

Whitfield

The Nature Journal of the Friends of Whitfield
Summer 2022

**Summer at the Whitfield
Wildlife Conservation Area**

**Environmental
Educator's Corner**

Birding in Season

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Johnny's New Baby

Whitfield TV



SUMMER 2022

FRIENDS OF WHITFIELD CENTER NEWSLETTER

The Friends of Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area
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www.FriendsofWhitfield.org

President's Message Part 1

I write this President's message with a heavy heart as this will be my last President's message. I am resigning due to family needs. As my mother grows older, she has required more of my assistance. I feel I cannot give my attention to supporting both her needs and the ongoing needs of the Whitfield. It is clearly an appropriate time to hand over the mantle to Linda Frazer who will now lead the Friends of Whitfield Board. She will make an excellent President as Linda has been in the Vice President position as well as a member of the Board for several years now.

I have had an extremely enjoyable time during my tenure starting in the Fall of 2018. Through the efforts of an outstanding Board, we have been able to accomplish much for the Whitfield to include strengthening and funding an environmental education program that touched over 600 Valencia County students on an annual basis. Our Board has provided the underpinning of many activities that took place at Whitfield to include our annual Desert Willow sale, Science Fiesta, Night Under the Stars, and many other annual events over the past few years. Our volunteer program also has become stronger. Due to Covid we moved our fundraising online through our annual auction that enabled us to raise revenue. The fiscal program is strong, and our membership program has been automated. In addition, the website has been updated and maintained. We have been able to provide you with updates on a quarterly basis through our newsletter.

Linda has hit the ground running and plans to hold a strategic planning meeting to set goals for the Board as well as determining budget priorities. This activity is done every year in the effort to continue to move the organization forward and to determine specific actions for a path forward. Your continued support of the Friends Board will help us to support the needs of Whitfield particularly since it was so impacted by the recent fire.

With Love,
Eileen



Events Calendar

September 10

10 AM - Noon Friends of Whitfield
Board of Director's Meeting

September 17

9 AM - Noon Monarch Butterfly
Tagging Event

October 22

Time TBA Bosque Education Guide
Workshop for School Teachers

October 29

3-9PM Fall Festival & Whitfield Under
the Stars

Help Wanted!

The Friends of Whitfield has several open volunteer opportunities. If you're interested, then please use the Contact Us form on the FOW website and tell us about yourself and the position you'd like to help with:

<https://friendsofwhitfield.org/contact-us/>

- **Board Treasurer:** some accounting experience preferred.
- **Membership committee:** assists FOW VP with membership tasks, recruitment and retention. No experience necessary.
- **Multimedia interns:** assist FOW PIO with Whitfield TV, the Whitfield newsletter, website and other multimedia tasks. No experience necessary.

President's Message Part 2

Happy summer all! I hope you are enjoying the monsoon weather. I am pleased to begin my new position as President of the Friends of Whitfield board. We also have a very enthusiastic new Vice President, Rex Reilly. We are looking to increase the numbers of the board so if you might be interested contact me or any other board member.

Currently we are searching for a Treasurer. There will be lots of activities coming in the near future so be sure to watch your email for announcements. Remember, you are always welcome to join us at the monthly meeting of the board on the second Saturday of the month from 10 a.m. to noon – a good way to end a hike at Whitfield!

Linda Frazer,
President Friends of Whitfield
505-715-3950

Environmental Education Corner

Greetings from your new Environmental Educator, Laura McCann! For this first writing of the Environmental Education Corner, I thought it would be interesting to focus on what you can be doing to help the environment in your own backyard this time of year... Let's focus on two areas: Water and Soil.

Water is essential to all life, including birds and insects. To help critters in your yard, you can set up a simple "bird bath." Whether you buy a simple one from your local garden supply center, or use a plant pot saucer filled with water, make sure to put rocks and twigs in it for wildlife to use as a perch- or to get in and out. Birds, bees, and other insects will stop by for a live giving drink! If your water dish is on the ground, you may see frogs, toads, or even snails use this water source.

