

Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc.

SPRING GRAND ARIZONA

May 10 - 20, 2007

Leaders: Barry Zimmer & Brennan Mulrooney

The silence of the night was intermittently broken by a single ventriloquial hoot from the large ponderosa pine in front of us. Despite our efforts we were unable to spot the small owl that was giving the call. This was our second night out in the high elevations of the Chiricahua Mountains in search of the elusive Flammulated Owl—without a doubt, the most difficult to see of the nine owl species that are possible on this tour. Tonight we were determined to be successful. The bird became silent for a short period and then began calling behind our group in a small oak thicket. A quick glimpse in the light revealed a back view only, and then the bird disappeared once more. A minute later it began calling again; fortunately, it was in another low oak tree. We crept up slowly and collectively held our breath, fingers crossed, prayers whispered. Suddenly, there in the spot light was the target of our quest. No more than 15 feet away and at eye level sat an adorable brown-eyed Flammulated Owl on a totally exposed lichen-covered oak branch! In over 20 years of leading trips to Arizona and New Mexico, I have never seen this species so well. We enjoyed unsurpassed scope-filled views of this wonderful bird as a Whip-poor-will serenaded us in the background.

This was one of many amazing highlights on our Spring Grand Arizona tour. The next morning we completed our goal of seeing all nine species of owls when a Northern Pygmy-Owl was whistled in directly overhead. No more than 30 feet away, he glared down at us while an entourage of Mexican Chickadees, Pygmy Nuthatches, Grace's Warblers, and Brown Creepers created a scolding frenzy around him. We eventually walked away, enjoying prolonged views, one after another.

Other owls were also memorable on this trip. A pair of roosting Spotted Owls in shady, maple-lined Scheelite Canyon were unforgettable, as were the tiny Elf Owls nesting in the telephone pole our first night of owling. Western and Whiskered screech-owls provided excellent studies that night as well, while Burrowing, Barn, and Great Horneds were all seen exceptionally well in the daytime.

Of course this trip was about much more than just owls. For starters we had 11 species of hummingbirds. Nowhere else in the country can come close to boasting this sort of diversity. Rarities included a stunning male White-eared, a female Lucifer, and a tiny female Calliope. Regulars such as the brilliant Violet-crowned and Broad-billed, the appropriately named Magnificent, the huge Blue-throated, and the localized Costa's put on great shows as well. The incredible Elegant Trogon, arguably the most sought-after bird in Arizona, was viewed at point-blank range in the Huachuca Mountains as it barked out its strange dog-like calls. Repeat views came days later in the Chiricahuas.

Winning honors as favorite bird of the tour was the amazing Montezuma Quail. We had a male perched on a rock for over ten minutes at 20 feet in Madera Canyon, and later in the tour we saw another male on Ruby Road and a pair in the Chiricahuas—our best luck ever with this often-missed species! We studied a singing Five-striped Sparrow from about 25 feet as it perched in a blooming ocotillo. We marveled at wonderful warblers such as the incomparable Red-faced, the pumpkin-headed Olive, and the spiffy Painted Redstart. Raptors put on a great show with superb

views of Common Black-Hawk, Zone-tailed Hawk, Gray Hawk, Mississippi Kite, and Peregrine Falcon among others. In addition we saw virtually all of the Arizona and southwestern specialty birds. From the unique Arizona Woodpecker to the raucous Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher to localized specialties such as Rufous-winged Sparrow and Buff-breasted Flycatcher, we had marvelous views of all.

As an added bonus we had a couple of nice rarities. A gorgeous male Flame-colored Tanager in Madera Canyon was a real treat, as were a pair of Black-capped Gnatcatchers sitting on a nest (!) at Patagonia Lake. Although both seem to be increasing in the United States, they are still viewed as unexpected Mexican vagrants.

I have barely scratched the surface on highlights of this trip, having failed to mention such noteworthy species as Crissal and Bendire's thrashers, Common Poorwill, Thick-billed Kingbird, Canyon Wren, Red Crossbill, and Black-chinned and Botteri's sparrows.

