



Newsletter

Spring 2023 www.friendsofwhitfield.org

The Birds of Spring: Of Verdin and Vulture

Whitfield's warm season residents return despite a rough start from New Mexico's high winds

by Laura McCann, VSWCD Environmental Education Manager

Spring has swept into New Mexico on the heels of high winds and clouds that tease us with bits of rain. Fortunately, our desert ecosystem and riparian wetland habitat at Whitfield WCA is used to such a rough start! At the end of March, I saw my first Turkey Vulture soaring over the conservation area, and in April Johnny



Adult Verdin

picture, the adult birds are grayish with a yellow head. They also have a small reddish patch at the bend in the wing below the head. Males and females have the same color patterns, but female colors are a bit duller.

Juveniles (full-sized young birds that are not sexually mature) lack the yellow and red coloration until they are full adults. One of the most interesting things about this species of



Photo: Johnny Chavez

pointed out the Verdins had returned and were building nests in our gardens near the Visitor Center. These two warm season residents will be in our area for the Spring and Summer months!

Verdins are a very small songbird (only 4.5 inches) you may not have heard of before. As you can see in the



Verdin nest. Photo: Johnny Chavez

songbird is their nest... Verdins prefer thorny desert scrub to build their nests of sticks, leaves, and grasses held together with spider webs. The opening to go inside the nest is located at the bottom of the nest! They enjoy using the Netleaf Hackberry trees we have planted on site

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President's Letter

Hello Friends!

So far Spring is shaping up to be an exciting season here at Whitfield. As the VSWCD's Environmental Education Manager Laura McCann observed in her excellent article, Whitfield's warm avian residents are returning. I am excited to see our flying friends return despite the ravages of last year's Big Hole fire. Plus our annual online auction that started on April 3 and ended on April 22 was a thorough success!



This was our biggest auction yet with 100 local merchants donating close to 200 items. We raised a little under \$4000 with the funds going directly to support education and restoration efforts at the Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Complex.

This was truly a team effort and we are grateful to ALL those who made it possible. It shows how much you care about this precious local treasure known as the Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area.

The VSWCD's Earth Day Fiesta on April 21 and 22 attracted over 150 people under two days of gorgeous weather.

I'm ready for summer!
See you at Whitfield!

Linda Frazer, President

Friends of Whitfield



Friends of Whitfield Board of Directors

Mission Statement:

Friends of the Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Complex (FWWCC) is a non-profit volunteer organization dedicated to supporting the Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Complex by promoting habitat restoration, education and conservation.

FOW Board of Directors

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Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area

is located at 2424 Hwy 47, Belen, NM
<https://goo.gl/maps/AKxgnLJGgKD3za7t8>

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("Birds," continued from page 1)

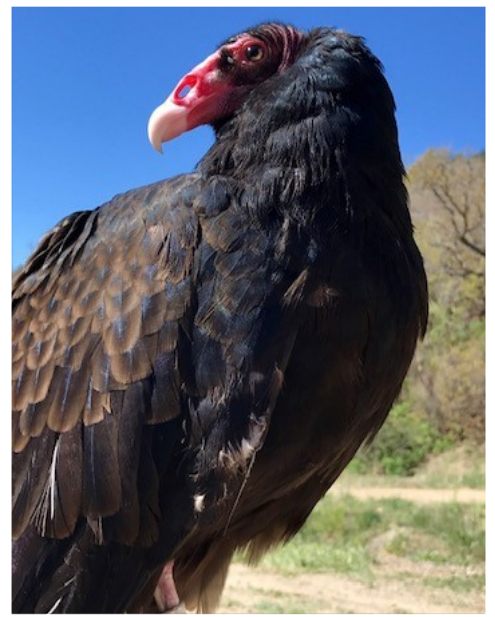
for their nests of 3-6 eggs which are hidden from human eyes. If you do spot a Verdin or one of the nests here at Whitfield, please keep a respectful distance in order to not disturb their nesting or hunting for spiders and insects.

Raising your eyes to the skies at Whitfield, you might spot a much larger warm weather resident- the Turkey Vulture.

