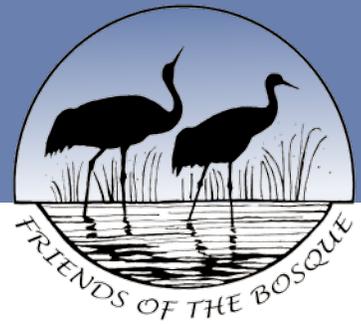


# BOSQUE WATCH



Volume 23, Number 2, July 2016. Editor: Paul White. Graphic design: Robyn J. Harrison. *Bosque Watch* is published quarterly by the *Friends of the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, Inc.*, P.O. Box 340, San Antonio, NM 87832. 575-838-2120 [friends@sdc.org](mailto:friends@sdc.org); [www.friendsofthebosque.org](http://www.friendsofthebosque.org).

## Field Day 2016: A Day of Fun and Excitement for Regional Kids

Bosque del Apache held its 3rd annual Field Day on April 30, connecting children and their chaperones with nature, and encouraging them to get outside, recreate, and make healthy lifestyle choices.

Supporting the 50 kids aged 7-13 and their chaperones were 37 volunteers and staff from all 3 refuges in the Middle Rio Grande region (Valle de Oro, Sevilleta and Bosque del Apache), and their Friends groups. Community involvement included the NMSU Cooperative Extension Service of Socorro County, who donated backpacks and presented about making healthy choices in “Rethinking your Drink,” avoiding drinks laden with sugar.

Along the 5 interactive stations on the Rio Viejo Trail, kids in each group got to: look for and photograph nature on a scavenger hunt; see a peregrine falcon; practice calling turkeys; learn how to identify animals by their tracks and scat; practice archery; and, thanks to Mary Weahkee from the Museum of New Mexico, try their hand at using the atlatl, one of the hunting weapons of our area’s first hunters.

Thanks to our Bosque del Apache Friends Field Day Fund and \$1620 in donations, each child received a T-shirt, hat with their group’s mascot (roadrunner, javelina, deer, bobcat, or quail), water bottle, SD card & reader for their photos, animal tracking guide, and a print of one of their favorite photos from the event. The day culminated with a hot-off-the-barbie hamburger and hot dog lunch, fruit-flavored waters, and juices on the Bosque del Apache plaza.

--Deb Caldwell



## San Pasqual Wildfire – Proactive Planning Limits Damage to Refuge

On the 4th of July, Bosque del Apache (BdA) National Wildlife Refuge had some fire-works of its own. The San Pasqual Wildfire was ignited by a lightning strike around 4:00 PM, and was discovered almost immediately by Park Ranger & Visitor Services Chief Chris Leeser. Approximately 120 personnel from US FWS fire crews responded, along with other agencies and volunteer fire departments from San Antonio and Midway. That day, the San Pasqual wildland fire burned 150-200 acres of mostly non-native salt cedar on both sides of the Rio Grande in the southern portion of the refuge. Fire breaks built as a precaution in previous years assisted the



Photo courtesy Andi Murphy

containment effort. For the next few days all or portions of the Tour Loop were closed to the public to facilitate fire suppression operations. By Saturday, July 9, the fire had burned 720 acres but was 90% contained, with ten fire personnel working to mop up and monitor. Both the North and South portions of the Tour Loop were re-opened to the public.

Refuge Manager Kevin Cobble is very pleased with how effectively and efficiently the fire crews handled the fire. A significant amount of salt cedar was burned with minimal damage to willows and cottonwoods, and endangered species and most animals were unaffected because of where the fire occurred.

In the next issue of *Bosque Watch*, we'll carry a more in-depth article on the San Pasqual Wildfire by Eric Krueger, BdA's Fire Management Officer. In the meantime, the best place to view the affected area is from the Point of Lands-El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro Overlook. Also check our Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/friendsofthebosque](http://www.facebook.com/friendsofthebosque) to read the many posts in response to the fire, and to "Tell us what you love most about Bosque del Apache" and add your own comments!

--Deb Caldwell



BdA NWR/USFWS



BdA NWR/USFWS



## FROM THE PRESIDENT

### It's Elementary ....

The ancient Greeks understood the world in terms of four elements – earth, air, fire and water. Science now suggests a somewhat different understanding, but there are times I feel the Greek view holds some insights for today.

