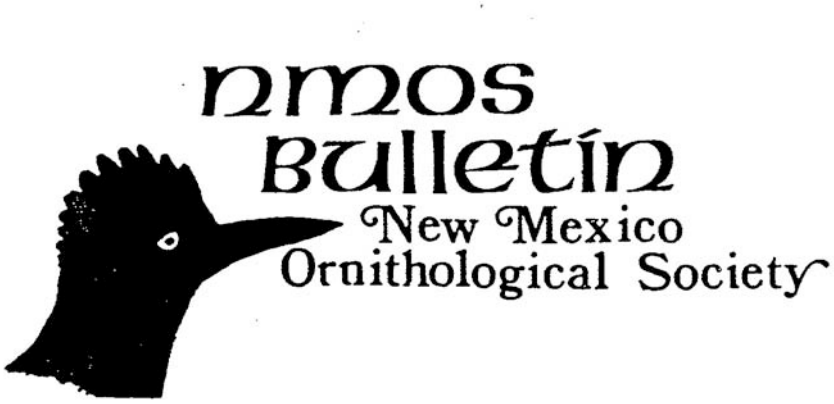

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DOCUMENTED BREEDING AND SEASONAL RECORDS FOR BIRDS IN SAN JUAN COUNTY, NEW MEXICO

TIM REEVES
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Documented records of breeding and seasonal occurrence in San Juan County, New Mexico, are reported. The sequence of species treated follows the Field Checklist of New Mexico Birds (1995). Locations and dates of my observations are given. A photograph printed here documents the Lark Bunting observations. Color slides (duplicates) documenting all these reports are on file with the New Mexico Ornithological Society/New Mexico Department Game and Fish.

Black-crowned Night-Heron *(Nyctricorax nycticorax).* Observations at Morgan Lake provided the first confirmed nesting at Morgan Lake, 1995 and 1996 and the first confirmed over-wintering records for San Juan County, 1994-1995, 1995-1996, 1996-1997. Morgan Lake is within the mapped breeding range of Davis (1993) but is outside the mapped year-round range.

On 3 May 1995 I observed a nest with one egg in thickets on Treasure Island on the south shore of the lake. Thirteen Black-crowned Night-Herons (12 adults and 1 grown immature) were counted in the area. This provides the first definitive evidence of nesting at Morgan Lake which was created in 1961 as the cooling pond for Four Comers Power Plant (Reeves and Nelson, 1996). In 1996 birds and nests were also observed on the north shore of the lake by Dwayne and Marge Longenbaugh and Bernard Bro, students in my Birds of San Juan County class at San Juan College. Additional observations also reveal the year-round presence of these birds, with observations in every month, for the first record of over-wintering of the species in the county. Winter sightings of Black-crowned Night-Herons have been made by the author on the following dates: 18 February 1994, 29 December 1994; 28 January 1995, 4 and 17 February 1995, 31 December 1995; 13 January 1996, 2 February 1996, 7 December 1996; and 11 and 24 January 1997.

Perhaps these newly detected nesting colonies at Morgan Lake are part of a broader pattern of invasion by new species here as the riparian woodlands along portions of the lake shore mature. Brown Thrasher *(Toxostoma rufum)* and Gray Catbird *(Dumetella carolinensis)* were first reported here within the past three years. Western Scrub Jay *(Aphelocoma californica)* and Plain Titmouse *(Parus inornatus)* (common species in pinyon-juniper woodland in the county) were first recorded at the lake in late 1995 and early 1996 respectively. The nearest pinyon-juniper woodland is not visible on this relatively flat terrain and is at least several miles distant (perhaps nearly 10 miles). A list of 181 species known to occur at the lake is found in Reeves and Nelson (1996).

Least Sandpiper *(Calidris minutilla).* First documented over-wintering records, Morgan Lake, 1993-1994, 1994-1995, 1995-1996, 1996-1997. Also observed in winter at Navajo Dam. Least Sandpipers were observed and photographed at Morgan Lake in January and February 1994, for the first documentation of over-wintering in the county. Birds were also observed during winter months in the winters of 1994-1995, 1995-1996, and 19961997. I have observed the species at Morgan Lake on the following winter dates: 2, 3, and 23 January 1994; 5 and 27 February 1994; 21 December 1994; 1 January 1995, 20 February 1995; 13 January 1996, 7 December 1996; and 11 January 1997. The species was observed at Navajo Dam on 1 and 7 January 1994. Jacobs (1986) reported sightings as late as 13 November on the Navajo Reservation but has no records for December through early April. There are no January, February, and first three weeks of March records for Colorado (Andrews and Righter, 1992). These cited San Juan County, NM locations are north of the mapped wintering range shown in Cooper (1994).

Long-eared Owl *(Asio otus).* Nesting, Morgan Lake, 17 March - 12 May 1995 and 8 March - 11 May 1996, first documented breeding records at Morgan Lake. Two birds were observed together on 24 January 1997 but nesting was not noted. Previous breeding records for the county include Schmitt (1976). On 17 March 1995 I observed a Long-eared Owl in Russian olive *(Elaeagnus angustifolia)* thickets at Morgan Lake. Subsequent observations revealed a nest located about 20 feet high in a dense Russian olive thicket. An adult was first observed sitting on the nest on 30 April and photographed there on 3 May. On 12 May an adult was

in the nest and 2 fledged young were photographed perched in Russian olives nearby.

