

WET...

It washed out part of the road on the west edge of Wetland Cell 1 and began draining to the Riverside Drain. Fortunately your partners came to the rescue. The Border Patrol alerted the Roberto Bustamante Wastewater Treatment Plant, and personnel from the Plant dug the leak with dirt fill until we could return the cell to a safer water level. Sincere thanks go to the Border Patrol and the Bustamante Plant for their invaluable help ✈

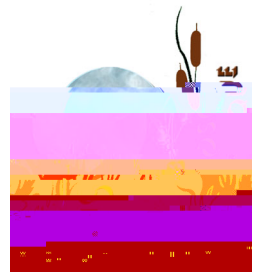
...AND WILD

Conditions at the Park have been great for waterfowl this fall and winter. By mid-November, we were seeing up to 2,000 dabbling ducks, and numbers kept rising. Since early December, 3,000-5,000 ducks have been present, with American Wigeon

and Northern Pintail the most common species. The biggest surprise came November 10-11, when a male **Eurasian Wigeon** visited. It was seen again in early January. As its name implies, this is a bird not often found in far west Texas. It was a first for the Park and represented the 7th documented record of this species for El Paso County.

The water also attracted 2 noteworthy landbirds. **Vermilion Flycatchers** are southwestern birds most often found near water. They nest along the river in Hudspeth County and tend to disperse more widely in the river valley in winter.

This year, we were fortunate to have a 1st-year male Vermilion Flycatcher over-



wintering along the edge of one of the Park's wetland cells.

The other surprising visitors were 4 **Rusty Blackbirds** on December 11. These birds nest in bogs in northern boreal forests. They winter mainly in southern U.S. swamps and are of conservation concern due to significant long-term population declines. Unlike most blackbirds, Rusty Blackbirds are ecological specialists. They are restricted to wooded wetlands and feed mainly on invertebrates. El Paso is well outside their normal range. The birds at Rio Bosque in December were another first for the Park and represented just the 9th county record.

Birds didn't provide all the recent wildlife highlights: On September 27, we had our first **tarantula** sighting at the Park. ✂

WE'RE WIRED!

The long, slow process of making the Rio Bosque visitor center fully operational continues. In October, the electrical system was installed, and work on the water system is expected to start soon. If you've been waiting anxiously for the restrooms to become functional, the day is drawing near! obosque.org