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nmos Bulletin

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Volume 8 1980 Number 2

MINUTES OF THE 1980 NMOS ANNUAL MEETING

By Mary Lou Arthur

On Friday afternoon, 11 April, a field trip to Morgan Lake was led by Alan Nelson. Friday night, a slide show was given by Dustin and Sue Huntington on their "Big Year Count." Forty members and guests were present Saturday for the morning session at the Square B Ranch. President John Hubbard opened the meeting by thanking Mr. Tom Bolack for his hospitality. He also thanked Alan Nelson and the Four Corners Bird Club for hosting the NMOS Annual Meeting.

Treasurer's Report:

Balance on Hand 1 January 1979	\$ 953.47
1 January 1980	750.55
Current Balance (1 April 1980)	\$ 887.62

Two new Board Members were elected: Dustin Huntington and William Stone. The two year terms of William Baltosser and Charles Hundertmark expired this year.

Dustin Huntington, representing the Central New Mexico Audubon Society, gave a short talk on the 1980 Southwest Regional Conference of the National Audubon Society to be held at Ghost Ranch, NM on 23-30 June. Judy Vance, of the Sangre de Cristo Audubon Society, discussed the bird list which she compiled on the birds of Santa Fe and Española areas. A check-list of birds of Los Alamos County is being developed by Jim Travis et al. and will be available soon.

The Christmas Count was discussed briefly, with a reminder from John Hubbard

to be sure to count all birds sighted in the count area, even if it is only the species.

Volunteers are needed for the Breeding Bird Route Census in June.

In a summary of the 19 years of NMOS, John Hubbard noted that this is a time of concern, including as to whether or not the Society should continue to exist. NMOS is dedicated to the documentation and publishing of bird records from the state. The questions asked: is this published information being used by the members? is it worth the time and effort? where do we go from here? The Society needs to consider its future direction. A suggested long-term project is the working toward the publishing of an atlas of the birds of New Mexico. This would require much involvement from the members to succeed.

The meeting was concluded with John Hubbard speaking on the status of the reclassification of the Rocky Mountain flock of whooping cranes as experimental.

The afternoon session opened with Al Schmierer, representing the Gallup Audubon Society, giving a short talk on the birds of the Zuni Pueblo area. He asked to be contacted of any unusual sightings or breeding records in McKinley County. His address is: Box 467, Zuni, NM 87327. Jim Travis presented a study of sound identification of the five *Empidonax* flycatchers. Charles Hundertmark spoke on the location and identification of nests.

The evening program was a slide show given by Greg Schmitt: a review of his trip to Bolivia and his study of the birds found there.

The meeting was concluded Sunday morning with a field trip led by Greg Schmitt to Kirtland Marsh.

All members were present for the Annual Board Meeting 12 April 1980 in Farmington. Pres. John Hubbard made the motion to award James Sands a life membership, in recognition of his service to NMOS in past years. Motion was approved and seconded.

Charles Hundertmark agreed to be an editor of the *Field Notes*, effective May 1st. Ross Teuber agreed to help him in this work.

Treas. Ross Teuber asked for an audit of the NMOS books. It was decided that he would form a committee of three or four members for this purpose.

A Board Meeting is to be called in the fall, if needed.

The 1981 Annual Meeting will be in Albuquerque. Host Committee: Dustin Huntington and James Travis.

ALBINISM IN HOUSE FINCHES

By Ross L. Teuber

From time to time I have noted occasional House Finches (*Carpodacus mexicanus*) as well as House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*) with one or two white feathers in their wings or backs. These have been categorized as incidences of partial albinism and passed over. However, over the past two months I have had a male and a female House Finch with definite white wing patches, approximately one centimeter in width and extending entirely across the wing. When the wings

are folded, the white marking forms a distinct "V" pattern across the back. I have taken photographs showing this feature.

As these birds are a pair, this leads to some interesting speculation. If this albinism is the result of a genetic event, will it be passed on to the offspring? Could it be possible a new "race" OF House Finches might evolve or be evolving, or is it just a strange coincidence?

This oddity has been mentioned to other birders, and at least two, in widely dispersed areas of Albuquerque, have observed a similar phenomenon. The locations are too far from my area for them to involve the same birds. Has this sort of thing happened before, or is this a unique instance? Does anyone know anything about it?

