

AVIAN JEWELS OF ARIZONA

JULY 17 – 24, 2011

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Thirteen species of hummingbirds! This is the stuff of fantasies for birders from the east, where only one species is regular. Even most areas of the west harbor only three or four hummingbird species at best. But in southeastern Arizona the story is quite different.

On our recent Avian Jewels of Arizona tour, we had marvelous hummingbird displays throughout the trip and tallied a very impressive, though not entirely unexpected, 13 different species. The biggest problem was determining which of these gems was the most spectacular. In Madera Canyon alone we tallied 8 species, with gigantic, not to mention brilliant Magnificent Hummingbirds, with their emerald-green throats and purple crowns; numerous Broad-billeds attired in wonderful shades of blue and green with a contrasting red bill; feisty coppery-orange Rufous (the prettiest of all?) and one rare Allen's; a stray Violet-crowned with its snowy-white belly, purple crown, and red bill; abundant Black-chinneds flashing purple throat patches; and a very rare for this mountain range, male Lucifer Hummingbird with its long decurved bill and extended purple gorget. A Berylline Hummingbird, a casual stray to the United States, was the topping on the cake on our second attempt. Farther east we added a late male Costa's Hummingbird in Patagonia, as well as several more Violet-crowns, and Anna's Hummingbird in the Huachuca Mountains.

Our best hummingbird display of all, however, was in the Chiricahua Mountains where the feeding station was literally swarming with hummingbirds. In very quick succession we had monstrous Blue-throats, tiny Calliopes with their streaky purple gorgets, and numerous Broad-taileds. It was enough to make your head spin! Three of these species were among the top vote-getters for the favorite bird of the tour!

Of course, as amazing as the hummingbirds were, they were only one small part of our total Arizona experience. Despite challenges of recent forest fires and forest closures, we had a wonderfully successful trip. On our first afternoon around Tucson we enjoyed Harris's Hawk, Tropical Kingbird, and Abert's Towhee among others. The next day we visited Green Valley and Madera Canyon where an unexpected Northern Goshawk; a marvelous male Elegant Trogon; Arizona Woodpecker; Gilded Flicker; Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher; Bridled Titmouse; Black-throated Gray Warbler; Painted Redstart; plum-colored Varied Bunting; Hepatic Tanager; Rufous-winged, Botteri's, Cassin's, and Black-throated sparrows; and Scott's Oriole were among the many highlights. Evening owling yielded spectacular studies of both Whiskered and Western screech-owls. Patagonia, Sonoita, and Nogales produced Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, Gray Hawk, Zone-tailed Hawk (our first of seven seen!), Thick-billed Kingbird, Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet, Vermilion Flycatcher, Canyon and Rock wrens, Yellow-breasted Chat, and Western Tanager. The Chiricahua Mountains, despite the damage caused by recent fires, were very productive. Two male Montezuma Quail (voted the favorite bird of the tour!),

Elf Owl, Common Poorwill, the localized Buff-breasted Flycatcher, Juniper Titmouse, Pygmy and Red-breasted nuthatches, Grace's Warbler, and Black-chinned Sparrow were among the more memorable sightings. In addition we also saw two black bears, several collared peccaries (javelina), a bobcat, and a gray fox (we saw a total of 23 species of mammals!).

On our last day we stopped at Willcox en route to the Catalina Mountains above Tucson. At Willcox we had some nice additions including American Avocet, Baird's and Stilt sandpipers, and Wilson's Phalarope. Finally, in the Catalina Mountains we had three more Zone-tailed Hawks, numerous Mountain Chickadees, and a dozen or so Red-faced Warblers. In all we had 181 species of birds in our week of birding with none more spectacular than those entertaining, pugnacious jewels, the hummingbirds!

Itinerary:

July 17 – afternoon visit to Sweetwater Wetlands (39 species)

July 18 – grasslands and desert areas near Continental, Madera Canyon, evening owling (65 species; 94 total)

July 19 – Green Valley, Madera Canyon, Rio Rico ponds, Patagonia (Roadside Rest & Paton's), Sonoita Grasslands (79 species; 117 total)

July 20 – Patagonia (Paton's), Empire Gulch Ranch, Sierra Vista Sewage Ponds, Ash Canyon, Ramsey Canyon Road (70 species; 133 total)

July 21 – Bisbee, Sulphur Springs Valley (Whitewater Draw, Elfrida), Portal Road, Southwest Research Station, evening owling (84 species; 151 total)

