

7 Tips for Bosque del Apache

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1 Time your trip right.

Bosque's big attraction is its huge numbers of wintering geese & cranes. Find them at the NWR mid-November through mid-February. However, as the season progresses, refuge managers cut back corn fields & by late-December the birds feed far from the road. That makes good photos tougher to get. An early-autumn visit can result in shots with cottonwood color, but often the bulk of the birds hasn't yet arrived. And timing your trip for the turning of the leaves can prove tricky.

2 Crowd control.

Bosque belongs on many a bucket list. That means peak season crowds can be an issue. Being part of a tour helps minimize some crowd-induced stress since your leader will know just where you need to go and how to jockey for position. The refuge/region hosts an annual Festival of the Cranes during prime photography time— fun, but **super crowded during the festival!!** Doing Bosque in January or February might help avoid some of the masses, but you also won't get the best bird action nor witness the dramatically large flocks.

3 Reserve lodging far ahead of time.

Socorro—about a 20 minute drive from Bosque—is your best bet for lodging. Hotels there fill quickly for the autumn peak season so if you're planning a Bosque trip book that room early! When you do, ask when breakfast is served (*most now offer free breakfast*). You want your tripod in place on the refuge long before sunrise. Many hotels do not start serving breakfast until 7:00 a.m.—that's way too late. (*During my tours, Mary O. usually treats us to coffee & hot cocoa on site to help keep us warm while we wait for sunrise & the morning "blast off."*)

4 Prepare for the cold.

Get the very most from your Bosque experience by getting set up for dawn's "blast off" while it's still pitch dark. Winter in the high New Mexican desert typically means morning temps in the teens. Even if you use a carbon fiber tripod like me (*helps reduce cold transmission*) your equipment will still convey the cold after hours out there shooting so gloves are crucial! You want a pair that protects from the cold while allowing you to quickly adjust settings. Dress in layers so you can unpeel as the weather warms. Afternoon temps usually rise at least into the 50s.

5 Bone up on your flight photography skills.

Want to perfect your flight photography skills? Bosque's the place to do it! Just a couple days on the refuge provides countless opportunities! And don't stop when that light fades as slower shutter speeds & panning with the subject can yield some surprising results! (*LEARN MORE: "7 Tips for Flight Photography"*).

6 Know bird behavior.

The more you know about the birds you'll photograph at Bosque del Apache the more prepared you'll be to capture the moments that make for the best images. Examples: birds take off & land into the wind; ducks usually give a photogenic wing flap after bathing; and, of course, there's that lean cranes do just as they're about to take off.

7 Don't overlook Bosque's other photo-worthy subjects.

Bosque's geese & Sandhill Cranes may star in its show, but the refuge provides many other worthy photo subjects, too. Wildlife abounds here including: waterfowl, raptors, song birds, roadrunners, Gambel's Quail, coyotes (*donning gorgeous winter coats!*), mule deer, & bobcats. Its landscapes—especially those sunrises!—result in the sort of images that make perfect canvases for your walls or to give as gifts.

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Award-winning naturalist photographer, Jeff Parker, leads friendly & informative photo tours & workshops focused on the flora & fauna of North, Central, & South America.



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