This seems to merit some further investigation. I intend to follow up in the literature and would appreciate hearing from anyone who has further information or observations. Pictures would be very valuable. Please contact me at 1612 Kentucky NE, Albuquerque, NM 87110, or call at (505) 265-8962.

ARE THERE TWO SPECIES OF WESTERN GREBE?

By John P. Hubbard

The A.O.U. giveth and the A.O.U. taketh away, or at least many birders must think, as species are split or lumped by the American Ornithologists Union. Gone are such well-known species as the Great White Heron (*Ardea occidentalis* = *herodias*) and Ipswich Sparrow (*Passerculus princeps sandwichensis*), while resurrected are others such as the Alder Flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii* = *alnorom*) and Boat-tailed Grackle (*Quiscalus mexicanus* = *major*). In the future such standbys as the Mexican Duck (*Anas diazi* = *platyrhynchos*) and Gray-headed Junco (*Junco caniceps* = *hyemalis*) are almost surely to follow the heron and sparrow, but will we get any species back? The answer is almost certainly yes, including perhaps among sapsuckers (*Sphyrapicus* spp.) and maybe even in the Western Grebe (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*).

The Western Grebe might at first hand seem an unlikely entity to be harboring more than one species, but the fact is that it was originally described as two such forms by Lawrence (in Baird 1958). One was called *A. occidentalis* and the other *A. clarkii*, the former a "dark phase" type and the latter a "light phase" one. Many years later it was found that the two "phases" mated in an assortive manner, i.e., dark birds tended to choose dark mates and light birds chose light mates (Nero, in Palmer 1962; Storer 1965). More recently Ratti (1979) has even better documented this assortive mating, and he also found that the two types differ in California and Utah in the timing of nest initiation and in the rate of plumage development in the young. Few instances of mixed pairs were found, e.g., only 1.2% of 1185 pairs of birds analyzed in Utah, suggesting that the two "color phases" are actually behaving as distinct biological species. The question is, do they do so everywhere in their breeding range, e.g., in Mexico?

Just how do these two kinds of grebe differ, at least in ways that the average birder might discern? As indicated above, there is a dark type and a light type. The easiest way to distinguish them is on the basis of the extent of black in the cheek area, the darker type having this extend below the eyes and the light type having it not extend to the eyes (Figure 1). Other differences are as follows (from Storer 1965; Ratti 1979):

<u>Character</u>	<u>Dark Type</u>	<u>Light Type</u>
Lores (area in front of eye):	Usually blackish but may be white	Always white
Nape stripe:	Black wider	Black narrower
Back color:	Darker gray	Lighter gray
Flank color:	More extensively dark	Less extensively dark
Bill color:	Dull greenish-yellow	Orange yellow



Figure 1. Dark phase (left) and light phase (right) Western Grebes in typical form.

Of these characters, the most definitive appears to be the extent of black in relation to the eyes, although other features may prove helpful in identification as well. Intermediate birds occur to a small degree, and these include birds that have dusky around the eyes rather than black or white. Other characters may also reflect intermediacy, but such determinations in the field would probably require direct comparison with typical dark and light birds. At any rate, intermediacy should not be a problem for observers, as Ratti (1979) found an incidence of less than 1% in over 3500 observations

In order to get a better appreciation of the characters of these two grebe types, I have checked illustrations in several standard field guides to see what they might provide. These are as follows:

Birds of North America (Robbins et al. 1966): pictured is a dark type, except the lores are white; Ratti (1979) found such birds mainly in California in winter.

A Field Guide to Western Birds (Peterson 1961): light type, except the back and flanks are too dark.

Audubon Water Bird Guide (Pough 1951): light bird--good illustration.

As for the situation involving Western Grebes in New Mexico, we have a long way to go in gathering even basic data. For example, we know that the species breeds on the Jicarilla Apache Reservation and at Elephant Butte Lake, and summer occurrences have been reported elsewhere--especially in the central-northern region. We also know that the species occurs rather widely in migration, and wintering is regular on larger bodies of water--especially southward. However, our information on color types is meagre at best, although both forms have been collected in the state.