July 22 – Paradise Road, East Turkey Creek, Herb Martyr Lake Road, Paradise, East Turkey Creek, Basin Trail, optional evening excursion (74 species; 169 total)

July 23 – Cochise Lake in Willcox, Catalina Mountains Mount Lemmon, (Bear Wallow, Summerhaven) (59 species; 181 total)

July 24 – departures for home (181 total species)

Key:

T = areas in and around Tucson, Catalina Mountains

S = Santa Rita Mountains, Green Valley

P = Nogales & Patagonia

H = Huachuca Mountains, Sierra Vista, Sonoita Grasslands

C = Sulphur Springs Valley, Chiricahua Mountains, Willcox

Underlined species indicate birds of very uncommon occurrence or species of such low density as to be easily missed

Bold-faced species indicate birds of rare, casual or accidental occurrence

Birds:

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck P

Mallard T,H,C---including some of the Mexican Duck subspecies *diazi*

Cinnamon Teal T,C

Ruddy Duck T,C

Scaled Quail H,C---especially nice was a pair with tiny chicks near Ramsey Canyon

Gambel's Quail T,S,C

Montezuma Quail C---quite unexpected were single males along the road to Paradise and near the Southwest Research Station; voted the favorite bird of the tour!

Wild Turkey S,T---the Gould's race

Pied-billed Grebe T---by some at Sweetwater

Great Egret P---uncommon

Snowy Egret P

Green Heron T,P

Black-crowned Night-Heron P

Black Vulture P

Turkey Vulture seen daily

White-tailed Kite H---one near Whetstone was a real surprise; generally rare anywhere in southeast Arizona

Cooper's Hawk T,S,C

Northern Goshawk S---adult over Madera Canyon; rarely seen here

Harris's Hawk T---pair at Sweetwater were our only ones; localized

Gray Hawk S,P---especially well in Patagonia thanks to Donna

Common Black-Hawk C---a brief view of one for some in the Chiricahuas where the species is rarely seen; not an expected species on this tour

Swainson's Hawk H,C

Zone-tailed Hawk H,C,T---this species could easily be missed for the entire trip (as it was in 2010) but we had great luck with an impressive seven scattered over four days; voted the second favorite bird of the tour!

Red-tailed Hawk almost daily

American Kestrel S,P,H,C

Falcon species C---either Peregrine or Prairie calling from the cliffs in Cave creek, but not seen

Common Moorhen T

American Coot T,C

Killdeer T,C

Black-necked Stilt T,C

American Avocet C---over 150 seen at Willcox
 Spotted Sandpiper C
Solitary Sandpiper T,C---singles at Sweetwater & Whitewater
 Greater Yellowlegs C---four at Whitewater
 Lesser Yellowlegs C---one at Willcox
 Western Sandpiper C---Whitewater & Cochise Lake
 Least Sandpiper T,C
Baird's Sandpiper C---two at Cochise Lake; uncommon
Stilt Sandpiper C---one at Cochise Lake; uncommon
 Long-billed Dowitcher C
 Wilson's Phalarope C---200+
 Rock Pigeon urban areas throughout
 Band-tailed Pigeon C---nice scope views
 Eurasian Collared-Dove now widespread in this part of the state
 White-winged Dove seen daily in numbers
 Mourning Dove seen daily
 Inca Dove C---one at Portal Peak and another in Willcox
 Common Ground-Dove P,C---nice study at Sweetwater
 Yellow-billed Cuckoo P---scope views
 Greater Roadrunner seven birds scattered throughout the trip
 Barn Owl C---nice daytime views
 Western Screech-Owl S---incredible views from as close as six feet away!; my favorite bird of the trip
 Whiskered Screech-Owl S---good views on our owling trip despite rain & wind
 Great Horned Owl S,C---one being mobbed by a Cooper's Hawk in Green Valley!
Elf Owl C---lucky to get great views in the Chiricahuas; easily missed this late in the summer
 Lesser Nighthawk T,C
 Common Poorwill C---brief flight views only
 White-throated Swift C---by Woody at the SWRS and a flock only by me over the Basin Trail
 Broad-billed Hummingbird S,N,H---up to 50 in a day; stunning
Berylline Hummingbird S---after much waiting on our first visit, we rewarded the second try with great views of this US rarity in Madera Canyon
 Violet-crowned Hummingbird S,P---one in Madera Canyon where rare and another five or so in Patagonia
 Blue-throated Hummingbird C---the 1000th world bird for Donna & Caryl!; tied for third favorite bird of the tour!
 Magnificent Hummingbird S,H,C---absolutely spectacular; tied for third favorite bird of the tour!
Lucifer Hummingbird S---male in Madera Canyon (from ten feet) where very rare; missed in Ash Canyon this time where more regular
 Black-chinned Hummingbird common throughout
 Anna's Hummingbird H---only a few seen, most in Ash Canyon
Costa's Hummingbird P---brilliant male at Paton's feeders; generally rare or very uncommon this late into summer

