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# THE RAVENS

## Newsletter

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

March — April 2024

Vol. 57, No. 2

## GILA CLIFF DWELLINGS

**Overnight camping, bird walk, and fire-side chat with Park Guide Jonah!**

**Friday, April 5:** Camping and fireside chat at Upper Scorpion Campground.

**Saturday, April 6:** Bird Outing

**Friday:** Pack camping equipment and food, then locate a site at the Upper Scorpion Campground. Join park guide Jonah Snead at 7 pm at the campfire. He'll share bird stories from indigenous cultures and discuss Saturday's bird outing.



*Jonah Snead*

**Saturday:** Meet at the Gila Cliff Dwellings trailhead at 8:00 am. We'll walk the trail, looking for painted redstarts, hummers, and black-throated gray warblers, then head to the West Fork of the Gila River to spot birds feeding near the water. We'll have extra binoculars on hand.

**Site Accessibility:** Well-maintained 1.1-mile loop trail. Packed dirt with uneven surfaces / moderate slope changes throughout. Includes 600+ stone stairs without handrails. Flat paved area near visitor center for birding. Wheelchair-accessible restrooms available.



*Gila landscape Middle Fork*



**Thursday, March 21, 2024**  
**4:30 pm – ??**  
**Silver City**

**Join us for Birds and Brews!!** We will take a bird stroll down the developed portion of Big Ditch Park, ending at Little Toad Creek Brewery for some social time, bird trivia, and food with friends!

**We will meet at the Main Street Plaza sign at 4:30 pm to start the stroll.** We'll then slowly work our way towards The Toad, birding along the way. Note: There is a set of stairs and uneven surfaces along the way; sturdy walking shoes are recommended.

**We are aiming to be at the Toad (200 N Bullard St) around 5:15–5:30 pm for those that want to meet us there.** Weather permitting, we'll sit outside at back tables, where we can order food and drinks on separate tickets.

**Space is limited! Please email [RSVP](mailto:RSVP@swnmaudubon@gmail.com) [swnmaudubon@gmail.com](mailto:RSVP@swnmaudubon@gmail.com).** Let us know if you would like to **borrow binoculars** and we'll come prepared!

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## **FIELD TRIP— Sat, April 13, 7:45 - 11:00am**

### **Bird Deadman Canyon**

Led by Brian Dolton. Deadman Canyon Trail is on the eastern flank of the Burros between Burro Peak and Ferguson Mountain. The area has mixed habitats with Ponderosa pine slopes and dense oak scrub, offering good opportunities to find birds hard to locate elsewhere in Grant County (e.g., Hutton's Vireo, Black-chinned Sparrow). The canyon hosts breeding American Goshawk. For mid-April migration, we can also expect a range of flycatcher and warbler species.

**Accessibility info:** 2+ miles out-and-back trail. Packed dirt surface, narrow trail with uneven surfaces and steep slopes in sections. No restrooms available.

**Directions:** The site is located along Tyrone Road, a dirt road that turns north off Highway 90 between mile markers 31 and 30 (also road to the Burro Mountain Homestead). Follow the road for 3.7 miles. Look for an "Entering National Forest" sign on your right; a hundred yards further, there is a forest road to the left and a sandy parking area. We **STRONGLY** recommend carpooling! The Silver City carpool will meet at the WNMU Fine Arts Center parking lot (see [campus map](#)) at 7 am, leaving **PROMPTLY** at 7:10 am.

## CONSERVATION IS KEY

*Audubon envisions a world where people and wildlife thrive. We present some of the key areas of conservation concern and challenge for the birds and wildlife specific to our region. We encourage SWNMA members to learn more about and speak up on behalf of these issues.*

### Ongoing conservation issues:

**Proposed National Monument/Florida Mountains Dolomite Mine:** In December the Friends of the Floridas, the Semilla Project, NM CAFÉ (Comunidades en Acción de Fe), New Mexico Wildlife Federation, Outdoor New Mexico, Friends of the Organ Mountains Desert Peaks, and Las Cruces Chamber of Commerce, supported by the Conservation Lands Foundation, The Wilderness Society, and Native Land Institute proposed the establishment of the Mimbres Peaks National Monument which would include: the Florida Mountains, Tres Hermanas Mountains, Good Sight Mountains, and Cookes Range.

At present, local support is limited, with significant pushback from the ranching community and small mine operators (mainly rock and gem sellers) who were not informed of the proposed project prior to its announcement. The Deming City Council has recently voted to oppose the project.

As a regional organization with a history of working with local ranchers on conservation projects, we are looking at how we might best become involved in this issue to the benefit of all parties.