The following material has been examined to date:

Dark phase

female--Caballo Lake, Sierra County, 18 December 1962, collected by J.R. Dixon (NMSU Wildlife collection 7653); Peralta, Valencia County, October 1974, P. Nylander (MSB 3991).

male--Elephant Butte Lake, Sierra County, 2 April 1935, J.S. Ligon (Peabody Museum 70103).

Intermediate(?)

female--Caballo Lake, 18 December 1962, J.R. Dixon (NMSU WC 7651)

male--Caballo Dam, Sierra County, 8 January 1963, A. Wershaw (NMSU Biol. Dept. 1962).

Light phase

male--Bosque del Apache NWR, Socorro County, 17 October 1973, G.R. Zahm (MSB 3423); Caballo Lake, 18 December 1962, J.R. Dixon (NMSU WC 7652).

Birders can help fill the gaps in our knowledge about the kind ("color phases") of Western Grebes in New Mexico. A good start would be to examine any photographs that you have of the species and to make note of the color type(s) represented. Some of you may even have notes on color phases, although such records will probably be few indeed. Perhaps most importantly, you can spend a few extra minutes looking closely at the next Western Grebe(s) that you see in order to document the color type. I would be happy to receive such data and to publish any notes that you may have to offer on the subject. And who knows, maybe someday the A.O.U. will give us another species to contend with--and then you will especially want to know which kind(s) of Western Grebes you have seen.

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ONLY TWO DUSKIES LEFT?

By the Wildlife Management Institute

A month-long search for dusky seaside sparrows (*Ammodramus maritimus nigrescens*) has ended with only two of the small birds seen. The search through Florida's St. Johns River marsh was described by one reporter as more of a wake than anything else. Although helicopters now are dropping searchers into areas of the marsh not accessible by foot, there is scant hope that more of the little black-streaked sparrows will be located.

"Realistically, it looks like we will lose the dusky," said Dr. Jim Baker of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The dusky was first described in 1872 by Charles Maynard. Most of the duskies known about then lived in the St. Johns marsh west of Titusville, Florida. Years later a substantial number of the birds were located on Merritt Island southeast of Titusville. Mosquito control killed off most of those by 1950.

Reportedly there were 4,000 duskies inhabiting the St. Johns marsh until the 1960's. Then a four-lane expressway was pushed through the marsh and a housing development and uncontrolled fires destroyed more habitat. By 1978, only 24 of the sparrows remained, in 1979 there were 13, and now there are two.

Three of last year's 13 were taken to a Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission aviary in Gainesville to attempt captive breeding. All three turned out to be males, however, and one of those died last month. The remaining two duskies in the wild also are males.

A decision reportedly will be made in June whether to allow the last two duskies to disappear naturally or to capture them and try breeding them to a related species. It will be a heartbreaking decision either way.

Bill Leenhouts of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service described his feelings last month when the two surviving duskies flew up to challenge the searchers. "I felt my eyes get a little misty," he said, "more than they were from the fog. I knew that these two birds were the last ones of the species."

Leenhouts obviously is sad to see the dusky go, but warns us all that it is only a symbol of a greater loss.

REPORT OF THE NEW N.M.O.S. BIRD COMMITTEE: NO. 1.

By John P. Hubbard

In an effort to expedite considerations of records that deserve more than normal scrutiny, the N.M.O.S. Bird Committee has been reorganized. The members now consist of two eminent bird specialists, Dr. Dale A. Zimmerman of Silver City and Mr. Kenneth Kaufman of Tucson. In addition, I will preside as chairman of the committee and will offer my opinion where it appears warranted.

Records to be scrutinized will be limited to those of notable significance, including reports of birds that are rare or unusual in New Mexico at any given time or place. Such records include first state occurrences, out-of-season or out-of-range reports, noteworthy breeding records, and so on. Review will include reports substantiated by photographs or tape recordings, and all records should include as much written detail as possible. Remember, the more the committee has to work with, the better the evaluation that can be made.

Sight records will be evaluated and judged in terms of the following scale: questionable, possible, probable, and highly probable. Reports that are accompanied by photographs or tape recordings will be subjected to this same terminology, plus two other terms: erroneous and definite. All definite records will be on a par with specimen documentation--if the material is deposited in N.M.O.S. archives.

