

# **GRAND NEW MEXICO**

**MAY 25 – JUNE 4, 2009**

**LEADER: BARRY ZIMMER**

**COMPILED BY: BARRY ZIMMER**

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# Grand New Mexico

May 25 - June 4, 2009

Leader: Barry Zimmer

Our 2009 Grand New Mexico tour was a record-breaker, tallying an impressive 214 species of birds and besting the previous high count by 13. With its unique combination of west Texas/ southeastern Arizona specialty birds in the southern portion of the state and Colorado Rockies species in the north, the diversity is bound to be good; however, it is the quality of the birds seen that may be even more impressive. Many of the country's most difficult to find and sought after species are readily available on this tour, and that was certainly in evidence on this year's trip as well.

We began in El Paso with a brief afternoon excursion to the west side of town in hopes of finding Mississippi Kite. We quickly located a pair perched in an elm tree and enjoyed wonderful scope views. Shortly thereafter we had a singing Crissal Thrasher uncharacteristically posing for prolonged studies. A small Cave Swallow colony and an obliging Burrowing Owl outside of its den topped off the afternoon.

The next day we ventured north to the Las Cruces area where the nearby Organ Mountains yielded both Gray Vireo and Black-chinned Sparrow (two highly sought species) at ridiculously close range. Golden Eagle, Scaled and Gambel's quail, Canyon Wren, Hepatic Tanager, Pyrrhuloxia, Black-throated and Rufous-crowned sparrows, and Scott's Oriole were the icing on the cake. In the late afternoon we visited White Sands National Monument and a nearby waterbird locale. Generally in late May the migration is all but done, but nesting Snowy Plovers, American Avocets, and Black-necked Stilts provide plenty of entertainment. This year, however, something strange was up with lingering migrants and rarities all around. We tallied 13 species of shorebirds and 10 species of waterfowl including a male Eurasian Wigeon (accidental in the state), Canvasback (very late), Black-bellied Plover in full breeding plumage (rare), Sanderling (casual), Dunlin (casual), Baird's and Semipalmated sandpipers, and Red-necked (rare) and Wilson's phalaropes. Other goodies included White-faced Ibis, Clark's Grebe, and Yellow-headed Blackbird.

On our third day we headed northward, first scouring the Rio Grande Valley, and then birding our way westward through the Black Range to Silver City. Riparian areas along the river produced an array of colorful birds including Vermilion Flycatcher, Yellow-breasted Chat, Summer and Western tanagers, Black-headed and Blue grosbeaks, and Hooded and Bullock's orioles to name a few. Our trip through the mountains paid dividends with a flurry of fantastic warbler sightings including Black-throated Gray, Grace's, Olive, Red-faced, and Painted Redstart! A Zone-tailed Hawk circling lazily overhead was an added bonus. We capped off our day with some evening owling which produced the always difficult Flammulated Owl in near record time and the Mexican race of Whip-poor-will right overhead.

The next two-and-a-half-days were spent around Silver City. This area is a birding mecca rivaling many of the mountain ranges in southeastern Arizona. Highlights here included two more Zone-tailed Hawks; Common Black-Hawk (both a pair in courtship display and a perched bird right next to the road); Common Poorwill (nearly in our laps); Elf, Barn, and Western Screech-owls; Gila Woodpecker; Dusky-capped (very rare here) and Brown-crested flycatchers; Western Bluebird; Bridled and Juniper titmice; Virginia's Warbler; a dozen each of Red-faced Warblers and Painted Redstarts in one day; four more Olive Warblers; and Abert's Towhee. The following day of the trip was basically a travel day to get to Socorro, yet we had some great bird sightings. Topping the list was a Dipper feeding young that we watched for about 20 minutes. Stunning Lewis's Woodpeckers and Mountain Bluebirds, a Ferruginous Hawk on a nest, Pinyon Jay (always a highlight), Sage Thrasher, Brewer's Sparrow, and a very responsive Green-tailed Towhee all vied for our attention.

A morning visit to famous Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge produced Western Grebe, American White Pelican, Neotropic Cormorant, three Least Bitterns, and Cinnamon Teal among others, and then it was on to Santa Fe.

