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THE RAVENS

Newsletter

Southwestern New Mexico Audubon Society
is a Chapter of National Audubon Society, Inc.

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FRIDAY, MARCH 2nd

Birds, Butterflies, and Dragonflies of Southwest New Mexico: Where and when to find them



The March monthly SWNM Audubon program will feature Tony Godfrey, Park Technician at City of Rocks State Park. Tony will be discussing locations in Southwest New Mexico where you can find the widest variety of birds, butterflies, and dragonflies.

Among the locations discussed will be the Pinos Altos and Black Range mountains, the headwaters of the Gila River, Lake Roberts, and the Dam Site Historic District in Elephant Butte.

The regional State Parks that will be covered are City of Rocks, Rock Hound, Elephant Butte Lake, Percha and Caballo State Parks.

Tony Godfrey was born and raised in Great Britain. He became hooked on birding in 1975 after a school visit to Lord Snowden's aviary at the London Zoo. He immigrated to the United States in 1986 and has since lived in Georgia, Arizona, and New Mexico. Tony describes himself as a former "twitcher," and has travelled to all seven continents in search of birds. He has now focused his attention on studying and photographing all forms of wildlife. He is a former member of the Arizona Bird Committee.

The program begins at 7:00 PM on March 2nd in WNMU's Harlan Hall, 12th & Alabama. The presentation is free and the public is welcome. Light refreshments follow.



Blue grosbeak.

PHOTO BY T. GODFREY

FRIDAY, APRIL 6th



PHOTO BY J. SMITH

Melissa Amarello photographing an Arizona Black rattlesnake.

The Social Lives of Rattlesnakes

The April monthly meeting of the SWNMA will feature an exciting program titled The Social Lives of Rattlesnakes. Melissa Amarello, co-founder of Advocates for Snake Preservation (ASP), is the guest speaker.

Although generally thought of as solitary, cold-blooded killers, rattlesnakes exhibit a variety of behaviors that we typically associate with animals such as birds and primates. Courtship, combat, and hanging out with friends are just a few behaviors captured by the remote, time-lapse cameras that you will see during the presentation.

Having the required permits to use live snakes for education, Melissa plans to bring along a gopher snake, a hognose snake, and a grey-banded king snake. The hognose snake is for viewing only, but the other two can be handled.

Melissa earned a B.S. in wildlife, watershed, and rangeland resources from the University of Arizona and an M.S. in biology from Arizona State University, where she studied rattlesnake social behavior. Melissa's lifelong fascination with snakes led her to work on a variety of projects on natural history and conservation of reptiles in Arizona, California, and Mexico. The need for positive messaging about snakes became apparent as she saw firsthand how negative attitudes stifle conservation efforts. Along with Jeff Smith, Melissa founded ASP in 2014 to encourage change in how people view and treat snakes. She currently serves as the Director of Education for ASP. Their website is <https://snakes.ngo>.

The presentation is at 7PM. The public is welcome. **You may never look at snakes the same way again.**

National Grant Awarded to Southwestern New Mexico Audubon

National Audubon Society (NAS) occasionally offers grants for chapters to work locally to achieve goals that align with the five strategic conservation priorities of NAS. One of those priorities is to promote bird-friendly communities. SWNMA was recently awarded funds to help make Silver City a Bird-Butterfly- and Bee- (B3) Friendly Community. The funds will be used to develop an education campaign coordinated with Gila Native Plant Society and Grant County Bee Keepers. Our ultimate goal is to connect people with birds and pollinators. We are working on a brochure that will focus on how to provide food, water, habitat and nesting sites for birds and pollinators. The brochure should be ready by Earth Day, April 21.

Another focus of the grant will be to address a local threat to birds. Silver City is fortunate to have a breeding population of Cliff swallows. Swallows build colonial mud nests on the overhangs of buildings and bridges throughout our community. Unfortunately, the owners of some of those buildings consider the swallows a nuisance and forcibly remove the nests. We will survey where the swallows are nesting and attempt to work with building owners to educate them on the value of swallows and offer alternative ways to discourage them from nesting in inappropriate locations.



Cliff swallows constructing their nest made of mud.

Why do swallows matter? Each day, a swallow can consume 60 insects per hour. Insect control is a valuable service that swallows provide to people. In our area, the mosquitoes the swallows eat can transmit diseases, such

as West Nile Virus, which are harmful to humans.

