

WINTER SOUTHERN ARIZONA

JANUARY 18-23, 2011

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Once again our Winter Southern Arizona tour was a huge success. We enjoyed superb weather (highs in the 70s every day) and had great luck with resident specialties, wintering species, and rarities.

On our first day we ventured south to the Santa Rita Mountains and world-famous Madera Canyon. En route we detoured through Green Valley where we enjoyed prolonged scope studies of the localized Gilded Flicker, as well as the equally restricted Rufous-winged Sparrow, a flock of Lark Buntings, a Prairie Falcon, and a family of Harris's Hawks. Common species included Gambel's Quail, Gila Woodpecker, Cactus Wren, Curve-billed Thrasher, and Pyrrhuloxia. Desert slopes below Madera yielded Black-throated and Brewer's sparrows, Green-tailed Towhee, Phainopepla, and Verdin. Up in the canyon the birds came fast and furious. A male Hepatic Tanager (rare in winter) was quickly followed by the often elusive Arizona Woodpecker. Acorn Woodpecker, Mexican Jay, Magnificent Hummingbird, Yellow-eyed Junco, Bridled Titmouse, and Hutton's Vireo all quickly ensued. A walk down from Whitehouse Picnic Area produced a stakeout Red-breasted Sapsucker (casual in the state) from as close as five feet, in addition to Hammond's Flycatcher, Red-naped Sapsucker, and Townsend's Warbler. All in all, a great first day!

On our second day we headed north to an area known as the Santa Cruz Flats. In one particular area, two nice vagrants had been recently located: Ruddy Ground-Dove and Rufous-backed Robin. Initially we did not locate either bird, but enjoyed a stunning male Vermilion Flycatcher, Yellow-headed Blackbirds, and Abert's Towhee. Finally, the Rufous-backed Robin was spotted in a bare pecan tree. It flushed before everyone could see it, but with a little patience we were able to relocate the bird and get scope views for all. On the way back to the van, we spotted a flock of small doves which included several Common Ground-Doves and three Ruddys—two good Mexican vagrants in about an hour! The remainder of the morning yielded Ferruginous Hawk, two more Prairie Falcons, Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, and Sage Sparrow.

The afternoon found us back in Tucson visiting a private yard with hummingbird feeders. Here we enjoyed a super show with a rare Violet-crowned, several Broad-billeds, (also rare in winter), a male Costa's, and lots of Anna's. We ended the day at Sweetwater Wetlands where highlights included Cinnamon Teal, Sora, Orange-crowned Warbler, an aseasonal Yellow Warbler, lots of Yellow-headed Blackbirds, and a very rare Summer Tanager.

The next day we headed south towards Nogales and Patagonia. Patagonia Lake had some surprises in the form of unusual waterbirds, Common Loon and Pacific Loon, in addition to the more expected Common Merganser, Canvasback, and Eared Grebes. Nearby thickets and ravines produced Gray and Dusky flycatchers, Canyon and Green-tailed towhees and, amazingly, another Rufous-backed Robin (in the scope for ten minutes!). Feeders in Patagonia hosted Inca Dove, Lincoln's Sparrow, and Lazuli Bunting.

A final stop at Pena Blanca Lake resulted in nice studies of a vagrant Least Grebe, in addition to Rock Wren and Rufous-crowned Sparrow. That evening we ventured out on an owling trip and were rewarded with a Western Screech-Owl about 15 feet away at eye level!

We visited the Sulphur Springs Valley south of Willcox on our last day. This area has become famous for the huge number of Sandhill Cranes that winter in the nearby agricultural fields. We were not disappointed, as we saw an estimated 15,000 cranes, many of which were very close and readily photographed. Other highlights of the day included Clark's and Western grebes, Ross's Goose, over 50 Greater White-fronted Geese (rare), a very rare Rough-legged Hawk, an impressive 16 Ferruginous Hawks, Merlin, Long-billed Curlews, a rare for winter American Avocet, Barn and Great Horned owls, a wonderfully close Bendire's Thrasher, and absolutely staggering numbers of Lark Buntings (estimated at 2,500 for the day).

The combination of southwestern specialty birds, large numbers of wintering raptors and sparrows, and great rarities made for superb winter birding—and with temperatures in the 70s, it just can't be beat!

