

REFUGE UPDATE

March 2021

Spring Time on the Sevilleta

Published bi-monthly by the Amigos de la Sevilleta



Calendar

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic all planned events have been cancelled. There will be a special notification sent to all if things change before the May Refuge Update is published.

Refuge Manager Notes

Kathy Granillo, Refuge Manager

Weather is always of interest on the refuge, especially if it includes rain and snow. In February we had the second lowest temperature and the highest wind speed recorded since 1989 when the Sevilleta Long Term Ecological Research site established several meteorological stations across the refuge. Doug Moore, UNM Meteorologist had this to say:

“The Polar Express arrived in central New Mexico on Feb. 14th. Temperatures went from near record highs early in the month to record lows. The 14th was a new record sub-zero low for this late in February and the 14th and 15th set new daily record low temperatures. Of course, it should be noted that this comes nowhere close to matching the cold temperatures back in February of 2011. The lowest temperature on record (1989-present) was -24 degrees F on 02/03/2011.

This Polar Express was brought in on some extremely strong east winds. On the Sevilleta these winds were strongest up near Los Pinos. The weather station nearest Los Pinos measured a top gust of 68 mph. Albuquerque's airport station only reported a gust of 62 mph. This is sort of deja vu all over again. Last year on Feb 11 a similar storm produced winds that topped at 66 mph. “

It was great to get moisture on the refuge especially in a drought year. Hopefully this will lead to a good spring bloom of wildflowers! I've included some photos in this newsletter of wildflowers from last spring. We will post updates on the wildflowers as they bloom on the refuge Facebook page and I'm sure the Amigos will post on the Amigos Facebook page.

The rain and snow will also help the overall water situation in New Mexico which will hopefully translate to a good spring flow in the Rio Grande. This will benefit the new cottonwood and willow trees we've planted in our restoration of native vegetation along the Rio Grande. Included in this newsletter is an article about our latest tree planting efforts, carried out in a COVID-safe manner with refuge staff and a handful of volunteers. We will post photos on Facebook as the trees leaf out and grow.

The refuge recently designated two new trails and the Amigos paid for the interpretive signs that are being placed at the trailheads. These are in our riparian areas Unit A and Unit B. We will provide more information on these trails via our website and Facebook pages once we get all signs installed and have a trail brochure. Keep them in mind for your spring hikes!

Amigos Board News

Ann Adams, Board President

Hola Amigos!

It must be Springtime in New Mexico, right? The wind has picked up. The temperature has dropped. The cranes are headed North. AND, it's snowed every day in mid Feb. Of course, it could be worse... we could be further East. In TX. With MORE cold. NO power. And NO water. We are so fortunate here: the sun shines almost every day. That alone should make us smile! But there's more: it's rarely seriously cold, or even seriously hot. When it does rain, we dance in it. We take so many things for granted. It's good to take time occasionally to remind ourselves about the blessings we have here in NM... even in the time of coronavirus.

This year, due to COVID-19, Amigos held our first virtual Annual Meeting. If you were there you met each of your Board members and heard about our 2020 operations, members, and accomplishments, as well as, our plans for 2021. Sevilleta refuge manager, Kathy Granillo, shared videos and still shots from the watering hole game cameras (Drinkers at the drinkers). There's a good laugh to be had when two young lions take on a striped skunk! If you haven't seen the video of Amigos' Annual Meeting, check it out at

https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/0219Y46G9IUK-eR_J2kDCqvCo-YS6gyetNHqxNB9olbEjNLPZ_fMmBSZSSnlWOb.O4b6d9ll7KD6cv0Q

Access Passcode: u2Qw0T&s

We hope you will make the effort to hike Sevilleta's trails as Spring actually warms them up. (Masks and social distancing are still in order.) Even though the Visitor's Center remains closed, the trails should be showing their Spring colors in March. A little moisture goes a long way in the desert so we may expect to have more cactus and wildflowers blooming this year than last. Watch the Amigos' website and Facebook page, as well as the refuge website for notice about Spring blooms you can see. Young critters will also begin appearing soon, too. Since their parents tend to keep them out of the public eye, your best chance to see baby animals will be on the Amigos' Facebook page. Migrating passerines (songbirds) will be replacing the cranes that spent the winter in New Mexico. Migration is a good time to look for birds that are only passing through on their way to their breeding grounds further north. It won't be long before it's time to get out our hummingbird feeders and clean them up for this coming season. Hummingbirds should begin appearing by the end of March or early April. All the birds should be sporting their fanciest plumage and looking to show it off. Spring can be an exciting time on the refuge as new plants and animals appear.

