



FRIENDS OF CITY OF ROCKS NEWSLETTER
(Vol. 2, No. 2, May 2018)
MISSION STATEMENT

The purpose of the Friends of City of Rocks State Park, Inc. (website: <http://www.friendsofcityofrocks.org>; e-mail address: friends@friendsofcityofrocks.org) is to help support the New Mexico State Parks in the enrichment of the park area. Specifically, the Friends aim to enhance, preserve and promote park use, to participate in nature as responsible stewards of the earth, to create an awareness of the wonder, fragility and importance of the park, to develop and improve existing education/interpretive programs, to develop and improve public awareness of the park, and to encourage public participation and/or membership in the Friends group.

BECOME A MEMBER OF THE FRIENDS!

To become a member of the Friends of City of Rocks, a) complete and send in the membership application form at the end of this newsletter, OR b) download, complete and submit a membership application from the Friends website: <http://www.friendsofcityofrocks.org>

NOTE: If you are already a member of the Friends, it is time to renew your membership! You can do so using the same form mentioned above.

UPCOMING MEETING OF THE FRIENDS

Come join us on Saturday, Aug. 25 2018 (weekend before Labor Day) 11:00 AM - 12:15 PM at the park group site for the next meeting of the Friends.

At this meeting, Drs. Kathy Whiteman and Corrie Neighbors (Department of Natural Sciences, Western New Mexico University) will give a presentation about undergraduate student research they are supervising at City of Rocks State Park.

Following the presentation, we will discuss potential projects for the Friends, which might include (but are not limited to):

- **Renovation of the Botanical Garden**
- **Presentations on stars, geology, cultural history, wildlife, etc.**
- **Fund-raising**
- **Planning for upcoming “Adopt-a-Highway” and wood-cutting work days.**

The meeting will be followed up by a pot-luck gathering open to all participants and attendees.

SUMMARY OF 3RD GENERAL MEETING OF THE FRIENDS

The third general meeting of Friends of City of Rocks took place at 11:00 AM – noon on Sunday, Mar. 25 2018 at the Patio Restaurant in Hurley, NM.

- The meeting was attended by eight people
- Friends member Shela Delong informed us that the Friends now has a functional e-mail address (see Mission Statement above).
- The following upcoming events and potential projects were discussed: “Adopt a Highway” cleanup between mile markers 3 and 4 on Hwy 61, firewood cutting to replenish the supply on hand, needed Botanical Garden and Ocotillo Trail renovation, postponement of a park “Mother’s Day” event.
- The following Friends business items were discussed: firewood supply, desired donation items, application for 501(c)(3) status, volunteer needs, newsletter content, Friends store, budget, fund-raising strategies.

FRIENDS OF CITY OF ROCKS STATE PARK ACHIEVES 501(c)(3) STATUS

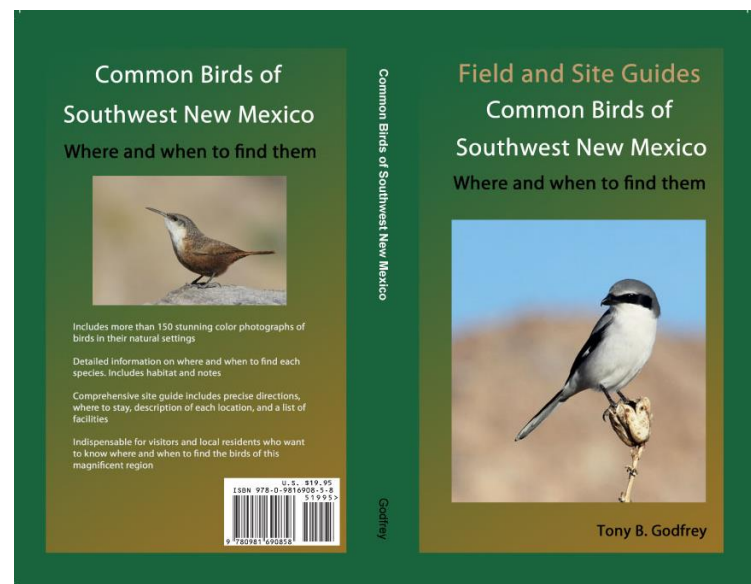
Thanks to the tireless efforts of Friends Member-at-Large Bobbi Widick, the Friends has just been notified that it is now an official 501(c)(3) organization. One of the numerous benefits of this status is that all future Friends’ purchases will now be exempt from sales tax. Thanks Bobbi!

FRIENDS OF CITY OF ROCKS STORE

The Friends Store, located in the park Visitor’s Center, offers a wide variety of items for sale including t-shirts, caps, food times, toiletries, souvenirs, etc.



