

# **Jewels of Arizona**

**JULY 25 – AUGUST 1, 2010**

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**TOUR REPORT**  
**JEWELS OF ARIZONA**  
**July 25–August 1, 2010**

**By Brennan Mulrooney**

Generally speaking, at the end of most VENT tours the leader asks the group to share their three favorite birds of the trip. It's a great way to remember some of the highlights of the trip, and also to see how different birds made impressions on different people. Usually there are some clear standouts that garner the majority of the votes, but this year, on our Jewels of Arizona tour, a group of only six people nominated 17 different species—with none getting more than three votes. This is a testament to just how many impressive and memorable birds there are to be found in Southeast Arizona in the summer.

Our tour started on a warm afternoon in the desert west of Tucson. We were seeking some of the Sonoran Desert birds that might not be as easy to find as we moved east. We quickly encountered birds like Cactus Wren, Verdin, Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, and the desert subspecies of Purple Martin, which nests in the Saguaro of this region. A rocky desert wash produced our first of several male Varied Buntings. This bird was quite cooperative, and we enjoyed a nice long look at the changing reds, purples, and blues of its plumage. Another stop produced a large group of Gambel's Quail that kept us entertained for quite some time. And what would a day of birding be without a visit to a sewage pond? Sweetwater Wetlands is justly famous among Tucson birders, and we found it to be teeming with birds including displaying Ruddy Ducks, Sora, Black-necked Stilt, Tropical Kingbird, Lucy's Warbler, and Abert's Towhee.

Soon we were leaving the hotter lowlands behind and venturing up into some of the canyons that make this area so popular with birders. On our way up to Madera Canyon we stopped for Gray Hawk; Vermilion Flycatcher; Rufous-winged, Botteri's, and Black-throated sparrows; Gila Woodpeckers; Greater Roadrunner; Bell's and Hutton's vireos; Phainopepla; and a pugnacious little Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet. Up in the cooler shadows of the canyon we found our first hummingbirds, with Anna's, Black-chinned, Broad-billed, Magnificent, and Violet-crowned hummingbirds all visiting feeders. Mexican Jays, Dusky-capped and Brown-crested flycatchers, Scott's Oriole, and our first Painted Redstarts all made appearances as we waited for darkness to fall. After a picnic dinner in the canyon we found a Common Poorwill right in the road, heard an Elf Owl, and had fantastic close-up views of a Whiskered Screech-Owl before rain chased us back to the hotel.

The rest of our tour was met with similar success and our list of specialty birds continued to grow as we visited some of the most scenic mountains and canyons in southern Arizona. We enjoyed an amazing hummingbird show at the Beatty's Guest Ranch in the Huachuca Mountains that included Blue-throated, Broad-tailed, and the rare White-eared Hummingbird. Higher up in Miller Canyon we enjoyed great looks at Arizona Woodpecker, Red-faced Warbler, Hepatic Tanager, and the always popular Bridled Titmouse. In the high Chiricahua Mountains we found some fantastic mixed flocks with Black-throated Gray, Virginia's (super sneaky), Yellow-

rumped, and Grace's warblers; Olive Warbler (neither olive, nor a warbler); "Brown-throated" House Wren; Pygmy and Red-breasted nuthatches; Yellow-eyed Junco; and the highly sought Mexican Chickadee.

Our last day brought a whole new group of birds when we visited a pond near Willcox that is a real shorebird hotspot (in the middle of the desert!). Here we enjoyed the comical antics of twirling flocks of Wilson's Phalaropes; at least 100 of these gorgeous little shorebirds dotted the surface of the pond, and they certainly entertained with their unique and comical foraging strategy. Elsewhere along the shore we worked our peep skills as we sorted out the small sandpipers. We saw lots of Least, Western, Baird's, and Stilt sandpipers, and our focus on their distinguishing characteristics paid off when we found one that just didn't fit. Semipalmated Sandpiper is rarely found in Arizona, but we were able to spot one trying to blend in with its more common cousins. We snacked as we took turns at the scope, discussing the finer points of shorebird ID.

