

# **SPRING GRAND ARIZONA**

**MAY 10-20, 2009**

**LEADER: BARRY ZIMMER**

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*Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc.*

## **Spring Grand Arizona**

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**Leader: Barry Zimmer**

*Our recent Spring Grand Arizona tour was without doubt one of the most successful of all time. We saw virtually all of the regional specialties, had three Mexican vagrants, and tallied an astonishing ten species of owls and ten hummingbirds. Every day had wonderful highlights, but the second full day was perhaps our best.*

*We began that morning around Green Valley in search of the localized Gilded Flicker. Within minutes a very responsive pair began posing atop a saguaro a short distance away. Common desert species such as Gambel's Quail, Gila Woodpecker, Cactus Wren, and Curve-billed Thrasher vied for our attention. Just down the road, we had wonderful views of roosting Great Horned Owls at 20 feet. Having successfully knocked off Rufous-winged and Botteri's sparrows the previous day, we were able to bypass the grasslands below the Santa Rita Mountains and head directly up to Madera Canyon. A male Flame-colored Tanager (a vagrant from Mexico) had arrived just a few days earlier, so we made that our top priority. Almost immediately upon arriving in the location where the tanager had been seen, we heard its burry robin-like song in a sycamore right over the road. After a few frantic moments, we spotted the bird and enjoyed great scope views. Quickly, a Painted Redstart popped in overhead and was soon joined by an Arizona Woodpecker. The redstart got out of sight before everyone had seen it, so I gave a brief pygmy-owl whistle to coax it back in. Much to my surprise, a Northern Pygmy-Owl responded right over our heads. It was quickly mobbed by Black-throated Gray Warbler, Magnificent and Broad-billed hummingbirds, a Hutton's Vireo, a pair of redstarts, several Bridled Titmice, and a Dusky-capped Flycatcher. We had unbelievable scope views of this hard-to-find owl for over 15 minutes. I was stunned at our luck.*

*We headed down for an early lunch so that we could make an afternoon attempt at a pair of Rufous-capped Warblers (another rarity from Mexico) that had been frequenting nearby Florida Canyon for the past few months. It seemed unlikely that we would have much luck in the heat of the day, but that would be our only chance to check this particular location. The short, but difficult, walk to the warbler locale produced a Black-capped Gnatcatcher (our second Mexican rarity of the day) which gave nice comparisons with a nearby Blue-gray Gnatcatcher pair. This species has become annual in the past decade in Arizona, but is always difficult to find and best considered a bonus on any given trip. We settled in at the warbler spot and crossed our fingers. A pair of Rufous-crowned Sparrows provided excellent views, as did a Canyon Wren and a Western Tanager. After about 20 minutes, I heard the warbler calling just up slope from us. Some got quick views, but the bird disappeared before everyone got on it. Another 15 minutes passed and the bird began singing again. This time we found the pair working along the rock face just to our west. We watched them for several minutes and had repeated superb views. Amazing that we had seen a pair of Rufous-capped Warblers (a first time ever for this tour), a male Flame-colored Tanager, and a Black-capped Gnatcatcher all in about an eight-hour span! Eventually we worked our way down to Nogales where we would be spending the next couple of nights. En route, we added the first Tropical Kingbird of the season in the state, scope views of a perched Gray Hawk, and several Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks. What an amazing day!*

*Of course, this was but one day in a long line of successful days for this trip. The very next day we had prolonged views of three Montezuma Quail at 30 feet, a Five-striped Sparrow less than 15 feet away, another Black-capped Gnatcatcher, Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet, Violet-crowned Hummingbird, and Thick-billed Kingbird. In the Tucson area (and points north) we tallied Common Black-Hawk; Zone-tailed Hawk; Harris's Hawk; Elf, Western Screech, and Whiskered Screech owls; Costa's Hummingbird; and stunning Lazuli Buntings. The Huachuca Mountains near Sierra Vista yielded Spotted Owl (a pair roosting together); Common Poorwill; Lucifer, White-eared, and Blue-throated hummingbirds; Elegant Trogon; Buff-breasted Flycatcher; Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher; Greater Pewee; and a bevy of stunning warblers including the incomparable Red-faced.*

