

GRAND NEW MEXICO

MAY 26 – JUNE 5, 2008

LEADERS: BARRY ZIMMER AND STEVE HILTY

COMPILED BY: BARRY ZIMMER

**VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS, INC.
2525 WALLINGWOOD DRIVE, SUITE 1003
AUSTIN, TX 78746
WWW.VENTBIRD.COM**

Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc.

GRAND NEW MEXICO

May 26 – June 5, 2008

Leaders: Barry Zimmer and Steve Hilty

The fourth day of our recent Grand New Mexico tour stands out as one of the best days of North American birding I have had in some time—and with the amount of birding I do, that is really saying something. We awoke to a nice crisp, sunny morning in Silver City with temperatures in the upper 50s. Our plan for the day was to bird the Mimbres Mountains north of town, with emphasis on Cherry Creek Canyon, and end up at the famous Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument. We had barely made it out of town when I noticed a Spotted Towhee perched up in a bush along the road. We stopped to take a quick look at the towhee and then began loading up again. As I was climbing into the van, I heard the distinct mewing cries of Pinyon Jays in the distance. I called for everyone to quickly get out. Within moments a band of ten or so Pinyon Jays filtered down the hillside. This highly sought species provided excellent views from about 30 feet for over five minutes.

As we were watching the jays, a Juniper Titmouse began calling to our right and also cooperated with great scope studies. Next, a group of Mexican Jays, a very local species in this state, moved in to see what the commotion was about. A pair of Bushtits, a close Ash-throated Flycatcher, and a Bewick's Wren followed. All this because of a towhee along the roadside! We managed to tear ourselves away from this spot and made it all of one mile up the road before a singing Black-throated Gray Warbler caught our attention. Once again we quickly unloaded and had marvelous views of two of these striking warblers. A Western Tanager popped into the same tree and was joined by a brilliant Western Bluebird. As we were enjoying the parade of species, an adult Northern Goshawk suddenly sailed over the road in front of us carrying prey. What unbelievable luck!

We logged another mile of travel before stopping again at the sight of 20 or more Band-tailed Pigeons in the pines to our left. Another bonanza of quality birds ensued. An Acorn Woodpecker peeked out of its nest hole, and two Bridled Titmice came by to inspect us. A pair of Grace's Warblers sang from the ponderosas, as did a "Gray-headed" Dark-eyed Junco. Violet-green Swallows with their stunning emerald, purple, and white plumages darted about overhead. A Steller's Jay popped in briefly and was followed by a pair of Hepatic Tanagers. It was hard to know where to look. By this time, an hour or more had passed and we had traveled about eight miles. Realizing we had a long way to go, I once again rounded up the group and headed up into the mountains, determined to make Cherry Creek our next stop. The birds would have none of that, however, and it took three more stops before we made the final five miles to Cherry Creek. A stunning Painted Redstart flitted about the roadside a few feet from us, and a group of Pygmy Nuthatches nearly landed on my head! More stunning Western Bluebirds and a Hairy Woodpecker came next.

The second stop yielded a cluster of birds responding to a whistled imitation of a pygmy-owl. The trees above our heads were alive with birds: incomparable Red-faced Warblers at 15 feet; a beautiful pumpkin-headed Olive Warbler overhead; and Plumbeous, Hutton's, and Warbling vireos, more Grace's Warblers, and White-breasted and Pygmy nuthatches joined in the scolding frenzy.

Over two-and-a-half-hours after we left the hotel, we finally reached our “first” stop of the day. Cherry Creek Canyon is a wonderful, scenic canyon and loaded with birds. The previous evening we had tallied incredible views of both Flammulated Owl and Whip-poor-will here. Now, in the daytime, we added the likes of Magnificent and Broad-tailed hummingbirds, Mountain Chickadee, and Virginia’s Warbler to our growing list. Lunch beckoned, so we proceeded toward Sapillo Crossing. A small lodge here has a very good restaurant, and, better still, a great selection of feeders. As we ate, we were entertained by Steller’s Jays and Western Scrub-Jays, Black-headed Grosbeaks, and Black-chinned and Broad-tailed hummingbirds just feet away. Before leaving we stood outside watching the hummingbird feeders for a few moments. Suddenly, one member of our group noticed a hummingbird with a red bill. A stunning male Broad-billed Hummingbird, very rare in New Mexico, provided excellent studies.