By skipping a sit down lunch, we freed up just enough time for one more stop, and it paid off big. We had already spent quite some time waiting patiently at feeders, hoping for a glimpse of a Berylline Hummingbird. Several had been seen at various locations, but we just hadn't been able to connect with one yet. With only about 30 minutes to give to the effort, we made it back up into Madera Canyon. It only took about 3 minutes, and there it was—the rarest bird of our trip and our twelfth species of hummingbird. It came in twice while we waited, giving us all fantastic looks at its emerald head and breast, rufous wings, and purplish tail. It was a fitting way to end a fantastic trip through one of my favorite birding destinations.

## **ITINERARY:**

**July 25:** Tour orientation then an afternoon excursion to the parking lot of the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum, Gates Pass Rd, the "Shannon-Broadway desert", and Sweetwater Wetlands, dinner in Tucson

**July 26:** Morning departure from Tucson; birding our way up from Continental into lower Madera Canyon then over to Florida Canyon; lunch in Continental followed by a post lunch break, then afternoon birding in upper Madera Canyon with a picnic dinner followed by night birding; night in Green Valley

**July 27:** Morning birding in Green Valley followed by stops at Rio Rico, Kino Springs, and the Patagonia Roadside Rest; after an exciting lunch in Patagonia we visited the Paton's feeders then stopped in the Sonoita Grasslands on our way to Sierra Vista; afternoon visit to the Beatty's feeders; night in Sierra Vista

**July 28:** Morning hike up Miller Canyon then afternoon birding on Fort Huachuca in Huachuca Canyon followed by an evening visit to Mary Jo Ballator's feeders in Ash Canyon; night in Sierra Vista

**July 29:** Morning excursion to Fort Huachuca with birding in Garden, Sawmill, and Scheelite Canyons; on our way to Portal we stopped at the San Pedro House and Willow Tank; post dinner owling in Portal and Cave Creek Canyon; night in Portal

**July 30:** Pre-breakfast birding around Rodeo, NM then birding our way up into the highlands with our efforts focused around Barfoot Junction, Barfoot Park, and Rustler Park; on our return we went to Paradise, spending some time at the George Walker House before returning to Portal in a downpour; post dinner birding in Cave Creek Canyon and on the Paradise Rd; night in Portal

**July 31:** Pre-breakfast birding in Cave Creek Canyon and along the road to Paradise; then we left Portal heading back up over the mountains through Onion Saddle; we stopped in Wilcox at Lake Cochise, then we were off for the main event and tour finale in Madera Canyon; night in Tucson

**Aug 1:** Departures for home

## **BIRDLIST**

Note: Species that are in **bold print** are birds of special note that are either rare, local specialties, or are otherwise generally hard to find. Bird List order is according to the 50<sup>th</sup> Supplement to the AOU Check-list.

Abbreviations:

SW - Sweetwater Wetlands

MC - Madera Canyon

PRR - Patagonia Roadside Rest

BGR - Beatty's Guest Ranch, Miller Canyon

FW - Fort Huachuca, including Garden, Sawmill, Scheelite, and Huachuca Canyons

AC - Ash Canyon Bed and Breakfast

CM - Chiricahua Mountains

LC - Lake Cochise, Wilcox

## **SWANS, GEESE, AND DUCKS**

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck - several pairs of this handsome "tree duck" at the ponds along Rio Rico Rd

Wood Duck - a couple at SW

Mallard - we saw "Mexican Mallards" at SW

Cinnamon Teal - a few at SW and LC, males were mostly in eclipse plumage

**Greater Scaup** - rare in winter, bizarre in summer, a single female had been hanging out at LC

Ruddy Duck - several at SW and LC with males in striking breeding colors

## **NEW WORLD QUAIL**

Scaled Quail - a small group below Portal

Gambel's Quail - more widespread than the former, seen best at the motel in Sierra Vista

## **PHEASANTS, GROUSE AND TURKEYS**

Wild Turkey - common in MC now, we also saw them in CM

## **GREBES**

**Eared Grebe** - unexpected at this season at LC, one in breeding plumage

## **BITTERN AND HERONS**

Great Blue Heron - a few scattered birds

Green Heron - one doing its best bittern impression at Rio Rico

## **IBISES AND SPOONBILLS**

White-faced Ibis - one in flight at Rio Rico

## **NEW WORLD VULTURES**

Black Vulture - near Nogales

Turkey Vulture - seen daily

## **HAWKS, EAGLES AND KITES**

Cooper's Hawk - several were seen well, a perched juvenile was especially cooperative

