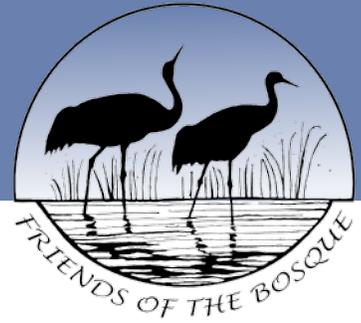


BOSQUE WATCH



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Water, Water, But Not Everywhere

Once again Bosque del Apache NWR heads into the growing season with increasingly limited water availability as a result of worsening drought conditions across the southwest. As we face this challenge it is important to remember we are not alone; farmers, ranchers and many others in our community whose livelihoods depend on water are all feeling the pain. The Refuge relies on water delivered through a complicated system of irrigation ditches and canals during the summer months to not only grow agricultural crops but to flood wetlands. It is necessary to flood and then slowly dry the wetlands during the summer months. When these rich, saturated wetland soils are exposed to the warm New Mexico sun, the perfect stage is set for the growth of food producing wetland plants that will help feed migratory birds in the fall and winter.

In preparation for another dry year, the Refuge has developed a plan that prioritizes our use of our limited water to ensure we create the greatest benefit for wildlife. The foundation for our new approach is an understanding that water availability is dictated by environmental conditions (snow melt, rain, etc.) as well as other concerns for water, such as the Rio Grande Compact, endangered species requirements and water rights prioritizations.

Limited spring runoff from snow melt and lack of rain is driving the limited water availability in the Rio Grande Valley. For this year the Refuge plans to limit summer wetland water use to approximately 300 acres of our best food producing wetlands. Concentrating limited water on the best producing acreage will maximize wetland plant production capabilities and hopefully yield the most food for our wintering birds. By comparison, if water conditions were favorable, the Refuge could develop excellent habitat on over 1,000 acres of wetlands. If water conditions do not improve by this fall, the Refuge anticipates even greater challenges to flooding many of its wetlands in time for the arrival of migratory birds, including cranes, ducks and geese.

**John Vradenburg, Supervisory Biologist and
Aaron Mize, Deputy Manager,
Bosque del Apache NWR**

Ducks Are Us!

(From the Editor: For those of us who swoon at the sight of a brilliant male mallard, graceful shoveler, or petite teal, there is entirely too much fuss made about those gangly cranes, and pale-by-comparison light geese. Ducks of various kinds are year round members of the Bosque del Apache community and as such are indicators of the overall health of this carefully managed wetland environment.)

According to Refuge Biologist Ashley Inslee, Refuge staff, volunteers, researchers, and students band ducks to contribute to a larger data pool compiled by the Bird Banding Lab, which is jointly administered by the United States and Canada. The information gathered when the birds are banded and when bands are returned to the Lab, allows scientists to study and understand the birds' movements, population demographics, survival, and behavior. Some of the metrics obtained include the species, age, sex, weight, and wing length of each bird. When these metrics are combined in calculations by species and population, the resulting values reflect the health or body condition of the birds. In the case of Bosque del Apache, these numbers allow the Refuge staff to assess whether they are making enough foraging and loafing habitat available to the birds so that they are able to metabolize energy and avoid stress. The bottom line? Happy, healthy, relaxed ducks breed well and successfully raise their young.

But speaking of volunteers and students, as you might know, included in every definition of environmental education comes the term 'hands on learning.' So last month, Friends Environmental Educator Andrea Brophy brought students from the San Antonio Elementary School to study birds in a way that couldn't be more 'hands on' – by holding and banding birds! With help from volunteers and the Refuge's biology staff, the students got an up close view of the different kinds of waterfowl (ducks) found at Bosque del Apache NWR. Andrea said that each student got to band, measure, weigh and release two birds - fitting in some math, biology, and total awe.

"This was the best day of my life," wrote one student in her nature journal.

"I want to do this when I grow up!" exclaimed another.

