

Bosque del Apache Wildlife Refuge

EVERY BIRD I HAVE WRITTEN ABOUT so far I have seen myself in Eldorado. This month I am going to highlight a world-renowned birding area not so far from Eldorado.



Snow geese, Bosque del Apache Wildlife Refuge
PHOTO: © SANDY SETH

The US Fish & Wildlife Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge is near the small town of San Antonio, NM, 9 miles south of Socorro. The 90-square-mile park has been developed and is intensively farmed to provide a winter home to as many as 30,000 ducks and geese and 4,000 to 8,000 Sandhill Cranes, plus other migrating and resident birds. It is a place to reliably find Bald Eagles. The Rio Grande River is a natural flyway for birds. Sandhill Cranes ar-

rive in November and depart in late February for Gray's Lake, Idaho, where they breed.

Development of the Bosque del Apache began in the 1930s by the Civilian Conservation Corps. It includes impoundments, crop areas, and intensive water management. During winter at dusk, the cranes and geese return to the shallow water areas where they can stay for the night, safe from predators. At dusk, they fly out to local areas for feeding. These fly-in and fly-out times are spectacular. Observers are surrounded by great numbers of flapping wings and loud honking calls.

Year round, many wild animals can be observed on the loop drive and foot trails, including many seasonal birds, songbirds, a small herd of mule deer, coyotes, turkey, pheasant, ducks, and hawks. At the Visitor Center, you can check out an audiotape that explains all the secret corners along the 15-mile Loop Tour, as well as the work done each season to keep the Refuge in shape for the birds. The next annual Festival of the Cranes is November 16-21, 2010, and features lectures, workshops, tours, hikes, and hands-on activities.

A trip to the Bosque any time of year is always a pleasure. A winter visit there to see the dusk fly-in, an overnight stay in Socorro, and a dawn visit for the fly-out the next morning is a delight for any birder. For more information, see these websites:

www.FriendsoftheBosque.org

www.FestivaloftheCranes.com.

—Pam Henline