

WINTER SOUTHERN ARIZONA

JANUARY 19-24, 2010

LEADERS: BARRY ZIMMER & BRENNAN MULROONEY

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Leaders: Barry Zimmer & Brennan Mulrooney

Despite some of the most challenging weather that I have ever encountered on a tour, our recent Winter Southern Arizona tour was hugely successful. Normally this trip enjoys mild conditions, with warm, sunny skies. This year, however, a series of fronts brought us instead a steady dose of wind, rain, and even some snow. Our bird list did not reflect the weather situation, however. With four full days of birding based out of Tucson, we enjoyed a bounty of rarities, hard-to-find southwestern specialties, and irregular invaders.

On our first day, we ventured to the Madera Canyon/Green Valley area and were treated to myriad highlights. In Green Valley we tallied prolonged scope views of Gilded Flicker among more common desert species such as Cactus Wren, Curve-billed Thrasher, and Pyrrhuloxia. Further up the road near Continental, we had walkaway scope studies of the highly localized Rufous-winged Sparrow and the always stunning Black-throated Sparrow. Madera Canyon itself was quite active. A stunning Painted Redstart posed for over five minutes in the scope, as it warmed itself in the morning sun. An Arizona Woodpecker foraged on a nearby sycamore. Bridled Titmice, Acorn Woodpeckers, Mexican Jays, and Yellow-eyed Juncos entertained us at the feeders of a small lodge. A female Broad-billed Hummingbird, defending one of the feeders, was an unexpected treat. Canyon Wren, Hermit Thrush, Spotted Towhee, Red-naped Sapsucker...the birds just kept coming. A walk along the stream bed produced Hammond's and Gray flycatchers, Hutton's Vireo, and a rare Olive Warbler.

Day two found us heading northward to an area known as the Santa Cruz Flats. A Bendire's Thrasher posed well to start the day and was followed by a challenging, but successful, search for Sage Sparrow. A flock of 21 Mountain Plovers on a nearby sod farm was a real bonus. They kept walking towards us until they were no more than 30 yards away! One alfalfa field yielded a flock of 20 Long-billed Curlews and over 100 Mountain Bluebirds. Crested Caracara, Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, Lark Buntings, and Lark Sparrow quickly ensued. The Sweetwater Wetlands of northwest Tucson had a lot of activity despite strong winds. The parking area, which was in the lee of the wind, was swarming with birds including Black-throated Gray, Orange-crowned, and Yellow warblers, Abert's Towhee, Harris's Hawk, and several Vermilion Flycatchers. One of the Vermilions was leucistic, its entire body being a creamy white (it was voted the favorite bird of the tour!). At a private home a short distance away, we enjoyed a rare winter hummingbird extravaganza with two Violet-crowns, one Broad-billed, a stunning male Costa's, and many Anna's all providing up-close views.

Our third day may have been the most exciting of all. We headed to Santa Gertrudis Lane at first light to chase the Rufous-backed Robin and Varied Thrush that had been wintering in the area. When we arrived, there were many Western Bluebirds, American Robins, and Hermit Thrushes enjoying the fruit-laden bushes along this lane. Within a very short time we spotted the Varied Thrush feeding on the ground no more than 20 feet away. As we were looking at her, Brennan

spotted the Rufous-backed Robin. It jumped up onto a bare log and posed for some time. Here was an unlikely duo of rarities (one from Mexico and the other from the Pacific Northwest) just feet apart! After soaking up these special birds, we continued on to Patagonia Lake, where highlights included a pair of Black-capped Gnatcatchers from about 15 feet away, a male Hepatic Tanager (rare in winter), and a very early Violet-green Swallow among others. Several Greater Roadrunners, two more Red-naped Sapsuckers, 15 Black Vultures, a male Canvasback, and a couple of Brewer's Sparrows rounded out the day.

On our final day we headed east toward the Sulphur Springs Valley—famed for its wintering raptors, sparrows, and cranes. This area did not disappoint. Over 4,000 Sandhill Cranes were seen in addition to Ross's Goose, Greater Scaup, nine Ferruginous Hawks, a Merlin, two coveys of Scaled Quail, several Soras in the open, four roosting Great Horned Owls, and arguably the most cooperative pair of Crissal Thrashers I have ever seen!

We concluded our trip with fabulous views of a Western Screech-Owl after our last dinner. In all, we tallied over 140 species of birds despite the challenging (and very unusual) weather.

