



Refuge Update

April 2025

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Board meetings are held the second Thursday of most months. The next board meeting will be held on Thursday, May 8th, 2:00-3:30 PM at the Visitor Center. You are welcome to attend in person or remotely via Zoom (a link will be sent to members several days prior to the meeting).

Refuge Update

Jeff Sanchez, Refuge Manager

Hello Everyone,

I apologize in advance for this very brief Refuge Manager newsletter entry.

I am going to take this opportunity to provide you with an update on the current state of the refuge, and most importantly, status of staff here at the Refuge. Most of you probably know that there are, and will continue to be, significant changes to the Federal Government. I think everyone has their favorite news outlet to investigate these changes, so I encourage you to follow the outlets closely that mention changes to the Department of Interior and Federal Lands if you would like to know more.

All staff here are working diligently to adhere to the required changes that come to us daily and will continue to follow the guidance from leadership on how to move forward. Currently, all staff members with exception to the vacant visitor services position continue to be on-site. We are focusing on pertinent Right-of-Way projects, the Bolson Tortoise project, and directives that come from upper management. I ask that you all be patient with us as we navigate these new directives. Please look to our wonderful Amigos Board Members who have been graciously looking for ways to support Refuge needs.

Thank you all for your support and dedication to Sevilleta NWR.

Jeff



Comings and Goings

Chuck Kooshian, Amigos Vice-President

Although Sevilleta's FWS staff are thus far not affected by federal employee cuts, there are many other volunteers, researchers, and UNM staff associated with the refuge. This Amigos newsletter highlights two important members of the Sevilleta community who are in transition.

Patty Vanderwaal

The volunteer at the front desk is the person who represents the refuge to visitors. For the past five months Patty Vanderwaal has kept the Visitor Center and Nature Store open three days a week. Now that the weather is warming up, she is ready to hitch up her trailer and go back to her home in Minnesota for the summer.

"Working here has been a snowbird's dream" says Patty. "I love the wide-open spaces and mild weather. The people who stop by are enjoying their travel through New Mexico, but don't know much about the refuge. I help them make the most of their time here, whether it's birding, hiking or just looking at the scenery."

She's grateful to everyone here for making her stay easy and fun. She was glad to be able to add her own touches, spicing up the exhibits by bringing out skins and skulls from the education collection. A forgotten supply of wildlife posters also became a source of free souvenirs that visitors could take with them.



Patty Vanderwall

Because on-site RV volunteers have been phased out at the refuge, Patty worked with new Board member Joan Kopietz and her team of local Amigos volunteers to get them ready to take over staffing the visitor center and store.

Patty's favorite things to do at Sevilleta were visiting San Lorenzo canyon and hiking the Mesa View trail (counterclockwise). She fell in love with New Mexico, so she plans to come back next season. She hopes that there will still be volunteer openings at Bosque del Apache.

Thank you, Patty, for your work at Sevilleta, and we hope to see you again soon.

April Bermudez

An important mission of the Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge is to provide natural areas for scientific research. Since the 1990's it has been the site of an important Long Term Ecological Research (LTER) program that studies the changes in the natural environment over time. Scores of scientists have ongoing projects at the refuge at any given moment.

As you can imagine, just keeping track of all this activity is a full-time job. Starting in February, April Bermudez has taken over as the Sevilleta LTER Program Manager. Her task is not only the daily oversight of all the LTER research activities on the refuge, but coordinating the data coming out of the studies, smoothing the way for new scientists and projects, and facilitating outreach activities to the public. Quite a portfolio!

Fortunately, April comes well prepared. She has experience working with researchers at the University of Michigan Classen Lab as well as at the Rocky Mountain Biological Laboratory in Colorado. Her own research specialty is studying the biology of plant roots, especially the effects of

environmental factors such as climate on underground eco-systems.

April is looking forward to working at Sevilleta, where four different biomes come together to provide a range of research opportunities. She is particularly interested in the rainfall mean and variance studies that have been ongoing at the refuge for so long. She hopes to find the time to perform her own research on plants roots and plant-soil interactions here at Sevilleta.

