



FRIENDS OF CITY OF ROCKS NEWSLETTER
(Vol. 6, No. 2, Apr. 2022)
MISSION STATEMENT

The purpose of the Friends of City of Rocks State Park, Inc. (website: <http://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!

Interested in helping out City of Rocks State Park? Consider joining the Friends. Typical Friends activities include highway cleanup, cutting and splitting firewood for sale to park campers, operation of a gift shop in the park Visitor Center, fund-raising, etc. To join, 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 (see above). 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.

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SCHEDULE OF UPCOMING EVENTS

Saturday, May 7 2022. Give Grandly. 9 AM – 2 PM, Makers’ Market, Silver City, NM. Make a donation in person or on-line (<https://www.givegrandly.org>) to support the Friends of City of Rocks.

Saturday, May 7 2022. 8 AM – 10 AM. Bird Hike at City of Rocks. Leaders: Karen Beckenbach and William (“Bill”) Norris. Meet at Park Visitor’s Center.



Scott’s Oriole. (photo by Andy Reago and Chrissy McLarren).

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scott%27s_oriole

Saturday, May 28 2022. Star Party. Begins at 8:30 PM (weather permitting).



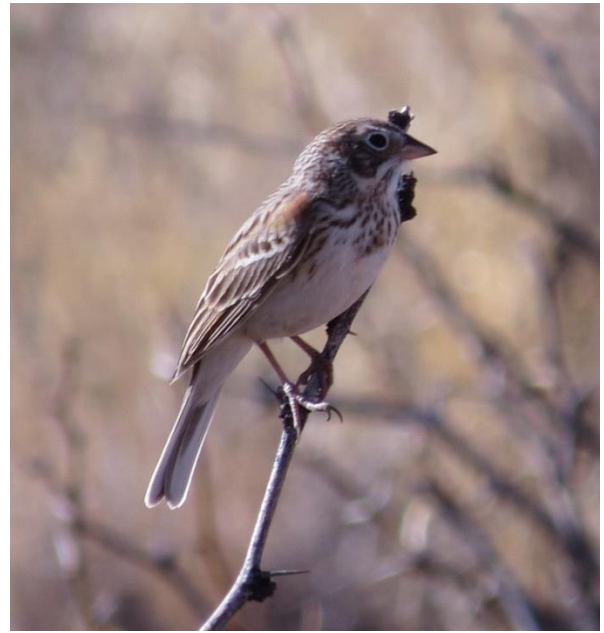
Bird Hike (Saturday, Apr. 2 2022): Field Trip Report.

by Susan Mittelstadt

’Tis the season to get out and welcome back our migrating friends as they return to more temperate climes for breeding. On April 2 the Friends of the City of Rocks and the SWNM Audubon Society joined together and offered a walking tour of the park. Twenty to thirty peeps (Depending on who you ask) showed up to be led by the sharp-eyed and knowledgeable leaders, Karen Beckenbach and Bill Norris. I feel compelled to mention this report was commissioned post-walk. Critical data for the serious minded historian was lost in the scrum of writers vying for the chance to fill these pages. Should I be asked to document future trips I will make a more concerted effort to capture our cast of characters, human and avian. Blue skies and mild temperatures made for an ideal morning to walk the campground loop and see who we could see and hear. Our genial hosts, made a round of

introductions and found binoculars for those that ran out the door and forgot to grab theirs. Like most addicted birders many of us carry a just-in-case-pair in the car. This has been me on more than one occasion. If you find yourself in this situation do not hesitate to ask.

Our first stop was the feeding station at the Visitor's Center. A Cactus Wren sang out from the top of a yucca as we gathered round to watch White-winged Sparrows, Canyon Towhees, and House Finches get their fill. A Green-Tailed Towhee darted in and was seen by some. Soon we turned for a counterclockwise mass movement around the stately rock outcrops. A chime of rock wrens made merry by the path to the botanical garden. These quick moving birds can have a repertoire of over 100 songs and do not drink water. All of their hydration comes from their food. We heard a few and suspect the first fledglings were out. Our group expanded and contracted amoeba like as birds here and there caught people's interest. Bill in his oriole yellow sweatshirt was our beacon. He ran sweep as Karen confidently lead us into the world of sparrows. While the White-crowned Sparrow was most numerous, soon we were able to pick out Black Throated, Brewer's, Vespers, Chipping and a couple Lincoln's.



Vesper Sparrow. Photo by Rachelle Bergmann.