We needed to allow time to visit the fascinating Gila Cliff Dwellings, so once again we headed onward. En route a Zone-tailed Hawk was spotted along the roadside. We piled out just as the bird disappeared over a ridge behind us. We waited a few minutes and the hawk came back right over us in a full stoop. What a show! In the ruins parking lot a short while later, as we were preparing to embark on the trail to the dwellings, a Common Black-Hawk flapped lazily over the parking lot. Simply put, we were having ridiculous luck—rare birds, hard-to-find species, stunningly beautiful species, and so many up-close, fantastic views. It was truly a day to remember. Of course, it wasn’t quite over. That evening we ventured out owling, and were met with more success. Superb, close studies of Western Screech and Elf owls, Common Poorwill, and Common Nighthawk were topped off by an unexpected Barn Owl hunting along the shoulder for a couple of minutes.

I should remind you that this was but one day of a wildly successful New Mexico tour. From the south-central part of the state (Mississippi Kite, Burrowing Owl, Cave Swallow, Gray Vireo, Crissal Thrasher, and Black-chinned Sparrow) to Silver City (American Dipper, Vermilion Flycatcher, Gray Flycatcher, Greater Pewee, and Abert’s Towhee among others) to the central grasslands and foothills (Ferruginous Hawk, Golden Eagle, Lewis’s Woodpecker, and Sage Thrasher) to the high Rocky Mountains near Santa Fe (Three-toed Woodpecker, Williamson’s and Red-naped sapsuckers, Hammond’s and Dusky flycatchers, Townsend’s Solitaire, Black-billed Magpie, Green-tailed Towhee, and Evening Grosbeak) we tallied an impressive 201 species of birds, 24 species of mammals (including bobcat, elk, pronghorn, collared peccary, and black bear), and marveled at the incredible scenery in the Land of Enchantment.

ITINERARY:

- May 26 - west El Paso and Sunland Park areas, Keystone Park, Border Hwy (35 species)
- May 27 - Wilderness Park Museum, Aguirre Springs Recreation area, Holloman Lakes, White Sands National Monument (51 species; 74 total)
- May 28 - Hwys 185 & 187, Percha Dam State Park, Caballo Reservoir, Hwy 152 over the Black Range, evening owling (74 species; 109 total)
- May 29 - all day in Mimbres Mountains, including Pinos Altos, Cherry Creek Canyon, Breathe Inn at Sapillo Crossing, Gila Cliff Dwellings, evening owling (76 species; 140 total)
- May 30 - Burro Mountains, Redrock, Mangus Springs (70 species; 153 total)
- May 31 - Mangus Springs, The Catwalk (Whitewater Canyon), Luna, Apache Springs, San Augustin Plains (including the VLA) (72 species; 167 total)
- June 1 - Bosque del Apache NWR, afternoon shopping at Santa Fe Plaza (68 species; 177 total)

June 2 - Jemez Mountains (Dome Meadow, Jemez Falls, Valle Grande, La Cueva) (54 species; 191 total)
 June 3 - Bandelier National Monument, Jacona, lower portion of Santa Fe Ski Basin Road (66 species; 195 total)
 June 4 - Santa Fe Ski Basin Road to top, Rio Grande Nature Center (60 species; 201 total)
 June 5 - departures for home (201 species total)

KEY:

E = areas in and around El Paso
 L = Las Cruces, Organ Mts, Holloman Lakes, White Sands
 P = Percha Dam, Caballo areas
 S = Black Range, Mimbres Mts, Redrock, Burro Mts, Whitewater Canyon
 R = Reserve, Luna, San Augustin Plains
 B = Bosque del Apache NWR, Socorro
 SF = Santa Fe and surrounding areas including the Jemez Mts, Jacona, Bandelier
 A = Albuquerque

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: total species - **201 (a new tour record!)**

Pied-billed Grebe B,A
 Eared Grebe L---several seen distantly at Holloman
 Western Grebe B---nice comparative views with Clark's
 Clark's Grebe P,B---including some displaying
 Neotropic Cormorant E,B
Least Bittern B---seen well by Steve's van at the refuge; heard only by others
 Great Blue Heron S,B
 Great Egret E,B---25 in view at once at BDA feeding frenzy!
 Snowy Egret E,L,B
Tricolored Heron A---our last new bird (the record breaker) found by Carolyn; casual in the state!
 Green Heron P
 Black-crowned Night-Heron B
 White-faced Ibis L,B---nice breeding-plumaged birds
 Turkey Vulture seen daily
Ross's Goose A---very rare for this season was a lingering bird at the nature center
 Canada Goose B,A
 Wood Duck E,A---great studies at the nature center, including babies
 Gadwall L,B,A
American Wigeon L,A---late
 Mallard seen most days including several of the "Mexican Duck" subspecies (diazi) the first few days
 Cinnamon Teal L,P,R,A---nice studies of males
 Northern Shoveler L,B,A
 Green-winged Teal L
 Redhead L,B
 Ruddy Duck E,L,B