Turkey Vultures have a very distinctive feather pattern when you see them underneath as in a seemingly fashion their

from they soar unsteady overhead holding wings in a strong dihedral or V shape. That is, their bodies and upper edge of the wing (covert feathers) form a T of black with silver on the bottom of the wing (underside of the primary and secondary feathers). This is a way to identify them... T of black and V of how they hold their wings as they soar- TV = Turkey Vulture! Turkey Vultures are fascinating scavengers. They do not hunt, only feed on carrion, so they are not true raptors like hawks, owls, or eagles. Also, unlike true raptors, they are social! They

hang out in groups to roost at night and can be seen soaring together. When they gather on a particularly large carcass to eat, the group is called a

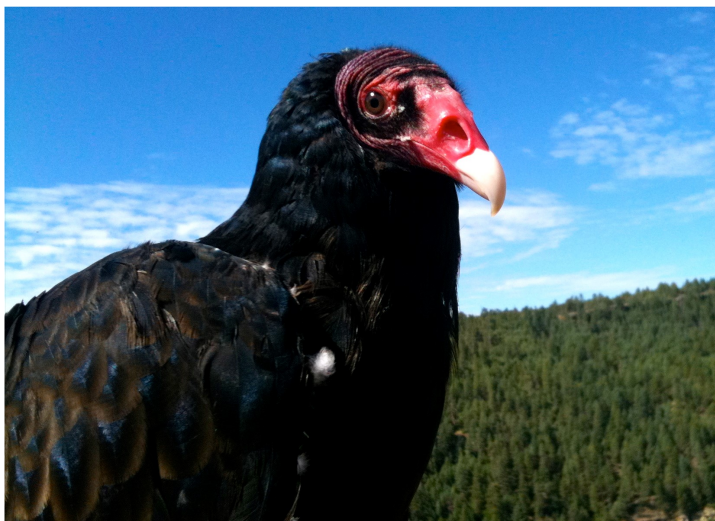


"Aeolus," educational Turkey Vulture.
Photo courtesy New Mexico Raptors.

Turkey vulture (*Cathartes aura*) in flight, Cuba
(created and nominated by Charlesjsharp).

"wake of vultures" They nest on the ground or in caves, and usually only lay 2-3 speckled eggs about the size of a goose egg. They tend to nest farther away from humans, so the nests are not usually encountered. Finally, you might see these magnificent birds soaring in low circles at times as they smell the air for decay. Unlike many other birds, Turkey Vultures actually have a keen sense of smell! If the bird has a red head and white beak, it is an adult. If the head is grayish and the beak is black, the bird you see is a juvenile in its first year on its own.

I hope you enjoyed learning about two of the bird species you might see on your next visit to Whitfield WCA. We look forward to seeing you soon! Make sure to bring your camera and a nature journal to record your observations in the wild. If you have time, stop by my office and share them with me! 🐾



"Aeolus," educational Turkey Vulture.
Photo courtesy New Mexico Raptors.

Volunteer News

by Frank Mazza, FOW Volunteer Coordinator

“Invite volunteers to a mission, don’t just recruit them to a role.” This is a quote from Jason Young in his book entitled, *The Volunteer Effect*. I’ve been pondering these words in the months since I read them and realize he’s expressed what I believe about the world of volunteering. In a time when there are a multitude of volunteer choices, what makes one organization or program more appealing than another? What causes a person to say, “This is where I want to volunteer my time, energy, and talent.”



The mission of the Friends of Whitfield is what invigorates all of us who volunteer at the conservation area. Our mission statement, in part, says we’re an organization dedicated to promoting education, conservation, and habitat restoration. Underlying these guiding principles is the belief that our natural world is to be respected and treasured, that it is both fragile and resilient, that what we have and see around us can never be taken for granted. That is why places like Whitfield are essential for the health and well-being of all of us. Although the role any one of us may take in helping to promote a mission can feel insignificant, it’s a personal statement of commitment.

The invitation to participate was very evident these past few months by the many people who volunteered to help at the Agriculture Appreciation Day on March 25, the Earth Day Festival at Whitfield on April 21 and

22, the Friends of Whitfield online auction that ran from April 3 -22, the Hummingbird Festival on April 29, and the Saturday workdays that are held on the third Saturday of the month. We also hosted booths at Earth Day celebrations on April 22 at the Belen Library and in Albuquerque at La Mantinita. In addition, the Friends have revived the Ambassador program at the Whitfield visitor center with shifts on Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays. Volunteers continue to assist the Education Program Manager in her elementary school program when they lead field trips at Whitfield.

