

## **Audubon New Mexico's Statewide *Birds for a Purpose* Education Outreach**

### **Project Summary:**

Audubon New Mexico/Randall Davey Audubon Center successfully took its popular *Birds for a Purpose* program into 5 classrooms in the Roswell and Las Cruces areas. Using birds as the focal point, *Birds for a Purpose* students learned about bird behaviors and habitats, with an emphasis on observing local bird species, as well as other animals and plants that are located in the region. The program included both indoor and outdoor activities. Classroom activities focused on the examination of feathers, nests, eggs, beaks and talons, as well as real bird specimens to discuss adaptations. To emphasize the importance of bird beaks, students participated in an activity using their own beaks (tweezers, clothespins, and spoons) to help them determine what types of food (pennies, toothpicks, and marbles) were best suited for their survival. A highlight for students was the dissection of owl pellets to determine what owls were preying on. Classroom activity averaged 3 hours of instruction.

At the end of each program, student's participated in a 3 hour field trip to the Bottomless Lakes State Park in Roswell or the Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park in Las Cruces. These field trip experiences brought together all the skills and subject matter learned in the classroom which emphasizes Audubon's conservation mission. The field trips included hands-on activities presented by both Audubon and State Parks staff as well as a hike using observation skills to identify local birds and wildlife. Students used binoculars and field guides to help identify the different species observed and to learn more about birds in their community. Emphasis on the scientific method helped students understand that the study of birds can assist scientist in understanding the relationships between species such as the predator/prey relationship of owls, an indication of change in an area, as well as indicate the overall health of an ecosystem.

Additionally, all participating teachers received a pre-and post-activity packet prior to implementation of the *Birds for a Purpose* program. This packet includes a series of activities for teachers to utilize in their classroom addressing the following topics: identifying characteristics of each vertebrate group, bird adaptations, bird sensitivities to environmental change, migration, and New Mexico Threatened and Endangered species. At the completion of the programs, teachers also received a New Mexico specific Bird Guide as well as a Spanish North American Bird Guide for use in their classrooms.

### **Roswell Classroom work:**

- Monday, April 27, 2009 – Mr. Allen Perry's Class
- Wed., April 29, 2009 – Mrs. Hamilton's Class

### **Roswell Field Trips to Bottomless Lake State Park:**

- Thurs., April 30, 2009 – Mrs. Hamilton's Class
- Friday, May 1, 2009 – Mr. Allen Perry's Class

### **Las Cruces Classroom work:**

- Wednesday, May 13, 2009 – Combined 2 classrooms - Mrs. Cassandra Rodriguez
- Wed., May 13, 2009 – Mr. Hernandez classroom

### **Las Cruces** Field Trips to Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park:

- Thurs., May 14, 2009 – Combined 2 classrooms, Mrs. Cassandra Rodriguez
- Friday, May 15, 2009 – Mr. Sam Hernandez

### **Project Evaluation and students served:**

Audubon New Mexico measures impact and success in several ways. All environmental education programs are evaluated by teachers participating in our programs. These evaluations ensure that we are serving teachers and students consistently with quality programs that support and enhance the content standards they are teaching in the classroom. Student comments are also important indicators of the success of a program.

Programming in the **Roswell** area reached 54 students in 2 separate fifth grade classrooms from Washington Avenue Elementary. Demographics of the students included 38 Hispanic students and 16 Anglo students. The teachers comments include: “Everything was very well thought out and planned. Excellent job!”; “I was very pleased with the history of the park and the bird study as well, great idea every year.” Upon returning from programming in Roswell, students followed up with thank you notes to the Audubon educator. One fifth grade student commented, “I enjoyed our field trip to Bottomless Lakes it was really fun and I liked all the animals we saw but yesterday before our Bottomless Lakes trip I liked it when we got to find bones in the owl pellets. I mostly liked the heads (skulls) inside the owl pellets also during the trip it was cool looking through the telescope (scope) at the birds on the water. Well the trip was fun and I hope to see you again.”

Programming in the **Las Cruces** area reached 47 students in 3 separate fifth grade classrooms from Booker T. Washington Elementary. We only received partial demographic information from Booker T. Washington. Out of 26 students the demographics included 26 Hispanic students and no Anglo students. Teacher comments included: “Very well presented and informative”; “The lesson fit perfectly with our science curriculum, especially with our Biome unit”; “They did a great job and were very informative. Even I left the field trip learning something.”

### **Partnerships:**

Partnerships with Audubon New Mexico contributing to the success of this program included the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, Share with Wildlife Program, New Mexico State Parks, the Mesilla Valley Audubon Chapter, and Audubon members in the Roswell area.