Thanks again, Friends, for helping us provide such a rich educational experience to our local kids. It's 'hands on' experiences like these that last a lifetime.





FROM THE EDITOR

Spring is always a turbulent time in this region. Day and night temps can vary enormously and the winds blow and blow and blow. After a dry winter the local farmers are raising storm clouds of dust as they prepare for the planting season. At the Bosque things also look a bit drab as the staff begins to drain some of the ponds now that our winter avian visitors have left. I have to say however, there was a hardy flock of about two hundred light geese who apparently didn't feel the urge to 'go north' in early March and for several weeks they remained at the north pond on Highway 1. The pond was more than half empty and their feet must have been draggin' on the bottom before they finally decided to play catch up with the rest of their kind. But, this being spring and all, they were quickly replaced with a large flock of seagulls who were decorating the farm fields north of the Refuge the last week of March. Go figure.

Despite all, spring also brings with it a sense of expectation. Fields of corn for next year's wintering cranes and geese need to be planted, ditches cleared and salt cedar removed. By early summer students and researchers will return for their summer's work and the bunk house will be full. This year however that sense of expectation is tinged with the extra tension that politics and environment are both capable of producing. After five years of drought, we are looking at another dry year. Fresh water, the most precious commodity on this planet, is in short supply and like every other user in the Rio Grande Valley, the Refuge has to stand in line for its share. Though water is what fills the ponds and floats the birds in the winter, it is a necessary component of every facet of the seasonal cycle at the Refuge. It is as important in July as in November.

With this comes the added expectation that this will be a bad fire season. Our fire

house on the Refuge is a regional office responsible for an area much larger than just the Refuge. Question is, how will the other source of tension—politics—affect the Fire and Refuge staff? And that brings me to the current state of 'sequestration.' A number of folks have asked me what effect it will have on the Refuge and I have in turn asked Refuge management the same question. We had thought to run an article in this issue on the impact but the truth is, at this point, no one knows. As you can imagine there is a lot of discussion going on at the Federal level in the Department of the Interior and the Fish and Wildlife Service as the effects slowly become apparent. Cuts in budget have been expected and planned around for some time and most everyone I have talked to says 'we can manage.' But, when you start talking about possibly furloughing staff or closing the Visitor Center some days each week, well then, everyone gets tight jawed.

What I can say for sure is that we have an enormously talented and dedicated staff at the Refuge and at the end of the day they will do whatever it takes to meet the mission. They (and the Friends) will adapt to the budget cuts and with your help and support, we'll get the job done. But as for the weather, all I can say is.... pray for rain. . . .

Lise Spargo, Editor

In The Garden

In a few weeks, Executive Director Leigh Ann Vradenburg and Friends Environmental Educator Andrea Brophy will be heading to Ithaca, New York, for training in a software program developed at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology called YardMap. This trip is funded by a grant from Cornell and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and when Leigh Ann and Andrea come back they will be able to teach others to use this program. This new software tool will be a good match for our educational workshop series and provide a great resource for mapping our Cactus Arboretum. The overall goal of the YardMap initiative is to obtain maps of bird habitat on a small scale around the country as a complement to Cornell's eBird data.

As the arboretum begins to renew itself after several hard winters, you have to wonder what the folks at Cornell will make of some recent visitors to the garden. In the last week of March, Andrea looked out of her office window to see six wild turkeys strolling by. Scrambling for her camera, she snapped this picture of one of these shy birds.





Here are some highlights from the January and March 2013 Board Meetings.

Refuge News

In January the new Refuge Manager, Kevin Cobble, spoke to the Board about the budget situation saying that this was the worst federal budget situation he had seen in his 33 years of service. If sequester comes to pass, (and it did), there could be as much as a 10% cut for the Refuge. Budget cuts are particularly critical for Bosque del Apache because it has one of the highest fuel costs in the Refuge system. Also, there is currently a hiring freeze and the Visitor Center and Services are critically understaffed.