Soon we found a Great Horned Owl on a nest in a rock pocket above a campsite. The previous owners of the nest had made a snug home with great views of the cottontails below. Great Horned Owls do not make their nests but rather find and use the nests of other species. This can make for some haphazard nesting sites. I once saw three fledglings sitting in the crotch of a cottonwood with a few scattered twigs at their feet. Today's nest was a very fine spot. Nearby in an oak tree was the presumed partner of the nest sitting bird. Soon we should be able to see the parents hard at work feeding the hatchlings.



Great-Horned Owl on the nest at City of Rocks State Park. Photo by Tim Geddes.

A little further on we came to the campgrounds water spigot. Lots of activity at the small puddle there. Somewhere in here a Swainson's Hawk flew overhead. It was the first of season spotting for many of us. Karen explained how we can pick out a Swainson's Hawk even from great distances. The trailing edge of their wings are bold and black, the opposite of a Red-Tailed Hawk.

After nearly two hours of looking and learning we were back at the Visitor's Center. From there a smaller group drove to the parks vista point. Our goal was Cassin's Sparrow. One might have been heard but none were seen. Over the next few weeks this spot is a great place to try and see this hard to find bird. It will be singing on the wing. This spot is also a place to go back in time and imagine what this area of New Mexico looked like before modern times. Bill helped us with his vision.

And then it was done. Twenty-one species of birds were noted by this observer but more importantly we were gathered with friends and enjoying a beautiful world. An auspicious day. Welcome back, friends.

Plant Hike (Saturday, Apr. 16 2022): Field Trip Report.

by William ("Bill") Norris

About 30 people gathered in the Cienega Parking lot on Saturday morning (Apr. 16 2022) eager to see a display of colorful desert wildflowers. Although we managed to find an occasional flowering Spiny-Leaf Dogweed (*Thymophylla acerosa*) while walking the Cienega Trail, actual flowers were few and far between.



Spiny-Leaf Dogweed (*Thymophylla acerosa*).

Photo by Sally and Andy Wasowski.

https://www.wildflower.org/gallery/result.php?id_image=24856

Not that there weren't plants to see on this parched landscape (thanks to an exceptionally dry spring). Co-leaders Ed Leuck and Bill Norris pointed out numerous desert shrubs and succulents,

including the enigmatic Mormon Tea (*Ephedra trifurca*).



Mormon Tea (*Ephedra trifurca*): Male Stems. Photo by Russ Kleinman.



Mormon Tea (*Ephedra trifurca*): Female Stems with Leaves. Photo by Russ Kleinman.

We were also able to compare two formidable thorny shrubs, Crucifixion Thorn (*Koeberlinia spinosa*) and Graythorn (*Sarcophalus obtusifolius*), side by side.



Crucifixion Thorn (*Koeberlinia spinosa*). Photo by Russ Kleinman.



Graythorn (*Sarcophalus obtusifolius*). Photo by Max Licher.

Evidence of animal activity was conspicuous at trailside, including low

Banner-Tail Kangaroo Rat (*Dipodomys spectabilis*) mounds and messy Packrat (*Neotoma* sp.) middens.

A



Banner-Tailed Kangaroo Rat (*Dipodomys spectabilis*) mound.

https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Representative-structures-built-by-banner-tailed-kangaroo-rats-and-rough-harvester_fig5_221845416



Packrat (*Neotoma* sp.) midden.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/20/science/packrat-nests-dna.html>

However, the most memorable observation of this hike was undoubtedly that of a porcupine (*Erethizon dorsatum*), first spotted by Burt Mittelstadt, moving lazily among high branches of a tall willow shading the cienega itself. And speaking of the cienega, let's not forget discussion (led by Naava Koenigsberg and

Monica Rude) of ethnobotanical properties of Yerba Mansa (*Anemopsis californica*), the fruiting stems of which we saw poking up out of the wetland grasses adjacent to the boardwalk.



Yerba mansa (*Anemopsis californica*).

https://www.birdandhike.com/Veg/Species/Aquatic/Anemop_cal/_Ane_cal.htm

In summary, although this hike didn't live up to its promise of desert wildflowers, it did offer numerous unexpected observations and opportunities for new friendships that made it memorable and worthwhile.

Snakes, Myth, Folklore, and Tall Tales

by Tim Geddes

Any animal that looks as unusual as a snake is bound to attract attention. Primitive man considered the snake to be supernatural. Religious beliefs and rituals were performed to placate the serpent. Snake worship often had strong sexual overtones. When slaves were imported to the West Indies they brought their Voodoo with them. The serpent is a phallus symbol and during rituals the

priestess was penetrated by the snake and goats were sacrificed. Snakes represent birth and longevity. When snakes shed their skins they seem to be rejuvenated. The Egyptians connected the cobra with the life giving Nile and the Pharaoh wore a cobra figure on his crown.