I hope that all of you whose records are evaluated will accept the committee's evaluation in the spirit it is intended. The committee has only

one axe to grind, that being that we want to provide the most objective assessment possible of any unusual bird(s) reported from New Mexico. If you do not agree with the committee, you are welcome to submit other written opinions of the records--based on the data available for use by the committee--for review. However, for N.M.O.S. purposes, the opinions here outlined on given records will be regarded as final unless changed by the committee.

1. Red-throated Loon (*Gavia stellata*). Two in winter plumage at Willow Lake, Eddy Co. 17 December 1978 by Richard and Linda Wilt; also one or both birds seen there on 18, 21, and 22 December 1978, including by Steve West.

Evaluation: Erroneous, based on two slides and a black-and-white photograph (NMOS 1978-15 A, B, and C), at least as concern the bird(s) photographed by the observer. The species actually represented is a Common Loon (*G. immer*) in winter plumage (JPH, KK, DAZ).

2. Red-necked Grebe (*Pidiceps grisigena*). One in winter plumage at Bluewater Lake, Valencia Co. 1 December 1979 by D. Archibald McCallum; also seen 2, 4, 6, and 8 December 1979, including by Louise Stevens.

Evaluation: Probable, based on details provided, which— though scant—are supportive of the identification (JPH, KK, DAZ). Photos provided for the record are very poor in quality and do not elucidate the record further.

3. Black Rail (*Laterallus jamaicensis*). One in apparent adult plumage at Harroun Lake, Eddy Co., on 17 April 1979, by Richard Wilt and Steve West.

Evaluation: Possible, based on the details provided; the bird was merely glimpsed as it flew over a short distance and disappeared into thick cover (KK, DAZ).

4. Black Duck (*Anas rubripes*). A male at Bitter Lake N.W.R., Chaves Co., on 31 December 1978, by Richard A. Wilt.

Evaluation: Possible, based on details provided, which do not mention the speculum or tail pattern/coloration (JPH, DAZ; rated questionable by KK).

5. European Wigeon (*Anas penelope*). One 3 miles east of Roswell, Chaves Co., on 16 December 1979 by Phelps White, Kenneth Smith, and Jerry Ainsworth and son.

Evaluation: Questionable, based on the scant details provided (JPH, KK, DAZ).

6. Red-shouldered Hawk (*Buteo lineatus*). An immature at Rattlesnake Springs, Eddy Co., on 6 May 1979, by Dustin and Sue Huntington.

Evaluation: Questionable, based on the details provided and on a series of color slides (NMOS 1979-bA, B, and C) (JPH, KK, DAZ). The general feeling of the committee is that the identification is best left at Buteo species, although if a name had to be applied it would more likely be Gray Hawk (*B. nitidus*) than Red-shouldered Hawk.

7. Buff-breasted Sandpiper (*Tryngites subruficollis*). One at Lake McMillan, Eddy Co., 26 August 1979, by Richard A. Wilt.

Evaluation: Possible, based on the details provide, which are scant (JPH, KK, DAZ).

8. Parasitic and Pomarine jaegers (*Stercorarius poaraciticus* and *S. pomarinus*). One of each at Lake McMillan, Eddy Co., 16 September 1978, by Steve West and Richard and Linda Wilt.

Evaluation: Each possible, based on details provided; there is little question that the birds were jaegers, but the species are open to question (JPH, KK, DAZ).

9. Eared Trogon (*Euptilotis neoxenus*). One at Godfrey Ranch headquarters, just north of the Animas Mountains, Hidalgo Co., 13 June 1979, by Steve and Janie Dobrott.

Evaluation: Probable, based on the details provided (JPU, KK; rated as highly probable by DAZ).

10. Lucifer Hummingbird (*Calothorax lucifer*). A male a Williamsburg, Sierra Co., 25-28 April 1979, by Doris Miller.

Evaluation: Highly probable, based on the details provided (JPH, KK, DAZ).

11. Rose-throated Becard (*Platypsaris aglaiae*). A female in Guadalupe Canyon, Hidalgo Co., 9 June 1979 by Steve West and Richard Wilt.

Evaluation: Probable, based on the details provided (JPH, KK, DAZ).