The owls were found again on 8 March 1996 when the female was photographed standing in the nest and the male was perched nearby. The female was observed sitting very low in the nest on 22 March and again on 1, 5, and 21 April. A fire which burned much of the adjacent area on 26 April apparently did not disturb the nesting success of the owls. On 1 May I photographed the female and three nestlings standing in the nest together. Later the same day the male was photographed perched fifty or sixty feet from the nest. On 6 May the family of five was present, the female and 2 young in the nest, 1 fledgling perched in the same tree, and the male perched a short distance to the southwest in the thicket. On 11 May two fledglings were observed, 1 standing in the nest, and the other perched away from the nest (this one had more nearly adult plumage).

The dense thickets containing the nest are part of the border of riparian vegetation surrounding the lake. They are bordered by open, grassy marshlands closer to the lake and extensive dry grasslands beyond the riparian vegetation zone. This combination of habitats is a perfect match for that described as typical for the species by Marks, Evans, and Holt (1994): "Although it prefers to nest and roost in dense vegetation, it hunts almost exclusively in open habitats."

Bendire's Thrasher *(Toxostoma bendirei).* Second documented county breeding record, Consol-Burnham road, West of NM hwy 371,13 miles south of 3003, 30 June - 2 July 1995. On 30 June 1995 Lori Schmierer (Fairbanks, AK) and I observed two adult Bendire's Thrashers and found a nest containing two young birds in a four-wing saltbush *(Atriplex canescens)* in grassland with snakeweed *(Guttierezia sarothrae)* and rubber rabbitbrush *(Chrysothamnus nauseosus)* beside the road. A subsequent visit on 2 July by the author and Al Schmierer (Torrey, UT) resulted in numerous observed feeding visits by adults to the nest site and photographs of the birds carrying food. Another bird of this species was seen on 30 June about 0.4 mi to the east in similar habitat and with Sage Thrashers *(Oreoscoptes montanus)* which were nesting in four-wing saltbush beside the road.

The previously published county breeding records are for Chaco Canyon National Monument (= Chaco Culture National Historic Park) (Darling, 1970), the Nageezi Breeding Bird Survey conducted in the 1970s by John Travis (Hubbard, 1971) and Marjory Swain (Hubbard, 1975) and in the 1980s and 1990s by Carl Gregory Schmitt (Goodman, 1987, 1989, 1990; Snider, 1992), and the Farmington BBS conducted by David Cleary (Goodman, 1987). None of these reports mentions finding a nest. The new nesting site reported here is within the mapped breeding range shown in England and Laudenslayer (1993). They state that "throughout range, breeders favor relatively open grassland, shrubland, or woodland with scattered shrubs or trees". They include saltbush *(Atriplex* sp.) in the list of supporting plants in which nests are placed (saltbush was in the category having "fewer reports of nests" in contrast to the common supporting plants cholla *(Opuntia* sp.), mesquite *(Prosopis* sp.), juniper *(Juniperus* sp.) and Joshua tree *(Yucca brevifolia)* and other species of yucca).

Schmitt (1976) reported Bendire's Thrasher to be "Casual in dense greasewood-rubber rabbitbrush near Kirtland (2 on 17 June 1971 and 2 on 23 July 1972); Status uncertain, but may breed." Additional summer records include Chaco Culture National Historic Park on 7/13/1969 by J. Dan Scurlock (Hubbard, 1969) and near Nageezi by John Hubbard (Hubbard, 1979) and Carl Gregory Schmitt (Williams, 1993).

Lark Bunting *(Calamospiza melanocorys).* First documented county breeding record, Split-Lip Flats, south of De-Na-Zin Wilderness, 2 July - 14 July 1995. This location (and all of San Juan County) are included in the mapped breeding range of the species depicted in Peterson (1990) and National Geographic Society (1987). Schmitt (1976) does not mention the species and Nelson (1976) considered it a non-breeder. The closest previously published New Mexico nesting site was near Torreon in McKinley County, June 1975, (Hubbard, 1978), about 50 miles southeast of this location. Another location near San Juan County is in Montezuma County in extreme southwestern Colorado and is mapped as a "former but not recent" breeding location by Andrews and Righter (1992). I observed a male Lark Bunting in that general area on 28 May 1993. I was looking for the species based on personal communication from Al Schmierer that he had observed the species there. Bailey (1928) mentioned eggs of the species collected at Navajo Springs in southwestern Colorado, this but a few miles east of the location where we observed the species.

On 2 July 1995, Al Schmierer and I observed male Lark Buntings singing from four-wing saltbush in grassland just south of the south edge of De-Na-Zin Wilderness along county road 7500 (see photograph Fig. 1). We counted five male birds and observed one carrying food. I visited the site again on 4 July and observed 7 birds and photographed a male carrying food. On 14 July I watched 11 birds, males, females, and immatures, including observation of a female feeding a fledgling on a fence. No nests were found but numerous birds were watched flying to the ground and disappearing. This area is an ecotone of sorts between the grassland/badlands further west and the pure stands of big sagebrush *(Artemisia tridentata)* to the east.

