

# **SUMMER ARIZONA**

**JULY 26 – AUGUST 2, 2009**

**LEADER: BRENNAN MULROONEY**

**COMPILED BY: BRENNAN MULROONEY**

**VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS, INC.  
2525 WALLINGWOOD DRIVE, SUITE 1003  
AUSTIN, TX 78746  
WWW.VENTBIRD.COM**

## **ARIZONA HUMMINGBIRDS JULY 26 – AUGUST 2, 2009**

**Leader: Brennan Mulrooney**

A summer trip to Southeast Arizona is a pilgrimage that every North American birder should make. Your non-birding friends will think you're crazy (Arizona? In August?), but you will know better. Late July/early August is the beginning of the monsoon season, and afternoon thunderstorms and the clouds associated with them can make temperatures downright comfortable. What's really hot is the birding. This time period coincides with a second peak of breeding activity for some species, as well as the beginning of fall migration for northern breeders. This is also a great time to find vagrant birds from Mexico that wander north after they have completed their breeding effort. This year's tour was another great success with 13 species of hummingbirds, 14 species of shorebirds (in Arizona!), 17 species of tyrant flycatchers, 13 species of sparrows (including some of our most striking species), and 4 species of tanagers. Our list included over 20 species of Southeast Arizona specialties and at least 5 genuine rarities, including one that was a first for North America!

The hummingbird show in Southeast Arizona is without equal in the United States. Our trip is scheduled to coincide with the peak of diversity and abundance, and though this year's total numbers weren't huge, the diversity was fantastic. Our list spanned the spectrum: from giant Blue-throated and Magnificent hummingbirds to the tiny Costa's and Calliope, and from the common and widespread Anna's and Black-chinned to the rare and elusive Berylline and White-eared. Lucifer Hummingbird has one of the more intriguing bird names (it's Latin for "light-bearer"), and an adult male of this species certainly lit up one afternoon for us. Though we saw them almost every day, we were repeatedly taken aback by the beauty of the male Broad-billed Hummingbird. The large and striking Violet-crowned Hummingbird was more widespread than usual, and our impressive list of hummers was rounded out by the congeneric Rufous and Broad-tailed.

While the hummingbirds are often the show-stealers at this time of year, any trip to this part of the country is assured of a large dose of specialty birds. No birding destination in the lower 48 boasts such a long list of regional specialties. A few of the highlights were a female Montezuma Quail that just sat at the side of the road for at least 10 minutes, seemingly oblivious to our presence less than 50 feet away; a Whiskered Screech-Owl that perched on a branch not more than 20 feet away, calling to a nearby mate; a gorgeous male Elegant Trogon that circled us for about 20 minutes; many a Bridled Titmouse made a convincing case for being deemed cutest bird in North America (though our Pygmy Nuthatches might have had something to say about that); and speaking of Pygmy Nuthatches, they were the glue that held together an amazing flock in the Chiricahuas that produced Olive Warbler, Grace's Warbler, and Mexican Chickadee. Black-capped Gnatcatcher has gone from being seen as a vagrant to being a low density breeder, and we connected with a very cooperative bird on the first morning. Finally, a scenic hike up Miller Canyon produced a gorgeous Red-faced Warbler, as well as a roosting pair of "Mexican" Spotted Owls.

Although hummingbirds are great fun and regional specialties can pile up the “lifers” in a hurry, for most of us it’s the rarities that really get our hearts pumping. Northern Parula was a nice find, and certainly a regional rarity, but it’s a common bird in the east and certainly wasn’t a lifer for any of us. Short-tailed Hawk, though a first for this tour, has started breeding here, and so our sighting doesn’t quite qualify. The gorgeous male Flame-colored Tanager (now we are getting rarer) seen in Madera Canyon has been seen there reliably for several years now, so it would have almost been a surprise if we hadn’t see one. No, the crowning achievement in the rarity category unquestionably goes to that sneaky little Sinaloa Wren. This was the first ever found in the ABA area, and though it had been in the area for about a year, it had never been easy to see and was a lifer for all of us. It took us two trips and plenty of patience, but eventually we all got glimpses of this littler skulker with the big voice.

