



# BOSQUE WATCH

WINTER 2022



*Crane Fiesta Winning Landscape Photo by Barbara Magnuson*

## Jessica Jia, New Visitor Services Lead, Returns to Bosque del Apache

Bosque del Apache gained a new Lead Park Ranger (aka: Visitor Services Manager, or Visitor Services Lead), Jessica Jia, on October 25, 2021. She joined us from her most recent station at Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge, a coastal refuge renowned for migratory birds near Houston, Texas. Jessica comes with a diverse background both academically and professionally: She received her bachelor's degree in urban planning with a minor in sustainability from Arizona State University, Phoenix, and her master's degree in biological sciences from the University of Northern Colorado, Greeley. She has worked for one U.S. Fish & Wildlife (USFWS) regional office, five USFWS stations/complexes, one Municipal Office of Water Conservation, and one National Park. Most of her professional and academic experience has been in the desert southwest, in which she feels a deep sense of belonging and wonder. If you get a chance to meet Jessica or see her work, you'll note that she is an engaging writer and illustrator, and a talented storyteller. Of special interest to

lovers of Bosque del Apache, Jessica is the product of one of the summer intern hiring programs that the refuge and Friends group supports. With permission, I share below



*Jessica at KBR KidsFest 2019*

what Jessica posted on her personal social media the day before she started her new job at our refuge. In it, she outlines her history with Bosque del Apache, how this place has changed her life, as it has so many others, and her feelings about the future in this place we collectively call home.

Now, in Jessica's words from her social media post on October 24:



*Park Ranger Jessica Jia with Red-Eared Slider Turtle*

Bosque del Apache is actually the refuge where I first got into the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS). I grew up in the suburbs, mostly with the company of books and movies. I thought I wanted to be an engineer or an architect, so I went to school for engineering. In 2014, I was looking for some sort of summer job and saw an opportunity to intern with wildlife refuges. I had no idea what that was, but I applied to this one because it was near-ish to my university in Phoenix. It's about a six-hour drive going straight east from the Phoenix area. I had no idea what to expect, but I packed my car and headed over.

That summer, I went to the woods to survey endangered birds, assist biologists monitoring endangered mice, and catch invasive bullfrogs. I spent my time crawling through thick forests of willow plants, stumbling terrified into large bones left by mountain lions, and using my clipboard as a shield as I crashed my way out and back to dirt roads. I would come back, change clothes, and help in the Visitor Center (where interns and volunteers greeted visitors) and help in the Bosque Nature Store. I'd learn from the volunteers and visitors about birds, and I started to learn what a red-tailed hawk looked like, how to tell hummingbirds apart, and that I shouldn't worry about the

mountain lions at that site because since the deer bones were white, they were old and sun-bleached; but if they were yellow, they would have been fresh. I also learned from a mountain lion biologist that so far mountain lions seemed to go for prey under 5 foot 1, and my being 5'2" and possibly 5'3" with my boots on statistically might put me just above their prey height range. I wasn't convinced, but I'm sure if I had a tape measure the mountain lions would probably nod and listen if I explained it to them.

That summer really changed my life in a critical way. I found a community of wonderful people and a connection to the desert and wild spaces that made me feel like the world was a big and wondrous place. I kept looking for internships and opportunities with the USFWS after that. I loved working with biologists and lovers of nature. Every little thing I saw I could find someone and to ask what it was, what it does, and why it's important.

It's been six years since I was here as a summer intern. Starting tomorrow, I have an opportunity to shape this place as the lead in visitor services. I am excited to have an opportunity to return and give back to this place, but at the same time I actually almost didn't apply for this job because I didn't feel as if I had enough experience to be a lead of this flagship station. I have so much to learn, and I'm really excited for this opportunity, but I also feel kind of inadequate to make reality the hopes I have for this place.

Bosque del Apache has changed, like everywhere in the desert Southwest. We face uncertainty about how to manage the acreage with less and less water each year. For the

better part of fifty years, the station has built a worldwide reputation for phenomenal wetland landscapes filled with thousands of five-foot-tall cranes and thousands of snow geese. But now we realize that we never told the story of the other endangered species—the smaller ones, the ones with quieter voices: the mouse population that’s estimated at twenty-four individuals; the small minnows that depend on the flowing streams. The most vulnerable are often the smallest, the quietest, the fewest in number. Is it really that different when we look at our human communities? During historic droughts, when the water is scarce, who is the last to receive a drop?

The Middle Rio Grande Valley is home to farmers, ranchers, wildlife, indigenous peoples, immigrants, retirees, and the poor and the rich alike. How do we coexist with our many loves, our many stories, our many histories?

When scarcity appears to loom over our heads, what does it mean to survive? And better yet, what does it mean to ‘thrive’? There are no answers in our short lifetimes, but only, as a brave friend said “living the question”—reflecting on what it means to live with spiritual calling.

