

# **WINTER NEW MEXICO**

**JANUARY 3 - 9, 2013**

**Leader: Barry Zimmer  
Compiled by: Barry Zimmer**

**VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS, INC.  
2525 WALLINGWOOD DRIVE, SUITE 1003  
AUSTIN, TX 78746  
[WWW.VENTBIRD.COM](http://WWW.VENTBIRD.COM)**

**TOUR REPORT**  
**WINTER NEW MEXICO**  
**January 3–9, 2013**

**By Barry Zimmer**

Our 2013 Winter New Mexico tour combined spectacular bird concentrations, many highly sought southwestern specialty birds, and a nice sprinkling of rarities, all packed into five-and-a-half-days of action-packed birding. Despite unusually cold and snowy conditions at the beginning of the trip, we were able to locate virtually all of the target birds.

Starting in El Paso, we enjoyed a nice show at local feeders including a Costa's Hummingbird (a tour first and an accidental species in the state), two Rufous Hummingbirds, a very rare overwintering Hooded Oriole, and other more typical species such as Inca Dove, Curve-billed Thrasher, Cactus Wren, and Spotted Towhee. Ascarate Lake yielded great studies of Common and Hooded mergansers, Greater and Lesser scaup side by side, and Neotropic and Double-crested cormorants practically in our laps. On the west side of town, we marveled at a huge Yellow-headed Blackbird roost site with an estimated 8,000 birds in view at once. Scope views of perched Golden Eagle and Prairie Falcon that afternoon were topped only by the vagrant Lewis's Woodpecker that we tracked down near Vinton.

Farther north near Las Cruces we had a great variety of sparrows including the highly sought Sage and Black-chinned, as well as Rufous-crowned, Cassin's (rare in winter), Grasshopper (casual here), Black-throated, Brewer's, Vesper, and White-crowned (by the hundreds) among others. Perhaps the most cooperative Crissal Thrasher I have ever seen, an equally cooperative Verdin, an adorable Burrowing Owl, and Green-tailed and Canyon towhees rounded out the afternoon.

Farther upriver we birded the agricultural fields and riparian habitats north of Hatch which produced stunning Ferruginous Hawks, another Prairie Falcon, Acorn Woodpecker, Red-naped Sapsucker, the locally rare Bridled Titmouse, all three phoebe species in one spot, brilliant Western Bluebirds, and numerous Phainopeplas among others. Elephant Butte harbored an adult Thayer's Gull (very rare here), Clark's and Western grebes, and a remarkable 27 Sage Thrashers in one morning!

Heading northward again toward Socorro, we detoured west to Water Canyon. The juniper/pine/oak canyon here yielded a great variety of new species including Red-naped Sapsucker, Mountain Chickadee, Steller's and Western Scrub jays, Juniper Titmouse (from ten feet away), and several Townsend's Solitaires. Along the entry road we also enjoyed fantastic scope studies of Chestnut-collared Longspur and found an unexpected and rare Rough-legged Hawk.

Finally it was time to head to world-famous Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge. We spent an afternoon and part of a morning here marveling at the 32,000 white geese (both Snow and Ross's) and 8,000 Sandhill Cranes that were wintering on the refuge. We witnessed two

incredible dawn takeoffs of the geese and had a magical evening watching cranes come in to roost at a ponding area thirty yards in front of us—with a backdrop of a spectacular orange sunset! Bald Eagles, Greater Roadrunners, a variety of waterfowl, coyotes, and more rounded out our visit.

On the last afternoon we dashed up to Sandia Crest and added all three rosy-finches to our already impressive list. In all we tallied 140 species of birds, enjoyed huge spectacles of geese, cranes, and blackbirds, and found virtually every southwestern target bird we searched for.

### **Itinerary:**

January 3 - my yard followed by a brief run to the Sunland Park area (22 species)

January 4 - Ascarate Lake, Border Hwy, entry road to Rio Bosque, Vinton, Los Nogales, Sunland Park, drive to Las Cruces (57 species; 69 total)

January 5 - Jornada del Muerto, Aguirre Springs Recreation Area, Mesilla Park, NMSU campus, return to the Jornada (46 species; 94 total)

January 6 - Hwys 185 & 187, Percha State Park, Caballo Lake, Animas Creek, Rock Canyon Marina at Elephant Butte (74 species; 118 total)

January 7 - Elephant Butte Lake State Park (Rock Canyon Marina & Three Sisters Cove), Water Canyon, Bosque del Apache NWR (74 species; 129 total)

