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# THE RAVENS

## Newsletter

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

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### Winter Raptor Survey January 13, 14 or 15, 2024

The Winter Raptor Survey will take place on Martin Luther King Jr. weekend, January 13–15, 2024. The routes can be done on any one of the three days.

These routes are well established driving routes, many of which require most of a day to complete. Interested participants should contact Linda Moore by December 29th at [raptors.linda@yahoo.com](mailto:raptors.linda@yahoo.com) with questions or interest.

### BIRDING TRIP

## Winter Birds of City of Rocks State Park

Saturday,  
Jan 20

8 am–10 am



CASSIN'S SPARROW@ CITY OF ROCKS  
PHOTO: DAVE McDONALD

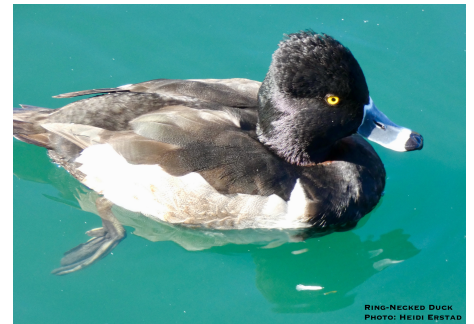
Join *Friends of City of Rocks* on this outing! Karen Beckenbach and Bill Norris will lead this birding trip, with a focus on sparrows. Participants are asked to meet at the Cienega Trail head at 8:00 am and be prepared to walk on a gentle to moderate loop trail (total distance: about 2.25 miles). The Cienega Trail trailhead and gravel parking area are on the left, prior to entering the larger CoR park area. Note that visitors without state park passes are required to pay a \$5 entrance fee.

### Program: *A Guide to Waterfowl Identification for Beginning and Intermediate Birders*



Friday, Feb 9 — 7:00 pm  
WNMU Harlan Hall, Room 111

Karen Beckenbach and Bill Norris will provide an overview of waterfowl identification based on general appearance, behavior and habitat. Although this presentation will focus on tips to geese and duck identification, brief attention may be devoted to identification of swans, grebes, coots, loons and cormorants if time permits.



RING-NECKED DUCK  
PHOTO: HEIDI ERSTAD

### Field Trip: Lake Roberts Saturday, Feb 10 — 8:30 - 11:30 am

Meet trip leaders Bill Norris and Karen Beckenbach at the [Lake Roberts Boat Launch area](#) at 8:30 am. Birding will start around the parking / fishing area and also across the creek to the picnic area side. We'll also bird the Upper End campground to the south side of the lake, and potentially the dam area. We'll scan open water for waterfowl (ducks, geese, grebes, loons, cormorants), keep our eyes open for raptors (eagles, hawks, falcons) overhead and kingfishers on overhanging tree branches, and look and listen for numerous songbird species (sparrows, blackbirds, titmice, chickadees, jays, crows, ravens, wrens, wood warblers) that frequent marsh, cliff and woody vegetation bordering the lake. Birders of all skill levels are welcome: the more the merrier!

Interested in ride-sharing from Silver City? Meet at 7am at [WNMU Fine Arts Center south parking lot](#), returning by 1 pm.

Site accessibility: Wheelchair-accessible parking and restrooms are available at the Boat Launch area and Upper End Campground. Parking lot surfaces are mostly flat, loose gravel. Trails are narrow, sometimes overgrown and muddy, mostly flat with increasing slope deeper into trails. The Dam Area is quite steep.

# Meet Your Appointed Board Officers 2023–2025

## Programs, Events & Field Trips Chair– Megan Ruehmann



Megan is a wildlife biologist for the consulting group Eagle Environmental, Inc. and is involved in survey efforts for many avian species of conservation concern. Megan is joined on this committee by biologist **Emily Pollom**, who serves as collaborator, host and support for events, and **Brian Dolton** who helps

lead field trips. Together they aim to continue with traditional programs, as well as incorporate other events and outings to reach a broader audience of those interested in our natural world. Anyone is welcome to contribute to the committee, even temporarily.

## Conservation Chair – Dawn Smith

Dawn Smith is a retired veterinary technician who spent most of her career in wildlife rehabilitation and conservation. Now settled in southwest New Mexico, she spends most of her time outdoors, enjoying its quiet beauty.