Gray Hawk - we found a few of these handsome southwestern specialties

Swainson's Hawk - fairly widespread in the open country

Red-tailed Hawk - we saw a few of the pale bellied "Fuertes" race

## **FALCONS**

American Kestrel - a few scattered about

## **RAILS, COOTS, AND ALLIES**

Sora - a rather bold individual seen briefly at SW

Common Moorhen - SW

American Coot - SW

## **PLOVERS AND SANDPIPERS**

Killdeer - a few scattered birds

## **AVOCETS AND STILTS**

Black-necked Stilt - several seen well at SW and LC

American Avocet - a few distant birds at LC

## **SANDPIPERS**

Spotted Sandpiper - at least one at LC

**Semipalmated Sandpiper** - a juvenile at LC was a surprise

Western Sandpiper - a few molting adults at LC  
Least Sandpiper - more common than the former at LC  
Baird's Sandpiper - a few at LC, adults in breeding plumage  
Stilt Sandpiper - a few adults in breeding plumage at LC  
Wilson's Phalarope - hundreds at LC; mostly adults in all different stages of molt, including at least one in full winter plumage and a few fresh juveniles; some were lefties, some were righties...

## **PIGEONS AND DOVES**

Rock Pigeon  
Band-tailed Pigeon - a nice view of a perched bird in CM  
Eurasian Collared-Dove - fairly common around Tucson and Rodeo  
Mourning Dove - seen daily  
White-winged Dove - seen and heard daily, "who cooks for you?"  
Inca Dove - seen only in Patagonia and the Paton's Yard  
Common Ground-Dove - seen at Rio Rico, Kino Springs, Paton's and San Pedro House

## **CUCKOOS**

Greater Roadrunner - we saw several of these charismatic birds along the road

## **OWLS**

Western Screech-Owl - heard well in Portal, then briefly glimpsed at close range on the road to Paradise

**Whiskered Screech-Owl** - great views in MC

Elf Owl - They were already away from their nests this year, but we heard one in MC

## **NIGHTJARS**

Common Poorwill - sitting on the road in MC

## **SWIFTS**

White-throated Swift - we saw scattered flocks, but they were all quite high

## **HUMMINGBIRDS 12 SPECIES!**

Broad-billed Hummingbird - these striking birds were fairly widespread

**White-eared Hummingbird** - great luck with this rare species, we had great looks at BGR

**Berylline Hummingbird** - we were very fortunate to have fantastic looks at an adult at the feeders at Madera Kubo on our last afternoon...at the last minute!

**Violet-crowned Hummingbird** - one of the more scarce breeding hummingbirds in southeast Arizona, we had great looks at several, first at Madera Kubo, then again at Paton's, and BGR.

**Blue-throated Hummingbird** - the largest of the bunch, the bird at BGR was a real bully

**Magnificent Hummingbird** - aren't they all magnificent?

**Lucifer Hummingbird** - another very scarce hummer in Arizona, we had two, first a female type, then an adult male, both at AC

Black-chinned Hummingbird - perhaps the most common hummer we saw

Anna's Hummingbird - fairly common and widespread at the feeders  
Costa's Hummingbird - fairly scarce this far east, we had a young male at AC  
Broad-tailed Hummingbird - their metallic wing trill first drew our attention at BGR  
Rufous Hummingbird - scarce this year, not seen well until the male at the Walker House

## TROGONS

**Elegant Trogon** - two males on FW gave us good looks at this truly tropical species

## WOODPECKERS

Acorn Woodpecker - these clowns of the oak woodlands were common in the canyons  
Gila Woodpecker - fairly common at lower elevations  
Ladder-backed Woodpecker - not as common as Gila, we heard more than we saw  
Hairy Woodpecker - CM only  
**Arizona Woodpecker** - first in the Huachucas, then again in CM  
Northern Flicker - but alas, none of its gilded brethren...