Within the next few months, park visitors will be able to purchase “Common Birds of Southwest New Mexico: Where and when to find them” by Tony B. Godfrey from the Friends Store. This book will feature Tony’s great nature photography and his wealth of knowledge about regional birds.



RECENT FRIENDS PURCHASES

The Friends recently purchased a professional photograph (“City of Rocks Christmas under the Stars”) by Wayne Suggs which we can use on t-shirts, post-cards, and other items for sale in the Friends store.



“City of Rocks Christmas under the Stars” photo by Wayne Suggs, purchased by the Friends.

The Friends also purchased a 14 cubic foot horizontal chest freezer for ice storage in the park shop. We anticipate that bags of ice will be a “hot” sale item (and Friends money-maker) when the summer heat moves in.



Chest freezer purchased with Friends funds. (photo by Gabe Medrano)

WISH LIST

One way to contribute to general park operations is through donation of essential equipment and supplies.

The following is a “wish list” of items that would greatly benefit the park:

- Solar panels and batteries to power the park Visitor’s Center and well pumps
- Remote “game cameras” to photograph hard to spot park wildlife
- Bird feeders
- Emergency food supplies
- Debit and credit card device connected to a smart phone to aid in Visitor Center gift shop sales transactions
- Microphone to help astronomers talk at star parties
- New video at the Visitor Center to replace and update the present 20 year old video.
- FIREWOOD. This is by far the most popular item for sale at the Visitor’s Center gift shop.

UPCOMING EVENTS AT CITY OF ROCKS STATE PARK

Saturday, May 5 2018: Global Big Day Hike. We will meet at the visitor center at 8:00 AM and hike around the park to see how many birds we can find. We expect to return to the visitor center by 11:00 AM. Bring water, good footwear, and binoculars if you have them!

Fees: Regular Entrance Fee

Contact: Tony Godfrey 575-536-2800

Saturday, May 12 2018: Star Party. Come to City of Rocks monthly Star Party! Program begins at 9:00 PM and ends at 10:40 PM. Gemini is setting and Sagittarius is rising. Omega Centaurus is visible.

Fees: Regular Entrance Fee

Contact: Gabriel Medrano 575-5362800

Saturday, June 9 2018: Star Party. Come out and join City of Rocks for the monthly Star Party. Program begins at 9:30 AM and ends at 11:00 PM. Saturn rises before program ends. Jupiter is well up. The summer Milky Way is rising in the east.

Fees: Regular Entrance Fee

Contact: Gabriel Medrano 575-536-2800

Saturday, Aug. 25 2018: Meeting of the Friends of City of Rocks. Presentation by WNMU Professors Kathy Whiteman and Corrie Neighbors about undergraduate student research in the park, followed by a general meeting of the Friends and then lunch (pot-luck). Meeting begins at 11:00 AM at the Orion Group Site.

**FRIENDS ADOPT-A-HIGHWAY /
WOOD CUTTING WORK DAY
(APR. 28 2018)
by Gary Woollen**

Eight intrepid souls assembled at City of Rocks Park on Apr. 28 2018 to pick up litter between mile marker 3 and 4 on Highway 61. From the Cienaga parking lot, Steve Collie, Susan Mosely, Dean Thomasson, Sherry Thomasson, Bill Norris, Bobbi Widick, and Gary Woollen moved out with plastic garbage bags and “litter-gitters” in hand. Tim Geddes followed us in his chase truck with extra litter bags, water, and snacks. By 11:00 AM, we had completed our “longest mile” collecting 14 bags of litter full of antique cans, glass and plastic beverage containers, a tire, various car parts, and all those lost socks that mysteriously go missing. We gathered for a group photo by Tim knowing that the next Adopt-a-Highway litter pickup would be a “shorter mile.”



Participants in Adopt-a-Highway cleanup: (left to right): Sherry Thomasson, Dean Thomasson, Bobbi Widick, Gary Woollen, Bill Norris, Steve Collie, Susan Mosely. (photo by Tim Geddes)

After lunch, Bobbi and Terry plus Dean followed in a truck behind Tim’s truck to go north on Hwy 61 to the Nan Ranch to cut and haul dead cottonwood back to the City of Rocks State Park wood lot. We all agreed we would return with a Farm-Boss chain saw the next time to help cut up the 2 foot diameter downed cottonwoods that Betty and John of the Nan Ranch were donating to the Friends.

Future litter pick-ups and wood cutting will be announced on the Friends website.



Woodpile (photo by Shela Delong)

CITY OF ROCKS STAR PARTIES

by Gary Woollen

Once a month on the dark of the moon, National Public Observatory, Inc. astronomers give a star party in the Orion Group Area at the Gene Simon Observatory of the City of Rocks. The program typically starts with a presentation by Bill Niggs, the former astronomy professor with his laser, pointing out the visible planets and major constellations and galaxies. Charles Turner and Mike Nuss next give views from their telescopes and from the 14' Meade telescope permanently housed in the observatory.

