

WEST TEXAS CIBOLO CREEK LODGE

SEPTEMBER 8-14, 2009

LEADER: BARRY ZIMMER

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Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc.

West Texas: Cibolo Creek Lodge

September 8-14, 2009

Leader: Barry Zimmer

Our third Cibolo Creek Lodge tour was a smashing success. This trip is designed to hit the peak of fall migration in West Texas, while enjoying the comforts of a very luxurious lodge with superb food. During our six days we saw many southwestern resident species and numerous migrants, and also tallied a ridiculous number of rarities. All this while enjoying wonderful fall weather, with highs in the low 80s and nighttime lows in the upper 50s.

Our trip started with an afternoon excursion to McKelligon Canyon where we enjoyed great views of residents such as Scaled Quail, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Rock Wren, and Black-throated and Rufous-crowned sparrows, as well as a migrant Lazuli Bunting and Brewer's Sparrow. We visited my yard to view the hummingbird feeders, seed feeders, and water features. Hummingbirds were plentiful with up close views of Calliope, Broad-tailed, Rufous, and Black-chinned, all present in numbers and zooming about literally within feet of us. Other highlights included Inca Dove, close scope studies of Curve-billed Thrasher, a migrant MacGillivray's Warbler, a bathing Lincoln's Sparrow, and a Hooded Oriole. All this in the first two hours of our trip!

The next morning we went to a nearby sewage pond before heading southeast toward the ranch. Harris's and Swainson's hawks; Gambel's Quail; Baird's, Western, and Least sandpipers; Black-necked Stilt; many Greater Roadrunners (24 for the trip); Green-tailed Towhee; Lark, Clay-colored, and Vesper sparrows; Lark Bunting; Black-headed and Blue grosbeaks; and Yellow-headed Blackbirds were among the more notable species seen. Quick checks of some irrigation impoundments and agricultural lands southeast of town yielded Western and Clark's grebes, American White Pelican, Neotropic Cormorant, more Harris's Hawks, Black Tern, and a wonderful pair of Burrowing Owls. A very rare White-tailed Kite spotted near Valentine en route was the first of our many trip rarities.

We arrived at the ranch late in the afternoon and settled into our luxurious surroundings. While tallying the day's list before dinner, we were interrupted by an Osprey, a Yellow-billed Cuckoo, a Black Phoebe, a Wilson's Warbler (in-hand inspection), and a Summer Tanager. It was hard to get anything done!

Over the next three full days we birded the 25,000-acre ranch property (which includes many springs and oases) and the nearby Davis Mountains, where higher elevation species can be found. Our first day was spent entirely on the western side of the ranch (never venturing more than two miles from the lodge). Highlights included Golden Eagle, three Zone-tailed Hawks (one of which was perched on the ground about 30 feet from our van for over five minutes—the best views of my life!), Common Poorwill, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Gray Flycatcher, abundant Vermilion Flycatchers, Cassin's Kingbird (also very common), great studies of Bell's Vireos, Verdin, Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, numerous Summer and Western (56 total for the trip) tanagers, Cassin's Sparrow, Pyrrhuloxia, Dickcissel, and many more Blue Grosbeaks. Our rarity for

the day was a stunning male Prothonotary Warbler far from the swamps of the southeastern United States.

Day two started off with a bang as we found a Broad-billed Hummingbird at the lodge feeders in with the Rufous, Broad-tailed, and Black-chinneds. This species is rare anywhere in Texas and was a real treat. We tore ourselves away and headed to the Davis Mountains which yielded more excitement, including a prolonged study of an immature Common Black-Hawk, comical Acorn Woodpeckers, Cassin's and Hutton's vireos, Western Scrub-Jay, Black-crested Titmouse, Bushtit, Canyon and Bewick's wrens, gorgeous Western Bluebirds, Townsend's Warbler, Hepatic Tanager (seven seen), Grasshopper Sparrow, and Scott's Oriole. That afternoon, upon returning to the lodge, we discovered yet another rare hummingbird; a male Ruby-throated had joined the other four species. Though common in the east, this species is a super rarity in west Texas.

The next day we birded the eastern portions of the ranch, venturing all of about fifteen miles from our lodge. Scope views of a Western Screech-Owl in its roost hole, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Hermit Thrush, scope views of the always elusive Crissal Thrasher, Yellow-breasted Chat, Varied and Painted buntings (females only), and Orchard Oriole topped the list.