Welcome April, the Amigos are happy you are here.



April Bermudes



The Remarkable Roadrunner

Jennifer Keyser, Amigos Member

One of New Mexico's most iconic birds can be found on the Sevilleta Refuge year-round. It is the Greater Roadrunner (*Geococcyx californianus*). The Greater Roadrunner, along with the Lesser Roadrunner (*Geococcyx velox*) are members of the cuckoo family. Its scientific name means "California earth-cuckoo." It is also known by such other names as "el correcaminos" and "el paisano."

Regardless of what it's called, the Greater Roadrunner is closely connected to the people of New Mexico. The State Legislature adopted it as the official State Bird on March 16, 1949. And in 1969, "Dusty Roadrunner" became the state's litter control mascot.

Greater Roadrunners are easily recognizable. They are about two feet long, including their tail. They have long legs, a crested head, and an oversized bill. They also have a bare strip of blue and orange skin behind their eyes. Another unique feature of theirs is large feet, each with four toes – two pointing forward, two backward. This gives the birds a distinctive x-shaped footprint. Some Native



Ash Meadows NWR (Photo: R. Colvin, USFWS)

American cultures believed the "x" pattern warded off evil, as it disguised travel direction and prevented sinister spirits from following.

Greater Roadrunners are primarily found within the southwestern United States and northern Mexico, often in arid and semiarid scrubland. They also live in brushy areas, and woodlands. From personal experience, I know that they dwell in numerous habitats in the "Land of Enchantment"; I've seen them from the Middle Rio Grande Bosque to the Tularosa Basin.



Rio Mora NWR (Photo: A.W. Blades, USFWS)

Although they don't go "beep beep," Greater Roadrunners may be seen running along and across roadways. They can reach speeds of about twenty miles per hour – not fast enough to outrun a coyote but quick enough to capture several types of food. They are opportunistic hunters who use their speed to outrun and catch prey. They feed on birds, small mammals, insects, scorpions, spiders, and reptiles such as lizards and small snakes. They have even been known to hunt larger snakes, including rattlesnakes. In turn, they are prey to hawks, skunks, raccoons, coyotes, and domestic cats.

The Audubon Society estimates the Greater Roadrunner population to be 1,400,000, making its conservation status a species of least concern. However, Roadrunners do face specific threats to their numbers including habitat loss, urban sprawl, and use of agricultural pesticides.

A few more facts about the Greater Roadrunner follow:

- Roadrunners obtain most of the water they need from prey they consume.
- They can fly for short distances but prefer to remain on the ground.
- Their most common vocalization is a series of “coos.”
- Roadrunners are monogamous and both birds build the nest.
- They sunbathe for warmth several times a day.

Sources

- Forbes, Andy. 2011. Missouri Department of Conservation. “The Adaptable Roadrunner.” [Missouri Conservationist](#).

- Greater Roadrunner. Adapted from Kenn Kaufman. 1996. *Lives of North American Birds*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Pub. Co. [Audubon Society](#).
- MocarSKI, Zen. 2016. “Greater Roadrunner.”. [New Mexico Wildlife Magazine](#). Volume 59 (2).
- National Park Service. 2020. “Greater Roadrunner.” [White Sands National Park](#).
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- Thrasher, Sage. 2011. *Seville National Wildlife Refuge: Birds*. [US Fish & Wildlife Service](#)
- Wikipedia Foundation, Inc. [Greater Roadrunner](#).
- Email exchange with Samuel Vassallo, Wildlife Refuge Biologist, Seville National Wildlife Refuge, February 19, 2025.



Nesting Note

Roadrunners breed spring to mid-summer on the refuge. They nest 3-10 ft off the ground in dense bushes, low trees, or cacti which offer some protection against the elements and predators. Nests may be used in subsequent breeding seasons as well as serving as a winter roost.

Photo: [Meridith](#)

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.



Correction: In the January 2025 Refuge Update, the article "The Prehistoric Pronghorn" incorrectly stated that the last Ice Age "began" about 11,000 years ago. In fact, the last Ice Age ended at that time. More information may be found at the [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration](#).

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>