for advice on where to see best early morning views of wildlife. Ask for advice on locations of open water to determine your best bet for seeing birds leaving their evening water roosts at dawn.

Remember that the deep red light occurs before sunrise and after sunset. The refuge is open one hour before sunrise, allowing you to get set up for the beautiful pre-dawn light. It all happens very quickly though; so it is important to be at the refuge early and setup with your tripod. I aim to be set up by 5:45AM as a general rule. Although it is hard to predict which mornings will offer up a stunning sunrise, the mornings with weather reports of “partly cloudy” are the most promising.

Compose your sunrise and sunset images so that they have water and ice in the foreground. Water and ice reflect the brilliant colors of the sky adding drama to your images. The [Photography, cont'd pg. 12](#)



**Morning light on cranes that have been roosting overnight in the flooded woodlands southwest of Audio Stops #5 and #6 on the South Loop, late December 2015. (Photo Ed MacKerrow)**



**Great blue heron doing some yoga near the entrance of the refuge tour loop. (Photo Ed MacKerrow)**

recent cold conditions are prime for catching “fire in the mist” images due to sublimation from snow and ice to steam and fog. Look for this effect around bodies of open water surrounded by snow and ice. A good rule of thumb for nature photography is that it is best when the weather is the worst. Storms bring dramatic light to a scene that might be relatively flat with clear blue skies.

After the sunrise birds are foraging in the cornfields on the south end of the South Loop. If you arrive to this area early enough in the morning, after sunrise, try for bird-in-flight images as the birds head to their morning feeding grounds. The ponds on the north side of the road in this area provide nice reflected light, provided there is no wind. Incorporate the angle of the sun relative to your location and the wildlife in your photography strategy.

As the sun continues to rise in the east the area of the South Loop between audio stops #5 and #6 (also mentioned above) has been good for roosting cranes with a nice foreground of water and ice. From there I make my way over to “The

Rookery,” the small pond on the southwest side of the intersection of the South Loop and Bosque Road. Here there have been good sightings of raptors including red-tailed hawks, the Harlan’s variant, and Cooper’s hawks.

Eagles are being seen in their usual perches on the snags in the Main Pond by the Eagle Scout Deck, and perched in the tall trees to the west of the eastern leg of the North

Loop. I slowly drive this segment of the North Loop and park and wait at the windows cutout of the vegetation as the morning progresses. This way I have good sun/subject angles and many birds have been flying into these fields for morning foraging. If you are lucky this is a good area to catch a glimpse of a mountain lion.

As you make your way along to the north end of the North Loop you will probably want to park and photograph the wildlife in these fields. This is one of my favorite places to just relax and wait for the action to happen – and it seems to happen in this area. Recently I have seen javelina, coyotes, and deer in the fields to the north of road. The sun angles are good in this area for most of the day. Also look for greater roadrunners, especially on the south side of the road in this area, to the west of the Farm Deck.

Plan your photography day by figuring out where the open water is, where the feed crops are located, and the sun angle. If there are no winds take advantage of having calm water in the foreground to reflect the sky



**Snow geese having a mid-air disagreement over the fields on the north side of the North Loop (Photo Ed MacKerrow)**

in your images. If winds are present then try to have the sun at your back and the wind at your back so you have birds flying towards you (into the wind) while they are front illuminated.

Some rules of thumb I like to follow for the best light at the refuge are:

1. Photograph looking to the east with water in the foreground before sunrise.
2. Locate myself on the east side of the North Loop in the morning.
3. Spend time on the north side of the North Loop in late morning.
4. Tour the west side of the South Loop in the afternoon.
5. Situate myself in the area around and on the Flight Deck for sunset.
6. Finish my day at the entrance ponds ("Crane Ponds") just after the sunsets for silhouette images of cranes returning to those water roosts.

Even though the water levels at the refuge have been lower than normal, and the crops located mostly in the south part of the refuge, there are still good opportunities for bird photography. This "slow year" has actually been exciting to me, since I am finding new places to capture images, versus always going back to the Flight Deck area for the morning fly-out.

--Ed MacKerrow

A map of the tour loop that shows the stops in this article can be found in the current *Habitat!* (pick one up at the Visitor Center) or download the map at [www.friendsofthebosque.org/Bosquemap2015.pdf](http://www.friendsofthebosque.org/Bosquemap2015.pdf)

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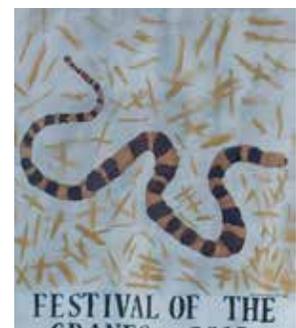
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