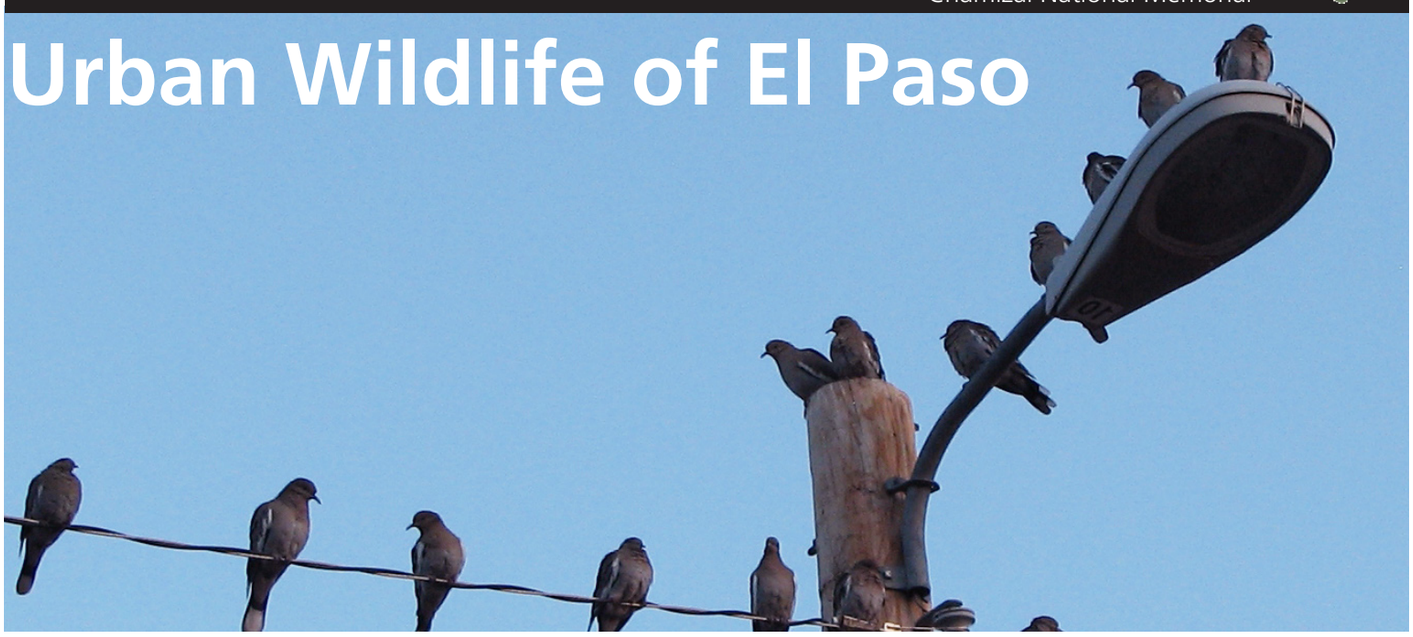
Chamizal

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Chamizal National Memorial

Urban Wildlife of El Paso



The kingdom of life knows no boundaries. In the twin desert metropolises of El Paso-Ciudad Juarez, many animals thrive. If you pause for just a moment, the animal kingdom might open up to you. Below is a description of wild animals that can be commonly seen at Chamizal National Memorial, in El Paso, and across the river in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico.

Great-tailed Grackle
Quiscalus mexicanus

Resembling the common raven but smaller and with a rather long tail, the great-tailed grackle originated in Central America. For the past several decades, it has been expanding its range northward into Mexico and now lives throughout a large portion of the western U.S. The great-tailed grackle has adapted to our wide-scale irrigation systems and landscaped yards. They thrive in the urban environment and live in El Paso and Ciudad Juarez year-round. Considered a noisy bird, the great-tailed grackle makes a variety of sounds.

