

# NMOS BULLETIN



New Mexico  
Ornithological  
Society

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# THE NEW MEXICO ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY, INC.

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www.nmbirds.org

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## **A NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT**

There are many upcoming NMOS events that I want to draw your attention to. Many of these events, and their associated information, can be accessed through the NMOS web site. Janet Ruth has been spearheading the updating of the web site and Dillon Shook has been doing the behind-the-scenes technical work. I think you will find numerous improvements. We have moved the web site to a server on the campus of Western New Mexico University and in the process we changed the domain name. Even though [www.nmosbirds.org](http://www.nmosbirds.org) will still work, we would encourage you to use the new address [www.nmbirds.org](http://www.nmbirds.org).

12 April 2007 has been set for the date of the Annual Meeting in Albuquerque. Dave Krueper is in charge of this project with help from Martha Desmond who is handling the paper session. Now is the time to think about presenting a paper. Look on the web site under 46<sup>th</sup> NMOS Annual Meeting Announcement for more details.

Pat Snider has long been involved in the New Mexico Rare Bird Alert. There is now easy access to the RBA on the web site, which is updated at least once a week. If you are interested in rare, uncommon, or unusual birds that have been recently seen in New Mexico, access the main web page and click on the "Hotline" link at the bottom.

There are now more past editions of the *NMOS Bulletin* accessible via the NMOS web site. Jerry Oldenettel has been scanning back-issues of the *Bulletin* and providing them for posting to the site. This is a great way to read accounts of events that occurred several years ago.

For those who are interested in applying for the \$1000 Ryan Beaulieu Research Grant, information is available on the web site. Applications are due by 12 March 2008.

The NMOS Board has been busy working on the criteria and process concerning the Florence Merriam Bailey Lifetime Achievement Award. In the history of NMOS, only four of these prestigious awards have been given. The purpose of these awards is to recognize a lifetime of significant scientific contribution to New Mexico's ornithological knowledge; or a significant lifetime promotion of interest in the appreciation of the value of birds, both aesthetic and economic; or a significant lifetime of effective conservation of the state's avifauna; or a

significant lifetime contribution to the New Mexico Ornithological Society. If you know of a deserving individual, look for upcoming information on nominations to be available both on the web and in the *NMOS Bulletin*.

Finally, the Database of *NMOS Field Notes* is available via the NMOS web site and is a powerful tool to gather information on many species of New Mexico's avifauna. Searching the database is an excellent way to improve your knowledge of New Mexico birds.

As December closes, the Board and I wish you the very best of Holiday Seasons.

– Roland Shook

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### **NEW NMOS WEBSITE ADDRESS**

The NMOS Website has moved to a new address: [www.nmbirds.org](http://www.nmbirds.org).

The former NMOS website ([www.nmosbirds.org](http://www.nmosbirds.org)) will provide a re-direct to the new address, but please update your web browser's bookmarks and favorites. Bruce Neville served for many years as the webmaster of the NMOS website. We thank him for his valuable contributions to this important NMOS resource. Janet Ruth has agreed to pick up the content webmaster responsibilities and will be working closely with Dillon Shook, the technical webmaster, in updating and continuing to improve the website. The newest project under construction on the website, thanks to assistance from Jerry Oldenettel, is a section providing access to scanned versions of historical issues of the *NMOS Bulletin*. If you have suggestions or comments about the NMOS website, please contact Janet at [janet\\_ruth@usgs.gov](mailto:janet_ruth@usgs.gov).

## BARN OWL (*TYTO ALBA*) USE OF CISTERNS AS NEST SITES IN NEW MEXICO

JEAN-LUC E. CARTRON<sup>1</sup> AND DALE W. STAHLCKER<sup>2</sup>

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In New Mexico, Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*) nests have been found in hollow trees and in holes along arroyo walls, as well as in a wide variety of man-made structures, including abandoned buildings, mine shafts, and nest boxes (Ligon 1961, Jorgensen et al. 1998, Williams 2000, 2003). Here we report on two New Mexico Barn Owl nests found by us in cisterns (defined simply as receptacles holding water or other fluids) near abandoned homesteads.

