

WINTER NEW MEXICO

JANUARY 6 – 12, 2010

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Once again our Winter New Mexico tour was filled with wonderful highlights. Despite generally cold weather, caused by the massive Arctic front that gripped much of the nation in early January, the birds put on a show. Beginning in El Paso the first afternoon, we enjoyed the amazing spectacle of an estimated 8,000 Yellow-headed Blackbirds coming in to roost in one spot late in the evening. The ground, roofs, and trees were literally covered in black and yellow.

The next day we scoured the river valley and irrigation impoundments southeast of the city and were treated to five species of grebes (including Horned, Eared, Clark's, and Western), side by side comparisons of Ross's and Snow geese, Cinnamon Teal, over 2,000 Common Mergansers in one spot, close views of Hooded and Red-breasted mergansers, perched Golden Eagle and Prairie Falcon, an impressive 13 Harris's Hawks, Gambel's Quail, Greater Roadrunner, Burrowing Owl, roosting Long-eared Owls, Sage and Curve-billed thrashers, and Green-tailed Towhee among others.

On our second full day we headed to the scenically spectacular Organ Mountains east of Las Cruces. A walk through the juniper/oak forest combined with some roadside birding netted such gems as Scaled Quail, another perched Golden Eagle and another Prairie Falcon, Merlin, Juniper Titmouse, superb studies of the generally shy Crissal Thrasher, a Townsend's Solitaire as close as ten feet away, and Black-chinned, Black-throated, Sage, Rufous-crowned, and Brewer's sparrows. A Las Cruces resident invited us into her yard where we watched a stunning male Black-throated Blue Warbler (accidental in the state at any season) coming in to a hummingbird feeder!

As we ventured farther north we began encountering lots of bluebirds. All three species were seen well including up to 120 Westerns in one day and over 60 gorgeous, azure-blue Mountains. Scope views of Ferruginous Hawk (we would see four on the trip) were a highlight for many. Riparian areas along the Rio Grande produced Red-naped Sapsucker, Hairy Woodpecker, Acorn Woodpecker, Bridled Titmouse, Brown Creeper, and Phainopepla. Two very rare Rusty Blackbirds and an equally rare Band-tailed Pigeon were discovered by our group near Hatch. More Sage Thrashers and Mountain Bluebirds were found in the junipers on the west side of Elephant Butte Reservoir, and the lake itself yielded a first year Thayer's Gull and two California Gulls among the more common species.

From there we headed on to world-famous Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge. A corn crop failure had resulted in lower numbers than usual of Sandhill Cranes and geese, but we still had thousands of each including many close up studies. Numbers of Bald Eagles were seen as they sifted through the geese flocks looking for

the weak and injured.

On our last afternoon we headed up to Sandia Crest (at 10,600 feet elevation) east of Albuquerque. Feeders here had a regular parade of Red-breasted Nuthatches, Steller's Jays, and Mountain Chickadees (as well as tassel-eared squirrels), but the real stars were the rosy-finches. All three species (Black, Brown-capped, and Gray-crowned) came in within one minute of our arrival. We enjoyed prolonged views of their frenzied feeding from about 15 feet away! Some of us walked out onto the deck to photograph them and literally had rosy-finches at our feet. A late afternoon visit to the nature center produced a beautiful male Cassin's Finch, more stunning Wood Ducks than we could count, and a flock of over 200 Cackling Geese.

In all we tallied 22 species of waterfowl, 16 species of raptors, and 16 species of sparrows. We also enjoyed wonderful spectacles of large numbers of birds that call the Rio Grande of New Mexico their winter home.

Itinerary:

January 6 - Crossroads Pond, Keystone Heritage Park, Sunland Park area (34 species)

January 7 - Ascarate Lake, Border Hwy, Tornillo Rest stop, Tornillo Reservoir, McNary Reservoir, Fort Hancock desert areas, Rio Bosque Wetlands Park, drive to Las Cruces (87 species; 94 total)

January 8 - Lynn Moseley's house, Aguirre Springs Recreation Area, Mesilla Park, Jornada del Muerto grasslands (54 species; 116 total)

January 9 - Hwys 185 & 187, Percha State Park, Caballo Lake, Animas Creek, Elephant Butte Dam area (86 species; 137 total)

January 10 - Elephant Butte Lake State Park, Water Canyon, Bosque del Apache NWR (80 species; 145 total)

January 11 - Bosque del Apache NWR, Sandia Crest, Rio Grande Nature Center (74 species; 154 total)

January 12 - departures for home (154 species total)

Key:

E = all areas in and around El Paso, including the valley to the southeast from McNary back into town

L = Las Cruces, Organ Mountains, Jornada, Mesilla Valley

P = Hatch, Percha & Caballo State Parks, Animas Creek, Elephant Butte

B = Bosque del Apache NWR

W = Water Canyon

A = Albuquerque, Sandia Crest

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:

Snow Goose E,B---though 20,000 birds were estimated to be at the refuge, we never had more than 5000 in a day; some problem with the corn crop resulted in birds being more spread out than usual; despite that we had superb views including many blue morphs

Ross's Goose E,B--- great comparative views with Snows; several hundred seen

Canada Goose E,B,A

Cackling Goose A---flock of over 200 at the nature center

Wood Duck E,A---stunning views!