I pray that I can live these questions with open-heartedness, compassion, sincerity, and vulnerability. I don’t know the answers, but I’m here through the uncertainty. Through it all, we must stand in “tenacious solidarity with the vulnerable” – the feathered, furred, and human.

*As Adrienne Maree Brown said, “Remember you are water.”*

We are excited to welcome Jessica to this station and to work with her, and likewise, she is looking forward to working with all the community here.

*-Deb Caldwell, Executive Director, Friends of Bosque del Apache*

## Join *The Oasis*: A Sustaining Community of Hope

Are you worried about the challenges facing our beautiful refuge and motivated to take action but don’t know where to start? We invite you to join a new community called ***The Oasis*** – a community that is rooted in taking hopeful action together on behalf of this ecosystem that astonishes us with its beauty and provides us such refuge.

Friends of Bosque del Apache is the only nonprofit organization whose sole purpose is to support Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, providing funds for education, advocacy, research, and infrastructure. Since 1994, Friends has invested over \$6.5 million on the refuge: providing funds for critical environmental research to protect endangered species; funding college internships for young scientists; funding educational trips to the bosque for school children; repairing and maintaining infrastructure on the refuge; purchasing farm equipment, and even adding acreage to trails and square footage to buildings. Our community of “Friends” has made all of this and more possible. The work that you support creates, inspires, and cultivates hope for everyone who visits.

We’ve all been touched by the beauty and wonder of Bosque del Apache and none of us wants to imagine a world without it. People come from around the world to enjoy its light, its landscapes, and its wildlife. While the world around us changes, the Bosque del Apache has endured through the ages – it’s a very rare ***Oasis*** in the Chihuahuan Desert and is part of the last 2% of wetlands that wildlife can depend upon in the desert Southwest. Because waters from the Rio Grande are shrinking and in such demand, refuge staff must do the work here that our once wild river did. This is a precious place deserving of these efforts. This is a refuge for many species, including for us humans. This has been a particularly anxious time for many,

but the cycles of nature and returning birds in each season are truly symbols of hope – resilient in the face of challenges and so deserving of our respect and our protection. We are living in a time when the impact of our choices and actions matter – our actions really make a difference now. This is why we've created a new program called **The Oasis**.

Why did we choose the name “**The Oasis**”? Just as our beautiful refuge serves as a wetland **Oasis**, providing for so many species who depend upon it, we envision **The Oasis** community as a wellspring of support – for the refuge and for one another. Your monthly participation ensures that we can continue to provide for Bosque del Apache's evolving needs. We deeply appreciate our annual and one-time givers; however, consistent monthly support creates stability for our community - not only allowing us to plan for the future, but also helping us to meet unexpected needs and the growing challenges the refuge is facing.

Every drop you contribute counts and will be reciprocated with opportunities to learn and engage with other members – people just like you, who want to flock together – just as in nature, there is power in numbers and we can help one another while helping this magical place.

Benefits of your **Oasis** Membership include:

- Exclusive **Oasis** newsletter delivered monthly, containing stories from the refuge and what your contributions are making possible.
- Invitations to quarterly community conversations with Friends, refuge staff, and/or special guests. These won't be passive, and boring Zoom-fatigue-inducing calls, but real conversations with experts to answer your questions and help you deepen your understanding of the refuge.
- Early registration for special events.

- Flexibility and control over your monthly gift – We give you access to your Member Portal, where you can update your contact information and make changes to your contribution.
- Special offers, and more as we grow.

No matter how much you choose to give, whether it's \$5 a month or \$200, you will receive the same opportunities and be a valued part of our community.

Please join us. As we kick off **The Oasis**, our Friends Board of Directors has joined together with a matching challenge of \$23,000! This means that the first \$23,000 pledged by new **Oasis** members will be doubled. Now is the best time to double your impact.

By joining **The Oasis** you'll not only contribute to sustaining our beautiful and rare refuge in the Chihuahuan Desert; you'll also create an authentic community of care, concern, and support, sustaining all of us. It's not too late to defend our precious resources, but we do need to take action now.

Join us now in making a critical difference for this place we so love. Click this link to join today: <https://friendsofbosquedelapache.org/Oasis/>



Photo by John Courtney

# Crane Fiesta 2021

Thank you to everyone who attended our second annual Crane Fiesta in November 2021. This was our second fully virtual major event. Our most well-attended webinars had over sixty registrants. While Covid-19 restrictions made it impossible for us to host our normal in-person Festival of the Cranes this year, we were thrilled to once again interact with new Friends and our amazing long-term Friends. This year we had just over four hundred folks join us online.