Audubon New Mexico and New Mexico State Parks partnership was quite extensive. Staff from both entities conducted numerous discussions regarding the planning and scheduling of programming both relating to the overall direction of the activities and the field trips to the individual State Parks. Prior to the implementation of programs, Audubon New Mexico met with State Parks staff, providing a more detailed overview of the *Birds for a Purpose* program materials. At least one State Parks staff member attended the classroom sessions to mentor with an Audubon educator, becoming familiar with the *Birds for a Purpose* program and the materials being used in the classroom portion of the program. Audubon New Mexico also provided the Share with Wildlife Project Manager a detailed schedule of programming. It was a pleasure to

have the Project Manager join us in Las Cruces during one of our two field trips to Mesilla Valley State Park.

Audubon New Mexico and New Mexico State Parks are expanding our current relationship; continue working together on the *Birds for a Purpose* curriculum. Audubon New Mexico has received additional funding to update the *Birds for a Purpose* curriculum. State Parks Staff are providing input into the redesign of the curriculum and will receive trunks containing materials similar to those used by Audubon New Mexico's during *Birds for a Purpose*. These trunks are intended be used by Audubon New Mexico, State Parks Staff, Audubon members and teachers Roswell, Las Cruces, and other areas across New Mexico. Both Roswell and Las Cruces State Parks Staff have been approached to comment on the redesign of the curriculum and will be recipients of the new curriculum in addition to the trunks mentioned above.

In both Roswell and Las Cruces, additional partnerships included local bird club and Audubon Chapter members. Their assistance, support, and enthusiasm contributed greatly to the success of these programs.

### **Lessons Learned:**

Continually assessing programs is important to ensure that the needs of our funders, students, teachers and partners are being met. As it should be, there are always valuable lessons to learn. This season they included:

- During the planning of these programs it became evident that there is a great demand for our programs. To assist in meeting these demands, increasing the amount of funding to include all fifth grade classes at a selected school instead of few. Audubon staff met this goal at one of the two schools, but not both.
- 3 hours of instruction in the classroom is difficult to meet if you are not conducting all the classroom work in the morning school hours. Afternoon sessions are usually cut short by teacher's commitments to other activities or the fact that not all schools districts release students at the same time across the state. 2.5 hours is a much more doable program time to implement programming in the classroom based on the current schedule of schools in the Roswell and Las Cruces areas. To maximize staff time, it is beneficial to schedule morning and afternoon sessions for the classroom programming since field trips can only be conducted in the morning due to bus schedules.
- Due to the additional funding for the redesign of the *Birds for a Purpose* curriculum, training for State Parks Staff was implemented through organizational and orientation meetings, as well as mentorship opportunities for the classroom portion of the program.
- Two additional challenges associated with this grant included time restraints associated with the contract award in February 2009 which did not allow us to claim time spent on planning with teachers in the late fall for spring implementation. Secondly, we did not have additional fiscal means to hire an education intern on staff to assist with programs away from the Santa Fe area. This would enhance our ability to facilitate more programs.

**Thank You:**

Audubon New Mexico would like to express its gratitude to the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, Share with Wildlife Program for the opportunity to serve students at in the Roswell and Las Cruces areas. The response was very positive and students were active and receptive to our programs. We look forward to continuing this partnership and to offering these programs in the future.

**Program Photos:**



**Steve Patterson and Scarlet teach students about raptors.**



**Roswell students participating in a beak adaptation activity.**



**Roswell students watching Ruddy Ducks on the lake and a Northern Mockingbird on the trail.**





Mark Wilson Photo (mwilson@roswell-record.com)

Washington Avenue Elementary School fifth-graders peer through binoculars to get a better view of birds (and a photographer) during a field trip to Bottomless Lakes State Park hosted by Audubon New Mexico, Thursday.

## Young birders flock to Lakes

KELLY HOPKINS  
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Local students flocked to Bottomless Lakes State Park on Thursday to learn about bird watching.

Fifth-graders from Washington Avenue Elementary were

taught how to identify birds and the proper use of binoculars. Although feathered friends were the main focus of the field trip, the students also learned about other New Mexico wildlife and their habitats.

Dana Strang, education manager from Audubon New Mexico, presented the program,

which is funded by New Mexico Department of Game and Fish's Share the Wildlife project. She said the students identified several birds native to the area — ruddy ducks, turkey vultures, mockingbirds, western meadowlarks, house

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## Lakes

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sparrows and a great-tailed grackle — and dutifully logged their sightings.

"Students are visual learners, and if they log it, they retain it a little longer," she said. "It's fun for them to see and take it back to the classroom."

The red-tailed hawk, Scarlet, a favorite attraction at Bottom-

less Lakes, also made an appearance. Stefan Conkle, the park's manager, talked to the children about a hawk's life span, diet, vision and hunting habits. He said about 70 classes visit the park during the school year for some hands-on education.

"By bringing them out here, they put into practice the things they're learning in the classroom," Conkle said.

Kori Bartlett, 10, said she

enjoyed Conkle's hawk presentation most of all.

"I like that we got to see her turn her head and we got to see her wings ... and how she acts around humans," Bartlett said.

Nick Archibeque, 11, was more enthusiastic about spotting some desert critters.

"I'm a hunter, so I like all of the wildlife," he said. "I liked how we got to look through the telescope and see all the different animals."

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