Calliope Hummingbird C---three wonderful males in the Chiricahuas; very uncommon
 Broad-tailed Hummingbird C---great views
 Rufous Hummingbird S,P,H,C---many fantastic studies of these gems; tied for third favorite bird of the tour
Allen's Hummingbird S---fully gorgeted, entirely green-backed adult males presumed to be of this species in Madera Canyon and in Paradise; rare
Elegant Trogon S---beautiful male near the Amphitheater; we got lucky on this one!; tied for third favorite bird of the tour!
 Acorn Woodpecker S,P,H,C
 Gila Woodpecker T,S,P,H
 Ladder-backed Woodpecker H,C---scarcer than usual with only a few seen
Arizona Woodpecker S,C---superb studies in Madera Canyon of this uncommon resident
 Northern Flicker H,C---red0shafted variety
 Gilded Flicker S---in Green Valley
Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet P---right overhead; uncommon
 Western Wood-Pewee S,H,C
 Cordilleran Flycatcher C---#650 for Woody!
Buff-breasted Flycatcher C---with no access to Carr or Garden canyons this year, we were very fortunate to pick up this localized & distinctive species in the Chiricahuas
 Black Phoebe T,C
 Say's Phoebe P,H,C
 Vermilion Flycatcher P,H
 Dusky-capped Flycatcher S,P,H,C
 Ash-throated Flycatcher S,P,H,C
 Brown-crested Flycatcher T,S,H,C
 Sulphur-bellied flycatcher S,C---nice studies in Madera and another on the road in Cave creek
Tropical Kingbird T---good scope views; rare & localized
 Cassin's Kingbird almost daily
Thick-billed Kingbird P---one at the roadside rest area; very localized
 Western Kingbird common in all lower elevation sites
 Loggerhead Shrike S,C---most in the Sulphur Springs Valley
 Bell's Vireo S,C---less numerous than usual
 Plumbeous Vireo S,C
 Hutton's Vireo S,C
 Steller's Jay C---subspecies *macrolopha*
 Western Scrub-Jay C---subspecies *woodhouseii*, a possible future split
 Mexican Jay S,H,C
 Chihuahuan Raven H,C
 Common Raven S,P,H,C,T
 Horned Lark H
 Purple Martin S---somewhat odd were five below Madera Canyon
 Tree Swallow T,C
 Violet-green Swallow C
 Northern Rough-winged Swallow P,C

Cliff Swallow T,S,C
 Barn Swallow seen daily
 Mexican Chickadee C---unfortunately this Chiricahua endemic was heard only; we had almost no access this year to the area where they occur due to the fire damage
Mountain Chickadee T---many up Mount Lemmon; not likely to be seen on future trips as we normally do not visit this site
 Bridled Titmouse S, P, H, C---very cute
 Juniper Titmouse C---seen best in Paradise
 Verdin T,S,P,C
 Bushtit H,C
 Red-breasted Nuthatch C,T
 White-breasted Nuthatch S,P,H,C,T
 Pygmy Nuthatch C,T
 Brown Creeper T---a couple up Mount Lemmon
 Cactus Wren T,S,H,C
 Rock Wren P
 Canyon Wren P
 Bewick's Wren S,P,H,C
 House Wren C,T
 Blue-gray Gnatcatcher S,C---uncommon
 Black-tailed Gnatcatcher C---localized along this route
 Hermit Thrush C,T
 American Robin C
 Northern Mockingbird almost daily
Bendire's Thrasher C---after some searching in the Sulphur Springs Valley we eventually had great views
 Curve-billed Thrasher seen daily
Crissal Thrasher C---unusual, prolonged scope study of this desert skulker
 European Starling S,P
 Phainopepla P,H
 Olive Warbler C,T---heard in the Chiricahuas and seen briefly by Jack and I in the Catalinas
 Lucy's Warbler T,S,P
 Yellow Warbler T,P
 Yellow-rumped Warbler T
 Black-throated Gray Warbler S,C
 Grace's Warbler C,T---only two seen
 Common Yellowthroat T,H
 Red-faced Warbler T---about a dozen in the Catalinas our last day; nice views; tied for third favorite bird of the tour!
 Painted Redstart S,C---always stunning
 Yellow-breasted Chat P---exceptionally good view at Empire Gulch
 Spotted Towhee H,C,T
 Rufous-crowned Sparrow P---only one seen
 Canyon Towhee S,C
 Abert's Towhee T,P

