

SPRING GRAND ARIZONA

MAY 10-20, 2008

**LEADERS:
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Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc.

Spring Grand Arizona

May 10-20, 2008

Leaders: Barry Zimmer & Kevin Zimmer

This year's Spring Grand Arizona tour may have been our best ever. We tallied virtually every Arizona specialty bird and had several great vagrants. Before our first dinner we had already seen Burrowing Owl, Costa's Hummingbird, and Black-tailed Gnatcatcher!

The next morning we started out north of Tucson, where we enjoyed excellent scope views of both Gilded Flicker and Harris's Hawk. Further afield, remote Aravaipa Canyon yielded both Common Black-Hawk and Zone-tailed Hawk (we would see an unbelievable 13 for the trip) on nests, plus such "regular" fare as Vermilion Flycatcher, Bell's Vireo, and Lucy's Warbler. Later that evening a pair of Arizona Woodpeckers entertained us during our picnic dinner in the Santa Rita Mountains. The real show began after dark with a superb night of owling which included fantastic views of Western and Whiskered screech-owls (both within 15 feet!), Elf Owl (at a nest hole), Lesser Nighthawk, and Common Poorwill.

The following day in Madera Canyon we spent some time watching feeders where a rare Flame-colored Tanager had been hanging out. Not only did we get point-blank views of this brilliant orange beauty from Mexico, but we also had a stunning male White-eared Hummingbird (very rare here), Magnificent and Broad-billed hummingbirds, Bridled Titmouse, Canyon Wren, Townsend's Warbler, Painted Redstart, Black-throated Gray Warbler, and Hepatic and Western tanagers—all at this one spot! Singing Botteri's and Rufous-winged sparrows in the desert below the canyon were the icing on the cake. The afternoon produced a male Black-capped Gnatcatcher for some (another rarity from Mexico), a very rare Gray Vireo, a pair of Tropical Kingbirds, and over 250 Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks in one field.

The Nogales region had many highlights in store for us. The trek to California Gulch resulted in three or four Five-striped Sparrows (one as close as ten feet), Golden Eagle, male Varied and Indigo buntings, a Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet, and five magnificent Montezuma Quail (one of which literally walked right in front of my van). Feeders in Patagonia were busy with Violet-crowned Hummingbird, Yellow-breasted Chat, Lazuli Bunting, and Blue Grosbeak among others. In the nearby riparian habitat we found a pair of Thick-billed Kingbirds and six Gray Hawks.

By the middle of our tour we had reached the Huachuca Mountains above Sierra Vista. Here in scenic Carr Canyon we had a truly mind-boggling day with two Northern Pygmy-Owls (prolonged scope views including one being mobbed by Greater Pewee, Buff-breasted Flycatcher, and Virginia's Warbler); numerous Band-tailed Pigeons; ten or more Buff-breasted Flycatchers; four Greater Pewees; nesting Brown Creepers; Grace's, Black-throated Gray, Virginia's, and Olive warblers; Painted Redstart; and Yellow-eyed Junco. It was hard to know where to look first!

Canyons in Fort Huachuca added superb studies of Elegant Trogon and a near-religious experience with a Spotted Owl. More feeder-watching yielded two female Lucifer Hummingbirds (one perched about ten feet away for some time), a very rare Berylline Hummingbird, Blue-throated Hummingbird, and Scott's and Hooded orioles.

The last portion of our trip was spent in the famed Chiricahua Mountains. Roosting Barn and Great Horned owls, and a nesting pair of Bendire's Thrashers were seen en route. Lower elevations of the Chiricahuas produced Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher for part of the group, Crissal Thrasher, Juniper Titmouse, and Black-chinned Sparrow. The upper regions were even more exciting with brilliant Red-faced Warblers, Mexican Chickadees, Red-breasted and Pygmy nuthatches, Western Bluebird, more Olive Warblers, a rare Short-tailed Hawk, a perched Whip-poor-will at 15 feet, and the last of our owls, the elusive Flammulated.

A final stop in Willcox on our way back to Tucson added Eared Grebe, American Avocet, and Red-necked and Wilson's phalaropes to our growing list.

In all we saw nine species of owls and eleven species of hummingbirds among our total list of 209 birds. The Flame-colored Tanager, Black-capped Gnatcatcher, and White-eared and Berylline hummingbirds were great bonuses. We had wonderfully cool weather as well, with high temperatures only on our first and last days. Most of the trip saw highs in the upper 70s and low 80s! Arizona in May really is hard to beat.