*Finally the Chiricahua Mountains, where we spent three wonderful days, produced such highlights as Flammulated Owl (12 feet away!), a very rare Northern Saw-whet Owl right overhead, a male Elegant Trogon that posed in the scope for 15 minutes, Mexican Chickadee, Crissal Thrasher, Juniper Titmouse, and Black-chinned Sparrow among others.*

*Ten owl species; Ten hummingbird species; Mexican rarities; Arizona specialties. What more could you ask for? This trip had it all.*

#### **ITINERARY:**

- May 10 - afternoon visit to Sonoran Desert Museum, Golf Links Road (29 species)
- May 11 - northwest Tucson, Aravaipa Canyon, Mammoth Sewage Ponds, Sweetwater Wetlands, Madera Canyon, evening owling (74 species; 77 total)
- May 12 - Green Valley, Madera Canyon, Florida Canyon, Rio Rico area (84 species; 119 total)
- May 13 - California Gulch and Ruby Road, Patagonia/ Sonoita Creek area, Paton's yard (79 species; 131 total)
- May 14 - Patagonia Lake State Park, Blue Heaven Road, Sonoita grasslands, Miller Canyon, Ramsey Canyon (Mile Hi Preserve) (86 species; 145 total)
- May 15 - Ramsey Canyon Road, Carr Canyon, Ash Canyon (75 species; 162 total)
- May 16 - Fort Huachuca including Garden Canyon & Scheelite Canyon, Sulphur Springs Valley (Whitewater Draw), State Line Road; evening owling (73 species; 171 total)
- May 17 - Paradise Road, Cave Creek Canyon, Paradise (George Walker House), evening owling (71 species; 177 total)
- May 18 - Portal & State Line Roads, upper elevations of Chiricahua Mts including the "T" junction, Barfoot Park, and Pinery Canyon, Jasper's feeders; evening owling (78 species; 184 total)
- May 19 - Paradise Road, "T" junction and Barfoot Park, Elfrida, Willcox Sewage Pond (Cochise Lake) (77 species; 196 total)
- May 20 - departure for home (196 total species)

#### **KEY:**

T = all areas in and around Tucson, also Aravaipa Canyon

S = Santa Rita Mountains (Madera Canyon), surrounding grasslands, Green Valley,

N = Nogales, Patagonia, Ruby Road

H = Huachuca Mountains, Sonoita grasslands

C = Chiricahua Mountains, Sulphur Springs Valley, Willcox

underlined species represent birds of very uncommon occurrence or species which occur regularly but in such low density as to be easily missed

**bold-faced species** indicate birds of rare, casual, or accidental occurrence

## **BIRDS:**

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck N  
American Wigeon C---one late bird at Willcox  
Mallard T,N,C---including some of the Mexican Duck subspecies  
Cinnamon Teal C  
Green-winged Teal C---late birds at Whitewater & Willcox  
Ring-necked Duck C---very late female at Willcox  
**Bufflehead** N---a female at Patagonia Lake was very aseasonal  
Ruddy Duck N,C---wonderful breeding males with bright blue bills  
Wild Turkey H---the Gould's subspecies  
Scaled Quail H,C---several great views; our first thanks to Don M.  
Gambel's Quail seen daily  
Montezuma Quail N---incredible luck with this easily missed species; we had two males and a female pose for lengthy close views near Pena Blanca Lake; tied for third favorite bird of the tour!  
Pied-billed Grebe N---heard only  
Eared Grebe C  
Neotropic Cormorant N  
Double-crested Cormorant N---nice side-by-side comparison with Neotropics  
Great Blue Heron T,N,C---babies on nests in Aravaipa  
Green Heron N---scope views at Rio Rico  
White-faced Ibis C---great views of breeding-plumaged bird thanks to Julia  
Black Vulture N  
Turkey Vulture seen daily in numbers  
Sharp-shinned Hawk S---seen by some in Madera while I was fixing dinner; late  
Cooper's Hawk N---less numerous than usual with only three seen  
Common Black-Hawk T---nice scope views of two thanks to Gary  
Harris's Hawk T---local, but we had about ten one day  
Gray Hawk N---superb views; five total  
Swainson's Hawk H,C  
Zone-tailed Hawk T,N---only two seen this year, but we had nice scope views of bird on nest and another in flight over Patagonia  
Red-tailed Hawk daily, including one dark morph near Rodeo  
American Kestrel T,S,N,C  
American Coot T,N,C  
Killdeer T,N,C  
Black-necked Stilt T,C  
American Avocet T,C  
Spotted Sandpiper T,N,C  
Willet C---very uncommon migrant here  
**Sanderling** C---very rare were two at Willcox; a tour first and a state bird for me!  
Baird's Sandpiper C---also uncommon  
Stilt Sandpiper C---rare spring migrant; one in stunning breeding plumage at Willcox  
Wilson's Phalarope C---gorgeous breeding plumaged birds  
**Least Tern** C---rare; two at Willcox  
Black Tern C---very uncommon were a dozen or so at Willcox  
Rock Pigeon seen in all urban areas  
Band-tailed Pigeon S,H,C---great views on several occasions; unusually numerous