## TYRANT FLYCATCHERS

Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet - a tiny flycatcher with a whopper of a name  
Western Wood-Pewee - very common in the canyons...too common...  
Cordilleran Flycatcher - first at BGR then again in CM  
**Buff-breasted Flycatcher** - this scarce breeder is limited to a few high altitude forests in southeastern Arizona, we had great looks on FW, including a bird on a nest  
Black Phoebe - predictable around water  
Say's Phoebe - a few scattered about  
Vermilion Flycatcher - such a gorgeous bird, we had some great looks  
Dusky-capped Flycatcher - fairly common in the canyons, more yellow and less rufous than the following  
Ash-throated Flycatcher - more a bird of open habitats  
Brown-crested Flycatcher - fairly common in riparian habitats, bigger than the previous two  
Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher - these strikingly patterned birds were found in canyon riparian areas  
Tropical Kingbird - a very localized breeder in Arizona, ours were at SW and Rio Rico  
Cassin's Kingbird - fairly common and very vocal  
**Thick-billed Kingbird** - a pair at PRR, another very localized breeder in the U.S.  
Western Kingbird - quite common, with migrants out in the open desert

## SHRIKES

Loggerhead Shrike - below MC

## VIREOS

Bell's Vireo - very vocal, but not easy to see, "chibbity-chibbity-chee?"  
Plumbeous Vireo - great looks at this split off of the "Solitary Vireo" group  
Hutton's Vireo - good looks at this drab little vireo  
Warbling Vireo - several scattered sightings of migrants and breeders

## **CROWS AND JAYS**

Steller's Jay - a few birds in the upper CM

Western Scrub-Jay - along the road to Paradise

Mexican Jay - "wink! wink!" these vociferous jays were common in the canyons

Chihuahuan Raven - we saw why they used to call it the White-necked Raven

Common Raven - seemed to be more common than the former

## **SWALLOWS**

Purple Martin - a few were still hanging around in Saguaro forest

Tree Swallow - just a few

Violet-green Swallow - good looks at this western specialty

Cliff Swallows - common breeders under the bridges in the area

Barn Swallow - seen most days

## **CHICKADEES AND TITMICE**

**Mexican Chickadee** - CM is the only spot in the U.S. where you can find this species and we great looks at several

**Bridled Titmouse** - a strong candidate for cutest bird in North America, we saw several in the canyons

Juniper Titmouse - we had to work a bit, but finally found a couple birds below Paradise; formerly part of Plain Titmouse, an unusually apt bird name

## **VERDIN**

Verdin - best looks at Desert Museum

## **BUSHTIT**

Bushtit - these guys are seemingly always in a flock, we ran into a couple of different groups

## **NUTHATCHES**

Red-breasted Nuthatch - in mixed flocks in CM

White-breasted Nuthatch - fairly common in most of the canyons

Pygmy Nuthatch - it took a little work, but we finally got good looks at several in CM

## **CREEPERS**

Brown Creeper - great looks at the "Mexican" race, best at BGR

## **WRENS**

Cactus Wren - a common parking lot bird of the desert southwest

Rock Wren - great looks along the road to Paradise

Canyon Wren - seen well at PRR

Bewick's Wren - several seen and heard

House Wren - good looks at the "Brown-throated" race

## **GNATCATCHERS**

Black-tailed Gnatcatcher - seen well at the Desert Museum and again in Montosa Cyn giving fantastic comparisons with the following species

## **THRUSHES**

Eastern Bluebird - Sawmill Canyon  
Hermit Thrush - seen well in the upper CM  
American Robin - just a few scattered birds

## **MOCKINGBIRDS AND THRASHERS**

Northern Mockingbird - fairly common at lower elevations  
Bendire's Thrasher - a cooperative bird below Portal  
Curve-billed Thrasher - common in the lower elevations  
Crissal Thrasher - a very cooperative bird near Rodeo

## **STARLINGS**

European Starling

## **PHAINOPEPLA**

Phainopepla - several in mesquites with mistletoe

## **OLIVE WARBLER**

**Olive Warbler** - great views of all plumages, easier than normal this year

## **WARBLERS**

Virginia's Warbler - very difficult at this time of year, we had a brief glimpse in CM  
Lucy's Warbler - a sneaky little gray warbler  
Yellow Warbler - a few scattered sightings  
Yellow-rumped Warbler - just one in CM  
Black-throated Gray Warbler - rather common in CM  
Townsend's Warbler - seen by Terry  
**Grace's Warbler** - nice views at FW and CM  
Common Yellowthroat - a couple at SW  
**Red-faced Warbler** - best views ever on this tour, we had one practically at our feet at FW  
**Painted Redstart** - fairly common in the canyons we saw adults and juveniles  
Yellow-breasted Chat - scope views at Kino Springs