As part of our mission to educate about the environment and bring Bosque del Apache to you, we partnered with many experts: staff from Bosque del Apache, videographer Steve Siegel, Sandra Noll and Erv Nichols, Catherine Sandell, Fort Craig and Public Land Interpretive Association, Matthew Mitchell, IRIS PASSCAL, Wonders on Wheels Mobile Museum, Prairie Dog Pals of Albuquerque, the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, and the Very Large Array. We also partnered with many sponsors, including Hunt's Photo & Video, Zeiss, Vanguard, Tamron, Olympus, and Sony to bring you some phenomenal photography workshops. This year's event featured the winning art from our art contest: the amazing art of Christina Baal.



*Winning People Category Photo by Geri Combs*

Additionally, we held our usual annual Photo Contest that normally coincides with Festival of the Cranes. We continued with changes made last year, including having four categories. Previously, our categories were two, Refuge and People, which were

often a difficult fit for all the terrific photos we received. We expanded to four categories: Sandhill Cranes, Wildlife, Landscapes, and People. You can find winners' names and their stunning photos from the 2021 Photo Contest on our website at <http://tiny.cc/contest2021>.



*Winning Wildlife Photo by Bill Gorum*

We appreciate the generosity of our attendees, who paid over \$10,400 in registration fees and donations. We also thank our sponsors, who covered the costs of the photography professionals, whom we thank for sharing their tips and techniques with the viewing audience. We learned a great deal from this year's three-day virtual event, and we will be incorporating these new skills as we plan future events.

We hope to deliver both a virtual and in-person Festival of the Cranes in 2022. We are in the beginning stages of planning, but it's looking as if we'll have our virtual elements the week before Thanksgiving, around the time that Festival has usually occurred, and it will likely be only one or two days in the timeframe around November 17-19. The in-person Festival of the Cranes is being planned for December 1, 2, and 3. We are currently beginning our talks with stakeholders – City of Socorro, New Mexico Tech, Hunt's Photo and Video and other photography companies, birding experts, and others – as we plan Festival of the Cranes 2022. Save the dates and stay tuned for more news as plans solidify! Whatever is in store for us globally in 2022, Friends hopes to see you at our future events, be they virtual, hybrid, or in-person!

- *Julie-Anna Blomquist, Festival of the Cranes manager*

# Welcome to Tommy Rosales, New Facilities Operations Supervisor

We are thrilled to welcome a talented member of our local community to the refuge staff! On October 25, 2021, Bosque del Apache welcomed Tomas (Tommy) Rosales as the new Facilities Operations Supervisor. Tommy is a third generation Middle Rio Grande Valley farmer, part of the Rosales family that is famous for the excellence of their chile crops (taking first place this year in the state competition for red chile, and placing first in two previous years for their green chile). Tommy grew up here farming and deeply loving the land. He also has sixteen years' experience with the Bureau of Reclamation, doing habitat restoration and construction. In that role, Tommy worked closely with the community and also with Ladd S Gordon Waterfowl Complex, part of NM State Game and Fish (with whom the refuge partners in growing corn for our wintering waterfowl). He could not be more perfectly prepared for his job at Bosque del Apache!

Tommy's skills and experience will serve him well in his new role as Facilities Operations Supervisor at Bosque del Apache. Tommy is in charge of a team of six staff members and is responsible for the refuge farm plan, facilities maintenance, and implementation or oversight of construction-type projects, such as installing gates, installing fencing, grading roads and units, and monitoring the well repair projects. His team works closely with the biologists on site, especially in maintaining the moist soil units.

As I spoke with Tommy, I found his enthusiasm contagious and felt relieved to have someone of his caliber joining the refuge team in such a critical role. He says that he loves working with the land (often using heavy equipment) and watching things grow. He talked to me briefly about the five-year plan he's working on to increase planted acreage for wildlife, to acquire needed equipment (like a larger ripper and corn planter) to accomplish work more efficiently and quickly, and also try to ensure that the crops and viewing spaces are "eye appealing for the visitors." Tommy



*Tommy Rosales, Facilities Operations Manager, with Refuge's New Ripper*

says that his top goal is to have a "topnotch farm on the refuge with plenty of food for the wildlife, which will serve them well and also keep them from feeding on surrounding private properties, making local farmers unhappy." He is currently reviewing proper crop rotations, optimal placement for crops, infrastructure improvements, and planting with water conservation in mind.

Tommy enjoys collaborating with others and is deeply invested in partnerships and community. On the refuge, he is already building a strong relationship with the biologists, other refuge staff, and the Friends. He knows several people in organizations like Bureau of Reclamation and NM State Game and Fish, and these are important partners for the refuge. Tommy has relationships with many farmers in the valley and has always been very involved in the community – his family, especially his mom Linda Rosales, taught him the importance of partnering and serving the community. He chuckled, "I hope people trust and like me half as much as they do my mom. So many people just love her." If my interview with Tommy is any indication, this key role at the refuge is in very capable hands.