Mississippi Kite E---great flyover our first afternoon; extremely local in southwest
Northern Harrier R---rare at this season
 Sharp-shinned Hawk SF---one near Dome Meadow
 Cooper's Hawk S, SF
Northern Goshawk S---gorgeous adult near Pinos Altos; rarely seen here
Common Black-Hawk S---one at the cliff dwellings, two at Redrock and another near Mangus Springs; can be hard to find
 Swainson's Hawk E,L,P,B---many nice views, including one attacking Golden Eagle!; our first bird of the trip
Zone-tailed Hawk S---only one seen, but great flight views as one stooped right overhead!
 Red-tailed Hawk almost daily
Ferruginous Hawk R---a tour first was one on a nest near Apache Springs; rare this far south in summer
Golden Eagle L,R---voted the favorite bird of the tour; an immature being attacked by a Swainson's near White Sands and a pair of adults spotted by Carolyn near Reserve; uncommon
 American Kestrel E,P,S,R,B,SF
 Ring-necked Pheasant B---the "white-winged" race originally from Afghanistan
 Scaled Quail E,L---several nice views our first full day
 Gambel's Quail E,L,P,S,B---including some babies
 Virginia Rail S---an unbelievable show with the bird approaching to within six feet of the group
 Common Moorhen B---only one seen
 American Coot E,L,P,B,A
Snowy Plover L---about eight of these declining birds at Holloman
 Killdeer E,L,P,B
 Black-necked Stilt E,L,B
 American Avocet E,L---babies at Keystone
 Spotted Sandpiper L,B
Red-necked Phalarope L---rare in spring; distant views
 Rock Pigeon seen daily
 Eurasian Collared-Dove seen all but two days; amazingly this species has gone from being virtually nonexistent in the state six years ago to widespread and common
 Band-tailed Pigeon S,SF---seen best near Pinos Altos; unusually numerous
 White-winged Dove seen daily, becoming scarcer as one goes north
 Mourning Dove seen daily
 Yellow-billed Cuckoo B---quick flyby for some; just arriving
 Greater Roadrunner L,P,S,B---a total of 18 seen!
 Barn Owl S---nice views of hunting bird; uncommon
Flammulated Owl S---the easiest Flamm of all-time; we had great views in minimal time; often missed completely; voted the second favorite bird of the tour!
 Western Screech-Owl S---fantastic views
 Great Horned Owl S---amazingly responsive bird in broad daylight, plus views of a fledged baby thanks to Jerry; voted the third favorite bird of the tour
 Elf Owl S---superb views; a real highlight
 Burrowing Owl E---great study of pair at nest hole
Spotted Owl S---this very scarce bird was heard only
 Lesser Nighthawk P,S,B
 Common Nighthawk S---nice views in the Burros
 Common Poorwill S---wonderful flyover

Whip-poor-will S---the mexican subspecies (*arizonae*) already split off from the eastern Whip-poor-will (*vociferus*) by some authors

White-throated Swift S,SF---many great views

Broad-billed Hummingbird S---male spotted by Carolyn at Breathe Inn was a tour first and a nice rarity

Magnificent Hummingbird S---female responding to owl whistle near Cherry Creek; very uncommon

Black-chinned Hummingbird seen all but two days

Broad-tailed Hummingbird S,SF---many great views at Breathe Inn's feeders

Lewis's Woodpecker R,SF---wonderful studies of several, including two at a feeder!

Acorn Woodpecker S---one at nest hole was especially nice

Gila Woodpecker S---found in NM only in the Redrock area

Red-naped Sapsucker SF

Williamson's Sapsucker SF---excellent views

Ladder-backed Woodpecker P,S,SF

Downy Woodpecker SF,A

Hairy Woodpecker S,SF

Three-toed Woodpecker SF---single males at two spots in the Jemez Mts; rare and local; seen on about a quarter of the trips only; fantastic prolonged studies

Northern Flicker E,P,S,B,SF--- red-shafted variety

Olive-sided Flycatcher B---late migrant here

Greater Pewee S---one in the Burro Mts was a real treat; not present in state every year

Western Wood-Pewee seen daily

Hammond's Flycatcher SF

Dusky Flycatcher SF---a breathtaking effort to see this one!