As I sit on my patio at an early hour the sun is rising over the Sangre de Cristo mountains. There is a thin overcast, but sunlight breaks through the gap between mountain peaks and clouds that don't quite reach the horizon. My morning world is bathed in a golden light, touching leaves and grass and trees with a fire that promises good things for the day ahead. We in New Mexico and the West are all too familiar with the devastating effects of wildfire. But there are good sides even to conflagration, offering cleansing, rebirth and renewal. There are magical moments of fiery light like this all around us if we care to look. The Bosque del Apache, our refuge, frequently offers such experiences – especially in early mornings or evenings. Bathed in such light, we sense a world of possibility, of renewal and hope.

It rained last night, and I breathe deeply of air that smells sweet and fresh. The monsoon has begun; so each afternoon our clear, blue sky fills with puffy pillows laden with moisture. Our usually dry, desiccating air has a tinge of humidity, a seasonal blessing. Whether moist or dry, the air here in the mountains is generally clean. Those in the valleys or in other, more industrial states are not so fortunate. But we are all the poorer when we poison the precious, life-giving atmosphere around us. We dim our view, we cloud our ability to see each other, and we diminish the value of the life-filled world around us.

New life springs from the damp ground of my backyard. The grass, flowers and weeds sprouting from this soil do so in a completely artificial construct wrenched by hand from native rock and clay. But across New Mexico, and especially up and down the Rio Grande valley, there is a rich canvas of the best that nature has to offer. In the Bosque area it ranges from new volcanic tuff and basalt of Chupadera and the Magdalenas to ancient limestone and shale of the Quebradas. In this parched landscape, life is tenuous. So the

spirit thrills at each sighting of a whiptail lizard or a pronghorn, of a winecup or chamisa. Yes, our dry, dusty earth does more than offer magnificent, soul-filling vistas; it also lifts up life that is all the more treasured for its fragility.

And then there's water. Sometimes it comes as rain, quickly absorbed in thirsty soil and almost as quickly pushing up new life. Other times it accumulates on mountain peaks as high snow, yielding its bounty in spring runoff, coursing through arroyos and otherwise dry creek beds to join the Rio Grande. We overtax this valuable resource, whether we tap it from our Great River or from our dwindling aquifers, whether for irrigation or for drinking water. The Rio also sustains our Bosque, and the refuge gasps when the river dries in summer. Right now, during our monsoon, water seems abundant. But the season is transient, the abundance is illusory, making the gift of life-giving water all the more precious.

Four elements – earth, air, fire and water. They are all around us; they are the fabric of our lives; and they lift our spirits. We are the stewards; we are responsible; we must choose.

*--Paul White*



## FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

### Reflections On My First Year....

It's been nearly a year since I accepted the position of Executive Director of the Friends of the Bosque del Apache. My lifelong commitment to personal and professional growth has indeed been challenged by the tremendous learning curve I have faced on the job! Thankfully, I have had many wise Board, committee, staff, Friends and refuge volunteers and staff willing to share their expertise with me! My predecessor, Leigh Ann Vradenburg, played a huge role, in everything from bookkeeping and updating websites and databases to making presentations and raising funds, and left big shoes to fill. In the past year the Executive Director's role has been somewhat restructured to focus more heavily on strategy, fundraising, public relations, and development. In the past few months, the Board, staff, key refuge management and I have evaluated the Friends business model and organizational development, and I have focused on learning my role and leading the Board in planning. Now, we are in the midst of a strategic planning process, and are deciding what is needed to help our organization remain relevant, sustainable and vibrant in the coming years.

The US Government launched the US Fish and Wildlife Service in its earliest form in 1871. While I'm sure there have been numerous

struggles over mission and focus over the intervening 145 years, clearly all of the system's refuges have felt the recent financial challenges of sequester and diminishing federal dollars. The Friends commitment, our *raison d'être*, to support the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, and to promote appreciation and conservation of wildlife and habitat through environmental education and natural history experiences at the refuge, is more important today than ever. Our strategic planning process keeps this goal in front of us as we do our work.

The results of this process will: guide us in decision-making over the next five years; demonstrate clear goals to potential donors; help us engage legislators and other leaders in support of our cause; and undergird relevant grant applications.

Several ideas and questions have emerged that I'm especially excited about and that will drive our planning. How can the Friends and refuge connect even more to our surrounding community and bring people together in a common cause during this time of particular political divisiveness? How can we increase appreciation and knowledge of, and interaction with nature (especially with the younger generations)? How can the Nature Store and other Friends' programs collaborate for increased outreach, education, and communication to the public? How can we become

more financially independent and viable to support what we all love, while retaining the heart and soul of our mission? How can we create a strong partnership with the other Friends groups along the Middle Rio Grande valley to accomplish more for our region's refuges? How can we collaborate with other powerful organizations, e.g., NWRA, International Crane Foundation, Lannan Foundation and Audubon Society, to tell our story and garner support for our shared causes?