Egyptian royal headdress.
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khepresh>

In India snakes are generally thought of as good. In Sanskrit, Naga is a half human and half cobra being that is dangerous but also beneficial. The Naga king sheltered Buddha from the rain while he was meditating.

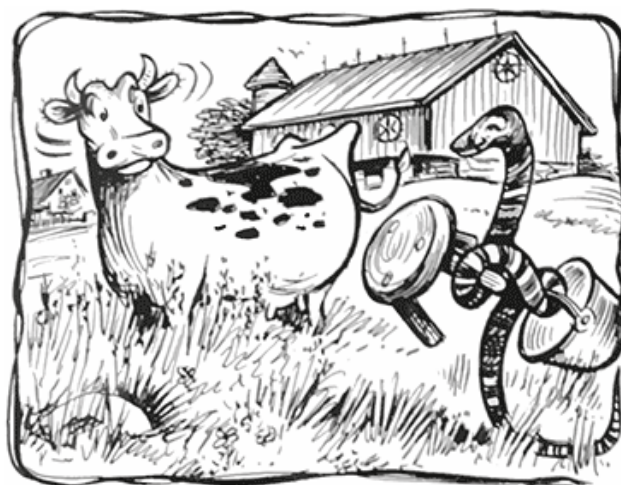


Naga of Shinomen Mori
https://powerlisting.fandom.com/wiki/Naga_Physiology

In Hinduism snakes are associated with rivers, lakes, and the sea which are symbols of fertility and the continuity of life. Snakes were important in the mythologies of the ancient Greeks and Romans. For example, in Ovid's *Metamorphosis* in The Story of Cadmus, "Why O Cadmus, Stare at the serpent slain? You also, some day, Will be a serpent for mortal men to stare at." Cadmus and his wife were turned into snakes but they never harmed humans because they remembered what they once were.

thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head and though shalt bruise his heel.”

Many snake myths were brought to America by European settlers. One ancient belief is that snakes milk cows. No cow is going to stand for a snake's six rows of needle sharp teeth to latch on to its teat.



<https://sciencepress.mnhn.fr/en/periodiques/anthropozoologica/52/1/le-reptile-buveur-de-lait-dans-une-perspective-comparee>

One interesting bit of folklore is that a mother snake swallows her young to protect them. Some fish do that but not snakes. Some snakes prey on other snakes and some snakes bear their young alive. The embryos are retained in the mother's body until hatching. If someone killed a pregnant snake and found baby snakes inside it would be logical to amuse that she swallowed them. The belief that snakes have poisonous breath can be blamed on the North American hog-nose snake. Colorful names like blow snake, hissing viper, and spreading adder all refer to this snake's defensive behavior.



Cadmus transformed into a serpent.
https://www.allposters.com/-sp/Cadmus-into-a-Serpent-Book-IV-Illustration-from-Ovid-s-Metamorphoses-Florence-1832-Posters_i16831416_.htm

The winged staff of Hermes with the intertwined serpents is still the symbol of medicine.



Winged staff of Hermes. Artwork by Tim Geddes.

Snakes get a bad rap in Christianity. From Genesis Chapter 3, “Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field .. And I will put enmity between

The hog-nose is actually a harmless snake. The joint snake is a legendary creature. This serpent if struck will break into many pieces but the snake will reassemble itself. The “joint snake”, or glass snake, is a legless lizard with a long tail that will break but the pieces do not reassemble.



“Joint Snake”. <https://dragon-discourse.tumblr.com/post/177925100687/joint-snake>

There is the coachwhip snake that chases people down and whips them with their tails. Whip snake tails do resemble whips but no snake chases people and whips them. Snakes are slimy. Snakes have dry scales. They are not worm-like. Serpents are vertebrate animals and have a body cavity with heart, lungs and stomach like mammals. Snakes sting with their tongues. The tongue is used to pick up particles of scent. It is harmless. A dead snake’s tail will wiggle until sundown. Snakes are reptiles and tenacious to life. They are also exothermic and muscle contractions may continue until it cools off at night.

