



Refuge Update

October 2026

Published quarterly by the Amigos de la Sevilleta

Board meetings are held the second Thursday of most months. The next board meeting will be held on Thursday, October 8th, 2:00-3:30 pm at the Visitor Center. You are welcome to attend in person, or contact Kitty Pokorny (members@amigosdelasevilleta.org) for a Zoom link.

Refuge Update

Jeff Sanchez, Refuge Manager

The past few months have been extremely busy for us here at Sevilleta NWR. I think the best way to present these highlights/changes is to provide a list with brief description. As always, if you have any questions, feel free to reach out to myself or Refuge staff. Highlights/changes include:

- Refuge team members supported the New Mexico Department of Wildlife (NMDOW) with restoration guidance for Indian Hills Farm property, located in San Acacia, New Mexico. The NMDOW is interested in speaking with any local Amigos member who reside in San Acacia. Please give me a call if you are interested in speaking with NMDOW. Additionally, a memorandum of understanding is nearing finalization allowing us to share effort and equipment between the two agencies, thus, supporting common goals/objectives.
- The Refuge is working with the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District (MRGCD) to focus on common goals and support water conveyance needs in the Valley. Additionally, MRGCD has provided us with gate materials to increase the safety aspect of Refuge hunt areas and have planned heavy equipment dirt work to ensure more reliable travel to wetland units and the Rio Grande.
- The Refuge has completed the hunt plan package to clean-up hunt verbiage and align more closely with NMDOW rules and regulations. This includes adding several additional blinds at Hunt Unit B, opening the River to hunting opportunities and cleaning up regulatory discrepancies that were confusing to all users. The hunt package also allows escorted (by Refuge staff/volunteers) hunts to mobility impaired veterans and/or youth to remove non-native oryx from the Refuge as a management tool for invasive species.

- The Refuge has also completed the fish plan package, thus opening the Unit 7 Drain and Rio Grande to fishing opportunities on Refuge lands. This change aligns with the properties surrounding the Refuge and the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) goals and objectives.
- Refuge staff are currently working on a Feral Horse removal Environmental Assessment, which is part of a \$1M grant received to fix boundary fences, protect springs and drinkers from non-native species degradation, and remove non-native ungulates from Refuge property. These efforts fit within the Refuge's established "Warranty Deed", which directs the USFWS to "maintain the property as a naturally functioning system."
- Refuge maintenance staff recently re-installed urinals in public and staff restrooms and fixed numerous miles of fence, several malfunctioning drinkers, constructed a Bolson tortoise pen, fixed ongoing domestic well issues, maintained roads, etc...
- Recently, Sevilleta NWR was consolidated with Valle de Oro NWR, Bosque del Apache NWR and San Andres NWR within the Middle Rio Grande Valley, and Sevilleta NWR

staff is now managing San Andres NWR due to a vacancy at that station. There will be much more to come on this in the near future. Sevilleta staff have also been traveling to other refuges to support regional needs.

- The RioSol power line project is within the planning stage. This is phase two of the SunZia project. This power line is further west of the new power poles that were erected through SunZia several years ago. Easements that pre-dated the Refuge allow for these upgrades through the Refuge.
- The SunZia project is within the restoration phase of the project with all pad sites planted with native plant seeds. All sites are planted weekly if needed. This will be an on-going project that the Refuge biology team is focusing on to ensure compliance.

There are many other day-to-day things that Refuge staff manage behind the scenes. I am proud and we are lucky to have such an amazing staff here at Sevilleta NWR. Thanks again for supporting the Amigos, which in turn, supports the Refuge.

Jeff



Unit A, SWNR (Photo: C Barnett)

President's Message

Joan Kopietz, Amigos President

Hola Amigos

The seasons are changing and although I will miss the summer the coolness and colors of Fall are welcome.

It is in the Fall that the Amigos put together a Slate of Officers and Board members for the next year. These are the people that move this organization forward, produce events and activities. If you are interested in bringing your talents and energy as an Officer or Board member please let me know at members@amigosdelasevilleta.org

2027 is one of those milestone years for the Amigos de la Sevilleta. We will be celebrating 20 years of service on the Sevilleta . A display of highlights is in the planning stage. Do you have mementoes or photos of events from the past that we could use to represent past Amigos activities?