The first nest site was a bottle-shaped cistern found near “Liberty” in extreme western Roosevelt Co. Surrounding habitat consisted of a mix of shortgrass and sandhill prairie. The cistern had a narrow (< 1-m diameter) opening at the top and was about 3-4 m deep and 3 m wide. The bulk of the cement-lined structure was underground with only about a 0.5 m “neck” extending above the surface. DWS visited it on 8 May 1998 when he observed the adult female on 1-2 week old nestlings. Returning on 25 May with a 2.5 m extension ladder, DWS banded one adult and six young staggered in age from about 4 to 6 weeks. The bottom of the cistern was littered with regurgitated pellets and the mostly eaten body of an adult Barn Owl. Whether the dead Barn Owl body was that of the other mate could not be determined.

The second cistern used as nest site was found by JLEC on 16 April 2007 in the Estancia Valley just northeast of Mountainair in Torrance Co. The cistern was on a wooden crate about 2 m. high near an abandoned house with scattered elm (*Ulmus* sp.) trees around (Fig. 1). Surrounding habitat was shortgrass prairie with junipers (*Juniperus monosperma*) clustered along ridges. The cistern was in the shape of a cylinder only about 1.5-2 m high with a narrow, round opening at the top facing sideways. Through a hole at the base of the cistern, JLEC



FIGURE 1. Barn Owl nest site and surrounding habitat in 2007 in the Estancia Valley. The nest site is the cistern in the left portion of the photograph.

observed two adults surrounded by large amounts of pellets. In retrospect, the pair must have been with eggs, but these could not be seen through the hole. One adult flew out of the cistern and into the abandoned building. JLEC returned on 22 May and observed one adult and two large downy young in the cistern. The other adult was discovered perched in the abandoned building.

Quite possibly the cistern or the abandoned homestead had been used as a nesting or roosting site for a number of years. In early summer 2000, JLEC found the fresh remains of a Barn Owl at the base of a Ferruginous Hawk (*Buteo regalis*) nest tree < 1 km from the cistern. The Ferruginous Hawk nest contained old nestlings. In all likelihood the Barn Owl had been killed as prey by the resident pair of Ferruginous Hawks and then brought back to the nest (see Cartron et al. 2004). In retrospect, the nearest likely roosting or nesting site for the Barn Owl that was killed would have been the cistern or the abandoned house. In particular, the surrounding area had no arroyos, cliffs, or large, dead trees that could have been used as natural sites.

These appear to be the first state reports of Barn Owls nesting in cisterns (although Ligon [1961] mentions without details the use of “abandoned wells”). Ault (1971) and Roberts (1976) mention use of cisterns by nesting Barn Owls in southwestern Oklahoma. Those cisterns appear to be underground like the Roosevelt County site, rather than the above-ground structure used in Torrance County. The 9 cistern nest sites found by Ault (1971) are described as “concrete lined wells, 3-6 m, built in the early 1900s for water storage”, while Roberts’ (1976) nest site is described interchangeably as cistern and old well. Reese (1972) reports a Barn Owl nest in a cistern along Chesapeake Bay, but does not provide any further description of the nest site. Anecdotally, both nesting adults at the cistern described by Roberts (1976) were found dead among remaining eggs. The cause of death was not apparent, although exposure to pesticide could not be ruled out (Roberts 1976). In combination with the dead adult found in Roosevelt County, however, it could also be suggestive of some problem encountered in departing the directly overhead, narrow opening of a cistern. In fact, Barn Owls have been observed (C. Marti, pers. comm.) having great difficulty in flying out from the bottom of concrete grain containers. Marti found a grain storage container in Davis County,

Utah, with a small opening in the top, shaped much like the above ground cistern described in this paper. In the bottom of the container he observed the decomposed and decomposing remains of 10-12 Barn Owls. According to Marti (pers. comm.), those Barn Owls had entered the container and apparently were unable to exit.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Monitoring of the Roosevelt County nest site was part of an inventory of vertebrate wildlife in Prairie-Chicken Management Areas in eastern New Mexico, funded by the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish. We thank C. Marti for his insightful and constructive comments on an earlier version of the manuscript, as well as for additional information on Barn Owls nesting in storage containers.

