

Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc.

Spring Grand Arizona

May 10 - 20, 2006

Leader: Barry Zimmer

Simply put, a springtime visit to southeastern Arizona is an absolute must on the list of every North American birder. Thirty or more species of birds have their entire United States ranges restricted to this tiny corner of Arizona and the adjacent southwestern corner of New Mexico. This year's spring tour proved to be one of our best ever, tallying virtually all of the specialty birds plus a dazzling array of rarities.

When one thinks of Arizona birds, perhaps hummingbirds come to mind first. We had an impressive ten species, from the tiny Costa's with its brilliant purple gorget to the gigantic Magnificent (which certainly lives up to its name) and Blue-throated. Violet-crowneds put on a show in Patagonia, and rare Lucifers and White-eareds were cooperative in the Huachuca Mountains. Picking a favorite hummingbird for the tour was no small task!

Nightbirds also come to mind quickly when one thinks of Arizona birding. We saw an incredible nine species of owls on this tour including prolonged studies of a Spotted Owl at 50 feet (voted the favorite bird of the tour by the group), walk away scope views of a calling Flammulated Owl, a tiny Elf Owl at a nest, Whiskered Screech and Western Screech owls at 20 feet, and two Northern Pygmy-Owls. In addition we studied a Common Poorwill from ten feet or less—one of three nightjar species for our list.

Other Arizona specialty birds also performed well for us. A male Elegant Trogon barked out his strange calls from a sycamore in Garden Canyon. A male Rose-throated Becard (irregular in recent years) put on a nest-building show in Patagonia. We had awesome views of two Five-striped Sparrows in California Gulch, one within ten feet of the group! Arizona also harbors an impressive list of flycatchers. We had superb luck with everything from the tiny Buff-breasted in the Huachucas to the noisy Sulphur-bellied in the Chiricahuas, to the localized Thick-billed and Tropical kingbirds in the Nogales/Patagonia region. Warblers also deserve special mention, with some of the most attractive members of this amazing group residing in the southwest. Judging whether the Red-faced Warbler or Painted Redstart is more stunning can spur hours of debate. Other warbler species seen well included Black-throated Gray, Virginia's, Lucy's, Grace's, and the unique pumpkin-headed Olive Warbler. We had scope studies of two Common Black-Hawk nests, watched a Zone-tailed as it lazily soared overhead, and saw multiple Gray Hawks during the course of our tour. And all of these wonderful birds constitute the "normal" Arizona fare.

As previously mentioned, we had the good fortune of seeing several rarities as well. In Madera Canyon, we had scope-filled views of a singing male Flame-colored Tanager with its brilliant orange plumage, streaked back, dusky mask, and bold black and white wings. Although this species is becoming increasingly regular in the United States, it is still considered a great vagrant. In Patagonia we watched a breeding-plumaged Harris's Sparrow (accidental in the state) from about 20 feet. Typically breeding in north-central Canada, this bird was clearly lost.

It was the first time I had seen this species in this plumage in almost 20 years! In the Chiricahuas we watched a light morph Short-tailed Hawk flying high over Barfoot Lookout. This species was virtually unknown in the state until a few years ago when a pair appeared at this location to breed. Finally, on our last afternoon we watched an out-of-place Least Grebe at a sewage pond in Tucson as it swam about within 15 feet or so of the group.

We also fared well with lingering migrants with the likes of Lazuli Bunting, Green-tailed Towhee, Hammond's and Dusky flycatchers, and MacGillivray's Warbler all putting in appearances. In addition, it seems I have forgotten to mention the Mexican Chickadee, Gilded Flicker, Arizona Woodpecker, Canyon Wren, and Rufous-winged and Botteri's sparrows, all of which provided excellent views. As you can see, southeastern Arizona offers spectacular spring birding with many species found nowhere else in the United States, so don't miss out—join our 2007 tour and see for yourself!

