



Central New Mexico
Audubon Society

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Winter 2021–22

Zoom in for Climate Crisis and Dinosaurs

CNMAS Monthly Programs are virtual, conducted over Zoom. Members will receive an e-mail with the link prior to each program or you may e-mail CNMASreg@gmail.com to receive the link.

The chapter's web page <http://cnmas.newmexicoaudubon.org/events/archived-meetings> has links to YouTube videos of previous programs.

January 20

7—8:30 p.m.

The Climate Crisis and Other Conservation
Topics

Laura Pascus and Jon Hayes



Please join us
for a conversation
between Audubon
Southwest Executive
Director Jon Hayes
and environmental
journalist Laura
Paskus.

They will discuss her book *At the Precipice: New Mexico's Changing Climate* and other topics related to the conservation of birds in the Land of Enchantment, including PFAS contamination, river health and environmental justice.

February 17

7—8:30 p.m.

The Dinosaurs Among Us

Kim Adelson

Virtually all paleontologists agree that birds evolved from dinosaurs, and most even believe that birds are, in fact, real living dinosaurs. The flood of new data coming from newly discovered fossil beds—primarily from China—has only solidified that position. Come learn about the structural and behavioral similarities between birds and the more “classic” dinosaurs they evolved from. We guarantee that you will not only be surprised by how dinosaur-like birds are, but also how bird-like dinosaurs were. You will never think about T. rex or mallards or chickadees in the same way again!



Melrose Woods Welcomes Birders

Story and photos by Judy Liddell

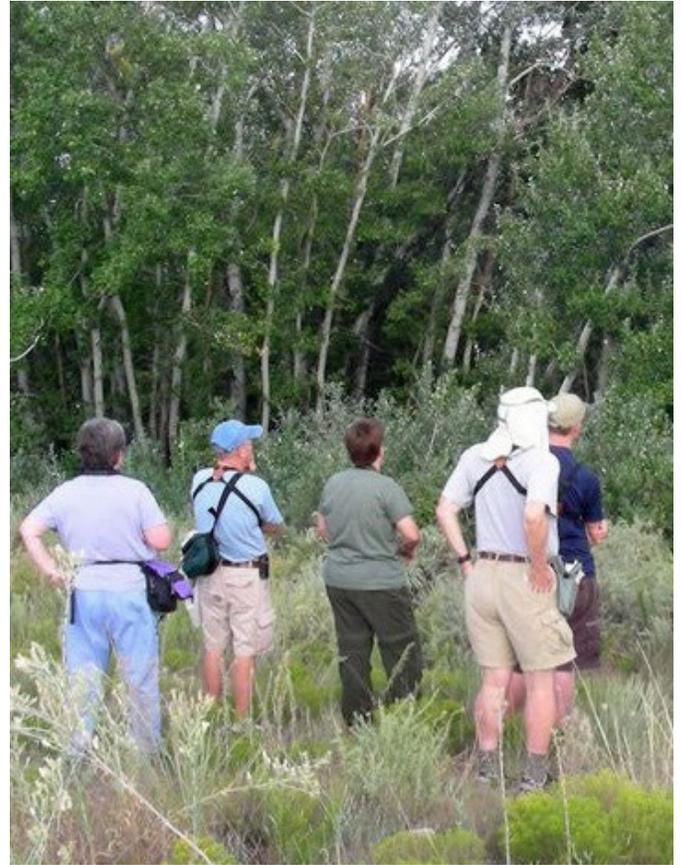
“There it is,” Barb stated as we were driving east through the flat prairie from Fort Sumner mid-morning September 18. The sparse stand of trees, an Audubon New Mexico (now Audubon Southwest) designated Important Bird Area, is a beacon of refuge to migrating birds each spring and fall. Barb and I were on our way to Melrose Woods for the dedication ceremony to mark the restoration of the area.

My first visit to what used to be called Melrose Trap was in September 2007 when the Central New Mexico Audubon Society (CNMAS) sponsored a Saturday field trip, and I learned why so many migrants, both regular species and those that got blown off course, depend on this vital stand of trees in the midst of the otherwise barren prairie. After flying all night, the stand of cottonwoods and poplar trees provides a beacon of hope – food and shelter during the daytime.

I have always been thankful that someone spotted a Prairie Rattlesnake curled up in the leaves next to some old logs. The memory always makes me very cautious when exploring at this spot.

The dense understory provided kindling for the lightning-sparked fire that roared through the stand of trees in 2011, a year of extreme drought when the grasses and shrubs were not as green as when the picture above was taken.