**Gila Wild and Scenic River Act:** In March of 2023, the M.H. Dutch Salmon Greater Gila Wild and Scenic River Act continues to slowly make its way in both House and Senate. Please help move this important act forward. The easiest ways to help are found on the New Mexico Wild Gila Action page: <https://www.nmwild.org/gila-wild-scenic-action-center/>

**Emma Mine expansion:** A formal hearing on the mine expansion is scheduled for February, at which GRIP will testify regarding their findings, which were backed by findings of the State Engineers' Hydrology Bureau, that local wells and an adjacent spring, critical for local wildlife, would be affected by mine dewatering.

**Land of Enchantment Legacy Fund:** The distribution of the funds (who will be funded) is already determined and the latest session has approved the next level of funding.

**Air Force Military Operations Area (MOA) Modifications:** The Draft Environmental Impact Statement is expected in Spring 2024. A tentative meeting of the local team working on potential impacts from the changes is planned sometime in February to prepare input.

*Dawn Smith*

## Feb 9 & 17: Waterfowl ID Program and Lake Roberts Outing

Nearly 30 participants attended our Feb 9th Waterfowl ID program, presented by Bill Norris and Karen Beckenbach. And on a bright, sunny Saturday, 23 birders made the trip up to Lake Roberts to put these ID skills to use! Karen Beckenbach led the group, spotting over 30 waterfowl species, including teal (cinnamon and blue-winged), redhead, merganser (common and hooded), Ruddy ducks, Shovelers, Buffleheads, Coots and more. Two Bald Eagles and two Great Blue Heron showed up too. A great day all around, with familiar and fresh faces! See the full eBird list here. <https://ebird.org/checklist/S161894859>





# EarthDay

## April 20, 2024



On Gila Earth Day at Gough Park, Saturday, April 20, 10 am to 2 pm, our SWNM Audubon Chapter will have a booth.

This is a very special Earth Day celebration because it's the 100th anniversary of the designation of the Gila Wilderness. The park will be bustling with people, booths, and events. Volunteers are needed to help with our booth. There will be 2, two-hour shifts: 10 am – 12 and 12 – 2 pm. Two to three volunteers are needed per shift. This will be a really fun day of visiting with people and being in the middle of an exciting event. Contact Jackie Blurton at 575-534-9400. Email [jjblurton@outlook.com](mailto:jjblurton@outlook.com)

### Gila River CBC Results

The Gila River Christmas Bird Count was conducted on December 31, 2023. Twenty participants counted on 10 routes in spectacular weather. A total of 93 species were counted, with high numbers of Gambel's Quail at 650, Yellow-rumped Warblers at 52, and Great-tailed Grackles at 96. The most unusual species noted was a Lark Sparrow, not commonly seen this time of year.

The highlight for the count was a Crested Caracara that had been seen two days previous to the count, verified with a photograph. While not able to officially count the species as it was not seen on count day, it was reported as a 'count week' bird, putting it for the first time on the official CBC list for the area. Additional count week birds were Western Screech Owl, Peregrine Falcon, Turkey Vulture, and Crissal Thrasher, all of which have been seen on previous counts but are unusual.

Several species were notably few in number. Where 758 American Robins were counted in 2022, this year produced only 54. Sparrow species also seemed on the low side this year, although White-crowned Sparrows tried to make up for it with 936 counted. Still, that was a far cry from their historical high of 2253. This points to the importance of trends over time when looking at species numbers, rather than one survey. The Gila River CBC has been conducted most years since 1972 and can give a good indication of trends for various species, although the number and ability of participants and time spent counting are variables that should be taken into consideration. Total number of birds for 2023 is 4037.

A huge thank you to all the participants who came out and counted birds instead of starting an early New Year's celebration!

*Linda Moore*

### See Us at Give Grandly May 4th

The Southwestern New Mexico Audubon Society is pleased to participate in Give Grandly this year. This annual fundraiser event for area non-profit organizations is supported by the Grant County Community Foundation. The Give Grandly website will be live for donations from April 20th through May 29th, with a live event on May 4th. On that day we will be at the Main Street Plaza from 9 to 2 and hope to see you there! More details coming soon.

**World Water Day** event organized by Silver City Watershed Keepers. Join Dave McDonald and Beth Cable on Saturday, March 23, at 8:00 am (to 11:00 am) for a bird walk along the San Vicente Cienega trail. Meet at the trailhead under the 90 overpass (go to the S end of Bullard and turn left, across from the Corner Kitchen; it's around the bend about 200 yards further on).

### Raptor Count Report

On January 9, teams of raptor enthusiasts surveyed pre-determined routes for wintering raptors. A total of 12 species were seen, with 261 birds counted. These volunteers drove well over 1000 miles and spent 52 hours in the field, and that was only after they had arrived at the beginning of their often distant route. This total number of birds is consistent with the past five years, except for 2021 when only 135 birds were counted.