ITINERARY:

May 10 - afternoon visit to Sonoran Desert Museum, Golf Links Road (34 species)

May 11 - NW Tucson, Aravaipa Canyon, Mammoth Sewage Ponds, Sweetwater Wetlands, Madera Canyon, evening owling (79 species; 90 total)

May 12 - desert near Continental, Madera Canyon, Amado Sewage Pond, Montosa Canyon, Tubac, Rio Rico area (91 species; 124 total)

May 13 - California Gulch and Ruby Road, Patagonia area, Paton's yard (70 species; 138 total)

May 14 - Kino Springs, Patagonia area, Patagonia Lake State Park, Sonoita grasslands, Ash Canyon (97 species; 159 total)

May 15 - Ramsey Canyon Road, Carr Canyon, Miller Canyon (Beatty's); evening owling (74 species; 175 total)

May 16 - Fort Huachuca including Garden Canyon & Scheelite Canyon, Ramsey Canyon, Sierra Vista Sewage Pond, Whitewater Draw, desert near Rodeo, NM; evening owling (84 species; 184 total)

May 17 - desert below Portal to Rodeo, Cave Creek Canyon, Paradise area (including George Walker House), East Turkey Creek, evening owling (79 species; 193 total)

May 18 - Paradise area, upper elevations of Chiricahua Mts including Barfoot Park, the "T" junction, and Pinery Canyon; afternoon to Cave creek Canyon, Paradise road, and Jasper's feeders; evening owling (80 species; 198 total)

May 19 - Cave Creek Canyon, Willcox Sewage Pond, Box Canyon, Sweetwater wetlands (102 species; 205 total)

May 20 - departure for home (205 total species)

KEY:

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

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

N = Nogales, Patagonia, Ruby Road

H = Huachuca Mountains, Sonoita grasslands

C = Chiricahua Mountains, Whitewater Draw 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:

Least Grebe T---fantastic views of a bird that we discovered five years ago that is still present at Sweetwater; accidental in Arizona
Pied-billed Grebe N,C,T
Eared Grebe C---breeding plumaged birds
Western Grebe N---one at Patagonia Lake was a nice find; rare
Neotropic Cormorant N
Great Blue Heron T,N,H,C
Great Egret N---one at Kino Springs was unusual
Snowy Egret N
Cattle Egret N
Green Heron N
Black-crowned Night-Heron C
White-faced Ibis N,C---great views of breeding-plumaged birds
Black Vulture N---one group of 30 or so near Rio Rico
Turkey Vulture seen daily in numbers
Black-bellied Whistling-Duck N---an impressive 200 or so near Rio Rico in a flooded field
Gadwall N---late pair near Rio Rico
American Wigeon T,C
Mallard T,N,H,C---including some of the Mexican Duck subspecies
Blue-winged Teal T,N,C
Cinnamon Teal N,C
Northern Shoveler C
Green-winged Teal C
Redhead C---one late male at Willcox
Ruddy Duck T,N,C---wonderful breeding males with bright blue bills
Cooper's Hawk T,S,N,H,C
Gray Hawk T,N---a total of three seen with excellent scope views
Common Black-Hawk T---nice views of pair at nest plus another single on a nest
Harris's Hawk T---local, only one seen
Swainson's Hawk T,N,H,C---including one dark morph
Short-tailed Hawk C---light morph over Barfoot Park; accidental in Arizona; only the second time ever for t
his tour
Zone-tailed Hawk T,N---we had two individuals (the best one near Mammoth); this bird can be missed
completely
Red-tailed Hawk almost daily
American Kestrel T,S,N,H
Peregrine Falcon C
Wild Turkey H---the Gould's subspecies
Scaled Quail H,C---several great views
Gambel's Quail seen daily including some really cute babies
Common Moorhen T
American Coot T,N,C
Killdeer T,S,C---two pair with adorable little babies
American Avocet N,C---one on a nest
Spotted Sandpiper T,S,N,C
Long-billed Dowitcher C
Wilson's Phalarope C---gorgeous breeding plumaged birds
Rock Pigeon seen in all urban areas
Eurasian Collared-Dove T,S,C---a recent arriver in this area
Band-tailed Pigeon N,H---exceptional views in Patagonia
White-winged Dove seen daily in numbers
Mourning Dove seen daily in numbers