As for your soil, this is a great time of year to start considering a mulch or compost/mulch mix to spread over your garden areas. Organic matter is a key component of a healthy soil, so it is always good to be intentional in adding it into your home soil through compost or mulch!

Volunteer News

Frank Mazza,
Volunteer Coordinator

Many thanks to those of you who continue to volunteer during the dog days of summer. A great example of your dedication was the turnout on multiple days in early July to help drill monitor wells at the Rio Abajo Conservation Area. Six wells were installed.

During the same week a consulting botanist did an extensive vegetation inventory (plant list) for the entire Whitfield Conservation Area (RACA, the Stacy Unit, and the Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area). This is huge! It allows for all sorts of citizen scientist volunteer opportunities at any one of the three conservation areas.

As climate change increasingly impacts the southwest, we now have a baseline of information. It's critically important to track data over time to help government and community leaders make informed decisions.

Andrew Hautzinger, the Director of the Valencia County Soil and Water District, has indicated there are other volunteer opportunities:

- Drill eight additional monitor wells at RACA in late August/early September;
- Make monthly water depth measurements at the RACA monitor wells;
- Build a trail/small fuel break in the middle of the 50 acre cottonwood grove at RACA;
- Create a plant cover map of RACA;
- Be a greeter/Ambassador at the Whitfield Visitor Center.

If you're interested in any of the above or have volunteer ideas of your own, please contact me at:

fmazza@live.com or 802-772-5320.

www.FriendsofWhitfield.org/volunteer-at-wwca

Director's Report:

Here on a rainy middle of August day, I look out upon the Whitfield preserve and I see a mixture of contrasting colors. I see the dark green of the lush grasses that emerged in strength after the heinous Big Hole Fire moved through $\frac{3}{4}$'s of the preserve back on 4/11/22. My gaze then is caught by a medium cottonwood tree in the ring of trees encircling the Whitfield Pond, as this tree is turning a light shade of yellow-ish green, a sign that it might not survive the rest of the summer. Across the way is another cottonwood tree that a month ago was as green as could be, giving us all hope that this was another burn victim making a lasting comeback.

Alas, now the recently turned brown leaves have largely scattered to the winds, as this tree is apparently short for the world. I've been told by fire ecologists that trees like cottonwoods, that aren't really adapted to fire dynamics, can re-leaf after a big fire, using stored up supplies of sugars. If, however these trees brown up early in the growing season, it likely means 1) they've used up their savings account of sugars, and 2) are unlikely to have the energy to try again next year.

My gaze, now a little circumspect and a bit sad, catches one of the oldest trees on the preserve, along the South Road circa the Maintenance Building, and my sense of hope for the burned Whitfield trees is powerfully buttressed: This old tree trunk was entirely burned as were all five of its major limbs, but lo and behold, all the large branches are resplendent with vibrant green leaves, as this old timer seems to be saying it is still singing its arboreal song, which sounds so very soothing to my tree loving ears.

My eyes turn again to see a pair of people walking around the pond. I later learned this is a grandmother and her granddaughter, both in rainbowed-colored clothes, enjoying the pond (although I was informed the mosquitoes are out and about on this cloudy day, with wishes expressed it'd be nice if I could make the bugs to go elsewhere). Mostly, I delight in seeing community members enjoying their Whitfield walkabout, as I dream about the day soon when we can reopen the entire preserve to the public, as we work hand in hand on the recovery here at Whitfield with our community members, Friends and other partners.

I also dream about our Rio Abajo Conservation Area, and the work happening next month to reduce the dense non-native understory of plants, as our State Forestry partners are bringing thinning crews to work on protecting the wonderful overstory of native trees that make the heart of our RACA public lands---someday soon, we hope to have public trails ready for friends and families' RACA walkabouts.