I visited the site only once in 1996, on 17 July, and found no Lark Buntings. However, John Hanson, Bureau of Land Management, Farmington Office, reported seeing a male Lark Bunting in mid June at Black Lake, a dry lake bed in the same general area as my sightings (Barney Wegener, BLM, personal communication).

There are other summer records of Lark Buntings, all considered to represent migrants, which in retrospect may suggest breeding. Bailey (1928) said of Lark Buntings "The larger part have passed across the State by the middle of May, but a flock of about thirty birds was seen at Shiprock [San Juan County] as late as 2 June, 1907 (Gilman). The fact that they were still in a flock would seem to indicate that they were late migrants, rather than local breeders." While the latter may be true, the numbers breeding at Split Lip Flats mentioned above were high enough to suggest a flock, and certainly were higher numbers than were observed locally of other sparrows present. Alan Nelson reports (personal communication) that a BLM employee in 1974 reported Lark Buntings to be "ubiquitous" in the Split Lip F1ats/De Na Zin Wilderness area in July (no mention was made of nesting activity). The summer of 1974, like that of 1995, followed a cool, wet winter which produced a tremendous herbaceous plant growth in comparison with 'normal' summers. Peterson (1990) notes that Lark Buntings expand their breeding range in favorable years and contract the range again otherwise.

Fig. 1. Male Lark Bunting perched on *Atriplex canescens* in nesting area at Split Lip Flats. Note atypical white mark behind eye noted only on this individual. Photographed by Tim Reeves, 14 July 1995. Photo copyright Tim Reeves.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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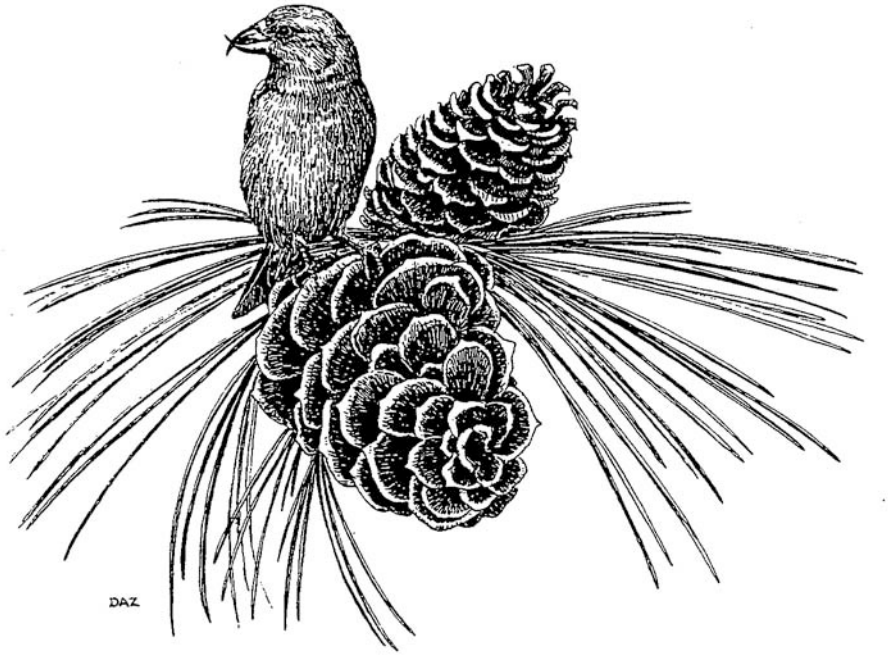

1995 NEW MEXICO NORTH AMERICAN MIGRATION COUNT

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The year 1995 marked the fourth consecutive year for New Mexico participation in the North American Migration Count (NAMC). Each year the count takes place on the second Saturday in May. The primary goal of the NAMC is to provide "a picture in time" of migration on one day across the North American continent. The count is patterned after a variety of other volunteer surveys; the NAMC is conducted on a single day and is confined to the borders of the county or parish. The NAMC has incorporated elements from a variety of other surveys to provide a new effort and, it is hoped, additional information on the status of North American birds. These data are especially important when analyzing count totals and the distribution of neotropical migrants. Each year the count provides a growing database that will provide information about the dynamics of North American bird populations.

Coverage in 1995 included 11 counties, one more that the previous year. Table 1 summarizes the results of the counts over the past four years. In 1995 Dona Ana and Sandoval Counties were not covered, which is unfortunate because both of these areas have provided additional information from interesting areas. Coverage in new counties included De Baca, Lea, and Lincoln. As is generally the case in New Mexico, coverage is always less than is desired because of a lack of observers. Even with partial coverage however, we can provide valuable information even on single-person counts, especially when these areas would otherwise not be covered.

The eleven county counts produced a number of new records in several categories primarily because of the new coverage areas. The species count dropped from 260 in 1994 to 256 in 1995. The number of individuals, however, was up over 21 % compared with 1994. In addition, the total party-hours were up by over 12%, and the party-miles also increased by 23%. Several observers reported high winds, which no doubt impacted on the results.

