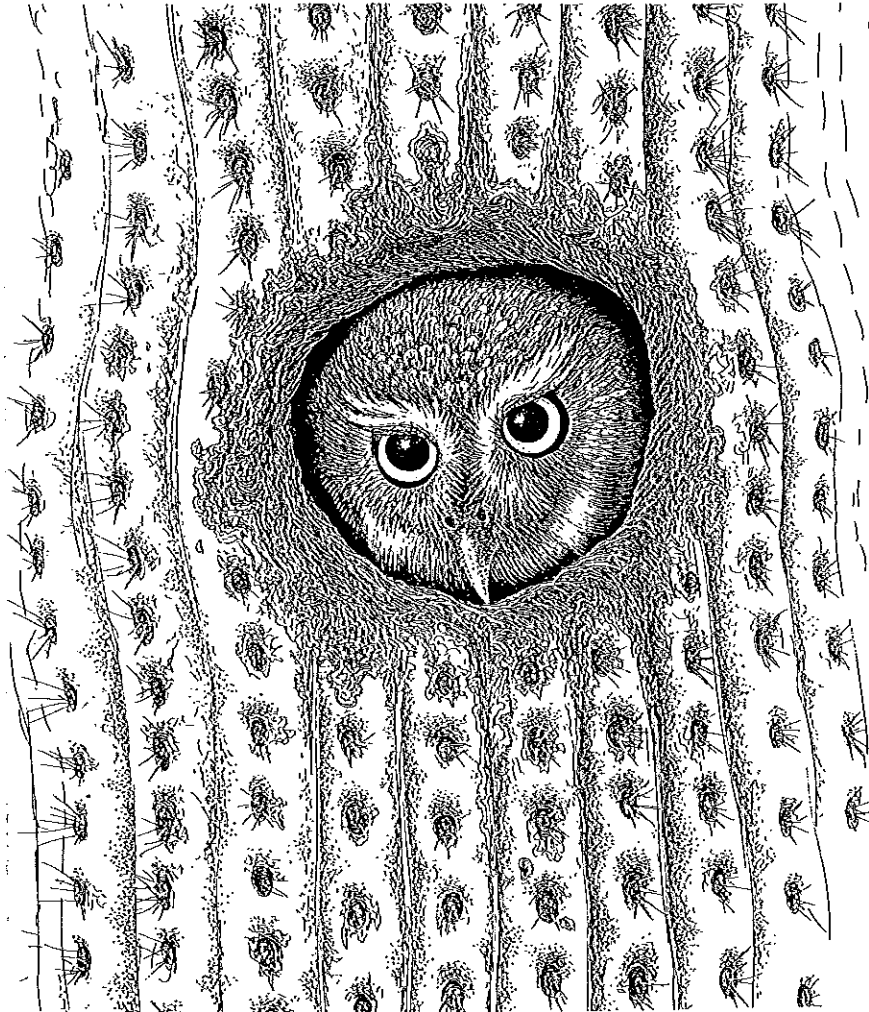


Texas Hill Country & Big Bend

May 5 – 15, 2002



Elf Owl
Micrathene whitneyi

Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc.
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Leader: Greg Lasley

Itinerary:

- May 5 Afternoon arrival in San Antonio with get-acquainted dinner.
- May 6 The early morning was spent birding the Mitchell Lake wetlands near San Antonio where we were able to see a number of waterbirds. From here we headed into the Hill Country arriving at Neal's Lodge in Concan by mid afternoon. Some afternoon birding at Neal's.
- May 7 Birded Lost Maples State Natural Area in the morning. Visited Utopia after lunch. In the afternoon we birded the area around Neal's, then visited the famous Frio Bat Cave at dusk to watch several million Mexican Free-tailed Bats as they left the cave. This is one of the greatest natural history spectacles of the world!
- May 8 We left Neal's early and then drove west toward Big Bend with stops at the Pecos River, and at Judge Roy Bean's "Law West of the Pecos" museum while enroute. Arrived at Big Bend in the late afternoon.
- May 9 Birded Rio Grande Village in the morning, the Basin lagoons in the afternoon with some night birding after dark.
- May 10 Birded the Window Trail in the morning and the Sam Nail Ranch in the afternoon.
- May 11 Hiked into Blue Creek Canyon in the morning, then had lunch at Cottonwood Campground. After lunch we made a brief visit to Santa Elena Canyon.
- May 12 All day hike into the Chisos Mountains & Boot Canyon.
- May 13 Drove from Big Bend to the Davis Mountains; afternoon birding in the Davis Mountains.
- May 14 Drove from Ft. Davis to Lake Balmorhea where we spent several hours. We then headed west toward El Paso with some brief birding at an irrigation reservoir near the Rio Grande. Arrived at our hotel in El Paso during the afternoon.
- May 15 Departure for home.