ITINERARY:

May 10 - afternoon visit to Sonoran Desert Museum, Golf Links Road (30 species)

May 11 - northwest Tucson, Aravaipa Canyon, Mammoth Sewage Ponds, Sweetwater Wetlands, Madera Canyon, evening owling (79 species; 84 total)

May 12 - desert near Continental, Madera Canyon, Green Valley, Amado Sewage Pond, Montosa Canyon, Rio Rico area (87 species; 121 total)

May 13 - California Gulch and Ruby Road, Patagonia/ Sonoita Creek area, Paton's yard (84 species; 140 total)

May 14 - Montosa Canyon, Patagonia Lake State Park, Sonoita grasslands, Ash Canyon (101 species; 157 total)

May 15 - Ramsey Canyon Road, Carr Canyon, Ramsey Canyon (Mile Hi Preserve) (68 species; 161 total)

May 16 - Fort Huachuca including Garden Canyon & Scheelite Canyon, Sulphur Springs Valley (Whitewater Draw, Elfrida), State Line Road; evening owling (73 species; 190 total)

May 17 - Portal Road, Paradise Road, Herb Martyr, Cave Creek Canyon, East Turkey Creek, evening owling (90 species; 192 total)

May 18 - Paradise Road, upper elevations of Chiricahua Mts including the "T" junction, Barfoot Park, and Pinery Canyon for some---Herb Martyr for others; afternoon to Herb Martyr for some and upper elevations for others; evening owling (83 species; 195 total)

May 19 - Portal Road, Cave Creek Canyon, Herb Martyr, Willcox Sewage Pond (Cochise Lake) (95 species; 209 total)

May 20 - departure for home (209 total species)

KEY:

T = all areas in and around Tucson, also Aravaipa Canyon

S = Santa Rita Mountains (Madera Canyon), surrounding grasslands, Green Valley, Amado, Montosa Canyon

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 250 or so near Rio Rico in a flooded field

Gadwall C---late

American Wigeon S,C

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

Blue-winged Teal C---late

Cinnamon Teal N,C

Northern Shoveler T,C

Northern Pintail N,C---male at Patagonia Lake and female at Willcox; very late

Redhead C---late birds at Willcox

Common Merganser N---female at Patagonia Lake was a tour first

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

Wild Turkey S,H,C---the Gould's subspecies

Scaled Quail S,H,C---several great views

Gambel's Quail seen daily including some really cute babies

Montezuma Quail N---incredible luck with this easily missed species (missed completely in 2006); we had five birds total in two locations, including unbelievable views (from about fifteen feet or closer of one male!) near Sycamore Canyon; voted the favorite bird of the tour!

Pied-billed Grebe N

Eared Grebe N,C---some breeding plumaged birds

Neotropic Cormorant N

Great Blue Heron T,N

Great Egret N---very uncommon at this season here

Snowy Egret N,C

Cattle Egret N---uncommon

Black-crowned Night-Heron N

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

Black Vulture N---nearly missed; only two total

Turkey Vulture seen daily in numbers

Cooper's Hawk T,S,N,H,C

Common Black-Hawk T---nice views of head of bird on nest

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

Gray Hawk N,H---superb views; seven total

Short-tailed Hawk C---quick view of light morph over Barfoot Park

Swainson's Hawk T,H,C

Zone-tailed Hawk T,N,H,C---we had an incredible thirteen birds (easily a record) with many great studies; this bird can be missed completely

Red-tailed Hawk daily

Golden Eagle N,H,C---four total

American Kestrel T,S,N,C

falcon species (Prairie or Peregrine) S---large falcon which flew past group below Madera when leaders were retrieving vans was thought by some to be a Prairie

Virginia Rail N---seen by some at Patagonia Lake

Sora N---nice views

Common Moorhen N

American Coot T,N,C

Killdeer T,S,N,C

Black-necked Stilt T

American Avocet C

Spotted Sandpiper T,S,N,C

Wilson's Phalarope C---gorgeous breeding plumaged birds

Red-necked Phalarope C---an incredible 27 seen at Willcox; very uncommon to rare

Ring-billed Gull C---uncommon

California Gull C---rather rare spring migrant; Willcox

Least Tern C---rare; Whitewater draw

Rock Pigeon seen in all urban areas

Band-tailed Pigeon H,C---great views on several occasions; unusually numerous

Eurasian Collared-Dove T,S,N,H,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 T,N---only three seen the entire trip

Common Ground-Dove N---nice pair near California Gulch

Greater Roadrunner T,N,H,C---a total of 7 seen

Barn Owl C---flight views

Flammulated Owl C---after much effort we finally got scope views of one high in a pine; this species is always the most difficult of all the owls to see on this trip

Western Screech-Owl S---fantastic views

Whiskered Screech-Owl S,C---excellent views from about ten feet!

