

CIBOLO CREEK WORKSHOP

SEPTEMBER 14-20, 2008

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Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc.

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Our second Cibolo Creek tour was a huge success, even topping the inaugural trip of last year. We started out with some difficulties, as unprecedented flooding in the vicinity of Presidio had caused the creek to rise enough so that access to the ranch was temporarily prohibited. A one-night stay in a historic hotel in Marfa solved that problem and put us in closer proximity to the Davis Mountains for our day of birding there. We tallied an impressive number of migrants during the trip, as well as many resident southwestern specialty birds, and savored the comforts and great food of Cibolo Creek Lodge.

Our tour started in El Paso, where on the first afternoon we visited McKelligon Canyon (uncharacteristically windy) and my house. McKelligon Canyon produced very close views of Black-throated Sparrow, but little else as winds funneled up the canyon. We decided to head quickly to my yard, where there was little wind, and watch the hummingbird feeders for awhile. We were rewarded with fantastic views of Black-chinned and Rufous (one adult male among the many immatures and females) hummingbirds from just a few feet away, in addition to close studies of Inca and White-winged doves, Warbling Vireo, Curve-billed Thrasher, and Western Tanager. A quick spin around the neighborhood before dinner produced a covey of Gambel's Quail right out in the middle of the road above my house.

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, including such highlights as Cooper's Hawk, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Plumbeous Vireo, Western Wood-Pewee, Wilson's Warbler, Western Tanager, Blue Grosbeak, Painted and Lazuli buntings, Dickcissel, and Clay-colored Sparrow. Nearby evaporation ponds yielded Solitary Sandpiper; Lesser Yellowlegs; Baird's, Western, and Least sandpipers side by side; Wilson's Phalarope; and Black-necked Stilt among others. A real surprise came with the discovery of an Eastern Kingbird (accidental in this area) which we studied at leisure. Two adorable pairs of Burrowing Owls were seen along the border before we began our drive toward Van Horn. We opted for the back roads route from Tornillo to McNary with a stop at a large irrigation impoundment. Here we had Western and Clark's grebes side by side, Black Terns, and a variety of herons, egrets, and waterfowl. Countless Swainson's Hawks and pronghorns entertained us on our journey toward Marfa, as did an unexpected flight of 224 American White Pelicans soaring over the grasslands. Prior to settling into our Marfa hotel for the night, we enjoyed superb studies of two Mississippi Kites, one of which perched for prolonged views.

The next day we traveled northward to the Davis Mountains to sample a higher elevation and more wooded habitat than available at Cibolo Creek, while we waited for the floodwaters to recede. Our first stop along Limpia Creek yielded Black-crested Titmouse, Canyon Wren, stunning Summer Tanagers, many Western Tanagers, and Rufous-crowned Sparrow among others. Someone in the

group spotted a perched adult Common Black-Hawk across the road, and we had fantastic walk-away scope views of this magnificent and localized raptor. As we headed for Davis Mountains State Park, we saw a Zone-tailed Hawk circling over the road, and piled out for another great raptor find. The park itself produced Acorn Woodpecker, a very rare Great Crested Flycatcher, Cassin's Kingbird, many Phainopeplas, and a Canyon Towhee on our van! Other highlights of the day included Hutton's Vireo at point-blank range, Western Bluebird, Townsend's Warbler, Hepatic Tanager, and Lark Sparrow. By late afternoon we were headed to Cibolo Creek, as the water had gone down enough to allow us to reach the ranch. We settled into our rooms and enjoyed a delicious dinner.

We spent the entire next day on the western portion of Cibolo Creek Ranch. An early morning walk down to North Springs produced a dazzling array of color with Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Vermilion Flycatcher (they seemed to be everywhere!), Blue Grosbeak, both tanagers, Orchard Oriole, and Scott's Oriole seen. An Osprey roosting with vultures added to the excitement. Higher elevation canyons produced Rock Wren and wonderful views of skylarking Cassin's Sparrow.