You can also do your part to make Silver City Bird-Butterfly- and Bee- Friendly by minimizing harms to them. Avoid using pesticides and harsh cleaning products, like bleach, anywhere outside of your house. Be aware that pesticides that pose a threat include all types of insect control (insecticide), rodent control (rodenticide) and weed control (herbicide) products.

You can make your own safe insecticides as detailed at this website:

www.treehugger.com/lawn-garden/8-natural-homemade-insecticides-save-your-garden-without-killing-earth.html

Audubon New Mexico's New Executive Director Welcomed to Silver City



Audubon New Mexico (ANM) Executive Director, Jon Hayes, and chair of the ANM Board of Directors, Anne Beckett, greeted some of the SWNMA Board members (L to R: Terry Timme, Sara Boyett, Jon Hayes, Elroy Limmer and Anne Beckett) during a reception on February 2nd. The following day, Jarrod Swackhammer led Jon Hayes on a trip to the Gila Bird Area. They were joined by Sara Boyett, Patricia Taber, Megan Ruehmann and Terry Timme.



YEAR OF THE BIRD

Audubon and multiple other organizations have designated 2018 as the Year of the Bird. This year marks to 100th anniversary of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA). This act arose out of the massive slaughter of birds for the millinery trade. It has provided protection for countless species of birds but is currently under extreme threat from Congress and the President.

The January issue of National Geographic led with the article *Why Birds Matter* by Jonathan Franzen. Probably most members of Audubon can relate to his summation, "It's not just what they do for the environment – it's what they do for our souls." If you missed the print edition check out this well written essay accompanied by beautiful photography at their website: www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2018/01/why-birds-matter

What can you do to participate in Year of the Bird?

In addition to contacting members of Congress when you receive our action alerts you can plant bird-friendly native plants. Birds often rely on plants in our yards, patios, and other spaces for habitat and food, and the best plants to provide for them are those native to our area. By growing the best bird-friendly plants for your area, you will attract and help the birds while making your space beautiful, easy to care for, and better for the environment. SWNMA is producing a guide to native plants that will be not only bird-friendly but also bee and butterfly friendly. See the accompanying article about the grant we received to produce this guide.

More Checklist Changes From the ABA

According to the 28th American Birding Association (ABA) checklist committee report, a hummingbird with two verified north American records, will be acceptable as being "countable" on your North American ABA area list. The **Amethyst-throated hummingbird** (*Lampornis amethystinus*) normally resides in Mexico and Honduras. It will be placed on the list between Plain-capped Starthroat and Blue-throated hummingbirds.

The **Pine flycatcher** (*Emidonax affinis*) was found in 2016 in the Santa Rita mountains in Arizona, where it unsuccessfully attempted to nest with a Cordilleran flycatcher. It will be placed between Dusky and Pacific-slope flycatchers on the ABA list.

There is also a "split" from the Red crossbill (*Loxia curvirostra*). This newly separated crossbill is called **Cassia crossbill** (*L. sinesciuris*). It is recognized as being endemic to the South Hills and Albion mountains of Idaho. Its large bill has resulted from co-evolution with thicker pine cone seeds, mediated by a lack of red squirrels in the region. The scientific name *sinesciuris* translates to "without squirrels." It will follow Red crossbill on the ABA list.

American Birding Association

CAR VANDAL

The residents of Snellville, Gwinnett County, Georgia, were recently the victims of a series of petty crimes.

Specifically, there was a pattern of smashed side-view car mirrors in the community. When more than two dozen people around the Nob Hill section of Snellville reported the same kind of broken glass mirrors on their cars, the police were sent out and were determined to find the culprits.

The hypothesis was that the damage was likely being caused by young boys with BB guns, or possible vandals running around with hammers smashing the mirrors.

But according to local Channel 2 Action News out of metro-Atlanta, the culprit was a Pileated woodpecker, defending territory against "rival" birds! See the TV news segment here (and ignore the reporter's inability to pronounce "pileated"):

<https://jalopnik.com/hell-raising-car-mirror-smashing-petty-vandal-identi-1819848006>

At the end of the day, local police reported that the case was solved.

The Birding Community E-Bulletin

SAVE THE DATE – Take a Trip:

Olympic Bird Festival April 13-15

Enjoy guided birding trips, boat tours, live auction & raffle, gala banquet, and more. Our featured speaker: noted nature photographer Bonnie Block. Join our festival pre-trip: a three-day, two-night birdingBirdFest registration at www.olympicbirdfest.org

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SWNMA Defends San Vicente Creek

The trail along San Vicente Creek, south of the Highway 90 bridge, is one of four trails highlighted by SWNM Audubon in its popular *Greenways* brochure. This trail provides riparian habitat for at least 139 bird species and in recent years has been home to a pair of nesting Common black hawks.