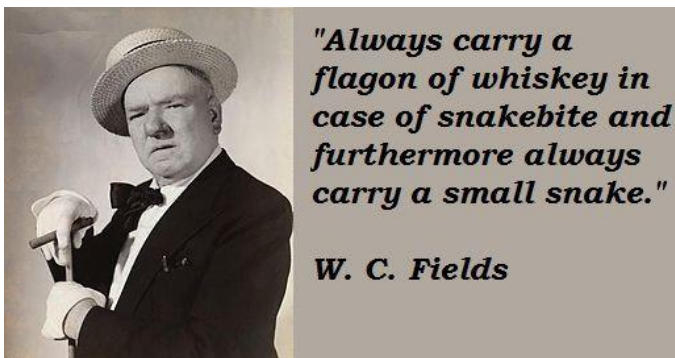
Rattlesnakes range from Canada to South America so rattlesnake folklore is strictly

American. There is the story of the little girl that swallowed rattlesnake eggs and when they hatched it killed her. For one thing, rattlers don’t lay eggs. For another, the digestive acids would kill the embryos. Then there is the case of the fatal boot. Venom left in the fang was still lethal. The story is false. Any venom still in the fang would quickly lose its toxic properties. Rattlesnakes will not cross a horsehair lariat. Snakes can and will cross a hair rope. The myth probably started to give cowboys a good night’s sleep. There is a belief that gopher snakes eat rattlesnakes. Gopher snakes, or bull snakes, feed on mammals, birds and their eggs but not other snakes. Rattlers feed on same prey items so there may be some competition for food. When I lived in Luna County I had plenty of both gopher snakes and rattlesnakes around my house. A woman from Texas told me about a kind of rattleless rattlesnake. This kind of rattler is presumably more dangerous because it did not sound a warning before striking. Rattlers do not always sound off. Much depends on the individual snake. There are no rattle-less rattlesnakes in the U.S. However, there is a rattle-less rattlesnake on an island in the Sea of Cortez, Mexico. There is a button on the tail but no segments form. This is an adaptation to the ecology on an isolated island.



Rattleless Rattlesnake (*Crotalus catalinensis*).
<https://www.gettyimages.com/detail/photo/rattleless-rattlesnake-santa-catalina-rattlesnake-royalty-free-image/1131838827>

There are numerous myths about the treatment of snakebite. Plant remedies such as the application of onions, garlic or tobacco are of no benefit. Ammonia, vinegar, and turpentine are of no value and may prove harmful. Snake stones to draw out the poison are of no use. A poultice of split, raw chicken is an old treatment for snakebite. The chicken flesh turns green when it draws out the poison. That is untrue. It won't work. Whiskey is a famous cure for snakebite. Actually, alcohol speeds up the circulation which is the last thing a snakebite victim needs. Reportedly the comedian W.C. Fields always kept a bottle of whiskey on hand in case he saw a snake. He also kept a snake handy.



https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/1402621.W_C_Fields

Mankind's relationship with snakes goes back to the dawn of humanity. Snakes seem supernatural, uncanny, the eyes ever open and watchful, even in death. Serpents as gods or messengers of the gods is a widespread belief. Whether seen as symbols of renewal or the promise of death snakes are important icons in culture. The list of snake myths seems unlimited and some of the folklore seems silly. The snakes themselves are oblivious to all the excitement they cause.

Off the Beaten Track at City of Rocks State Park: "South Windmill"

Text by William ("Bill") Norris, Photos by Tim Geddes.

City of Rocks State Park, established in 1953 with an original area of about one square mile, has increased in area about four-fold in the past two decades due to several recent acquisitions. One of our favorite new areas to explore is the "South Windmill" site, accessed via an inconspicuous gate along Hwy 61. Here, after a rough drive along bumpy roads (definitely four-wheel drive terrain), you will find an active windmill, a stock tank brimming with water and a small wetland. See the pictures below of the South Windmill site at City of Rocks State Park, and you desire to visit it *be sure to check in at the park Visitor's Center to ask for directions.*



White-Crowned Sparrow and Brewer's Sparrow playing hard-to-get.



White-Crowned Sparrow and Brewer's Sparrow overcoming initial shyness.



Stock tank at South Windmill, filled to the brim.



Stemless Townsend's Daisy (*Townsendia exscapa*).



A former resident of South Windmill.

Membership Application

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

FCR is a non-profit 501(c) organization dedicated to enhance, preserve and promote 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 are my annual membership dues. Dues and donations are tax deductible.

***ACTIVE MEMBER: (Voting)**

SPONSOR (Non-Voting)

_____ \$15 Individual

_____ \$25 Friend

_____ \$20 Family

_____ \$50 Good Friend

_____ \$10 Senior (single or couple)

_____ \$75 Very Good Friend

_____ \$500 Lifetime

_____ \$100 Best Friend

_____ \$500 Special Best 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., PO Box 74, Hurley, NM, 88043

Upon receipt of our completed membership application, 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: _____