12. Pine Warbler (*Dendroica pinus*). One at Percha Dam State Park, Sierra Co., 29 November 1978, by Kevin J. Zimmer.

Evaluation: Probable, based on the details provided (JPU, KK; rated highly probable by DAZ).

13. Connecticut Warbler (*Oporonis agilis*). A female at Rattlesnake Springs, Eddy Co., 11 September 1979, by Richard Wilt.

Evaluation: Possible, based on details provided (JPH, KK; rated questionable by DAZ).

14. Common Redpoll (*Acanthis flammea*). One at Parkview, Rio Arriba Co., on 26 December 1979, by Dorothy and Jack Blanton; also seen 3-4 days later.

Evaluation: Questionable, based on the details provided--which are scant and do not eliminate a Cassin Finch (*Carpodacus cassinii*) (JPH, KK, DAZ).

15. Rufous-sided Towhee—eastern form (*Pipilo erythrophthalmis*) . A female at Socorro, Socorro Co., 8 November 1978, by Pat Basham.

Evaluation: Highly probable, based on the details provided (JPH, KK, DAZ).

To summarize, reports of 16 different species were evaluated from records

submitted in 1978 and 1979. Evaluations by the committee were as follows:

Erroneous - 1	Probable - 4
Questionable - 3	Highly Probable - 2
Possible - 6	Definite - 0

The following reports represent first state records (cf. Hubbard 1978) (evaluation of records in parentheses):

Black Rail (possible).
Buff-breasted Sandpiper (possible)
Eared Trogon (probable)
Lucifer Hummingbird (highly probable)
Pine Warbler (probable)
Connecticut Warbler (possible)

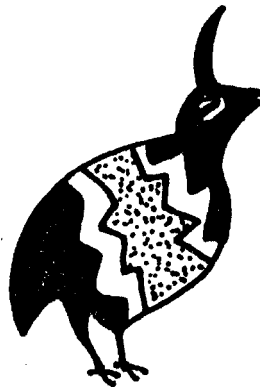
In addition, species previously reported are upgraded as follows:

Red-necked Grebe (Questionable to probable).
Rose-throated Becard (Possible to probable).

It should be noted that, in reading over these 16 reports, there was generally too little rather than too much detail provided by observers on records. The need for adequate detail cannot be overly emphasized, and all observers should strive to improve in this regard. Remember, your records must stand on their own, so give them all the help you can.

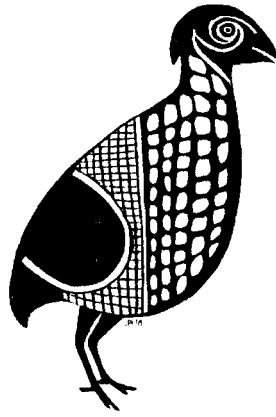
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REVISED CHECK-LIST OF THE BIRDS OF NEW MEXICO



BY JOHN P. HUBBARD

NEW MEXICO ORNITHOLOGICAL
SOCIETY PUBLICATION NO. 6

— 1978 —

NOTES AND NEWS

Mary Orr Russell passed away in California earlier this year, and the Society expresses its regrets at this event. Mary was a dynamic and warm person, with an abiding interest in biology and many other subjects. We will miss her, but her memory will long be associated with the Reserve area and Catron County.

We wish Alan Schmierer well, with his move from Zuni to Bemidji, Minnesota. Al has put Zuni and its birds on the map, and his careful observations and extensive reports from that area have been most welcomed.

The Society expresses its gratitude to Dale Zimmerman and Ken Kaufman for taking time to serve on the NMOS Bird Committee. The products of their first deliberations are presented in an article in this issue, and we hope this will be only the first of a long series.

This may have been our most successful year in conducting of U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service breeding bird routes. As of this moment, all routes but one have either been assigned or completed. The one route not done was Crownpoint, which is subject to replacement and was therefore deleted in 1980. NMOS members who have participated in this activity are thanked for their efforts.

DIRECTORY OF NMOS MEMBERS 1979/1980

By Mary Lou Arthur

The following people, institutions, and agencies comprise the membership of the New Mexico Ornithological Society in 1979 and/or 1980. Members from 1979 who have not paid their 1980 dues are marked with an asterisk (*). All addresses without the state indicated are in New Mexico.

