

RIO BOSQUE NEWS

A newsletter reporting on events at Rio Bosque Wetlands Park

Center for Environmental Resource Management
The University of Texas at El Paso



No. 69

July 2019

SUMMER BIRDS

Each year, as native river-valley habitats continue to develop at Rio Bosque Wetlands Park, we also see changes in the park's wildlife populations. Some of the best examples involve nesting birds. The park supports a fascinating mix of breeding species and is well worth a summer visit.

Many of the park's nesting bird species were already present before the launch of the wetland project at Rio Bosque in 1997. Some of these birds are year-round residents, including characteristic species of the desert southwest like Gambel's Quail, Greater Roadrunner, Harris's Hawk, Burrowing Owl, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Verdin and Crissal Thrasher. Others are birds that spend the winter south of us and annually migrate north to the Paso del Norte region to breed. Examples include Black-chinned Hummingbird, Swainson's Hawk, Western Kingbird, Yellow-breasted Chat, Blue Grosbeak and the impossibly colorful Painted Bunting.

More than 60 years after a bend of the Rio Grande that formerly wound through the site was cut off when the river was channelized, the wetland project brought water back to the Rio Bosque landscape. And that water, once available in summer, brought back as nesting species many water-associated birds, including Blue-winged and Cinnamon teal, Mexican



These two young Western Screech-Owls in a Goodding willow at Rio Bosque are not long out of the nest. (Photo: Peter Holder, June 6, 2019)

Duck, Common Gallinule, Black-necked Stilt, American Avocet, Green Heron, Black Phoebe, Red-winged Blackbird and Common Yellowthroat.

As wetland, riparian and other habitats began to develop, they lured other nesting species. White-tailed Kites first appeared in 2003 and first nested in 2009. Exceptional summer rains in 2006 spurred exceptional plant growth that led to exceptional small-mammal numbers that led to a pair of Long-eared Owls nesting in 2007. Bell's Vireos first appeared in 1999 and first nested in 2005.

Cassin's Sparrows have nested in

Friends of the Rio Bosque Membership Application

Name:

Address:

E-mail:

- Life Member \$1,000
- Wetlands Society \$500-\$999
- Restoration Patron \$250-\$499
- Cottonwood Commando \$75-\$249
- Bosque Booster \$50
- Family \$20
- Individual \$15
- Student or Senior (62+) \$10
- Bosque Buddy (12 and under) \$6

Please make checks payable to *Friends of the Rio Bosque* and mail to: Friends of the Rio Bosque, CERM-UTEP, 500 W. University Ave., El Paso, TX 79968-0684.



Next Meetings

Wed., July 24
Wed., Aug 28
Wed., Sep 25
6:30 – 7:30 p.m.
206 Kelly Hall
UTEP

Info: 915-747-8663

years when the pattern and amount of rainfall have been favorable.

As the habitats at the park continue to change, each year brings new surprises. This year's highlights:

- **Yellow-billed Cuckoos** nested at the park before 1997 but disappeared with the vegetation clearing that was part of site preparation for the wetland project. We did not see or hear cuckoos again until 2007 and went 7 years before the next detection in 2014. Last year, though, brought multiple cuckoo detections in June/July in cottonwood-willow habitat along and near the old river channel, a trend that continued in 2019. We still await evidence of renewed nesting.
- We first observed **Western Screech-Owls** at Rio

Bosque in November 2009, when they began roosting in Wood Duck nest boxes. In 2016 (and perhaps earlier), they nested in at least one of these boxes. This year, there was no evidence of nesting in the boxes, but there was, as the photo on the previous page shows, definite evidence of nesting. It appears the park's riparian-woodland habitat has now developed to the point where natural nest cavities are available to these owls.

- For 8 years now, **Northern Cardinals** have been consistently present in summer, and they have nested in at least 3 of those years, including 2019. Over the past 2 years, cardinals have become noticeably more numerous. This year, they are appearing throughout the park, their clear whistles now a conspicuous sound of summer at Rio Bosque. ✨



Center for Environmental
Resource Management
The University of Texas at El Paso
500 West University Ave.
El Paso, TX 79968-0684

Return Service Requested

RIO BOSQUE CALENDAR

Join us at Rio Bosque for a free walking tour or to help with habitat management or park maintenance. Coming up:

| JULY | | | AUGUST | | | SEPTEMBER | | |
|-----------|-------------------|--------|-----------|-------------------|--------|-----------|-------------------|--------|
| 6 (Sat.) | Birding Tour | 7 a.m. | 11 (Sun.) | Introductory Tour | 8 a.m. | 7 (Sat.) | Birding Tour | 8 a.m. |
| 20 (Sat.) | Workday | 8 a.m. | 17 (Sat.) | Workday | 8 a.m. | 15 (Sun.) | Introductory Tour | 8 a.m. |
| 21 (Sun.) | Introductory Tour | 8 a.m. | 24 (Sat.) | Birding Tour | 8 a.m. | 21 (Sat.) | Workday | 8 a.m. |

Meeting place for all activities is a bridge crossing the Riverside Canal. From I-10, take Americas Ave. (Loop 375) to Pan American Dr., turn left onto Pan American and travel 1.5 miles to the bridge. Please be prompt.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

www.riobosque.org

John Sproul 915-747-8663 jsproul@utep.edu

Want to help us save postage and paper by receiving this newsletter only via e-mail? Let John know.