Grant County again produced the most species with 175, followed by Bernalillo with 147, and Chaves with 140. San Juan had the highest number of individuals, followed by Chaves and Bernalillo Counties. As has been the pattern for each year of this count, Grant again produced the high counts for the most species at 77.5, with Chaves at 50.5, and Eddy County with 31.3. (Note: In high counts of species for each of the counties, most counties have an incomplete number. In cases where two counties tied for the high number, each county received 0.5 for the total number of high counts for that county, three counties would each receive 0.3 and so on.)

Only eight species were recorded on all 11 counts: Turkey Vulture, Mourning Dove, Black-chinned Hummingbird, Barn Swallow, European Starling, Chipping Sparrow, Red-winged Blackbird, and House Finch. Interestingly, the House Sparrow was missed on the Lincoln County count. Highly unusual rarities were not found in 1995, but an excellent sample of species expected in New Mexico in early May was found. The goal of this count is not to concentrate on extralimital records but rather to get a snapshot of what is occurring in New Mexico on a specific day in spring.

Overall coverage across the state is improving, but there are several areas in which coverage is still needed. Except for brief coverage in Lea County, there is still inadequate coverage along the eastern row of counties in New Mexico. lt is unfortunate that the lower Rio Grande Valley of New Mexico and the bootheel of the state are not being covered, two areas that are sorely needed in any statewide survey of this sort.

The 1996 count was conducted on 11 May. The results of that count will appear in a future NMOS Bulletin. Those interested in taking part in an on-going count or initiating a count in a county not already covered, should contact the author at the above address. Anyone who desires a complete species list of the 1995 results can receive one by sending a stamped, self-addressed envelope to the author.

BERNALILLO COUNTY: Tamie Bulow compiled the Bernalillo County count which produced 147 species and 5429 individuals. Indicative of good coverage were high numbers of 29 species. Bernalillo has the added advantage of having a wide variety of habitats which can produce good representation in water birds, high mountain species, and desert scrub forms.

White-winged Doves were also found on the count, thus showing additional movement of this expanding species up the Rio Grande Valley. This seems to be occurring because of the increase of deciduous trees, especially pecans which provide a food source through the winter when other foods are not as abundant.

CHAVES COUNTY: Thirteen species were found in Chaves County which were not recorded on any other count; Great Egret, Snow Goose, Surf Scoter, Black-bellied Plover, Greater Yellowlegs, Marbled Godwit, Sanderling, Stilt Sandpiper, Least and Black Tern, Chimney Swift, Eastern Bluebird, and Clay-colored Sparrow. The count, compiled by Sherry Bixler, recorded a slight increase in the number of species (140 versus 134) and a slight drop in individuals (8412 versus 9388) compared to 1994.

Unusual birds included a single Surf Scoter, five Red-necked Phalaropes, and three Chimney Swifts. Partly because of the availability of shorebird habitat, Chaves County found state highs for 50.5 species.

DE BACA COUNTY: De Baca County was added to the list of counties participating in the count thanks to the compiler, Roger Hoppe. Forty-seven species and 522 individuals were recorded. De Baca County is an area where there are no resident birders so it is good to have this information in an area that is infrequently visited. Large numbers of Cassin's Kingbirds (37) were found and three Common Ravens were perhaps late in an area where they are more frequently known as a wintering species. This area has the potential for turning up unusual migrants and it is hoped that coverage will continue. De Baca recorded a high number for one species, the Double-crested Cormorant.

EDDY COUNTY: Windy conditions again plagued Eddy County which recorded 139 species and

4258 individuals. While nothing highly unusual was found on the count, five species were found that were not recorded on any other count: Harris' Hawk, Cave Swallow, Indigo and Varied Buntings, and Red Crossbill.

Heron and shorebird numbers were again low and numbers of passerines were also low for many species, possibly due to high wind conditions. All four species of *Passerina* buntings were recorded on this count. High counts were recorded for 31.3 species.

GRANT COUNTY: In spite of windy conditions reported by compiler Ralph Fisher, Grant County again excelled in almost all areas. Of 49 species recorded in but a single county, 21 were found in Grant County, thus attesting to the unique qualities of that area. Those species include: Common Loon; Black- and Zone-tailed Hawks; Golden Eagle; Peregrine Falcon; Montezuma Quail; Northern Pygmy-, Elf, and Spotted Owls; Whip-poor-will; Gila Woodpecker; Greater Pewee; Brown-crested Flycatcher; Mexican Jay; Bridled Titmouse; Hutton's Vireo; Lucy's, Red-faced, and Olive Warblers; Painted Redstart; and Abert's Towhee.

Grant also led other counties with 175 species and 4851 individuals. This was 11 species over their impressive total of 164 species in 1994. In spite of this, Fisher reported that there were several species missed on count day. Grant County also recorded high count day numbers for 77.5 species.

LEA COUNTY: A Lea County count was sent in by Doug Emkalns who drove through part of the county with Bruce Neville. In their short time in the county they found 42 species and 240 individuals. This should attest to the potential of this infrequently visited area. Lea County recorded a high number for one species, three Scissor-tailed Flycatchers.

LINCOLN COUNTY: This was the first time that coverage occurred in Lincoln County. Anita Powell of Ruidoso compiled the report and found 62 species and 738 individuals. While nothing unusual was recorded, several species found were of interest for various reasons including a late Canvasback and three Magnificent Hummingbirds. This is another part of New Mexico with great potential but is hampered by a lack of observers. Lincoln County recorded high numbers for one species, Dark-eyed junco.