ITINERARY:

January 18 - arrival in Tucson

January 19 - Green Valley, Continental, Madera Canyon (53 species)

January 20 - Santa Cruz flats, Rich's house, Sweetwater Wetlands (83 species; 108 total)

January 21 - Amado, Rio Rico ponds, Kino Springs, Patagonia Lake SP, Paton's yard, Pena Blanca Lake; evening owling (85 species; 131 total)

January 22 - Willcox, Cochise Lake, Kansas Settlement, Sulphur Springs Valley to Whitewater Draw (74 species; 147 total)

January 23 - departures for home or on to Winter California (147 species total)

KEY:

T = Tucson, Sweetwater, Santa Cruz flats

M = Madera Canyon, Green Valley, Amado

N = Nogales, Patagonia area, Pena Blanca Lake

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:

Greater White-fronted Goose S---51 birds at Whitewater draw; rare
Snow Goose T,S---unusual was one lone bird in the Santa Cruz flats
Ross's Goose S---one at Kansas Settlement
Canada Goose S
Gadwall T,S
American Wigeon T,N,S
Mallard T,N,S
Blue-winged Teal T---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,S
Ring-necked Duck T,N,S
Bufflehead T,N,S
Common Merganser N,S
Ruddy Duck T,N,S
Gambel's Quail T,N
Common Loon N---rare was one at Patagonia lake
Pacific Loon N---even rare was a Pacific at the same location; both were tour firsts
Pied-billed Grebe T,N
Least Grebe N---great scope views of stakeout at Pena Blanca Lake; accidental
Eared Grebe N---distant flock at Patagonia Lake
Western Grebe S---two at Kansas Settlement
Clark's Grebe S---one at Kansas Settlement, side-by-side with Westerns
Double-crested Cormorant N---three at Patagonia Lake
Great Blue Heron T,N
Great Egret N---uncommon at this season
Green Heron N
Black Vulture N
Turkey Vulture N
Northern Harrier M,T,N,S
Sharp-shinned Hawk S
Cooper's Hawk M,T,N,S
Harris's Hawk M,T,S---our first group thanks to Alan
Red-tailed Hawk seen daily with a high count of **58** in one day; included the Fuerte's race and rufous morphs
Ferruginous Hawk T,S---**sixteen** (!) in one day; wonderful scope views
Rough-legged Hawk S---very rare was one in the Sulphur springs Valley
American Kestrel seen daily in small numbers
Merlin T,S---four total including one *richardsonii* near Willcox
Prairie Falcon M,T,S---an impressive six seen with several nice views
Virginia Rail T---heard only
Common Moorhen T
Sora T
American Coot T,N,S
Sandhill Crane S---over **15,000** seen in Sulphur Springs Valley; many wonderful views

Killdeer T,S
 Greater Yellowlegs S---not seen by all
Long-billed Curlew T---flock of 10 in Sulphur Springs Valley; uncommon
 Least Sandpiper T,S
 Ring-billed Gull N
 Rock Pigeon M,T,N,S
 Eurasian Collared-Dove M,T,N,S
 White-winged Dove M,N,S---uncommon in winter
 Mourning Dove seen daily
 Inca Dove N---two in Paton's yard were our only ones
 Common Ground-Dove T---about ten in the Santa Cruz Flats
Ruddy Ground-Dove T---three in with Commons on the Santa Cruz Flats
 Greater Roadrunner T,S---only four seen this time
 Barn Owl S---great daytime views
 Western Screech-Owl M---prolonged close study; voted the favorite bird of the tour!
 Whiskered Screech-Owl M---heard only; tough at this season
 Great Horned Owl S---three in one day
Violet-crowned Hummingbird T---one in Rich's yard provided prolonged scope views. A great
 rarity in mid-winter
Magnificent Hummingbird M---male & female in Madera; uncommon in winter
Broad-billed Hummingbird T---four in Rich's yard were a good mid-winter rarity
 Anna's Hummingbird T,N---particularly well at Rich's
Costa's Hummingbird T---stunning male at Rich's; rare in January
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,N---great studies
Red-breasted Sapsucker M---this stakeout was seen from literally five feet away; spotted by Patti;
 casual in Arizona; voted the third favorite bird of the tour!
Arizona Woodpecker M---generally uncommon; nice views in Madera
 Northern Flicker T,N,S---Red-shafted form
 Gilded Flicker M---five Green Valley; one of our first birds; localized
Hammond's Flycatcher M---one
 Gray Flycatcher N
Dusky Flycatcher N---two at Patagonia Lake; very uncommon
 Black Phoebe T,N,S
 Say's Phoebe daily
Vermilion Flycatcher T---stunning male on the Santa Cruz Flats
 Loggerhead Shrike T,S
 Hutton's Vireo M
Western Scrub-Jay S---lone bird in Texas Canyon was a surprise find; the interior race *woodhouseii*
 which is alleged to be a future split
 Mexican Jay M,N
 Chihuahuan Raven S
 Common Raven daily
 Horned Lark T,S

