



FRIENDS OF CITY OF ROCKS NEWSLETTER
(Vol. 2, No. 1, March 2018)
MISSION STATEMENT

The purpose of the Friends of City of Rocks State Park, Inc. (<http://www.friendsofcityofrocks.org>) is to help support the New Mexico State Parks in the enrichment of the park area. Specifically, the Friends aim to enhance, preserve and promote park use, to participate in nature as responsible stewards of the earth, to create an awareness of the wonder, fragility and importance of the park, to develop and improve existing education/interpretive programs, to develop and improve public awareness of the park, and to encourage public participation and/or membership in the Friends group.

BECOME A MEMBER OF THE FRIENDS!

To become a member of the Friends of City of Rocks, a) complete and send in the membership application form at the end of this newsletter, OR b) download, complete and submit a membership application from the Friends website: <http://www.friendsofcityofrocks.org>

NOTE: *If you are already a member of the Friends*, it is time to renew your membership! You can do so using the same form mentioned above.

HELP WANTED!

If you are available to volunteer in the City of Rocks Visitor Center to staff the Friends store, especially during Easter weekend (Mar. 30-Apr. 1 2018), please call the park Visitor's Center (575 536-2800) for more information. If no answer, please leave your name and number and

park staff will promptly return your phone call.

UPCOMING MEETING OF THE FRIENDS

Come join us on Sunday, Mar. 25 2018 for the next meeting of the Friends at "The Patio" restaurant in Hurley, NM between 11:00 AM – noon. The Patio is located at 100 Cortez Ave., across the street from the post office. During this meeting, we will discuss potential projects for the Friends, which might include (but are not limited to):

- Management of the Botanical Gardens
- Presentations on stars, geology, cultural history, wildlife, etc.
- Fund-raising (Bake Sales, participation in "Give Grandly", etc.)

- “City of Rocks Days” in May to celebrate park establishment, perhaps on Mother’s Day
- Participants are invited to stay for lunch after the meeting
- Adopting a nearby highway for cleanup



Photo of “Adopt-A-Highway” sign along Hwy 61 by Shela Delong

SUMMARY OF 2ND GENERAL MEETING OF THE FRIENDS

The second general meeting of Friends of City of Rocks took place at 11:00 AM – noon on Saturday, Jan. 20 2018 at the Patio Restaurant in Hurley, NM.

- The meeting was attended by eight people
- The following potential projects for the Friends were discussed: “Adopt a Highway” for the City of Rocks entrance road, Botanical Garden maintenance, application for “Dark Sky” status, application for 501-3c status
- The following people were elected officers of Friends of City of Rocks: President: Tim Geddes; Vice-President: William (Bill) Norris;

Secretary: Gary Woollen; Treasurer: Gary Woollen.

- Bill will assist Gary with secretarial duties.

RECENT FRIENDS HAPPENINGS

The Friends of City of Rocks State Park have recently purchased the following items to assist with park operations: chainsaw, wood splitter, tires for the Gator trailer, front tires for the tractor, battery for the Gator, hitch for trash compacter, 2" ball for Gator (hitch), bird seed, phone for Visitor Center, plumbing parts for Visitor Center bathroom, battery for tractor, shower curtains, shop tools, and the Orion spotting scope.



Wood Splitter purchased with Friends funds.



Chainsaw purchased with Friends funds.



Numerous parts for the above Gator purchased with funding by the Friends.

FRIENDS OF CITY OF ROCKS STORE

The Friends Store, located in the park Visitor's Center, offers a wide variety of items for sale including t-shirts, caps, food items, toiletries, souvenirs, etc.



WISH LIST

One way to contribute to general park operations is through donation of essential equipment and supplies. For example, park personnel and volunteers greatly appreciate a recent donation by Steve Collie and Susan Mosely of a freezer to keep ice for the park. ☺



The following is a “wish list” of items that would benefit the park:

- **Another freezer to increase capacity for ice storage.**
- **Solar panels and batteries to power the park Visitor's Center and well pumps**
- **Remote “game cameras” to photograph hard to spot park wildlife**
- **Bird feeders**
- **Emergency food supplies**
- **Debit and credit card device connected to a smart phone to aid in Visitor Center gift shop sales transactions**
- **Microphone to help astronomers talk at star parties**
- **New batteries for the Orion observatory**
- **New video at the Visitor Center to replace and update the present 20 year old video.**
- **FIREWOOD. This is by far the most popular item for sale at the Visitor's Center gift shop.**

May 14 – City of Rocks Days

**CITY OF ROCKS PARK MANAGER
GABRIEL MEDRANO HONORED
WITH GOVERNOR'S AWARD**



FACEBOOK AND WEBSITE

Our Facebook page and website (<http://www.friendsofcityofrocks.org>) will keep everyone informed on all the happenings of the Friends group as well as general park happenings. *If there is a cancellation of one of the Star Parties (which are weather dependent) we will post it on both the Friends website and Facebook page.