The northern portion of the state yields quite a different variety from the south, with close affinities to Colorado. Here the cool spruce-fir forests of the mountains gave us many great sightings including Williamson's (five) and Red-naped sapsuckers; a Three-toed Woodpecker at about 20 feet (!); Hammond's, Dusky, and Gray flycatchers; a flock of 40 Pinyon Jays very close; Clark's Nutcrackers; Black-billed Magpie; more Mountain Bluebirds; a stunning Lazuli Bunting; a very rare for here Black-and-white Warbler; MacGillivray's Warbler; and Evening and Pine grosbeaks.

In all we tallied 214 species of birds, 22 species of mammals (including bobcat, elk, pronghorn, and tassel-eared squirrel), and 17 species of reptiles and amphibians. We marveled at spectacular scenery and ancient Native American ruins. We also enjoyed splendid weather, with the thermostat reaching 80 degrees on only three days (never topping 87), and getting down to as low as the 40s at night. All in all, a superb trip!

### **Itinerary:**

May 25 - residential west El Paso and Sunland Park areas, Keystone Park, Border Hwy, Ascarate Lake (32 species)

May 26 - Wilderness Park Museum, Aguirre Springs Recreation area, Holloman Lakes, White Sands National Monument (86 species; 92 total)

May 27 - Hwys 185 & 187, Leasburg Dam State Park, Percha Dam State Park, Caballo Reservoir, Hwy 152 over the Black Range, evening owling (97 species; 144 total)

May 28 - all day in Mimbres Mountains, including Pinos Altos, Cherry Creek Canyon, Breathe Inn at Sapillo Crossing, Lake Roberts, Gila Cliff Dwellings, evening owling (80 species; 162 total)

May 29 - Burro Mountains, Redrock, Hwys 464 & 90, Tyrone sewage Ponds, Jack's Peak expedition (83 species; 173 total)

May 30 - Mangus Springs, The Catwalk (Whitewater Canyon), Luna, Hwy 12 thru Reserve, Apache Springs, Plains of San Augustin (including the VLA) (80 species; 188 total)

May 31 - Bosque del Apache NWR, afternoon shopping at Santa Fe Plaza, Tesuque Pueblo (72 species; 196 total)

June 1 - Jemez Mountains (Dome Meadow, Jemez Falls, Valles Caldera, La Cueva, Pajarito Ski Basin) (57 species; 208 total)

June 2 - Bandelier National Monument, Tesuque, Pojoaque, Jacona, late afternoon to Valles Caldera & Jemez Falls (70 species; 211 total)

June 3 - Santa Fe Ski Basin Road to top, Rio Grande Nature Center (64 species; 214 total)

June 4 - 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, Leasburg areas

S = Black Range, Mimbres Mts, Redrock, Burro Mts, Whitewater Canyon

R = Reserve, Luna, San Augustin Plains, etc.

B = Bosque del Apache NWR, Socorro

SF = Santa Fe and surrounding areas including the Jemez Mts, Jacona, Bandelier

A = Albuquerque

# = birds seen with babies, on nests, or both

**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:**

**Snow Goose** L---very unusual was an immature bird at Holloman Lakes

Canada Goose B,A,#

Wood Duck E,A,#  
Gadwall L,S,B  
**Eurasian Wigeon** L---a truly amazing vagrant found at Holloman Lakes; accidental in the state and completely aseasonal in regards to records that do exist; adult male  
American Wigeon L---late birds at Holloman  
Mallard seen most days, including some of the "Mexican Duck" subspecies (diazi)  
Blue-winged Teal L,P,B---late  
Cinnamon Teal L,R,B,A---nice studies of males  
Northern Shoveler L,B  
Green-winged Teal L,B,A---late  
**Canvasback** L---extremely late was a male at Holloman Lakes  
Redhead B  
Ruddy Duck E,L,P,S,B  
Ring-necked Pheasant B,A---the "white-winged" race originally from Afghanistan  
Wild Turkey S,B  
Scaled Quail E,L---several nice views our first full day  
Gambel's Quail E,L,P,S,B  
Pied-billed Grebe E,P,S,B,A  
Western Grebe P,B  
Clark's Grebe L,P  
American White Pelican B---flock of twelve was unusual  
Neotropic Cormorant E,L,B  
Double-crested Cormorant P  
Least Bittern B---our patience was rewarded with nice views of this skulker  
Great Blue Heron P,S,R,B  
Great Egret L,P,B  
Snowy Egret E,B,A  
Cattle Egret A  
Green Heron L,B,SF  
Black-crowned Night-Heron B  
White-faced Ibis L,P---nice breeding-plumaged birds  
Turkey Vulture seen daily  
Mississippi Kite E---stunning perched pair in El Paso; extremely local in southwest  
Cooper's Hawk S---oddly only one seen  
Common Black-Hawk S---two at Redrock in display flight and great scope views of another near Cliff perched next to highway; can be hard to find; voted the favorite bird of the tour  
**Harris's Hawk** E---one in el Paso our first morning was a tour first!  
Swainson's Hawk L,P,S,SF---many nice views, including one rufous morph  
Zone-tailed Hawk S---three seen (our first thanks to Gary); uncommon  
Red-tailed Hawk almost daily  
**Ferruginous Hawk** R---one on a nest near Apache Springs; rare this far south in summer  
Golden Eagle L---pair en route to White Sands provided great views; uncommon  
American Kestrel E,P,S,R,B,SF  
Peregrine Falcon S---three seen around silver City, our first thanks to Judy

