

SPRING GRAND ARIZONA

MAY 10-20, 2011

LEADER: BARRY ZIMMER

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Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc.

Spring Grand Arizona

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Leader: Barry Zimmer

We arrived on the west side of the Chiricahua Mountains at around 7:45 PM in search of the always difficult Flammulated Owl and the recently split Mexican Whip-poor-will. Due to a large fire in the range, we were unable to stay in the Chiricahuas this year and this would be our only chance to go owling in the area. We were coming all the way from Benson (nearly two hours away) and I had warned people that we might be out until midnight. A steady and cool breeze blew down Pinery Canyon, and the initial bursts of Flammulated Owl tape drew no response. I paused, played some whip-poor-will, and then went back to the owl. Almost immediately a Flammulated called back, and within ten seconds it seemed as if he had halved the distance. Suddenly the moonlit sky revealed a small object darting directly over our heads. I spun around and there in a small oak, at eye level and right next to the road, sat our tiny dark-eyed quest. We watched the Flammulated for perhaps 30 seconds, studying every detail, before he took off into the darkness. A total of four minutes had elapsed since we had exited the van! Most years this species requires a few days to track down.

Elated, we headed up the road to try a different spot for the Mexican Whip-poor-will. We got out at an oak-filled draw where I'd had some luck in the past. When the van door was shut and the lights went out, I played the whip-poor-will song. Immediately we spied a fluttering shadow overhead. The flashlight caught the bird hovering about 15 feet directly above us like a giant butterfly. We had superb views for several seconds before he too vanished into the night. The time was 7:58 PM and both targets were under our belts! We headed back to the hotel for a much earlier night than anticipated.

Our entire Spring Grand Arizona tour seemed to be blessed with luck such as this. On our first afternoon at the Sonoran Desert Museum, we had wonderful studies of Costa's Hummingbird, Gilded Flicker, two late Green-tailed Towhees, and a pair of localized Rufous-winged Sparrows among others. The next day we headed north to Aravaipa Canyon in search of Common Black-Hawk, a species not readily found elsewhere in the southeastern corner of the state. Not only did we have superb views of a pair of black-hawks, but in addition we had three Zone-tailed Hawks, two Gray Hawks, and two Harris's Hawks among our nine species of raptors for the day! A pair of Tropical Kingbirds and close views of Botteri's Sparrows were among the afternoon highlights. Evening owling that night yielded the tiny Elf Owl from ten feet, a Northern Pygmy-Owl right overhead, and a pair of Western Screech-Owls almost close enough to touch.

The next morning we headed to Madera Canyon. Migrants seemed to be everywhere with numerous Empidonax flycatchers, Townsend's and Wilson's warblers, Western Tanagers, Black-headed Grosbeaks, and Lazuli Buntings. Magnificent and Broad-billed hummingbirds, Dusky-capped Flycatcher, Bridled Titmouse, Mexican Jay, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Painted Redstart, Hepatic Tanager, and Yellow-eyed Junco—the action was fast and furious. As we were about to leave the canyon, I received a third-hand tip from a friend about a nearby roosting Spotted Owl. I had never seen Spotted Owl in the Santa Rita Mountains before, and the area where we typically get the bird requires a difficult uphill hike. We followed the directions and, a short 150 feet or so from

the parking lot, someone in the group spotted the owl along the edge of the creek bed. It was only about 10 feet off the ground and no more than 30 feet away from us. We had lengthy and completely unobstructed views of this endangered species.

Farther south around Nogales and Patagonia we enjoyed such treats as Golden Eagle, Common Poorwill at our feet, Violet-crowned Hummingbird, Thick-billed Kingbird, Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet, numerous Vermilion Flycatchers, Lucy's Warbler, Canyon and Rock wrens, and an amazing six Five-striped Sparrows (the most I have ever seen on one trip). The Sierra Vista region produced a thirty-minute show from a male Elegant Trogon; Whiskered Screech-Owl; Lucifer, Calliope, and Blue-throated hummingbirds; several Arizona Woodpeckers; Greater Pewee; Buff-breasted Flycatcher; Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher; and myriad stunning warblers including Grace's, Olive, and Red-faced. A large black bear in one canyon was a real bonus!

