

# **Dripping Springs Natural Area**

## **Watchable Wildlife Site No. 54**

The Chihuahuan desert grasslands meet the Organ Mountains at Dripping Springs Natural Area -- a dramatic locale of immense boulders, rocky peaks, narrow canyons, and open woodlands.

### **120 Years of History**

In the Organ Mountains during the 1870s, a man named Eugene Van Patten built Van Patten's Mountain Camp, later changing the name to Dripping Springs Resort. At the turn of the century, Dripping Springs was a popular spot, drawing such regional celebrities as Pat Garret and Pancho Villa.

However, as the First World War approached, the resort fell on hard times. It was sold to Dr. Nathan Boyd who later converted it to a tuberculosis sanitarium. New structures were built there to provide housing and care for patients. By the late 1940s, the fortunes of the sanitarium changed. After a historic preservation group failed to raise sufficient funds for its purchase, the resort was looted by scavengers for building materials.

The land on which Dripping Springs lies was eventually sold to the Cox family in the early 1950s. The Cox family had a long history of ranching in the Organ Mountains area. Later, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) opted to purchase the property from the Cox family, transferring title to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in exchange for other lands it could sell to recover costs of the purchase. Because of this cooperation between TNC and the BLM, beautiful Dripping Springs is now preserved in perpetuity.

### **Wildlife Viewing**

Because of water which finds its way to the surface there year-round, Dripping Springs is a desert oasis where unique biotic communities thrive.

Any time of year, visitors enjoy excellent viewing of red-tailed hawks and Gambel's quail. There's also a good chance of spotting desert mule deer, coyotes, and rock squirrels. In spring and summer, watch for golden eagles and prairie falcons which occasionally soar overhead. Along the hiking trails, look for black-chinned sparrows, Scott's orioles, canyon wrens, Red-naped sapsuckers, and collared lizards. There are also occasional sightings of mountain lions, of which this area has a viable population. Dripping Springs is also home to a race of the Colorado chipmunk and two threatened species of land snails.

Best wildlife-watching times are mid-week as soon as the area opens. Spring and fall temperatures are most comfortable for wildlife watching, since summer mid-day temperatures can climb above 100 degrees.

Naturally occurring water allows plants like the velvet ash, netleaf hackberry, and rare endemic wildflower species, such as the endangered Organ mountains primrose, to occur here.

### **Facilities at Dripping Springs**

Four hiking trails (Dripping Springs, Crawford, La Cueva, and Fillmore) are maintained for public use, as well as several on-site picnic areas. The A. B. Cox Visitors Center offers visitor maps and features a small garden with native vegetation.

Dripping Springs Natural Area is open seven days a week, every day of the year except Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day. Note: while other trails remain open, the Dripping Springs trail closes daily at 3pm. Day use fee (as of March 1994) is \$3.00. Open 8am - 5pm.

### **Directions**

From I-25 in Las Cruces, take the University Exit. Go east on University Boulevard. The road is first paved, then gravel, back to paved, then returning to gravel, on its nine mile route to the site. Watch for signs for the A. B. Cox Visitors Center. Dripping Springs is owned by the Bureau of Land Management (505-525-4300) and managed in cooperation with The Nature Conservancy (505-522-1219).