Eurasian Collared-Dove T,S,N,H,C---a recent arriver in this area; now common in places  
 White-winged Dove seen daily in numbers  
 Mourning Dove seen daily in numbers  
 Inca Dove T,N---only two seen the entire trip  
 Common Ground-Dove N---generally uncommon  
 Greater Roadrunner T,S,N,H,C---seen or heard daily with a total of 14 recorded  
 Barn Owl C---excellent flight views of a pair; our tenth and final owl species  
Flammulated Owl C---after much effort we finally got superb views of one at about 12 feet for ten seconds or so; this species is always the most difficult of all the regular owls to see on this trip; voted the second favorite bird of the tour!  
 Western Screech-Owl S---fantastic views  
 Whiskered Screech-Owl S,C---excellent views from about fifteen feet!  
 Great Horned Owl S,C---nice daytime studies from twenty feet  
Northern Pygmy-Owl H---arguably the best luck ever with this often difficult to find species; we had two very responsive birds---one in Madera and another in Carr; easily missed  
 Elf Owl S---great study at nest hole  
Burrowing Owl T---uncommon & localized  
Spotted Owl H---after a strenuous hike, we were rewarded with unbeatable views of a pair on their day roost  
**Northern Saw-whet Owl** C---totally unexpected and only the second time seen on this tour in the past 25 years; we had one right overhead about fifteen feet away for several minutes; voted the favorite bird of the tour!  
 Lesser Nighthawk S,H,C,  
 Common Poorwill S,H,C---up close and personal  
 Whip-poor-will C---great views of perched bird in daytime at Whitewater where totally unexpected; the Mexican subspecies *arizonae*, already split by some authors  
 White-throated Swift T,S,N,H,C---many nice views  
 Broad-billed Hummingbird S,N,H,C  
**White-eared Hummingbird** H---fantastic male in Miller Canyon; very rare at this season  
 Violet-crowned Hummingbird P---only two seen  
 Blue-throated Hummingbird H,C  
 Magnificent Hummingbird S,H,C---lives up to its name  
Lucifer Hummingbird H--- two females in Ash Canyon (where the species has become somewhat regular in recent years) were a treat  
 Black-chinned Hummingbird daily  
 Anna's Hummingbird N,H  
Costa's Hummingbird T---three at the desert museum and one at California Gulch  
 Broad-tailed Hummingbird H,C  
 Elegant Trogon H,C---great, prolonged scope views of a male in the Chiricahuas  
 Acorn Woodpecker seen every day except the first afternoon  
 Gila Woodpecker T,S,N,H  
 Ladder-backed Woodpecker T,S,N,H,C---several excellent views  
 Hairy Woodpecker C  
Arizona Woodpecker S,H,C---several nice views of this uncommon species; often hard to find  
 Northern Flicker N,H,C---red-shafted variety; seemed scarcer than usual  
 Gilded Flicker S---cooperative pair in Green Valley  
 Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet N---close study  
 Olive-sided Flycatcher H---migrant in Carr Canyon

