

CIBOLO CREEK WORKSHOP

SEPTEMBER 11-17, 2007

LEADERS:

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COMPILED BY:

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Leaders: Barry Zimmer and Brennan Mulrooney

Our inaugural Cibolo Creek tour was a huge success. The idea was to run a trip to a luxurious lodge (four nights at Cibolo Creek Ranch) during the peak of fall migration in west Texas. We tallied an impressive number of migrants, as well as many resident southwestern specialty birds, and savored the comforts and great food of the lodge.

Our tour started in El Paso, where on the first afternoon we visited McKelligon Canyon and my house. McKelligon Canyon yielded not only resident specialties such as Crissal Thrasher, Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, Black-throated Sparrow, Cactus Wren, and Rock Wren, but also a good sprinkling of migrants including Dusky Flycatcher, Warbling Vireo, Virginia's Warbler, Western Tanager, Black-headed Grosbeak, and Green-tailed Towhee. We then spent some time watching the hummingbird feeders in my yard and were rewarded with great views of four species—the tiny Calliope, Broad-tailed, Rufous, and Black-chinned—buzzing about, at times within a few feet of us. A quick spin around the neighborhood before dinner produced a covey of Gambel's Quail, a pair of Curve-billed Thrashers, and a very cooperative Black-throated Gray Warbler.

The next morning we visited the Fort Bliss Sewage Ponds before working our way eastward toward Cibolo Creek. Trees around the ponds were very active with migrants including such highlights as Cooper's and Sharp-shinned hawks; Red-naped Sapsucker; Red-breasted Nuthatch; Cassin's Vireo; Cordilleran Flycatcher; Western Wood-Pewee; MacGillivray's, Wilson's, and Orange-crowned warblers; Blue Grosbeak; and Clay-colored Sparrow. Nearby evaporation ponds yielded Solitary Sandpiper, Lesser Yellowlegs, White-faced Ibis, and Black-necked Stilt among others. A real surprise came with the discovery of an Eastern Kingbird (accidental in this area) as we worked our way out of town. Eight Burrowing Owls, one Great Horned Owl, and countless Swainson's Hawks and pronghorns entertained us on our journey toward the ranch. A small pond near Marfa surprised us with a Stilt Sandpiper, two Baird's Sandpipers, and over 250 Yellow-headed Blackbirds. Finally we settled into our rooms and a delicious dinner.

We spent the entire next day on the western portion of Cibolo Creek Ranch. A small cottonwood oasis had a cooperative pair of Zone-tailed Hawks soaring directly overhead, as well as Vermilion Flycatcher, Bell's Vireo, American Redstart, Summer Tanager, and Pyrrhuloxia. Higher elevation canyons produced the uncommon and localized Gray Vireo, Canyon Wren, many more Western Tanagers, Cassin's and Rufous-crowned sparrows, and Varied Bunting. A lone Mississippi Kite, Osprey, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Western and Cassin's kingbirds, and Painted Bunting rounded out the day's migrant tally. A night excursion resulted in superb views of a Western Screech-Owl, as well as a quick view of a gray fox.

The next day we traveled northward to the Davis Mountains to sample a higher elevation and more wooded habitat. Grasslands en route had a stunning Prairie Falcon, Scaled Quail, and numerous Lark Buntings and Lark Sparrows. A stop along Limpia Creek provided one of the highlights of the trip with stunning views of a very unexpected adult Gray Hawk. Other highlights of the day included another Osprey, Acorn Woodpecker, Black-crested Titmouse, Plumbeous Vireo, Western Bluebird, and Hepatic Tanager.

Our third full day on the ranch was spent in the eastern section of the property at La Cienega and La Morita. Here we found another Zone-tailed Hawk, Ladder-backed and Golden-fronted woodpeckers, another pair of Gray Vireos, Verdin, many more Vermilion Flycatchers, Townsend's Warbler, and Orchard Oriole. Another night drive gave us great views of a pair of javelina with a tiny youngster, and more studies of gray fox.