As we look to the future and other opportunities to volunteer, the board of the Friends will be looking to expand our ability to sell items at the visitor center and when we’re at community events. If you have retail or business experience, your expertise would be valuable to us. We’re always in need of people who have computer knowledge and skills to help us with outreach and publicity.

If you have questions or even better, a specific idea of how you see yourself promoting the mission of the Friends, please contact Frank Mazza, Volunteer Coordinator, fmazza@live.com. 🍷

Did You RENEW?

As a member your support directly impacts
the work we do for the

Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area.

It’s easy to renew or become a new member
by registering on our secure website at:

<https://friendsofwhitfield.org/become-a-member/>

And thank you!

Valencia Soil & Water Conservation District

Director's Report

On April 6-7, 2023 the Valencia Soil and Water Conservation District and the USDA Southwest Climate Hub co-hosted the Restoring Whitfield: A Climate-Adapted Revegetation Workshop. This two day workshop brought almost 40 subject matter experts to the Whitfield preserve to talk about restoring and managing the floodplain of the Middle Rio Grande in a time where the climate is getting hotter and drier, and the specter of fire is replacing floods as the major disturbance mechanism in these riparian systems (aka “bosque” in the local vernacular).

A major impetus for this workshop came through the impacts of the April 11, 2022 Big Hole Fire, which flamed through over 900 acres of the bosque, consuming many ancient trees, and razing over 100 acres of the Whitfield Conservation Area Complex. In the year since the fire—Valencia County’s biggest bosque fire on record—the Valencia SWCD has been working with many partners to devise a roadmap for the restoration of the burned lands, with a focus on utilization of the extensive science that’s been developed for the MRG and similar desert rivers.

The District’s planning effort took a big step forward on April 6th, as we convened this workshop of experts to help plan Whitfield’s restoration. This intent of the workshop was to advance a climate-adapted revegetation design for the Whitfield Complex lands based on feedback from scientists and land managers with expertise in diverse fields of study, including: ecology, biology, hydrology, soils, and, importantly, fire management. A key aspect of the restoration design relates to plant choices: What native plants are most likely to survive and thrive with the new climatic conditions we expect to be coming our way?

The facilitated workshop focused on the need to customize the many existing lists of plant species

that are considered native to the greater Middle Rio Grande ecosystem (which is defined variously amongst the scientists...), and that are likely to thrive in the hotter and drier weather expected ahead, and that are fire-adapted (selecting plants partially based on their fire behavior). Our District plans to apply this customized plant list to support Whitfield’s restoration, identifying what plants will go where (and why), while including other considerations like the development of a system of fire breaks and an improved water delivery infrastructure (that could be designed to be used to apply water when fires occur). During the workshop, it was acknowledged that while fire breaks are largely absent in our stretch of the Middle Rio Grande, and become less relevant when the winds blow like they did in the Big Hole Fire (winds that day were estimated at 70 miles per hour), they are critical to firefighting in the bosque, as they provide access and a defensible space for our brave fire fighters. Fire breaks can also serve to keep fires smaller.

Upon the conclusion of the Restoring Whitfield Workshop our team felt it went as well as we could have hoped for, with actively engaged participants and lots of robust discussion on topics where disagreements are common. We received nothing but positive feedback from the participants, including a piece of high praise from one workshop participant, who complemented our team on “opening up the decision space for the work at Whitfield that could apply to restoration work many of us are doing elsewhere in the bosque”. We now feel better prepared to meet the challenges before us, feeling empowered by the support and wisdom we received by the impressive experts who attended the Restoring Whitfield Workshop, as we try to use the golden opportunity represented by the Big Hole Fire to collectively improve how we manage and protect the Middle Rio Grande’s treasured bosque.

Andrew Hautzinger

District Director

Valencia Soil & Water Conservation District

Who Were Those Artists Who Painted the Aldo Leopold Benches?

The Aldo Leopold Benches featured in our online auction are always a BIG draw! Here's a little background information on the six artists and organizations that made these benches so special!