LOS ALAMOS COUNTY: Pat Snider again compiled the Los Alamos County count, a small area of relatively high elevation. Twelve observers found 86 species and 1780 individuals. Four species were recorded that were not found on any other count: Blue Grouse, Williamson's Sapsucker, Swainson's Thrush, and Nashville Warbler. Unusual species included Winter Wren, Swainson's Thrush, Nashville Warbler, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and Common Grackle. High counts were recorded for 17.3 species.

McKINLEY COUNTY: Dave Cleary again led a solo effort to provide data from McKinley County. In spite of adverse weather conditions he was able to find 101 species and 1603 individuals. High winds that began at 8:00 a.m. and lasted until sunset hampered the count. No species were found that were unique to the county but he did find high counts for 7.8 species.

SANTA FE COUNTY: Two species were found on the Santa Fe County count that were not found elsewhere: American Pipit and American Tree Sparrow. Christopher Rustay also reported that several of the species were unusual including Lesser Scaup, Western Sandpiper, Ring-billed Gull, Marsh Wren, American Redstart, American Tree Sparrow, and Black-chinned Sparrow.

Santa Fe County recorded 119 species and 3116 individuals with nine parties. Snow in the higher elevations prevented access to some of those areas, and several species that might be expected were missed. High counts for 14.6 species were found on this count.

SAN JUAN COUNTY: John Rees compiled the San Juan count on which 138 species and 9652 individuals were recorded. Four species were found on count day that were not recorded elsewhere in the state: Clark's Grebe, Greater White-fronted Goose, Bonaparte's Gull, and Long-eared Owl. San

Juan County recorded good numbers of waterfowl plus nine shorebird species. San Juan County also found high counts for 25.3 species.

Table 1. Comparison of 1992-1995 New Mexico NAMC County Totals.

	1992	1993	1994	1995
Total Counties Covered	3	5	10	11
Total Species	222	218	260	256
Total Individuals	13,969	15,538	33,374	40,584
Total Party-Hours	182	118	445	500
Total Party-Miles	894	676	2251	2768

Received 14 February 1997

1997 ANNUAL MEETING REPORT

The 35th annual meeting of the New Mexico Ornithological Society was held in Foster Hall on the New Mexico State University campus, Las Cruces, on Saturday 5 April 1997. Craig Benkman, of the Department of Biology at NMSU, and Bruce Thompson, of the Fishery & Wildlife Sciences Cooperative Unit at NMSU, were the local hosts for the meeting.

A memorial to Paul Steel, who died accidentally just prior to the meeting, was on display at the meeting. A tribute to Paul, who was an editor of this Bulletin and ardent supporter of the Society, is being prepared by Ross Teuber.

Dr. James Travis chaired the business meeting. Treasurer Jerry Oldenettel read the year-end financial statement for the Society, which was published in the Bulletin. The Society is in excellent financial position and had a net gain over 1995. Secretary Nancy Cox read the minutes of the previous annual meeting. Dr. Sandy Williams asked for persons to run five vacant Breeding Bird Survey routes. Dr. Williams reported for the Bird Records Committee that the 1995 report has been published, and the 1996 report is being prepared. During the last year, six new species were confirmed for the state. The Committee will be looking at the review list for possible revisions. Sandy and Bill Howe are working on an expanded version of the state field checklist. The Field Notes for spring 1994 are out, summer 1994 is being reviewed, and Pat Snider is working on fall 1994. Mary Alice Root reported that the database project has had some logistical problems, but it is getting underway again, and volunteers are needed to enter data. Bruce Thompson passed out a form letter for "Teaming with Wildlife" and urged members to write their congressional delegation in support of the initiative. Mary Alice Root announced that the Society's bird finding guide has been reprinted with minor revision.

The chief topic of discussion at the Board meeting, led by Dr. Dale Zimmerman, regarded revisions to the New Mexico bird finding guide. Only limited revision was possible with the present reprinting, and it was generally agreed that a complete rewriting would be required for the next edition. Constructive comments were generated regarding questions of funding, ethical issues, and workload. The current reprint of the guide is projected to last approximately three years, and we should be ready with the new guide at that time.

Twelve papers were presented during the afternoon paper session. Abstracts appear in this issue of the Bulletin. Craig Benkman and Bruce Thompson shared the chair and projectionist duties.

The banquet was held at La Cueva in the Dripping Springs Natural Area in the shadow (unfortunately not the *wind* shadow) of the Organ Mountains. Thirty or so stalwart souls braved subfreezing wind chills to be rewarded with an excellent barbecue meal.

Dr. Erick Greene of the University of Montana, Missoula, presented the evening lecture: "Coming of Age in Lazuli Buntings: The Importance of Dressing Up and Learning How to Sing." The interesting lecture was

truly a multi-media experience, with many recorded examples of Lazuli Bunting songs.

The 36th annual meeting will be in Albuquerque; watch the Bulletin for the date.

