

Randall Davey Audubon Center & Sanctuary

“Where birds thrive, people prosper.”

The Randall Davey Audubon Center & Sanctuary is nestled at the edge of the National Forest and upper Santa Fe River Watershed and encompasses an area of 135 acres owned by the Audubon Society. The watershed expanse is comprised of piñon/juniper, ponderosa pine and mixed spruce-fir, and includes 525 acres of the Santa Fe Canyon Preserve which contains a bosque of cottonwood and willow trees, and beaver ponds.

In 1735, Manuel Trujillo petitioned for a land grant from Spain and was awarded the Talaya Grant, which includes the area that is now the Audubon Center & Sanctuary. A sawmill, powered by the Santa Fe River, was constructed in 1847 by the U.S. Army. It was the first sawmill in New Mexico territory to provide lumber for the military assembly stationed at Fort Marcy.

By 1852, the sawmill had been converted to a gristmill, and a trapper and trader from St. Louis, Colonel Ceran St. Vrain, purchased the property for \$500 at a public auction. The land was then transferred a few times to different owners before Randall Davey bought the property in 1920, from the Martinez family. In 1847, Davey converted the mill into a home and studio, where he created works of modern art including skilled painting, printmaking, and sculpture until his death in 1964.

The Randall Davey House was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1970. Heirs of Randall Davey donated the property in 1983 to the National Audubon Society, so that the area would be preserved as a wildlife sanctuary and used as an educational, cultural, and historical center. Over 10,000 individuals visit annually to explore the walking trails as well as Davey's works of art, his antique furnishings, and personal memorabilia which are exhibited in the historic house and accessible to the public during special historic tours.

The Sanctuary provides a protected space for local plants, animals, and migratory visitors. Approximately 190 species of birds have been found in the various ecosystems of the sanctuary. Protection of native species of plants as food, nesting material and habitat for birds, is part of the Audubon's mission. In 2003, the Audubon partnered with the Santa Fe Master Gardener Association to create organic and sustainable gardens at the Center & Sanctuary that showcases native and xeric plants which attract bees, butterflies and insects. Some of the native plants at the Center & Sanctuary include Beebalm (*Monarda fistulosa*), Desert Four O'clock (*Mirabilis multiflora*), and Wild Hyssop (*Agastache cana*). Shrubs include Fernbush (*Chamaebatiaria Millefolium*) and Golden Currant (*Ribes aereum*).

Western rivers, such as the Rio Grande, the Colorado River, and their tributaries, provide critical drinking water for millions of people, sustain food production in the Southwest region, offer recreation and tourism, as well as critical habitat for wildlife. Due to the increasing value of water and prolonged drought in the Southwest, some farmers have sold their water rights to upstream urban centers, industry and mining companies. The result of water transfers, mega industries and high population demands for water in major cities is diminishing streamflow.

In September 2020, a mass die-off of songbirds occurred across several states in the south-western United States. According to the USGS National Wildlife Health Center's necropsy of thousands of songbirds that died, 80% showed signs of emaciation caused by long-term starvation. Unseasonably cold weather, linked to the climate crisis, was a factor in the mass die-off event according to scientists.

Biologists noticed that most carcasses found in New Mexico, Colorado, Texas, Arizona and Nebraska were insectivores and long-distance migratory birds, such as flycatchers, swallows and warblers.

Hundreds of thousands of birds may have died in the severe weather event. The USGS investigation of birds that died, showed that the muscles controlling the birds' wings were severely shrunken, blood was found in their intestinal tract, many had kidney failure, as well as an overall loss of body fat. The sudden and severe weather event may have forced birds to migrate prior to being ready, or perhaps impacted their access to food sources along their migration journey.

Scientists speculated whether wildfires in California may have caused birds to re-route their migration path inland over the Chihuahuan desert; however the necropsies of these birds did not show smoke damage in their lungs. Tests for contagious bacterial and viral diseases, parasites, and pesticide poisoning were also run—all of which came back negative.

As large-scale mass mortality wildlife events are happening more frequently, creating and maintaining landscapes for birds and other wildlife with native plants is important. Preserving critical habitat, clean water, and food sources sustains the biodiversity of the region, and allows for the enjoyment and education of the natural environment for thousands of people.

Sources:

1. [Visiting the Randall Davey Audubon Center & Sanctuary | Audubon New Mexico](#)
2. [The Historic Property | Randall Davey Audubon Center & Sanctuary](#)
3. *Samuel Larcombe (May 14, 1970). "National Register of Historic Places Inventory/Nomination: Randall Davey House". National Park Service. Retrieved July 8, 2019.*
4. [Native Plants for Birds | Randall Davey Audubon Center & Sanctuary](#)
5. [Mass die-off of birds in south-western US 'caused by starvation' | Birds | The Guardian](#)