It is clear from the creative visions that are surfacing during the strategic planning brainstorming that we do not lack for ideas about how to support Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge and promote appreciation and conservation of wildlife and habitat through environmental education and natural history experiences at the refuge. In fact, what we are ultimately able to do is only limited by the resources we are able to generate and use wisely. The challenge for your elected representatives – the Board – and the staff is how to prioritize based on available resources. The challenge for me as Executive Director and for Michael Hanauer as Special Projects Director is how to find the financial support to realize the vision and fulfill the refuge's needs. And, of course, we need the Friends volunteer manpower to implement the projects we are able to fund.

In non-profit organizations, as in all businesses, we must be financially viable to sustain our efforts and make a difference. If we truly hope to fulfill the Friends mission, we need the resources to

do so. Our Friends group helps refuge management do things they otherwise couldn't – for example: acquiring funds to build the Lannan Annex; raising funds to acquire the land to the top of Chupadera Peak; writing various grants to support target projects; supporting research projects and purchasing equipment; purchasing items to make the refuge even more energy efficient; purchasing signage for trails; and advocating for the preservation of this unique and awe-inspiring place that we all love. This time of strategic planning is key so that our direction is set for all of us to remain engaged and working to make the Friends of Bosque del Apache everything we believe it can be.

--Deb Caldwell

### SAVE THE DATES

- 🦋 October 15, 2016: Friends Annual Meeting – Lannan Annex, Bosque del Apache NWR Visitor Center
- 🦋 November 15 – 20, 2016: Festival of the Cranes – Registration begins September 6 (Members) and September 7 (Non-members)
- 🦋 December 9, 2016: Cranes, Candles, Caroling, Cookies & Christmas Shopping – Nature Store & Bosque del Apache NWR Visitor Center. Watch for details in the next *Bosque Watch*.

## STAFF CHANGES

Please join us in welcoming Lisa Markland and Trisha Sanchez to our Friends of the Bosque del Apache NWR staff, and in wishing Kim Royle a fond farewell.

Lisa Markland joined us in April as our new half-time Administrative Assistant. In this role, Lisa provides bookkeeping support to the Friends, including invoicing, payroll, and QuickBooks entry. She also provides assistance with membership, filing, archiving, phone calls, and distribution of key documents. We are very lucky to have someone of Lisa's caliber, as she has eighteen years of banking experience and five years experience as the Payroll Manager for Socorro Consolidated Schools. She hit the ground running, helping us with our yearly audit, and has already been tremendously valuable. Lisa has lived in the San Antonio area her entire life and has been an active volunteer with many organizations, including the San Antonio Elementary School where she has coordinated the Arts and Crafts Fair during Festival of the Cranes for many years.

Many thanks to Kim Royle for her years of service as our Nature Store manager, which ended in late April. Kim's creativity and excellent customer service added significant value to the store. We wish her the best in future endeavors. With Kim's departure, the Nature Store will have a new structure with two Associate Nature Store Managers sharing coverage so that Friends management is on board every day the store is open.

Trisha Sanchez joined us in early June as our new Associate Nature Store Manager. She and Julie-Anna (aka Jack) Blomquist (who has been on board for over two years) will share the management role in the Nature Store. Trisha's unique blend of experience and education will serve the Friends well, even beyond her role in the Nature Store. Her background includes time as a middle school teacher, banker, university resident advisor, and cashier. Her education centered largely on communication, group dynamics, leadership principles, conflict management, and community mobilization. She also has served as a volunteer at two national wildlife refuges (Sequoyah and Bitter Lake), and has a passion for the causes we support. While Trisha is new to the area, she has already learned a great deal about Bosque del Apache and has some ideas on how to expand the Nature Store's and Friends' online presence, membership, and outreach. Please, extend a personal welcome the next time you visit the Store.

--Deb Caldwell



Trisha Sanchez

# PINYON JAYS AND PIÑON PINES

Pinyon jays and New Mexico go together like peanut butter and jelly.

Or, in this particular case, more like piñon pines and their seeds.

These long-billed, sky-blue jays are found in piñon-juniper habitats throughout the West, including New Mexico. In fact, it is estimated nearly one-third of the world's pinyon jay population resides within New Mexico's borders.

