

## Mesilla Valley Audubon Society

### *Members' Favorite Birding Spots by Mark Pendleton, MVAS Fieldtrip Coordinator*

For more info on these spots: [mpndltn@gmail.com](mailto:mpndltn@gmail.com) (MVAS birding spots in subject line please) or 575.635.8711

#### Doña Ana County

**1) Aguirre Springs Recreation Area:** Entry Fee \$5/vehicle or free with America the Beautiful Pass. **Location:** About 20 miles east of the I-25/US 70 interchange (I-25 Exit 6) in Las Cruces. **Note:** Despite name, there are no springs nor water. **Possible Birds:** On the way out from Las Cruces, watch for Red-tailed and Swainson's Hawk on the powerline poles. Chihuahuan Raven and Golden Eagle are also possible, as are American Kestrel and Loggerhead Shrike on fences and Yucca. The road in to the campground goes through some grasslands for the first few miles. Watch for various Sparrow species, Gambel's and Scaled Quail, plus Greater Roadrunner here. In the last couple miles, grass gives way to more desert scrub; here expect Cactus Wren, Curve-billed Thrasher, Crissal Thrasher, Verdin. In the campground, Black-chinned, Broad-tailed and Rufous Hummingbirds have been seen in the summer.

Other campground birds are White-throated Swift, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Say's Phoebe, Western and Cassin's Kingbird, Cassin's Finch.

**2) Dripping Springs Natural Area:** Entry Fee \$5/vehicle or free with America the Beautiful Pass. **Location:** About 10 miles east of Las Cruces at western foot of the Organ Mountains. **Possible Birds:** Gambel's Quail, Scaled Quail (by side of road once you round the base of "A-Mountain"), Golden Eagle, Red-tailed Hawk, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Common Raven, Lesser Nighthawk, Black-throated Sparrow, Verdin, Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, Black-chinned and Broad-tailed Hummingbirds (there are numerous "hummer" feeders at the Visitors' Center). Along the La Cueva Trail between the Visitors' Center, in the winter, there are often Long-eared Owls. Bewick's Cactus, Canyon and Rock Wrens also abound. Also look for Say's Phoebe, Loggerhead Shrike, Hermit Thrush, Northern Mockingbird, Phainopepla, Black-chinned, and -throated, Brewer's, Lark, White-crowned, Vesper, Savannah, Song, Lincoln's and Rufous-crowned Sparrow, Canyon, Green-tailed and Spotted Towhee, Black-headed and Blue Grosbeak, and House Finch.

**3) Las Cruces Dam Area:** No entry fee. **Location:** Behind (to the east of) Las Cruces Dam that runs about 3 miles north and south just to the west of I-25 Exits 3 and 6. **Possible Birds:** There are arroyos, scrub, cottonwoods, constructed wetlands, seasonal ponds and playas, plus other habitats here. The arroyos attract Greater Roadrunner, Crissal and Curve-billed Thrasher, Verdin, Cactus Wren, Gambel's Quail, and, as elsewhere in Las Cruces White-winged Dove. Mourning Dove and Eurasian Collared-Dove are here too. The wetlands and playa attract numerous duck species in winter, as well as Great Blue Heron, Green Heron, American Coot, Pied-billed Grebe, Black Phoebe, Belted Kingfisher, Killdeer, sometimes White-faced Ibis, Yellow-headed, Red-winged and Brewer's Blackbird. Be sure to watch the sky, also, as Cooper's, Red-tailed, and Swainson's Hawk hunt here. There usually at least one pair of American kestrel too.

**4) Leasburg Dam State Park:** Entry Fee \$5/vehicle or free with NM State Parks Annual Day Use Pass (\$40.00) **Location:** About 15 miles north of Las Cruces at I-25 Exit 19 (Radium Springs) **Note:** There are hot springs in the river bed just below the dam, so there is at least some water flowing all year long, making this a great birding spot. **Possible Birds:** When the Rio Grande is low in summer look for Great, Snowy, and Cattle Egret as well as

Great Blue, Green and Black-crowned Night Heron, Spotted Sandpiper, Killdeer, both Yellowlegs, plus Wilson's Snipe and other shore birds. Barn, Cave, Cliff, and Northern Rough-winged Swallows also nest in the area near the dam. At migration, this can be a great spot for warblers, with Yellow-rumped, Lucy's, Orange-crowned,



Yellow, Wilson's, and Townsends Warblers among those seen. In May 2018, a Blue-winged Warbler was seen here as well. Migration is also a time when it's possible to see Violet-Green Swallows, Western Tanagers, Blue-headed Vireos and others passing through. In winter, Mallard, Gadwall, Blue-winged, Green-winged and Cinnamon Teal, American Widgeon, Northern Shoveler, and Northern Pintail can be spotted here. Both Eastern and Western Bluebird appear in the winter as well.