The final day of our trip was spent at irrigation impoundments, sewage ponds, and an Audubon sanctuary near El Paso. Numerous waterbirds added greatly to our trip list with Western, Clark's, Eared, and Pied-billed grebes, American White and Brown (very rare) pelicans, Neotropic Cormorant, Semipalmated Plover, American Avocet, Wilson's Snipe, Wilson's Phalarope, Black and Forster's terns, and Franklin's Gulls among the highlights. A stunning Harris's Hawk was also seen.

In all we totaled 157 species with 14 species of shorebirds, 16 species of raptors (hawks and owls combined), four species of hummingbirds, five species of vireos, and nine species of warblers. Some species were present in huge numbers such as Clay-colored Sparrow (100+), Western Tanager (69), and Blue Grosbeak (55). The weather was wonderful throughout (the first day had an incredibly pleasant high temperature of 75 degrees), and we thoroughly enjoyed spending four nights at the wonderful Cibolo Creek Ranch. I can hardly wait for next year!

Itinerary:

- September 11 - McKelligon Canyon, my yard, Mountain Park (31 species)
- September 12 - Fort Bliss Sewage Ponds, Border Highway, Hwy 20 from Tornillo to Fort Hancock, drive to Cibolo Creek with roadside birding (83 species; 100 total)
- September 13 - all day on west side of Cibolo Creek Ranch; evening owling (59 species; 121 total)
- September 14 - all day in Davis Mountains, including scenic loop, McDonald Observatory Road, Laurence Wood picnic area, also Marfa ponds (65 species; 134 total)
- September 15 - morning on east side of Cibolo Creek ranch including La Cienega and La Morita; afternoon on western portion; evening owling (62 species; 138 total)
- September 16 - drive back to El Paso with roadside birding and stops at McNary Reservoir, Fort Hancock Sewage Ponds, Tornillo Reservoir, Feather Lake Sanctuary, and Fort Bliss Sewage Ponds (82 species; 157 total)
- September 17 - departures for home

Key:

E = all areas in and around El Paso and down river to McNary

C = Cibolo Creek Ranch

D = Davis Mountains and surrounding grasslands, Marfa ponds

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:

Gadwall E
Mallard E,D---mostly of the “Mexican Duck” subspecies (*diazi*) but a few regular Mallards as well
Blue-winged Teal E,D,C
Northern Shoveler E,C
Northern Pintail E
Green-winged Teal E,C
Ruddy Duck E
Scaled Quail C,D
Gambel’s Quail E---great views near my house
Pied-billed Grebe E
Eared Grebe E---two at McNary
Western Grebe E---dozens at McNary & Tornillo
Clark’s Grebe E---side-by-side with preceding species
American White Pelican E---one at Tornillo; uncommon
Brown Pelican E---one at McNary was a real rarity!
Double-crested Cormorant E
Neotropic Cormorant E---superb scope views at Feather Lake
Great Blue Heron E
Great Egret E
Snowy Egret E
Cattle Egret E
White-faced Ibis E
Turkey Vulture seen daily in numbers
Osprey E,C,D---great scope study along Limpia Creek near Fort Davis
Mississippi Kite C, Van Horn---two migrant immature birds; unexpected this late
Northern Harrier D,C,E---early migrants
Sharp-shinned Hawk E
Cooper’s Hawk E,D,C---exceptional study of one at Fort Bliss the first morning
Gray Hawk D---an adult along Limpia Creek was completely unexpected; voted the second favorite bird of the tour
Harris’s Hawk E---lone birds seen very well near Tornillo on our first and last days
Swainson’s Hawk E,D---up to 25 in one day
Zone-tailed Hawk C---repeated excellent studies of pair at oasis near ranch and another lone bird at La Cienaga; tied for third favorite bird of the tour!
Red-tailed Hawk seen daily
American Kestrel E,D,C
Prairie Falcon E,D---one distantly over Hwy 20 near Tornillo and great views of another north of Marfa; tough at this season
Sora E---heard only
American Coot E
Semipalmated Plover E---two at McNary
Killdeer E,D
Black-necked Stilt E
American Avocet E
Spotted Sandpiper E
Solitary Sandpiper E,D---nice studies
Greater Yellowlegs E---one at Fort Hancock
Lesser Yellowlegs E,D