All in all we had a fantastic trip with great rarities, spectacular hummingbirds, and superb looks at a multitude of regional specialties. And we even squeezed in a hail storm—in Arizona—in August!

## **ITINERARY:**

**July 26:** Tour orientation followed by an afternoon excursions to the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum and Sweetwater Wetlands then dinner in Tucson

**July 27:** Morning departure from Tucson; birding our way up from Continental into Florida Canyon; lunch in Green Valley followed by a post lunch break, then spent the afternoon and evening in Madera Canyon; night in Green Valley

**July 28:** Early departure from Green Valley heading straight for the Sonoita Creek Preserve in Patagonia for a date with a wren. The rest of the morning was spent at the Patagonia Roadside Rest Area before and the Paton’s feeders before lunch in Patagonia. After lunch we drove through the Sonoita Grasslands en route to Sierra Vista; pre-dinner visit to Ramsey Canyon and Mary Jo’s feeders in Ash Canyon; night in Sierra Vista

**July 29:** Morning excursion to Fort Huachuca with birding in Garden and Sawmill Canyons, lunch in town followed by a break then afternoon visits to Ramsey Canyon and the Beatty’s Guest Ranch in Miller Canyon for some fancy hummingbirds; night in Sierra Vista

**July 30:** Morning birding in upper Miller Canyon followed by birding at the Sierra Vista Environmental Operations Park and the San Pedro House before lunch in Bisbee; afternoon drive to Portal via Stateline Rd and Willow Tank; post dinner poorwill search; night in Portal

**July 31:** Pre-breakfast birding at and around Dave Jasper’s place; after breakfast up into the highlands of the Chiricahua Mts with stops at Onion Saddle, Barfoot Junction and Barfoot Park, then a hike up to Barfoot Lookout just in time to get chased off by a hail storm; return to Portal via Paradise Rd; after a break we returned to Paradise where we spent time at the George Walker House feeders; night drive up Paradise Rd to East Turkey Creek Crossing, returning through Cave Creek Canyon; night in Portal

**Aug 1:** Pre-breakfast birding in and around Rodeo, NM, Stateline Rd, and Willow Tank; post breakfast departure from Portal with a productive stop in Wilcox at Lake Cochise; after lunch in Wilcox we stopped at Saguaro National Park for our last specialty bird of the trip, a very hot Gilded Flicker. Dinner and night in Tucson.

**Aug 2:** Departures for home

## **BIRD LIST**

Note: Species that are underlined are birds of special note that are either rare, local specialties, or are otherwise generally hard to find. Bird List order is according to the 48<sup>th</sup> Supplement to the AOU Check-list as published in *The Auk* 124:1109-1115 (2007).

Abbreviations:

SW – Sweetwater Wetlands

FC – Florida Canyon

MC - Madera Canyon

PRR - Patagonia Roadside Rest

RC - Ramsey Canyon

BGR - Beatty's Guest Ranch, Miller Canyon

AC - Ash Canyon Bed and Breakfast

GC - Garden Canyon

CM - Chiricahua Mountains

LC - Lake Cochise, Wilcox

SNP – Saguaro National Park

## **SWANS, GEESE, AND DUCKS**

Mallard - we saw "Mexican Mallards" at SW

Cinnamon Teal – a large number of teal at SW were mostly if not all this species

Ruddy Duck - about 20 at LC with males in striking breeding colors

## **PHEASANTS, GROUSE AND TURKEYS**

Wild Turkey - seen at MC as well as other places along our route, these are part of a reintroduced population

## **NEW WORLD QUAIL**

Scaled Quail – several at the eastern end of our route

Gambel's Quail - more widespread than the former, seen most days

Montezuma Quail – we were very lucky to spot a single female in the grasslands below Garden Canyon, despite all our waiting and her calling, a male never joined her.