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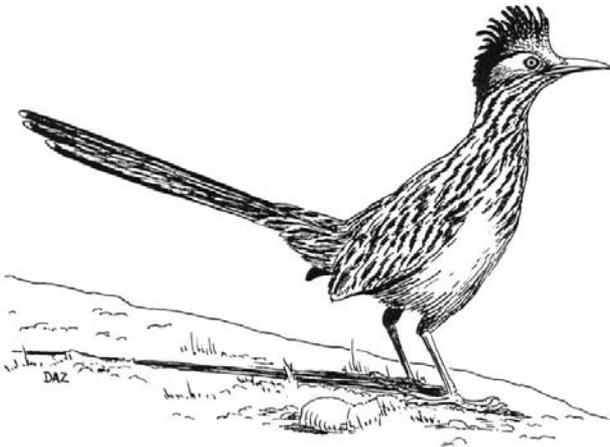
WILLIAMS, S.O., III, ed. 2003. *New Mexico Ornithological Society Field Notes* 42:25.

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## **NMOS 46<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL MEETING**

12 April 2008  
Vagabond Inn Executive  
1901 University Blvd. SE  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

The New Mexico Ornithological Society will hold its 46<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting on Saturday, 12 April 2008 at the Vagabond Inn Executive (formerly Airport University Inn), located at 1901 University Blvd. SE in Albuquerque. Further details on the meeting, including registration information, will appear in the next issue of the *NMOS Bulletin*. Details of the meeting will also be posted on the NMOS web site, [www.nmbirds.org](http://www.nmbirds.org), as soon as they develop.



**NMOS 46<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL MEETING  
CALL FOR PAPERS**

The 46<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the New Mexico Ornithological Society will be held on Saturday, 12 April 2008 at the Vagabond Inn Executive in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Oral presentations will be allotted 15 minutes, with an additional five-minute period for questions. Papers may range from technical reports of original research to general observations. Poster presentations are also encouraged. Poster sizes should be no larger than 91 cm H x 122 cm W.

Please submit abstracts containing the following information:

- TITLE (in all capital letters) of no more than 20 words.
- Names and addresses of author(s) in the following form:

Bear, V. L. and C. Finch, Dept. of Ornithology,  
University of Central New Mexico, Birdsville, NM 88666

- Body of abstract as one single-spaced paragraph, not to exceed 250 words.
- Include e-mail address and/or phone number of presenting author.

Please e-mail your abstract, including the entire abstract in the body of the e-mail, not as an attachment. This will prevent any problems with incompatible word processing formats. Abstracts should be e-mailed to Martha Desmond at [mdesmond@nmsu.edu](mailto:mdesmond@nmsu.edu) on or before 12 March 2008.

The abstracts will be distributed at the meeting and will be published in the *NMOS Bulletin*.

Session Chair: Martha Desmond, 505-646-1217

**NMOS FLORENCE MERRIAM BAILEY  
LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD**

The New Mexico Ornithological Society recognizes those individuals who have made a significant lifetime contribution to: New Mexico's ornithological knowledge; the promotion of the value of birds, both aesthetic and economic; effective conservation of the state's avifauna; and/or the New Mexico Ornithological Society.

Nominations for the award can be submitted by any interested individual(s) and will be accepted at any time. Nominations should be submitted to the current NMOS President or Secretary (see inside front cover). The Florence Merriam Bailey Lifetime Achievement Awards Committee may seek additional information about the nominee from the person(s) who submitted the original nomination. The Awards Committee will review the nomination and determine by majority vote if, in their opinion, a nominee meets the above criteria. The decision of the committee is final. Upon recommendation of the Awards Committee, awards will be presented at the NMOS annual meeting.

\* \* \*

**FLORENCE MERRIAM BAILEY – ORNITHOLOGIST**

JANET M. RUTH

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Florence Augusta Merriam Bailey (1863-1948), whom we honor with our NMOS Florence Merriam Bailey Lifetime Achievement Award, was a woman of "firsts." She was the first woman associate member of the American Ornithologists' Union (AOU) (1885), the first woman elected as a Fellow of the AOU (1929), and the first woman recipient of the

AOU's William Brewster Memorial Award (1931). She was also a member of the Cooper Ornithological Club, the Wilson Ornithological Club, and the National Audubon Society.