Inca Dove T,N---only three or four seen the whole trip
 Common Ground-Dove N---three seen
 Greater Roadrunner T,N,H,C---a total of 13 seen with one particularly memorable bird near California Gulch
 Barn Owl C---flight views
Flammulated Owl C---great views of perched bird thanks to Sue's spotting
 Western Screech-Owl H---fantastic views
 Whiskered Screech-Owl S,H---excellent views
 Great Horned Owl S,C---nice daytime study
Spotted Owl H---after much effort we were rewarded with unbeatable views; the runaway winner of the favorite bird of the tour!
Northern Pygmy-Owl C---two seen in Cave Creek but neither bird seen by everyone
 Elf Owl S---great study at nest hole
 Burrowing Owl T---uncommon & localized
 Lesser Nighthawk T,S,N,C
 Common Poorwill S,C---superb views in the Chiricahuas
 Whip-poor-will C---nice flyover; the Mexican subspecies *arizonae*, already split by some authors
 White-throated Swift T,N,H,C
 Broad-billed Hummingbird S,N,H,C---a nest in Portal was unusual that far east
White-eared Hummingbird H---fantastic male and female in Miller Canyon; very rare at this season
 Violet-crowned Hummingbird P
 Blue-throated Hummingbird H,C---seemed scarcer than usual
 Magnificent Hummingbird S,H,C---lives up to its name
Lucifer Hummingbird H---very unexpected was a pair in Ash Canyon
 Black-chinned Hummingbird seen daily
 Anna's Hummingbird H
Costa's Hummingbird T,N,H---six total (a good showing)
 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 S,N---much scarcer than usual
 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
 Gilded Flicker T,S---four seen
 Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet N---close study
 Olive-sided Flycatcher P---migrant
 Greater Pewee H---only two seen
 Western Wood-Pewee T,S,N,H,C
Hammond's Flycatcher H,C---late migrants
 Dusky Flycatcher S---one late bird
 Cordilleran Flycatcher S,H,C---very close views
 Buff-breasted Flycatcher H---five of these localized birds seen
 Black Phoebe T,N,C
 Say's Phoebe N,H,C---nest with babies in Portal
 Vermilion Flycatcher S,N,C---always spectacular
 Dusky-capped Flycatcher S,N,H,C
 Ash-throated Flycatcher N,C---less numerous than usual
 Brown-crested Flycatcher almost daily
 Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher C---prolonged scope views of one of these late arrivers
Tropical Kingbird N---pair near Rio Rico was the first in a few years for this trip
 Cassin's Kingbird almost daily
 Thick-billed Kingbird N---one in Patagonia

Western Kingbird almost daily
Rose-throated Becard N---great scope views of male; only the second time in past decade on this trip
 Loggerhead Shrike H,C---seemed scarcer than usual; one fledged family group near Rodeo; our first thanks to
 Melody
 Bell's Vireo T,S,N,C
 Plumbeous Vireo S,H,C
 Hutton's Vireo S,H,C
 Warbling Vireo T,S,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
 Common Raven T,S,N,H,C
 Horned Lark H,C---better views than normal
 Purple Martin T---two only in Aravaipa
Tree Swallow N---very late migrant
 Violet-green Swallow H,C
 Northern Rough-winged Swallow T,S,N
 Bank Swallow T---uncommon migrant
 Cliff Swallow T,N
 Barn Swallow almost daily
 Mexican Chickadee C---including one down low in Cave Creek
 Bridled Titmouse every day but the first
 Juniper Titmouse C---eating peanut butter in Paradise
 Verdin T,S,N,H,C---more good views than usual
 Bushtit N,H,C---a nest at Patagonia Lake
 Red-breasted Nuthatch C
 White-breasted Nuthatch almost daily
 Pygmy Nuthatch C---one of the cutest birds of North America
 Brown Creeper H,C
 Cactus Wren almost daily
 Rock Wren N,S
 Canyon Wren N,H,C---best at Ramsey
 Bewick's Wren T,S,N,H,C
 House Wren S,C---the "Brown-throated" Wren of old
Marsh Wren N---very late was one at Patagonia Lake
 Ruby-crowned Kinglet H,C
 Blue-gray Gnatcatcher C---pair in Cave Creek
 Black-tailed Gnatcatcher T,S
 Eastern Bluebird N
 Hermit Thrush S,H,C
 American Robin S,H,C
 Northern Mockingbird seen daily
Bendire's Thrasher C---thanks to Alice
 Curve-billed Thrasher almost daily
Crissal Thrasher C---pair near Portal and another in New Mexico; always skulky and elusive (first spotted by
 Judy)
 European Starling T,S,N,H
 Cedar Waxwing N,C
 Phainopepla T,S,N,H,C
 Olive Warbler H,C---a total of five seen including a stunning male in Barfoot
 Orange-crowned Warbler S,H---late migrants
 Virginia's Warbler H---only three seen