## **GREBES**

Eared Grebe – three at LC, 2 of which were looking sharp in breeding plumage

## **CORMORANTS**

Double-crested Cormorant - a single bird at LC

## **BITTERN AND HERONS**

Great Blue Heron – two at LC

Snowy Egret – a few at LC

Black-crowned Night-Heron – flying around at LC

### **NEW WORLD VULTURES**

Black Vulture – only between Nogales and Patagonia

Turkey Vulture - seen most days

### **HAWKS, EAGLES AND KITES**

Cooper's Hawk - several were seen well perched and in flight

Harris's Hawk – a family group at SW gave us great looks

Gray Hawk - we found a couple of these handsome southwestern specialties

Short-tailed Hawk – a single perched bird seen from Barfoot Lookout was one of a pair that has bred there in recent years. This is an extremely rare bird in the ABA area away from South Florida.

Swainson's Hawk - fairly widespread in the open country

Zone-tailed Hawk - we had a single fledgling near a nest, but never saw the adults

Red-tailed Hawk - we saw a few of the pale bellied "Fuertes" race

Golden Eagle - a soaring pair over Cave Creek Canyon

### **FALCONS**

American Kestrel - a few scattered about

### **RAILS, COOTS, LIMPkin, AND CRANES**

Common Moorhen - SW

American Coot – SW and LC

### **PLOVERS AND SANDPIPERS**

Killdeer – SW and LC

### **AVOCETS AND STILTS**

Black-necked Stilt – SW and LC

American Avocet - several at LC with most showing their lovely breeding colors

### **SANDPIPERS**

Spotted Sandpiper – SW and LC

Greater Yellowlegs - SW

Lesser Yellowlegs - SW

Long-billed Curlew – a large flock at LC

Marbled Godwit – a single bird at LC

Western Sandpiper - a few molting adults at LC

Least Sandpiper – saw as above at LC

Baird's Sandpiper – the most common "peep" at LC

Stilt Sandpiper – two adults molting from breeding plumage at LC

Long-billed Dowitcher - one adult in breeding plumage at LC

Wilson's Phalarope - mostly adults in all different stages of molt

### **GULLS AND TERNS**

Ring-billed Gull - one adult at LC, rare in summer

California Gull – a single ratty looking second year bird at LC

### **PIGEONS AND DOVES**

Rock Pigeon

Band-tailed Pigeon – a single perched bird at Jasper's

Eurasian Collared-Dove – a couple near Tucson and also in Rodeo

White-winged Dove - seen and heard daily  
Mourning Dove - seen daily  
Inca Dove – several at Paton’s and a surprise bird up in RC  
Common Ground-Dove – heard only at Paton’s

## **CUCKOOS**

Yellow-billed Cuckoo – FC and Patagonia  
Greater Roadrunner - we saw several of these charismatic birds along the road, best below Portal

## **OWLS**

Western Screech-Owl – great views below MC  
Whiskered Screech-Owl – great views in MC  
Great Horned Owl – a pair in an abandoned building in San Simon  
Spotted Owl - spectacular daytime views in Miller Canyon and at Barfoot Junction, this is a the  
“Mexican Spotted Owl”, currently considered a subspecies

## **NIGHTJARS**

Lesser Nighthawk – seen briefly at dawn in Green Valley and at dusk in Tucson  
Common Poorwill - we heard several in MC and Portal, but never saw one well on the road  
Whip-poor-will – we heard the “Mexican” form in the CM and MC, the one in MC flew in circles  
over us then disappeared into the trees

## **SWIFTS**

White-throated Swift - best up in CM

**HUMMINGBIRDS:** Arizona is rightly famous for its hummingbird diversity and late July is  
prime time, we saw an impressive 13 species though numbers in general were fairly low

Broad-billed Hummingbird - these striking birds were fairly common and widespread, the adult  
males are truly stunning

White-eared Hummingbird - great luck with this rare species, we had fantastic looks at an adult  
male at the feeders at BGR where it has been annual in recent years

Berylline Hummingbird - we were very fortunate this species at BGR, they are not seen in AZ  
every year, this is the first I have seen in Miller Canyon.