(Editors' note: at this writing, the impact of budget cuts and possible furloughs has not yet become clear at the Refuge level.)

Despite the current situation Kevin has some long range plans for the Refuge footprint which in time the Friends may be able to help with. These include the possible construction of a 'green' bunkhouse that would allow more people to come to research and volunteer at the Bosque.

Festival Report

Feedback from exhibitors and Festival visitors continued to be very good with very positive comments about the new activities in the Wildlife Zone, the Expo Tent, and the addition of more Crane Workshops. Planning meetings for Festival 2013 have already begun and booths in the Expo Tent are already being reserved.

Education

In January, despite 30 degree weather, we had a good turnout for the Bird Count For Kids (and adults). The list of birds was long, and included six eagles!

Teaching unit 3 has been completed, with four classes on birds focusing on habitat, adaptations and ecosystems. The kids met with Board member Matt and his falcons, which were a big hit, and Refuge researcher Ryan DeVore did a presentation on his elk project (which includes telemetry collars that allow tracking) which generated a million questions. The kids got to track each other with the telemetry equipment.

The Socorro Environmental Education Needs Assessment has been distributed to Socorro County School teachers and we hope to have results soon.

State of the Friends

In January we wrapped up the first quarter of FY2013 and we are definitely on a better track than last year. December was a great month in the Nature Store and although cold weather in January brought lower visitation rates, the two month average of sales was good. Overall the Nature Store compared to last year is doing well, back up to 2010 numbers.

Friends Executive Director Leigh Ann Vradenburg has installed a much needed new desktop computer that has already eliminated a number of outdated software problems, resulting in fewer 'crashes' of the overall system.

Leigh Ann has submitted two new grants for the Friends. These include a grant for special training on a new citizen science program developed by Cornell Lab of Ornithology called Yard Map, and a second grant that will hopefully help fund 3 events: an outdoor skills workshop for kids, a volunteer planting event at the annual Friends meeting, and an expanded bird count for kids in the winter.

An ad hoc committee of Friends Board members is continuing to work to upgrade our webpage. Leigh Ann has added new pages for hiking and points of interest on the Refuge. Check'em out.



UNEXPECTED TREASURES

It was one of those days in the middle of Festival, Festival 25! no less, when everything was running just fine, But 'running' was definitely the operative word. As I came flying through the Friends House I bumped, literally, into Paul Tebbel. Paul as many know is an expert in Sandhill Crane behavior who has been graciously sharing his knowledge with Festival goers for many years now. The conversation went something like this.

Paul: *Hi Lise, your books will be here soon.*

Me: *Huh?*

Paul: *Your books for the Friends from Robert.*

Me: *Who?*

Paul: *Robert Kruidenier*

Me: *Oh, Robert, of course.*

But...ah...what books?

Paul: *Robert and his family are donating his library of books...to the Friends.*

Me: *Oh! Great!...Ahhhh, how many are there?*

Paul: *Oh, about 5 maybe 8 boxes. Where do you want them?*

Me: *Where? Ah.....let me think about that....I...ah... will get back to you....*

Well the books found a temporary home on the floor in the back room. As it turns out, they include a wide variety of texts, slides, pictures, and perhaps most fascinating of all, Robert's birding journals. As I walked around the Festival that day I came to several conclusions. First, the Friends should have a library and Robert's generous gift was a good start. Second, a library of the sort I envisioned would not fit into the already crowded workspaces in the Friends House. But late that day, as I came through the newly refur-

bished Biology Annex, I was stopped in my tracks by the new conference room that had—Yeaaaaa!—three, big, blank, walls. Hmmmm, walls that could easily accommodate nice, big, bookcases. As luck would have it I almost immediately ran into Aaron Mize, Refuge Acting Manager, and asked, “How would you feel about starting a research library that could be housed in the Biology Annex?”

“Funny you should ask,” he said, “we had always planned to do something like that when the work on the Biology building was done.”