Western Sandpiper E---up close studies
 Least Sandpiper E---ditto
 Baird's Sandpiper E,D---nice views in Marfa
Stilt Sandpiper D---one in Marfa in yellowlegs flock
 Wilson's Snipe E---great views of one at McNary
 Wilson's Phalarope E---spotted by Laura
Franklin's Gull E---flock of eight at Tornillo; very uncommon
 Black Tern E---about a dozen at McNary
 Forster's Tern E
 Rock Pigeon urban areas throughout
 Eurasian Collared-Dove E,D---now present in most towns along our route
 White-winged Dove E,D,C
 Mourning Dove seen daily in numbers
 Inca Dove E,D---seen best in my yard
 Greater Roadrunner E,C,D---an amazing total of 20 seen, many very well
Barn Owl E---brief views of flushed bird by some
Western Screech-Owl C-----superb nighttime study on first owling trip; difficult at this season
 Great Horned Owl D---roosting bird near Valentine right next to road
 Burrowing Owl E---eight in one morning ; fantastic studies
 Common Nighthawk C---two late migrants at La Cienaga
 Common Poorwill C---heard only by a few; late
 Black-chinned Hummingbird E,C---twenty or more in my yard including a couple of adult males
Calliope Hummingbird E---one or two females in my yard seen very well
 Broad-tailed Hummingbird E---about six at my feeders
 Rufous Hummingbird E---four at my feeders including one adult male
 Belted Kingfisher E,C
 Golden-fronted Woodpecker C---at the westernmost limit of their range
 Acorn Woodpecker D
Red-naped Sapsucker E---a very early bird at Fort Bliss
 Ladder-backed Woodpecker E,C---exceptional study our last day at the ranch
 Northern Flicker D---two migrants in grasslands between Van Horn and Marfa
 Western Wood-Pewee E,C,D
Least Flycatcher C---two at Cibolo
 Dusky Flycatcher E---one in McKelligon Canyon and possibly another at La Cienaga
 Cordilleran Flycatcher E,C---singles at Fort Bliss and Cibolo
 Black Phoebe C---always one or two around the lodge
 Say's Phoebe D,C
 Vermilion Flycatcher C---always around lake at lodge; up to ten in a day; voted the favorite bird of
 the tour
 Ash-throated Flycatcher C---a couple of late birds near the ranch
 Cassin's Kingbird D,C---up to 30 a day as migrants went through
 Western Kingbird E,D,C---mostly around El Paso but a few elsewhere
Eastern Kingbird E---the rarest bird of the trip was one in northeast El Paso
 Bell's Vireo C---some still singing; nice views
Gray Vireo C---a pair at the dry waterfall and another pair along a wash on the east side of the ranch
 were somewhat unexpected this late; a real local specialty
 Plumbeous Vireo D,C
Cassin's Vireo E---uncommon
 Warbling Vireo E,D,C

Western Scrub-Jay D
 Chihuahuan Raven D---many in grasslands from Sierra Blanca to Marfa; the white based neck
 feathers seen on one
 Common Raven C,D
 Tree Swallow E---one early migrant
 Cliff Swallow E
 Cave Swallow E,D---a flock of 40 or so in Valentine provided great scope studies
 Barn Swallow seen daily
 Black-crested Titmouse D
 Verdin E,C---great views of one at Gray Vireo spot
 Bushtit D---heard only
Red-breasted Nuthatch E---three at Fort Bliss our first morning; occurs only in montane invasion
 years
 White-breasted Nuthatch D
 Cactus Wren E,C
 Rock Wren E,D,C
 Canyon Wren C,D
 Bewick's Wren C,D
 House Wren E,C
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher C---by a few only
 Black-tailed Gnatcatcher E,C
 Western Bluebird D---about twenty with some nice males
 Northern Mockingbird seen daily
 Curve-billed Thrasher E,C---about twelve in one day
Crissal Thrasher E---one skulky bird in McKelligon Canyon provided distant scope views
 European Starling one in Marfa and one in Fort Hancock were our only ones
 Orange-crowned Warbler E---three total
 Virginia's Warbler E---singles in McKelligon Canyon and at Feather Lake
 Yellow Warbler E,C---four total
 Yellow-rumped Warbler C,D---"Audubon's" type
Black-throated Gray Warbler E---one spotted by Brennan near my house put on a great show; very
 uncommon
 Townsend's Warbler D,C---best was one spotted by Sandra at La Cienaga
American Redstart C---female at the oasis south of the ranch; very uncommon
 MacGillivray's Warbler E---singles at Fort Bliss and feather Lake
 Wilson's Warbler seen daily with 18 total
Hepatic Tanager D---three near the observatory
 Summer Tanager C,D,E---several stunning males
 Western Tanager E,C,D---a very impressive 69 individuals with a few nice males
 Green-tailed Towhee E---three in McKelligon Canyon
 Canyon Towhee C,D
 Cassin's Sparrow C,D---good views
 Rufous-crowned Sparrow C,D
 Chipping Sparrow E,C,D---common
 Clay-colored Sparrow E,C,D---also common
 Vesper Sparrow E,C,D---good views
 Lark Sparrow C,D
 Black-throated Sparrow E,C---a truly stunning sparrow
 Lark Bunting E,C,D