There are many reasons to admire this bird, not the least of which is its commitment to its mate. Pinyon jays are monogamous (have only one mate). The couples are so faithful that a researcher in Arizona, who separated couples and placed them with other attractive individuals, could not get them to "cheat" on each other.



*Photo courtesy  
Mark Watson,  
NMDGF*

This seems more impressive considering the highly social nature of this bird. They occur in large flocks that may contain more than 500 individuals and are rarely seen alone. Many jays remain in their birth flocks for the duration of their lives and flocks nest in large colonies, usually in the same general location year-after-year.

As suggested earlier, the pinyon jay has a close relationship with the piñon pine tree and its seed. This relationship is critical to both for survival: for the jay it's a means of sustenance and for the tree, it is dependent on the jay to spread its seeds.

The pinyon jay specializes in collecting, transporting, and caching the seeds. In a good year, one pinyon jay may store in the ground approximately 2,600 pine seeds. As members of the same family as crows and ravens, which are known for their intelligence, pinyon jays are among the smartest of birds.

Individual jays can remember where they cached approximately 95 percent of their piñon seeds and, even after several months have passed, they can remember thousands of locations even if the spots are under snow. In addition, given their monogamous nature, members of a pinyon jay couple ensure they know where their partner's seed stash is hidden – a bird version of a life insurance policy.

The relationship with the piñon pine comes from the five percent

the jay forgets in the ground, effectively planting new piñon pine forests. The relationship is so intertwined that one cannot survive without the other.

The news isn't all good for this brightly-colored bird or the pine. While New Mexico remains a haven for the pinyon jay, these birds are not doing particularly well. Since the 1960s, it is estimated that pinyon jay populations throughout the West have declined by more than eighty percent, making their population among the fastest declining of the western forest bird species.

The reasons are varied, including the past clearing of piñon-juniper woodlands and die-offs of piñon pine due to drought and bark beetle attacks. Researchers are also looking at the potential impacts of climate change.

These factors have left the pinyon jay with an uncertain future and, as a result, has been listed by the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish as a Species of Greatest Conservation Need. The department is working with a variety of partners to protect and improve pinyon jay habitat so future generations of New Mexicans may continue to enjoy this smart and social bird while ensuring the continued seeding of piñon pines throughout its range.

*--Peggy Darr*

*This article is from the Spring 2016 issue of New Mexico Wildlife, and is reprinted with permission. Peggy Darr is the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish nongame avian biologist at headquarters in Santa Fe.*

2017:  
Southern Ecuador Birding,  
Natural History  
and Something Totally  
Different

Come and join the Friends on the last of three trips to Ecuador. We'll arrive in Guayaquil on February 24th for ten great days of birding and natural history. We've birded north and central Ecuador along with the Galapagos. Now we are headed to southern Ecuador, home to some of its largest National Parks. This pristine area is home to the long-wattled umbrellabird, striated heron, snail kite, northern crested caracara, eared dove, white-whiskered puffbird, speckle-breasted wren, Pacific royal-flycatcher, yellow-tufted dacnis, guira tanager, orange-crowned euphonia, gray hawk and many more. We'll be birding in lowland forest and mangrove estuaries, to cloud forests over 9,000 feet above sea level: just about every life zone found in Ecuador.

Our last night in country will be the last night of Carnaval in Ecuador and we'll be able to go watch if we want to. For the photographers in the group this should be a great opportunity for something totally different.

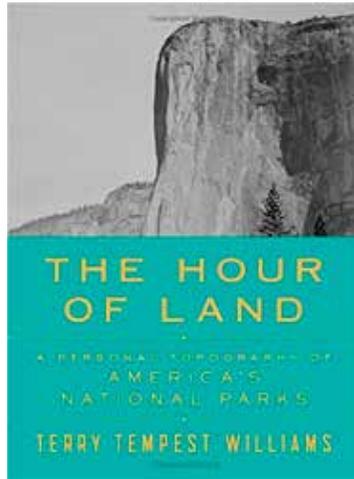
For more information check the link below:

<http://www.holbrooktravel.com/where-we-travel/americas/ecuador-birds-wildlife-friends-of-the-bosque>