- Deb Caldwell, Executive Director, Friends of Bosque del Apache

# Friends Purchase a New Ripper for the Refuge

The Friends Group recently purchased and donated a new eight-foot ripper to the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge (refuge). Why is this such a critical addition? Rippers are used to loosen topsoil before planting fields, whether for traditional agricultural crops like corn and triticale, or for restoration of habitat back to native grasses and forbs. The refuge used to rely on a four-foot wide ripper for the prep work for all our farm fields and restorations. The replacement of our old four-foot ripper with this new eight-

foot ripper means that we can prep fields in half the time that it used to take us! This means our staff can get their work done more efficiently. Reducing the time is also important because we share tractors with other refuges, and sometimes the tractors were not available as many weeks as we needed using the old, four-foot ripper. Thank you, Friends, for your continued support of the refuge. We couldn't accomplish everything we do without your support.

- Deb Williams, Bosque del Apache refuge manager

## Many Hands Make Lighter Work



L to R - Mary Ruff, Cari Powell, Jon Morrison, Eileen Comstock, Andy Jochems, and Chuck Kooshain (not pictured, Cyndie Lawrence-Dever)

Many people in our community care about Bosque del Apache, and they volunteer to help with projects when they can. On Saturday, October 23, Arboretum staff member Cari Powell hosted a volunteer workday with the Socorro Rotary Club and their Satellite Club. Due to a heavier than normal monsoon season this year, the Arboretum had started to “re-wild” with many native grasses popping up, including six weeks grama (*Bouteloua barbata*), prairie dropseed (*sporobolus heterolepis*),

and sideoats grama (*Bouteloua curtipendula*). Trails were beginning to look overgrown, and the cacti seemed to be hiding. Our Arboretum experts (Tom Hyden and Cari Powell) found it very difficult to keep up the arboretum alone. Jon Morrison, President of the Rotary Club (long-time Friends member and one-time Friends board president), along with five other Rotarians joined Cari for the morning clean up. Included in these ranks was Friends of Bosque del Apache’s own board president, Mary Ruff.

Many hands make light work, and the volunteers were able to finish weeding paths throughout the garden as well as lay down crusher fines to keep the path accessible and safe for all refuge visitors. A few resident packrats are causing havoc at the Arboretum. Although packrats are wonderful archivists and native to the refuge, they do make some unsightly nests. Volunteers stepped in with enthusiasm to help clear out a few nests so that native plants can be seen.

Cari was able to provide volunteers with a quick tour of some of her favorite plants, as well as provide information about all the work that Friends do to help make Bosque del Apache such a great place for the animals and plants who make this refuge their home. Refuge park ranger Amanda Walker and USFWS volunteers also worked in the plaza area outside of the Arboretum to put our best face forward for guests. Many thanks to the Socorro Rotary Club and its Satellite Club, as well as the many USFWS volunteers, for their efforts and time. If you are interested in volunteering at the Desert Arboretum or learning more about the native plants it houses, please reach out to Cari Powell at 970-759-7299.

- Cari Powell, Desert Arboretum staff member, Friends of Bosque del Apache



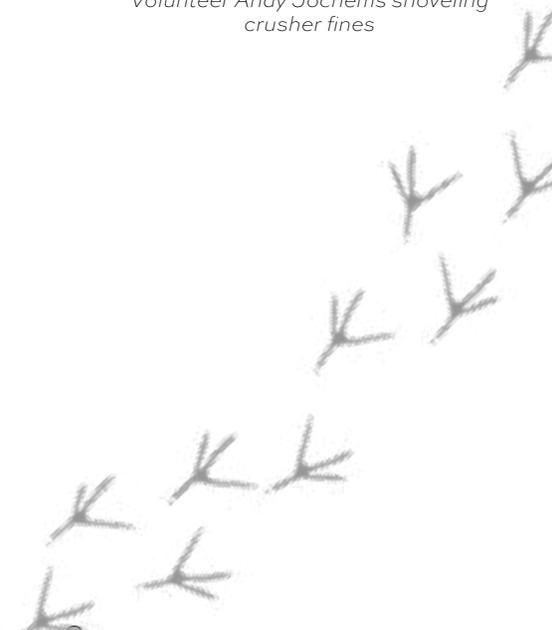
*Volunteer Andy Jochems shoveling crusher fines*