In 2013 the CNMAS Thursday Birders included Melrose on their Birdathon and I was shocked to see the blackened trees. Despite the damage to the trees, it remained a magnet for migrating birds, and our group was delighted to see a species not normally viewed in New Mexico, a Blackpoll Warbler, striking in its breeding plumage.



When I returned in 2018 for another Birdathon, the trees were starting to recover.

When we arrived at the site on September 18, 2021, several birders were clustered around Robert Munro’s scope trying to ID an empid. Later we gathered near the north side of the restored area for the dedication.

Munro, Board member who had shepherded this project through the process of restoration, provided an overview of the project and introduced collaborating partners from Audubon Southwest and the New Mexico State Land Office.

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Birds and Bark Recover at Melrose Woods

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While most of us at the dedication were visiting “an old friend of many years,” some were making their first visit and discovering what a gem this oasis on the prairie is for birds.



Afterwards, I wandered along the recently leveled trails, noticing the new growth springing up from existing trees and the resilience of scorched tree bark, then I admired the new signage.

As Barb and I began our trek home, we were grateful for the hard work and dedication of many who made the restoration possible.



A Word from the State Land Office

Recreational users of State Trust Lands must have a recreational access permit to access these lands. You can apply for the permit here: <https://openforadventure.nmstatelands.org/>

- Obey all postings/respect private property.
- No digging for or collecting cultural artifacts.
- SLO operates under a multiple-use concept therefore visitors may encounter other permitted users on-site.
- We strongly recommend visitors to trust lands carry and utilize a GPS device to avoid trespassing on to lands not managed by the NMSLO.
- Visitors are not allowed to manipulate any of the site’s improvements and are prohibited from interfering with the ranching operations.

- Please try to minimize your use footprint and pack out all trash. Leave No Trace.
- Please be attentive to weather reports. Storms can form quickly.
- Pack appropriate clothing for the season. During spring, summer and fall, typical day-hiking gear is recommended.
- Be mindful of tree snags (widowmakers).
- Please close the gate after entering the site, even if you find it open, and ensure the gate remains closed.
- Please be aware of prohibited activities under the Recreational Access Permit.

For more information, please call 505-827-5760.



Belen Marsh Clean-up Makes Another Haul

Story and photo by Eileen Beaulieu

On Saturday, October 30, the Central New Mexico Audubon Society sponsored a clean-up of the Belen Marsh located off Don Felipe Road in Belen. Over thirty volunteers came out to participate.

CNMAS has been cleaning the area for almost 15 years now, and this was one of the most successful outings. The volunteers were given a safety briefing and provided with safety vests, gloves and trash bags made available by the Valencia County Roads Department. Snacks and water were also available thanks in part to CNMAS.

Everything from tires, windshields and even a large satellite dish was collected. At noon the county road crew arrived to pick up the trash.

A video about Belen Marsh can be found at <http://www.newmexicoaudubon.org/belen>.



Area Birding Sites Are (Mostly) Open

Rio Grande Nature Center State Park

The first part of the year is a great time to pause and appreciate the changes that have occurred as our plants, trees and animals prepare for the winter and the renewal of spring.

January's "Nature in Winter" festival features bird walks and nature walks led by volunteers.

In the Visitor Center, which is open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Wildlife Rescue volunteers display birds. In the Observation Room, Audubon Society members help with bird identification and set up scopes for close-up looks on or near the pond. In the Discovery Room, Nature Center volunteers conduct kids' activities. And in the Education Building guest experts give presentations.

For details visit rgnc.org and look under Events.

Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area

This Belen venue is part of the Valencia Soil and Water Conservation District. The grounds are open Thursday through Saturday from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

National Wildlife Refuges

Grounds and trails are open but buildings are closed. Details are at <https://www.fws.gov>.

Valle de Oro NWR is having a photo contest; entries are due Dec. 31. The grounds are open from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Trail guides and a flower field guide are on the Sevilleta NWR website.

At Bosque del Apache NWR viewing opportunities for cranes, geese and ducks are likely to be good through the end of January.

Other New Mexico wildlife refuges are in Las Vegas, Maxwell, Roswell and Muleshoe.

Update on Bird Names Discussions

The program for the American Ornithological Society's 2021 virtual conference featured a statement from its Diversity & Inclusion Committee.

The organization is the official source on the taxonomy of birds in North and Central America. A committee reviews scores of proposals to rename birds, to split a genus into two or more subspecies or to lump subspecies into a genus.

There were no proposals to change eponymous or honorary bird names, although a resolution was passed splitting the Mew Gull from the *Larus* genus and renaming it the



Short-billed Gull. The old name was derived from the "high-pitched mewing call given in the breeding colony."