The next Amigos board meeting is March 17th at 4:30 By Zoom

All Amigos members are welcome and are encouraged to attend.

Contact Ann ann.d.adams@comcast.net, for access information if you would like to attend.

Amigos Contacts

Amigos web site

<https://www.amigosdelasevilleta.org/>

Amigos on Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/amigossevilleta>

Refuge Web Site

[Http://www.fws.gov/refuge/sevilleta](http://www.fws.gov/refuge/sevilleta)

Jeannine Kimble

Visitor Services Manager

505-864-5021ex106

Past editions of this Newsletter are available at the Amigos website: <https://www.amigosdelasevilleta.org/contacts>

There are openings on the Amigos de la Sevilleta board of directors.

Contact Steve Randall at 505-861-1088

Spring on the Refuge

Submitted by Susan Richards

Spring hiking – it doesn't get much better than that. Trails are dry, weather is (generally) nice, and colorful surprises dot the landscape – flowers, lizards, and birds. Sevilleta NWR trails are wonderful for spring hiking – you can hike any time of day. Pick short ones like the 0.25-mile Wildflower Loop or the mile plus Nature Trail. West of the Visitor's Center, Mesa View Trail and Ladrones Vista offer longer routes and broader vistas. Two new trails in the Wetlands (Unit A and Unit B) add birds to the colorful surprises. If you know flowers, birds and lizards by name, great; consider them old friends. If you want to enjoy them just for their beauty, that's fine, too.

A hiking brochure is available at the Visitor's Center. If it's after hours, park at the gate and take the short connector trail to the Center. It's Spring. Come hike Sevilleta NWR.



Desert Paintbrush



Chocolate Flower (Photo: Santa Fe Botanical Garden)



Tufted Evening Primrose or Sand Lily



Curve-billed Thrasher (Photo: Kim Pravda)



Woven Spine Pineapple Cactus



Desert Spiny Lizard

Spring Hiking Tips

Submitted by Penny Lommen

Wear a mask. There is a new federal mandate masks MUST be worn in all Federal buildings and on all public lands.

Dress in layers. This time of year, it can look warm and sunny but a sudden wind can be quite chilly.

Wear appropriate footwear. Tennis shoes and hiking boots are good, flip flops and high heels aren't!

Carry water, have a hat, use sunscreen.

Distance yourself from others who aren't part of your group.

Watch for wildlife. As the weather warms up the animals are coming out to enjoy it too. Be aware!

Remember the old saying, "Take only pictures, leave only footprints".

More information on Sevilleta NWR Trails is available at:

https://www.fws.gov/refuge/Sevilleta/visit/visitor_activities/trails.html

Volunteers

Submitted by Rex Meyers

Gary Loos

Cactus Guy

Gary Loos is one of Sevilleta's Volunteer Naturalists. His expertise is cacti. A physicist by training, Gary has enjoyed cactus as a hobby since graduate school. When he retired from NM Tech in 2009, he volunteered his services to Sevilleta. "I like people" he says, and he likes the Chihuahuan desert. An enjoyable day for Gary is one spent with people hiking and sharing his expertise about the natural environment. His yard in San Acacia reflects his love of desert plants with a long, varied, and impressive cactus garden. For each plant he shares the name and a story. When asked if he has a favorite, he hesitates saying they all have their special beauty and interest, but he then points to a "Horse Crippler" – that's my favorite.

Watch for one of Gary's hikes when Sevilleta NWR reopens for programs.



Gary's favorite cactus



Tree Planting on the Refuge

Submitted by Sandy Barnett

With flood control and channelization projects along the Rio Grande, cottonwood seeds and saplings often fail to find enough moisture to survive. There are many old trees but few young ones in our riparian forests; these saplings must also now compete against non-native and invasive Russian olive and salt cedar.



Gooding's Willows and Rio Grande Cottonwoods are being planted along the river at the refuge. (Photo: Kathy Granillo)

Fortunately, there are a number of programs in New Mexico, including one at Sevilleta, to restore the riparian ecosystem. Every year in late winter/early spring, a group of volunteers join refuge staff in planting native Gooding's Willows and Rio Grande Cottonwoods along the stretch of the Rio Grande that winds through the refuge. This tree restoration program not only helps to stabilize the banks of the river but creates habitat for wildlife. This year, around 500 young cottonwoods (each measuring around 15 feet tall and 1-2 inches in diameter at the base) and 2,670 willow poles (measuring 12-15 feet tall) are being planted.