*Volunteers Chuck Kooshain and Mary Ruff clearing paths*



*Volunteer Cyndie Lawrence-Dever removing packrat nest*



# A House for a Mouse

It's not uncommon for people to be physically taken aback when I tell them I work to conserve mice, specifically the New Mexico meadow jumping mouse (*Zapus hudsonius luteus*). One can't blame them; I hadn't even heard of the jumping mouse until I saw the job posting that would bring me to Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge (refuge) months prior. "A mouse?" they say, "You can protect a mouse? Why?" Ah there it is - the eternal question. Why would time, money, and effort be put into this little creature? By all accounts, these mice are not as grand or well known as some of the other species that have benefitted from human protection. Whooping cranes, California condors, sea otters, and black footed ferrets are just some of the few animals that have been successfully shepherded back from the brink of extinction. With possibly only twenty individuals left in the Middle Rio Grande Valley, the jumping mouse could use a shepherd. However, how does one protect an animal that most people in the world, let alone New Mexico, don't know exists? They don't offer themselves to be spectacularly displayed in wildlife photos; there is no tourism to see them; and I would be hard pressed to think that anyone has nostalgic memories of their childhood featuring the jumping mouse. It makes a person wonder why these little mice have warranted such effort.

To understand the fuss and muss about these rodents, I think it is only right that I tell a little about the mice themselves. They

are by all accounts a little odd compared to what normally comes to mind when we think of a mouse. Considered a habitat specialist, they rely exclusively on riparian areas where herbaceous seed-bearing plants grow. This foraging habitat is composed of sedges, forbs, and grasses—plants that are typically found in areas with extremely saturated soils next to waterways. Due to their habitat needs, jumping mice are quite accomplished swimmers, often crossing waterways to reach desired food sources. Their swimming ability isn't the only thing that makes this wonderful, little creature unique; they are also completely nocturnal. They often weave cup-like nests out of grasses and other vegetation as they rest during the day; they forage at night. The jumping mouse also has one of the longest hibernation periods known for small mammals—approximately seven months. With such little time to breed, raise young, and build up enough fat reserves to service the next hibernation, the mouse must have access to abundant food resources. Unlike many other rodents of similar size, the jumping mouse typically has only one litter a year, with few young. Thus, these endangered mice are at a disadvantage because they are subject to an increasingly changing environment.

Like most small rodents, the jumping mouse is quite shy and secretive. Though there was a time when they were physically captured and individuals were known, the population has decreased so much that this



invasive surveillance method is no longer used. Instead, trail cameras are stationed in areas with ideal herbaceous cover and seed abundance. (I have always found it humorous that most refuge visitors keep their cameras and eyes trained at the sky, and yet I am always looking at ground level.) Combing through the photos that the cameras take isn't as tedious as one would expect. There are plenty of other little creatures that trigger the cameras' response. Cotton rats, harvest mice, short-tailed weasels, javelina, common yellow throats, Virginia rails, and sora birds (a grayish-brown rail) are all frequent visitors.

The jumping mouse is not particularly small, like a harvest mouse, nor is it particularly large like a cotton rat; it ranges somewhere in between. Its fur is shaggy and has an orangish hue to it, thus earning it a piece of its scientific name "Zapus hudsonius luteus," luteus being a Latin word for orange. Its back feet have incredibly long toes, almost finger like, that it uses for grasping grasses as it climbs up to eat the seed heads. Its tail is astonishingly long, reaching twice its body length. In short, the jumping mouse looks like a Looney Tunes mouse brought to life. A young cotton rat can look a lot like a jumping mouse, but after a moment of scrutiny, you would find them different. However, the flash of orange, the long feet and even longer tail, and the shortened snout peeking through the foliage caused me to pause. I found a catch in my breath as I looked at a photo, and then a smile came when I found one. It's a moment of relief and excitement when I can say, "Yes, they are here," after seeing the result of the hours, days, and weeks of work confirmed in a photo.

It is the mandate of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) "to work with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people" (USFWS official website). This duty extends from the animals as large as a Bryde's whale to something as small as the jumping mouse. A protected species can act as an umbrella and help protect multiple species within its managed habitat. The wetland units managed

for the jumping mouse provide food for waterbirds, such as migrating sandhill cranes, nesting habitat for rails, and hunting grounds for meso-carnivores, such as raccoons. By managing and maintaining areas for the jumping mouse, the refuge also nurtures a blossoming and more complete ecosystem.

Like many animals, the jumping mouse is not immune to the pressures of a human-centric world. Although historically the jumping mouse occurred throughout the Middle Rio Grande Valley in New Mexico, currently the refuge is the largest protected tract of public land within the active floodplain of this region and hosts the only known population of jumping mice within the valley. We surmise that changes in water availability (due to reduced flows from tributaries and the elimination of large-scale flooding events within the valley) has caused jumping mouse feeding habitat to decline, resulting in the mouse's now limited range. This not only creates a concern for the jumping mouse but also for the valley, and it shines light on an issue that no one can escape: water scarcity. Increasing decline of the water resources in the valley has not only jeopardized the jumping mouse but human livelihood as well. Ranchers and farmers who have called this valley home for generations are struggling to eke out a living. Riverbeds are running dry, and water wells are becoming more strained.