Lucy's Warbler S,N,C
 Yellow Warbler T,N,
 Black-throated Gray Warbler S,H,C---many great views
 Townsend's Warbler T,S,H---in hand inspection
Hermit Warbler S---male and female; very uncommon migrant
 Grace's Warbler H,C
 MacGillivray's Warbler C---a quick fly by only
 Common Yellowthroat T,N
 Wilson's Warbler T,S,N,H,C---almost daily
 Red-faced Warbler H,C---stunning!
 Painted Redstart S,H,C---always spectacular
 Yellow-breasted Chat T,N---great views at Paton's
 Hepatic Tanager S,H,C
 Summer Tanager T,N,C
 Western Tanager almost daily with up to 30 in one day!
Flame-colored Tanager S---wonderful male in Madera provided great views; casual in this country
Green-tailed Towhee T,N,C---late migrants
 Spotted Towhee H,C
 Canyon Towhee T,N,H,C
 Abert's Towhee T,N
Botteri's Sparrow S---never to be expected on a spring trip; subspecies *arizonae*
 Rufous-winged Sparrow S---very good views of this localized species
 Rufous-crowned Sparrow N,H---subspecies *eremoeca*
Five-striped Sparrow N---unsurpassed views of two in California Gulch; extremely localized
 Chipping Sparrow S---late migrant in Madera
 Lark Sparrow T,S,N,H
 Black-throated Sparrow T,S,C---the handsomest sparrow?
Savannah Sparrow T,C---late individuals at Mammoth and Willcox
Grasshopper Sparrow H---several 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
Harris's Sparrow N---a stunning breeding-plumaged bird in Patagonia; a tour first!
 Yellow-eyed Junco H,C
 Northern Cardinal seen daily; the longer crested, brighter red Arizona subspecies
 Pyrrhuloxia T,H,C---only a handful seen
 Black-headed Grosbeak seen daily
 Blue Grosbeak N,C---just arriving
 Lazuli Bunting N,H,C---several fabulous males; late migrants
 Red-winged Blackbird T,N,H,C
 Eastern Meadowlark H,C---the southwestern race *liliana*, a possible future split
Brewer's Blackbird C---one very late male at Willcox was a tour first
 Great-tailed Grackle everywhere but the Chiricahuas
 Bronzed Cowbird T,S,N,H,C
 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
 Pine Siskin S,H,C---late migrants
 Lesser Goldfinch almost daily
 House Sparrow seen daily

TOTAL SPECIES - 205

Leader only birds:

Swainson's Thrush

Mammals: total species - 16

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

Coyote---leader only

White-tailed Deer

Mule Deer

Pronghorn

bat species---at least two different sizes including a very large one

Reptiles & Amphibians: total species - 15

Western Whiptail

Desert Grassland Whiptail

Sonoran Spotted Whiptail

Crevice Spiny Lizard

Clark's Spiny Lizard

Yarrow's (Mountain) Spiny Lizard

Lesser Earless Lizard

Zebra-tailed Lizard---scope views of this handsome lizard

Regal Horned Lizard---in hand inspection; rarely seen!

Coachwhip

Night Snake

Desert Kingsnake

Red-eared Slider

Sonoran Mud Turtle

Bullfrog---scope views

Butterflies: total species - 7

Black Swallowtail

Two-tailed Swallowtail

Pipevine Swallowtail

California Sister

Queen

Reakirt's Blue

Nabakov's/Canyonland Satyr

Significant others:

Tarantula Hawk (Wasp)

Nina de la Tierra

the quail shoe along Ruby Road

the friendly Tubac Chihuahua

Tundra