Our third full day on the ranch was spent in the eastern section of the property at La Cienega and La Morita. Migrants were on the move in every desert wash and our progress toward La Cienega was slowed. Clay-colored and Chipping sparrows seemed to be everywhere and were joined at points by Lark and Vesper sparrows and Lark Buntings. A couple of Townsend's Warblers were spotted, followed by a couple of skulking Virginia's Warblers. A Green-tailed Towhee perched in the open, and then a pair of Gray Vireos (always a treat) joined in. Black-tailed Gnatcatchers, Western Wood-Pewees, Bell's Vireos, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Scott's Orioles, and too many Western Tanagers and Blue Grosbeaks to count paraded by. We also had scope views of Crissal Thrashers along one stretch of the road. Finally we arrived at the oasis of La Cienega and almost immediately found the bird of the trip, a female Green Kingfisher. This gem of a bird posed from about 20 feet away for over 15 minutes. It represents the westernmost record ever for Texas. Also in the area were a Yellow-billed Cuckoo, a dozen or more Vermilion Flycatchers, and a Solitary Sandpiper. On our way back to the lodge for lunch, a rarely seen badger walked right across the road, followed by a stunning flock of 28 Yellow-headed Blackbirds on the fence next to us. Over 200 White-throated Swifts hawking insects over the ranch pond greeted our arrival back at the lodge. In the afternoon we headed to another oasis at La Morita where we enjoyed daytime views of a roosting Western Screech-Owl, an early Red-naped Sapsucker, Hermit Thrush, and another Townsend's Warbler. This was a fantastic day!

The final day of our trip was spent driving back toward El Paso in the morning (Red-necked Phalarope on a stock pond, Lark Buntings by the hundreds, Scaled Quail, and male Bullock's Oriole among the highlights), and in the afternoon at irrigation impoundments, sewage ponds, and a nature preserve near El Paso, in addition to revisiting my yard. Harris's Hawk, Golden Eagle, American Avocet, and both Calliope and Broad-tailed hummingbirds were among the 19 new species we added that day.

In all we totaled 159 species, with 13 species of shorebirds, 14 species of raptors (hawks and owls combined), 4 species of hummingbirds, 5 species of vireos, and 8 species of warblers. Some species were present in huge numbers such as Lark Bunting (800+), Western Tanager (61), and Blue Grosbeak (56). In addition we saw 10 species of mammals and 28 species of butterflies. We experienced wonderful weather throughout (the high temperature never surpassed 80 degrees until the last day, and one day didn't top 70!), and thoroughly enjoyed our nights at the wonderful Cibolo Creek Ranch. I can hardly wait for next year!

Itinerary:

September 14 - McKelligon Canyon, my yard, Mountain Park (21 species)
September 15 - Fort Bliss Sewage Ponds, Border Highway, Hwy 20 from Tornillo to McNary Reservoir, drive to Marfa with roadside birding (80 species; 89 total)
September 16 - all day in and around the Davis Mountains including Limpia Creek, Davis Mountains State Park, and the McDonald Observatory; drive to Cibolo Creek (54 species; 113 total)
September 17 - all day on west side of Cibolo Creek Ranch including North Springs, the waterfall area, and Alamo Springs (44 species; 122 total)
September 18 - all day on east side of Cibolo Creek Ranch including La Cienega and La Morita (65 species; 140 total)
September 19 - drive back to El Paso with roadside birding and stops at McNary Reservoir, Fort Hancock Sewage Ponds, Tornillo Reservoir, Cattleman's restaurant pond, Ascarate Lake, Keystone Heritage Park, Trans-Mountain Road, and my house (84 species; 159 total)
September 20 - 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

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:

Wood Duck E

Mallard E---mostly of the "Mexican Duck" subspecies (*diazi*) but a few regular Mallards as well

Blue-winged Teal E

Cinnamon Teal E

Northern Shoveler E

Northern Pintail E

Green-winged Teal E,C

Canvasback E---one female at McNary; rare this early

Ruddy Duck E

Scaled Quail C,D---oddly scarce with one covey near La Cienega spotted by Marianne and another lone bird near Valentine

Gambel's Quail E---great views near my house

Pied-billed Grebe E

Eared Grebe E---four at McNary

Western Grebe E---dozens at McNary

Clark's Grebe E---side-by-side with preceding species

American White Pelican D---very unusual was a flock of 224 migrating south near Marfa

Double-crested Cormorant E

Great Blue Heron E,C

Great Egret E

Snowy Egret E

Cattle Egret E

Green Heron E---nice scope study at Keystone

White-faced Ibis E---flight views only of two different flocks

Turkey Vulture seen daily in numbers

Osprey E,C---great scope study along Cibolo Creek

Mississippi Kite D---two migrant birds (an immature and second year bird) in residential Marfa; unexpected this late; voted third favorite bird of the tour

Northern Harrier D,C---early migrants

Cooper's Hawk E

Common Black-Hawk D---superb views of late lingering adult bird thanks to Sarah!

Harris's Hawk E---two seen near Tornillo our last day

Swainson's Hawk E,D---up to 20 in one day

Zone-tailed Hawk D---nice prolonged flight views near Davis Mountains SP

Red-tailed Hawk seen daily, mostly of the *fuertes* race

Golden Eagle E---spotted by Marianne our last afternoon

American Kestrel E,D,C

Peregrine Falcon E,D---we had an impressive four Peregrines including great views our first afternoon over my yard!