*AHLBORN, Gary--NMSU, Dept, F&W, Box 4901, Las Cruces 88003
ALLEN, Mrs. Bertha R.--P.O.Box 5, Sandia Park, NM 87047
*ANDREWS, Mr.& Mrs. Craig--3Al6 Sierra Dr. NE, Albuquerque 87110
ARTHUR, Mrs. Mary Lou--728 Monroe NE, Albuquerque 87110
AXELROD, Miriam--PD Box 618, Artesia 88210
*BALTOSSER, William--NMSU, Dept. Biol., Box 3AF, Las Cruces 88003
*BARKER, Albert A Dorothy--7105 Remington NE, Albuquerque 87109
BASHAM, Pat--Box 1646, Socorro 87801
*BEDNARZ, James--6128 McLeod NE, Apt. 15, Albuquerque 87109
BERGER, Bryon--1431 College, Emporia, Kansas 66801
*BRAUN, Ron--1302 Berrywood Ln. , Houston, Texas 77077
CARTER, Dr. William--Rt. 6, Box 63, Ada, Oklahoma 74820
*COFFEY, Michael--306 Cactus Rd., Gallup 87301
COMINSKEY, Stella--8005 Hendrix, #621, Albuquerque 87109
CONNER, Ms. Neppie--102 N. Plainview, Fayetteville, Ark, 72701
CORS, Paul--1409 Garfield St., Laramie, Wyoming 82070
*CROMER, Marjorie--194 Tunyo, Los Alamos 87544
DAVIS, Charles A.--NMSU, Dept. F&W, Box 4901, Las Cruces 88003
*DELESANTRO, Michael--NMSU, Dept. F&W, Box 4901, Las Cruces 88003
DELOLLIS, Mrs. Nicholas--3600 Piermont NE, Albuquerque 87111
DRUMMOND, Jack--2030 Chilton, Las Cruces 88001
DURRIE, John & Hope--614 Richmond NE, Albuquerque 81106
EGBERT, John--PO Box 449, Cliff 88028
EPPICH, John W--116 E, Gladden Dr., Farmington 87401
ESPY, Mrs. J. P.--Box 1459, Fort Davis, Texas 79734
*FISHER, Ralph--PO Box 1029. Silver City 88061
*FLYNN, Dr. Joe--2630 Morrow NE, Albuquerque 87106
*FOUTZ, Mrs. J. L.--505 McDonald Rd., Farmington 87401
GOODMAN, Roland A.--Rt. 3, Box 91F, Santa Fe 87501
*GOULD, Kim--Rt. 1, Box 1560, Las Cruces 88001
GRAY, Mrs. Charlotte--Box 4424, Santa Fe 87502
GROSSMAN, E. H.--925 H. Georgia #700, Vancouver, BC, Canada V6C 188
HALLEIT, Mr.&Mrs. Harold--PO Box 396, Roswell 88201
*HAMPTON, Gary--9300 Northgate #141, Austin, Texas 87858
HARRIS, Mrs. F. W.--PO Box A, Farmington 87401
HARTSHORNE, Mr.& Mrs. Pierre--510 Jornada, Las Cruces 88001
HAWK, Dr. Walton--PO Box 40, San Cristobal 87564
HAWKINS, Leslie--7532 Bear Canyon Rd., NE, Albuquerque 87109
HAYES, Mrs. Preston C.--917 Sayers, Hobbs 88240
HAYWARD, Dr. Bruce J.--Rt. 8, Box 160, Silver City 88061
HEFLEY, Mr.& Mrs. Harold M.--612 Gary Dr., Roswell 88201

