

JOPPA FLATS EDUCATION CENTER
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BOSQUE DEL APACHE – BROCHURE – 2018 (08/9/17)

TEXAS TO NEW MEXICO: BOSQUE DEL APACHE AND THE RIO GRANDE CORRIDOR



Snow and Ross's Geese - Liftoff at Bosque del Apache NWR

January 9 - 15, 2018

Leaders

Bill Gette and Alison O'Hare

Mass Audubon's Joppa Flats Education Center



Curve-billed Thrasher



Sandhill Cranes



Pyrrhuloxia



Townsend's Solitaire



Gray-crowned and Black Rosy-Finches

BOSQUE DEL APACHE AND THE RIO GRANDE CORRIDOR

Introduction

The Rio Grande River Valley between El Paso, Texas, and Albuquerque, New Mexico, is an extraordinary area to explore in the winter. During our trip, we will experience many different habitats – from desert to montane forest. Since we will be visiting so many habitats, we expect to see a wide variety of birds. During our thirteen previous trips, we have seen a total of _____ species of birds, including many southwestern specialties, and 18 species of mammals. After visiting excellent birding areas near El Paso, we'll explore some of New Mexico's finest state parks, wilderness areas such as the Organ Mountains, the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, and Sandia Crest, located at 10,678 feet above sea level. We hope that you can join us for our adventure in the Rio Grande River Valley. We're so excited about our return trip to this beautiful area.

Target bird species include Clark's Grebe, Ross's Goose, Sandhill Crane, Golden Eagle, Harris's Hawk, Scaled Quail, Greater Roadrunner, Red-naped Sapsucker, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Juniper Titmouse, Verdin, Cactus Wren, Sage Thrasher, Curve-billed Thrasher, Crissal Thrasher, Phainopepla, Pyrrhuloxia, and three species of rosy-finches.

Tuesday, January 9

Our program begins at the El Paso International Airport at about noon. From the airport, we will have a short drive to the Rio Bosque Wetlands Park. This 372-acre reserve is managed by the University of Texas at El Paso. As we enter the park, we will cross a small bridge and drive along an irrigation canal where we expect to see ducks and shorebirds. During previous trips, we have seen Northern

Shovelers, Black-necked Stilts, Long-billed Dowitchers, and Western Sandpipers.

Within the park, we will walk along several trails where we expect to see Black Phoebe, Say's Phoebe, Green-tailed Towhee, and White-crowned Sparrow. We will look and listen for the Chihuahuan Ravens that often fly in mixed flocks with American Crows. We will also search for Burrowing Owls. The park staff has constructed several artificial nest burrows for the owls, and the birds have re-colonized the area.

Lodging in El Paso

Wednesday, January 10

We will have a 7:00 a.m. departure and drive south along I-10 to Fabens. At Fabens, we will leave the interstate and drive through an extensive agricultural area en route to McNary, Texas. An excellent birding venue is the Tornillo Reservoir, where we have seen large numbers of water birds, including American White Pelican, American Wigeon, Northern Pintail, Ring-necked Duck, and Eared Grebe. In the roadside vegetation along our route, we will look for Verdin, Loggerhead Shrike, Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, Bewick's Wren, and Pyrrhuloxia. At Lovelady Park in Fort Hancock, we expect to see White-winged Doves and Eurasian Collared-Doves.

At McNary, we will bird the arid thorn-bush country looking for more southwestern specialties, and we will make a brief visit to McNary Reservoir. When water levels are right, large numbers of water birds flock to this area. We hope to see three species of grebes (Eared, Western, and Clark's), Neotropic Cormorants, and more ducks. We will search the edges of the impoundments and mudflats for shorebirds and waders. In past years, we have seen our first Greater Roadrunners in the McNary area.

BOSQUE DEL APACHE AND THE RIO GRANDE CORRIDOR

Wednesday, January 10 (Continued)

From McNary, we will return to Fabens for lunch and then rejoin I-10 for the short drive north to Sunland Park Racetrack. The stables and paddocks at the racetrack are a reliable place to see Yellow-headed and Brewer's blackbirds. A mile north of Sunland Park, we will stop at Doniphan Marsh, where we have seen a good variety of ducks and shorebirds.