## Natural History of the Gila Symposium X Feb 28 – Mar 1

*Sharing the natural beauty, research, and resources of the Gila Region in Arizona and New Mexico since 2006*

The 10th Natural History of the Gila Symposium is set for February 28 – March 1, 2024. This biennial event will feature keynote speakers and presentations on research, management, education and policy focused on the Gila region, including watersheds and neighboring areas extending into southwestern New Mexico, southeastern Arizona and Mexico. SWNM Audubon is co-sponsoring the

social and is represented on the symposium planning committee. This is a FREE event! We encourage all SWNMA members to attend!

Go to [www.wnmu.edu/gilasymposium](http://www.wnmu.edu/gilasymposium) to learn more. Re-visit the site closer to the event for a specific program of events.



## Publicity Co-Chairs– Patricia Taber and Heidi Erstad



Patricia moved to Silver City from Vermont and has been a Board member since 2001 and The Ravens newsletter editor since 2004. Patricia is a plein air painter and camps out while creating her southwest landscape paintings, and volunteers for the NM Alliance. She is a licensed bird bander and enjoys birding locally and in Central and South America.



Heidi moved to Silver City from Milwaukee, Wisconsin after retiring in 2021 from a career in public school education. She is thrilled to have time to dedicate to getting outdoors and learning about the wonders of the Southwest, particularly the amazing birding in this corner of the country.

In future issues we will feature  
our Valuable Volunteers

## New Species Added to ABA Checklist

**Name Changes– One Deletion– Three Additions**

American Ornithological Association (AOS);  
American Birding Association (ABA)



The finalized voting of ABA Checklist Committee in 2023 representing the ABA area, was to three species accepted and added to the ABA Checklist.

The AOS North America Classification Committee's decision resulted in the deletion of one species due to the lumping of Pacific-slope and Cordilleran flycatchers into Western Flycatcher (*Empidonax difficilis*).

The common names of two species are based on taxonomic splits on the ABA Checklist. Northern Goshawk becomes American Goshawk (*Delichon lagopodum*) and Common House-Martin becomes Siberia House-Martin (*Delichon lagopodum*).

New Species Accepted (in our area): Western Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*). This species was previously called Eurasian Marsh-Harrier.

With the deletion of one species and addition of three totals the ABA Checklist at 1,135.

*Excerpted from the 34th ABA Checklist Committee 2023 Report*

## *SWNMA Chapter Highlights*

### **Nov 3: Community Science**

#### **Projects Highlighted**

Jackie Blurton shared the origin story of Audubon's Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs), then John Gorey and Linda Moore presented info on our local CBCs and Winter Raptor Survey. Visit our YouTube channel to view this presentation.

### **Nov 18: Lake Roberts Outing**

Two dozen birders [spotted just over 30 species on this field trip](#), mostly on or over the lake, as the fringes were pretty quiet. Highlights included two adult Bald Eagles seen well in the scope, an Osprey fishing over the lake, a Sora showing from the boat ramp, a handsome male Hooded Merganser, and a couple of Pintail.

### **Dec 3: Mangas Springs Outing**

Nearly 20 birders joined trip leader Brian Dolton on a chilly Sunday morning at Mangas Springs. This site's unique blend of habitats provides great sightings all year round. Participants were entertained by calls from both Virginia Rail and Sora in the marsh and got a good look at a Wilson's Snipe bobbing around in the creek. Thanks to all who attended, and a special thanks to Brian and Bill Norris for your generous and patient teaching.

### **Dec 16: Victorian Christmas**

Over 100 people stopped by the Audubon table at this annual event! Kids and parents had a great time painting the feather craft that Jackie Blurton created. Jackie and chapter president Linda Moore also developed and handed out activity books about feathers. Thank you to the chapter volunteers who showed up to help and to those who stopped by to say "hi" on a perfectly sunny day.



Linda Moore photo

## **AOS Will Change the English Names of Bird Species Named After People**



In November 2023, the American Ornithological Society (AOS) announced that it will change all English bird names currently named after people or whose names are deemed offensive and exclusionary. This effort will start in 2024, focus initially on 70-80 bird species in the US and Canada, be led by a new and diverse committee, and involve the public in name selection.

*Why this change?* “As scientists, we work to eliminate bias in science. But there has been historic bias in how birds are named, and who might have a bird named in their honor. Exclusionary naming conventions developed in the 1800s, clouded by racism and misogyny, don’t work for us today, and the time has come

for us to transform this process and redirect the focus to the birds, where it belongs,” said Judith Scarl, Ph.D., AOS Executive Director and CEO. For example, in 2020, the AOS renamed a small prairie songbird found on the Great Plains to “Thick-billed Longspur.” The bird’s original name—honoring John P. McCown, an amateur naturalist who later became a general in the Confederate Army during the U.S. Civil War—was perceived as a painful link to slavery and racism.