The Diversity & Inclusion Committee arranged to highlight "the contributions of Black, Latin-American, Hispanic/Latino/Latinx, and Indigenous ornithologists" during the conference "to continue building an equitable and inclusive ornithological community."

The Bird Names for Birds website dated 2020 did not add to the list of ornithologists whose records should be investigated. There is a link to a list of 154 names taken from humans, including Sick's Swift and Pallas's Rosefinch, Pallas's Bunting and Pallas's Leaf-Warbler.

Several of last year's proposed changes applied to birds named by or for Spencer Fullerton Baird, who became an avid birder at the age of 13, participated in field trips with eminent naturalists and amassed a huge collection of birds.

In *Birds of a Feather: A Brief History of American Birding*, Scott Weidensaul said Baird "almost single-handedly created the National Museum of American History at the Smithsonian." In a chapter titled Shotgun Ornithology Weidensaul reported that Baird recruited and mentored military officers who were among the first to explore the American West. Among the ambitious and competitive collectors were Charles Bendire, John Townsend, John Bachman and John McCown. Birds were named for all of them and all were targeted by Bird Names for Birds. In 2020 McCown's Longspur was renamed Thick-billed Longspur in the first victory for advocates of name changes.



The Oasis:
A Community
of Hope

The Friends of Bosque del Apache have created a new monthly giving program "to preserve the delicate ecosystems of Bosque del Apache, one of the last remaining wetlands in New Mexico."

Friends executive director Deb Caldwell says the group's board will match donations up to \$23,000.

See friendsofbosquedelapache.org.

Seeing Local Birds Through the Lens



Annual Meeting Gets a Treat

The CNMAS board enjoyed a picture show at its June meeting. Among the treats were (clockwise from left):

- Great Horned Owls at Willow Creek Bosque Open Space by Michele Weisz
- Cooper's Hawk in Albuquerque's Northeast Heights by Susan Hunter
- Wood Ducks at Tingley Beach by Brandt Magic
- Loggerhead Shrike at McIntosh by Bonnie Long



Climate Change Puts New Mexico's Ancient Acequias to the Test

Communal irrigation systems that have sustained communities, culture, and birdlife for centuries are running dry in a drought-racked Southwest.

By Lourdes Medrano

A narrow, meandering ditch brings water from the Rio Grande into the orchard on Enrique Lamadrid's north-central New Mexico property. The retired University of New Mexico professor and folklorist often marvels at the abundance of birds that flitter through the trees on its banks. "We have Great Horned Owls. We have several kinds of hawks, including the little gavilanes—the little kestrels," he says. "We have all kinds of songbirds. We have wrens. We've got the Bewick's Wren that sings up a storm."

This small waterway is known as an acequia, an ancient type of gravity-powered ditch found throughout northern New Mexico. These earthen canals carry mountain snowmelt and rain to fields, orchards, and gardens. The emerald-green ribbons of vegetation that flourish as a result provide an oasis for a diversity of avian life, says Lamadrid, an avid birder who has researched acequias extensively. "We forget to give acequias credit, but acequias broaden and expand the riparian zone," he says. "Where there are acequias, there are beautiful trees full of birds."



Bewick's Wren
by Joe Schelling

Acequias (pronounced ah-SEH-kee-ahs), have a long history of delivering water for flood irrigation dating to the colonization period during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. They have helped people in New Mexico and other parts of the arid Southwest to endure times of both plenitude and scarcity.

But severe weather this summer caused some acequias to run dry, raising concerns about whether these centuries-old symbols of resilience can continue to provide for communities as climate change causes deeper, longer-lasting water shortages.

Acequias stem from a blend of civilizations whose communal culture still thrives in the region. The ditches evolved over thousands of years in the Middle East. They spread to Spain during the North African Muslim occupation of the Iberian Peninsula in the eighth century. When the Spanish arrived in the Southwest, they used these irrigation techniques to build on similar canals that Pueblo Indians relied on to grow corn, beans, and squash.

New Mexico's estimated 700 to 800 surviving acequias flow through both urban and rural communities, and their users are diverse. "Some are commercial farmers, and some are lucky enough to have an acequia in their backyards, but everybody benefits

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. . . More on Acequias

“Water seepage replenishes shallow aquifers”

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because they make this a very livable place,” Lamadrid says. In Santa Fe, the Randall Davey Audubon Center and Sanctuary draws water from the Acequia del Llano.

The old irrigation systems still function in much the same way as centuries ago, under principles of equity and cooperation.