Legend:

BBNP - Various Big Bend National Park locations
CB - Chisos Basin - Big Bend National Park
CC - Cottonwood Campground, Big Bend National Park
CM - Chisos Mountains (includes Boot Canyon), Big Bend National Park
DM - Davis Mountains
ELP - El Paso area (includes irrigation reservoir in Hudspeth County)
HC - Various Hill Country locations
LA - Areas near Langtry
LB - Lake Balmorhea and nearby areas
LM - Lost Maples State Natural Area & vicinity near Vanderpool
ML - Mitchell Lake wetlands, San Antonio
NL - Neal's Lodge and area at Concan
UT - Utopia, a small town in the Hill Country
RGV - Rio Grande Village, Big Bend National Park

The spring of 2002 was very pleasant in west Texas! While we certainly encountered some hot weather in the deserts, overall the weather was not a problem. We did extremely well with most of the birds we were seeking and even encountered a few uncommon and rare species. This was an amazing year, but then, each visit to the Big Bend holds surprises!

BIRDLIST (215 species):

GREBES

Eared Grebe – one or two breeding plumaged birds were at ELP
Western Grebe - we saw upwards of 20 Westerns at LB and near ELP
Clark's Grebe - at least 4 were seen at LB and near ELP with some excellent comparisons with Westerns

PELICANS

American White Pelican - three were at ML

CORMORANTS

Double-crested Cormorant - ELP
Neotropic Cormorant - ELP

HERONS

Great Blue Heron - widespread in small numbers
Great Egret - a few at ML
Snowy Egret - a few at ML and near ELP
Little Blue Heron - one at ML
Cattle Egret – ML and ELP
Green Heron - a few seen at several locations during the trip

Black-crowned Night-Heron - one or two at RGV

IBISES

White-faced Ibis - nice studies of about 15 of these birds at LB

NEW WORLD VULTURES

Black Vulture - widespread in Hill Country

Turkey Vulture - commonly seen at all locations

WATERFOWL

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck - a few were seen near Uvalde

Gadwall - a few lingered at LB

American Wigeon - several were near Del Rio with others at LB

Mallard - several "Mexican" Ducks, a race of the Mallard, were seen at LB
along with a few regular green-headed birds

Blue-winged Teal - ML, LB, ELP

Northern Shoveler - a few at several water areas

Northern Pintail - several were at LB

Redhead - one was at ML

Lesser Scaup - a few lingered at LB

Ruddy Duck - ML, LB, and ELP

HAWKS, EAGLES & KITES

Northern Harrier - one was near LB

Cooper's Hawk - seen at LM and DM; a bird was seen on the nest in DM

Gray Hawk - great looks at one flying over CC while another was seen in the
DM for a rare area record

Common Black-Hawk - we were treated to good views of this very local
species at RGV and DM where a female was on a nest at each location

Harris's Hawk - Two were seen along the road west of Uvalde

Swainson's Hawk - one or two seen near Alpine and ELP

Zone-tailed Hawk - brief looks at one in the DM

Red-tailed Hawk - widespread in small numbers

FALCONS & CARACARAS

Crested Caracara - several were seen in the Hill Country

American Kestrel - a single bird was seen at ELP

TURKEY

Wild Turkey - one was at CC

NEW WORLD QUAIL

Montezuma Quail - incredible views of this gorgeous species in the DM! We
saw them virtually at our feet. Voted the favorite bird of the trip!