THE HOUR OF LAND: A PERSONAL TOPOGRAPHY OF  
AMERICA'S NATIONAL PARKS

By  
Terry Tempest Williams



The Hour of Land is part tribute, part memoir and part sermon. This book is a collection of essays centered on twelve of America's national parks and monuments. For Terry Tempest Williams this journey is decidedly and intensely personal. Her writing is not abstract, but speaks from shared experience with family and friends. Visits to our national parks are often said to evoke wonder – a very individual reaction. Like us, Tempest Williams experiences that personal wonder and meditates upon it in some of the essays. But “shared” experience goes beyond the personal, deepening memory, provoking questions, and making our interactions with

nature more multidimensional. In reading this book we share the journey, the experience with the author. She reminds us that not all of our parks are preserves for wildness or beauty. Some are set aside to remind us of our history, and some serve both purposes if only subtly. Tempest Williams takes the reader to the edges of these lands, boundaries often under threat from development and oil and sovereignty issues. She reminds us how many of these treasured places were appropriated from Native Americans. Tempest Williams probes these often difficult crevasses with tenderness and sometimes with measured anger. But she also offers hope. For example, she points out how Native Americans are, however belatedly, being made partners in the management of some parks. She also recounts how individuals and groups have stood up to entrenched interests, and invites us to be part of the struggle.

The essays exhibit Tempest Williams's dexterity with the written word. The reader is drawn in to this personal journey with language that is often lyrical, like the stroke of a hand that is both gentle and encouraging. Sometimes the words flow smoothly, but the message is difficult, provoking anger and recoil, like fingernails across a blackboard. But she gets our attention. Tempest Williams invites us to care and care deeply about “America's best idea.” But she wants us to care enough to respond, not just to visit, but to act boldly to ensure the future of these “breathing spaces for a society that increasingly holds its breath.”

In this 100th year of our National Parks, this book is worth reading. In my own reading, some passages spoke to me so clearly and so memorably that I highlighted them – I lost count of how many. The book will provoke you, it will enrich you, it will inspire you.

Find your copy in the Nature Store.

--Paul White



## Annual Meeting

Please, mark your calendars! The Friends Annual Meeting will be on Saturday, 15 October, at 10:00 AM in the Lannan Annex of the refuge Visitor Center. Kevin Cobble, Refuge Manager, will offer his personal take on what has been, and will be happening on the refuge. Deb Caldwell, our Executive Director, will give her annual update on what's been going on with the Friends. And, of course, we'll be conducting our annual election of Officers and At-Large Directors for the Friends Board. Lunch will be served, and our afternoon program will follow. Refuge staff will lead us on a guided walk of the newly re-developed Rio Viejo Trail. We are also planning an activity for young people not wishing to go on the trail walk. See you there!

## Festival of the Cranes Is Coming

Our 29th Festival is coming! Want an early peek at Festival event sessions? Check out the Friends website ([www.friendsofthebosque.org](http://www.friendsofthebosque.org)) for event postings. The Festival brochure will be available in August and online registration starts September 6th. All Friends members will be given online registration priority for one day starting September 6th at 9:00 AM. Non-member registration begins on September 7th at 9:00 AM. So, become a member and register early. It's easy to join – just visit our website. Click the green and blue <<Join Us>> button, and in few minutes you will be

joining one of the strongest Friends groups in the country. Friends encourage online registration but realize this doesn't serve everyone. A hard copy registration form will be available in our brochure, and can be snail-mailed to the Friends office. Starting September 8th after 1:00 PM all snail-mail, hard-copy registrations will be entered manually in the order they were received. The fastest way to register is online, and this enables both speed and accuracy. You know instantly if the event session you desire is available. So, please consider online registration.

We have planned an exciting Festival, with more than 158 event sessions – 45 of them new – over 6 days. For more than 10 years Festival has been a premier birding festival and that tradition continues with 67 birding event sessions. In the last few years Festival has also expanded photography events to the point folks are describing Festival as one of the top photography festivals in the country with 64 photography event sessions offered this year.

American birding legends Kenn and Kim Kaufman are joining Festival in 2016, leading multiple birding tours. Kenn will be our keynote presenter for Friday night's social. **Our tours offer a rare opportunity to spend time with Kenn and Kim Kaufman as they bring a wealth of knowledge about our feathered friends and how best to protect them.**

Are you a serious birder? If so, look for the brochure's Birder's Corner for information. The BRANT group is back offering even more birding intensives. Did you hear

the talk about last year's Owling Expedition Intensive? **Have you had difficulty getting your ticket for Owling Expedition Intensives? Friends and BRANT Nature Tours have doubled the seat availability.** Check out the Advanced Birding Intensive for something new this year.

Talk about something uncommon: a serious line-up of twelve photography pros is joining us this year, leading the way to better photography. Friends and the VLA are bringing back the VLA Nighttime Photography workshop sponsored by Sigma and led by Roman Kurywczak.