Rufous-winged Sparrow S---superb views
 Cassin's Sparrow S,H,C---many skylarking birds
 Botteri's Sparrow S,H---great studies
 Chipping Sparrow C
Black-chinned Sparrow C---great looks at a pair near Paradise; very localized and uncommon
 Lark Sparrow P,H,C
 Black-throated Sparrow S,C---the most handsome sparrow?
Grasshopper Sparrow H---incredible views of a generally skulky bird
 Song Sparrow T,P,C---southwestern subspecies *saltonis*
 Yellow-eyed Junco C,T---almost eating out of hands at Mount Lemmon
 Hepatic Tanager S,C
 Summer Tanager S,P
 Western Tanager P---only two seen
 Northern Cardinal S,P,H,C---the brighter red, longer crested race
 Pyrrhuloxia S,P,C
 Black-headed Grosbeak S,P,C
 Blue Grosbeak everyday but the first
Indigo Bunting C---female at Whitewater Draw; very uncommon
 Varied Bunting S,Bisbee---stunning, plum-colored beauties
Painted Bunting C---an unprecedented invasion this summer of this species into Arizona; generally rare here
 Red-winged Blackbird T,P,H
 Eastern Meadowlark H,C---southwestern subspecies *lilianae*
 Yellow-headed Blackbird H---a few early migrants
 Great-tailed Grackle all but one day
 Bronzed Cowbird S,P,H,C
 Brown-headed Cowbird S,P,H,C
 Hooded Oriole S,P
 Bullock's Oriole H,C
 Scott's Oriole S,H
 House Finch seen daily
Pine Siskin T---one aseasonal bird in Rose Canyon on Mount Lemmon
 Lesser Goldfinch seen daily
 House Sparrow seen daily

Total species – 181

Mammals:

Desert Cottontail
 Eastern Cottontail
 Black-tailed Jackrabbit
 Round-tailed Ground Squirrel
 Harris's Antelope Squirrel
 Cliff Chipmunk

Apache (Mexican) Fox Squirrel
Arizona Gray Squirrel
Rock Squirrel
Botta's (Valley) Pocket Gopher
Banner-tailed Kangaroo Rat---nice views below Madera of this large k-rat
kangaroo rat species---either Merriam's or Ord's
peromyscus species---leader only
White-throated Wood Rat
cotton rat species
small bat species
large bat species
Coyote---leader only
Gray Fox
Bobcat---a nice bonus for one van near Paradise
Pronghorn
White-tailed Deer
Collared Peccary (Javelina)
Black Bear---two seen our first afternoon in Cave Creek

Total species – 24 (possibly a tour record!)

Reptiles & Amphibians:

Desert Spiny Lizard
Mountain Spiny Lizard
Ornate Tree Lizard
Desert Grassland Whiptail
Sonoran Spotted Whiptail
Lesser Earless Lizard
Texas Horned Lizard---in hand inspection
Short Horned Lizard---BZ only at Summerhaven
Sonoran Desert Toad---put a saddle on this one!
Red-spotted Toad
Bullfrog---heard only

Total species – 11

Butterflies:

Pipevine Swallowtail
Two-tailed Swallowtail
Black Swallowtail
White species---probably Checkered
Chiricahua White---a rare find in the Catalinas!
Marine Blue
Queen

Fiery Skipper
Roadside skipper species---Dotted?
Silver-spotted Skipper

Total species – 10 (an unusually low count due to the drought and lack of flowers)

Significant others:

Tarantula
Tarantula Hawk (Wasp)
Gibber californicus (a pleasing fungus beetle)
Click beetle species (Chalcolepidius webbi)
Lycus lecontei (net-winged beetle species)
Impressive monsoon storms!