Please use the about email address or visit the Visitor Center Wed-Fri with your materials or ideas.



Jimmy Gonzolas from [Gonzo Taxidermy](#) cleaning and sprucing up the mountain lion in the Visitor Center. He is also freshening other taxidermy specimens on display. (Photo: J. Kopietz)



The taxidermy in the Visitor Center has been accumulating dust for years. Next time you visit you will see refreshed critters. The Amigos have hired a professional Taxidermist to clean and refresh all of the display pieces. The work should started Sept 28.

The Bolson Tortoise has been established on the Sevilleta for 2 years but is not represented in the Visitor Center other than a few photos. A team of Amigos has taken on the task to design an educational display to introduce the species to the public. The display will be on the west wall of the Visitor Center and will be a permanent exhibit.

Finally, if you are interested in joining our team in the Visitor Center, informing the public about Sevilleta, selling items in the Nature Store and keeping the VC clean, we're looking for a few new members. Please contact me at joankopietz@gmail.com

Joan



Sevilleta Nature Connections & Confections

Joan Kopietz, Amigos President

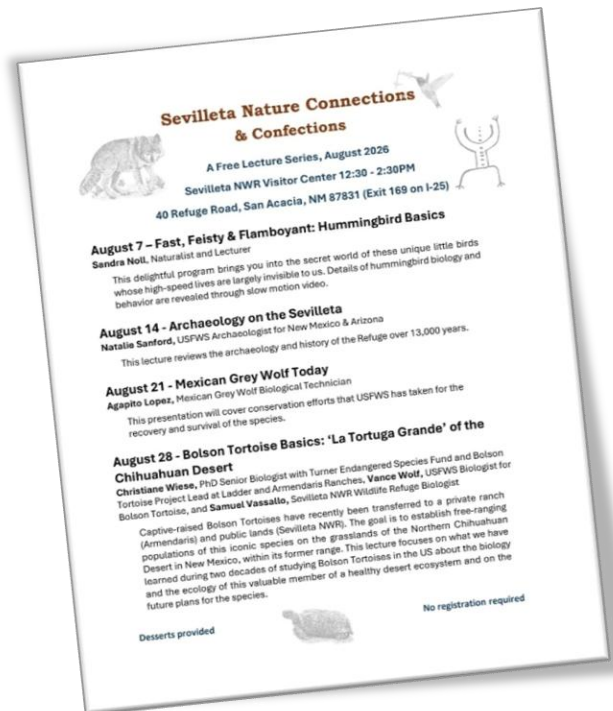
Sevilleta Nature Connections & Confections was a new lecture series this summer at the Visitor Center sponsored by the Amigos de la Sevilleta. The lectures, along with deserts, were offered every Friday in August. The four lectures covered Hummingbirds, Archaeology at Sevilleta, USFWS Grey Wolf Recovery Program, and the USFWS Bolson Tortoise program.

There were three results we were hoping the activity would produce.

1. Increase visitors during a slow month
2. Introduce the Amigos to those visitors in hopes of attracting members.
3. Increase sales in the Nature Store to support the Sevilleta

The event accomplished all three goals. The lectures were wonderful and attracted 90 visitors, added six new members and almost doubled sales over 2025.

The Amigos Board is making this an annual event and is establishing a committee of three to start the plan for August of 2027.