Tree Swallow S---25 or more at Whitewater Draw
 Bridled Titmouse M,N---great looks
 Verdin one or two seen daily
 White-breasted Nuthatch M,N
 Cactus Wren M,T,S
 Rock Wren N
 Bewick's Wren M,N
 House Wren M---scope views in Madera
 Marsh Wren T,N,S
 Ruby-crowned Kinglet M,T,N
 Blue-gray Gnatcatcher N---one at Patagonia Lake; uncommon
 Black-tailed Gnatcatcher T---spotted by Patti
 Hermit Thrush N
Rufous-backed Robin T,N---stake-out birds at Santa Cruz Flats & Patagonia Lake; prolonged
 scope views of second bird; casual U.S. visitor
 Northern Mockingbird M,T,N,S
Bendire's Thrasher S---great views; spotted by Alan
 Curve-billed Thrasher M,T,N,S---the western *palmeri* subspecies!
 European Starling seen daily
 American Pipit T
 Phainopepla M,N
 Orange-crowned Warbler T,N
Yellow Warbler T---one at Sweetwater; rare
 Yellow-rumped Warbler T,N--- mostly Audubon's subspecies, but one Myrtle
Townsend's Warbler M---very uncommon to rare in winter
 Common Yellowthroat T,N,S
 Green-tailed Towhee M,N---great studies
 Canyon Towhee N,S
 Abert's Towhee T,N---scope study at Santa Cruz Flats
 Rufous-winged Sparrow M---great looks at this very localized species
 Rufous-crowned Sparrow N
 Chipping Sparrow M,T,N
 Brewer's Sparrow M,N,S
 Vesper Sparrow M,T,N,S---good numbers this winter
 Lark Sparrow T,N
 Black-throated Sparrow M,S---the most handsome sparrow?
Sage Sparrow T,S---the interior race *nevadensis*
 Lark Bunting M,S---abundant this year in Sulphur Springs Valley with an estimated **2500** seen
 Savannah Sparrow T,S
 Song Sparrow T,N,S---southwestern race *saltonis*
 Lincoln's Sparrow T,N
 White-crowned Sparrow M,T,N,S
 Dark-eyed Junco M---Oregon, Pink-sided, and Gray-headed varieties
Yellow-eyed Junco M---uncommon; great views
 Northern Cardinal T,N---the brighter, longer-crested race of Arizona
 Pyrrhuloxia M,T,N,S
Hepatic Tanager N--- male at Madera & a female at Patagonia (both spotted by Patti); very rare in
 winter

Summer Tanager T---one at Sweetwater was a rarity in winter
Lazuli Bunting N---male at Paton's feeders
Red-winged Blackbird T,N
Western Meadowlark T,N,S
Yellow-headed Blackbird T,N
Brewer's Blackbird T,S
Great-tailed Grackle T,N,S
Brown-headed Cowbird T
House Finch daily
Pine Siskin M,N
Lesser Goldfinch M,T,N
House Sparrow M,T,N,S

total species - **147**

MAMMALS: total species - 7

Arizona Gray Squirrel
Rock Squirrel
Round-tailed Ground Squirrel
cotton rat species
Desert Cottontail
Coyote---howling on our owling trip
White-tailed Deer

REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS: species - 1

turtle species (Painted?)

BUTTERFLIES: species - 8

Sleepy Orange
Dainty Sulphur---leader only
sulphur species
Checkered White
Reakirt's Blue
blue species---possibly Spring Azure
American Snout
Mourning Cloak