



**"New Mexico: A Natural History Exploration" May 15-22, 2019**  
**Leaders: Terry Lawson Dunn and Paul Pisano**

New Mexico is known as the land of enchantment, but it's also a land of great diversity-- diverse wildlife, diverse ecosystems influenced by a huge range of elevations and past geological events, diverse cultures where Native American and Spanish influences dominate, and a history that is unlike any other. Visiting New Mexico in May means catching the birds while they are migrating and the desert blooms are opening!

Your exploration of New Mexico begins in Albuquerque. The settlement of Albuquerque dates back to at least 2000 BC when the Ancient Puebloan Indians settled and cultivated this area bordering the Rio Grande River. Spanish explorers arrived around 1540, and by 1706, a small group of Spanish settlers established the village of Albuquerque. The first structure built by the Spanish settlers was an adobe chapel and it was soon followed by adobe dwellings arranged around a central plaza. The San Felipe de Neri Church was built after the original chapel collapsed in 1792 and the church, as well as many of the 300 year old adobe buildings, now make up Albuquerque's Old Town. The buildings contain shops, galleries and restaurants, but the buildings themselves have changed very little, giving visitors the sense that they are walking back in time. The Old Town area is also home to the New Mexico Museum of Natural History and Science (a well-conceived museum that highlights the unique geology, archaeology, and astronomy of New Mexico) and the Albuquerque Museum (human history and art of New Mexico). Old Town, and the museums, are within several blocks of your hotel, leaving you plenty to explore and eat after our excursions further afield! Albuquerque has grown, of course, particularly with the arrival of Route 66 (also near your hotel!) and is now the largest city in New Mexico.

Albuquerque will serve as our base for the first part of our trip. Even within the city and county limits, there is a great diversity of habitats and birding/wildlife-watching opportunities. We will spend some time in the forests near the river, in the foothills, on top of Sandia Peak (reached by the world's longest tram) and in the rocky, volcanic desert of Petroglyph National Monument. We will also venture about an hour and half to the west to visit the spectacular Acoma Sky City, the longest continuously inhabited city in the US (over 800 years) and the great lava flow of El Malpais National Monument. We'll also head south to visit Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge to check out avian residents and migrants.

During the second half of our trip we will be based out of Santa Fe, which is about an hour north of Albuquerque. More than a decade before the Mayflower arrived, Santa Fe was established. Santa Fe is home to the oldest public building in the US and is the oldest capital city in North America. Historic preservation and strict building codes have meant that Santa Fe maintains the distinct look that draws people from around the world. Santa Fe also has more than 200 world-class art galleries. From your hotel, you can reach many of the city's highlights and great restaurants on foot.

While in Santa Fe, we'll spend one morning birding at Randall Davey Audubon Center and an afternoon venturing up towards the Santa Fe ski area, stopping in conifer forests and aspen stands, looking for birds and early fall color changes. Another day will be spent visiting the Valles Caldera National Preserve and Bandelier National Monument.

*This trip will have a leisurely pace, with standing, light to moderate walking/hiking, sometimes on uneven, rocky, sandy or hilly surfaces. The itinerary is ideal for people with a broad variety of interests that include many aspects of nature (birding, wildlife-watching, ecology, geology, archaeology, conservation and land management) and culture, particularly how human history is deeply tied to the natural surroundings of this area. Because of the altitudinal variations, participants should be in good general health. Those with a fear of heights may choose to opt out of the tram ride to the top of Sandia Peak, but there are things to explore at the base while you wait. Please expect changeable spring weather, which can include hot afternoons, cool evenings, strong winds and temperatures that vary with different elevations. It is, however, usually dry and sunny in May.*

*The following day-to-day itinerary, represents an outline of the locations we'll be visiting. Our daily plans will be based on maximizing our sightings and may sometimes be modified because of weather.*

#### **Day One, Wednesday, May 15th:**

Arrival and hotel check-in. Group dinner/meet the guides. Overnight in Albuquerque at Hotel Albuquerque.

#### **Day Two, Thursday, May 16th:**

After breakfast on your own, our first full day in Albuquerque will keep us at Albuquerque's lowest elevation so participants can adjust to the altitude (Albuquerque ranges from 5,000ft in the valley, to 6500ft in the foothills, and nearly 11,000ft on Sandia Peak). In the morning, we will venture to the Rio Grande Nature Center State Park which is located in the bosque (the forested area near the river), where we will be looking for birds and other wildlife. After lunch as a group, we'll explore Petroglyph National Monument, one of the largest petroglyph sites in North America. Petroglyph is on the western edge of town where volcanic rocks have been left after repeated eruptions of nearby volcanoes. Upon our return, there may be time to visit the New Mexico Museum of Natural History and Science, which provides a fantastic overview of the natural history of the state. Dinner on your own.

Overnight in Albuquerque at Hotel Albuquerque.

### **Day Three, Friday, May 17th:**

Today will be a memorable one. In the morning (after breakfast on your own), we will head west for our visit to Acoma Sky City. This picturesque Native American pueblo sits atop a mesa with sheer cliffs on all sides. People have lived here continuously for over 800 years and still live here without electricity, running water or sewers. Known for their detailed pottery, you will be able to purchase directly from the Acoma artists as part of our tour led by one of the Acoma people. We will have lunch as a group at the Acoma Cultural Center which features traditional Acoma foods and contemporary American choices.



In the afternoon, we will venture a bit further west and visit El Malpais National Monument. El Malpais is an alien-looking landscape, with pygmy pine forests and piles of volcanic rock. Although the last lava flow in this area happened 800 years ago, it looks as if the last eruption was a mere century ago. Here, we explore the unusual paths winding through the rocks, looking for raptors, canyon wrens, white-throated swifts, and possibly some well-camouflaged horned toads. Dinner on your own.