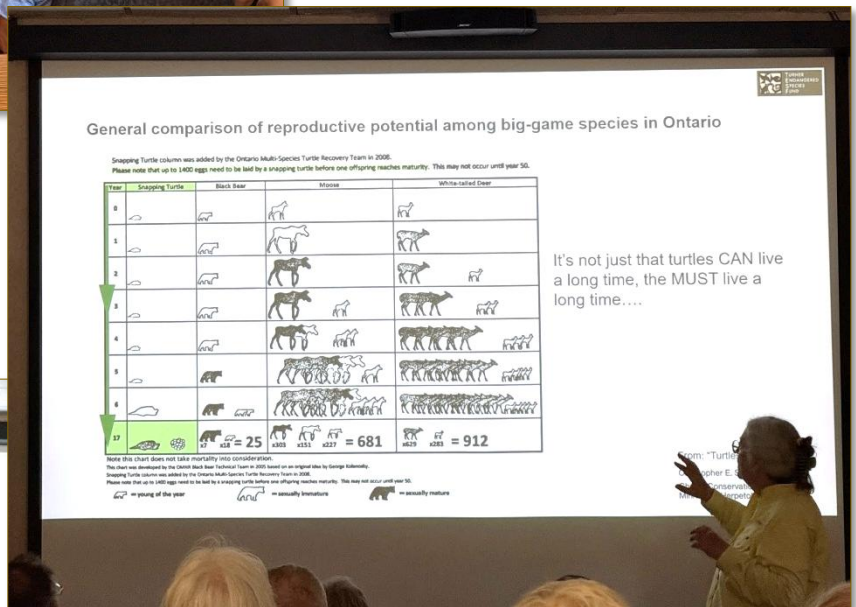
August 7: Joan Kopietz with Sandra Knoll, lecturer on hummingbirds



August 14 George McDonnell –
Archaeology of the Central
Rio Grande



August 21: Agepito Lopez–
Mexican Grey Wolf



August 28: Chris Wiese
(above) and Sam Vassello
(left) – Bolson Tortoise

The “Ghost” on the Refuge

Jennifer Keyser, Amigos Member

Since Halloween is approaching, it seems a good time to talk about a “ghost” that can be found on Sevilleta. It’s the javelina, or collared peccary (*Pecari tajacu*). The javelina is sometimes called a “ghost” because of its remarkable ability to stand still, then vanish into the landscape. It lives in many parts of the Americas, ranging from the Southwestern United States to northern Argentina. At Sevilleta, it can often be found in the riparian area along the Rio Grande and also traveling up the arroyos into the upland areas. It’s also been seen around the Visitor Center and the UNM Field Station housing.



Motion-activated camera caught javelinas at one of the solar-powered drinking stations on the refuge.

The javelina’s widespread range is due to its ability to adapt to the diverse habitats it lives in, and the variety of foods it can eat. It lives in deserts, shrublands, grasslands, broadleaf forests, and several other environments. An omnivore, it often feeds on cacti, mesquite beans, fruits, berries, seeds, roots, tubers, and grasses. But it will also eat lizards, small carrion,



Aransas National Wildlife Refuge
(Photo: M Zieschang)

and rodents. Unfortunately for the javelina, it is also prey for many different carnivores including wolves, coyotes, cougar, ocelots, and bobcats.

This animal has several interesting physical features, including a scent gland on the top of its rump that discharges a skunk-like odor. It rubs its scent on rocks and tree stumps to mark its territory. An adult has rough grey hair with whitish fur that wraps around its neck and shoulders, resembling a collar. Another

distinctive feature is sharp canine teeth, which protrude about one inch from its jaws. The javelina is approximately two feet in height, three to four feet in length and usually weighs between 35 to 60 pounds.

Sevilleta's "ghost" is prolific, breeding year-round with peak breeding times varying by geographic location. Females typically have two litters per year. Litter sizes range from one to four young following a gestation period of approximately 140 to 150 days. Young remain with their mothers for about nine months,



Photo: R. Niebrugge

reaching independence and sexual maturity at eleven months.

Exact statewide population counts for javelina are difficult to determine, but estimates place the overall U.S. population well over 250,000 animals. Global population is thought to be approximately five million, making its conservation status that of an International Union for Conservation of Nature Species of Least Concern. However, the javelina does face specific threats to its numbers including habitat loss, hunting, roadkill, and climate change.

If you visit Sevilleta, you might be lucky enough to spot this "ghost." If not, at the Visitor Center

you can see a slide presentation behind the reception desk which includes images of this elusive animal. You can also find javelina-themed items in the Nature Store, such as a Christmas ornament, magnets, and a children's book.

