

Although saltcedar is not a native plant, this large stand does provide a unique habitat within the park. In summer, birds like Yellow-breasted Chat and Painted Bunting nest here. In winter, it is used by 1000's of crows and ravens for roosting at night. We are clearing the saltcedars here only gradually and selectively as native species become established.

**4** Just ahead of you is another native tree that was an important part of historic river-valley woodlands: **screw-bean mesquite** or **tornillo**. How do you think it got its name? We don't have to do much to encourage tornillo at the park. Soil and water conditions here are very favorable for this tree. It grows throughout the park, and in many areas you'll find young seedlings. In 10 years, there will be many new tornillo stands at the park.

**5** What is this big "X"? As you walk the park's trails, you'll see several of these strange structures. As the landscape at Rio Bosque changes, we are monitoring different physical and biological aspects of the environment to better understand the changes and help guide park management. The big "X" is a **pitfall trap**, for live-trapping small animals. In the middle of the X is a covered, buried bucket. Once a month, we remove the covers from the buckets at 5-6 traps and leave them open overnight. The next morning, we identify what we have caught, take some measurements and release the animals. Each individual trap gets used 2-3 times per year.

**12** Disturbance events like flood and **fire** can play an important role in shaping ecosystems. Some plants are tolerant of fire and resprout after a burn. Other are fire-intolerant and can be eliminated by a burn. The area in front of you and to the left burned in 2005. At the time, a shrub known as arrowweed dominated the site. Today, arrowweed is still the main shrub you see. Would it be considered a fire-tolerant or fire-intolerant species?

**13** This tree and the larger one to its right are the **two native mesquites** of the El Paso area. You've already met the screwbean mesquite, or tornillo. The other native mesquite is western honey mesquite. Which of these two trees is a tornillo and which a honey mesquite? Honey mesquite is fairly common at Rio Bosque, has flat seed pods and 1-2-inch thorns. Tornillo is common at the park, has corkscrew-shaped seed pods and 0.33-0.5-inch thorns. Both were part of historic river-valley woodlands.

**14** **Cattails** – with their brown fuzzy flowerheads that look like a hot dog on a stick – may be the most familiar of all wetland plants. They provide nesting, roosting and feeding habitat for many birds and other wildlife but also present a management challenge. When Rio Bosque has water during the growing season, the shallow wetlands and the slow-moving water in our channels quickly support cattails. The challenge: How do we create conditions that allow some cattail stands but keep these plants from completely covering the wetlands and water channels?

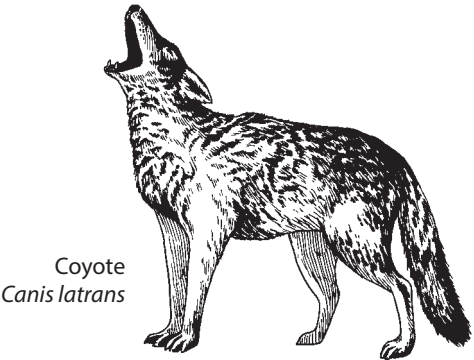
**15** As you walk along this water channel, imagine you're walking along the **historic Rio Grande**. Guess what? You are! The channel is actually an old bend of the river, cut off when the Rio Grande was straightened and put into its current location in the 1930's. Today, many of the plants you see here are early successional species. These plants colonize disturbed areas by sprouting from seed very quickly and reaching maturity in a short time. Eventually, they will be replaced by native trees and shrubs historically found along the river. The process is already under way. Here and throughout the park, the environment is changing. As you visit in the future, you'll be able to see the changes and enjoy the results.

**16** **Water** is vital for sustaining wetland and riverside habitats. It is also a limited resource in the El Paso area. Securing water to support these habitats at Rio Bosque is a challenge. The pipe to your right delivers water to the old river channel from a well when no other water sources are available.



# Rio Bosque Wetlands Park

*A City of El Paso Natural Area*



Cover art: Zackery Zdinak

[www.riobosque.org](http://www.riobosque.org)



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The environment in the El Paso-Juárez Valley has changed dramatically since pre-settlement times. The wetlands, riverside forests and other highly productive native habitats that once graced the banks of the Rio Grande are largely gone. At Rio Bosque, the environment is still changing, but in a new way. Here, a diverse partnership is working to bring back meaningful examples of the unique and valuable ecosystems once found in our river valley.

The **Bosque Trail**, at 0.6 miles, is the shortest loop trail at the park. This hard-surfaced trail is suitable for wheelchairs. The generous support of the Paso del Norte Health Foundation and the Recreational Trails Program of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department made this trail possible. Follow the green trail signs with the frog logo. **Note:** The stops on this trail are not all in numerical order.

**1** Upstream and downstream of this bridge, you'll find cottonwood and willow trees growing along this channel. **Cottonwood-willow bosques**, or woodlands, once lined the banks of the Rio Grande for miles and were wonderful habitats for wildlife. We're working to restore this habitat along the channel. We've planted some of the trees; some have come in on their own. Can you tell which are which?

**2** **Wolfberry**, the shrub next to the post, is a common native of the river valley that we are seeking to establish in new areas at the park. In late spring, it can be covered with red-orange berries that are a good food source for many birds and mammals. Speaking of which, have you seen any of the park's many jackrabbits yet? On wolfberry and many other shrubs at the park, you'll find a browse line created by jackrabbits eating the foliage as high as they can reach.

**3** One of the common trees in this bosque is **saltcedar**. The large saltcedar here is probably 70+ years old. This non-native plant has replaced native riparian species along the Rio Grande and other rivers of the western United States. It was brought to the U.S. from the Mediterranean because it could prevent erosion by growing quickly in poor, salty soil. We are removing it from many areas of the park to allow native vegetation to become re-established. (Continued on back...)