As usual, some routes produced a great number of raptors, while others were slim in number. This seems to vary from year to year, depending on the amount of rainfall and vegetation growth. This year the more southern routes produced a low number of birds. Jim Blurton overlaid the map of the current extreme drought area over the raptor routes, and found a correlation with the routes producing the fewest number of birds. In fact, the route from Silver City down to the Redrock area only produced 6 birds, while the Mangas Springs to Mule Creek route produced 68.

Red-tailed Hawks were the most numerous, with 138 counted, including an unusual Harlan's Hawk observed at the Gila River. American Kestrels were next with 75 seen. More Golden Eagles were seen than in the past 5 years, with 15 counted. A White-tailed Kite was the most unusual species observed. Greater Roadrunners and Loggerhead Shrikes are also counted because they have been historically, with a corresponding 7 and 57 observed.

A heartfelt thank you to all who participated in this year's survey, especially those who drove those long southern routes with few birds to be seen. *Linda Moore*

## Awaiting a Safe Return

Drink, drink tee-eee..... a Spotted Towhee merrily serenaded another on an unusually warm day in February. As I strolled along the trail behind my house, other birds were singing as well: numerous House Finches, White-winged Doves and Curve-billed Thrashers. Every year, I'm pleasantly startled by the lovely bird song denoting the coming of spring while at the same time, nervous about their arduous journey to arrive safely. One particular species that is close to my heart is the Cliff Swallow (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*). Community members and I have been keeping a close eye on these graceful flyers and their nesting habits at Western New Mexico University for seven years. Due to other obligations, I decided to observe the birds during the even numbered years and take off in the odd years. So now, in 2024, I will be recruiting volunteers to assist me in making observations to determine how many nesting pairs there are and how many young fledge



*Cliff Swallow*

each year. It's important for university staff to know that our community cares about these birds in order to keep them safe. I will be giving a presentation titled *Managing for Increased Depredation of a Colonial Cliff Swallow Colony on Western New Mexico University Campus* at the Gila Natural History Symposium Wednesday, March 28th at 2:20pm. It will be a time to learn about this project and ask questions. If you would like to volunteer with this project, please contact Carol Ann Fugagli at: [cfugagli@gmail.com](mailto:cfugagli@gmail.com). No experience necessary, just an inquisitive mind!

*Carol Ann Fugagli*

## Member Spotlight

### Jackie Blurton — Volunteer

Jackie Blurton has been a SWNMA chapter member for over 30 years, contributing her time and many talents to our birding community in considerable ways. A gifted artist, Jackie has created bird guides and activity booklets for local kids and families on a range of topics, from swallows to feathers to habitat. She's organized creative projects to engage visitors at the Audubon table at local events like Earth Day and Victorian Christmas. For nine years, Jackie's pen and ink drawings accompanied Roland Shook's weekly nature articles in the Silver City Daily Press. Perhaps you've purchased her two booklets of these illustrations, "From Our Place to Yours," at the Grant County Art Guild Gallery.



*Jackie with Owl puppet at Earth Day 2023*

Jackie served on the SWNM Audubon Board in the late 90's and has been a leader in local community science birding projects. She organized the Silver City Christmas Bird Count (CBC) for several years and has been a leader on Silver City and Gila River CBC and HMANA Winter Raptor Survey routes for many years running.

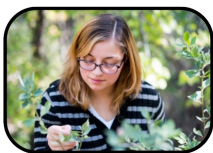
Jackie has been interested in birds since she was a child growing up in Albuquerque. Though she stepped away from birding as a young adult, Jackie rediscovered her love of birds when she and her husband moved to Silver City and joined our Audubon chapter. She has dedicated energy to restoring a bird-friendly habitat at home. Starting in 2019, Jackie started digging up and clearing out the horehound weeds that had invaded a wide swath of their property. Each year, the huge roots of the horehounds soaked up water, killing off native plants. Today, she reaps the joy of keeping a plot of pinyon pines, junipers, and cholla in its natural state. Thick grasses and wolf berry bushes now grow in place of weeds, attracting deer, birds, and lizards to their yard. Jackie has found this practice to be life-giving. She declares that the feeling we get when we nurture something is as much for us as it is for the birds.

We're beyond grateful for all that Jackie has brought and continues to bring to our chapter!

## 10TH Natural History of the Gila SYMPOSIUM

FREE!

— SHARING THE NATURAL BEAUTY, RESEARCH, AND RESOURCES OF THE GILA REGION IN ARIZONA AND NEW MEXICO SINCE 2006 —



- ✓ PRESENTATIONS
- ✓ FIELD TRIPS
- ✓ CREATIVE VOICES

**FEB 28 - MAR 1, 2024**

**WNMU GLOBAL RESOURCE CENTER - SILVER CITY & VIA ZOOM**

**FIND OUT MORE! [WNMU.EDU/GILASYMPOSIUM](http://WNMU.EDU/GILASYMPOSIUM)**

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