Common Moorhen E---one in drainage ditch near Tornillo the last day

American Coot E

Killdeer E,D,C

Black-necked Stilt E

American Avocet E---one in with stilts at Fort Hancock

Spotted Sandpiper E

Solitary Sandpiper E---nice studies of three

Greater Yellowlegs E---one at Fort Hancock

Lesser Yellowlegs E

Long-billed Curlew E---one flying over Fort Bliss

Western Sandpiper E---up close studies

Least Sandpiper E---ditto

Baird's Sandpiper E,D---nice views at Fort Bliss and again at Fort Hancock; a very impressive total of 47 seen; generally uncommon

Wilson's Phalarope E---huge flock of 100 or more at Cattleman's

Red-necked Phalarope D---one immature on a small stock tank near Valentine our last day was quite a surprise; rare fall migrant

Black Tern E---about three 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---only in my yard

Yellow-billed Cuckoo D,C---singles along Limpia Creek and at La Cienega (scope views); late

Greater Roadrunner E,C,D---scarcer than usual with only 7 total, though some very nice views the last day

Western Screech-Owl C----superb daytime study; difficult at this season; voted the favorite bird of the tour

Burrowing Owl E---nice studies of pair at burrow

White-throated Swift C---huge flock of 200 or more over the pond at the ranch

Black-chinned Hummingbird E,C---thirty or more in my yard including several of adult males

Calliope Hummingbird E---one female in my yard seen very well the last day

Broad-tailed Hummingbird E---one female in my yard the last day

Rufous Hummingbird E---ten at my feeders including one adult male

Belted Kingfisher D,C

Green Kingfisher C---totally unexpected was a female at La Cienega (a first ranch record and the westernmost record ever for Texas); we had prolonged views from about twenty feet; voted the second favorite bird of the tour!

Golden-fronted Woodpecker C---at the westernmost limit of their range

Acorn Woodpecker D

Red-naped Sapsucker C---a very early bird at La Morita

Ladder-backed Woodpecker E,C,D
 Olive-sided Flycatcher C---two seen, one especially well right at the ranch
 Western Wood-Pewee E,C,D---18 in one day
Least Flycatcher C---two at La Cienega
 Cordilleran Flycatcher C---Marianne only
 Black Phoebe E,D,C---always one or two around the lodge
 Say's Phoebe D,C
 Vermilion Flycatcher C---always around lake at lodge; up to twelve in a day
Great Crested Flycatcher D---one in Davis Mts State Park was a great vagrant
 Ash-throated Flycatcher C---a couple of late birds on the east side of the ranch
 Cassin's Kingbird D,C---up to 20 a day as migrants went through
 Western Kingbird E,D,C---mostly around El Paso but a few elsewhere
Eastern Kingbird E---one of the rarest birds of the trip was one at Fort Bliss
 Bell's Vireo C---some still singing; nice views
Gray Vireo C---a pair along a wash on the east side of the ranch were somewhat unexpected this late; a real local specialty
 Plumbeous Vireo D,C
Hutton's Vireo D---a pair spotted by Ronan near the observatory was a treat!
 Warbling Vireo E,C---six at one time in my yard
 Western Scrub-Jay D
 Chihuahuan Raven E,D---scarcer than usual with best views the last day at Cattleman's
 Common Raven C,D
 Tree Swallow E---one early migrant in marfa
 Bank Swallow D---one in with Cave Swallows near Valentine
 Cave Swallow D---a flock of 35 or so near Valentine provided great studies
 Barn Swallow seen daily
 Black-crested Titmouse D
 Verdin E---surprisingly this species was heard only
 White-breasted Nuthatch D
 Cactus Wren E,D,C
 Rock Wren E,D,C
 Canyon Wren C,D---seen best along Limpia Creek
 Bewick's Wren D
 House Wren E,C
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher C---a direct hit from overhead!
 Black-tailed Gnatcatcher C
 Western Bluebird D---about six with one nice male
 Hermit Thrush C---one at La Morita
 American Robin E,D---one of our first birds; generally uncommon in this region
 Northern Mockingbird seen daily
 Curve-billed Thrasher E,C---superb study in my yard
Crissal Thrasher C---somewhat surprising were three different birds on the east side of the ranch; we missed it in El Paso where we expected to see one
 European Starling E,D---a few only
 Phainopepla D---numerous in the state park this time
 Orange-crowned Warbler E---three total
 Virginia's Warbler C---two on the east side of the ranch
 Yellow Warbler D---one along roadside near Lobo
 Yellow-rumped Warbler E,D---"Audubon's" type; only three seen
 Townsend's Warbler D,C---four total including one adult male
 MacGillivray's Warbler D,C---three
 Common Yellowthroat E---heard only
 Wilson's Warbler seen daily with 26 total