Despite being unable to stay in the Chiricahua Mountains, we were able to bird the west side and added the highly sought Mexican Chickadee, which can be found nowhere else in this country. Another Northern Pygmy-Owl (this one in the scope for 15 minutes at 20 feet!), Pygmy and Red-breasted nuthatches, and more Red-faced Warblers were also seen. We then headed into New Mexico to pick up some other species that we would normally find in the Chiricahuas. After some work we had Gray Flycatcher, Juniper Titmouse, and Black-chinned Sparrow in the bag.

In all we tallied 206 species of birds, including eight owls and nine hummingbirds, and saw virtually all of the southeastern Arizona specialties. We enjoyed unusually cool weather with temperatures reaching 90 degrees only once during our ten days. All in all a splendid trip!

ITINERARY:

- May 10 - afternoon visit to Sonoran Desert Museum (34 species)
- May 11 - northwest Tucson, Aravaipa Canyon, Mammoth Sewage Ponds, Sweetwater Wetlands, evening owling (91 species; 96 total)
- May 12 - grasslands below Madera, Madera Canyon, Rio Rico area (80 species; 130 total)
- May 13 - California Gulch and Ruby Road, Pena Blanca Lake, Patagonia/ Sonoita Creek area, Paton's yard (85 species; 147 total)
- May 14 - Rio Rico ponds, Patagonia Lake State Park, Sonoita grasslands, Ramsey Canyon (Mile Hi Preserve), Ash Canyon (113 species; 167 total)
- May 15 - Carr Canyon, Miller Canyon, evening owling (63 species; 179 total)
- May 16 - Fort Huachuca including Garden Canyon & Huachuca Canyon, Sulphur Springs Valley (Whitewater Draw), Elfrida, Kansas Settlement pond, Cochise Lake (Willcox Twin Lakes) (96 species; 190 total)
- May 17 - west side of Chiricahua Mountains (Pinery Canyon), Cochise Lake, Benson Water Treatment Facility; evening owling (93 species; 199 total)
- May 18 - excursion into New Mexico including Lordsburg, Redrock, the Burro Mountains, and Pinos Altos; afternoon stop at "The Thing" (71 species; 204 total)
- May 19 - Ramsey Canyon, Sonoita Grasslands, Box Canyon, Madera Canyon (74 species; 206 total)
- May 20 - departure for home (206 total species)

KEY:

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

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

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---flock of 100 or more near Rio Rico

American Wigeon two late pairs at Benson

Mallard T,N,C

Cinnamon Teal N,C

Green-winged Teal C---late birds at Willcox

Ruddy Duck T,N,C---wonderful breeding males with bright blue bills

Scaled Quail H,C---especially well near Miller Canyon

Gambel's Quail almost daily

Wild Turkey S,H,C---the Gould's subspecies

Pied-billed Grebe T,N

Least Grebe N---accidental was a pair at Pena Blanca Lake

Neotropic Cormorant N

Double-crested Cormorant N

Great Blue Heron T,N---several on nests

Great Egret N---uncommon

Cattle Egret N

Green Heron N

Black-crowned Night-Heron N---our first spotted by Jerry

White-faced Ibis T,N,C---several nice views of breeding-plumaged birds

Black Vulture N

Turkey Vulture seen daily in numbers

Cooper's Hawk T,S,N,H,C,NM

Common Black-Hawk T,N,NM---great views right overhead; we had five but this species is easily missed; our first spotted by Carolyn R.

Harris's Hawk T,C---localized; scope study; spotted by Carolyn B.

Gray Hawk T,N---superb views; seven total

Swainson's Hawk T,H,C,NM

Zone-tailed Hawk T---three total

Red-tailed Hawk daily

Golden Eagle N---one near California Gulch spotted by Carolyn B.