North America has lost nearly 3 billion birds since 1970. Says Scarl, “To reverse these alarming bird population declines, we need as many people as possible to get excited about birds and unite to protect them.” For more information, [visit the AOS web site](#).



*There is power in a name, and some English bird names have associations with the past that continue to be exclusionary and harmful today.*

Colleen Handel  
AOS President  
[www.americanornithology.org](http://www.americanornithology.org)

# San Vicente Cienega Trail

By Dave McDonald

The San Vicente Cienega Trail is arguably an oft-overlooked treasure of the natural history of our area. "It winds from Chicago to L.A., more than 2,000 miles all the way" – wait, that's a different topic. San Vicente starts near the south end of Bullard. If you turn left at the Corner Kitchen (onto San Vicente St. two blocks south of Broadway), the road turns to dirt and curves around to a parking area under the Highway 90 overpass. The trail then follows the creek for a while until it reaches the remains – just the abutments – of an old railroad bridge. Beyond that, it runs along the rails-to-trails raised embankment, toward the sports complex and Scott Park golf course. The combination of forested stream and open yucca-juniper habitat makes for a great year-round birding hotspot.

With the addition of 21 species first seen there in 2023 (at least on Cornell's eBird list), San Vicente now has an official list of 209 species (number 209 was a rare Rufous-backed Robin, added on 10-Dec-2023). Most of the 209 species are more-or-less "common" birds of the area doves, ravens, towhees, Gambel's Quail, White-breasted Nuthatches, Ladder-backed Woodpeckers and Bewick's Wrens. One of the 209 species, though, is the Common Black Hawk, which has nested near the start of the trail for a number of years, above the old cars that were used to stabilize the banks – they now resemble either sculpture or eyesores, depending on your perspective. The nest has to be one of the most accessible anywhere in the U.S. This magnificent bird of the borderlands is a great treat for visiting birders from other parts (e.g., Chicago or St. Louis).



*One of the adult  
Common Black Hawks  
near its nest*

Spring and fall bring a sprinkling of migrants. Painted Redstarts from up higher in the Gila National Forest, for example, are regulars in the spring and fall. Occasionally, a rarity from elsewhere is drawn to the perennial waterflow and abundant trees of this riparian belt. This fall, a Prothonotary Warbler showed up at the beginning of September. The little cutie normally lives in bald cypress swamps in the south-east.

Another stray, whose normal range barely extends to the Brownsville area of coastal Texas, near the Mexican border, was a Couch's Kingbird that stayed for 10 days in November. It drew a number of ace birders from the



*A Prothonotary Warbler, along San Vicente, 1-Sep-23*

Albuquerque area. Much easier to find (in the summer) are Cassin's Kingbirds in the trees, and Western Kingbirds in the more open areas.

A breeding warbler that can be difficult to see, but is easier to hear, is Lucy's Warbler. Its breeding range is more or less restricted to AZ, and the fringes of neighboring states, including our corner of NM. Other summer breeders that add a splash of color are Summer Tanagers (red) and Blue Grosbeaks. If you prefer simple black and white, Black Phoebes are common much of the year, sallying for insects right along the waterway. Or look for Bridled Titmice, found only in SE AZ and our corner of NM, along with the more widely distributed Juniper Titmouse.



*A Bridled Titmouse*

In the upland areas, one can hear and sometimes see Rufous-crowned Sparrows, Crissal Thrashers, Cactus Wrens (look for the big cholla cactus patch in the open area), Greater Roadrunners, Phainopeplas, and other desert birds.

Efforts are underway, led by Silver City Watershed Keepers, to remove invasive trees (primarily Siberian elm and tree of heaven) and replace them with native species

Volunteers watered the new plantings through the dry non-monsoon of 2023. If you are interested in helping with watering or planting, contact Beth Cable (my wife) at [silvercitywatershedkeepers@gmail.com](mailto:silvercitywatershedkeepers@gmail.com).

One of the great things about San Vicente is that the birding can be exciting all year long. Something new is almost bound to show up eventually some time, somewhere, winter, spring, summer or fall. And the old familiars are great fun too.

As Nat King Cole would say, "won't you get hip to this timely tip" and try San Vicente for yourself?