Virginia Rail S,R,B---a great show with the bird approaching to within six feet of the me

Sora S---heard only, but quite close

American Coot E,L,P,S,B,#

**Black-bellied Plover** L---brilliant breeding-plumaged bird at Holloman provided another tour first; very rare

Snowy Plover L---thirteen of these declining birds at Holloman

Killdeer E,L,P,B,A

Black-necked Stilt E,L,B

American Avocet E,L,P,B,#

Spotted Sandpiper E,L,S

**Sanderling** L---basic plumaged bird at Holloman was yet another tour first; very rare

**Semipalmated Sandpiper** L---more of the rare shorebird bonanza at Holloman

Least Sandpiper L---very late

Baird's Sandpiper L---rare this late

**Dunlin** L---yet another tour first was this lovely breeding plumaged bird

Wilson's Phalarope L---late

**Red-necked Phalarope** L---rare in spring

Forster's Tern L---rare in June

Rock Pigeon seen daily

Band-tailed Pigeon S,SF---seen best near Cherry Creek; unusually scarce

Eurasian Collared-Dove seen all but one day; amazingly this species has gone from being virtually nonexistent in the state seven years ago to widespread and common

White-winged Dove seen all but one day, becoming scarcer as one goes north

Mourning Dove almost daily

Inca Dove E,P---easily missed on this trip

**Common Ground-Dove** S---heard only; rare in this area now

Greater Roadrunner L,P,S,B,A---a total of 16 seen, including a copulating male with male presenting lizard to female

Barn Owl S---distant views of hunting bird; uncommon

Flammulated Owl S--- we had good views in minimal time; often missed completely; tied for second favorite bird of the tour!

Western Screech-Owl S---this one put up a battle but we ultimately had good views

Great Horned Owl S,B

Elf Owl S---superb views; a real highlight

Burrowing Owl E,L---nice studies

Lesser Nighthawk L---scarcer than usual

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 L,P,S,SF---many great views

Black-chinned Hummingbird seen all but one day

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

Lewis's Woodpecker R,SF---wonderful studies; seven total

Acorn Woodpecker S  
Gila Woodpecker S---found in NM only in the Redrock area; just one seen  
 Red-naped Sapsucker SF---two seen  
Williamson's Sapsucker SF---excellent views; five total  
 Ladder-backed Woodpecker P,S,B,SF  
 Downy Woodpecker SF,A,#  
 Hairy Woodpecker S,SF,#  
**Three-toed Woodpecker** SF---single male in the Jemez Mts; rare and local; seen on about a quarter of the trips only; fantastic prolonged study; tied for second favorite bird of the tour  
 Northern Flicker P,S,B,SF--- red-shafted variety  
Olive-sided Flycatcher L,SF---late migrant at Aguirre Springs, breeders in the Jemez  
 Western Wood-Pewee seen daily  
 Hammond's Flycatcher SF  
 Dusky Flycatcher SF---less numerous than Hammond's  
 Gray Flycatcher S,SF  
 Cordilleran Flycatcher S,SF  
 Black Phoebe P,S,B  
 Say's Phoebe L,S,R,B,SF,#  
 Vermilion Flycatcher P,S,B---unusual at Percha at this season, rare at Bosque anytime; always spectacular; total of eleven seen  
 Ash-throated Flycatcher L,P,S,B,SF  
Brown-crested Flycatcher S---normally found only around Redrock in this state, but we also had one at Whitewater  
**Dusky-capped Flycatcher** S---very rare was one in Cherry creek; another tour first!  
 Cassin's Kingbird S,R,SF  
 Western Kingbird E,L,P,S,R,B  
 Loggerhead Shrike L,S,R---only five seen  
 Bell's Vireo P,S---always hard to see well  
Gray Vireo L---two seen very well at Aguirre Springs; very uncommon, local, and irregular; seen on about half the trips here  
 Plumbeous Vireo P,S,SF  
Hutton's Vireo S---one in the Black range and two pairs near Cherry Creek; uncommon  
 Warbling Vireo S,SF---one of the most common breeding birds of the high mountains  
 Steller's Jay S,SF---subspecies *macrolopha*  
 Western Scrub-Jay S,R,SF---subspecies *woodhouseii*  
 Mexican Jay S  
Pinyon Jay R,SF---one near Reserve and a flock of 40 or more near Tesuque  
 Clark's Nutcracker SF  
Black-billed Magpie SF---a pair near Tesuque and a single near Pojoaque; 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,#  
 Common Raven S,R,SF,A