Itinerary:

- May 10 - afternoon visit to Sonoran Desert Museum, Golf Links Road (26 species)
- May 11 - northwest Tucson, Aravaipa Canyon, Mammoth Sewage Ponds, Madera Canyon, evening owling (71 species; 75 total)
- May 12 - desert near Continental, Madera Canyon, Green Valley, Amado Sewage Pond, Tubac, Rio Rico area (83 species; 106 total)
- May 13 - California Gulch and Ruby Road, Patagonia/ Sonoita Creek area, Paton's yard (73 species; 125 total)
- May 14 - Kino Springs, Patagonia Lake State Park, Sonoita Creek, Sonoita grasslands, Ash Canyon (91 species; 143 total)
- May 15 - Ramsey Canyon, Carr Canyon, Miller Canyon (Beatty's); evening owling (68 species; 161 total)
- May 16 - Fort Huachuca including Garden Canyon & Scheelite Canyon, Sulphur Springs Valley (Whitewater Draw, Elfrida), desert near Rodeo, NM; evening owling (81 species; 179 total)
- May 17 - Paradise Road, Cave Creek Canyon, South Fork Trail, Paradise, evening owling (70 species; 184 total)
- May 18 - Portal Road, upper elevations of Chiricahua Mts including the "T" junction, Onion Saddle, and Pinery Canyon; afternoon to Jasper's feeders and Cave Creek Canyon; evening owling (83 species; 195 total)
- May 19 - Cave Creek Canyon, over mountain route to Willcox, Willcox Sewage Pond (Cochise Lake) (86 species; 202 total)
- May 20 - departure for home (202 total species)

Key:

- T = all areas in and around Tucson, also Aravaipa Canyon
 - S = Santa Rita Mountains (Madera Canyon), surrounding grasslands, Green Valley, Tubac
 - N = Nogales, Patagonia, Ruby Road
 - H = Huachuca Mountains, Sonoita grasslands
 - C = Chiricahua Mountains, Sulphur Springs Valley, Willcox
- underlined species represent birds of very uncommon occurrence or species which occur regularly but in such low density as to be easily missed
- bold-faced species** indicate birds of rare, casual, or accidental occurrence

Birds:

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck N---an impressive 100 or so near Rio Rico in a flooded field

Gadwall C---late

American Wigeon C

Mallard T,N,C---including some of the Mexican Duck subspecies

Blue-winged Teal C---late

Cinnamon Teal N,C

Northern Shoveler C

Redhead T---late birds at Mammoth

Lesser Scaup C---also late

Ruddy Duck N,C---wonderful breeding males with bright blue bills

Wild Turkey H---heard only; the Gould's subspecies

Scaled Quail H,C---several great views

Gambel's Quail seen daily including some really cute babies

Montezuma Quail S,N,C---incredible luck with this easily missed species (missed completely in 2006); we had birds in three locations (a record!) including unbelievable walk-away views in Madera Canyon; voted the favorite bird of the tour!

Pied-billed Grebe N

Eared Grebe C---breeding plumaged birds

Western Grebe C---one at Willcox was a nice find; rare

Clark's Grebe N---rarer still were two at Patagonia Lake

Neotropic Cormorant N

Great Blue Heron T,N,C

Snowy Egret C

White-faced Ibis N,C---great views of breeding-plumaged birds

Black Vulture N---nearly missed

Turkey Vulture seen daily in numbers

Mississippi Kite T---a pair near Mammoth thanks to Brennan; unexpected

Cooper's Hawk T,S,N,H,C---including two nests

Common Black-Hawk T---nice views of pair at nest after much searching

Harris's Hawk T---local, only two seen

Gray Hawk S,N---superb views; four total

Swainson's Hawk H,C

Zone-tailed Hawk T,N---we had three individuals (the best one near Mammoth); this bird can be missed completely

Red-tailed Hawk daily

Golden Eagle H,C

American Kestrel T,C

Peregrine Falcon T---great scope study

Virginia Rail C---up close and out in the open; unexpected!