Hepatic Tanager D---two pairs near the observatory
 Summer Tanager C,D---several stunning males
 Western Tanager E,C,D---a very impressive 61 individuals with 2-3 males seen
 Green-tailed Towhee C---one in dry wash on east side of ranch
 Canyon Towhee C,D
 Cassin's Sparrow C,D---great views of skylarking bird
 Rufous-crowned Sparrow C,D
 Chipping Sparrow E,C,D---common
 Clay-colored Sparrow E,C---smaller numbers than Chipping but still numerous
 Brewer's Sparrow E,C---about seven total
 Vesper Sparrow C---good views near runway
 Lark Sparrow E,C,D---repeated good views
 Black-throated Sparrow E,C---a truly stunning sparrow
 Lark Bunting C,D---three on the ranch and then monstrous flocks along Hwy 90 the last day perhaps totaling 800 birds
 Lincoln's Sparrow E---one seen by a few at Fort Bliss
 White-crowned Sparrow E---one immature bird at Fort Bliss by some
 Northern Cardinal C,D
 Pyrrhuloxia E,C---great views
 Black-headed Grosbeak E---surprisingly only one seen,an immature male at North Springs
 Blue Grosbeak E,C,D---next to Western Tanager and Chipping Sparrow this species was the next most common & widespread migrant with 56 seen including several striking males
 Lazuli Bunting E---one female at Fort Bliss
 Painted Bunting E---one female plumaged bird; surprisingly scarce
Dickcissel E---scope study at Fort bliss of this uncommon species
 Red-winged Blackbird E---only three seen
 Eastern Meadowlark D,C---the liliana subspecies, a possible future split
 Yellow-headed Blackbird D,C,E---stunning; flock of 28 near runway and scattered birds elsewhere
 Brewer's Blackbird C---two in with Yellow-heads; early
 Great-tailed Grackle E,D
 Brown-headed Cowbird D,C
 Orchard Oriole C, near Van Horn
 Bullock's Oriole striking male along roadside near Van Horn the last day
 Scott's Oriole C---seven total including three nice adult males
 House Finch small numbers most days
 Lesser Goldfinch E,C,D---several nice sightings, mostly black-backed birds
American Goldfinch C---one early bird by Ronan at La Morita
 House Sparrow E,D,C

total species - 159

Leader only birds:

Bushtit
 Bronzed Cowbird

Mammals: total species -10

Mule Deer
Pronghorn--- many superb studies
Desert Cottontail
Black-tailed Jackrabbit
Texas Antelope Squirrel
Rock Squirrel
bat species---smaller ones probably Mexican Free-tailed
Coyote
Collared Peccary (Javelina)
Badger---wonderful sighting of this rarely seen mammal near the runway

Introduced mammals: total species - 4

Camel
Bison
Scimitar-horned Oryx
Barbary sheep

Reptiles & Amphibians: total species - 8

Rio Grande Leopard Frog
Red-spotted Toad
Desert Box Turtle
Yellow Mud Turtle
Desert Grassland Whiptail
Marbled Whiptail
Greater Earless Lizard
Western Black-necked Garter Snake---Ronan

Butterflies: total species - 28

Sleepy Orange
Orange Sulphur
Large Orange Sulphur
Southern Dogface
Dainty Sulphur
Cloudless Sulphur
Clouded Sulphur
Common Checkered White
Red-spotted Purple
Pipevine Swallowtail
Black Swallowtail
Two-tailed Swallowtail
Western Pygmy Blue
Reakirt's Blue
Red Satyr
Bordered Patch
Pearl Crescent
Painted Lady
American Lady---Marianne
Variegated Fritillary
American Snout
Empress Lelia
Queen
Monarch

leafwing species
Orange Skipperling
Common Checkered Skipper---plus many checkered skippers left unidentified
Mournful Duskywing

Significant others:

Horse Lubber Grasshopper
Cockerell's Blue-winged Grasshopper
Pallid-winged Grasshopper
Tarantula---about five seen our first thanks to Sarah
Desert Millipede
Walking Stick species
Leaf-footed Bug
camouflaged moth, possibly a sphinx moth species
Choctaw (Chokie), Cherokee, and Cholla the lovable Brittany Spaniels
Rosie
Texas Longhorns
the Marfa gas caper
getting stuck in Cibolo Creek