If someone were to ask me what a jumping mouse meant to me a year ago, I would not have had an answer for them. Beyond its funny feet and long tail, it appears to be only a mouse. However, I now realize that the effort put into these little rodents represents our collective ability to adapt to a changing world. Our ability to manage our landscape, approach new challenges, and cautiously use our resources, all align with how we approach the conservation of this endangered species. After all, we are a very small world, and the fate of the jumping mouse rests on our shoulders as much as our own fate. If we are not the stewards of the landscape now, then we will not be the stewards of the landscape of the future.

# Year of Refuge

Welcome fellow lovers of Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge. I have lived close to and visited the refuge frequently for more than a decade, and I trekked here often before then from my home in Arizona. Usually, I take my camera gear with me, but often I go without it to make certain I'm not letting my lenses get in the way of my seeing.



On December 21 this year, winter solstice, I began a photographic journey I have been dreaming of for years. I will be photographing daily on the refuge for the next twelve months. But, before I say more about the Year of Refuge project, let me ask you some questions. Have you ever wanted to do something that strongly called to you, but the daily chores and labors made it seem impossible? Did the dull background hum of daily responsibilities rise in pitch every time you wistfully thought, if only?

Then perhaps you can appreciate the challenge I have chosen as I ask my

supportive wife to bear an unfair amount of our shared life's chores, and I ask dear friends to understand my absence and preoccupation with a task that may bring more to mind a man with a lance in search of a windmill than a noble quest.

Nature as a backdrop for a vision and quest is as old as humankind. Anthropologists' stories are replete with tales of cultural traditions that ask novitiates to leave behind the child's life and accept the responsibilities of an engaged adult through a ritualized, yet deeply personal task that marks their transition.

In more "civilized" times, we may accept the stories of others as our own because our culture has drifted away from asking something so deliberate and personal of us. When Henry David Thoreau reflected on why he spent more than two years alone in a cabin on Walden Pond, he wrote, "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived." This declaration resonates so strongly with us that there is hardly a person who has not heard his story many times over. And, if you are one of the few who are hearing him for the first time now, I would wager that it wakes something deep within you and long dormant.

My year-long quest to have a more intimate relationship with the refuge, one blessed by daily contact, is not for lack of a rich life. Rather, what drives me to this particular task is what one writer calls "divine discontent": a desire to dive even more deeply into a life that I have accepted too casually.

Like many of you, I am drawn to the abundant bird and plant life on the refuge, and I feel viscerally the healing power of the natural rhythms, the color and music of the birds, animals, and wind in this rich oasis along the Rio Grande in the Chihuahuan Desert. So many visitors to the refuge that I have met have told me that the refuge has changed their lives or that it feeds their souls. All of us have struggled to find the words that convey an experience so uncommon in our daily lives.

Clearly, our too infrequent visits can leave us hungry for more. But why make such a costly personal decision to be there daily for a year? As a photographer, I have chosen this journey much as you might if, as an expression of a commitment to a mindful life, you apprehensively sat down like Thoreau in a far-away cabin in the woods, facing a clean blank page to write your story, knowing in advance that you would better understand your reason for being there only as you began recording and reading your story.

The whys of many things begin much as life does, pre-verbally, intuitively, and the answers follow only as the products of our efforts become manifest. Photography, like good writing, can create a space in us that holds our voice and vision, a place where the boundaries between you and the photograph dissolve. Your life warms from the inside and glows with the light and colors of an image warmed by time.

While it may be difficult to see a year photographing on the refuge as a path parallel to that of Thoreau's, my intention is to view it as a small but sincere modern equivalency. An equivalency at least of a desire to look outward and inward to what I might learn from my honest efforts, to, as Thoreau said, "... see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived."

A path is often recognized only in retrospect.

This one seems buried vaguely somewhere within the 57,000 acres of this riparian refuge. A daily thirty-minute commute each way to the refuge can be, in its own way, a pilgrimage, or at least a part of one. It may pale compared to a twenty-six-month sojourn in a cabin built by oneself where intimacy with things both in and outside a cabin is unavoidable. But I have spent enough time at the refuge already to know how easy it is to carry it with me

both to and from my life outside the refuge confines. So, excitedly, I look forward to the next twelve months and fully expect that it will become a mark on my life's calendar that separates all that was before and came after.

A dormant capacity for self-discovery is awakened as you choose the path of vulnerability. A year-long, mindful journey on the refuge may reveal more about the person behind the lens than about the subjects in front of it. I'm counting on it.