Florence was born 8 August 1863 in Locust Grove, New York, the youngest of three children of Clinton Levi and Caroline (Hart) Merriam. She was educated at a private school in Utica, New York, and attended Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts, from 1882 to 1886, although she did not receive a degree. Smith College later granted her a B.A. in 1921. Florence acquired her interest in natural history, and particularly ornithology, early from her father and her brother Clinton Hart Merriam who later became the first chief of the U.S. Biological Survey, the predecessor of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. While in college, largely in response to the threats posed to birds by their harvest for the women's hat industry, she organized The Smith College Audubon Society and was very active in protesting these practices. She also began writing articles for the *Audubon Magazine*. At 26 years of age, and refusing to use a man's nom de plume as women writers frequently did at that time, she revised and published a series of these articles in her first book *Birds Through an Opera Glass* (1889).

Soon after college she developed tuberculosis, resulting in a series of western trips to "take the cure" in southern California, Utah, and Arizona. In addition to improved health, these trips resulted in three more books—*My Summer in a Mormon Village* (1896), *A-Birding on a Bronco* (1896), and *Birds of Village and Field* (1898). This last book was written for beginning ornithologists and became one of the first popular American bird guides, including simple field keys for identification and illustrations by Ernest Thompson Seton, Louis Agassiz Fuertes, and John L. Ridgway. Following these travels, she moved to Washington, D.C. to live with her brother Hart. There she met Vernon Bailey (1864-1942) who had been hired by her brother as a naturalist for the Biological Survey. They were married on 16 December 1899 and made their home in Washington, D.C. Florence frequently accompanied Vernon on his Biological Survey field trips to the West where he collected and studied mammals, birds, reptiles, and plants, and Florence observed the birds. They explored New Mexico systematically and, over the next 30 years, also worked in Texas, California, Arizona, the Pacific Northwest, and the Dakotas. Florence published about 100 articles in

ornithological journals, such as *The Auk*, *Bird-Lore*, and *The Condor*, and authored 10 books. Among these books was *Handbook of Birds of the Western United States* (1902) with 600 pages and about as many illustrations. Additional recognition came to Florence when Joseph Grinnell named a subspecies of Mountain Chickadee—*Parus gambeli baileyae* (now *Poecile gambeli baileyae*)—in her honor (1908).

Florence was a founding member of the Audubon Society of the District of Columbia and was an active promoter of the society, its publication projects, and the bird classes it organized to provide basic instruction in field and laboratory ornithology to teachers of nature study.

In 1916, Professor Wells W. Cooke died before completing a project to publish on the birdlife of New Mexico. Dr. E. W. Nelson, then chief of the Biological Survey, asked Florence to complete the volume. Based on her knowledge of western birds and her experiences with her husband thoroughly surveying the biological resources of New Mexico, she completed *Birds of New Mexico*, published by the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish in 1928. She received the AOU's William Brewster Memorial Award for this publication and soon after received an honorary LL.D. degree from the University of New Mexico in recognition of the value of her work.

Her final major work was titled *Among the Birds in the Grand Canyon National Park*, published in 1939 by the National Park Service when she was past age 75. Vernon Bailey retired from the Biological Survey in 1933 and they continued to live in Washington, D.C. Vernon died in 1942 and Florence died six years later on 22 September 1948 at the age of 85.

## RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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- Kofalk, H. 1989. No Woman Tenderfoot: Florence Merriam Bailey, Pioneer Naturalist. Texas A & M University Press, College Station.

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St. Lawrence County, New York Branch, American Association of University Women. *Women of Courage, Florence Merriam Bailey: Pioneer Naturalist*. Online (available at <http://www.northnet.org/stlawrenceaauw/bailey.htm>).

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## **NMOS RESEARCH GRANTS**

The New Mexico Ornithological Society is again pleased to announce the availability of two \$1000 research grants, through the Ryan Beaulieu Research Grant Program, to support research on New Mexico birds.

The criteria for the grants are: the grant money must be spent while conducting research on birds in New Mexico; the recipient must either present a paper based on the research at an annual NMOS Meeting or submit an article based on the research to the *NMOS Bulletin*; and preference will be given to student applicants.