Festival continues to bring you the best of crane and raptor workshops with over twenty offerings. Have you ever spent the day birding on a boat? Festival offers Land, Sea and Air four times during the week with two being intensives. Our keynote for Friends dinner will be a double feature, with Refuge Supervisory Biologist Jeff Sanchez and Refuge Manager Kevin Cobble. Learn what's changing on the refuge and what's planned for the future. Our Expo Tent once again brings the leading camera, optics and eco-travel exhibitors to Festival. Help us celebrate a national treasure and place Festival dates November 15-20 on your calendars. The fun is about to begin!

– Michael Hanauer,  
Special Projects Director

## Support Friends with Amazon

Is Amazon one of your most frequently-visited shopping sites on the internet? Did you know that simply by going to "[smile.amazon.com](http://smile.amazon.com)" instead of to "[amazon.com](http://amazon.com)",

## COLLABORATION ON NWRA ADVOCACY TRAINING

Amazon will donate 0.5% of your purchase to the Friends? It's really that simple! Enter "[smile.amazon.com](http://smile.amazon.com)" when visiting Amazon, designate *The Friends of the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge* as your non-profit group the first time you visit, and one-half of 1% of the sale will be donated to the Friends.

From then on, every time you purchase something from Amazon using [smile.amazon.com](http://smile.amazon.com), Amazon will designate the same fraction of your purchase price for the Friends. It costs you no more than the effort to type 'smile' in front of the internet address for each visit. For more information about the Amazon program, go to <http://smile.amazon.com/gp/aw/ch/about>. Just imagine - every shopping spree can be a boon to the Bosque del Apache NWR. Smile!

During April, the Friends of the Bosque del Apache NWR hosted a Communications Workshop sponsored by the National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA). Last autumn, NWRA invited the Friends to host this workshop during the Spring of 2016. In consultation with NWRA, we decided to expand the vision and create a fun, educational, two-day event involving the three refuges of the Middle Rio Grande Valley. These refuges (Bosque del Apache, Sevilleta and Valle de Oro), together with their Friends groups, held refuge tours for NWRA, the consulting group Resource Media, and dignitaries from national and regional US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) offices, and Friends of the Alaska National Wildlife Refuges (ANWRs). The evening of Friday, April 1, following tours of Valle de Oro and Sevilleta, we enjoyed a delicious catered dinner, and presentations by Jim Kurth (USFWS Deputy Director) and Dr. David Raskin (President of the Friends of ANWRs). The Friday evening events were held at Sevilleta's UNM Field Station, and many participants stayed overnight at Field Station residences.

On Saturday, the three Friends boards moved to Bosque del Apache for breakfast burritos and a short tour by Refuge Manager Kevin Cobble. Then we all convened for an NWRA-sponsored workshop led by Resource Media. The purpose of the workshop was to learn value-based messaging, and how to tell our stories effectively. The ANWRs with their unique issues and values was used as the focus for examples and methods developed during the workshop. Of course, the skills carried over to local issues as participants developed specific strategies for addressing regional concerns. We all learned skills for better advocacy and creating compelling messages. The two-day event was a wonderful opportunity for the refuges of the Middle Rio Grande to work together and to become more familiar with new state and national audiences. Expect to see more such collaborations in the future.

--Deb Caldwell



Dr. Benjamin Tuggle, Southwest Regional Director, USFWS, enjoys dinner at Sevilleta's UNM Field Station.



John Raskin, President, Friends of Alaska National Wildlife Refuges



## WE NEED YOUR HELP!

Like any volunteer organization, the Friends need willing hands to pitch in and help the organization run. Our programs and other support for the refuge won't last long without your help. You can make a difference!

Here are some of the many ways you can work with the Friends to support the Bosque del Apache NWR:

### Board of Directors or Board Committees

Starting this fall, the Board will need a new President, a new Secretary, and three new At-Large Directors. The Friends also needs willing volunteers to serve on its Committees – where the real work gets done. Opportunities include:

- Education Committee
- Nature Store Advisory Committee
- Development Committee
- Finance Committee
- Ad Hoc IT Committee (Infrastructure, Communications and Website)

### Other Volunteer Opportunities

- Festival of the Cranes & Special Events
- Nature Store Customer Service
- Cactus Arboretum – Restoration and Education
- Landscaping – Restoration and Maintenance
- Library – Cataloging and Archive Work
- Publications – *Bosque Watch* and *Habitat!*

For more information, call 575-838-2120, or email to [friends@sdc.org](mailto:friends@sdc.org).