Greater Pewee H---five seen  
 Western Wood-Pewee S,N,H,C  
Hammond's Flycatcher H,C---late migrants  
 Pacific-slope Flycatcher S---migrant  
 Cordilleran Flycatcher N---scarcer than usual  
 Buff-breasted Flycatcher H,C---about five total; a cute easy-to-identify empid  
 Black Phoebe H---much scarcer than usual with only two seen  
 Say's Phoebe T,C---also much scarcer than usual with only four seen  
 Vermilion Flycatcher T,S,N,H,C---always spectacular  
 Dusky-capped Flycatcher S,N,H,C  
 Ash-throated Flycatcher S,N,H,C  
 Brown-crested Flycatcher T,S,N,C  
Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher H,C---only one seen, but a few others heard; always a very late arriver,  
 and we apparently found the first one this spring  
Tropical Kingbird N---one at Rio Rico was a treat, and may have also been the first reported in the  
 state this spring  
 Cassin's Kingbird almost daily  
 Thick-billed Kingbird N---two in Patagonia  
 Western Kingbird T,S,H,C  
 Loggerhead Shrike H,C---declining?  
 Bell's Vireo T,S,N,C  
 Plumbeous Vireo S,H,C  
 Hutton's Vireo S,H,C  
 Warbling Vireo N,H,C  
 Steller's Jay H,C---subspecies *macrolopha*  
 Western Scrub-Jay H,C---subspecies *woodhouseii*  
 Mexican Jay S,N,H,C---subspecies *arizonae*  
 Chihuahuan Raven S,H,C  
 Common Raven T,S,N,H,C  
 Horned Lark H,C---better views than normal  
 Violet-green Swallow H,C  
 Northern Rough-winged Swallow T,N  
 Bank Swallow T,N  
 Cliff Swallow N  
 Barn Swallow almost daily  
 Mexican Chickadee C---scarcer than usual, but good views in Pinery  
 Bridled Titmouse S,N,H,C---many great views of this cute species  
Juniper Titmouse C  
 Verdin T,S,N---scarcer than normal  
 Bushtit N,H,C---a general consensus group favorite!  
 Red-breasted Nuthatch C  
 White-breasted Nuthatch S,N,H,C  
 Pygmy Nuthatch C  
 Brown Creeper H,C  
 Cactus Wren almost daily  
 Rock Wren N  
 Canyon Wren S,N,H,C  
 Bewick's Wren T,S,N,H,C

House Wren S,C  
 Blue-gray Gnatcatcher S,C  
 Black-tailed Gnatcatcher T,C---especially well the next to last morning  
**Black-capped Gnatcatcher** S,N---two different sightings--a female in Florida Canyon and a very close male in California Gulch; increasing but still best considered an unexpected vagrant  
 Swainson's Thrush S,H---migrants  
 Hermit Thrush H,C---heard only  
 American Robin H,C  
 Northern Mockingbird daily  
Bendire's Thrasher C---always tough but we had great views in the Sulphur Springs Valley  
 Curve-billed Thrasher daily  
Crissal Thrasher S,C---pair near Portal; generally skulky and elusive  
 European Starling T,S,N  
 Phainopepla T,S,N  
 Olive Warbler C---adult male in the Chiricahuas was heard by all, but only seen by part of the group (this was in large part due to a recorder malfunction)  
 Virginia's Warbler H---only two seen, both rather poorly  
 Lucy's Warbler T,S,N  
 Yellow Warbler T,N,H,C  
 Yellow-rumped Warbler T,S,N,H,C---Audubon's types  
 Black-throated Gray Warbler S,H,C--- many great views  
 Townsend's Warbler S,N,H,C---migrants  
 Grace's Warbler H,C---several nice studies  
MacGillivray's Warbler S---skulky migrant  
 Common Yellowthroat T,N  
**Rufous-capped Warbler** S---a pair in Florida Canyon provided a tour first and after much patience gave us great views; tied for third favorite bird of the tour!  
 Wilson's Warbler migrants scattered throughout  
 Red-faced Warbler H,C---stunning!  
 Painted Redstart S,H,C---always spectacular  
 Yellow-breasted Chat N---great views at Paton's  
 Hepatic Tanager S,N,H,C  
 Summer Tanager T,S,N  
 Western Tanager almost daily  
**Flame-colored Tanager** S---wonderful male in Madera provided great views (thanks to Marilee's spotting); casual in this country  
 Spotted Towhee H  
 Canyon Towhee S,N,H,C  
 Abert's Towhee T,N,C  
 Rufous-winged Sparrow T,N---very good views of this localized species  
Botteri's Sparrow S---prolonged scope study; not necessarily to be expected on a spring trip; subspecies *arizonae*  
 Rufous-crowned Sparrow S,N,H,C---subspecies *eremoeca*  
Five-striped Sparrow N---unsurpassed views in California Gulch; extremely localized  
 Chipping Sparrow C  
Black-chinned Sparrow C---one near Paradise; often hard to find  
 Lark Sparrow T,N,H,C  
 Black-throated Sparrow S,N,C---the handsomest sparrow?