Scaled Quail - BBNP, LB

RAILS & COOTS

Sora – one seen briefly at RGV
American Coot - ML, Del Rio, ELP

PLOVERS & LAPWINGS

American Golden-Plover – one at ML was a rare treat
Killdeer – ML and LB, ELP

AVOCETS & STILTS

Black-necked Stilt - ML and LB
American Avocet - several were at LB with a few others at LB

SANDPIPERS

Greater Yellowlegs – a few at LB
Lesser Yellowlegs - a few at ML and LB
Spotted Sandpiper - widespread in small numbers at HC, LB, ELP
Hudsonian Godwit – one migrant at ML was a real bonus, very rare here
Sanderling – one at ML was a rare surprise at this inland location
Semipalmated Sandpiper – ML
Western Sandpiper – a few at LB
Least Sandpiper - a few at ML
White-rumped Sandpiper – several nice looks at ML
Baird's Sandpiper - a few were at ML with others studied closely at LB
Pectoral Sandpiper - one was at ML with others at LB
Stilt Sandpiper – a dozen were at ML
Long-billed Dowitcher – a few at ML & LB
Wilson's Phalarope - ML & LB; at least 200 were at ML!

GULLS & TERNS

Franklin's Gull - one was at ML while 6 were at LB
Ring-billed Gull - one at LB with a few others at ELP
Forster's Tern – one at LB

PIGEONS & DOVES

Rock Dove - widespread in cities and towns
Eurasian Collared-Dove - this rapidly expanding introduced species was seen
at Comstock, Alpine and Balmorhea
White-winged Dove - common and widespread
Mourning Dove - common and widespread
Inca Dove - scarce this year; a few in San Antonio and the HC, and a few at
RGV
Common Ground-Dove – several in the HC and BBNP

CUCKOOS, ROADRUNNERS & ANIS

Yellow-billed Cuckoo – HC, BBNP
Greater Roadrunner - common at RGV

OWLS

Eastern Screech-Owl - one was heard at NL but not seen
Western Screech-Owl - great studies of this species one night at RGV
Great Horned Owl – one or two seen along the roadside at night
Elf Owl - we had wonderful views of a calling bird in BBNP
Barred Owl - a pair at UT glared down at us from high in a cypress tree

NIGHTJARS

Lesser Nighthawk - seen at dawn and dusk in BBNP
Common Nighthawk - several near NL
Chuck-will's-widow - heard regularly at NL but not seen

SWIFTS

Chimney Swift - a few seen at NL and in the Hill Country
White-throated Swift - seen occasionally at several BBNP locations. The most memorable sighting of this species was of several as they swooped in to drink in the CB "lagoons"

HUMMINGBIRDS

Blue-throated Hummingbird – one seen briefly by some in CB
Lucifer Hummingbird – this bird can be hard to find but we saw one in BBNP
And one in the DM!
Broad-billed Hummingbird – a male at a feeder in DM was a Texas rarity!
Black-chinned Hummingbird - common and widespread
Broad-tailed Hummingbird - a female on a nest was found in DM; at another Nest we saw two tiny chicks!

KINGFISHERS

Green Kingfisher – scarce this year but we had two brief looks in the HC

WOODPECKERS

Acorn Woodpecker - BBNP & DM
Golden-fronted Woodpecker - widespread in moderate numbers
Ladder-backed Woodpecker - widespread in small numbers
Northern Flicker - seen in DM

TYRANT FLYCATCHERS

Olive-sided Flycatcher - one was at the DM
Western Wood-Pewee - fairly common in BBNP & DM
Eastern Wood-Pewee - several were singing at NL & LM
Acadian Flycatcher - several singing birds were studied at LM
Gray Flycatcher - several in the DM were a treat; this is the only area in Texas where this species is known to nest in small numbers
Cordilleran Flycatcher – one cooperative bird was in CM
Black Phoebe - NL, BBNP

Eastern Phoebe - NL, LM
Say's Phoebe - widespread in BBNP
Vermilion Flycatcher - widespread at NL, BBNP
Ash-throated Flycatcher – widespread
Dusky-capped Flycatcher – one calling bird was seen well in CM, a Texas rarity!
Cassin's Kingbird - many were in the DM
Western Kingbird - common and widespread
Eastern Kingbird - a few at ML
Tropical Kingbird – a pair was at CC
Scissor-tailed Flycatcher - common in the Hill Country