ITINERARY:

January 19 - arrival in Tucson

January 20 - Green Valley, Continental, Madera Canyon, Florida Canyon (54 species)

January 21 - Santa Cruz flats, Sweetwater Wetlands, Rich's house, McCormick Park, intersection of Seneca & Ridgeway (64 species; 98 total)

January 22 - Santa Gertrudis lane, Patagonia Lake SP, Kino Springs, Nogales cemetery, Rio Rico area; evening owling (80 species; 119 total)

January 23 - Willcox, Cochise Lake, Kansas Settlement, Sulphur Springs Valley to Whitewater Draw; evening owling (71 species; 141 total)

January 24 - departures for home or on to Winter California (141 species total)

KEY:

T = Tucson, Sweetwater, Santa Cruz flats

M = Madera Canyon, Green Valley

N = Nogales, Patagonia area

S = Sulphur Springs Valley, Willcox

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 S---about 40 at Whitewater including three blue morphs
Ross's Goose S----six or so in with Snows
Gadwall T,N,S
American Wigeon T,N,S
Mallard T,N,S
Blue-winged Teal S---very uncommon in winter
Cinnamon Teal T,N,S---gorgeous
Northern Shoveler T,N,S
Northern Pintail T,N,S
Green-winged Teal T,N,S
Canvasback N---one male at Rio Rico
Redhead N---one male at Patagonia Lake
Ring-necked Duck N
Greater Scaup S---male at Whitewater Draw was a nice rarity
Lesser Scaup S
Bufflehead T,S
Common Merganser N,S
Ruddy Duck T,N,S
Wild Turkey M---flock of 25 or more in Madera Canyon
Scaled Quail S---nice views around Willcox
Gambel's Quail T,S
Pied-billed Grebe T,N,S
Eared Grebe S---one at Cochise Lake
Western Grebe S---two at Kansas Settlement were somewhat of a surprise
Double-crested Cormorant N---one at Patagonia Lake
Great Blue Heron N
Green Heron S---Cochise Lake
Black Vulture N---roost of 15 or more at Nogales
Turkey Vulture T,N
Northern Harrier T,S
Sharp-shinned Hawk M---only one flying across I-19 near Green Valley on first day
Cooper's Hawk M,T,N,S
Harris's Hawk T---great views at Sweetwater
Red-tailed Hawk seen daily with a high count of **70** in one day; included the Fuerte's race and rufous morphs
Ferruginous Hawk S---nine in one day; wonderful scope views
Crested Caracara T---increasing in this area but still considered a rarity
American Kestrel seen daily in small numbers
Merlin S---one in scope at Kansas Settlement
Virginia Rail S---heard only
Sora S---superb views
American Coot T,N,S
Sandhill Crane S---over **4000** seen in Sulphur springs Valley; many wonderful views
Killdeer T,S
Mountain Plover T---fantastic studies of a flock of 21 on the Santa Cruz Flats; always a very difficult find on this trip
Spotted Sandpiper S

Greater Yellowlegs S
Long-billed Curlew T---flock of 20 in Santa Cruz flats; uncommon
 Least Sandpiper S
 Wilson's Snipe S
 Rock Pigeon M,T,N,S
 Eurasian Collared-Dove T,N,S
 White-winged Dove M,N,S---uncommon in winter
 Mourning Dove seen daily
 Greater Roadrunner N,S---8 total including one almost in our van!
 Western Screech-Owl M---prolonged scope study after our final dinner; those who saw this bird said they would likely have changed their favorite bird voting!
 Great Horned Owl S---four seen in one day
Violet-crowned Hummingbird T---two in Rich's yard provided amazing, repeated views. a great rarity in mid-winter
Broad-billed Hummingbird M,T---a female in Madera and a male at Rich's; another rarity
 Anna's Hummingbird T---particularly well at Rich's
Costa's Hummingbird T---stunning male at Rich's from about ten feet; voted the second favorite bird of the tour!
hybrid hummingbird T---a hybrid female at Rich's feeders was believed to be a Black-chinned x Costa's cross
 Acorn Woodpecker M,N
 Gila Woodpecker M,T,N
 Ladder-backed Woodpecker seen daily
 Red-naped Sapsucker M,T---great studies
Arizona Woodpecker M---uncommon; nice views in Madera
 Northern Flicker M,T,N,S---Red-shafted form
 Gilded Flicker M---five Green Valley; one of our first birds
Hammond's Flycatcher M---three
 Gray Flycatcher M,N
 Black Phoebe T,N,S
 Say's Phoebe daily
Vermilion Flycatcher T,N,S---stunning males & **a leucistic bird** at Sweetwater; voted the favorite bird of the tour!
 Loggerhead Shrike M,N,S
 Hutton's Vireo M
 Mexican Jay M
 Chihuahuan Raven S
 Common Raven daily
 Horned Lark T,S
Violet-green Swallow N---one male for some over Patagonia Lake; very early
 Bridled Titmouse M,N---great looks
 Verdin seen daily
 White-breasted Nuthatch M,N
 Cactus Wren M,T
 Rock Wren M,S---excellent views; our first thanks to Margaret
 Canyon Wren M---good views at the Madera Kubo
 Bewick's Wren M,N
 Marsh Wren T,N,S