--Bruce Neville, Centennial Library, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque

Abstracts to the 35th Annual Meeting of the New Mexico Ornithological Society

TRENDS IN ARIZONA GRASSHOPPER SPARROW BREEDING POPULATIONS IN NEW MEXICO: VALUE OF LONG-TERM STUDIES

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In New Mexico, the Arizona Grasshopper Sparrow *(Ammodramus savannarum ammolegus)* is known to breed only in the southern Animas Valley and the western Playas Valley, both locales on the privately-owned Gray Ranch in Hidalgo County. Apparently overlooked there by early naturalists, Grasshopper Sparrows were first noted summering in the Animas Valley in 1977, and were verified as *ammolegus* in 1987. In June 1987, I initiated surveys for these sparrows in the Animas Valley, including establishing a 19-stop transect following Breeding Bird Survey methodology; there are now 10 consecutive years of data for this transect. At the request of The Nature Conservancy, in June 1992 I expanded the Animas Valley transect to 46 stops plus established a 25-stop transect east of the Continental Divide in the western Playas Valley (where I had first detected summering Grasshopper Sparrows in 1990); there are now 5 consecutive years of data for these expanded transects. Since 1992, both the Animas and Playas breeding populations have shown steep declines, these amounting to 80% and 83%, respectively, with the Animas population declining from 2.37 to 0.48 birds per stop and the Playas population declining from 1.64 to 0.15 birds per stop from 1992 to 1996. Interestingly, similar sharp declines for these sparrows were observed in Arizona studies over the same 5-year period. Such apparently widespread and seemingly persistent ("half a decade") population declines are of concern; they would be alarming except that, in New Mexico, the previous 5-year period showed a reverse trend-initially declining from 1987 to 1988 but then increasing sharply from 1988 to 1992. Indeed, the original Animas transect showed a 300% increase during that period, from 0.79 birds per stop in 1988 to 3.16 birds per stop in 1992. The resulting 10-year pattern suggests a cyclic trend in New Mexico's breeding Arizona Grasshopper Sparrows. Possible causes of this apparent population cycle are being explored and will be discussed.

AVIAN SPECIES OF SPECIAL CONCERN: OCCURRENCE, HABITAT ASSOCIATIONS, AND POTENTIAL ADVERSE IMPACTS AT WHITE SANDS MISSILE RANGE.

North, Barbara R., Don L. Brubaker, Kathleen L. Brubaker,
John E. Puschock, Adrienne A. Croly, and Bruce C. Thompson,
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A progress report of bird occurrences detected on White Sands Missile Range (WSMR) will be discussed. WSMR includes approximately 800,000 ha of south central New Mexico, which is quite ecologically diverse. Field observations for this bird project began in spring 1996 and will continue until October 1997. Standardized bird survey point count routes have been established in representative tracts of 10 vegetation communities. Survey route locations are based on vegetation community mapping of WSMR from the New Mexico Gap Analysis Project and the New Mexico Natural Heritage Program. These routes include the following vegetation categories: Rocky Mountain/Great Basin Closed Conifer Woodland, Rocky Mountain/Great Basin Open Conifer Woodland, Rocky Mountain Montane Deciduous Scrub, Plains-Mesa Microphyllous Sand-Scrub, Great Basin Broadleaf Deciduous Desert Scrub, Chihuahuan Broadleaf Evergreen Desert Scrub, Chihuahuan Broadleaf Deciduous Desert Scrub, Great Basin Lowland/Swale Grassland, Chihuahuan Foothill-Piedmont Desert Grassland, and Barren/White Sand. Other surveys include: mist netting (in five vegetation categories), southwestern willow flycatcher *(Empidonax traillii extimus)*, and

shorebirds. Results of surveys will be summarized and briefly discussed.

PASSERINE MIGRATION ON WHITE SANDS MISSILE RANGE, FALL 1996: VOLUME, SPECIES COMPOSITION, TIMING, AND FAT RESERVES OF MIGRANTS

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Passerine migrants were captured with mist nets in 4 habitats (arroyo riparian, pinyon-juniper, mountain mahogany, and mesquite) on White Sands Missile Range (WSMR) from 13 August to 7 October 1996. Capture effort was 1,514 net-hours (nets were not opened every day). Species, amount of visible subcutaneous fat, weight, wing chord, and whenever possible, age and sex of each bird were recorded. Relative insect abundances among habitats were estimated by counts of insects captured on 3x5" yellow sticky cards. Eighty-one captures of 16 species that neither breed nor winter on WSMR and 239 captures of 38 species that breed and/or winter on WSMR were recorded. Nearctic-Neotropic migrant numbers peaked in early September. Capture rates were generally greater and Nearctic-Neotropic migrants tended to be leaner in habitats with greater insect abundances. Average fat load of migrants may be an indication of stopover habitat suitability, and changes of average fat load between years may possibly be used in conjunction with counts of migrants to more precisely monitor population changes. This study will continue during the spring and fall of 1997.

TRENDS IN COUNTS OF MIGRANT HAWKS IN THE SANDIA AND MANZANO MOUNTAINS OF CENTRAL NEW MEXICO 1985-1996.

