

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



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DISTINGUISHED VISITOR

The Least Bittern, smallest member of the heron family, relies on cattail marshes and other wetland habitats for nesting. In the [1939](#) and [1944](#) editions of the bird checklist for the El Paso region, this species was listed as a fairly common permanent resident and nesting species. “Permanent resident” is unlikely – Least Bittern is a migratory species – but it certainly nested at local river-valley wetlands, including sites near La Mesa in New Mexico and Canutillo, Ascarate and Zaragoza in Texas. The Zaragoza site would have been near today’s Rio Bosque Wetlands Park.

During the 1930s and early 1940s, the Rio Grande in the El Paso region was channelized. With the attendant loss of wetland habitat, Least Bitterns began a steep decline locally. The [current edition](#) of the local bird checklist considers them “very rare and not expected annually” during the period from April to September.

Since 2015, when water first became consistently available to Rio Bosque during spring and summer, cattail stands have been expanding at the park, both in the wetland cells and along the former bend of the Rio Grande that winds through the site. And on June 30, we saw a Least Bittern at Rio Bosque for the first time! It’s another encouraging sign of progress in our efforts to restore native ecosystems at the park. ✈



Least Bitterns were once a fairly common nesting bird in the El Paso region. Will they make a comeback at Rio Bosque? (Photo: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service)

HIGH WATER WOES

The pipeline El Paso Water built from the Roberto Bustamante Wastewater Treatment Plant to Rio Bosque in 2014-15 is, for many reasons, our preferred way to deliver water to the park. This past fall and winter, it was not able to serve that purpose.

The Rio Bosque pipeline branches off from a larger pipeline that discharges water from the Bustamante Plant to the Riverside Drain, an irrigation drain located west of the plant. Last fall and winter, due to work in the Riverside Canal east of the plant, all

Friends of the Rio Bosque Membership Application

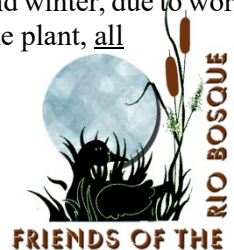
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- Life Member \$1,000
- Wetlands Society \$500-\$999
- Restoration Patron \$250-\$499
- Cottonwood Commando \$75-\$249
- Bosque Booster \$50
- Family \$20
- Individual \$15
- Student or Senior (62+) \$10
- Bosque Buddy (12 and under) \$6

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
TBD

We are getting closer to resuming monthly meetings, as pandemic conditions improve.
Info: 915-747-8663

treated water from the plant had to go to the drain and Rio Bosque from Oct 14 through April 10. Our plan back in October was to divert enough water from the Drain pipeline into the Rio Bosque pipeline to meet the park's needs. The rest could go to the drain.

It wasn't possible. Well before significant volumes could be diverted, water started backing up to the Bustamante Plant. We had to revert to the original delivery method used before the Rio Bosque pipeline was built: Let the water go to the drain, then divert it from the drain into the old river channel in the park.

With this delivery method, the only way to flood the park's largest wetland cell is to raise the water level in the upstream half of the old river channel to a level at which water can spread into and throughout the wetland cell...and keep it at that high level.

The previous 5 years, we kept fall/winter flows low in the channel by delivering water directly to the wetland cells via the pipeline. This year, with high water, much of the vegetation along the upstream half of the channel experienced persistent flooding for 6 months. The result? We lost 19 Rio Grande cottonwoods, 18 Goodding's willows, and numerous coyote willows, willowleaf baccharis, and Panhandle baccharis.

A setback, to be sure, but there is also another way to look at this outcome. The historic Rio Grande was a dynamic, living river that shaped river-valley ecosystems, in part, through disturbance from seasonal flooding. This past fall and winter, we experienced a somewhat similar process. As more favorable conditions return along the old river channel, we can expect the vegetation to recover over time. Already, new willow seedlings are starting to appear. ✎



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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		
10 (Sat.)	Birding Tour	7 a.m.	15 (Sun.)	Introductory Tour	8 a.m.	11 (Sat.)	Birding Tour	8 a.m.
17 (Sat.)	Workday	8 a.m.	21 (Sat.)	Workday	8 a.m.	18 (Sat.)	Workday	8 a.m.
18 (Sun.)	Introductory Tour	8 a.m.	28 (Sat.)	Birding Tour	8 a.m.	19 (Sun.)	Introductory Tour	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

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