American Robin
Turdus migratorius

Although some robins remain in the same habitat year-round, the robins you see in El Paso migrate. Our robins winter in southern Mexico, travel northward in spring, spend summer in the United States and Canada, and finally, fly back to Mexico in the fall. In El Paso, the first robin arrives in February. The robin can be distinguished by its red underbelly. It eats mainly worms and fruit. Robins make a “cheery carol,” and are often the first bird chirping at dawn.

Mourning Dove
Zenaida macroura

One of the most common birds of North American cities, the mourning dove is even more abundant open areas. Light grey and brown in color, this dove is commonly hunted for food and sport. Even so, there is still a large population of this bird due to the fact that pairs produce many offspring. The mourning dove lives in El Paso year-round. It is the closest relative of the passenger pigeon, which was hunted to extinction in the early 1900s. The mourning dove makes a soft *coo-oo* sound followed by two or three louder *coos*.

Keep wildlife wild! Don’t feed or approach urban wildlife.

White-winged Dove
Zenaida asiatica

Unlike the mourning dove, the white-winged dove migrates, spending winters in Central America and southern Mexico. Mainly found in the wild, the white-winged dove can also be seen in El Paso. It is a chunky, brownish-grey bird that has a distinct white patch on its wings and a blue eye ring. The bird eats seeds, grains, and fruit, and makes *a hoo-hoo-hoo-hoo* (who-cooks-for-you) sound.

Spotted Ground Squirrel
Spermophilus spilosoma

Compared to other squirrels, the spotted ground squirrel might look colorless and small. But this species of squirrel has adapted almost perfectly to the desert environment of West Texas and Chihuahua (the Mexican state): its light color acts as camouflage. The spotted ground squirrel eats seeds from common desert shrubs and grasses, and it also eats fruits and flowers produced by cacti. Like grizzly and black bears of the northern Rocky Mountains, the spotted ground squirrel hibernates during the coldest part of winter.

Coyote
Canis latrans

Along with the mountain lion, the coyote can be found in practically every part of North America. A member of the canine family, the coyote is smaller than the wolf but larger than the fox. Coyotes can grow up to 25 pounds and they have thick, bushy tails and pointed ears. Coyotes mainly feed on rabbits and rodents, but they will eat just about anything. A fast runner, the coyote has been clocked at over 40 miles per hour.

Photo courtesy of Heather Honeywell

Desert Cottontail
Sylvilagus audubonii

If you see a rabbit speeding through a park or school campus, it's probably a desert cottontail. Named for its puffy white tail, the desert cottontail is most active at night. However, it can also be seen in the early morning and late afternoon, when the sun is not quite as fierce. The cottontail is coprophagic, which means that it eats its own feces to get extra nutrients. The rabbit eats mainly grasses, and is itself eaten by rattlesnakes, coyotes, bobcats, and birds of prey. Sometimes the desert cottontail can save itself by running in a zigzag pattern, which confuses its predator. Although it does have many predators, the species' population remains stable because female cottontails produce several young each year.

Photo courtesy of University of Texas at El Paso

Rattlesnake
Crotalus sp.

The Western Diamondback (*Crotalus atrox*) is the most common rattlesnake in West Texas, but the black-tailed rattlesnake (*Crotalus molossus*) can also be seen in the Chihuahuan Desert. Rattlesnakes are grayish brown in color and can be distinguished from other snakes by a rattle at the end of their body. Rattlesnakes hibernate in winter but come out if there is a long warm spell. They are most active in the morning and evening the rest of the year. Their diet consists mainly of rodents and rabbits. Rattlesnakes are preyed on by coyotes and birds of prey. If you see a rattlesnake, leave it alone and give it plenty of room. If bit by a rattlesnake, seek medical attention immediately.

Black-tailed rattlesnake

Did you know...? *There are four species of hummingbirds that migrate through El Paso. To learn more about the hummingbirds of Chamizal National Memorial, pick up a brochure at the visitor center.*