We will bird a residential area on the northern fringe of El Paso and make a brief stop at the Rio Grande River Regional Park in Canutillo to look for shorebirds and ducks. We will then ascend into the Franklin Mountains via Transmountain Road. We will stop at a roadside viewing area and scan the valley below for Golden Eagle. On the eastern side of the mountains, we will stop at the U.S. Border Patrol Museum, where we have seen a variety of species, including Rock Wren, Cactus Wren, Crissal Thrasher, Black-throated Sparrow, and Brewer's Sparrow.

By 4:00 p.m., we will retrace our route over the Franklin Mountains and drive north to Las Cruces.

Lodging in Las Cruces

Thursday, January 11

This morning, we will head for the Aguirre Springs Campground, located at about 6,000 feet on the eastern side of the magnificent Organ Mountains. We plan to spend the morning exploring the access road and park. Conditions permitting, we will take a leisurely hike up the Pine Tree Trail. Along this trail, we have seen Canyon Wren, Black-chinned Sparrow, Rufous-crowned Sparrow, Canyon Towhee, and Townsend's Solitaire. Expect to see dramatic scenery with the spires of the Organ Mountains as the background and the broad expanse of the

White Sands National Monument fanning out to the east.

From Aguirre Springs, we will return to Las Cruces for a carry-out lunch and then drive the short distance to the Dripping Springs Natural Area located in the western foothills of the Organ Mountains. During the winter, species typical of this area include Western Bluebird, Loggerhead Shrike, Phainopepla, Canyon Towhee, Spotted Towhee, Green-tailed Towhee, Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, Rufous-crowned Sparrow, and Black-throated Sparrow.

As we drive to and from Dripping Springs, we will be sure to bird the housing areas along Dripping Springs Road. During each of our previous trips, we have found both Gambel's and Scaled quails here along with Curve-billed Thrashers and Cactus Wrens. On several occasions, we have seen Coyotes in and around the housing area.

Lodging in Las Cruces

Friday, January 12

By 7:00 a.m., we will leave Las Cruces and drive about 20 miles north on I-25 to Leasburg Dam State Park. This park protects 293 acres of land along the Rio Grande River. From the park's observation platform, one gets a good view of the river (often with only a trickle of water) and the surrounding area. In 2014, we saw a good variety of birds from that overlook, including over 200 Lark Buntings.

From the park, we will cross to the western side of the Rio Grande River and follow a country road through farm lands toward Hatch. We expect to see a number of raptors en route.

We will rejoin I-25 at Hatch and drive to two beautiful state parks, Percha and Caballo. Percha Dam State Park is located

BOSQUE DEL APACHE AND THE RIO GRANDE CORRIDOR

near the southern end of the Caballo Lake. While small, only 80 acres, the park is one of the best sites in New Mexico for land birds. The stands of cottonwoods along the Rio Grande River, open fields, and woodland edges attract a large variety of wintering species. On four of our previous trips, we found Vermilion Flycatchers at Percha. In 2008, we found a Hammond's Flycatcher. Western Bluebirds and Phainopepla are commonly seen in the cottonwoods in the campground.

Caballo Lake State Park is a large reserve encompassing over 16,000 acres. The lake, which covers approximately 11,000 acres, is a good place to view waterfowl. We have seen grebes here, including both Western and Clark's.

From Caballo, we will drive a short distance north to Las Animas Creek where we will search the sycamores for Bridled Titmouses and Acorn Woodpeckers. On most trips, we have found both of these species there.

We will end our day at the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge. Our plan is to arrive at the refuge by 4:30 p.m. to watch the fly-in of thousands of geese and cranes. The evening fly-ins are wonderful!

Lodging in Socorro

Saturday, January 13

Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, a magnificent 57,191-acre preserve situated along a nine-mile stretch of the Rio Grande River, will be today's focal point. We will have a predawn departure from Socorro, so we can see the early-morning waterfowl and crane spectacle. Each year, tens of thousands of geese, ducks, and cranes winter at Bosque del Apache. In recent years, as many as 15,000 Sandhill Cranes have been observed here. The huge, swirling flocks of Snow and Ross's geese

and the booming calls of the cranes are awe inspiring.