## WESTERN KINGBIRDS

You won't see Western Kingbirds at your birdfeeders, they don't eat seed or suet but these large flycatchers don't hide from view. If you know where to look, these ashy gray birds with a yellow belly are easy to spot.



Western Kingbirds position themselves on open perches like utility lines, fences and exposed tree limbs. From these vantage points they flutter out to capture one or more insects on the fly and then return to their perch where they may shake or beat the insects into submission before eating them. They will also sometimes swoop to the ground to grab insects. Although Western Kingbirds sometimes eat berries, their diet is almost entirely made up of bugs like bees, moths, butterflies, crickets, flies and the like.

It's easy to spot kingbirds since all this perching and hunting is done out in the open. Their nine inch long size also distinguishes them. We'll see Western Kingbirds all summer long, especially in open country. I've seen kingbirds perched high on a line across an intersection fly down low to snag insects as cars wait for the light to change.

According to bird expert Stan Tekiela, author of *Birds of New Mexico*, parent Western Kingbirds teach young how to hunt, bringing wounded insects back to the nest for the young to chase. Apparently this is just the training young kingbirds need.

Western Kingbirds head south to Southern Mexico and Central America for the winter but it can take them a while to make the trip. Late summer many of these kingbirds will begin to congregate in our region of the country where they will fully molt before continuing south in the fall. It's not uncommon to see some Western Kingbirds in southern New Mexico all winter long although their official winter grounds are well south of our state.

The nesting range of the Western Kingbird covers the entire Western U.S. This range has expanded over the last hundred years because of human-caused activity. Because kingbirds like open areas, when forests were cleared, kingbirds moved in. Each spring, males arrive first and establish a nesting territory. Once paired up, the female builds the nest while both birds aggressively defend their territory from predators and other kingbirds. They will even chase off Red-tailed Hawks and Kestrels. The defense of their territory includes use of a harsh buzzing call, snapping of their bills and the raising of their red crown, usually hidden from view. Western Kingbirds are monogamous for a nesting season and will usually stay together feeding their young for up to three weeks after the babies have fledged. The rest of the year, Western Kingbirds are mostly solitary.

*Reprinted by permission. Anne Schmauss is the co-owner of Wild Birds Unlimited in Santa Fe and she loves to hear your bird stories. She is the author of For the Birds: A Month by Month Guide to Attracting Birds to Your Backyard and Birdhouses of the World.*



PHOTO OPS

## Photographing the Sounds of Summer at the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge

Songbirds advertising their territory, bullfrogs croaking, and the buzz of insects are just some of the sounds of summer at the Bosque del Apache NWR. The refuge is an oasis that draws wildlife in from a huge area. It is a unique summer photography opportunity. Landscape, macro (flower and insect), and wildlife photographers can capture amazing photos during the summer months. I frequently have the entire refuge to myself this time of year!

There are plenty of shady places to situate yourself while photographing. Listen carefully to the different bird calls to help locate species of interest. The southern end of the South Loop, and the seasonal intermediate road on the South Loop, are great places to listen for vermilion flycatchers, western tanagers, and lazuli buntings. These colorful songbirds are stunning photography subjects. I prefer to set my autofocus to a point, or a single center square for these smaller targets. Opening up your aperture (i.e.  $f/4$ ) allows for artistic blurring of the background. A bright colored bird, with a glint of reflected light in its eye, composed against a beautiful bokeh (blurred background) makes for an artistic image. The hardest part is tracking these smaller birds in the foliage and obtaining focus

before they flutter off to a new spot. Plan things so you have good sun angles. In early morning I want to be on the crossover road on the South Loop, or on the east of the North Loop. I look for places where the edges of dense vegetation are close to water (either irrigation ditches, ponds, or flooded fields). Once you situate yourself do not forget to prepare your camera settings for what you expect to be photographing.

Is the shutter speed fast enough to capture movement? Is the aperture set to blur the background, or to ensure a larger bird is entirely in focus? For larger summer birds like egrets or herons I have my aperture set to  $f/7.1$  or smaller. You can open up your aperture for the smaller songbirds. The depth of field (DOF) is a function of the aperture size, lens focal length,

and the distance to your subject. There are many good smartphone apps that will let you calculate the DOF for your camera body, lens, and distance to the subject. A useful website for calculating focus distances for your camera and lenses is: <http://www.dofmaster.com/dofjs.html>.