Great Horned Owl S,C---nice daytime studies

Northern Pygmy-Owl H---arguably the best luck ever with this often difficult to find species; we had two incredibly responsive birds in the same morning, one of which followed us around for some time; tied for third favorite bird of the tour

Elf Owl S---great study at nest hole

Burrowing Owl T,C---uncommon & localized

Spotted Owl H---after much effort we were rewarded with unbeatable views; voted the second favorite bird of the tour

Lesser Nighthawk T,S,C,

Common Poorwill S,C---up close and personal

Whip-poor-will C---amazing views of perched bird; the Mexican subspecies *arizonae*, already split by some authors; tied for third favorite bird of the tour

White-throated Swift T,S,N,H,C---many nice views

Berylline Hummingbird H---repeated close vies in Ramsey; casual in the US

Broad-billed Hummingbird S,N,H,C

White-eared Hummingbird S---fantastic male in Madera 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--- two females in Ash Canyon were a treat
 Black-chinned Hummingbird daily
 Anna's Hummingbird T,N,H---two at Sweetwater seemed odd
Costa's Hummingbird T---five at the desert museum and one at California Gulch
 Broad-tailed Hummingbird S,N,H,C
 Elegant Trogon H---great Questar views of a male in Garden Canyon
 Acorn Woodpecker S,N,H,C
 Gila Woodpecker T,S,N
 Ladder-backed Woodpecker T,S,N
 Hairy Woodpecker C
Arizona Woodpecker S,N,H,C---especially well in Madera at our picnic dinner!; often hard to find
 Northern Flicker H,C---red-shafted variety; seemed scarcer than usual
 Gilded Flicker T---one male north of Tucson
 Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet N---close study; only one seen
 Olive-sided Flycatcher C---our first in New Mexico
 Greater Pewee H,C---an impressive eight seen
 Western Wood-Pewee S,N,H,C
 Cordilleran Flycatcher H,C
 Buff-breasted Flycatcher H---about ten total; a cute easy-to-identify empid
 Black Phoebe H,C---much scarcer than usual with only four seen
 Say's Phoebe S,N,H,C
 Vermilion Flycatcher T,S,N,H,C---always spectacular
 Dusky-capped Flycatcher S,N,H,C
 Ash-throated Flycatcher N,H,C
 Brown-crested Flycatcher T,S,N,H,C
 Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher C---only one seen by part of group at Herb Martyr; always a very late
 arriver; tied for third favorite bird of the tour
Tropical Kingbird N---pair near Rio Rico was a treat
 Cassin's Kingbird almost daily
 Thick-billed Kingbird N---two in Patagonia
 Western Kingbird almost daily
 Loggerhead Shrike S,N,H
 Bell's Vireo T,S,N,C
Gray Vireo S---one in Montosa provided a tour first
 Plumbeous Vireo S,H,C
 Hutton's Vireo S,H,C
 Warbling Vireo H,C
 Steller's Jay H,C---subspecies *macrolopha*
 Western Scrub-Jay C---subspecies *woodhouseii*
 Mexican Jay S,N,H,C---subspecies *arizonae*
 Chihuahuan Raven H,C---especially nice views near San Simon
 Common Raven T,S,N,H,C
 Horned Lark H,C---better views than normal
 Purple Martin T---three in Aravaipa; uncommon & localized
 Violet-green Swallow H,C
 Northern Rough-winged Swallow T,N