Visitors are encouraged to bring their favorite outdoor chair and a red-colored flashlight to preserve participant night vision. A warm jacket helps with the cool evening temperatures. Although pizza is not served at these star parties, and boom box music is not allowed, the thrill of discovery of our park's dark skies is an adventure to be remembered. Future astronomers of all ages are encouraged to ask any questions related to the heaven of the star party astronomers.

The next star party is on May 12th 2018. Keep in mind that sunset is at 7:59 PM that night, the program begins at 9:10 PM and ends at 10:40 PM. Check with the Visitor Center if weather for the star party is in question.

BIRDING AT CITY OF ROCKS

by Tony Godfrey

Located in the Chihuahuan desert at an elevation of 5,200 feet, the City of Rocks is home to more than 35 species of resident

birds. Another 70 species either migrate through or spend a part of the year here. A good place to start your search for birds is around the visitor center. A resident pair of Barn Owls nest in the wooden box located on the windmill behind the visitor center. Sage Thrasher has been a reliable winter visitor at the Hydra Trailhead. Canyon Towhee, Gambel's Quail, Say's Phoebe, and Cactus Wren are all familiar residents. Check the ocotillo in summer for the brilliant yellow and black male Scott's Oriole.



Scott's Oriole (photo by Tony Godfrey).

As you hike into the rocks, the rather tame Rock Wren is a familiar sight. Look also for nesting Great Horned Owl and Chihuahuan Raven. During some winters, small numbers of Long-eared Owl have been found roosting in the large oak trees. During summer, listen for the distinct *peent* call of the Common Nighthawk as it flies high above the rocks.

For the adventurous, look for Rufous-crowned Sparrows among the many Black-throated Sparrows along the 1.6-mile hike to the top of Table Mountain. Once at the top, scan the surrounding skies for migrating raptors, as well as

taking in the amazing views. A good alternative for those who do not wish to do the hike is to drive to the top of Observation Point. Look for Greater Roadrunner and the occasional Scaled Quail along the way.

The recently opened two-mile Cienega Trail is already proving to be a good birding area. Sagebrush Sparrow and Crissal Thrasher can be found during the winter months. Plumbeous Vireo, Yellow Warbler, and even a Sora have been seen during migration. Swainson's Hawk and Great Horned Owl have nested in the Cienega itself!



Long-Eared Owl (photo by Tony Godfrey)

**SOME RECENT CITY OF ROCKS
MOST UNEXPECTED BIRDS**
by Tony Godfrey

During the past several years, I have documented several “new” and unexpected birds for the City of Rocks State Park. Let's take a look at the top five:

1. Acorn Woodpecker

Although this species is fairly common in mountain canyons with oaks and

sycamores, such as the Pinos Altos and Black Range mountain ranges, it is not a species that would typically be found in the Upper Chihuahuan desert. I photographed this individual in the Orion group area on the 29th May, 2015.



Acorn Woodpecker (photo by Tony Godfrey)

2. Vermilion Flycatcher

The male Vermilion Flycatcher is one of the most striking birds in all of North America...difficult to believe it is a flycatcher! A bright red bird with dark wings was reported to me by a couple of volunteers on the 5th March, 2018. I managed to see and photograph the bird on the 9th March, 2018. This species is typically found in association with riparian areas; a habitat that we lack at the City of Rocks.



Vermilion Flycatcher (photo by Tony Godfrey)

3. Red-faced Warbler

While leading a nature hike on the 21st April, 2018, I found a Red-faced Warbler in the Orion group area. This species is also typically found in the Pinos Altos and Black Range mountain ranges.



Red-Faced Warbler (photo by Tony Godfrey)

4. Gray Catbird

This species was definitely on my radar! While hiking the Hydra Trail on the 25th October, 2017 I found a bird that I immediately recognized as this species. I spent the next twenty minutes trying to obtain a documentation photo of this “skulker”. This species is unexpected anywhere in southwestern New Mexico.



Gray Catbird (photo by Tony Godfrey)

5. Lazuli Bunting

While writing this article on the 29th April, 2018, I was pondering over what should be listed as number 5. A bird

landed on my window sill and I immediately recognized it as a male Lazuli Bunting! After I showed my wife, Shela, I grabbed the camera and got this photo of it through our window as it flew from the hood of my truck. Typically found in mountain scrub and riparian areas, this bird landed just two feet from my head as if to say “Pick me, pick me”.



Lazuli Bunting (photo by Tony Godfrey)

LIZARDS by Tim Geddes

Lizards are the most diverse group of reptiles alive on earth today. There are over 10,000 species of lizards in the world, and approximately 91 in North America. The exact number depends on rulings of the International Congress of Zoological Nomenclature.