Violet-crowned Hummingbird - one of the more scarce breeding hummingbirds in  
southeast Arizona, we had great looks at the Paton’s feeders and some also saw one  
in Portal

Blue-throated Hummingbird - the largest of the bunch, the huge white cornered black tail is their  
most distinctive trait, great looks at BGR and in Portal

Magnificent Hummingbird - aren’t they all magnificent? But then again, adult males of  
this species are truly breathtaking

Lucifer Hummingbird - another very scarce hummer in Arizona, we had excellent looks at a  
male at the feeders in AC

Black-chinned Hummingbird - perhaps the most common hummer we saw

Anna's Hummingbird - fairly common and widespread at the feeders

Costa's Hummingbird - fairly scarce this far east, we had a female at the Desert Museum

Calliope Hummingbird – we had a male in Portal and a female in Paradise, this species only  
shows up in migration and these were the first fall migrants we heard about

Broad-tailed Hummingbird – the male’s metallic wing trill was distinctive, a few at BGR

Rufous Hummingbird - usually these guys are everywhere! we only saw a couple at scattered  
locations

## **TROGONS**

Elegant Trogon – a pair in Sawmill Canyon were higher than I normally find them

## **WOODPECKERS**

Acorn Woodpecker - these clowns of the oak woodlands were common in the canyons

Gila Woodpecker - fairly common at lower elevations

Ladder-backed Woodpecker – we found a couple in the lowlands

Arizona Woodpecker – we saw at least 5, which is better than average for this inconspicuous specialty

Northern Flicker - the red-shafted form at higher elevations

Gilded Flicker – great looks in SNP

## **TYRANT FLYCATCHERS**

Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet – great looks in Florida Canyon

Greater Pewee – a perched bird below Sawmill Canyon gave us good scope views

Western Wood-Pewee - fairly common in the canyons

Gray Flycatcher – not usually seen in Summer here, we found two, one in the lower CM where they could be breeding, and one down near Rodeo that must have been an early migrant

Cordilleran Flycatcher - first in Patagonia, then better in Miller Canyon

Buff-breasted Flycatcher - this scarce breeder is limited to a few high altitude forests in Southeast Arizona, we found a family group right off the trail in Sawmill

Black Phoebe – SW and again in the Huachucas

Say's Phoebe – one down near Rodeo, NM

Vermilion Flycatcher – best view was a stunning male on our first morning in Continental

Dusky-capped Flycatcher – Dean's favorite bird, these were fairly common in the canyons

Ash-throated Flycatcher - more a bird of open habitats, we only saw a couple

Brown-crested Flycatcher - fairly common in riparian habitats, the biggest *Myiarchus* we saw

Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher - these strikingly patterned birds were uncommon in canyon riparian areas, their squeaky toy calls were a give-away, seen best in the Huachucas

Tropical Kingbird - a very localized breeder in Arizona, our only ones were at SW

Cassin's Kingbird - fairly common and very vocal

Thick-billed Kingbird - a family group at PRR, another very localized breeder in the U.S.

Western Kingbird - quite common, with migrants out in the open desert

## **SHRIKES**

Loggerhead Shrike – a few scattered sightings

## **VIREOS**

Bell's Vireo - very vocal, but not easy to see, we had decent views of a few

Plumbeous Vireo - we had several good looks in the canyons, including one that we watched go to bed in MC

Hutton's Vireo - good looks at this drab little vireo, like a kinglet on steroids...