A little more about cottonwoods

The Rio Grande Cottonwood, *Populus deltoides wislizeni*, is the largest (growing to nearly 100 ft in height) and undeniably the most beautiful tree we associate with the forest that borders the Rio Grande in New Mexico and the San Juan basin in northwest New Mexico. The cottonwood has lustrous, bright green foliage in summer that changes to brilliant yellow in fall, fading to brown over the winter. While it is commonly classified as “deciduous,” the cottonwood is technically “everciduous,” since it holds on to many of its leaves throughout the winter, only dropping them when the new leaves of the year emerge in the spring. (Among the possible advantages of dead leaf retention is that it may help to protect the trees from water and temperature stress.)

Cottonwoods are “dioecious,” meaning that there are male and female trees. Once they reach reproductive age, males are easily identifiable in the spring by the cylindrical red-purple flower clusters (catkins) they produce. The flowers release pollen carried by wind to the tiny red flower clusters on female trees. By June, the fruit on the female ripens and releases an abundance of cotton-tufted seeds that produce that familiar early “summer snow.” A mature Rio Grande cottonwood can produce as many as 25 million seeds in a season!



Cottonwood male (L) and female catkins in flower and the seed mass with cotton tufts produced on the female (R)
(Photos: Bob Klips)

The seeds on a cottonwood remain viable for only a few days to a few weeks, and must quickly find saturated alluvial soil in which to sprout. If the soil dries too quickly, the seedling dies. Given sufficient moisture, however, the seedling may put down roots extending three to five feet deep in the course of the first summer.

Did you know?

The inner bark of cottonwood can be dried and ground into a powder for use as thickener in soups or added to grains when making bread. The sticky catkins have been used by children as a chewing gum, and both catkins and flowers can be eaten as a vegetable. Cottonwood also has many uses in traditional medicine, likely due to the high salicin (a precursor of salicylic acid – aspirin) content that is particularly high in the leaf buds.

Springtime Flowers

Pictures Submitted by Kathy Granillo and Gary Loos



Hedgehog



Cholla



Hedgehog



Hedgehog



Desert Four O'clock (herbaceous perennial, not a cactus)



Unidentified cactus, but very pretty!



Smallflower Fishhook Cactus,
(*Sclerocactus parviflorus*)
Not common on the refuge.
Found in the Four Corners region of NM.

Cacti were identified by Volunteer Naturalist Gary Loos

March Financial Report

Submitted by Penny Lommen

Back in October the Fish & Wildlife Service sent out a report from the Department of the Interior. The Office of the Inspector General (OIG) had a lot of questions about Friends Groups at National Parks and Wildlife Refuges. They wanted to make sure that the money that was generated by Friends Groups was being spent properly. This caused a lot of animosity with various group boards and resulted in a lot of questions being asked about finances.

Since then, I have participated in 3 or 4 webinars dealing with this problem. Everyone has agreed that transparency is an important issue. Here is some information about the Amigos de la Sevilleta.

We are a 501(c)3 organization, all memberships and donations are tax deductible. We file a 990-N return with the IRS every year.

Our income comes from memberships, donations and revenue from the Nature Store. The Amigos do not have any paid employees so we do not pay any salaries. All the money that we raise goes back to the refuge to pay for programs that the Amigos support. We do have a certain amount of administrative fees which we have to pay in order to stay in business. This includes liability insurance, the cost of our website and our accounting software.

Our largest expense every year is the Drawn to Sevilleta program. This is an educational program that introduces elementary school students in both Socorro and Valencia County to the refuge. Interns visit the schools and present information on the various types of wildlife that can be found at Sevilleta. This is followed by an art contest and the Fall Family Fair. This year due to Covid everything was done virtually. Our intern, Jenna Rabe, did an excellent job with this difficult situation.

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| 2020 Income | | 2020 Expenses |
| Memberships | \$4870.00 | \$3544.00 |
| Donations | <u>\$2019.00</u> | |
| | \$6889.00 | |
| Nature Store Income | | Nature Store Expenses |
| | \$3707.00 | \$1903.00 |

Our expenses were low this year due to the pandemic but that caused a decline in our donations and store revenue. We sent out an appeal for donations and received funds from several generous members. Thank you to all who donated, we appreciate you so much!

We don't know what will happen this year. We just have to wait and see. In the meantime, the trails are open. Come out to enjoy them!

Editor's Note

Steve Randall

This month's newsletter is the first one to have a "theme;" in the months to follow we will try to have different themes. In the upcoming months the planned themes are:

MAY migration, birds

JULY pollinator benefits, cactus blooms, and species information

SEPTEMBER geology, history, natural features on Sevilleta, historic facilities (line shacks, fence/gate/ranch remnants)

NOVEMBER Fall Family Fair, connecting people with nature

Anyone can submit an article for consideration, preferably in .docx format; email to sdrandall72@gmail.com