*HIBBEN Dr. & Mrs. Frank C.--3005 Campus Blvd NE, Albuquerque 87106
HILTY, Mrs. Robert--Box 51, Sandia Park 87047
HOWE, William--PO Box 618, Artesia 88210
HUBBARD, Dr. & Mrs. John P.--2016 Valle Rio Santa Fe 87501
HUNDERTMARK, Charles A. --223 Morningside NE, Albuquerque 87108
HUNTINGTON, Mr. & Mrs. Dustin S.--11 Calle Pueblo Pinado NW, Albuquerque 87120
HUSSEY, Mrs. Thomas W.--705 Monte Alto Dr. NE, Albuquerque 87123
*ISAACS, Bill--Rt. 4, Box 2B, Santa Fe 87501
JACKSON, Nick & Debbie--Alto 88312
*JENKS Randolph--2146 E. 4 St., Tucson, Arizona 85719
JOHNSON, Sgt. & Mrs. Jack--Alto Rd., Capitan 88316
KARO, James--1621 Cedar Ridge Dr. NE, Albuquerque 87112
KLOSS, Phillips--Box 33, Taos 87571
*KREHBIEL, Adolf J. --PO Box 40, Clayton 88415
LANGE, David E.--1800 Vassar NE, #B, Albuquerque 87106
*LANNING Dirk--Chi.Des.Res.Inst., PO Box 1334, Alpine, Tx 79830
LATAS, Patricia J.--PO Box 74, Radium Springs 88054
LEE, Dwight R. --1656 Ebert St., Winston-Salem, NC 27103
LEFKOFSKY, Mr. & Mrs. Charles--8002 Morrow Rd. NE, Albuquerque 87110
LESPERANCE, H. H.--1801 N. Wagner, Farmington 87401
*LEWIS, W. Burton--314 Potrillo Dr., Los Alamos 87544
*LINDSAY, Bert--2910 Utah NE, Albuquerque 87110
LUHRS, Ruth J.--Star Rt. Box 551, Sandia Park 87047
*MARR, Thomas--NMSU, Dept. Biol., Box 3AF, Las Cruces 88003
*McCALL, Geraldine--1482 44th St., Los Alamos 87544
McCALLUM, D. Archibald--Rt. 2, Box 3, Thoreau 81323
*McKERNAN Robert L.--905 Pine Ave. #13, Redlands, CA 92373
McKNIGHT, Daniel M. & Barbara C. --PO Box 202, Glenwood 88039
McLEOD, Boyd--1647 2nd St., NW, Albuquerque 87107
*MERCHANT Steven--NMSU, Dept. F&W, Box 4901, Las Cruces 80003
*MERKEL Terrence J.--222 E, Nizhoni Blvd., F-8, Gallup 87301
MILLER, Mr. & Mrs. Julius E.--PO Box 610, Williamsburg 87942
MILTON, Martha M.--9024 Los Arboles NE, Albuquerque 87112
MOHLHENRICH, Marjorie--320 Gen. Marshall NE, #4. Albuquerque 87123
MOORE, Polly H.--2614 Carolina Way, Houston, TX 77005
MORTON, Mrs. Claribel F.--Mt. Rt., Box 115, Jemez Springs 87025
MORTON, Edward & Dorothe--Box 616. Capitan 88316
*MURPHY Dr. Lawrence W.--1835 Lamar Circle, Alamogordo 88310
*NEAL, Jim--1862 Propps NE, Albuquerque 87112
NELSON, Alan P.--106 W. 33rd Street, Farmington 87401
NICKLAS, Rita G.--1907 Buena Vista SE # 64, Albuquerque 87106
NILES, David M.--Del.Mus.Nat.Hist., Box 3937, Greenville, DE 19807
*NODA, Mr. & Mrs. Frank--11621 Morenci NE, Albuquerque 87112
NORDSTROM, Judith A.--1518 Zuni Dr., Farmington 87401
*OAKS, Mrs. Blance--101 Waneta, Clovis 88101
OLSON, Toren--753 Sage, Grants 87020
PACHE, Peter H.--Earth Env. Cons., 9426 Indian School Rd NE, Albuquerque 87112
PETERSON, Donald J.--8317 Guide Meridian Rd., Lynden, WA 98264
PETERSON, Roger S--St. Johns College, Santa Fe 87501
PHILLIPS, Joanne J.--11033 Hwy. 85 NW, Albuquerque 87114
POWELL, Bob--Box 741, Moriarty 87035
PUTNAM, Helen P.--4201 Wilshire Dr., Farmington 87401
*RAITT, Dr. Ralph J.--NMSU, Dept. Biol. Box 3AF, Las Cruces 88003
ROGERS, Bill D.--PO Box 2419, Silver City 88061
ROOT, Mary Alice--1108 Columbia NE, Albuquerque 87106
ROSE, Donald G.--4895 Trinity Dr., Los Alamos 87544
RUDELL, Raymond F., Jr.--1875 Camino Mora, Los Alamos 87544
SANDS, James L.--Star Rt., Box 10, Placitas 87043