Bank Swallow T---one at Sweetwater
 Cliff Swallow T,N
 Barn Swallow almost daily
 Mexican Chickadee C---responsive pair in the high country
 Bridled Titmouse S,N,H,C
 Juniper Titmouse C
 Verdin T,S,N,C
 Bushtit H,C
 Red-breasted Nuthatch C
 White-breasted Nuthatch almost daily
 Pygmy Nuthatch C---one of the cutest birds of North America; great views!
 Brown Creeper H,C---one pair at a nest
 Cactus Wren almost daily
 Rock Wren N
 Canyon Wren S,N,H,C
 Bewick's Wren T,S,N,H,C
 House Wren S,H,C
 Blue-gray Gnatcatcher N
 Black-tailed Gnatcatcher T,C
Black-capped Gnatcatcher S---two different sightings of a male in Montosa Canyon, but neither
 was seen by everyone
 Eastern Bluebird N,H
Western Bluebird C---uncommon
 Swainson's Thrush S,N,H,C---more numerous than usual
 Hermit Thrush H,C
 American Robin H,C
 Northern Mockingbird daily
Bendire's Thrasher C---always tough but we had great views at a nest
 Curve-billed Thrasher daily
Crissal Thrasher S,C---pair near Portal; generally skulky and elusive
 European Starling T,S,N
 Phainopepla T,S,N,C
 Olive Warbler H,C---immature male in Carr and adult male in the Chiricahuas
 Virginia's Warbler H---only two seen, one mobbing a pygmy-owl!
 Lucy's Warbler T,S,N,C
 Yellow Warbler T,N
 Yellow-rumped Warbler H,C---Audubon's types mostly with one Myrtle
 Black-throated Gray Warbler S,H,C--- many great views
 Townsend's Warbler T,S,H---migrants
Hermit Warbler S--- female for some; very uncommon migrant
 Grace's Warbler H,C---several nice studies
MacGillivray's Warbler N---migrant
 Common Yellowthroat T,N
 Wilson's Warbler migrants scattered throughout
 Red-faced Warbler H,C---stunning!
 Painted Redstart S,H,C---always spectacular
 Yellow-breasted Chat 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; tied for third favorite bird of the tour
 Spotted Towhee H,C
 Canyon Towhee S,N,H,C
 Abert's Towhee T,N---only four seen
 Rufous-winged Sparrow S---very good views of this localized species
Botteri's Sparrow S---prolonged scope study; not to be expected on a spring trip; subspecies *arizonae*
 Rufous-crowned Sparrow S,N,H,C---subspecies *eremoeca*
Five-striped Sparrow N---unsurpassed views in California Gulch; extremely localized
 Chipping Sparrow C
Black-chinned Sparrow C---nice looks near Paradise; often hard to find
 Lark Sparrow N,H
 Black-throated Sparrow S,N,C---the handsomest sparrow?
Grasshopper Sparrow H---a few near Sonoita; uncommon breeder; subspecies *ammolegus*
 Song Sparrow T,N,C---subspecies *saltonis*
 Lincoln's Sparrow C---by a few at Herb Martyr; late
 White-crowned Sparrow N,C---a few remnant migrants of the black-lored (*oriantha*) variety
 Yellow-eyed Junco H,C
 Northern Cardinal almost daily; the longer crested, brighter red Arizona subspecies
 Pyrrhuloxia S,N,H,C---more numerous than usual
 Black-headed Grosbeak daily
 Blue Grosbeak S,N,C---just arriving
 Lazuli Bunting T,N,C---gorgeous males at Paton's
Indigo Bunting N,C---males in California Gulch and Herb Martyr; unexpected
Varied Bunting N---skulky male in California Gulch; just arriving
 Red-winged Blackbird T,N
 Eastern Meadowlark H,C---the southwestern race *lilianae*, a possible future split
Yellow-headed Blackbird C---flock of ten or so near Elfrida; late
 Great-tailed Grackle everywhere but the Chiricahuas
 Bronzed Cowbird T,N---scarcer than usual
 Brown-headed Cowbird seen daily
 Hooded Oriole T,S,N,H,C
 Bullock's Oriole N,H,C
 Scott's Oriole S,N,H,C
Cassin's Finch C---late birds following a big winter invasion; rare this late
 House Finch seen daily
 Pine Siskin S,N,H,C---late migrants; unusually numerous
 Lesser Goldfinch almost daily; unusually numerous
 House Sparrow seen daily

total species - 209

Leader only birds:

Hammond's Flycatcher
 Pacific-slope Flycatcher
 Red Crossbill

Mammals: total species - 15

Rock Squirrel
Apache (Mexican) Fox Squirrel
Arizona Gray Squirrel
Round-tailed Ground Squirrel
Spotted Ground Squirrel
Harris's Antelope Squirrel
Cliff Chipmunk
Desert Cottontail
Eastern Cottontail
Black-tailed Jackrabbit
Coyote
Javelina (Collared Peccary)
White-tailed Deer
Pronghorn
bat species

Reptiles & Amphibians: total species - 14

Western (Checkered) Whiptail
Chihuahuan Spotted Whiptail
Desert Spiny Lizard
Clark's Spiny Lizard
Yarrow's (Mountain) Spiny Lizard
Plateau Striped Lizard
Great Plains Skink
Coachwhip
Sonoran Striped Whipsnake---dead on road
Brown Vine Snake---a life reptile for me; rare!
Spiny Soft-shelled Turtle
mud turtle species
Red-eared Slider
Bullfrog---scope views

Butterflies: total species - 19

Two-tailed Swallowtail
Pipevine Swallowtail
Giant Swallowtail
Diana
Sleepy Orange
Southern Dogface
Mexican Yellow
Checkered White
Empress Lelia
California (Arizona?) Sister---possibly just split
Mourning Cloak
Queen
Reakirt's Blue
Marine Blue
Gray Hairstreak
Variegated Fritillary
Texan Crescent
duskywing species
Silver-spotted Skipper

Significant others:

Tarantula Hawk (Wasp)
Walking Stick
Tarantula
wolf spider