On our last full day we headed back toward El Paso to recheck the local reservoirs and hit migrant traps. En route we enjoyed wonderful studies of Cave Swallows in Marfa and Valentine. At McNary Reservoir we added Eared Grebe and Virginia's Warbler, and discovered a very rare immature Sabine's Gull. This Arctic species was far from its normal haunts, yet another great bonus bird! At Tornillo we found one of my local birding friends watching another Sabine's Gull, this one an adult in full breeding plumage! We were stunned to see two of these birds in one day in Texas. My friend told us that he had also found a Royal Tern at nearby Fort Hancock Reservoir. We quickly loaded up and headed there. This coastal species had never been seen in this region of the state before. We found the bird quickly and had distant scope views of arguably the rarest of all our rarities. One final stop back at the sewage ponds revealed quite a few migrant passerines with many Olive-sided Flycatchers and Western Wood-Pewees present, along with a Willow Flycatcher, Warbling and Plumbeous vireos, three Townsend's Warblers, lots of Wilson's Warblers, another MacGillivray's Warbler, and another Dickcissel. An early Red-naped Sapsucker was unfortunately seen only by me.

We ended our tour with a record-setting 162 species which included six super rarities. We had many tour firsts, which brought the trip cumulative total over the three years to 202 species. We also had nice mammals (including many pronghorns, javelina, and coyote), and nearly 30 species of butterflies. A wild success on all fronts!

ITINERARY:

September 8 - McKelligon Canyon, my yard, Mountain Park (27 species)

September 9 - Fort Bliss Sewage Ponds, Border Highway, Hwy 20 from Tornillo to McNary with stops at Fort Hancock Sewage Ponds & McNary Reservoir, drive to Marfa with roadside birding (83 species; 97 total)

September 10 - all day on west side of Cibolo Creek Ranch including Carrizal Springs, Cibolo Springs, North Springs, and the waterfall area; evening owling (59 species; 115 total)

September 11 - all day in and around the Davis Mountains including Limpia Creek, Davis Mountains State Park, the McDonald Observatory, and the Laurence Wood Picnic area (71 species; 133 total)

September 12 - all day on east side of Cibolo Creek Ranch including La Cienega and La Morita (62 species; 143 total)

September 13 - drive back to El Paso with roadside birding and stops at McNary Reservoir, Fort Hancock Sewage Ponds, Fort Hancock Reservoir, Tornillo Reservoir, Sunland Park bridge, Keystone Heritage Park, Fort Bliss Sewage Ponds (94 species; 162 total)

September 14 - departures for home

KEY:

E = all areas in and around El Paso and down river to McNary

C = Cibolo Creek Ranch

D = Davis Mountains and surrounding grasslands, Marfa

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

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

BIRDS:

Wood Duck E

American Wigeon E

Mallard E---of the "Mexican Duck" subspecies (*diazi*)

Blue-winged Teal C

Cinnamon Teal E

Northern Shoveler E

Northern Pintail E

Green-winged Teal E,C,D

Ruddy Duck E

Scaled Quail E,C

Gambel's Quail E---great views at Fort Bliss

Pied-billed Grebe E,C

Eared Grebe E---two at McNary

Western Grebe E---numerous at McNary

Clark's Grebe E---side-by-side with preceding species

American White Pelican E---lone bird at Tornillo

Neotropic Cormorant E---especially well at Keystone

Double-crested Cormorant E

Great Blue Heron E,C

Great Egret E

Snowy Egret E

Cattle Egret D---lone bird north of Marfa

White-faced Ibis E---single roosting in trees at McNary

Turkey Vulture seen daily in numbers

Osprey E,C---great views of three fishing at one time at lodge pond

White-tailed Kite D---stunning adult near Valentine; very rare here; a tour first

Northern Harrier E,D---early migrants

Cooper's Hawk E,C

Common Black-Hawk D---superb views of lingering immature bird

Harris's Hawk E---unusually numerous with a total of nine seen

Swainson's Hawk E,D---up to 15 in one day

Zone-tailed Hawk C,D---the best views I have ever had of this species; two adults (one of which was perched on the ground 30 feet away for several minutes!) and one immature bird at Carrizal Springs; another adult female overhead along Limpia Creek; voted the favorite bird of the tour