Savannah Sparrow E,C
 Lincoln's Sparrow E---one seen by a few at Feather Lake
 Northern Cardinal C,D
 Pyrrhuloxia E,C---great views
 Black-headed Grosbeak E---surprisingly only two seen, both in McKelligon Canyon
 Blue Grosbeak E,C,D---next to Western Tanager and spizellas this species was the next most
 common migrant with well over 50 seen
 Varied Bunting C---two immature birds
 Painted Bunting C,E---two female plumaged birds only; surprisingly scarce
Dickcissel E---a couple of high flyers over the hotel
 Red-winged Blackbird E,D
 Eastern Meadowlark D,C---the lilianae subspecies, a possible future split
 Yellow-headed Blackbird D,C,E---stunning; over 250 in one spot
 Great-tailed Grackle E,D
 Brown-headed Cowbird D,C
 Orchard Oriole C
 Scott's Oriole C,D
 House Finch seen daily
 Lesser Goldfinch C,D---scarcer than expected
 House Sparrow E,D

total species - 157

Leader only birds:

Cinnamon Teal
 Golden Eagle
 Peregrine Falcon
 Band-tailed Pigeon
 Northern Rough-winged Swallow

Mammals: total species -12

Mule Deer
 White-tailed Deer
 Pronghorn--- many superb studies
 Desert Cottontail
 Black-tailed Jackrabbit
 Rock Squirrel
 Spotted Ground Squirrel
 mouse species---the smallest mouse I have ever seen
 bat species---smaller ones probably Mexican Free-tailed, but also a few larger ones
 Gray Fox
 Collared Peccary (Javelina)---including a very cute tiny baby on a night drive

Introduced mammals: total species - 7

Camel
 Bison
 Elk
 Blackbuck
 Fallow Deer

Spotted Deer (Chital)
Scimitar-horned Oryx

Reptiles & Amphibians: total species - 8

Rio Grande Leopard Frog
Red-spotted Toad
Crevice Spiny Lizard
Desert Box Turtle
Coachwhip
Gopher Snake
garter snake species---possibly Black-necked
snake species---seen by Margaret, possibly Ground Snake

Butterflies: total species - 38

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|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Sleepy Orange | Red Admiral |
| Orange Sulphur | Painted Lady |
| Southern Dogface | Snout |
| Dainty Sulphur | Empress Lelia |
| Little Yellow | Hackberry Butterfly |
| Lyside Sulphur | Tawny Emperor |
| Cloudless Sulphur | California Sister |
| Common Checkered White | Queen |
| Cabbage White | Monarch |
| Pipevine Swallowtail | Fatal Metalmark |
| Black Swallowtail | Palmer's Metalmark |
| Marine Blue | Common Mestra |
| Reakirt's Blue | Question Mark |
| Gray Hairstreak | leafwing species |
| Bordered Patch | Orange Skipperling |
| Pearl Crescent | Desert Checkered Skipper |
| two other different crescent species | brown skipper species (Python?) |
| Buckeye | duskywing species |
| Tropical Buckeye | |

Significant others:

Horse Lubber Grasshopper
Tarantula
Desert Millipede
katydid species
large green grasshopper with spiked tail
Choctaw (Chokie), Cherokee, and Cholla the lovable Brittany Spaniels