



Refuge Update

July 2025

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Board meetings are held the second Thursday of most months. The next board meeting will be held on Thursday, July 10th, 2:00-3:30 PM at the Visitor Center. You are welcome to attend in person or remotely via Zoom (contact Colin Barnett colinbarnett88@gmail.com for a Zoom link).

Refuge Update

Jeff Sanchez, Refuge Manager

Moist Soil Unit Work on Unit B

As some of you may know, the spring and early summer yielded difficult times in terms of water availability in the Middle Rio Grande Valley. The Rio Grande has fluctuated quite a bit with minimal snowpack in the northern mountains, thus, limiting early season irrigation opportunities for local farmers and wildlife managers alike. We decided to take advantage of the drier soils adjacent to the Rio Grande at Sevilleta NWR and began Moist Soil Management prescriptions and re-contouring of our Wetland Unit B. Lower water levels within the river usually means less saturated soils adjacent to the river, which is not favorable for native vegetation, but offers opportunity to drive heavy equipment on areas that are normally soft and muddy. These Moist Soil Management techniques, like those conducted at Bosque del Apache NWR, will increase wildlife feeding opportunity and allow for more efficient water use.

Last month, our outstanding Biologist, Samuel Vassallo, and Heavy Equipment Operator, Pete

Miranda, used farm equipment to rip the southern $\frac{1}{4}$ of the unit, which helps dislodge non-desirable woody plants and breaks up hardened soils. If you



Mowing the grass in Unit B

are not familiar with a ripper, just think of large tines shaped like a fork cutting into the ground to break up soils. We then took a heavy disk and finished breaking the soils up enough to be leveled with a laser level, which will provide efficient water flow/use and increased seeds for waterbird use. Later we will strategically add minor topographic areas so that the unit is not uniformly flat. We intend on implementing these techniques

on the entire unit in the near future, when the opportunity presents itself.

I encourage all of you to visit the wetland unit areas to get a taste of this process in progress. These techniques increase wildlife use, save precious water and mimic the natural erosive actions that historically occurred within the Rio Grande.



Marshy area in Unit B on the Refuge. (Photo: C. Barnett)

Amigos Membership

The Amigos are in need of a volunteer to manage our membership list. (Our membership coordinator has moved away and left the Amigos.) The job takes about 30 minutes a month and consists of two tasks: 1. Adding new members to the database. 2. Sending out renewal notices.



The membership database is in Excel, so a basic understanding of Excel is required. If you would like to volunteer, please contact the Treasurer, Colin Barnett, at colinbarnett88@gmail.com.

A Quail of Many Colors

Jennifer Keyser, Amigos Member

When I visit the Middle Rio Grande, the bird I most look forward to seeing is the Gambel's Quail (*Callipepla gambelii*). Unlike me, it isn't an occasional "visitor" to Sevilleta – it can be found on the Refuge year-round, in places near the Visitor Center and also in washes on the Refuge. The name of the Genus, *Callipepla*, is derived from Ancient Greek. "Kalós" means beautiful and "péplos," an outer robe or shawl (referring to the plumage of the bird.) This specific quail is named for William Gambel, a 19th century naturalist and explorer of the Southwestern United States.

The Genus name seems appropriate. Males have distinctive bluish-gray feathers on most of their bodies, and the tops of their heads are a brilliant copper. They also have a conspicuous black patch



Male Gambel's Quail, southern Nevada
(Photo: Lee Karney.USFWS)



Female Gambel's Quail, Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument, AZ
(Photo: National Park Service)

in the center of a yellow belly. Their faces are also black with a striking white striped pattern above and below their eyes. Males also sport an impressive black topknot.

Female Gambel's Quail are plainer than the males. Their plumage is less ornate, and they lack the russet cap and black faces. However, they do have an eye-catching head plume and distinct scaling designs on their feathers.

These birds are frequently confused with the California Quail (*Callipepla californica*). California Quail have a different range from Gambel's Quail, and a scalier appearance. They also lack the male

Gambel's Quail's black breast patch. Another similar species is the Scaled Quail (*Callipepla squamata*).

Gambel's Quail generally live in brushy deserts and canyons. Because they inhabit such a dry environment, finding water can be a challenge. They have adapted to their arid habitat by obtaining much of the water they need from plants they eat. They consume several types of leaves and seeds, and also fruits and berries from cacti. Although they do eat insects, the chicks are more insectivorous than the adults but feed increasingly on plants as they mature.





Gambel's Quail nest, San Tan Valley, AZ
(Photo: Alstrupjohn).

Nesting Note

Gambel's quail are monogamous, generally forming a life-long pair bond. They tend to be fiercely aggressive towards other pairs, very rarely breeding in groups. The female typically lays 10–12 eggs in a simple ground-level scrape concealed in vegetation, often at the base of a rock or tree. The female, rarely the male, incubates the eggs for about three weeks. The chicks are precocial, leaving the nest within hours of hatching to find food under the watchful eyes of their parents.

Refuge Tours



Wildlife/Wetlands Management Tour with
Refuge Manager, Jeff Sanchez, May 23rd.



Left: Jeff demonstrates the control slats in a seasonal wetland gate at the refuge. Above: Feral horses on the refuge

Upland Wildlife Tour with Assistant Director Ethan Hammer, June 5th.



Geology Field Trip to the NE portion of Sevilleta with geology professors Jack Oviatt and Dave Love, June 4th.





**Long-term Ecological
Research Tour with LTER
Director Jennifer Rudgers
(pictured) and Sevilleta
LTER Program Manager,
April Bermudez, June 6th.**



Visitor Center Open

The Sevilleta NWR Visitor Center, including the Nature Store, is open Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, 9AM to 4PM.

We have had a number of Amigos volunteer to work at the VC, and if you were thinking you might be interested, please contact us. We still need you and would love to have you join us.

If you have questions or want to volunteer, please contact Joan Kopietz by phone 248-625-8677 or write joankopietz@gmail.com.



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>

Editor's Note

Items for consideration in the Refuge Update are encouraged.

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

Past editions of this Newsletter are available at the Amigos website:

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