American Kestrel T,C

Peregrine Falcon C---one in Texas Canyon

Virginia Rail N,C---great views at Whitewater Draw

Common Moorhen T

American Coot T,N,C

Killdeer T,N,C

Black-necked Stilt three at Benson
 American Avocet C---nice studies
 Spotted Sandpiper T,N,C
Willet N---flock of about ten at Willcox spotted by Jerry; rare
 Western Sandpiper C---late bird at Willcox
 Least Sandpiper C---two late birds at Willcox
Baird's Sandpiper C---two at Willcox; very uncommon
 Long-billed Dowitcher C---late
Red-necked Phalarope C---three at Willcox; rare spring migrant
 Wilson's Phalarope T,C---about a hundred at Willcox
 Rock Pigeon seen in all urban areas
 Band-tailed Pigeon N,H,C,NM
 Eurasian Collared-Dove seen daily
 White-winged Dove seen daily in numbers
 Mourning Dove seen daily in numbers
 Inca Dove N---only one the whole trip
 Common Ground-Dove N,C---generally uncommon
 Greater Roadrunner T,N,H,C---seven total
Flammulated Owl C---amazingly we got this species in record time in our one Chiricahua chance at
 owling; excellent views; this species is almost always the most difficult of all the regular owls
 to see on this trip
 Western Screech-Owl S---from fifteen feet!
 Whiskered Screech-Owl S,H---excellent views
 Great Horned Owl C---nice daytime study
Northern Pygmy-Owl S,C---walk away views from about twenty feet, plus another on a night time
 owling trip; easily missed; voted the fourth favorite bird of the tour
 Elf Owl S---great study at nest hole
Burrowing Owl T---uncommon & localized
Spotted Owl S---quite incredibly, a roosting bird was discovered in Madera Canyon the day we were
 there only about 200 feet from a parking lot; we watched it for over twenty minutes completely
 unobstructed and at eye level; WOW!
 Lesser Nighthawk T,S,N
 Common Poorwill S,N---after some effort we had unsurpassed views from about three feet!!!
 Mexican Whip-poor-will C---recently split off from the Eastern Whip-poor-will; right overhead
Vaux's Swift T---three over Sweetwater were a real bonus; rare
 White-throated Swift T,H---much scarcer than usual
 Broad-billed Hummingbird T,S,N,H
 Violet-crowned Hummingbird P---two at Paton's
 Blue-throated Hummingbird H,C
 Magnificent Hummingbird S,H---lives up to its name!
Lucifer Hummingbird H--- male & female in Ash Canyon (where the species has become somewhat
 regular in recent years) were a treat
 Black-chinned Hummingbird S,N,H---nest at Ramsey
 Anna's Hummingbird H---much scarcer than usual
Costa's Hummingbird T---three at the desert museum and one in
Calliope Hummingbird H,S---a rarity in spring; first spotted by Carolyn B.
 Broad-tailed Hummingbird S,N,H,C---our most common hummer this year
Elegant Trogon H---a stunning male in the Huachucas that we followed for about twenty minutes

and had repeated excellent views; voted the second favorite bird of the tour

Acorn Woodpecker S,N,H,C

Gila Woodpecker T,S,N,H

Ladder-backed Woodpecker T,S,N,H,C

Hairy Woodpecker C

Arizona Woodpecker S,H---four total; often hard to find

Northern Flicker S,H,C---red-shafted variety

Gilded Flicker T---cooperative pair near the museum

Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet N,S---close studies; five total

Olive-sided Flycatcher H---late migrants

Greater Pewee H---three total

Western Wood-Pewee S,N,H,C

Hammond's Flycatcher S,H,C---several late migrants

Gray Flycatcher C,NM---one late migrant in the Sulphur Springs Valley and a few breeders in the Burro Mountains

Dusky Flycatcher H,C---three late migrants

Pacific-slope Flycatcher S,N

Cordilleran Flycatcher H,C,NM

Buff-breasted Flycatcher H---about eight in the Huachucas including a pair with a nest; a cute easy-to-identify empid

Black Phoebe N,NM---much scarcer than usual with only three seen

Say's Phoebe N,H,C

Vermilion Flycatcher T,S,N,H,C,NM---always spectacular; nest in Aravaipa

Dusky-capped Flycatcher S,N,H,C

Ash-throated Flycatcher T,S,N,H,C,NM

Brown-crested Flycatcher T,S,N,H

Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher H---only one seen and by some only in flight as it chased an Acorn Woodpecker; always a very late arriver

Tropical Kingbird T,N---pair at Sweetwater where unusual and another at Rio Rico

Cassin's Kingbird T,S,N,H,C

Thick-billed Kingbird N---great, prolonged study of one in Patagonia

Western Kingbird T,S,N,H,C

Loggerhead Shrike H,C---only six seen; declining?