Until that day, we are powered by the kindness and good work of our many friends, partners and members of the community who see the Whitfield Complex as the public asset that it truly is.

Andrew Hautzinger
VSWCD District Director

New Staff

Whitfield and the Valencia Soil and Water Conservation is now blessed with a whole bunch of staff! We have, in addition to Andrew Hautzinger and Johnny Chavez:

Megan Owen, Business Manager

Laura McCann, Education Program Manager

Nohelia Cervantes & Gabi Padilla, EVUGP Garden Managers

Samuel Medrano & Gabriel Dimas, YDI Field Workers

AND, the very special addition **Willamena Meadow Kerbs Chavez**, brand new baby daughter of Marlissa Kerbs and Johnny Chavez.

In the works will be another Education Assistant Intern in the not-too-distant future.

New Whitfield Baby!

Willamena Meadow Kerbs Chavez was born July 29 at 12:33am. Her weight at birth was 6lbs 3 ounces.

She is now a month old and is 8lbs 2 ounces. She is growing above average and starting to get chunky. She loves her mama and has started to practice smiling. She loves to boss her mom and dad around, but her parents don't mind it at all.

Willamena already has both grandparents wrapped around her finger. This is Johnny's parent's first grandchild. Johnny has already put her in cargo pants so she could look like her dad.

Birding in Season

By Laura McCann

As we wind down for the summer, you will notice many bird species starting to gear up for their fall migration. Two species that are still with us this time of year, but soon to be moving on, are the Turkey Vulture and the Swainson's Hawk.

Turkey Vultures are scavengers, not hunters. When you see them soaring overhead, you will notice they hold their wings in a strong dihedral (or V-shape). They appear to almost rock on the wind. This flight style is due to their long wingspan (about 5' 7") but relatively light body weight (approximately 3lbs). Interestingly, these are the only birds in North America with a keen sense of smell, so you will often see them flying lower to use their sense of smell to find food!



Another large bird you can see in our district this time of year is the Swainson's Hawk. These large hawks also fly with their wings in a dihedral (or V-shape), but less pronounced than the Turkey Vulture. Swainson's Hawks are Raptors with strong feet and sharp talons for killing their prey. Their diet consists of mostly rodents and large insects, like grasshoppers!

You will sometimes hear them let out a screech reminiscent of the Red-tailed Hawks that overwinter in our district. Their call is a bit higher pitched though. An interesting fact about Swainson's Hawks is they have a very long migration.



Birds that breed in the United States in the Spring will migrate as far south as Argentina for the winter! I hope you keep your eyes to the skies and spot these two amazing species in your neighborhood.



Whitfield TV is a short monthly show about the Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area in Belen, NM. Each month we look at different species at Whitfield and check in on various projects.

Get Involved

Send us your photos and videos of Whitfield. We can't promise to include them all but we'll try.

www.wildlandstem.org/WhitfieldTV

Video Interns Wanted!

If you're a Valencia County High School student with an interest in video or multimedia production then be sure to fill out the form at:

www.wildlandstem.org/videointerns

Joseph Moya Friends of Whitfield Super Volunteer

The Friends would like to highlight a super volunteer this month. His name is Joseph Moya. He and his family have lived in Valencia County for many generations. Joseph has contributed to Whitfield's historical records by sharing his knowledge of the area and has identified the various owners as well as what the property was used for prior to becoming the Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area. Joseph remembers the Whitfield area when it was primarily alfalfa fields that attracted hundreds of Sandhill Cranes. His family owns the farm that abuts the Whitfield to the north. Farming 85 acres of organic alfalfa, he recently shared that he planted one of the first trees at Whitfield in 2003.