*SCHMIERER Al--Box 467, Zuni 87327
 SCHOLES, Dr.& Mrs. Robert T.--Box 117, Rodeo 88056
 *SEIBERT Linda--1001 S. Almendra, Las Cruces 88001
 SHRYOCK, Mrs. Louis D.--Box 461, Kirtland 87411
 *SILIA, Ms. Madge--PO Box 0, Shiprock 87420
 SLOWEN, Mr.&Mrs. Frank--615 Calle de Leon, Santa Fe 87501
 *SNELL, Sheree--2208 Cole Village, Las Cruces 88003
 SNIDER, Patricia R.--#90 Royal Crest, Los Alamos 87544
 SNYDER, Mildred O.--161 Del Mar Circle, Aurora, Colorado 80011
 STEIN, Patricia C.--305 Potrillo Dr., Los Alamos 87544
 STEINAU, Barbara & Bernard--4140 Senna Dr., Las Cruces 38001
 *STINNETT, Ken--115 1/2 Faulkner #14, Socorro 87801
 STONE, Dr.&Mrs. William--927 Los Lovatos Rd., Santa Fe 87501
 SWAIN, Mr.& Mrs. Robert R.--Mt. Rt., Box 114, Jemez Springs 87025
 *TERRILL, Scott B.--1508 E. Cedar, Tempe AZ 85281
 TEUBER, Ross L.--1612 Kentucky NE, Albuquerque 87110
 *THATCHER, Donna--1108 N. Monterey, Farmington 87401
 *THOMPSON, Richard--PO Box 1493, Socorro 87801
 THOUMSIN, C. Pierre--PO Box 618, Artesia 88210
 TRAVIS, Dr.&Mrs. James R.--9420 Avenida de La Luna NE, Albuquerque 87111
 TURNER, Mrs. Ellis A.--308 La Plata NW, Albuquerque 87107
 VANCE, Julia W.--PO Box 1795, Santa Fe 87501
 *VANCLEVE, Mr.& Mrs. 8. Bernard--304 S. Winebiddle St., Pittsburgh, Penn.
 15224
 *WAGNER, Stephen--PO Box 325, Algodones 87001
 WAHL, Charles R.--1210 Plain St., Las Cruces 88001
 WEBB, Bruce--3 Chautauqua, Boulder, Colorado 80302
 WEST, Mr.& Mrs. Clarence R.--10 Kachina, Los Alamos 87544
 WEST, Steve--Box 104, Loving 88256
 *WILLIAMS, Frances--3307 Neely, Midland, Texas 19703
 WINTERSTEIN, Scott R.--NMSU, Dept. Biol., Box 3AF, Las Cruces 88003
 *WISDOM, Michael--NMSU, Dept. F&W, Box 4901, Las Cruces 88003
 WITZEMAN, Janet--4619 E. Arcadia Ln. . Phoenix, Arizona 85018
 *WORD, Terrence 5. --502 Ponderosa NW, Albuquerque 87107
 WYNDHAM, Richard M.--PO Box 9134, Albuquerque 87119
 ZELLER, Col.&Mrs. Henry M.--PO Box 810, Silver City 88061
 ZIMMERMAN, Dr.&Mrs. Dale A.--1011 W. Florence St., Silver City 88061
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New Mexico Ornithological Society, Inc.

President:

*John P. Hubbard

2016 Valle Rio

Santa Fe 87501

Vice-President:

James R. Travis

9410 Avenida de la Luna, NE

Albuquerque 87111

Secretary:

Mary Lou Arthur

728 Monroe, NE
Albuquerque 87110

Treasurer:

Ross L. Teuber

1612 Kentucky, NE
Albuquerque 87110

Directors-at-large:

Dustin Huntington

11 Calle Pueblo Pinado, NW
Albuquerque 87120

Allan P. Nelson

106 W. 33rd St.
Farmington 87401

William Stone

927 Los Lovatos Rd.
Santa Fe 87501

* Also editor of NMOS Bulletin