American Robin, Spotted and Green-tailed Towhee, Pyrrhuloxia and Phainopepla are some of the year-round birds. *Blue-winged Warbler Leasburg Dam State Park ©2018 C.J.Goin*

**5) Mesilla Park:** No Entry Fee; **Location:** A neighborhood partly in Las Cruces and partly in the town of Mesilla. **Note:** When birding this area, follow the No Parking signs on the narrow streets and respect residents' privacy; don't go on peoples' property without permission. You can park in front of the Mesilla Manor Pool on McDowell. **Possible Birds:** During winter irruptions, Steller's Jay, Pygmy Nuthatch and White-winged Crossbill are regularly seen here. White- and Red-breasted Nuthatch, Yellow-Bellied, Williamson's and Red-naped Sapsucker, Hairy Woodpecker, Cedar Waxwing, and Inca Doves are other regular birds on Mesilla Park lists. In migration, there can be numerous warblers. The area has several *acequias* and there's good walking beside them. In summer, Black-chinned (mostly) and Broad-tailed Hummingbirds (some) can be seen. Other summer birds include Blue and Black-headed Grosbeak, Western Kingbird, Say's and Black Phoebe, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Warbling Vireo, Barn, Tree, and Northern Rough-winged Swallow. Many residents have feeders in their yards and often will stop you to ask what you're seeing when they're out walking and meet you.

**6) Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park:** Entry Fee: \$5.00/vehicle or free with or free with NM State Parks Annual Day Use Pass (\$40.00). **Location:** On the Western bank of the Rio Grande in the town of Mesilla, just west of Las Cruces. **Note:** Rattlesnakes, Javelina, Bobcat and Coyote live in the Park. There are several hummingbird feeders, a native plant garden and a shade structure for picnics at the Visitors' Center. **Possible Birds:** Gambel's and Scaled Quail, American Coot, Great Blue and Green Heron, Wood Duck, Black-headed and Blue Grosbeak, Say's and Black Phoebe, Western Wood-Pewee, Yellow-breasted Chat, White-tailed Kite (summer), Burrowing Owl, Eastern and Western Meadowlark, Greater Roadrunner, Common and Lesser Nighthawk.

**7) Telbrook Park:** A Las Cruces City Park (none have entry fees); **Location:** 4290 E. Winchester Road, Las Cruces **Note:** a small gem of a park, where MVAS hosts a beginner's bird walk on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday of each month at 7:45 am. A mammalian highlight one Wednesday morning was a Bobcat. **Possible Birds:** As with everywhere in



Las Cruces, White-winged Dove. Mourning and Eurasian Collard-Dove are only slightly numerous and sometimes a few Inca Doves show up. For over a year, now, there has been at least one male Bronzed Cowbird at the Park, and several observers report seeing a female as well. The surrounding desert scrub habitat attracts Cactus Wren, Crissal and Curve-billed Thrasher, Northern Mockingbird, Gambel's Quail, Black-throated, Brewer's, and White-crowned Sparrow (winter), and Pyrrhuloxia. The Park and the transition zone between it and the desert draw Spotted Towhee, Green-tailed Towhee,

Verdin, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Lesser Goldfinch, Say's Phoebe, Western Kingbird, Greater Roadrunner, Bullock's, Hooded and Scott's Oriole, plus more. *Bronzed Cowbird Telbrook Park ©2017 Wayne Treers*

### Otero County

**1) Cloudcroft and Vicinity** No Entry Fee; **Location:** in the Sacramento Mountains above Alamogordo. **Note:** In summer, a worthwhile detour is to **Karr Canyon Picnic Area**. Go half a mile and a half beyond the exit of the tunnel and turn right on A-62 (Karr Canyon Rd). Go 4 miles and here at the picnic area in May and June a small population of breeding Red-faced Warblers can be found. When it's hot in Las Cruces, it's nice to escape to the evergreens and cool mountain air of Cloudcroft and the surrounding area. **\*\*However\*\*** the Lincoln National Forest that surrounds this tiny village is frequently closed to camping and trail use in summer due to high fire danger. Before you go, check with the National Forest office in Alamogordo or Cloudcroft for any restrictions. **Possible Birds:** Mountain Chickadee, Brown Creeper, White-, Red-breasted and Pygmy Nuthatch, Golden Eagle, Common Raven, Steller's Jay, Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay, Hermit Thrush, Broad-tailed Hummingbirds, and even sometimes Rufous, Magnificent and Calliope "hummers" (fall), Band-tailed Pigeons, and other high-altitude birds. In winter, look for all three Bluebirds, Townsend's Solitaire and White-winged Crossbills.