Gray Flycatcher S,SF---several nice views

Cordilleran Flycatcher S,SF

Black Phoebe E,L,P,S,B,A

Say's Phoebe E,L,P,S,R,B,SF---our last bird of the trip

Vermilion Flycatcher P,S---unusual at Percha at this season; always spectacular; total of ten seen

Ash-throated Flycatcher P,S,B,SF

Brown-crested Flycatcher S---found only around Redrock in this state

Cassin's Kingbird S,R,SF

Western Kingbird E,L,P,S,R,B

Loggerhead Shrike L,R---only four seen

Bell's Vireo S---two at Redrock

Gray Vireo L---two seen very well at Aguirre Springs; very uncommon, local, and irregular; seen on about half the trips here

Plumbeous Vireo S,SF

Hutton's Vireo S---one in Cherry Creek and one in the Burro Mts; uncommon

Warbling Vireo S,SF---one of the most common breeding birds of the high mountains; nest near Dome Meadow

Steller's Jay S,SF---subspecies *maculophya*; exceptional views at Breathe Inn

Western Scrub-Jay S,R,SF---subspecies *woodhouseii*

Mexican Jay S---great study near Pinos Altos

Pinyon Jay S---flock of about ten near Pinos Altos were the only ones of the trip!; incredible prolonged views

Clark's Nutcracker SF---several along the ski basin road

Black-billed Magpie SF---a pair near Tesuque thanks to Anne!; this species has declined dramatically in the state in recent years possibly due to West Nile virus---now easily missed
 American Crow R,SF
 Chihuahuan Raven L,P,B
 Common Raven S,R,SF,A
 Horned Lark S,R
 Violet-green Swallow S,R,SF---excellent scope studies of these beauties
 Northern Rough-winged Swallow P,S,B,A
 Cliff Swallow E,P,S,B,SF---nests at BDA
 Cave Swallow E---about thirty in west El Paso
 Barn Swallow almost daily in small numbers
 Mountain Chickadee S,SF
Bridled Titmouse S---only two seen, but great views at a nest!
 Juniper Titmouse S,SF---several good views
 Verdin L,P,S,B---nice views at nest at BDA
 Bushtit S---pair at point blank range near Pinos Altos; scarce this year
 Red-breasted Nuthatch SF---oddly scarce with only two seen our last full day
 White-breasted Nuthatch S,SF---fledged babies in Pinos Altos
 Pygmy Nuthatch S,SF---at nest; one of the cutest birds of North America!; repeated superb views
 Brown Creeper SF---heard only
 Cactus Wren E,S---scarcer than normal but great views in El Paso
 Rock Wren S---only one seen, but unbeatable views of that individual
 Canyon Wren L,S,SF---one of my favorite songs
 Bewick's Wren L,P,S,SF
 House Wren S,SF
 American Dipper S---fabulous study in Whitewater Canyon
 Golden-crowned Kinglet SF
 Ruby-crowned Kinglet SF
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher S---uncommon
 Western Bluebird S,R,SF---many great views
 Mountain Bluebird R,SF---gorgeous!; worthy of a jig
 Townsend's Solitaire SF---excellent studies
 Hermit Thrush S,SF
 American Robin E,P,S,B,SF
Gray Catbird B---seen only by some at the refuge; relatively rare here
 Northern Mockingbird daily
 Sage Thrasher R---great looks by the VLA
 Curve-billed Thrasher P,S,R
 Crissal Thrasher E---nice scope views of this desert skulker
 European Starling almost daily
 Phainopepla E,P,B---increasingly less common as we moved northward
Olive Warbler S---nice views of four including one adult male; uncommon and local
 Orange-crowned Warbler SF
 Virginia's Warbler S,SF
 Lucy's Warbler P,S
 Yellow Warbler P,S,B,SF
 Yellow-rumped Warbler SF,A---Audubon's subspecies; much scarcer than usual
 Black-throated Gray Warbler S---especially well near Pinos Altos
 Grace's Warbler S,SF---several excellent views