Southwestern Fence Lizard (photo by Tim Geddes)

The origin of the Order Squamata (squamate lizards) dates back over 180 million years to the Triassic Period. Lizards are not closely related to dinosaurs. There were 16 orders of reptiles alive during the Mesozoic Era, and only two of those orders were what we call dinosaurs. Lizards are related to snakes and have some common characteristics. In both lizards and snakes, the anal opening is a transverse slit and the male copulatory organs are paired. Also, lizards and snakes have a Jacobson's Organ in the roof of the mouth. The tongue picks up particles and transfers them to ducts of this organ for identification. Unlike snakes, lizards often show sexual dimorphism. Male lizards are often brightly colored and engage in courtship/territorial displays in the manner of birds.

Reptiles are adapted for life in arid climates. Their covering of scales prevents water loss, as does their excretion of nitrogenous waste as a semi-solid (uric acid). Reptiles are ectothermic and control their body temperature through behavior. They thermoregulate by basking in the sun. When too warm, they retreat into the shade or to a burrow underground.

Most lizards are insectivorous, feeding on a variety of arthropods including spiders. The large and aggressive collared lizards also prey on other lizards. The Gila monster feeds on eggs and nesting birds and mammals.

The scientific name of the Gila monsters is "*Heloderma suspectum*." "*Heloderma*" refers to the beaded texture of its skin and

"*suspectum*" means it was suspected of being venomous. The Gila monster and its close relative the Mexican beaded lizard are the only venomous lizards in the world. Gila monster fangs are grooved teeth in its lower jaw, and while the venom is neurotoxic, the lizard is not a threat to humans who don't handle animals.

Most lizards lay eggs but there are a few live bearers. The large family Phrynosomatidae is named after its type genus "*Phrynosoma*" that includes the horned lizards or horny "toads." There are three species of horned lizards in southwestern New Mexico, and among these the greater short-horned lizard is a live bearer. The female gives birth to a 6-17 young after a gestation period of 80 days. The babies are 1 inch long. Another phrynosomid that brings forth living young is the Crevice Spiny Lizard. Other spiny lizards are egg layers. The Clarke's Spiny Lizard is common at the City of Rocks. It is named after the collector John H. Clark who was a member of the Mexican Boundary Commission in 1851. Several of New Mexico's reptiles were first described from specimens collected during U.S. Government surveys in the 19th century.



Texas Horned Lizard (photo by Tim Geddes)



Round-Tailed Horned Lizard (photo by Tim Geddes)

The whiptails are an interesting group of lizards because some species produce parthenogenetically. There are no males and the all-female populations lay eggs that produce only females.

Parthenogenesis usually results from hybrid events and while the process is common in plants, it is rare in animals.



Desert Grasslands Whiptail (photo by Tim Geddes)



Common Checkered Whiptail (photo by Tim Geddes)

Lizards are a vigorous group of reptiles in modern times, and compete with mammals in total number of species. The earth is likely to continue its warning and drying trend and that's good weather for reptiles.

Membership Application
Friends of City of Rocks State Park, Inc. (FCR)

FCR is a non profit 501(c)3 organization dedicated to enhance, preserve and promote the Park use. Your contribution and membership will give you the satisfaction of helping preserve and protect one of the most beautiful places on the planet.

New Renewal

Name(s) _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Phone _____ E-Mail _____

Yes, I want to support FCR. Enclosed is my annual membership dues. Dues and donations are tax deductible.

***ACTIVE MEMBER: (Voting)**

- _____ \$15 Individual
- _____ \$20 Family
- _____ \$10 Senior (single or couple)
- _____ \$500 Lifetime

SPONSOR: (Non voting)

- _____ \$25 Friend
- _____ \$50 Good Friend
- _____ \$75 Very Good Friend
- _____ \$100 Best Friend
- _____ Over \$100 Special Friend

In addition to my dues, I enclose \$ _____, as a donation.(optional)

*Active dues paying members are those individuals who are entitled to vote at annual meetings and MUST participate in at least one of the following. Please check at least one of the following.

- _____ hospitality _____ newsletter _____ programs _____ membership _____ publicity
_____ garden care _____ fund-raising _____ events _____ scrapbook _____ officer

Active Members receive free day admittance to City of Rocks State Park.

Thank you for your support and interest. Together we can create an awareness of the wonder, fragility, and importance of City of Rocks State Park.

Please send your check to: Friends of City of Rocks State Park, Inc.
P.O. Box 50
Faywood, NM
88034

Upon receipt, you will receive a welcome letter, receipt, and membership card. For further information or questions, please call 1-228-363-1403.

Official use only

Date Received: _____ Ck# _____ cash _____ Membership card _____