Joseph is an elected supervisor on the Valencia Soil and Water Conservation District Board. He currently holds the position of Treasurer and first joined the Board from 1974 - 1977 then returned in 1985. Joseph is the longest serving member of the Board and has volunteered for over 20 years holding the position of Treasurer twice and Board Chair for several years as well. Joseph is proud to have also served as the Board's parliamentarian, keeping the Board complaint with proper procedures. When asked why he has participated in VSWCD Board, he answered that he gets the same satisfaction as he did when he was a vocational agriculture teacher at Belen High School.

Joseph is especially interested in teaching people how to farm in an arid climate and stressed the importance of laser leveling the field prior to planting. Joseph feels this provides better access to water for plants. He also is especially interested in promoting Financial Assistance to local farmers through the VSWCD and wants to share his knowledge of farming to our community which helps future generations enjoy the fruits of their labor.

Recently, Joseph and his brother Ron played a significant role in preventing the Big Hole fire from doing more damage than it did at Whitfield. He explained that when they saw the fire was burning weeds along the shared fence line between Whitfield and his family's farm, they knew the fire was threatening the Northeast corner of the Whitfield preserve and the adjacent Moya family residences. They requested permission to cut through the fence, enter the Whitfield land and begin disking the land with their tractor to create firebreaks thus preventing the fire from spreading.

Due to their quick thinking, they saved many trees growing in the Northeast corner of the Whitfield, while protecting the Moya family's longtime home (which was directly in the line of fire if Whitfield's northeastern forest area burned). It is amazing how many interesting and knowledgeable people are working to preserve our beautiful Whitfield and how we can count Joseph as one of these unique and important individuals.



Whitfield grounds are open to the public Tuesday through Saturday 8:00 am to 4:30 pm

Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area Visitors' and Education Center and site is open to the public free of charge.

- Go birding and wildlife watching
- Read & research in the Dr. Richard Becker Library
- Explore the area's habitats
- Hike Whitfield's trail: 1 mile flat dirt trail at Whitfield
- Visit the Rio Abajo Botanical Garden at Whitfield

Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area

2424 Hwy 47
Belen, NM 87002
505-864-8914
public-input@valenciaswcd.org



WHITFIELD WILDLIFE CONSERVATION AREA

MONARCH BUTTERFLY TAGGING EVENT

COME JOIN US:

- ★ Help catch monarchs to tag (bring a net if you have one)!
- ★ Learn how butterflies are "tagged" for tracking!



ENJOY WHITFIELD AND LEARN
MORE ABOUT THESE IMPORTANT
POLLINATORS!



★ **SAT, SEPT. 17**
9 AM-12 PM

★ **2424 HWY 47,**
BELEN, NM
87042

Birds of Whitfield

www.valenciaswcd.org/whitfield-wildlife-conservation-area/birds-of-whitfield



Red-tailed Hawk—*Buteo jamaicensis*, belonging to Jamaica, from Latin, where it was collected. Buteo means a species of hawk in Latin. Common large raptor in our area that is usually seen soaring/circling. Often seen perching in the large cottonwoods at Whitfield. Reddish-tail hard to see (upper side only). Found year round. Highly variable coloration; eats small mammals, birds and reptiles. Distinct “keer-keer” call – can spot a mouse from height of 100 ft.

Swainson’s Hawk—*Buteo swainsoni*, named for William Swainson (1789-1855) British artist and naturalist. Large hawk-adult soars and glides alternating with deep wing beats; note pointed wings. Have white throat, rufous upper breast, pale under parts, buff-grey banded tail with dark terminal band. Diet consists of snakes, insects, and mammals. Fall brings the long migration to wintering grounds in Argentina.

Turkey Vulture—*Cathartes aura*, Cathartes is a cleanser or purifier in Latin, auraura, is bird name to Mexican Indians. Head and feathers resemble a turkey; vulture in Latin is vulturus or a tearer. Large black raptor; wings two-toned grayish and black. Summer visitor. Wing held in shallow ‘V’ while soaring; feeds on dead animals, keen smell sense. Can live 17 years or more.



Watch for the Fall 2022 edition of the Friends of Whitfield newsletter coming sooner than you think...