During our visit, we will drive slowly along the 15 miles of roads that encircle much of the refuge. We will stop often to observe the waterfowl and many other species. We should see Greater Roadrunner, Say's Phoebe, Spotted Towhee, and Verdin. Throughout the day, we will also be on the lookout for Coyotes and the beautiful Mule Deer. During our 2012 trip, a dozen Collared Peccaries ran across the refuge road in front of us. In 2013, we saw Elk.

By mid-afternoon, we will leave Bosque del Apache and drive to Water Canyon in the Magdalena Mountains. As we drive into the canyon, we will pass through a wide variety of habitats, from grasslands to montane forest. Resident species along the lower portion of Water Canyon include Common Raven, Western Scrub-jay, and Loggerhead Shrike. At higher elevations where the grassland gives way to forest, resident species include Acorn Woodpecker, Mountain Chickadee, Juniper Titmouse, Bushtit, and Western Bluebird.

During five of our previous visits to Water Canyon, we have seen herds of Pronghorns. We typically see them in the grasslands as we approach the canyon.

Lodging in Socorro

Sunday, January 14

By 7:00 a.m., we will leave Socorro and drive north along I-25 to Bernardo. We will then drive east along U.S. 60 to the Salinas Pueblo Missions National Monuments (Abó and Quarai). During our recent visits to these historic sites, we had excellent birding. We saw many exciting species including Pinyon Jay, Mountain Bluebird, Sage Thrasher, and Cassin's Finch. (While our

BOSQUE DEL APACHE AND THE RIO GRANDE CORRIDOR

time at these sites will be limited, we will have an opportunity to explore both ruins.)

From Quarai, we will then drive through the grasslands east of the Manzano Mountains en route to Sandia Crest. Sandia Crest is located east of Albuquerque at 10,678 feet above sea level. The Sandia Mountains have been a reliable place in recent years for rosy-finches. While rosy-finch numbers vary from year to year depending on food availability and weather conditions, we have a good chance of seeing some. In 2016, we saw all three species—Brown-capped, Gray-crowned, and Black. We plan to spend the afternoon birding Sandia Crest looking for the rosy-finches and other exciting species such as Townsend's Solitaire, Mountain Chickadee, Steller's Jay, and Red Crossbill. We will also look for the beautiful Abert's Squirrel with its long ear tufts.

Lodging in Albuquerque

Monday, January 15

Today is a travel day. Our trip ends at Albuquerque airport at about 6:00 a.m.

Considerations

1. Scheduled events are subject to change depending on weather conditions and other factors.
2. We start early and are busy all day. Remember, this is a birding trip—not a vacation!
3. Meals will be informal. Usually, we stop for only one sit-down meal each day. For most of our other meals, we will utilize carry-out restaurants and convenience stores. Continental breakfasts are the only meals included in the program fee.
4. Due to the fact that the road to Sandia Crest is occasionally impassable due to

inclement weather conditions, our visit to Sandia Crest is dependent on safe travel conditions.

5. For your added enjoyment, you will receive a copy of the *New Mexico Trip Guide* prior to the trip. This guide contains background information about the areas we will be visiting, species summaries, maps, and the trip checklist.

Program Cost (per person)

Members: \$1,295
Non-members: \$1,395
Single Room Option: \$400
(no senior discounts available)

A non-refundable, non-transferable deposit of \$400 is required at the time of registration. Final payment is due December 10, 2017.

The program fee does not include air transportation, personal items, or meals (except continental breakfasts). The fee does include all ground transportation in Texas and New Mexico, entrance fees, lodging, and interpretive materials.

Important Note:

Please do not make your flight arrangements before consulting with Bill Gette.

For additional information, please contact:

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Photos by Bill Gette

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Cancellation Policy

If you must cancel your trip with us, we can offer full refunds (less the initial deposit) up to 30 days before departure. Cancellations made less than 30 days before departure are non-refundable, unless we are able to replace you with another paying participant. In any case, your initial deposit is non-refundable.

Registration Form (Bosque del Apache)

Name(s): _____

Membership #: _____

Address: _____

Tel. # Days: _____

Evenings: _____

E-mail: _____

Deposit Enclosed: \$ _____
(\$400 per person. Please make check payable to *Massachusetts Audubon*. Please note the deposit requirement.)