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Bob Watson Photography

Reflecting The Spirit of Nature

NATURE - LANDSCAPES - WILDLIFE

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BOSQUE DEL APACHE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE, NEW MIXICO

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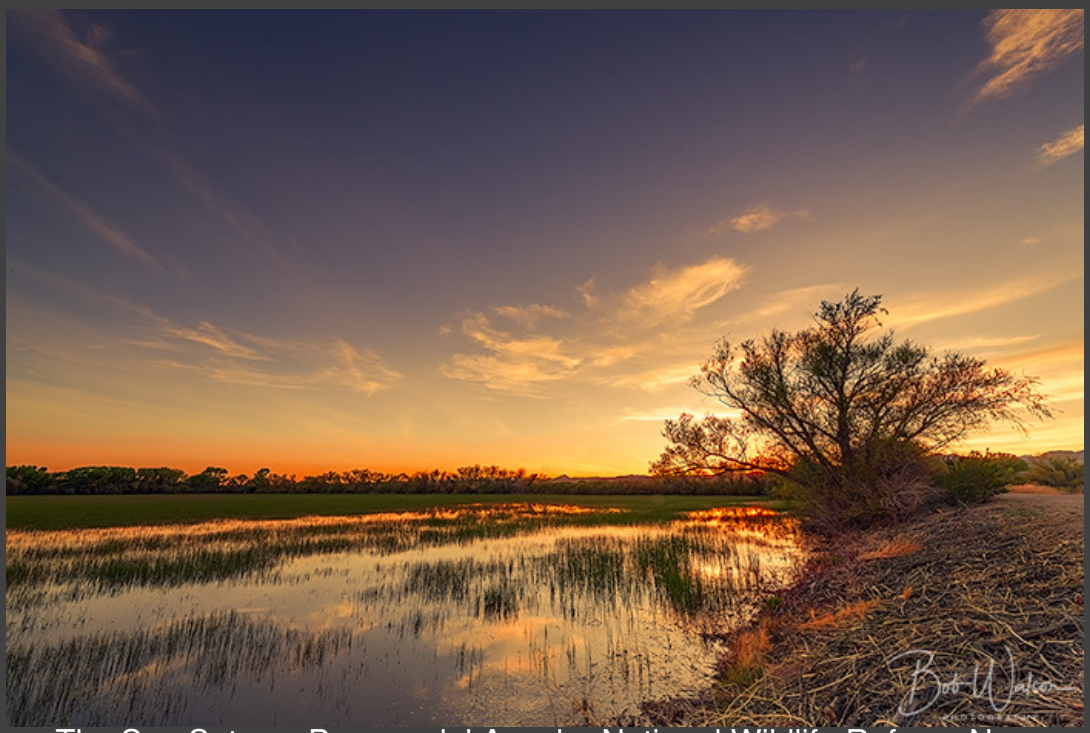

The Sun Sets on Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, New Mexico

Twilight at Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, New Mexico

In my last Monthly Newsletter, I started what will be a few newsletters relating to my visit this spring to New Mexico. Last month, I wrote about my visit to the unique and awesome White Sands National Park. This month I want to share a little with you about my time spent at Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge ("Bosque del Apache NWR").

First, let me say that I did not visit the refuge at the best time of year for observation of birds, which is between early November and mid-February, with the prime time being between mid-November and mid-December. This is when tens of thousands of snow geese, sandhill cranes and approx. 20 species of ducks arrive for the winter. In fact, over half the World's population of sandhill cranes winter here each year. Even though I wasn't there during the height of the bird population, there were still many birds around and it felt like I was in a spiritual place. Not only was the refuge and surroundings beautiful, but teaming with life. Bosque del Apache NWR is on the northern edge of the Chihuahuan desert and this amazing wetland area is a true oasis, and home for all kinds of mammals, reptiles, and fish, in addition to the thousands of waterfowl.

More is necessary relating to the amazing spectacle when tens of thousands of birds come to Bosque del Apache NWR. Near sunrise, imagine the sound and sight of beating wings of flocks of birds, one after another, taking off from the wetlands to fly to one of their many feeding grounds. Near sunset, they return to roost for the night.

Bosque del Apache was the name given this wide flood plain by the early

Spanish explorers, which means “Apache Woods”, and was so named because they were frequently attacked by the Apache Indians that camped beneath the cottonwood trees along the Rio Grande River.

Bosque del Apache NWR is located near the Rio Grande River in central New Mexico, about 90 miles south of Albuquerque. It consists of nearly 60,000 acres, of which 30,000 acres is designated as wilderness. It was established in 1939 to preserve a critical wintering site for waterfowl, as well as a critical stopover site for migrating waterfowl. For those of you not familiar, the U.S. National Wildlife Refuge System is managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Their stated mission is:

“to administer a national network of lands and waters for conservation, management and, where appropriate, restoration of fish, wildlife and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans."

Many naturalists and other nature enthusiasts consider Bosque del Apache NWR to be the crown jewel of the U.S. National Wildlife Refuge System.

Today, Bosque del Apache NWR is one of the most highly managed wildlife refuges in the National System. Prior to the building of dams on the Rio Grande River and other diversion tactics, the flooding in this area occurred naturally, resulting in roosting and feeding grounds. Now, the wetlands are flooded and drained, via channels and canals, to replicate the natural process. Corn and grains are planted to feed the thousands of birds that come here. Although it takes a lot of work and financial resources, the result is astounding.

Although I was not there at the height of the bird population, I still very much enjoyed my visit to Bosque del Apache NWR. I’ve seen the amazing spectacle referred to above at other National Wildlife Refuges, but still, I hope to return to Bosque del Apache NWR to view and photograph again.

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