In addition to the multitude of songbirds that summer at the refuge, there are fabulous photo opportunities with egrets, herons, nighthawks, shorebirds, ducks, and other waterfowl, including the majestic American white pelicans. Great egrets are one of my favorite summertime species to photograph at the refuge. Look for them off the seasonal tour road off the South Loop, the main pond, and the “Old Rookery” where the South Loop intersects with Bosque Road (see <http://www.friendsofthebosque.org/>

**A vermilion flycatcher with the background intentionally blurred. (CANON 1DX, EF 600 MM F/4L, AT 1/1600 SEC, F/6.3, ISO 400). PHOTO: ED MACKERROW**



[mapNMandtouroop.html](#)). Cattle egrets, snowy egrets, herons, and grackles are also to be found in these areas.

Since egrets are bright white proper camera exposure can be tricky at first. Camera exposure modes (evaluative or matrix) that evaluate the entire scene may over expose the white bird. In order to retain details in the white feathers of the egret it is best to use manual exposure and spot metering on the egret. Set your camera to “M” manual mode and spot metering. Focus your center spot on the subject and adjust your exposure by changing the shutter speed, aperture, and ISO while looking at the light meter your camera provides (i.e. the exposure scale). Take a few images and check your image histogram for clipping or clipping alerts (“blinkies”). Try to “expose to the right”, so your histogram is centered more to the right than the left, without clipping on the right side.

There is an important tradeoff you need to consider when adjusting the exposure. Do you want the main focus of your image to be the bird, or the bird in a larger landscape scene? If you desire a landscape scene to be the main subject of your image, you may choose evaluative metering (or “matrix metering”) mode that averages the exposure over the field of view. Frequently I see images where a bird is perfectly exposed, only to have a very scenic background be incorrectly exposed. Experiment while out in the field and soon you will be able to recognize exposure challenges that need special



**Egrets roosting as the sunset lights up the “Old Rookery” at the Bosque del Apache NWR. (Ed MacKerrow)**

attention. In these cases it is usually best to utilize manual exposure and spot metering to set up the desired lighting in your image.

For some photographers, choosing an automatic exposure mode (e.g. aperture priority or shutter priority) is simpler for them. I often hear “the camera is

smarter than I am” by those that choose this approach. Although today’s cameras are indeed advanced, they have a hard time determining the correct exposure when the scene has a large range of tonal values. How does the camera know there is a bright white egret in a small portion of the image? Using automatic exposure modes on a backlit shiny black raven, or a bright white egret in a dark pond is challenging for the camera to figure out on its own. Scenarios like these are perfect for spot metering in manual exposure mode. Give manual exposure mode a try. I find this also slows me down, in a good way, and forces me to think more about what I am doing in the field relative to the final image I desire.

The summer landscape at the refuge is not what most people expect. Instead of “dry and brown”, I find many lush green scenes. The classic “Bosque skies” known for their bright orange and red sunrises and



**A lesser nighthawk zips along feeding on insects by the flight deck. (CANON 1DX EF 600MM F/4L II + 1.4X III, AT 1/1600 SEC, F/7.1 ISO 640)**

sunsets are still present in the summer. If it is not windy I try to find some still water in the foreground to reflect the vivid colors of the sky in my composition. Afternoon thunderstorms provide big white puffy clouds contrasted against deep blue skies. If you are lucky you maybe able to photograph rainbows and lightning too.

Brilliant cactus blooms located at the desert arboretum to the northwest of the Visitors Center provide a fabulous setting for photographers. Often you can compose images of native desert plants with quail, roadrunners, and summer migrant bird species in them. If you situate yourself for ideal lighting and sit quietly for a few minutes you are likely to experience some beautiful birds visiting the blooms.

At the end of a summer day I situate myself along the end of the North Loop, by the flight deck, to photograph nighthawks, swallows, and shorebirds. Acquiring focus on nighthawks and swallows in flight is extremely challenging. Practice tracking and focusing on these erratic fliers to rapidly improve your bird-in-flight photography skills. Patience and persistence are required.

Bring lots of cool water, a nice big sun hat and insect protection (bug juice and long sleeved shirts and long pants) on your summer photography outings at the refuge. You will be pleasantly surprised at the photographic opportunities the refuge provides in the summer months!

--Ed MacKerrow

*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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[sigfredo@windstream.net](mailto:sigfredo@windstream.net)

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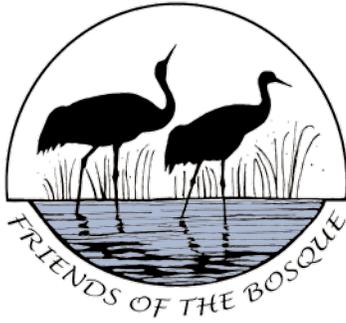
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