**2) Holloman Lakes** No Entry Fee; **Location:** To the north of US 70 3.4 miles NE of the Visitors' Center at White Sands National Monument and 3.6 miles to the SW of the Entrance to Holloman Air Force Base. The entrance is over a cattle guard on the north side of Hwy 70. **Note:** The source of water (besides rain which is scant) is the sewage effluent from Holloman Air Force Base. Hence the pestilent stench almost always enveloping the place. Three tenths of a mile from the cattle guard is a parking area and levee where you can get out to scope the water to see if it's worth continuing. After a rain, the dirt roads can be slick and treacherous and they are always potentially dangerous for any low-slung vehicle. **Possible Birds:** Ducks (in winter) It's often possible to see great rafts (maybe into the thousands) of ducks, among them Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail, Ruddy Duck, Green-winged and Cinnamon Teal, Canvasback, Redhead, Lesser Scaup, Ring-necked Duck, Bufflehead, Gadwall, Common, Red-breasted and Hooded Merganser, American Widgeon. American Avocet and Black-necked Stilt are common summer visitors. Clark's, Eared, Horned, Western, and Pied-billed Grebes are frequently reported as well. Raptors to possibly be seen here include Cooper's Hawk, Golden Eagle, Turkey Vulture, Red-tailed Hawk, Swainson's Hawk, American Kestrel, Merlin, Peregrine Falcon, Prairie Falcon. On the way over from Las Cruces watch the powerline poles for Red-tailed (winter) and Swainson's (summer) Hawk and always for Golden Eagle. Between Alamogordo and the stink lakes also watch for Harris's Hawk.

**3) La Luz:** No Entry Fee. **Location:** Between Alamogordo to the south and Tularosa to the north, the small village of La Luz is a lot of fun to bird. **Note:** The cemetery, at the north end of Kearney Rd is usually a good place to try; also, you can park at the Post Office and walk the streets. Some uncommon sightings have been Blue Jay, Common Grackle, and Ovenbird. **Possible Birds:** Cooper's Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Lewis's Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, American Kestrel, Eastern and Western Bluebird, Mountain Chickadee, Cassin's Finch.

### Sierra County

**1) Las Palomas Marsh:** No Entry Fee. **Location:** At I-25 Exit 71. **Note:** There is a fence enclosing some 80+ acres to keep cattle out of the marsh. From the top of the exit ramp, head SE for almost .7 miles to NM 187; turn left

(NE) and go almost a quarter mile to Palomas Cemetery Rd and turn right. At a little more than .8 miles you can turn right and park at the south end of the fence, or you can continue ahead slightly more than a quarter mile and turn right and park at the north end. There are gates at both. **Possible Birds:** During migration (spring and fall) at the right time, the marsh can be crawling with Yellow-rumped Warblers; Wilson's, Lucy's, Townsend's Warblers and Common Yellowthroat are others seen here. When the Rio Grande is high, the marsh is flooded at least partially. Other birds seen in the marsh include Barn, Cave, Northern Rough-winged and Tree Swallow, Say's and Black Phoebe, Vermillion Flycatcher, Western Kingbird, Summer and Western Tanager, Great Horned and Barn Owls. On or above the river, and in the pastureland beside it, one can see various Ducks and Grebes, Belted Kingfisher, Cattle, Great, and Snowy Egret, Lark Sparrow, and Bald Eagle.

**2) Percha Dam State Park:** Entry Fee \$5/vehicle or free with NM State Parks Annual Day Use pass (\$40.00). **Location:** Take I-25 Exit 59 and head south for 1.02 miles on NM 187; turn left on E Grand Percha Rd and continue for .4 miles and turn right, follow this for another .8 miles to the Park. **Note:** "Percha", for several reasons is one of the best, if not the best all-round birding spots in the State. Greater Roadrunner, Gambel's Quail, Great Horned Owl, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Red-winged Blackbird and Lesser Goldfinch are a few of the resident species. In summer, look for Common Black Hawk, Green and Great Blue Heron, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Yellow-breasted Chat, Bullock's Oriole, Lucy's Warbler, Black-headed and Blue Grosbeak, Western Kingbird, Ash-throated Flycatcher and Vermillion Flycatcher. Wintering birds include Marsh Wren, American Robin, all three Bluebirds (sometimes), Cedar Waxwing, Hutton's Vireo, and Orange-crowned Warbler. Numerous Ducks can be found in winter. The list could go on and on. Just be prepared to possibly see something very interesting when you go to Percha.