**UPCOMING EVENTS AT CITY OF
ROCKS STATE PARK (2018)**

Mar. 24 – Nature Hike. Meet at Visitor's Center at 9:00 AM. Please bring plenty of water and snacks. Dogs are welcome on this hike if they are well behaved. Day use fees apply.

Mar. 25 – Friends of City of Rocks General Meeting, to be held at The Patio Restaurant in Hurley, NM between 11 AM-noon.

Apr. 14 – Star Party. Program will start at 8:50 and end at 10:20 PM. It will be held in the Orion Group Area, weather permitting. Day use fees apply.

Apr. 28 – Nature Hike. Meet at Visitor's Center at 8:00 AM. Please bring plenty of water and snacks. Dogs are welcome on this hike if they are well behaved. Day use fees apply.



City of Rocks Park Manager Gabriel Medrano was recently awarded the 2017 New Mexico State Park's Governor's Award, which according to a NM State Parks press release "recognizes an employee who performs duties in a superior manner and who exemplifies, in attitude and action, those traits most desired in the Division." According to this press release, "Gabe took on additional duties and accomplished many important things for his Park and the State of New Mexico."

Congratulations Gabe!

**NEW YEAR'S DAY CIENEGA TRAIL
HIKE**

by Gary Woollen

On January 1st 2018, thirty souls started our 10:00 AM nature hike down to the cienega (Spanish for swamp or marsh). The cienega area was recently traded to City of Rocks State Park by a mining company for state land due to the

fact that an endangered grass (alkali grass, *Puccinellia parishii*) is a resident of the cienega. The Cienega Trail makes a 2-mile round trip that starts about ½ mile into the City of Rocks State Park from the park entrance on Hwy 61.

State government in Santa Fe directed all state parks to begin statewide free New Year's Day hikes at 10:00 AM, so we "late birds" started out to hunt for a few early birds to view. Tony Godfrey, our resident park ornithologist, led this nature hike as he does on our monthly nature hikes. He carried with him the new City of Rocks nature telescope, purchased with Friends of City of Rocks State Park funds. Western New Mexico University botanists William (Bill) Norris and Russ Kleinman hiked in the back.

The botanists discovered a record size Crucifixion Thorn (*Koeberlinia spinosa*), the size of a small tree.



Crucifixion Thorn. Photo by Russ Kleinman.

Tony pointed out pack rat mounds on our route to the marsh area. This rat, true to its name, collects any item on display from our civilization. We crossed the board walk that goes across the southern cienega halfway into our 2-mile hike. In general, few birds were seen during the

hike. Back at the parking lot, with happy hikers and few birds to report, a lone red-tailed hawk circled high.

COMMON SNAKES OF CITY OF ROCKS

by Tim Geddes

The City of Rocks is located in Grant County and is in the Chihuahuan Desert ecoregion. Park vegetation is composed of a mosaic of desert scrub and arid grassland. Creosote bush, "Ephedra", oaks and junipers are common. Dropseed, bluestems, and gramma grasses form an important food base for rats and mice. The diversity of plants provide habitat for a wealth of insects that are an energy source for the dozens of lizard species that live in the park. Snakes are major predators in the desert ecosystem.

Probably the most abundant snake in the park is the gopher or bull snake. It often attains the length of five feet or more. These snakes vary in temperament. Most are docile but others are prone to bite. Tail shaking and hissing are common defensive behaviors. This snake feeds on rodents, birds, and their eggs. Young specimens also eat lizards and insects. I have heard that gopher snakes keep rattlesnakes away but I don't know the basis of that story. Both species do compete for the same prey however. Gopher snakes lay between two and two dozen eggs in summer. The large young may measure up to twenty inches in length.

The much-feared western diamondback rattlesnake is very common. Its large size and hemotoxic venom can cause a grave case of

snakebite. The record size is seven feet but most observed at the park are two and a half to four feet in length. These rattlers prey on rodents and lizards. Rattlesnakes are pit-vipers with a heat sensitive pit between the eye and the nostril. They can detect warm-blooded prey in the dark. All North American pit-vipers are live bearing, the young being retained in the oviducts until birth. Diamondbacks have the reputation for aggressive behavior but most individuals seek to avoid conflict and quickly crawl away if given a chance.

The fastest snakes in the park are two members of the genus “Masticophis”. The name means whipsnake and these snakes are indeed whip-like in general morphology. The striped whipsnake has yellowish-white stripes running down the length of its chocolate brown body. It reaches a length of four and a half feet. It can appear to move over the ground like a streak. Official measurements of snake speed indicate that they are only going about three miles an hour but that seems a bit slow to me. The coachwhip is a unicolored grey to light tan snake that is four or five feet long when mature. Whipsnakes can run down day active lizards and also feed on other snakes, insects, rodents and any other small animal it can catch. The lens of the eyes of whipsnakes is yellow, like shooting glasses to aid in visual acuity. Whipsnakes are egg layers and the eggs hatch in two or three months. The mother provides no care for her offspring. The young know instinctively how to survive.