Gadwall almost daily

American Wigeon almost daily with over a thousand seen one day

Mallard daily, including some of the "Mexican Duck" subspecies

Cinnamon Teal E---about 20 at Rio Bosque

Northern Shoveler E,P,B,A

Northern Pintail almost daily; over 1000 in one day

Green-winged Teal E,B,A

Canvasback E,B

Redhead E---about ten at Rio Bosque

Ring-necked Duck E,P,B,A

Lesser Scaup E---only eight total

Bufflehead E,P,B---a few most days

Common Goldeneye E---immature male at Ascarate was our only one

Hooded Merganser E,B---five total

Red-breasted Merganser E---three at Ascarate provided superb views

Common Merganser E,P,B---flock of about **2000** at McNary was impressive

Ruddy Duck E

Ring-necked Pheasant B---only two seen this year

Scaled Quail L---prolonged, close views near Organ

Gambel's Quail E,L,P,B---many wonderful views

Pied-billed Grebe E,P,B,A

Horned Grebe E---two at Ascarate were the first of the winter seen in El Paso; rare

Eared Grebe E---mostly at Tornillo Reservoir

Western Grebe E,P

Clark's Grebe E,P--- good comparative views with Westerns

American White Pelican E,P
 Neotropic Cormorant E,B---great views at Ascarate
 Double-crested Cormorant E,P
 Great Blue Heron E,P,B
 Great Egret E
 Snowy Egret E
 Green Heron E---excellent scope study at Keystone
 Black-crowned Night-Heron E---only one seen
Osprey P---one at Elephant Butte Dam was aseasonal
 Bald Eagle P,B---thirteen total
 Northern Harrier E,L,P,B---seen daily
 Cooper's Hawk E,L,P,B---many nice views
Harris's Hawk E---a very impressive 13 birds seen around rio Bosque and Hwy 20
 Red-tailed Hawk seen daily including a couple dark/ rufous morphs and several of the Fuertes race
 Ferruginous Hawk P,B---a total of four seen with fantastic studies north of Hatch; tied for the favorite bird of the tour
Golden Eagle E,L,W---three total including exceptional study of an adult at Aguirre Springs
 American Kestrel seen daily
Merlin L,B---two seen
Peregrine Falcon E---one our first morning chasing pigeons at Ascarate
Prairie Falcon E,L,P,B---three total including great scope views of perched birds at McNary and near Hatch
 Common Moorhen E
 American Coot almost daily
 Sandhill Crane E,P,B,A---an estimated 5000 wintering at the refuge (lower than usual) and an additional 5000 seen in other areas; spectacularly close views
 Killdeer E,P,B
Black-necked Stilt E--- two along the Rio Grande in NM and two at Rio Bosque; only the fourth time ever for this tour
 Spotted Sandpiper P---spotted by Mary
 Greater Yellowlegs P---one along the river near Garfield
 Least Sandpiper E---three at Rio Bosque were our only ones
 Long-billed Dowitcher E,B---uncommon in winter
 Wilson's Snipe E,B---great study in canal near Sunland Park
 Ring-billed Gull E,P,B
California Gull P---two at Rock Canyon Marina; rare
 Herring Gull P---ten at Rock Canyon Marina
Thayer's Gull P---one immature bird studied at length at rock Canyon Marina; a real bonus!
 Rock Pigeon seen daily
Band-tailed Pigeon P---an immature bird near Hatch was a rare treat at any season, but especially in mid-winter; this was the first I have ever seen in the county in 35 years of birding here
 Eurasian Collared-Dove seen daily---a rapidly expanding species