No wise person would undertake a journey like this without trepidation. A meditation teacher once said about following the path of a mindfulness practice, "If you knew what was in store for you, you would run kicking and screaming from this room." So, if you come across me at the refuge or see me in my hometown of Socorro, and I am unkempt and am mumbling to myself, be gentle with me and kindly offer to pour water on my burning hair.

If you would like to follow along on this journey, you can do so on Facebook at / DonBoydPhotography, or see more photos as well as notes in my blog at [www.DonBoyd.com](http://www.DonBoyd.com). On my website I will post some images of the journey under the home page heading, Year of Refuge. Welcome fellow travelers.

*-Don Boyd, photographer & Friends of Bosque del Apache volunteer*



# A Story of Two Grand Dames: Casa Blanca and Phoebe Wood

Many visitors to Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge (refuge) have enjoyed the hospitality of Phoebe Wood at Casa Blanca Bed and Breakfast, just down the road in San Antonio. I recently visited Casa Blanca to interview Phoebe about her business and found the story of her life so interesting that I've made her the focus of this article. She is quiet and unassuming, but as the saying goes, "still waters run deep." First, a bit about the house, and then I'll focus on the story of its steward.

Casa Blanca was built in 1880 by Eutimio Montoya, who came from a prominent family of merchants in the 19th century West. At that time, San Antonio was a prosperous town, a home to ranchers and miners, and the birthplace of the hotelier Conrad Hilton.

Casa Blanca was one of the largest Victorian style farmhouses in the area. It was built of double adobe (24-inch-thick walls) with a typical tin roof and a large veranda. The house passed through many families over the years. While it's a grand old home, Casa Blanca takes a labor of love to maintain. Luckily, the home is in good hands with Phoebe Wood, who has done a number of renovations since she purchased the property in 1988.

When Phoebe bought the home, she had no thoughts about running a bed and breakfast. Having volunteered at the Bosque Nature Store for five years and served on the Friends Board for four years, Phoebe loved living down the road from the refuge. She also loved learning the history of Casa Blanca. When she first bought her home, Phoebe had people stopping by, asking to see it and telling her stories of playing there as children or visiting friends there. When she bought Casa Blanca, Phoebe was still working in the Socorro Consolidated School System and had not intended to run a bed and breakfast (B&B). But after staying in a B&B while



visiting her father and realizing the potential of the house she'd bought, she turned her home into a bed and breakfast in 1989.

Let's learn a little about the woman behind Casa Blanca. Phoebe grew up in northern New Jersey, near New York City. Her mother had gone to Julliard School of Music and instilled a love of music into Phoebe, who grew up playing piano, flute, and guitar, and singing in choirs. Phoebe's family moved to Philadelphia when she was twelve. Her parents enrolled Phoebe in Germantown Friends School, a Quaker prep school that emphasized "service to others." After high school graduation, Phoebe went to college at Syracuse University in upstate New York, where she majored in English and anthropology. While in college, she discovered her interest in Native American culture and the western US. During her sophomore year in college, Phoebe worked one summer in Yellowstone National Park and was awestruck by the wide open spaces and beauty of the west. She began thinking about how she could move west, even breaking off her wedding engagement to a physics doctoral candidate as she contemplated the type of life she wanted to create for herself.

Phoebe ventured west in 1965 to become a VISTA volunteer (VISTA stands for Volunteers in Service to America and was basically a domestic peace corps) at the Navajo reservation in Crownpoint, New Mexico. There she met and eventually married (in 1967) a fellow teacher (from Maryland),

who was teaching science in the junior high school. Phoebe spent the next six summers attaining her teacher's credentials and then her master's degree in education at the University of New Mexico, with a focus on K-12 reading and library science. She continued to teach in schools on the Navajo, Pueblo, and Apache reservations for a total of thirteen years (with a hiatus of two years after her daughter Jennifer was born in 1969).

In 1980, Phoebe's husband at the time landed a job as Superintendent of Socorro Consolidated Schools, and this brought Phoebe to our area. She proceeded to teach in federal reading programs in the Socorro schools and also worked as a librarian in just about every elementary school in Socorro County until she retired in 1998, with twenty-five years in the New Mexico public schools.

It's hard to imagine how Phoebe single-handedly ran a bed and breakfast in San Antonio for eight years while also teaching all over Socorro County! At first, she kept the B&B open year-round. About twenty years ago, she decided to keep it open only during the refuge's busy season (October to March) and to spend the other months enjoying her retirement travelling and doing volunteer work. In her numerous stints as a volunteer for US Fish & Wildlife Service, National Park Service, US Forest Service, American Hiking Society, Sierra Club, and Habitat for Humanity International, Phoebe has travelled to many unique places.