A short research proposal (two pages maximum) must be submitted describing the nature of the project and how the funds would be spent (e.g., on gas, tape recording, specific equipment, etc.). Each proposal should include two letters of reference, one of which should be from a graduate advisor if the applicant is a graduate student. References should comment on the applicant's commitment to New Mexico ornithology and ability to design and carry out creative, independent research. Research proposals must be received by 12 March 2008. Please submit your electronic proposal, with "NMOS Grant" in the subject line, to:

Dr. Roland Shook  
Western New Mexico University  
Silver City, NM 88061  
shookr@wnmu.edu

All applications will be acknowledged upon receipt. If no acknowledgement is received, it is the applicant's responsibility to follow-up with their submission to ensure consideration. Grant awards will be announced at the NMOS Annual Meeting on 12 April 2008.

## DUES INCREASE FOR 2008

The current dues amounts for New Mexico Ornithological Society membership have been unchanged since 1993. Beginning 1 January 2008, dues will increase from their current level. Members wishing to renew before the prices increase are encouraged to do so. Changes to the dues schedule are shown below.

<b>Membership category</b>	<b>Current dues</b>	<b>Dues effective 1 January 2008</b>
Regular	\$10	\$20
Family	\$15	\$30
Student	\$5	\$10
Supporting	\$35	\$50
Life	\$300	\$500

Current members should check their membership expiration date to avoid a lapse. Membership renewals can be mailed to: NMOS, P.O. Box 3068, Albuquerque, NM 87190-3068

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## REVIEWERS FOR VOLUME 35

The New Mexico Ornithological Society and the editor of the *NMOS Bulletin* would like to thank the following individuals who served as reviewers of manuscripts in 2007. Persons who provided reviews for more than one manuscript are indicated by an asterisk.

William H. Howe\*, David J. Krueper\*, Carl Marti, Bruce D. Neville, Jerry R. Oldenettel, Roland S. Shook, and Sartor O. Williams III\*.

**NEW MEXICO ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY – MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION**

Membership in the New Mexico Ornithological Society is open to anyone with an interest in birds. Memberships are for a calendar year and annual dues are payable 1 January. Dues below are effective 1 January 2008.

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

CITY: \_\_\_\_\_ STATE: \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

*Select membership category:*

- Regular            \$20    \_\_\_\_\_
- Family            \$30    \_\_\_\_\_
- Student           \$10    \_\_\_\_\_
- Supporting       \$50    \_\_\_\_\_
- Life                \$500   \_\_\_\_\_

*Please send this form with check to:*

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This issue of the *NMOS Bulletin* published 19 December 2007.

# NEW MEXICO ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

— *Founded 1962* —

The New Mexico Ornithological Society was organized to gather and disseminate accurate information concerning the bird life of New Mexico; to promote interest in and appreciation of the value of birds, both aesthetic and economic, to further effective conservation of the state's avifauna; to facilitate opportunity for acquaintance and fellowship among those interested in birds and nature; and to issue publications as a means of furthering these ends.

Membership and Subscriptions: Membership in the New Mexico Ornithological Society is open to anyone with an interest in birds. Memberships are for a calendar year and annual dues are payable 1 January. Dues are: Regular Membership \$10; Family \$15; Student \$5; Supporting \$35; Life \$300. Address for the New Mexico Ornithological Society: Post Office Box 3068, Albuquerque, NM 87190-3068.

## ***NMOS BULLETIN***

The *Bulletin* is published quarterly; subscription is by membership in NMOS. The *Bulletin* serves two primary purposes: (1) to publish articles of scientific merit concerning the distribution, abundance, status, behavior, and ecology of the avifauna of New Mexico and its contiguous regions; and (2) to publish news and announcements deemed of interest to the New Mexico ornithological community.

NMOS members are encouraged to submit articles and news. Articles received are subject to review and editing. Published articles are noted in major abstracting services. Please submit articles in double-spaced electronic format, such as a Microsoft Word document, by e-mail to the Editor (see inside front cover). Refer to recent issues of the *Bulletin* for examples of style. News items may be submitted to the Editor by way of e-mail.

**[www.nmbirds.org](http://www.nmbirds.org)**

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