## **SPARROWS AND ALLIES**

Spotted Towhee - heard often, not actually seen until our last day!  
Canyon Towhee - more common below the canyons, sharper looking than...  
Abert's Towhee - more localized than the former, only at the Paton's and SW  
**Rufous-winged Sparrow** - a very cooperative bird our first morning below MC  
Cassin's Sparrow - outnumbered by Botteri's this year, good looks near Sonoita  
Botteri's Sparrow - best looks were below MC

Rufous-crowned Sparrow - best views on the road to Paradise  
Lark Sparrow - who said sparrows are drab?  
Black-throated Sparrow - even better looking than the former? Perhaps.  
Grasshopper Sparrow - excellent views near Sonoita  
Song Sparrow - seen only at SW  
**Yellow-eyed Junco** - fairly common in the higher elevations of CM and FW

## **CARDINALS AND ALLIES**

Hepatic Tanager - seen best in the Huachucas  
Summer Tanager - best in MC, inhabits lower elevations than the former  
Western Tanager - nice looks at these handsome birds  
Northern Cardinal - fairly common and widespread  
Pyrrhuloxia - not as common as the former but we had several good looks  
Black-headed Grosbeak - seen daily  
Blue Grosbeak - seen or heard almost daily  
Lazuli Bunting - gorgeous males at Willow Tank  
Indigo Bunting - great looks at a singing male on the road to Paradise  
Varied Bunting - they seemed to be everywhere this year, several nice views of males

## **BLACKBIRDS AND ALLIES**

Red-winged Blackbird - scattered birds where we found water  
Eastern Meadowlark - the distinctive southwestern form, "Lilian's Meadowlark"  
Great-tailed Grackle - these big brutes are common, especially around towns  
Bronzed Cowbird - best looks at Rio Rico  
Brown-headed Cowbird - common and widespread  
Hooded Oriole - many great looks at males and females  
Bullock's Oriole - not as common as Hooded, we only saw it at Kino Springs  
Scott's Oriole - great looks near Rodeo

## **FINCHES**

House Finch - common and widespread  
Pine Siskin - only at the Walker House feeders  
Lesser Goldfinch - common at feeders

## **OLD WORLD SPARROWS**

House Sparrow

## **MAMMALS**

Black Bear (*Ursus americanus*) - right on the side of the highway!!!  
Western Spotted Skunk (*Spilogale gracilis*)  
Striped Skunk (*Mephitis mephitis*) - including a family group that was really cute  
Desert Cottontail (*Sylvilagus audubonii*)  
Black-tailed Jackrabbit (*Lepus californicus*)  
Round-tailed Ground Squirrel (*Spermophilus tereticaudus*)  
Rock Squirrel (*Spermophilus variegates*)

Arizona Gray Squirrel (*Sciurus arizonensis*)  
Cliff Chipmunk (*Tamias dorsalis*)  
Harris's Antelope Squirrel (*Ammospermophilus harrisi*)  
Coues' White-tailed Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus couesi*)

### **HERPS**

Desert Spiny Lizard (*Sceloporus magister*)  
Mountain Spiny Lizard (*Sceloporus jarrovi*)  
Chihuahuan Spotted Whiptail (*Cnemidophorus exsanguis*)  
Zebra-tailed Lizard (*Callisaurus draconoides*)  
Bullfrog (*Rana catesbeiana*)  
Ramsey Canyon Leopard Frog (*Rana subaquavocalis*)

### **BUTTERFLIES**

Pipevine Swallowtail (*Battus philenor*)  
Two-tailed Swallowtail (*Papilio multicaudata*)  
Marine Blue (*Leptotes marina*)  
Red Satyr (*Megisto rubricata*)  
California Sister (*Adelpha californica*)  
Queen (*Danaus gilippus*)

### **OTHERS**

Tarantula sp.