Sora C

Common Moorhen N

American Coot N,C---one of Bob's favorites

Killdeer N,C

American Avocet C

Spotted Sandpiper T,S,N,C

Greater Yellowlegs C---one distant bird at Whitewater; late

Willet C---two at Willcox; rare

Marbled Godwit C---a rare find at Willcox; possibly a tour first

Stilt Sandpiper C---another rarity; breeding-plumaged bird at Whitewater
 Wilson's Phalarope C---gorgeous breeding plumaged birds
Laughing Gull N---first winter bird at Patagonia Lake; very rare
 Rock Pigeon seen in all urban areas
 Band-tailed Pigeon C---great views at Jasper's
Eurasian Collared-Dove T,S,C---a recent arriver in this area; now common in places
 White-winged Dove seen daily in numbers
 Mourning Dove seen daily in numbers
 Inca Dove N---amazingly only one seen the entire trip
 Common Ground-Dove N---one fly-by at Kino Springs
 Greater Roadrunner T,N,H,C---a total of 13 seen with many great views
 Barn Owl C---flight views
Flammulated Owl C---unsurpassed views of this difficult to see species; we spent about four hours
 of owling time nailing this one down and were rewarded with the best views ever!; voted the
 third favorite bird of the tour!!!
 Western Screech-Owl S---fantastic views
 Whiskered Screech-Owl S,C---excellent views
 Great Horned Owl S,C---nice daytime study
Northern Pygmy-Owl C---finally, after being teased by two others, we had walk-away views of one
 overhead in the Chiricahuas; tied for second favorite bird of the tour!
 Elf Owl S,C---great study at nest hole
 Burrowing Owl T---uncommon & localized
Spotted Owl H---after much effort we were rewarded with unbeatable views
 Lesser Nighthawk T,S,N,
 Common Poorwill S,H---up close and personal ("Sam")
 Whip-poor-will C---nice views of perched bird; the Mexican subspecies *arizonae*, already split by
 some authors
 White-throated Swift T,N,H,C
 Broad-billed Hummingbird S,N,H
White-eared Hummingbird H---fantastic male in Miller Canyon; very rare at this season
 Violet-crowned Hummingbird P---wow!
 Blue-throated Hummingbird H,C---seemed scarcer than usual
 Magnificent Hummingbird S,H,C---lives up to its name
Lucifer Hummingbird H--- unexpected was a female in Ash Canyon
 Black-chinned Hummingbird almost daily
 Anna's Hummingbird N,H
Costa's Hummingbird T---five at the desert museum and one at our final dinner
Calliope Hummingbird H---very unexpected at this season was a female seen repeatedly in Ash
 Canyon
 Broad-tailed Hummingbird S,H,C
 Elegant Trogon H,C---great Questar views of a male in Garden Canyon and also in the Chiricahuas;
 tied for second favorite bird of the tour!
 Acorn Woodpecker S,N,H,C
 Gila Woodpecker T,S,N
 Ladder-backed Woodpecker S,N,H,C
 Hairy Woodpecker C
Arizona Woodpecker S,H,C---several good views of this often difficult to find species
 Northern Flicker H,C---red-shafted variety; scarcer than usual
 Gilded Flicker T,S---three seen

Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet N---close study at the last minute!
 Olive-sided Flycatcher H---migrants
 Greater Pewee H,C---four seen
 Western Wood-Pewee T,S,N,H,C
 Dusky Flycatcher C---one late bird by some
 Pacific-slope Flycatcher N---migrants down low
 Cordilleran Flycatcher S,H,C
 Buff-breasted Flycatcher H---six of these localized birds seen
 Black Phoebe T,N,C
 Say's Phoebe N,H,C
 Vermilion Flycatcher T,S,N,C---always spectacular
 Dusky-capped Flycatcher S,N,H,C
 Ash-throated Flycatcher T,S,N,H,C
 Brown-crested Flycatcher almost daily
 Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher H,C---prolonged scope views of these late arrivers
Tropical Kingbird N---one near Rio Rico and one at Kino; tough on this trip
 Cassin's Kingbird almost daily
 Thick-billed Kingbird N---two in Patagonia
 Western Kingbird almost daily
 Loggerhead Shrike H,C
 Bell's Vireo T,S,N,C
 Plumbeous Vireo S,H,C
 Hutton's Vireo S,H,C
 Warbling Vireo S,H,C
 Steller's Jay H,C---subspecies *macrolopha*
 Western Scrub-Jay H,C---subspecies *woodhouseii*
 Mexican Jay S,N,H,C---subspecies *arizonae*
 Chihuahuan Raven H,C
 Common Raven T,S,N,H,C
 Horned Lark H,C---better views than normal
 Violet-green Swallow H,C
 Northern Rough-winged Swallow T,S,N,C
 Cliff Swallow T,N
 Barn Swallow almost daily
 Mexican Chickadee C---thanks in part to Rea!
 Bridled Titmouse S,N,H,C
 Juniper Titmouse C---eating peanut butter in Paradise
 Verdin T,S,N
 Bushtit S,N,H,C
 Red-breasted Nuthatch C
 White-breasted Nuthatch almost daily
 Pygmy Nuthatch C---one of the cutest birds of North America; several mobbing the pygmy-owl!
 Brown Creeper C
 Cactus Wren almost daily
 Rock Wren N---distant views
 Canyon Wren N,H,C
 Bewick's Wren T,S,N,H,C
 House Wren S,C---the "Brown-throated" Wren of old
 Blue-gray Gnatcatcher S,C