SHRIKES

Loggerhead Shrike – one at Alpine

VIREOS

White-eyed Vireo - NL, LM
Bell's Vireo - quite common at RGV, CC, and other lowland areas in BBNP
Black-capped Vireo - wonderful looks at two males near LM
Gray Vireo - good looks at a singing bird in Blue Creek Canyon in BBNP
Blue-headed Vireo – one in HC
Plumbeous Vireo – one in BBNP and two in DM
Yellow-throated Vireo - several great looks at singing birds at NL
Hutton's Vireo - several were in the CM
Warbling Vireo – one in DM by some
Red-eyed Vireo - several singing birds were near LM

CROWS & JAYS

Western Scrub-Jay - near NL and in the DM
Mexican Jay - common in the CM and CB
Chihuahuan Raven - several near BBNP and ELP
Common Raven - common and widespread in BBNP and DM; a few in the HC

SWALLOWS

Purple Martin - NL, LM
Violet-green Swallow - several were at CB and at other BBNP locations
N. Rough-winged Swallow – ML, BBNP
Cliff Swallow - common and widespread
Cave Swallow - common and widespread, especially at the Frio Bat Cave
where 100 or more circled overhead as the bats left the cave!
Barn Swallow - common and widespread

CHICKADEES & TITMICE

Carolina Chickadee - NL
Mountain Chickadee - one in the DM was a lucky find
Tufted Titmouse - the "Black-crested" form of this species was common and
widespread at several locations we visited

VERDIN

Verdin - widespread in small numbers in drier areas

BUSHTIT

Bushtit - a few were seen in the HC and DM

NUTHATCHES

White-breasted Nuthatch - one or two were seen in the DM

WRENS

Cactus Wren - common and widespread in BBNP

Rock Wren - several were in the HC and at BBNP

Canyon Wren - this beautiful singer was heard and seen regularly

Carolina Wren - common in the Hill Country

Bewick's Wren - common in the Hill Country and CM

Marsh Wren – one migrant was heard at RGV

KINGLETS

Ruby-crowned Kinglet – one late bird at BBNP

OLD WORLD WARBLERS & GNATCATCHERS

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher - NL, LM, CM

Black-tailed Gnatcatcher - nice looks at a calling bird in BBNP

THRUSHES

Eastern Bluebird - one or two near Neal's

Western Bluebird - several seen in the DM

Swainson's Thrush – one in BBNP

Hermit Thrush - this species was seen in BBNP by a few folks

MOCKINGBIRDS & THRASHERS

Gray Catbird – a late migrant was at BBNP

Northern Mockingbird - common and widespread

Curve-billed Thrasher - BBNP

Crissal Thrasher - several looks at this shy species in BBNP

STARLINGS

European Starling - cities and towns

PIPITS

American Pipit - several were at BBNP and LB

WAXWINGS

Cedar Waxwing – one bird was seen at CC

SILKY-FLYCATCHERS

Phainopepla – a beautiful male was seen in the DM

WOOD WARBLERS

Nashville Warbler – one at BBNP

Colima Warbler - about 8 were seen in the CM on our Boot Springs hike;
the 2nd favorite bird of the trip.

Lucy's Warbler - nice looks at an adult at CC

Northern Parula – one near LM

Yellow Warbler – several in BBNP and one near LB

Yellow-rumped Warbler - "Audubon's" Yellow-rumped were seen in small
numbers at scattered BBNP locations

Golden-cheeked Warbler - This bird can be a little difficult at this time of year
(they arrive in March and by early May can be very quiet), but we
found several at LM, so we all had great views