SWNM Audubon is among several organizations that recently asked the Town of Silver City to take a stronger role in protecting the trail. During the Silver City Christmas Bird Count, it became apparent that off-road vehicles (ORV) were causing significant trail damage. Jackie Blurton led a field trip with nine other chapter members (pictured above) on January 6th to document the damage. Jackie also prepared a report for the Town Council. Both Jackie and Terry Timme, as well as several other concerned citizens, made comments in support of stronger protections for the trail at the January 9th Town Council meeting. Since then, Dustin Gnader, the Town's newly hired trail maintenance worker, has installed or repaired gates at the primary entry points for the trail. If you are hiking the San Vicente Creek trail and come across damage or ORV riders, please report it to the Silver City police at 575-388-8840.

EarthDay Festivities on April 21

This year Earth Day will be celebrated in Silver City on April 21st between 10AM and 2PM in Gough Park. SWNM Audubon will be among numerous environmental and service organizations with informational and interactive displays. Vendors will be selling native plants and annual bedding plants for your yard or garden. This is a great time to remember to plant for the birds. Also on the same day is the downtown criterium & citizen races for the Tour of the Gila. Lots of activities to make a day of it in downtown Silver City.

Fix a Leak Week March 19 – 25, 2018

You can find and fix leaks inside and outside your home to save valuable water and money all year long.

10% of homes that leak 90 gallons or more per day. If you live in Silver City or Deming the electronic meters will detect leaks and you will be contacted.

Comments on the Silver City Christmas Bird Count

On December 16, 2017, members of Southwestern New Mexico Audubon Society participated in the 118th Christmas Bird Count sponsored by the National Audubon Society. Thirty-five participants, including those counting avian visitors at feeders, counted birds within a 7.5-mile radius circle historically centered on the Silver City golf course. Participants reported 96 species of birds.

Before I mention particulars about this count, a word about counts, in general, is warranted. The goal of the Christmas Bird Count is to estimate populations of birds in an approximately 177 square mile circle bounded by a 47-mile circumference. No easy task when one considers that all parts of the circle are not equally accessible, have various habitats and are visited by birders of various skills. On top of this are variations in weather from year to year. The ultimate goal of the count is to compare the estimates of the bird population in one year to those of previous years with potentially different people (regarding numbers and skills), routes, weather, etc. A strategy employed is to try to reduce variation in these multitude of factors from year to year. National Audubon has specified a specific time of year (days around Christmas), counting only on count day, counting only in the defined circle, and reviewing the results by knowledgeable birders. If various counts ignore or bend these rules, then it is much harder to come up with valid conclusions. With all the above in mind, it is possible to make some general comments and conclusions on this year's count: Observers saw Hooded and Common mergansers, species that do not occur commonly in the count circle. A Rough-legged hawk was seen which is rare in our area. Several observers detected Eurasian Collared-doves (120) which were unknown in our area before 2002. This species was introduced to the Bahamas, spread to Florida, and then to the rest of the U.S. White-winged doves outnumber Mourning doves, a phenomenon reversed over the past several years. The same pattern is reflected in Lesser and American goldfinches. A first for the count were two Anna's hummingbirds seen at Brian Dolton's hummingbird feeder. Some higher elevation species occurred in larger numbers on the count this year including Steller's jay, Mountain chickadee, Red-breasted nuthatch, Mountain bluebird, and Cassin's finch. Separating ravens into species, Chihuahuan vs. Common still is a difficult field identification problem, as is the separation of meadowlark species into Eastern and Western. Both raven and meadowlark species were reported on this count. A Black and White warbler was a first for the Silver City count. Finally, an observer reported four Black-headed grosbeaks from their area. This species is a common summer bird but very rare in the winter. The NM Ornithological Society searchable database (<http://www.nmbirds.org/>) shows two December Silver City records for this species, one in 2001 and the other in 2006. An unusual winter sighting but one that is supported by other previous sightings.

Some observers mentioned the paucity of birds on their routes. Factors such as milder weather and lack of a good seed crop could be in play. Seed eating birds such as sparrows are often affected locally by food supplies. Mild fall temperature are implicated in the lack of certain hawks.

We are sometimes misled that "rarer" species are more important than the common birds in our area. If the purpose of the Christmas Bird Count is to document changes throughout the years, all species are of equal importance. – Roland Shook