Horned Lark S,R  
Purple Martin S,R---generally missed on this trip; very local & uncommon  
 Violet-green Swallow S,R,SF,#---excellent scope studies of these beauties  
 Northern Rough-winged Swallow L,P,B  
 Bank Swallow L---late migrants at Holloman  
 Cliff Swallow E,P,S,B,SF---nests at BDA and Gabriel's  
Cave Swallow E---about ten in west El Paso  
 Barn Swallow almost daily in small numbers,#  
 Black-capped Chickadee A---our last new bird #214  
 Mountain Chickadee S,SF  
Bridled Titmouse S---only two seen, but great views  
 Juniper Titmouse L,S,SF---several good views  
 Verdin P,S---scarcer than normal  
 Bushtit L,S,SF  
 Red-breasted Nuthatch S,SF  
 White-breasted Nuthatch S,SF  
 Pygmy Nuthatch S,SF,#--- one of the cutest birds of North America!; repeated superb views  
 Brown Creeper S,SF---one in each place; our first thanks to Gary  
 Cactus Wren E,L,S,#---scarcer than normal but great views in El Paso  
 Rock Wren S,SF---only one seen, but great views of that individual  
 Canyon Wren L,S,SF---one of my favorite songs  
 Bewick's Wren almost daily  
 House Wren S,SF,#  
 American Dipper S,#---fabulous study of adult and fledged young in Whitewater Canyon  
 Golden-crowned Kinglet SF---gorgeous orange crest  
 Ruby-crowned Kinglet SF---our record breaking species #202  
 Western Bluebird S,R,SF---many great views  
 Mountain Bluebird R,SF---gorgeous!  
 Townsend's Solitaire SF---only two seen  
 Hermit Thrush S,SF---my other favorite song  
 American Robin seen daily,#  
 Northern Mockingbird seen daily  
 Sage Thrasher R---great looks by the VLA  
 Curve-billed Thrasher E,L,S,A  
 Crissal Thrasher E,L,S---superb scope views of this desert skulker  
 European Starling E,L,P,S,B,A  
 Phainopepla P,S,B---numerous around Percha  
Olive Warbler S---nice views of five including two adult males; uncommon and local  
 Orange-crowned Warbler SF---scope views  
 Virginia's Warbler S---three seen well  
 Lucy's Warbler P,S  
 Yellow Warbler P,S,B  
 Yellow-rumped Warbler S,SF,A---Audubon's subspecies  
 Black-throated Gray Warbler S---especially well near Cherry Creek