Warbling Vireo – a rather plain little bird, these were fall migrants

## **CROWS AND JAYS**

Steller's Jay – good looks up near Barfoot Lookout

Western Scrub-Jay – a decent look at a juvenile near Jasper's feeders, but mostly heard only along the road to Paradise

Mexican Jay - “wink! wink!” these vociferous jays were common in the canyons

Chihuahuan Raven – a couple perched in Yuccas south of Portal showed us the white bases to their neck feathers

Common Raven - seemed to be more common than the former

## **LARKS**

Horned Lark – a few out in the open grasslands

## **SWALLOWS**

Purple Martin – we saw them in Saguaro habitat near the Desert Museum and at SNP

Tree Swallow – good views at Willow Tank

Violet-green Swallow - good looks at this western specialty, best on the wires at GC and CM

Northern Rough-winged Swallow - LC

Cliff Swallows - common breeders under the bridges in the area

Barn Swallow - seen most days

## **CHICKADEES AND TITMICE**

Mexican Chickadee – great looks in our super flock at Barfoot Junction

Bridled Titmouse - a strong candidate for cutest bird in North America, we saw several in the lower canyons

Juniper Titmouse – great views as it visited the feeders at the Walker House

## **VERDIN**

Verdin - we saw several of these cute little guys in the drier areas

## **BUSHTIT**

Bushtit - we found a few flocks of these charismatic little fluff balls

## **NUTHATCHES**

White-breasted Nuthatch - fairly common in most of the canyons

Pygmy Nuthatch – many in the super flock

## **CREEPERS**

Brown Creeper – great looks at the “Mexican” race

## **WRENS**

Cactus Wren - common and conspicuous

Rock Wren – good views on Paradise Rd

Canyon Wren – mostly heard these guys, but we had a couple views in the canyons

Sinaloa Wren – it took a bit of time and effort, but it was well worth it for this great rarity. We could hear the bird singing its distinctive song almost continuously, but seeing it was a whole different story. Eventually we all got looks at this first North American record.

Bewick’s Wren – several scattered about

House Wren – unusually scarce this year, we heard one in CM

## **GNATCATCHERS**

Black-tailed Gnatcatcher - seen well below MC and at SNP

Black-capped Gnatcatcher - a very rare bird in the U.S. and not present every year, we had great looks at a vocal individual in Florida Canyon

## **THRUSHES**

Hermit Thrush - great looks in RC

American Robin – scattered sightings at higher elevations

## **MOCKINGBIRDS AND THRASHERS**

Northern Mockingbird - fairly common at lower elevations

Bendire's Thrasher - a cooperative bird in Rodeo showed well for us

Curve-billed Thrasher - common in the lower elevations

Crissal Thrasher – nice views near Rodeo

## **STARLINGS**

European Starling

## **PHAINOPEPLA**

Phainopepla – unusually scarce this year, only seen around Patagonia

## **OLIVE WARBLER**

Olive Warbler - not olive and not a warbler - discuss. We had great looks at an adult male and several female/imm types in the super flock

## **WARBLERS**

Lucy's Warbler – a sneaky individual at San Pedro House

Northern Parula – a rarity in Arizona, we found one in Ramsey Canyon

Yellow Warbler – common in riparian habitats

Black-throated Gray Warbler - several in the canyons

Grace's Warbler - good looks in Sawmill Canyon and elsewhere

Common Yellowthroat – only a few seen around ponds

Red-faced Warbler – fantastic looks at a bird coming in to bathe in the creek in Miller Canyon

Painted Redstart - fairly common in the canyons we saw adults and immatures

Yellow-breasted Chat – probably seen best in Patagonia

## **TANAGERS**

Hepatic Tanager – good looks at several in the canyons

Summer Tanager - heard and saw several in lower elev. riparian zones

Western Tanager - we saw several of these handsome birds

Flame-colored Tanager – this guy put on quite a show for us in MC. We had fantastic looks as it visited the feeder at Madera Kubo.

## **SPARROWS AND ALLIES**

Spotted Towhee - heard more than seen, but they were fairly common in the canyons

Canyon Towhee - more common below the canyons, sharper looking than...