Julie Mehrl studied a variety of art media in college and beyond. She practiced as an Occupational Therapist for over 30 years in NM and is excited to be retired with time to explore the creative arts. The amazing colors and natural beauty of NM are a great source of inspiration for Julie who currently works in soft pastel and acrylic media. "Whitfield is such an amazing asset to Belen and Valencia County. It is an honor to help the Friends of Whitfield raise funds for environmental conservation, education, and habitat restoration". Julie is a member of the Belen Art League and the Friends of Whitfield.



Jo'I Moore is a popular local artist. Her use of vibrant color, movement, and unbounded creative vision is always a surprise and brings joy to the eye. Watch out - her energy and humor are infectious! Jo'I especially enjoys "Narrative Art" which uses the power of the visual image to ignite imaginations, evoke emotions and capture universal cultural truths and aspirations. She has volunteered tirelessly for her community for many, many years and is the manager of Books on Becker in Belen and the President of the Belen Art League.



Pati Woodard makes fun stuff!" I love to make all sorts of art from recycled items, UV resin jewelry, sewing cozies to bottle-cap jewelry! I love read and draw. I have participated in all of the seasons of painting the Aldo Leopold benches and have enjoyed doing each one. I don't consider myself a painter so I am always pleasantly surprised that they have turned out as well as they have! Thank you for letting me participate.



Kay Sartori is a proud wife and mother of 4 and grandmother of 1. She is a graduate of Delta State University in Cleveland, Mississippi with a BFA in Interior Design ('00) and a BA in Art Education ('02). In 2011, a move to rural New Mexico changed her heart from Southerner to everything New Mexican. Her art has always been inspired by and centered around vibrant colors, and the feelings of joy Mexican and Southern folk art evoke. When she is not homeschooling, volunteering with 4H, or chasing goats, she collects found objects to turn into upcycled, mixed media art.



The Belen Art League (BAL) is a vital part of the revitalization of historic Becker Street in Belen. Established in 1956, the BAL works to support local artists, provide gallery space for members, promote the visual arts in Belen and beyond, and to support the local community at large. The BAL provides great classes in a variety of arts and crafts for any interested blooming artist! Don't forget about classes for local children and youth. The BAL provides a large number of scholarships so all interested kids and youth can attend! Stop by 509 Becker Street to see the amazing variety of local talent on display. Purchase some great art and gifts and get inspired today!



H2 Academic Solutions values their ongoing partnership with Whitfield. They saw this opportunity to paint the benches as a way to give back and support a collaborative partner whose success very much supports our own. They had plenty of staff members interested in participating in one way or another.

SAVE THE DATE!





Your grocery purchases can help keep a local Valencia County treasure alive and thriving!



The Friends of Whitfield have teamed up with Smith's to provide an easy way for YOU to support the Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area.

Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area is the only conservation area in Valencia County. Nestled along the Rio Grande in Belen, this 97-acre tract of enhanced wetlands not only serves as a resting place and home to over 200 species of birds but also to hundreds of native plants, shrubs and trees

One of the ways you can help is through Smith's Inspiring Donations program. It makes donating to Friends of Whitfield easy based on the shopping you do every day. Once you link your Smith's Reward Card to Friends of Whitfield, all you have to do is shop at Smith's and swipe your Shopper's Card. Here's how it works:

1. Create a digital account.

A digital account is needed to participate in Smith's Inspiring Donations. If you already have a digital account, simply link your Shopper's Card to your account so that all transactions apply toward the organization you choose. If you don't have a digital account, click [HERE](#).

2. Link your Card to our organization.

Selecting the organization that you wish to support is as simple as updating the Smith's Inspiring Donations selection on your digital account.

1. Sign in to your digital account.
2. Search for your organization [here](#). The name to search for is: **Friends of Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area**
3. Enter the name or NPO number of the organization you wish to support. **Our NPO number is: US071**
4. Select the appropriate organization from the list and click "Save".

Friends of Whitfield will also display in the Smith's Inspiring Donations section of your account. If you need to review or revisit your organization, you can always do so under your Account details.

3. The Friends of Whitfield earns.

Any transactions moving forward using the Shopper's Card number associated with your digital account will be applied to the program, at no added cost to you. Smith's Inspiring Donations will donate 0.5% of all eligible spending to organizations that customers have linked to their Rewards Card.

If you have any questions, please contact Smith's [Customer Service Center](#).