Ruby-crowned Kinglet M,T,N
 Blue-gray Gnatcatcher T---one or two at Sweetwater; uncommon
 Black-tailed Gnatcatcher T---in the midst of the great windstorm
Black-capped Gnatcatcher N---superb studies of a pair at Patagonia Lake
 Western Bluebird M,N---numerous this year
Mountain Bluebird T---about a hundred in one alfalfa field!; irregular
 Hermit Thrush M,N
Rufous-backed Robin N---stake-out bird at Santa Gertrudis seen for several minutes at about
 fifteen feet!!!!
 American Robin M,N---including one being killed by a Cooper's Hawk!
Varied Thrush N---arguably the rarest bird of the tour was a female at Santa Gertrudis
 Northern Mockingbird M,N,S
Bendire's Thrasher T,S---great views!
 Curve-billed Thrasher M,N,S---the western *palmeri* subspecies!
 Crissal Thrasher S---fantastic views of this skulker
 European Starling M,T,N
 Phainopepla M,N
Olive Warbler M---female in Madera was unexpected
 Orange-crowned Warbler T
Yellow Warbler T---one at Sweetwater in the gale!
 Yellow-rumped Warbler M,T,N--- Audubon's subspecies
Black-throated Gray Warbler T---another rare warbler was this female that put on a show in the
 storm at the Sweetwater parking lot
 Common Yellowthroat N,S---not seen by most
Painted Redstart M---scope views of gorgeous bird in Madera
Hepatic Tanager N--- male at Patagonia Lake; very rare in winter
 Spotted Towhee M,N---oddly only three seen
 Canyon Towhee M,N,S
 Abert's Towhee T,N---scope study at Santa Gertrudis
 Rufous-winged Sparrow M,N---great looks at this very localized species
 Chipping Sparrow N
 Brewer's Sparrow N---two at Kino Springs were our only ones of the trip in this down sparrow
 year
 Vesper Sparrow N,S
 Lark Sparrow T,N
 Black-throated Sparrow M---the most handsome sparrow?
Sage Sparrow T---challenging views of the interior race *nevadensis* in the 70 mph winds!
 Lark Bunting T,S---quite numerous this year in Sulphur Springs Valley
 Savannah Sparrow S---briefly by some
 Song Sparrow T,N,S---southwestern race *saltonis*
 Lincoln's Sparrow M---our only one was coming to a feeder at Madera Kubo!
 White-crowned Sparrow T,N,S
 Dark-eyed Junco M---Oregon, Pink-sided, and Gray-headed varieties
Yellow-eyed Junco M---uncommon
 Northern Cardinal M,N---the brighter, longer-crested race of Arizona
 Pyrrhuloxia M,T,N
 Red-winged Blackbird T,N,S
 Eastern Meadowlark N---at least one seen well and probably more

Western Meadowlark N,S
Yellow-headed Blackbird T
Brewer's Blackbird T,N,S
Great-tailed Grackle T,N,S
Brown-headed Cowbird N---one male at Patagonia Lake by some
House Finch daily
Pine Siskin M,N
Lesser Goldfinch M,T,N
House Sparrow T,N,S---scarcer than usual

total species - **141**

Leader only birds: total species - 2

Magnificent Hummingbird---female in Madera actually glimpsed by some in group but not seen well

Cedar Waxwing

Mammals: total species - 4

Arizona Gray Squirrel

Rock Squirrel

Desert Cottontail

White-tailed Deer

Reptiles & Amphibians: total species - 1

Red-eared Slider

Significant others:

the Santa Cruz flats dust storm

the giant tumbleweed

the worst storm week in Arizona in 20 years!!!! (challenging to say the least)

snow in Texas Canyon

Brennan tackling and conquering the "Granddaddy"