A few more facts about javelinas:

- A group of javelinas is called a squadron.
- Young are nicknamed "reds" due to their reddish-brown fur.
- They have an excellent sense of smell but poor eyesight.
- Javelinas can run up to thirty-five miles per hour when threatened.

Sources:

Benson, Aaliyah. 2023. *Pecari tajacu* (collared peccary). [Animal Diversity Web](#).

DeGregory, Alex. 2022. First Dance with the Desert Ghost. [Traditional Bowhunter](#) (Dec/Jan).

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Collared Peccary [Explore the Taxonomic Tree](#).

Wikipedia contributors. Collared peccary. [Wikipedia](#).

Email exchange with Joan Kopietz, Amigos de la Sevilleta President, September 12, 2026.

Email exchange with Samuel Vassallo, Wildlife Refuge Biologist, Sevilleta NWR, September 16, 2026.



Butterfly Count

Chuck Kooshian, Amigos Vice-President

Below are the results from our Annual Butterfly Count on September 5, 2026 at the Refuge. The eight participants counted 101 butterflies in 14 different species. One group surveyed upland areas of the Refuge and the other surveyed the riparian areas. They took some beautiful photos too! Thank you all for helping monitor our butterfly populations.

Species (13)	Upland	Riparian
Checkered White		4
Cabbage White		1
Orange Sulphur		1
Clouded Sulphur		40
Unidentified White*		7
Western Pygmy Blue	7	8
Reakirt's Blue	4	
Rita Blue	8	
Ceranus Blue	3	
Palmer's Metalmark	1	
Painted Lady		2
Monarch		3
Queen		11
Common Checkered Skipper		1
	23	78

*probably Checkered or Cabbage

Total # Individuals = 101



Above photo: J Ruff; Other photos: M.R. Gracey

New Arrivals at the Nature Store

Joan Kopietz, Amigos President

A variety of fun new items are available at the Nature Store.

New plush animals include a 20-inch Horned Lizard that you will want to cuddle, along with a lovable Bighorn Sheep and a cute bat.

Our new metal bird collection includes a Blue Heron, owl, hummingbird, roadrunner, and three different Gamble's Quail. The quail have already proved to be very popular. These birds can be displayed indoors or outdoors.

We are introducing a Sevilleta NWR Christmas ornament. This is a must-have for every Amigo. You can choose from three styles--coyote and roadrunner, owl on a prickly pear, and javelina.

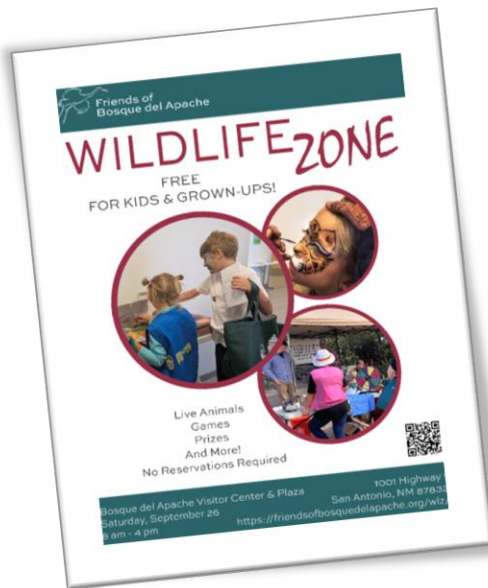


Wildlife Zone

Joan Kopietz, Amigos President

On Saturday, September 26, 2026, the Amigos participated in the Wildlife Zone, a family-oriented event at the Bosque del Apache NWR. Various organizations had activities to explore geology, nature, birds, and more.

The Amigos table introduced visitors to Sevilleta, and especially to new the Bolson Tortoise program.



Buck Kopietz at the Amigos table.

Contacts

Amigos Website: amigosdelasevilleta.org

Amigos on Facebook: facebook.com/amigossevilleta

Amigos Email: members@amigosdelasevilleta.org

Refuge Website: fws.gov/refuge/sevilleta

Editor's Note

Articles and photographs for consideration in the Amigos newsletter are encouraged.

Please email your submission in Word format to sandybarnett95@gmail.com

The Amigos newsletters are available at amigosdelasevilleta.org/contacts