Red-tailed Hawk seen daily, mostly of the *fuertes* race

Golden Eagle C---adult over the waterfall

American Kestrel E,D,C

Peregrine Falcon D---one perched on fence post near Valentine

Common Moorhen E

American Coot E

Killdeer E

Black-necked Stilt E

American Avocet E---four at Keystone

Spotted Sandpiper E

Greater Yellowlegs E

Western Sandpiper E

Least Sandpiper E

Baird's Sandpiper E---nice views at Fort Bliss; generally uncommon

Long-billed Dowitcher E

Ring-billed Gull E---early bird at McNary

Sabine's Gull E---incredibly we had two of these arctic / pelagic birds---a juvenile at McNary and a breeding-plumaged adult at Tornillo; another tour first

Black Tern E---one at McNary

Royal Tern E---among our many rare birds for the trip, this was by far the most unusual---a Trans Pecos first found by Jim at Fort Hancock

Rock Pigeon urban areas throughout

Eurasian Collared-Dove E,D---now present in most towns along our route

White-winged Dove E,D,C

Mourning Dove seen daily in numbers

Inca Dove E---my yard, Marfa, and Fort Hancock

Yellow-billed Cuckoo D,C---singles at the lodge and briefly in Davis Mountains SP; late

Greater Roadrunner E,D---a total of 23 seen with repeated excellent views

Western Screech-Owl C----nice daytime study after missing it owling; difficult at this season

Burrowing Owl E---nice studies of pair at burrow; six total

Common Poorwill C---a very close male on our our owling trip was quite unexpected this late and yet another tour first

Broad-billed Hummingbird C---female at Cibolo feeders; casual in the Trans-Pecos; probably a presidio County first

Ruby-throated Hummingbird C---adult male at Cibolo was probably even rarer than the Broad-billed!

Black-chinned Hummingbird E,C,D---thirty or more in my yard including a couple of adult males

Calliope Hummingbird E---three females in my yard seen very well

Broad-tailed Hummingbird E---three females in my yard

Rufous Hummingbird E---ten at my feeders, and another five or so at Cibolo

Belted Kingfisher C

Golden-fronted Woodpecker C---at the westernmost limit of their range

Acorn Woodpecker D

Ladder-backed Woodpecker E,C,D

Olive-sided Flycatcher C---an impressive eight seen on the trip

Western Wood-Pewee E,C,D---a total of 48 seen

Willow Flycatcher E---one at Fort Bliss the last afternoon
Least Flycatcher C---one just west of La Cienega
 Gray Flycatcher C---one near the waterfall; getting late for this species
 Black Phoebe E,D,C---always one or two around the lodge
 Say's Phoebe E,D,C
 Vermilion Flycatcher C---always around lake at lodge; 53 total seen!
 Ash-throated Flycatcher C---a late bird on the east side of the ranch
 Cassin's Kingbird D,C---up to 30 a day as migrants went through
 Western Kingbird E,D,C---mostly around El Paso but a few elsewhere
 Loggerhead Shrike E,C,D---seen daily in small numbers
 Bell's Vireo C---some still singing; nice views of several; an impressive 24 seen!
 Plumbeous Vireo E---briefly by some the last afternoon
Cassin's Vireo D---two along Limpia Creek; uncommon
Hutton's Vireo D---one near the observatory was a treat!
 Warbling Vireo E,C---nine total
 Western Scrub-Jay D
 Chihuahuan Raven E,D---scarcer than usual
 Common Raven C,D
 Northern Rough-winged Swallow C---four one evening at the lodge
 Bank Swallow D---one in with Barns at Fort Bliss
 Cliff Swallow E
 Cave Swallow D---a flock of 58 or so near Valentine and another four in Marfa provided great studies
 Barn Swallow seen daily
 Black-crested Titmouse D
 Verdin E,C
 Bushtit D---nice views in the state park
 White-breasted Nuthatch D
 Cactus Wren E,D,C
 Rock Wren E,C
 Canyon Wren E,C,D---seen best along Limpia Creek & La Cienega
 Bewick's Wren C,D
 House Wren E,C
 Ruby-crowned Kinglet E,C---a few
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher D---one briefly in the state park
 Black-tailed Gnatcatcher C
 Western Bluebird D---about fifteen with a couple nice males
 Hermit Thrush C---one at La Cienega
 American Robin E---three the last afternoon; generally uncommon in this region
 Northern Mockingbird seen daily
 Curve-billed Thrasher E,C---superb study in my yard
Crissal Thrasher C---nice scope views of one on the east side of the ranch; we missed it in El Paso where it is more expected
 European Starling D---a few only
 Orange-crowned Warbler E---three total
 Virginia's Warbler E---two total
 Yellow Warbler C,D,E---nine total
 Yellow-rumped Warbler E,D---"Audubon's" type; about 32 seen
 Townsend's Warbler D,E---nice views of four total