Overnight in Albuquerque at Hotel Albuquerque.

### **Day Four, Saturday, May 18th:**

On this day we will head south to Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge. Despite being too late for the famous sandhill cranes, there are still plenty of birds to see. We'll spend the morning looking for late migrant shorebirds and the entire assemblage of western migrant land birds, including Hammond's, Dusky, and Willow flycatchers, as well as warblers including Wilson's, Virginia's, Orange-crowned, MacGillivray's and Audubon's. Every migration season is unique, and so we will remain flexible to take advantage of the species most representative and most abundant at this time. After lunch in the nearby town, we will head to Water Canyon, in the Magdalena mountains. This small, fault-block range on the west side of the Rio Grande rift valley, is a little oasis in the desert, and for that reason it draws a variety of birds, including Gray Flycatcher, Western Scrub-Jay, Pinyon Jay, Bridled and Juniper Titmice, Bushtit, Black-throated Gray Warbler and Hepatic Tanager. Dinner on your own.

Overnight in Albuquerque at Hotel Albuquerque.

### **Day Five, Sunday, May 19th:**

This morning we explore the eastern side of Albuquerque where the foothills turn into the high peaks of the Sandia wilderness area. We'll start by birding at Embudito Canyon, a broad, relatively open area at the base of the Sandias where we hope to see Canyon, Cactus, Bewick's and Rock Wrens, Canyon Towhee, Black-throated Sparrow, Curve-billed and Crissal Thrashers, and Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay. We will also see some spring flowers such as Mexican Primrose, Indian Paintbrush, Prickly Pear Cactus, and Claret Cup Cactus. Next, we will make the short drive to the base of the Sandia Peak Tram. This scenic tram ride takes about 15 minutes each way and glides over several biomes, starting with areas dominated by juniper trees, then populations of ponderosa pines, then Douglas firs and finally, a mix of spruce and fir trees. When we reach the top (just over 10,000 feet in elevation), we'll take in the breathtaking views. It is not unusual to be able to see more than 60 miles in all directions. The descent is equally thrilling and you are certain to come away with an appreciation of the ruggedness of this wilderness area so close to the city. After lunch at the base the tram, we'll drive for just over an hour to Santa Fe. After checking into our hotel, you are on your own to explore the galleries, museums, shops and charming architecture of Santa Fe in the afternoon. Or, find a quiet patio and just absorb the laid-back vibe of the 'city different'. Dinner on your own.



Cactus Wren

Overnight in Santa Fe at Las Palomas Hotel.

### **Day Six, Monday, May 20th:**

Breakfasts are included with accommodations in Santa Fe (and it's well worth it at this hotel!). Today, we'll venture to the end of Santa Fe's famous Canyon Road, to visit the Randall Davey Audubon Center and Sanctuary. Approximately 190 bird species take advantage of the habitats in this sanctuary bordered by acres of Forest Service land and the Santa Fe River watershed. You will quickly notice that things are a little greener at this latitude. After lunch in Santa Fe, we'll take a leisurely drive up the road to Santa Fe ski area to look for Hermit Thrush, House Wren, Dark-eyed Junco, Cordilleran Flycatcher, Lincoln's Sparrow, Gray Jay, and Clark's Nutcrackers that are using the pine and aspen forests of the cooler elevations. Dinner on your own.



Juniper Titmouse

Overnight in Santa Fe at Las Palomas Hotel.

### **Day Seven, Tuesday, May 21st:**

There are six, super volcanos on dry land in the world and three of them are in United States. Yellowstone is one. Long Valley, California is another. And New Mexico is lucky enough to have one as well. The 13 mile wide Valles Caldera, is a dramatic, grassy bowl set in the Jemez mountains near Los Alamos. Although the last eruption was a long time ago, hot springs and fumaroles are still in the region. The Valles

Caldera is now one of the country's youngest National Preserves (part of the National Park system). Here, we will explore the wildlife, geological history and management issues at the Caldera. After our time at the Valles Caldera, we'll have lunch in Los Alamos then head for Bandelier National Monument. Evidence of human history in Bandelier extends over 10,000 years ago when nomadic hunter-gatherers followed migrating wildlife through this area. By 1150 CE. Ancestral Pueblo people began to build more permanent settlements. The dwellings and ceremonial areas are still easily seen by walking on short trails (just over a mile one way) and for the ambitious, you can climb wooden ladders to go inside the dwellings. We will return to Santa Fe before dinner and prepare for flights back home the next day. Dinner on your own.

Overnight in Santa Fe at Las Palomas Hotel.

### **Day Eight, Wednesday, May 22nd:**

Drive back to Albuquerque for flights home

### **LEADERS:**

**Terry Lawson Dunn** holds a master's degree in environmental communications, a bachelor's degree in wildlife science, has worked for World Wildlife Fund, Smithsonian National Zoo, National Audubon Society, and World Resources Institute. She authored the publication, Guide to Global Environmental Issues and recently published the award-winning book, Art of the National Parks. She has also participated in wildlife field research projects ranging from wolf reintroduction in the Northern Rocky Mountains to bird research in Panama. Terry has led group trips to Panama for the last 8 years and finds her true joy lies in enabling others to experience and understand the natural world. Terry has lived in Albuquerque for the last 16 years and adores the wide-open spaces and the surprises that come with living in the Land of Enchantment.

**Paul Pisano** has supported ANS since 1977 when he started as a volunteer at the Audubon Bookshop in Georgetown at the age of 14. Over the years he has since led many field trips and forays for the Audubon Naturalist Society and has traveled in 40 countries throughout the world. He has led ANS Nature Travel trips to Honduras in 2015 and Florida in 2018.