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We conducted daily, standardized counts of migrating diurnal raptors throughout the migration season along the Sandia (spring) and Manzano (fall) mountains, beginning in 1985 and continuing annually through 1996. Analyses are based upon 11 years of data from the Manzanos (1985-1995) and 12 years of data from the Sandias (1985-1996). Linear regression techniques were used for the analysis of trends. Results showed that counts of all 14 raptor species analyzed were either stable or increasing. Annual rates of change were impressive for four species: Merlin (+ 14.4% in the Sandias: $P<.05$; and +12.3% in the Manzanos: $P<.01$); Peregrine Falcon (+13.0% in the Sandias: $P<.01$; +13.3% in the Manzanos: $P=.07$); Turkey Vulture (+11.5% in the Manzanos: $P<.05$); and Osprey (+4.7% in the Sandias: $P=.06$; +13.3% in the Manzanos: $P<.001$). These trends are consistent with reduced levels of DDT and other organochlorines in the food chain throughout the Western Heminsphere. The cause of the vulture trend is unknown, but may relate to the northward expansion of their breeding range. In addition, similar analyses at HawkWatch International's Utah (Wellsville Mtns.) and Nevada (Goshute Mtns.) sites obtained comparable results, with these exceptions: 1) Northern Goshawks and Golden Eagles showed a 40% decline at the Wellsville (UT) Lookout (1977-79 vs. 1987-95); and 2) Red-tailed Hawks showed a significant positive trend at both the Utah and Nevada sites (avg. increase: +6.7%). The goshawk and red-tail trends suggest a loss of forest cover in eastern Idaho and possibly southwestern Montana. The Golden Eagle decline is likely due to the degradation of the sagebrush-bunchgrass ecosystem in southern Idaho. Finally, for most species counts from 1992-1995 (at all four sites) have become more variable in numbers and in age composition, suggesting greater year-to-year fluctuations in breeding success. This variability is probably caused by the recent extreme variations in spring weather patterns.

SEASONAL VARIATION IN SIZE AND WEIGHT OF SHARP-SHINNED AND COOPER'S HAWKS MIGRATING THROUGH CENTRAL NEW MEXICO.

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Data from two long-term raptor banding programs conducted by HawkWatch International, Inc. in New

Mexico were used to explore size and weight variation of Sharp-shinned Hawks *(Accipiter striatus)* and Cooper's Hawks *(A. cooperii)* during the migration season. Data for 1995 and 1996, collected from fall, southbound, migrants in the Manzano Mountains and from spring, northbound, migrants in the Sandia Mountains, were used and analyzed separately. Linear regressions were run for weight, wing chord, and tail length on date, as well as for wing chord and tail lengths on weight. The two species showed both contrasting and similar patterns. Sharp-shinned Hawks showed a consistent positive correlation between weight and date in the fall, while Cooper's Hawks did not. Adults of both species showed a negative correlation between weight and date in the spring. Wing chord and tail were not correlated with date or weight in Sharp-shinned Hawks, yet adult Cooper's Hawks showed correlations between wing chord and weight in fall, and adult female Cooper's showed this in the spring. We suggest that Sharp-shinned Hawks show increasing weight in the fall because either birds that leave later leave heavier or birds gain weight while migrating. Cooper's Hawks do not show an increase because these two situations likely do not occur in this species. Spring decreases in weight and wing chord for adult female Cooper's Hawks may be a result of larger and more southerly birds preceding smaller and more northerly birds past the site. This may also be the case for Sharp-shinned Hawks, with one important difference. Sharp-shinned Hawks apparently do not get smaller with increasing latitude, and thus show decreases in weight independent of size.

WINTERING AVIFAUNA AND HABITAT AFFINITIES IN THE CENTRAL RIO GRANDE VALLEY.

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During three consecutive winters (1994-95 - 1996-97), we systematically monitored the distribution and habitat affinities of terrestrial birds in a portion of the Rio Grande Valley extending from Polomas Canyon, NM, south to Fabens, TX. We made roadside point counts on fixed routes in agricultural habitats; and walking surveys in residential, irrigation drain return, and bosque habitats. Our study encompassed replicate surveys on 135 kms (84 miles) of road on 10 routes, and on 33 kms of walking transects. We characterized observed bird species by migratory behavior, foraging guild, and protected status. During the first two years of study we evaluated the frequency occurrence and numbers of birds among 15 general habitat classes and by four geographical sections of the study area. In 1996-97 we focused on the influence of habitat interspersion by examining bird use of irrigation drain returns according to adjacent land use practice. Although the wintering avifauna differed somewhat among years, partial analyses revealed consistent differences in bird distribution by habitat and by geographic area. Drain returns and residential areas had high species richness, but supported a less diverse avifauna than a bosque-dominated park. Moreover, adjacent habitat strongly influenced bird use of drain returns, with pecan orchard drains supporting high avian diversity. Upon completion of analysis, we will generate practical recommendations for conservation of the avifauna of a highly engineered segment of the Rio Grande floodplain.

WHY BIRDS OF A FEATHER SHOULD FLOCK TOGETHER.

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Enhanced resource assessment remains one of the least studied and most underappreciated factors favoring group formation (Clark and Mangel 1986; Valone 1989, 1993; Ruxton 1995; Templeton and Giraideau 1995, 1996). Here we provide an experimental demonstration of red crossbills *(Loxia curvirostra)* increasing their speed of resource patch assessment by observing foraging flock mates (using so called "public information" [Valone 1989]). We also show that feeding performance is greatly diminished when the feeding performance of flock mates is uncorrelated. This provides a mechanism that will favor assortative grouping by phenotype when phenotypes affect feeding performance, which may in turn promote speciation in some groups of animals.