MacGillivray's Warbler L,SF---a late migrant at Caballo and breeding birds in the Sangre de Cristos; great looks!
 Common Yellowthroat P,S,B,SF
 Wilson's Warbler P---late migrants
 Red-faced Warbler S---always spectacular; six seen; one of the prettiest warblers in North America!
 Painted Redstart S---as stunning, if not more so, than the previous species; four seen, one exceptionally well
 Yellow-breasted Chat P,S,B---unusually good views of this skulker
 Hepatic Tanager L,S,SF---excellent studies
 Summer Tanager P,S,B
 Western Tanager P,S,SF---one on a nest
 Green-tailed Towhee SF---great views near Dome Meadow
 Spotted Towhee S,SF
 Canyon Towhee L,S,SF
 Abert's Towhee S---another Redrock specialty
 Rufous-crowned Sparrow L,S
 Chipping Sparrow S,SF
 Black-chinned Sparrow L---fantastic views of this localized species
 Vesper Sparrow R
 Lark Sparrow S
 Black-throated Sparrow E,L,S---the most handsome sparrow?
 Song Sparrow SF---uncommon
 Lincoln's Sparrow SF---mostly just heard though glimpsed by a few
 Dark-eyed Junco S,SF---Gray-headed types
 Northern Cardinal S---yet another Redrock specialty; the brighter red and longer crested southwestern subspecies
 Pyrrhuloxia E---two at the Wilderness Park Museum were the only ones of the trip
 Black-headed Grosbeak P,S,B,SF
 Blue Grosbeak L,P,S,B----stunning
 Lazuli Bunting B,SF---possibly the prettiest bunting
Indigo Bunting S---male found by Steve at the Catwalk was unusual
 Red-winged Blackbird E,L,P,S,B,SF,A
 Eastern Meadowlark L,R---*liliana* subspecies
 Western Meadowlark B
Yellow-headed Blackbird L,P---late migrants
 Brewer's Blackbird R,SF
 Common Grackle SF---always hard to find here
 Great-tailed Grackle E,L,P,S,B,SF,A
Bronzed Cowbird L---female flying by van near Organ for some; very uncommon still
 Brown-headed Cowbird almost daily
 Hooded Oriole E,S---best views at Redrock
 Bullock's Oriole E,L,P,S,B---great views at the refuge feeders
 Scott's Oriole L,S
 Red Crossbill R---small flock at Luna seen only in flight
 House Finch seen every day
 Pine Siskin P,S,SF---more common than usual
 Lesser Goldfinch P,S,SF
Evening Grosbeak SF---pair in the Jemez Mts; uncommon
 House Sparrow seen daily

Leader only birds:

Inca Dove

Mammals: total species - 24 (a tour record!)

Abert's (Tassel-eared) Squirrel---amazing!

Red Squirrel

Rock Squirrel

Golden-mantled Ground Squirrel

Spotted Ground Squirrel

Texas Antelope Squirrel

prairie dog species---probably Gunnison's

Gray-necked (Gray-collared) Chipmunk

Cliff Chipmunk

chipmunk species---either Colorado or Least

Black-tailed Jackrabbit

Desert Cottontail

Eastern Cottontail

Mule Deer

White-tailed Deer

Elk

Pronghorn

Coyote---nice views of two near Bandelier

Gray Fox

Bobcat---one by Anne in the Burros

Muskrat

Collared Peccary (Javelina)---two groups---one in the burros and the other near Cliff

Black Bear---very unexpected was one at Bandelier (a tour first); "Buford"

bat species

Reptiles & Amphibians: total species - 13

Desert Grassland Whiptail

Little Striped Whiptail

Chihuahuan Spotted Whiptail

Tree Lizard

Eastern Fence (Southern Prairie) Lizard

Desert Spiny Lizard

Crevice Spiny Lizard

Clark's Spiny Lizard

Short-horned Lizard

Gopher Snake

Bullfrog

Painted Turtle

Spiny Soft-shelled Turtle

Butterflies: total species - 15 (plus many more left unidentified)

California Sister
Two-tailed Swallowtail
Western Tiger Swallowtail
Giant Swallowtail
Sleepy Orange
Southern Dogface
Mourning Cloak
Monarch
Queen
Variegated Fritillary
Cabbage White
Checkered White
Silver-spotted Skipper
Marine Blue
Gray Hairstreak

Spectacular/ Interesting places:

White Sands National Monument
Gila Cliff Dwellings
The Catwalk
Very Large Array
Santa Fe Plaza
Bandelier National Monument
view from the ski basin

Significant others:

Tarantula Hawk (Wasp)
Darkling Beetle
the hanging bull
the jumping baby bunny
Santa Fe beagle
“four delicious scents”