Black-tailed Gnatcatcher T
Black-capped Gnatcatcher N---fantastic study of pair after much searching at Patagonia Lake; we even discovered the nest!
Western Bluebird C---nice views; uncommon
 Hermit Thrush H,C
 American Robin S,H,C
 Northern Mockingbird almost daily
Bendire's Thrasher C---always tough but we had great views
 Curve-billed Thrasher almost daily
Crissal Thrasher C---pair near Portal; generally skulky and elusive
 European Starling T,S,N---alas, missed by Wayne
 Cedar Waxwing T,N
 Phainopepla T,S,N,H,C
 Olive Warbler H---only one seen, but it was a brilliant male in Carr
 Virginia's Warbler H,C---only two seen, and generally poorly
 Lucy's Warbler S,N
 Yellow Warbler T,N,C
 Yellow-rumped Warbler S---only two seen the entire trip....; Audubon's
 Black-throated Gray Warbler S,H,C--- great views
 Townsend's Warbler N,H---migrants
Hermit Warbler S--- female; very uncommon migrant
 Grace's Warbler H,C---as close as possible!
 Common Yellowthroat N,C
 Wilson's Warbler migrants scattered throughout
 Red-faced Warbler C---stunning!
 Painted Redstart S,H,C---always spectacular
 Yellow-breasted Chat T,S,N---great views at Paton's
 Hepatic Tanager S,H,C
 Summer Tanager T,S,N
 Western Tanager almost daily
Flame-colored Tanager S---wonderful male in Madera provided great views; casual in this country
Green-tailed Towhee S---one late migrant by some
 Spotted Towhee H,C
 Canyon Towhee N,H,C
 Abert's Towhee N
Botteri's Sparrow S---prolonged scope study; not to be expected on a spring trip; subspecies *arizonae*
 Rufous-winged Sparrow T,S---very good views of this localized species
 Rufous-crowned Sparrow N,H---subspecies *eremoeca*
Five-striped Sparrow N---unsurpassed views in California Gulch; extremely localized
 Chipping Sparrow C
Black-chinned Sparrow C---somewhat elusive pair near Paradise
 Lark Sparrow N---a couple at Paton's were the only ones
 Black-throated Sparrow T,S,N,C---the handsomest sparrow?
Grasshopper Sparrow H---two near Sonoita; uncommon breeder; subspecies *ammolegus*
 Song Sparrow T,N,C---subspecies *saltonis*
 White-crowned Sparrow N---a few remnant migrants of the black-lored (*oriantha*) variety
 Yellow-eyed Junco H,C
 Northern Cardinal seen daily; the longer crested, brighter red Arizona subspecies

Pyrrhuloxia S,C
 Black-headed Grosbeak almost daily
 Blue Grosbeak N,C---just arriving
 Lazuli Bunting N---female migrants
 Red-winged Blackbird N,C
 Eastern Meadowlark H,C---the southwestern race liliana, a possible future split
Yellow-headed Blackbird N---female near Rio Rico
 Great-tailed Grackle everywhere but the Chiricahuas
 Bronzed Cowbird T,S,C---scarcer than usual
 Brown-headed Cowbird seen daily
 Hooded Oriole T,S,N,C
 Bullock's Oriole N,C
 Scott's Oriole N,H,C
 House Finch seen daily
Red Crossbill C---prolonged scope views; seen only about every fourth or fifth year
 Pine Siskin S,C---late migrants
 Lesser Goldfinch almost daily
 House Sparrow seen daily
 total species - 202

Mammals:

Rock Squirrel
 Apache (Mexican) Fox Squirrel
 Arizona Gray Squirrel
 Round-tailed Ground Squirrel
 Harris's Antelope Squirrel
 Cliff Chipmunk
 Hispid Cotton Rat
 Desert Cottontail
 Eastern Cottontail
 Black-tailed Jackrabbit
 Antelope Jackrabbit
 Coyote
 White-tailed Deer
 Mule Deer
 Pronghorn
 bat species---at least two different sizes
 total species - 17

Reptiles & Amphibians:

Western Whiptail
 Desert Grassland Whiptail
 Sonoran Spotted Whiptail
 Desert Spiny Lizard
 Yarrow's (Mountain) Spiny Lizard
 Eastern Fence Lizard
 Lesser Earless Lizard

Coachwhip---in the talons of a Red-tail
Sonoran Striped Whipsnake
Gopher Snake
Sonoran Mountain Kingsnake---ouch!
Black-tailed Rattlesnake
(Mojave Rattlesnake---dead on road)
Bullfrog---scope views
total species - 14

Butterflies:

Black Swallowtail
Two-tailed Swallowtail
Pipevine Swallowtail
Sleepy Orange
Southern Dogface
Dainty Sulphur
Cabbage White
Checkered White
Hackberry Emperor
Empress Lelia
California Sister
Mourning Cloak
American Lady
Tropical Buckeye
Queen
Snout
Spring Azure
Reakirt's Blue
Marine Blue
Gray Hairstreak
Canyonland Satyr
Variegated Fritillary
Gulf Fritillary
Common Checkered Skipper
total species - 23

Significant others:

Tarantula Hawk (Wasp)
Walking Stick
Tundra