THE ORIGIN AND EVOLUTION OF BIRDS: THE CURRENT THEORIES.

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Numerous papers have appeared recently in both the scientific and the popular press on the origin and evolution of birds. Opinions differ and the controversy has stimulated intense activity, both in the field and in the laboratory. Many new specimens from the Mesozoic Era have been described, some apparently from before the time of *Archaeopteryx.* The investigators are attempting to assemble a logical evolutionary order, using geological data, cladograms, and study of the fossils. Although as enigmatic as the cause of the K/T extinction, progress is being made toward a better understanding of the earliest history of birds. The theories presently in the limelight will be presented.

RECENT OCCURRENCES OF APLOMADO FALCONS IN NEW MEXICO: IS NATURAL RECOLONIZATION OF HISTORIC RANGE UNDERWAY?

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For over a half-century, the Aplomado Falcon *(Falco femoralis)* has been a species of mystery in New Mexico and elsewhere in its borderlands range. Apparently rather plentiful in desert grasslands of southern New Mexico around the turn of the century, by the 1930s the species had become quite scarce; the last specimen was obtained in Hidalgo County in 1939. Following observations in southern Luna County in 1951 and the subsequent discovery of a nest there in 1952, the Aplomado Falcon seemed to vanish from its former haunts in the state. Reports in subsequent decades were few and were widely scattered in time and space; in the persistent absence of verifiable evidence, many if not most of those few reports were viewed with skepticism. Although reports through the mid-1980s varied greatly in detail, taken together (and without evaluating or otherwise judging them) they indicate that for about 35 years following the last nesting, the species was at best only accidental in New Mexico. Reports known to me and on file with the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish and/or the New Mexico Ornithological Society are as follows: 1950s, none after 1952; 1960s, 2 reports of 3 birds (Eddy and Lea counties); 1970s, 4 reports of 4-6 birds (Hidalgo, Grant, and Dona Ana counties); 1980s, 4 reports of 5 birds (Hidalgo, Grant, Luna, and Eddy counties); 1990s, 12 reports of up to 18 birds in 6 counties. Indeed, Aplomado Falcons were reported in New Mexico in 10 of the 11 years 1987-1997, amounting to 14 reports of up to 21 birds. All 14 reports were from localities within the known historic range of the species, these in Hidalgo, Grant, Socorro, Dona Ana, Otero, and Eddy counties; the 4 verified reports were from the period 1991-1997. The observed increase in New Mexico reports coincided with the discovery of previously unknown breeding populations in northern Chihuahua in the early 1990s, the nearest of these only some 250 kIn (160 mi) from the New Mexico line. Given the apparently thriving populations in nearby Chihuahua and the observed increase in reports and verified records in southern New Mexico, the prospects appear good for natural recolonization of historic range in New Mexico, provided that suitable habitat exists.

FIRST REPORT OF CURLEW SANDPIPER FOR NEW MEXICO, WITH NOTES ON THE INLAND OCCURRENCES OF THE SPECIES.

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New Mexico's first reported Curlew Sandpiper *(Calidris ferruginea)* was discovered at Bitter Lake National Wildlife Refuge, Chaves County, on 4 May 1996 by Bruce Neville and Doug Emkalns and photographed the following day by Larry Gorbet (still photographs) and Jerry Oldenettel (videotape). The report is currently circulating through the New Mexico Rare Birds Committee. The Curlew Sandpiper is an Old World sandpiper that occurs annually in small numbers on both coasts of North America and irregularly throughout the interior of the continent. The species has now occurred in at least 35 states and most of the provinces of Canada, though most interior states have just one or a few records. Historical reports of inland occurrences in North America are summarized geographically and temporally.

BIRDS OF THE B-SQUARE RANCH, SAN JUAN COUNTY, NEW MEXICO.

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The 12,500 acre B-Square Ranch in Farmington, San Juan County, NM is a rich area for birds. My 1996 book, Birds of the B-Square Ranch, A Guide to Noteworthy Species, records 192 species there. Additional species recorded since the August publication date bring the number of known species to around 200 reinforcing the ranch's position as the richest birding site in the Four Corners region. Color slides are presented of many species found on the ranch including the only known San Juan County records of Common Black Hawk, Zone-tailed Hawk, Broad-winged Hawk, and Pacific Loon. One of only two county Brown Pelican records comes from the ranch and only two county records of Short-eared Owls exist in addition to ranch records. Regular winter specialties at the ranch, in addition to the thousands of Canada Geese and Mallards, include Greater White-fronted Goose, Snow Goose, Ross' Goose, and Barrow's Goldeneye. Summer features Green Heron, Wood Duck, raptors, and our three blue-colored buntings/grosbeaks. Fall and spring migration can be spectacular here with fourteen species of vireos and warblers and eleven species of sparrows recorded. The rich diversity of birds here is supported by the wide variety of habitats include nearly six miles of San Juan River, numerous lakes and ponds, riparian woodland, marshes, agricultural fields, orchards and other cultivated trees, sagebrush, greasewood, saltbush, pinyon-juniper woodland, grassland, and cliffs.