Grace's Warbler S,SF---several excellent views  
**Black-and-white Warbler** Sf---male at Bandelier spotted by Gary was yet another tour first  
 MacGillivray's Warbler P,S,SF---a late migrants at Percha & Whitewater and breeding birds around Santa Fe  
 Common Yellowthroat P,S,R,B,SF,A  
 Wilson's Warbler P,SF---late migrants  
 Red-faced Warbler S---always spectacular; fourteen seen; one of the prettiest warblers in North America!  
 Painted Redstart S,#---as stunning, if not more so, than the previous species; fourteen seen, including pair at nest  
 Yellow-breasted Chat P,S,B,SF,A---decent views of this skulker; heard more often than seen  
 Hepatic Tanager L,S,SF---excellent studies  
 Summer Tanager P,S,A  
 Western Tanager P,S,SF---one on a nest  
 Green-tailed Towhee R,SF---great views near Datil  
 Spotted Towhee S,B,SF  
 Canyon Towhee L,S,SF  
Abert's Towhee S---another Redrock specialty  
Cassin's Sparrow S---unexpected given how dry it had been  
 Rufous-crowned Sparrow L,S  
 Chipping Sparrow S,SF---everyone especially enjoyed the Jack's Peak "subspecies"  
**Brewer's Sparrow** R---apparently a low density breeder here, but it was a tour first  
 Black-chinned Sparrow L,S---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  
 Dark-eyed Junco S,SF,A---Gray-headed types  
 Northern Cardinal S---yet another Redrock specialty; the brighter red and longer crested southwestern subspecies; very unusual was one in the Burros  
 Pyrrhuloxia E,L,P---four total; seen best in El Paso  
 Black-headed Grosbeak P,S,B,SF  
 Blue Grosbeak P,S,B,SF----stunning  
 Lazuli Bunting SF---possibly the prettiest bunting  
Indigo Bunting S---three males at the Catwalk were unusual  
 Red-winged Blackbird E,L,P,S,R,B  
 Eastern Meadowlark L,R---*lillianae* subspecies  
 Western Meadowlark R,B  
Yellow-headed Blackbird L---late migrant female at Holloman  
 Brewer's Blackbird R,SF  
 Great-tailed Grackle E,L,P,S,B,A  
Bronzed Cowbird L,P---sadly seems to be on the increase  
 Brown-headed Cowbird almost daily  
Hooded Oriole S---best views at Hillsboro; generally uncommon & local

Bullock's Oriole L,P,S,B  
Scott's Oriole L---only seen in the Organs, but great views there  
Pine Grosbeak SF---nice scope views of three female plumaged birds; uncommon  
House Finch seen every day,#  
Red Crossbill S,SF,#---small flock in the Burros thanks to Gary; also some at Jemez Falls; often missed entirely  
Pine Siskin SF  
Lesser Goldfinch P,S,B,SF  
Evening Grosbeak SF---two in the Jemez Mts and two in the Sangre de Cristos; uncommon  
House Sparrow seen daily

total species - 214 (a new tour record by an amazing 13 species!)

### **Mammals:**

Abert's (Tassel-eared) Squirrel---amazing ears!  
Red Squirrel  
Rock Squirrel  
Golden-mantled Ground Squirrel  
Texas Antelope Squirrel  
Black-tailed Prairie Dog  
Gray-necked (Gray-collared) Chipmunk  
Cliff Chipmunk  
chipmunk species---either Colorado or Least  
mouse species---possibly a Deer Mouse  
Black-tailed Jackrabbit  
Desert Cottontail  
Eastern Cottontail  
Mule Deer  
White-tailed Deer  
Elk  
Pronghorn  
Coyote  
**Bobcat**---one at Bosque was a surprise!  
Muskrat  
Raccoon  
bat species

total species - 22

### **Reptiles & Amphibians:**

Collared Lizard---fabulous views at Aguirre Springs; uncommon  
Desert Grassland Whiptail

Chihuahuan Spotted Whiptail  
New Mexico Whiptail  
Tree Lizard  
Southwestern Fence Lizard  
Desert Spiny Lizard  
Crevice Spiny Lizard  
Striped Plateau Lizard---only in extreme southwestern portion of state  
Texas Horned Lizard---leader only  
Checkered Garter Snake  
Black-tailed Rattlesnake---uncommonly seen  
Western Diamond-backed Rattlesnake  
Bullfrog  
Painted Turtle  
Red-eared Slider  
Spiny Soft-shelled Turtle

total species - 17 (a tour record)

**Butterflies:**

California Sister  
Two-tailed Swallowtail  
Western Tiger Swallowtail  
Black Swallowtail  
Southern Dogface  
Marine Blue  
Spring Azure  
Mourning Cloak  
Monarch  
Queen  
Diana  
Variegated Fritillary  
Hackberry Emperor  
Wiedemeyer's Admiral  
Buckeye  
Hoary Comma  
Cabbage White  
Silver-spotted Skipper  
Northern Cloudywing

total species - 19 (plus many more left unidentified)

**Spectacular/ Interesting places:**

White Sands National Monument  
Gila Cliff Dwellings

Jack's Peak  
The Catwalk  
Very Large Array  
Santa Fe Plaza  
Bandelier National Monument  
view from the ski basin  
Sandia Crest & the tramway

**Significant others:**

Tarantula Hawk (Wasp)  
Darkling Beetle