Grasshopper Sparrow H---very good views of a couple near Sonoita; uncommon breeder; subspecies  
*ammolegus*  
 Song Sparrow T,N,H---subspecies *saltonis*  
 White-crowned Sparrow N,C---a few remnant migrants of the black-lored (*oriantha*) variety  
 Yellow-eyed Junco H,C---more numerous than usual with many great studies  
 Northern Cardinal almost daily; the longer crested, brighter red, Arizona subspecies  
 Pyrrhuloxia T,N,C---less numerous than usual, but great vies the last afternoon in the Chiricahuas  
 Black-headed Grosbeak daily  
 Blue Grosbeak T,N,H,C---just arriving  
 Lazuli Bunting T,N,C---several gorgeous males  
Indigo Bunting C---female at Jasper's and male on Paradise Road; unexpected  
 Red-winged Blackbird T,N,C  
 Eastern Meadowlark H,C---the southwestern race *liliana*, a possible future split  
Yellow-headed Blackbird C---male at Whitewater; late  
 Great-tailed Grackle everywhere but the Chiricahuas  
 Bronzed Cowbird N---scarcer than usual with only three seen  
 Brown-headed Cowbird seen daily  
 Hooded Oriole T,S,N,C  
 Bullock's Oriole T,N,H,C  
 Scott's Oriole S,C---great views  
 House Finch seen daily  
 Pine Siskin S,N,H,C---late migrants; unusually numerous  
 Lesser Goldfinch almost daily; unusually numerous  
 House Sparrow seen daily

total species - 196

**MAMMALS:** total species - 18

Rock Squirrel  
 Apache (Mexican) Fox Squirrel---much more numerous than usual  
 Arizona Gray Squirrel  
 Round-tailed Ground Squirrel  
 Harris's Antelope Squirrel  
 kangaroo rat species---either Merriam's or Ord's  
 cotton rat species---probably Arizona Cotton Rat  
 Valley Pocket Gopher  
 Cliff Chipmunk---ridiculous numbers of this usually uncommon species  
 Desert Cottontail  
 Eastern Cottontail  
 Black-tailed Jackrabbit  
Bobcat---seen by some in Madera  
 Javelina (Collared Peccary)  
 White-tailed Deer  
 Pronghorn  
 bat species---at least two different sizes, including a quite large one near Rodeo

**Reptiles & Amphibians:** total species - 13

Tiger (Checkered) Whiptail  
Sonoran Spotted Whiptail  
Desert Grassland whiptail  
Clark's Spiny Lizard  
Yarrow's (Mountain) Spiny Lizard  
Ornate Tree Lizard  
Selvin's Bunch Grass Lizard---uncommon  
Striped Plateau Lizard  
Sonoran Spiny-tailed Iguana---escaped population at desert museum  
Gopher Snake  
Spiny Soft-shelled Turtle  
Red-eared Slider  
Bullfrog---scope views

**Butterflies:** total species - 18

Two-tailed Swallowtail  
Pipevine Swallowtail  
Giant Swallowtail  
Diana  
Sleepy Orange  
Clouded Sulphur  
Mexican Yellow  
Cabbage White  
Empress Leilia  
California (Arizona?) Sister---possibly just split  
Dark Buckeye  
Queen  
Reakirt's Blue  
Marine Blue  
Texan Crescent  
Mylitta Crescent  
duskywing species---(Mournful or Funereal)  
Silver-spotted Skipper

**Significant others:**

Tarantula Hawk (Wasp)  
hot apple pie in Nogales  
milk shakes at The Diner  
the adventures of Strickland  
Perly returns  
the painful, nonstop barrage of SW at her hummingbird clinic---well it did provide much joke fodder!