The word acequia, of Arabic origin, embodies not just the network of canals, but also a complex system of inherited cultural norms, shared responsibilities, and democratic decision-making. “It’s a privilege to use water communally,” Lamadrid says. “The acequia is physical and spiritual and communal values.”

State law recognizes acequias as political subdivisions and addresses related matters through the governor-appointed New Mexico Acequia Commission. Acequia traditions include self-governing practices and a distinct Spanish lexicon. Elected *comisionados*, or commissioners, manage the acequias. A *mayordomo*, or ditch manager, ensures fair distribution of water and acequia upkeep. *Parciantes* who hold water rights must help clean and repair the acequia madre every spring during *la limpia*, when people of all ages gather to cook, eat, and catch up with neighbors when the work is done. From this cherished main canal, the water flows into communities and is then allotted to *parciantes* via smaller ditches that flood individual plots.

Since water from typically unlined acequias infiltrates through their beds, some critics view them as less efficient than other methods of watering crops.

Drip irrigation, for example, uses flexible tubing to slowly deliver water directly to plants, keeping evaporation and runoff to a minimum. Supporters, however, hold up acequias as a viable alternative to confront an increasingly warming climate. And science seems to support those assertions.

Studies from New Mexico State University show acequias provide multiple benefits for the environment. Not only do they expand and maintain riparian areas for increased bird and wildlife diversity, but water seepage from acequias replenishes shallow aquifers, feeding streams and rivers, says Alexander “Sam” Fernald, director of the university’s Water Resources Research Institute. To call these irrigation systems inefficient “is mischaracterizing the point of acequias,” he says. “Part of their function, historically and ideologically, is keeping the groundwater and surface water in balance, so they’re actually the most efficient system for doing that.”

Not only do they expand and maintain riparian areas for increased bird and wildlife diversity, but water seepage from acequias replenishes shallow aquifers. Maintaining that balance will be especially important and challenging in the coming decades, during which scientists predict that



Acequia in Corrales
by Marc De Simone/Alamy

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. . . Acequias

“an integral part of thriving habitat”

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New Mexico will become even hotter and drier. Higher temperatures earlier in spring mean that acequia users will have to adjust to the snowmelt they rely on arriving sooner, says John Fleck, director of the Water Resources Program at the University of New Mexico. “If you’re a water user below a dam, where you can store spring runoff to use in the summer, you can correct for that problem,” Fleck says. “But most of the acequias are not below dams, so they’re victims of this fundamental change in the climate.”

Still, acequias have proven resilient during periods of severe drought and other external forces over the past 400 years, Fernald notes. The communal nature of acequias can provide cohesiveness to help meet the challenges of a changing climate head-on, without advanced irrigation technologies or major infrastructure, he says.

Parciantes already are adjusting their approach. In Albuquerque’s North Valley, where Lamadrid lives and the acequias bring water from the Rio Grande, drought this summer forced the system to shut down three months earlier than usual. “Farmers put their fields to bed for the winter when they water one last time in the middle of October,” says Lamadrid, a comisionado for Alamos de los Gallegos Acequia Association. “This year, they cut the cycles off by the end of July.”

Monsoon rains brought some temporary relief, allowing farmers to water their fields and plots a few more times.

“We’re still in the middle of a drought, but this year we had a very generous temporal,” says Lamadrid, using the Spanish word for seasonal rain that fell intermittently through September.

In East Pecos, state commission chairman Ralph Vigil is mayordomo of the Acequia del Molino. An eighth-generation farmer in the Pecos River Valley, he has started growing more drought-tolerant crops that he sells to schools. He views acequias as an integral part of thriving habitat for birds and other creatures throughout the state: “The growth along the acequias, along those corridors where that water basically leaches through, allows this plant life that sustains the birdlife and the insect life and every piece of wildlife in there.”

Vigil and parciantes around New Mexico hope that acequia communities will be able to adapt to a changing climate and preserve a time-honored water-sharing culture built on *querencia*, a deep love of place that also involves respect. “We were all taught about *querencia* of ourselves, of community, of the land and the place that we were brought up in,” Vigil says.

This heritage passed on from one generation to another, he says, can help sustain acequias in a region they helped to build centuries ago, and where they still belong.

This article is reprinted with permission from the Audubon website. Western Water News is a regular feature.



Thursday Birder Schedule

December 2

Los Poblanos Open Space 8:55 a.m.–12 noon

Meet in trail parking lot off Montaña Road

GPS coordinates (35.14347018381828, -106.65960555767202)

Difficulty level: one and a half to two miles on flat, even trail

Leader: Perrienne Houghton

December 9

Rio Grande Nature Center 8:55 a.m.–12 noon

GPS coordinates (35.1295, -106.6820)

Meet at the wetland blind in the northeast corner of the parking lot

Note that a \$3 parking fee, State Parks pass or Friends of the RGNC pass is required per car and that the Visitor Center and restrooms open at 10 a.m.