Prothonotary Warbler C---totally unexpected was a male near Ojo Carrizal, but it proved elusive
 for most; accidental in region
 MacGillivray's Warbler E---three
 Common Yellowthroat E---heard only
 Wilson's Warbler seen daily with 59 total
Yellow-breasted Chat C---seen only by me; heard by others
Hepatic Tanager D---seven total including a striking male
 Summer Tanager C,D---several stunning males
 Western Tanager E,C,D---a very impressive 56 individuals with 2 males seen
 Green-tailed Towhee E---two at the sewage ponds our first morning
 Canyon Towhee C,D---our first spotted by Libby
 Cassin's Sparrow C,D---several nice views
 Rufous-crowned Sparrow E,C,D
 Chipping Sparrow E,C,D---very common
 Clay-colored Sparrow E,C---over 30 seen, some very well
 Brewer's Sparrow E,C---about 12 total
 Vesper Sparrow E,C---our best view thanks to Ruthann; about 23 total
 Lark Sparrow E,C,D---repeated good views
 Black-throated Sparrow E,C---a truly stunning sparrow
 Lark Bunting E,C,D---about a hundred total
Grasshopper Sparrow D---four in grasslands south of Fort Davis were a surprise
 Lincoln's Sparrow E---superb study in my yard
 White-crowned Sparrow E---one immature bird at Fort Bliss
 Northern Cardinal C,D
 Pyrrhuloxia E,C---great views
 Black-headed Grosbeak E,C,D---five total
 Blue Grosbeak E,C,D---31 seen including about four adult males
 Lazuli Bunting E,C---lone females at McKelligon and near La Cienega
Varied Bunting C---scope views of a female on the east side of the ranch; uncommon this late
 Painted Bunting C---one female plumaged bird; surprisingly scarce
Dickcissel C,E---scope study at Cibolo Creek and an even closer bird at Fort Bliss; very uncommon
 fall migrant
 Red-winged Blackbird E,D
 Eastern Meadowlark D,C---the liliana subspecies, a possible future split
 Yellow-headed Blackbird D,C,E---one tree was decorated with 29 birds
 Great-tailed Grackle E,D
 Brown-headed Cowbird D,C
 Orchard Oriole C---two at La Cienega
 Hooded Oriole E---female in my yard; uncommon
 Bullock's Oriole C---female at La Cienega and adult male by me only near Marfa
 Scott's Oriole C---seven total including five nice adult males
 House Finch small numbers most days
 Lesser Goldfinch C,D
 House Sparrow E,D

Total species - 162

Leader only birds:

Violet-green Swallow

Philadelphia Vireo---yet another stray to the region

Mammals: total species -10

Pronghorn---many superb studies; about 45 seen

White-tailed Deer---three in the Chinatis

Desert Cottontail---one at the Fort Bliss sewage Ponds

Black-tailed Jackrabbit---one on our owling trip at Cibolo

Texas Antelope Squirrel---one near La Morita

Rock Squirrel---ten or more scattered around

bat species---smaller ones probably Mexican Free-tailed

Coyote---very close views of one at the sewage ponds

Collared Peccary (Javelina)---23 total including one group on our owling trip with a tiny youngster

Striped Skunk---two at Fort Bliss; one closer than we would have liked!

Introduced mammals: total species - 3

Camel

Scimitar-horned Oryx

Black Buck

Reptiles & Amphibians: total species - 5

Rio Grande Leopard Frog

whiptail species

Greater Earless Lizard

Round-tailed Horned Lizard---in hand inspection of this cute guy

Chihuahuan Collared Lizard---a first for this trip near La Morita

Butterflies: total species - 28

Sleepy Orange

Orange Sulphur

Mexican Yellow

Dainty Sulphur

Cloudless Sulphur

Clouded Sulphur

Cabbage White

Red-spotted Purple

Pipevine Swallowtail

Black Swallowtail

Two-tailed Swallowtail

Western Pygmy Blue

Reakirt's Blue

Ceraunus Blue

Gray Hairstreak

Pearl Crescent
Painted Lady
Common Buckeye
California Sister
Variegated Fritillary
American Snout
Hackberry Butterfly
Queen
Monarch
leafwing species
Orange Skipperling
Common Checkered Skipper
grass skipper species (Fiery?)

Significant others:

Horse Lubber Grasshopper
Pallid-winged Grasshopper
Tarantula---about five seen
Desert Millipede
Praying Mantis
Leaf-footed Bug
Rosie
Texas Longhorns
Marfa Prada