As of March, Robert’s books have been cataloged and existing Refuge references and research materials will follow over the months to come. Board member Jerry Goffe acquired a laptop donation from PC Magic Pro on which to begin the cataloging, and we have a Friends member who has offered to build shelves this summer. In time we hope to reach out to various Libraries, institutions and professionals to increase our holdings, and to find funding for on line journals and an Audio Visual system. Although there will be a section for Bosque History and older, ‘special’ books, the intent is to produce a regional resource containing current, scientific information and support for Refuge Biologists, Staff and researchers. The Friends wish to thank Robert Kruidenier and his family for this wonderful gift and the inspiration it provided for this new library.

Lise Spargo, Board President

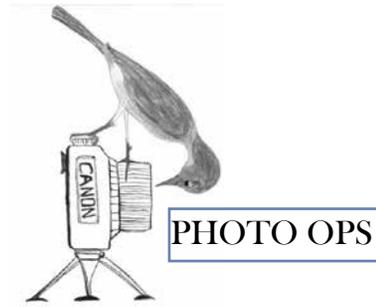


Verdin



Yellowlegs

Wilson’s Snipe



Spring migration is in full swing. Apart from the wind and dust that make for some gritty days, it’s a really great time to be out and about at Bosque del Apache. Around the ponds you are likely to see shorebirds (waders) of different species, which are good photographic subjects.

As the name shorebirds says, these birds forage along the shallow edges between water and land, and are most numerous here in the spring. Some are elusive. Wilson’s Snipes, for instance, can hide in plain sight in muddy, grassy regions, but once you see their movement and manage to get your focus, snipes make for very nice photos. Killdeers with their plaintive cries are ubiquitous at this season. Once they lay eggs, often on the side of the road, or their young hatch, parents are very protective and may even challenge your car! This behavior may give you the opportunity for a close-up of their lovely eyes, but try to minimize their stress by quickly aiming, shooting and moving by.

Among the spring and summer shorebirds, American avocets and black-necked stilts are distinctively long-legged, striking and easy to spot. The latter carries its name well as it stalks along on shocking pink legs. A few summers ago we even had a few nesting in the pond near the flight deck. Greater yellow legs and long-billed dowitchers are other shorebirds you may see. And if you manage to get a photo of a rarer wading visitor, you’ll gain distinction among the local birding community. Keep a lookout for dunlins, godwits and long-billed curlews.

Nesting birds and their nests make for good pictures too. The intricate woven sac nest of a Bullock’s oriole or the fluffy ball nest of a verdin are good examples (verdin nests can be found near the visitor’s center and the Cactus Garden). Canada geese escort their goslings on their first aquatic adventures and tiny quail chicks scurry through thickets and across roads following their parents. As you travel around the Bosque you may even see kingbirds feeding their babies or with luck, see the fluffy head of a baby least bittern along the ditches or ponds.

You’ll find plenty to see and photograph in the spring, but be observant as some birds are distracted by parental duties and may just fly in front of you. Remember to dress in layers, use sunscreen and to carry insecticide for evening excursions. Bring water, too, and enjoy spring at the Bosque!

Ingrid and Kumar

(Comments and questions: bosquebirds@gmail.com)



2013 Festival of the Cranes Photo Contest Launches in May

You don't have to be a professional photographer to enter the Festival's Photography Contest. All you need is a camera, enthusiasm, and a trip to the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge! Instructions for entering will be posted on our website in May: www.festivalofthecranes.com



Black-necked Stilt

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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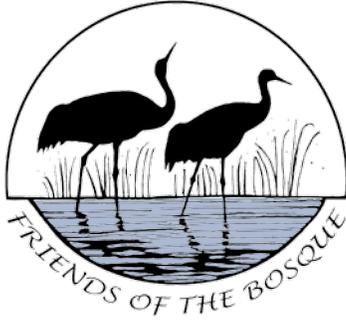
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