In 2002, Phil Norton (former refuge manager at Bosque del Apache NWR from 1981-2000) joined Phoebe at the B&B. At that time, Phoebe had started travelling internationally every year. Phil appeared in her life and became her assistant innkeeper and travelling companion. Phil and Phoebe have now been together for almost twenty years. They have travelled extensively on camping, hiking, trekking, and volunteering sojourns throughout the US, Canada, and Mexico, and they have explored sixty-two different foreign countries in their years together.

When Phil joined Phoebe at the B&B, he originally started by helping with landscaping, gardening, and repairs. Phoebe remarked that Phil has also

helped a lot with socializing and making people feel comfortable, a skill that was not natural to her at first but that she has grown into over the years. Phoebe says that she has met such fine people who were drawn to the area due to their interest in or love for Bosque del Apache. Many guests come yearly now and have become friends, some even spending holidays with Phil and Phoebe or inviting them to their homes.

In listening to Phoebe during our interview and by observing her at other times, I am struck by how she quietly goes about the business of making people feel welcome and helping her community. As I interviewed Phoebe, her natural reserve gave way as she told me stories from her life. Driving to work at Bosque del Apache recently, I noticed Phoebe (as I often do) out on Highway 1 and Highway 380 in San Antonio picking up litter. I know that she is active in some local organizations, such as Friends of the Socorro Public Library, Save our Bosque Task Force, Performing Arts Series at New Mexico Tech, and Friends of both Bosque del Apache and Sevilleta NWRs. If you are fortunate enough to stay at the popular Casa Blanca B&B, you will also enjoy the pleasure of Phoebe's quiet company. I am so glad I took the time to visit.

- Deb Caldwell, Executive Director, Friends of Bosque del Apache

Author's note: If you'd like to stay at Casa Blanca, reserve early! Here's the link for more information: <https://casablancabedandbreakfast.com/>



# Upcoming Events – Winter 2022

THURSDAY, JANUARY 20 THROUGH SATURDAY, JANUARY 22



Join Friends of Bosque del Apache for small, outdoor, in-person workshops with birding expert and author Holly Merker. Holly will offer five sessions: three sessions (one each day) on Expanding Your Foundations in Bird ID; one session on

Saturday in Ornithery; and one session on Saturday of a workshop named Kids' Birding Adventure. Before each session, Holly will be available to sell and sign copies of her book, Ornithery for your Mind, Body, Soul, available in our Bosque Nature Store. For more information and to register for any of these workshops, go to <https://friendsofbosquedelapache.org/2022-january-ornithery/>

## SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 19

Friends Annual Meeting: Join us as we review the year at our virtual Annual Meeting on February 19 from 11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. on Zoom. Refuge manager Deb Williams will share her insights about the challenging year on the refuge, and Friends Board and staff will report on program progress and our financial picture. For the final portion of the meeting, we'll enjoy a special keynote presentation by Dr. Fred Phillips about the history and the future of water in the Middle Rio Grande Valley and how we can make a difference. We will soon send out a link for you to register for this meeting.

# Shop at Bosque Nature Store for Gifts that Make a Difference

Visit Bosque Nature Store online or in-person for all your shopping and gift-giving needs. We're open seven days a week, from 9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. (although the refuge Visitor Center remains closed). Here's a quick look at just a little bit of what the store has to offer.



It's not too late to add a piece from this year's Crane Fiesta to your Festival collection—we still have Crane Fiesta merchandise in stock, including stickers, buttons, magnets, and notecards. And if you're looking for something nicer, we've got you covered with an extra special custom pendant inspired by this year's beautiful and whimsical Festival artwork. These one-of-a-kind Crane Fiesta items won't last long so be sure to pick yours up today, before they're gone for good!

Have you heard about our upcoming, in-person workshops with birding expert and author Holly Merker, January 20th - 22nd? You can come prepared for Holly's workshops by purchasing your own copy of her book Ornithery online



or in the Nature Store. And if you do, Holly will happily autograph it for you the day of the event.

Valentine's Day is just around the corner, and we could all use a little extra love these days! Here's a fun idea: show your sweeties you care by protecting the birds they love! Bosque Nature Store carries window alert decals, which prevent bird strikes on your windows. Grab yours now and be ready before the spring migration! You could also show that "someone special" in your life that you think they're one-of-a-kind by giving them one of our exclusive items this Valentine's Day.

Please visit us online for these items and more!

Crane Fiesta

<https://friendsofbosquedelapache.org/shop/product-category/festival/>

Ornithery

<https://friendsofbosquedelapache.org/product/ornithery/>

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Exclusive Memorabilia

<https://friendsofbosquedelapache.org/shop/product-category/exclusive-products/>

- Danielle Gallegos, Bosque Nature Store Manager



*Crane Fiesta Winning Sandhill Crane Photo by Larry Kimball*



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**YOUR STORY MATTERS!**

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

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**— Friends of Bosque del Apache Donation Form —**

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