The harmless hog-nosed snake is the great bluffer of the park. When threatened the snake spreads its neck, hisses, and makes half-hearted attempts at striking. They seldom bite humans. If the serpent fails to frighten away the threat it plays dead. Even when handled the snake remains limp. When the hog-nosed thinks the coast is clear it will “come back to life” and crawl away. These snakes are rear-fanged with large teeth at the rear of the upper jaw. The fangs may help deflate toads for easier swallowing. They also feed on lizards and mice. Hog-nosed snakes are small burrowing reptiles usually about one and a half feet in length. They are egg-layers and the young may be found in late summer and early fall.



Hognose Snake. Photo by Tim Geddes.

Snakes are an interesting part of the fauna at the City of Rocks. With today’s wealth of books and online sources it’s easy to learn about snakes. Snakes evolved from lizard ancestors about one hundred million years ago and fill an important niche in the ecosystem.

GREAT HORNED OWL

by Tony Godfrey

A familiar sound at the City of Rocks State Park during the twilight hours of dusk and dawn is the loud “*hoot, hoot, hoot*” call of the Great Horned Owl (*Bubo virginianus*). It is a sound not too easily forgotten by our visitors from metropolitan areas. This bulky owl measures about 22 inches tall and has a wingspan of about 50 inches. Its distinctive feature is the two prominent feathered tufts on its head.

Great Horned Owls are monogamous. A pair will stay together on the same territory for life. If something happens to one of the pair, the remaining survivor may find another mate. One to four eggs are usually laid, with two being the most common. Only the female will incubate the eggs. The male will bring food prey to the female and to the chicks once they have hatched.

The diet of the City of Rocks owls consists of about 90 percent mammals and 10 percent birds. Occasionally, a snake or lizard may be part of its diet. Rock Squirrels, Desert Cottontails, and Black-tailed Jackrabbits will be the main menu. However, we have had the occasional report of a missing small dog during the night!

The City of Rocks hosts two pairs of Great Horned Owls. One pair resides in the main area of rocks, the other along the Cienega Trail. Great Horned Owls are early nesters. They typically mate in February and the female can be seen sitting on the eggs in March. The young chicks will leave the nest by the end of April.

Under no circumstances should you disturb an owl on its nest. Always observe from a distance and do not make any loud noises. If the female is forced to fly from the nest, the eggs or chicks are left vulnerable to ravens. A recent problem that we have encountered at the park is the popularity of people flying drones. This is one of the reasons that the park has enforced a NO DRONE ZONE.



A male Great Horned Owl perched on a boulder. Photo by Tony Godfrey



A female Great Horned Owl with its two chicks on a rock ledge. Note: This image was taken a good distance from the nest with a telephoto lens. Photo by Tony Godfrey.

Membership Application
Friends of City of Rocks State Park, Inc. (FCR)

FCR is a non profit 501(c)3 organization dedicated to enhance, preserve and promote the Park use. Your contribution and membership will give you the satisfaction of helping preserve and protect one of the most beautiful places on the planet.

New Renewal

Name(s) _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Phone _____ E-Mail _____

Yes, I want to support FCR. Enclosed is my annual membership dues. Dues and donations are tax deductible.

*ACTIVE MEMBER: (Voting)

- _____ \$15 Individual
- _____ \$20 Family
- _____ \$10 Senior (single or couple)
- _____ \$500 Lifetime

SPONSOR: (Non voting)

- _____ \$25 Friend
- _____ \$50 Good Friend
- _____ \$75 Very Good Friend
- _____ \$100 Best Friend
- _____ Over \$100 Special Friend

In addition to my dues, I enclose \$ _____, as a donation.(optional)

*Active dues paying members are those individuals who are entitled to vote at annual meetings and MUST participate in at least one of the following. Please check at least one of the following.

_____ hospitality _____ newsletter _____ programs _____ membership _____ publicity
_____ garden care _____ fund-raising _____ events _____ scrapbook _____ officer

Active Members receive free day admittance to City of Rocks State Park.

Thank you for your support and interest. Together we can create an awareness of the wonder, fragility, and importance of City of Rocks State Park.

Please send your check to: Friends of City of Rocks State Park, Inc.
P.O. Box 50
Faywood, NM
88034

Upon receipt, you will receive a welcome letter, receipt, and membership card. For further information or questions, please call 1-228-363-1403.

Official use only

Date Received: _____ Ck# _____ cash _____ Membership card _____