Abert's Towhee - more localized than the former, seen at SW and the Paton's

Rufous-winged Sparrow - a very cooperative bird on our first morning below MC

Cassin's Sparrow – good looks in the grasslands south of Patagonia

Botteri's Sparrow – not much to look at, but a fun song, we had a very responsive bird alongside Cassin's Sparrows south of Patagonia

Rufous-crowned Sparrow – more often heard than seen, singing from rocky canyon sides

Chipping Sparrow – we found a flock along the road to Paradise

Black-chinned Sparrow – an uncommon and localized bird in this area, we finally found a couple near Portal

Lark Sparrow - who said sparrows are drab? we had great looks at several locations

Black-throated Sparrow - even better looking than the former? perhaps

Song Sparrow - seen best at SW

Yellow-eyed Junco – great looks at adults and juvs up in CM

## **CARDINALS AND ALLIES**

Northern Cardinal - fairly common and widespread, formerly the “Long-crested Cardinal”

Pyrrhuloxia - not as common as the former but we had several good looks

Black-headed Grosbeak - almost seen daily

Blue Grosbeak – several good looks at scattered locations  
Lazuli Bunting – great looks at Willow Tank  
Indigo Bunting – an unexpected find in Florida Canyon  
Varied Bunting - great looks in Florida Canyon and also at PRR

### **BLACKBIRDS AND ALLIES**

Red-winged Blackbird - scattered birds where we found water  
Eastern Meadowlark - the distinctive southwestern form, “Lilian’s Meadowlark” we saw a few in various grasslands  
Yellow-headed Blackbird - several in the marsh at the Sierra Vista sewage ponds  
Great-tailed Grackle - these big brutes are common, especially around towns  
Bronzed Cowbird – good looks below MC and at the Paton’s  
Brown-headed Cowbird - all too common and widespread, we were entertained by a juvenile that repeatedly plucked Lesser Goldfinches off the Walker House feeders  
Hooded Oriole - many great looks at males and females  
Bullock’s Oriole - not as common as Hooded, we saw a few in Portal  
Scott’s Oriole - seen best in MC

### **FINCHES**

House Finch - common at seed feeders  
Pine Siskin – good looks at the Walker House feeders  
Lesser Goldfinch - common at feeders

### **OLD WORLD SPARROWS**

House Sparrow

### **MAMMALS**

Kangaroo rat – (*Dipodomys sp.*)  
Desert Cottontail (*Sylvilagus audubonii*)  
Antelope Jackrabbit (*Lepus alleni*) – HUGE EARS  
Black-tailed Jackrabbit (*Lepus californicus*)  
Rock Squirrel (*Spermophilus variegates*)  
Arizona Gray Squirrel (*Sciurus arizonensis*)  
Harris’s Antelope Squirrel (*Ammospermophilus harrisi*)  
Collared Peccary (*Pecari tajacu*) – AKA Javelina, we saw a group in Patagonia  
Coues’ White-tailed Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus couesi*)

### **HERPS**

Desert Spiny Lizard (*Sceloporus magister*) - the lizard with a collar  
Lesser Earless Lizard

### **BUTTERFLIES AND MOTHS**

Pipevine Swallowtail (*Battus philenor*)  
Two-tailed Swallowtail (*Papilio multicaudata*)  
Checkered White (*Pontia protodice*)  
Orange Sulphur (*Colias eurytheme*)  
Southern Dogface (*Zerene cesonia*)  
Sleepy Orange (*Eurema nicippe*)

Spring Azure (*Celastrina ladon*)  
Zela Metalmark (*Emesis zela*)  
Gulf Fritillary (*Agraulis vanillae*)  
Variegated Fritillary (*Euptoieta claudia*)  
Mourning Cloak (*Nymphalis antiopa*)  
Red-spotted Purple (*Limenitis arthemis*)  
California Sister (*Adelpha bredowii*)  
Red Satyr (*Megisto rubricata*)  
Monarch (*Danaus plexippus*)  
Queen (*Danaus gilippus*)  
Dull Firetip (*Pyrrhopyge araxes*)  
Two-spotted Forester (*Alypiodes bimaculata*) - this was the abundant black and white moth

### **OTHER CRITTERS**

Velvet Ant (family Mutillidae) - AKA Cow Killer  
Tarantula Hawk (*Pepsis sp.*) - big black wasp with orange wings and long legs