

## WINTER, WATER, WILDLIFE

Water deliveries from the Roberto Bustamante Wastewater Treatment Plant to Rio Bosque Wetlands Park resumed Nov 4. Over the next month, the park's wetland cells filled gradually, and by early December they were fully flooded. Waterbird numbers were low until a mid-November cold spell, when duck numbers jumped from ~100 to ~1,800. Currently, more than 2,000 are present.

For Rio Bosque, the phrase "dead of winter" doesn't quite apply. In many ways, winter is the most active time of year at the park. Late in the day, just before and after sunset, can be especially lively. Ducks constantly move across the sky, some settling in for the evening, some heading offsite. Herons, egrets and ibis fly in to roost for the night. Red-tailed Hawks are abundant, and Northern Harriers continue cruising low over the wetlands well after sunset. The thou-

sands of American Crows and Chihuahuan Ravens that roost at the park in winter are seemingly everywhere, like a scene out of *The Birds*. Many evenings, a blazing sunset provides a dramatic backdrop. This remarkable show takes place nightly, available to all at no charge but observed by few.

New Birds: The bird-species list for Rio Bosque grew by just 1 in 2016 and in 2017. In 2018, at least 5 new species appeared, most recently Red-naped Sapsucker on Nov 4 and a Chimney Swift on Nov 13. Why the surge? One factor was more observers in the field. Our staff doesn't see every visitor at Rio Bosque, but the number of visitors we did see in 2018 was an all-time high 2,341, well above the previous high of 1,719 in 2008. Many of those new visitors were birders.

Want to enjoy it? You should visit soon. The show has a limited seasonal run, dictated largely by water. In many years, water deliveries from the Bustamante Plant end in early February, the wetlands go dry, the landscape grows quiet, and it waits for spring. University of Texas at El Paso

Friends of the Rio Bosque		Membership Application	
Name:	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Life Member.....	\$1,000
Address:	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Wetlands Society.....	\$500-\$999
		<input type="checkbox"/> Restoration Patron.....	\$250-\$499
		<input type="checkbox"/> Cottonwood Commando.....	\$75-\$249
		<input type="checkbox"/> Bosque Booster.....	\$50
		<input type="checkbox"/> Family .....	\$20
0684.			



Thurs., Jan 24  
 Thurs., Feb 28  
 Thurs., Mar 28  
 6:30 – 7:30 p.m.  
 206 Kelly Hall  
 UTEP  
 Info: 915 -747-8663

## **¡GRACIAS!**

The Big Bosque Bird Bash on Nov 10 was a big hit! Many thanks go to the Friends of the Rio Bosque for organizing the event, the City of El Paso's Parks and Recreation Department for providing logistical support, and all of the great participating groups that shared their knowledge of our region's environment.

Thank you, El Paso Water! For years, after every good rain, the parking areas at the Tornillo and Wetland trailheads would become mud wallows. No longer. Last fall, El Paso Water graded and placed gravel surfaces on both areas.

On Dec 17, 120 enthusiastic aquatic-science students from Pebble Hills High School visited the park. They

gained an enhanced understanding and appreciation of the Rio Bosque environment, thanks to tour leaders Christy Adame, Liz DeMoultrie and Eric Suh.

## **FRIENDS OF THE RIO BOSQUE**

January is when annual dues are due for the Friends of the Rio Bosque. If you are a member, you'll soon receive (or recently received) a renewal notice. If you are not, now is a great time to join (see front). The Friends are the heart of the Rio Bosque project. From education programs, to outreach, to ecosystem