Bell's Vireo T,S,N,NM

Plumbeous Vireo S,N,H,C

Hutton's Vireo S,H,C

Warbling Vireo T,S,N,H,C

Steller's Jay H,C---subspecies *macrolopha*

Western Scrub-Jay H---subspecies *woodhouseii*; a likely future split

Mexican Jay S,N,H,C,NM---subspecies *arizonae*

Chihuahuan Raven H,C,NM

Common Raven daily

Horned Lark T,H,C,NM

Tree Swallow T

Violet-green Swallow T,N,H,C,NM---much more numerous than usual

Northern Rough-winged Swallow T,N,C---ditto

Bank Swallow T,C---also more numerous than usual

Cliff Swallow NM---a colony at Redrock were our only ones of the trip

Barn Swallow almost daily
 Mexican Chickadee C---great views in Pinery from five feet!
 Bridled Titmouse S,N,H,C---many great views of this cute species
Juniper Titmouse NM---after some effort we had very good views in the Burros
 Verdin T,S,N
 Bushtit S,N,H,C
 Red-breasted Nuthatch C
 White-breasted Nuthatch S,N,H,C
 Pygmy Nuthatch C,NM---voted the third favorite bird of the tour; the cutest bird in North America?
 Brown Creeper H,C---a nest in Carr Canyon!
 Cactus Wren T,S,N,C
 Rock Wren N---a very cute family group near Pena Blanca
 Canyon Wren N,H,C---great views
 Bewick's Wren almost daily
 House Wren H,C
 Blue-gray Gnatcatcher S---uncommon
 Ruby-crowned Kinglet S,N,H,C---an unusual number of late migrants
 Swainson's Thrush S,N,H,C---also an unusual number of late migrants
 Hermit Thrush T,S,N,H,C---unusually widespread
 American Robin H,C
 Northern Mockingbird N,H,C,NM
Bendire's Thrasher C---always tough but we had great views in the Sulphur Springs Valley
 Curve-billed Thrasher almost daily
 European Starling T,S,N,H
 Cedar Waxwing S,N---late migrants; first spotted by Jerry
 Phainopepla T,S,N
 Olive Warbler H---beautiful male & female in Carr Canyon
Orange-crowned Warbler S,N,H,C---a total of six; very late
 Virginia's Warbler H---only one seen the whole trip
 Lucy's Warbler T,S,N
 Yellow Warbler T,N,H,NM
 Yellow-rumped Warbler T,S,N,H,C,NM---Audubon's types
 Black-throated Gray Warbler S,H,C,NM--- many great views
 Townsend's Warbler S,N,H,C,NM---a total of 25 was an unusually high count for this tour
Hermit Warbler S,C,H---four total; very uncommon
 Grace's Warbler H,C---several nice studies
 MacGillivray's Warbler T,N,C---four was a high count
 Common Yellowthroat T,N,C
 Wilson's Warbler seen daily with migrants everywhere and unusually common; a high count of **40**
 in one day!; the unofficial tour mascot
 Red-faced Warbler H,C---this stunning species was seen extremely well twice
 Painted Redstart S,H,C---always spectacular
 Yellow-breasted Chat T,N,NM---great views at Patagonia Lake
Green-tailed Towhee T,N,NM---four late migrants
 Spotted Towhee H,C,NM,NM
 Rufous-crowned Sparrow S,N,H,NM---subspecies *eremoeca*
 Canyon Towhee S,N,H,C
 Abert's Towhee T,N,NM