White-winged Dove seen daily in numbers (up to 500 in a day)
Mourning Dove seen daily
Inca Dove E---twelve along a canal in El Paso were our only ones
Greater Roadrunner seen daily with a total of twelve; many fantastic views
Western Screech-Owl P---heard only by a few at Animas Creek
Great Horned Owl B
Burrowing Owl E---fantastic studies
Long-eared Owl E---seven at a day roost in El Paso were a huge bonus; it took some effort but most had good views
Belted Kingfisher E---much scarcer than usual with only one seen
Acorn Woodpecker P---four in Animas Creek
Red-naped Sapsucker P---incredible views at Percha
Ladder-backed Woodpecker L,P,B---several nice views
Downy Woodpecker A---at the nature center and Sandia Crest
Hairy Woodpecker P,A---the one at Percha was a local rarity
Northern Flicker E,L,P,B; the "Red-shafted" variety
Black Phoebe E,P,B
Say's Phoebe L,P,B
Loggerhead Shrike E,L,B
Hutton's Vireo L---in Lynn's yard; rare here
Steller's Jay W,A---subspecies *macrolopha*; very close studies
Western Scrub-Jay W---subspecies *woodhouseii*; a likely future split from the one in California
American Crow E,L,P,B,A---by the thousands
Chihuahuan Raven E,L,P,B
Common Raven P,W,B,A
Horned Lark P---scope views just outside Percha
Black-capped Chickadee A---our last new bird
Mountain Chickadee A---great views
Bridled Titmouse P---nice views of this striking species at Animas Creek after some effort
Juniper Titmouse L,P,W---more numerous than usual with seven total; the one at Percha was especially noteworthy
Verdin E,L,P
Bushtit P,W,B---more widespread than normal
Red-breasted Nuthatch A--- at Sandia Crest feeders
White-breasted Nuthatch P,W,A
Brown Creeper P,A---great studies for most at Percha; uncommon
Cactus Wren E,L
Rock Wren P---heard only
Bewick's Wren E,L,P,B,A
Marsh Wren E,B---nice views at the refuge
Ruby-crowned Kinglet seen daily
Black-tailed Gnatcatcher P---uncommon
Eastern Bluebird P,B---an invasion year for this generally rare species

Western Bluebird P,B---very common around Percha (120 in one day) in this bluebird invasion year

Mountain Bluebird P,B---91 total including many stunning males; only occurs in invasion years; tied for the favorite bird of the tour

Townsend's Solitaire L,P,A---total of six seen with great views from as close as ten feet!; erratic

American Robin L,P,B,A

Northern Mockingbird E,L,P

Sage Thrasher E,P---superb views near Fort Hancock and Elephant Butte

Curve-billed Thrasher E,P

Crissal Thrasher L,P---seen best near Aguirre Springs

European Starling seen daily

American Pipit P,B

Phainopepla E,L,P---many nice studies

Orange-crowned Warbler L---at Lynn's hummingbird feeders!

Black-throated Blue Warbler L--our rarest bird of the trip was the stunning male in Lynn's yard; we watched hi come to the hummingbird feeders on and off for 40 minutes from about fifteen feet away!; accidental in NM and a tour first

Yellow-rumped Warbler E,L,P,B---the Audubon's subspecies

Green-tailed Towhee E---a lone bird seen well near Fort Hancock

Spotted Towhee E,L,P,B,A

Canyon Towhee E,L,P,W

Rufous-crowned Sparrow L

Chipping Sparrow L,P---scarcer than usual

Brewer's Sparrow L---a down year in general for sparrows in terms of numbers; we had about 20 Brewer's near Aguirre Springs

Black-chinned Sparrow L---great views of one at Aguirre Springs

Vesper Sparrow E,P

Black-throated Sparrow L---the handsomest sparrow?

Sage Sparrow L--- nice views of the interior race *nevadensis*

Savannah Sparrow E,P,B

Song Sparrow E,L,P,B,A

Lincoln's Sparrow E---scarce this year

White-crowned Sparrow seen daily in numbers

Dark-eyed Junco daily, including Gray-headed, Oregon, and Pink-sided races

Pyrrhuloxia E,L,P---many good views

Red-winged Blackbird E,L,P,B

Western Meadowlark E,P,B

Yellow-headed Blackbird E---incredible sight of about 8000+ gathering to roost in west El Paso

Rusty Blackbird P---our second rarest bird of the tour were two females along the Rio Grande near Garfield; only the second time ever for the tour

Brewer's Blackbird seen daily

Great-tailed Grackle every day but the last

Brown-headed Cowbird E,L

Bronzed Cowbird L---three at the NMSU cattle pens; rare in winter

Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch about 8 seen on Sandia Crest; as with all the rosy-finches may not be seen on future trips due to road conditions or the birds just not being present

Black Rosy-Finch about 20 seen very close (as close as seven feet away!!!) at Sandia Crest feeders

Brown-capped Rosy-Finch about 45 seen at Sandia Crest, almost at arm's length!

Cassin's Finch A---a male at the nature center feeders was an unexpected treat; tied for the favorite bird of the tour

House Finch seen daily

Pine Siskin L---two in Mesilla Park were our only ones

Lesser Goldfinch L---flock of eight or so in Mesilla Park

House Sparrow seen daily

total species - 154 (our sixth highest total ever)

Leader only birds:

Eurasian Wigeon---a male at rio Bosque popped out of the brush briefly, but sadly tucked back in before anyone else could get on it

Sharp-shinned Hawk

Mammals:

Desert Cottontail

Eastern Cottontail

Black-tailed Jackrabbit

Rock Squirrel

Tassel-eared (Abert's) Squirrel---great views in the Sandias

vole species---seen by Linda at Sandia Crest

Muskrat---one at Ascarate Lake

Coyote---several seen

Mule Deer---great studies at Bosque

Pronghorn---herd of about 20 near water Canyon

total species - 10

Reptiles/ Amphibians:

Yellow Mud Turtle

Significant others:

man with the green mohawk

"Doug" the dog