Difficulty level: one mile on flat, even trails

Following a guided walk behind the Nature Center, we will hold our holiday get-together at the picnic tables outside the RGNC Education Building. Please bring a donation of \$2 towards cookies and a hot drink.

Leaders: Karen Herzenberg and Leah Henzler

No trips December 16, 23, 30

It's Christmas Count Season

The Albuquerque count will be held Sunday, December 19. For details e-mail AlbuquerqueCBC@gmail.com.

A list of other counts is at <https://nm.audubon.org/bird-counts>.

January 6

Tingley Ponds and bosque 9:03 a.m.–12 noon

Meet at the north end of the Tingley Beach parking lot.

GPS coordinates (35.088596, -106.677003)

Difficulty level: one and a half miles on flat, sandy trails

Leader: Lefty Arnold

January 13

Bernardo Waterfowl Management Area

8:15 a.m.–3:00 p.m.

Meet at the South Valley Railrunner parking lot, Camino del Tren Avenue

GPS coordinates (35.030140, -106.6568077)

Bring a picnic lunch.

Difficulty level: 50 miles drive each way

Leader: Ken Zaslou

January 20

Eastern plains of Tarrant County 8:20 a.m.–3:00 p.m.

Meet at Tijeras Senior Center parking area on NM 333/ Route 66

There will be space for eight cars. If you'd like to go, please arrange to carpool and e-mail us at thursdaybirders@gmail.com by January 6 to reserve your spot.

GPS coordinates (35.07924, -106.3909)

Secondary meeting place, 9:00 a.m. at Pilot Travel Center on north NM 41

Plans for lunch will be shared before the trip.

Difficulty level: 100-mile driving tour with focus on raptors

Leader: Bonnie Long

More TB Trips

January 27

Rio Grande Nature Center State Park and bosque
8:55 a.m.–12 Noon

GPS coordinates (35.1295, -106.6820)

Meet at the wetland blind in the northeast corner of the Nature Center parking lot

Note that a \$3 parking fee, State Parks pass or Friends of the RGNC pass is required per car and that the Visitor Center and restrooms open at 10 a.m.

Difficulty level: one and a half miles on flat, even trails

Leaders: Leah and Joe Cairns

February 3

Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge
7:50 a.m.–3:00 p.m.

Meet at the South Valley Railrunner parking lot, Camino del Tren Avenue.

There will be space for eight cars. If you'd like to go, please arrange to carpool and e-mail us at thursdaybirders@gmail.com by January 27 to reserve your spot.

GPS coordinates
(35.030140,
-106.6568077)

Difficulty level: 90-mile drive each way, plus driving and some short walks at the refuge

Bring a picnic lunch.

Leader: Judy Liddell



Bald Eagle
by Joe Schelling

February 10

Willow Creek Bosque Open Space
8:55 a.m.–12 noon

Meet in trailhead parking lot. Directions: go east on Willow Creek Road NE from State Road 528, 1.8 miles south of 550 in Bernalillo. After 0.1 mile, turn left after Spruce Mountain Road NE to a gravel road marked Bosque Trail.

Difficulty level: one and a half miles, flat with some uneven trails

Note there are no restrooms at this site.

Leader: Ginny Davis

February 17

Durand Open Space 8:55 a.m.–12 noon

Meet in Open Space parking lot.

GPS coordinates (35.003503, -106.689796)

Difficulty level: one and a half miles on flat, sandy trails.

Optional lunch gathering place after the walk is Abuelitas (details will be shared at the walk).

Note there are no restrooms at this site.

Leader: Susan Hunter

February 24

Albuquerque Open Space Visitor Center
8:55 a.m.–12 noon

Meet in the center's parking lot on the east side of Coors Boulevard

GPS coordinates (35.1656, -106.6734)

Difficulty level: two miles on flat trails, some uneven and sandy

Leader: Sara Jayne Cole

CNMAS Directory and Contacts

Central New Mexico Audubon Society is a 501(c)(3) non-profit chapter of the National Audubon Society Inc.

Our mission: To appreciate, experience and conserve birds, other wildlife and their habitats; and to encourage and support environmental education in New Mexico.

Mailing address: CNMAS, P.O. Box 30002, Albuquerque NM 87190-0002

The CNMAS membership form is on the web site:

<http://cnmas.newmexicoaudubon.org>

Officers

President	Perrienne Houghton cnmaspresident@gmail.com
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