Rufous-winged Sparrow T---very good views of this localized species
Cassin's Sparrow H---one in the Sonoita Grasslands was unexpected at this season
Botteri's Sparrow S---nice studies of three; not necessarily to be expected on a spring trip;
subspecies *arizonae*
Chipping Sparrow S,C,NM
Brewer's Sparrow N,C---two very late individuals seen
Black-chinned Sparrow NM---a few in the Burros; often hard to find
Lark Sparrow S,N,H,C---striking
Black-throated Sparrow T,S,N,H,C,NM---the handsomest sparrow?
Five-striped Sparrow N---unsurpassed views in California Gulch; we had a record setting six total;
can be missed completely; extremely localized
Lark Bunting NM---late individuals near Lordsburg; generally gone by this time
Grasshopper Sparrow H---one near Sonoita; uncommon breeder; subspecies *ammolegus*
Song Sparrow T,N,C---subspecies *saltonis*
Lincoln's Sparrow N,C,NM---late migrants; normally gone by this time
White-crowned Sparrow T,N,C---a few remnant migrants of both the black-lored (*oriantha*) variety
and the white-lored *leucophrys*
Dark-eyed Junco NM---one of the Gray-headed subspecies north of Silver City; not typically seen
on this tour
Yellow-eyed Junco S,H,C---great studies
Hepatic Tanager S,N,H,C
Summer Tanager N,S
Western Tanager daily; an incredible **80** birds estimated for the trip!
Northern Cardinal T,S,N,NM--- the longer crested, brighter red, Arizona subspecies *superbus*
Pyrrhuloxia T,N---exceptionally well at the desert museum; only three seen
Black-headed Grosbeak daily and like the Western Tanager we had exceptional numbers with an
estimated **140** seen!
Blue Grosbeak N,C,NM---just arriving
Lazuli Bunting T,S,N,H,C,NM---impressive numbers of this often missed species as well with an
estimated **20** total
Red-winged Blackbird T,N,C
Eastern Meadowlark H,C---the southwestern race *lilianae*, a possible future split
Western Meadowlark T---one seen by some north of Tucson; very uncommon at this season
Yellow-headed Blackbird C---about 25 at Kansas Settlement and two at Willcox; very uncommon
this late
Great-tailed Grackle daily
Bronzed Cowbird T,S,H---including a male in helicopter display flight
Brown-headed Cowbird daily
Hooded Oriole T,S,N
Bullock's Oriole T,H,C---best near Whitewater Draw
Scott's Oriole S,H---great views
House Finch seen daily
Pine Siskin S,N,H,C---late migrants; unusually numerous
Lesser Goldfinch T,S,N,H,C
House Sparrow seen daily

Total species - 206

MAMMALS: total species - 15+

Rock Squirrel

Arizona Gray Squirrel

Round-tailed Ground Squirrel

Harris's Antelope Squirrel

cotton rat species

Desert Cottontail

Black-tailed Jackrabbit

Antelope Jackrabbit

Javelina (Collared Peccary)---great study in Aravaipa

Gray Fox---outside the Chiricahuas

White-tailed Deer

Mule Deer

Pronghorn---spotted by Stephanie

Black Bear---a big burly individual in Huachuca Canyon only about fifty feet away!

bat species---at least two different sizes

REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS: total species - 10

Sonoran Spotted Whiptail

Clark's Spiny Lizard

Desert Spiny Lizard

Yarrow's (Mountain) Spiny Lizard

Zebra-tailed Lizard

Ornate Tree Lizard

Gopher Snake---a big one in the Burro Mts

Spiny Soft-shelled Turtle

Red-eared Slider

Bullfrog---heard only

BUTTERFLIES: total species - 7

(this list suffered incredibly due to a lack of flowers brought on by the drought)

Pipevine Swallowtail

Sleepy Orange

Western Pygmy Blue

Marine Blue

California (Arizona?) Sister---possibly just split

Queen

duskywing species---(Mournful or Funereal)

SIGNIFICANT OTHERS:

Tarantula Hawk (Wasp)

Flame Skimmer

blue damselfly species

the Border Patrol incident & "Tom Cruise" wannabe

getting the van absolutely blasted by a dust devil!

tales of Cabeza de Vaca

the "Thing"

a vagrant Velociraptor in Benson (we have photographic evidence)