Townsend's Warbler – a one migrant was seen in BBNP

Grace's Warbler - several singing birds in the DM

Black-and-white Warbler - several were seen at LM with one also at CC

American Redstart – a migrant was seen at BBNP

MacGillivray's Warbler – two migrants at BBNP

Common Yellowthroat - a few seen at various locations

Wilson's Warbler – several at BBNP

Yellow-breasted Chat - widespread in small numbers in HC and BBNP

TANAGERS

Hepatic Tanager - we had nice looks at a pair in CB with others seen at DM

Summer Tanager - widespread in small numbers

Western Tanager – a few in BBNP and DM

SPARROWS & ALLIES

Olive Sparrow – one near NL

Spotted Towhee - widespread in small numbers in CB & CM

Canyon Towhee - common in CB, CM, and DM

Rufous-crowned Sparrow - BBNP, DM

Chipping Sparrow - widespread in small numbers at several locations

Clay-colored Sparrow - a few at ML

Brewer's Sparrow – one late migrant at BBNP

Field Sparrow - one at NL by some

Black-chinned Sparrow - excellent looks from 15 feet away in the CBI

Vesper Sparrow – a late migrant lingered at BBNP

Lark Sparrow - widespread in moderate numbers

Black-throated Sparrow - seen in several desert areas of BBNP

Lark Bunting – one remained at BBNP

Savannah Sparrow – a few lingered at BBNP

Swamp Sparrow – one at ML and another at BBNP were late

White-crowned Sparrow – several lingered at BBNP

CARDINALS, GROSBEAKS & BUNTINGS

Northern Cardinal - common and widespread

Pyrrhuloxia - several seen in BBNP

Black-headed Grosbeak - fairly common at BBNP and DM

Blue Grosbeak - seen in small numbers at several locations visited

Lazuli Bunting – one migrant was seen at BBNP

Indigo Bunting - LM

Varied Bunting - BBNP; several wonderful studies of this desert specialty

Painted Bunting - NL, LM, BBNP, many wonderful observations of stunning males! Voted the 3rd favorite bird of the trip

Dickcissel - several were singing at ML

BLACKBIRDS & ALLIES

Red-winged Blackbird - common and widespread

Eastern Meadowlark – a few at ML and LB

Yellow-headed Blackbird – one was near DM and another was at LB

Brewer's Blackbird - a few lingered at RGV

Great-tailed Grackle - common around San Antonio and ELP

Bronzed Cowbird - widespread in small numbers

Brown-headed Cowbird - common and widespread

Orchard Oriole - ML, RGV, BBNP

Hooded Oriole - nice looks at a female in Langtry and a beautiful male at CC

Baltimore Oriole – one or two at ML

Bullock's Oriole – a few in BBNP

Scott's Oriole – one in HC and fairly common in BBNP

FINCHES

House Finch - common and widespread

Pine Siskin - three lingered at BBNP

Lesser Goldfinch - a few in the HC and BBNP

American Goldfinch - one seen briefly in RGV

OLD WORLD SPARROWS

House Sparrow - common and widespread

We had an good variety of other wildlife sightings as well. In addition to the below identified animals, we saw a number of unidentified lizards, bats, rodents, butterflies, etc.

MAMMALS

Mexican Free-tailed Bat (*Tadarida brasiliensis*) - huge numbers (ca. 10 million) leaving the Frio Bat Cave!

Coyote (*Canis latrans*)- two pups in BBNP watched us closely

Desert Cottontail (*Sylvilagus audubonii*) - common in BBNP
Black-tailed Jackrabbit (*Lepus californicus*) - common in BBNP
Rock Squirrel (*Spermophilus variegatus*) - HC and BBNP
Eastern Fox Squirrel (*Sciurus niger*) - NL, LM
Collared Peccary (*Tayassu tajacu*) - also called Javalina, seen in BBNP
White-tailed Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) - NL, BBNP, DM
Mule Deer – BBNP
Axis Deer – one of these introduced exotics was seen in HC
Pronghorn (*Antilocapra americana*) – several seen in DM

HERPS

Crevice Spiny Lizard
Checkered Whiptail
Earless lizard (species?)
Red-eared Slider
Common Snapping Turtle
Softshell Turtle
Western Diamondbacked Rattlesnake
Texas Long-nosed Snake
Western Coachwhip
Big Bend Patch-nosed Snake (dead on road)
Four-lined Skink
Canyon Tree Frog

FISH (really!)

Large-mouthed Bass
Carp
Mosquito Fish (*Gambusia gageae*)