January 8 - Bosque del Apache NWR, Sandia Crest, Rio Grande Nature Center (55 species; 140 total)

January 9 - departures for home (140 species total)

### **Key:**

E = all areas in and around El Paso

L = Las Cruces, Organ Mountains, Jornada

P = Hatch, Percha & Caballo State Parks, Animas Creek, Elephant Butte

B = Bosque del Apache NWR

W = Water Canyon

A = Albuquerque, Sandia Crest

**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 E,B---an estimated 32,000 white geese at the refuge; we had two great morning takeoffs; a fair number of blue morphs  
Ross's Goose B--- nice comparative views with Snows  
Canada Goose E,P,B,A  
Wood Duck E,A---stunning  
Gadwall almost daily  
American Wigeon E,P,B  
Mallard almost daily, including some of the "Mexican Duck" subspecies  
Northern Shoveler E,P,B,A  
Northern Pintail P,B  
Green-winged Teal P,B,A  
Canvasback P  
Redhead P---four total  
Ring-necked Duck P,B,A  
**Greater Scaup** E---two females side-by-side with Lessers at Ascarate Lake; rare  
Lesser Scaup E,P,B  
Bufflehead E,P,B  
Common Goldeneye E,P---close study of a female at Ascarate; very uncommon  
Hooded Merganser E,P,B---nice studies  
Common Merganser E,P---seen best at Ascarate  
Ruddy Duck E,P,B---scarcer than usual  
Gambel's Quail L,P,B  
Pied-billed Grebe E  
Eared Grebe E---Ascarate Lake  
Western Grebe E,P  
Clark's Grebe P---two at Rock Canyon  
American White Pelican P  
Neotropic Cormorant E---great views at Ascarate; gotta love those eyes!  
Double-crested Cormorant E,P  
Great Blue Heron E,P,B  
Great Egret E  
Black-crowned Night-Heron E  
Bald Eagle P,B---twelve total  
Northern Harrier E,L,P,B---12 total including two males  
Sharp-shinned Hawk L,W  
Cooper's Hawk E,L,P  
Harris's Hawk E---two first full day at Rio Bosque; localized  
Red-tailed Hawk seen daily in numbers  
**Rough-legged Hawk** W,B---a real surprise were singles at the entrance to Water Canyon and at Bosque; very rare this far south; tied for second favorite bird of the tour  
Ferruginous Hawk P---two seen near Hatch; superb prolonged views of perched birds

Golden Eagle E,B---one near Vinton and another south of Socorro; nice studies of perched adults  
 American Kestrel seen daily  
Merlin W,B---our first thanks to Mike  
Prairie Falcon E,P--three total including perched birds near Vinton & Percha (eating a meadowlark!)  
 American Coot almost daily  
 Sandhill Crane P,B,A---an estimated 8,000 wintering at the refuge and an additional 750+ seen in other areas; spectacularly close views  
 Killdeer E,P  
 Spotted Sandpiper E---near Rio Bosque  
Greater Yellowlegs E,P,B---four total; uncommon in winter  
 Least Sandpiper E,P  
 Long-billed Dowitcher E,B---uncommon in winter  
 Ring-billed Gull E,P,B  
 Herring Gull P  
**Thayer's Gull** P---very rare was a winter adult at Rock Canyon Marina; a real bonus!  
 Rock Pigeon seen daily  
 Eurasian Collared-Dove almost daily---a rapidly expanding species  
 White-winged Dove missed only one day with up to 800 in a day  
 Mourning Dove seen daily  
 Inca Dove E---three in my yard were the only ones for this declining species  
 Greater Roadrunner L,P,B---five total; great views  
 Burrowing Owl L---fantastic study of one near burrow on NMSU campus; thanks David!  
**Costa's Hummingbird** E---a tour first provided by a sub-adult male in my yard; this species is less than annual in the state of Texas  
**Rufous Hummingbird** E---two immature birds in my yard; rare in winter  
 Belted Kingfisher E---oddly only one seen  
**Lewis's Woodpecker** E---a stakeout near Vinton; very rare in this area  
 Acorn Woodpecker P,W---exceptional studies in Animas Creek  
 Red-naped Sapsucker P---nice views of three; our first thanks to Joan; tied for favorite bird of the tour  
 Ladder-backed Woodpecker E,L,P---six total  
 Downy Woodpecker A---at the nature center  
 Hairy Woodpecker A---at the nature center  
 Northern Flicker seen daily; the "Red-shafted" variety  
 Black Phoebe P,B---two total  
**Eastern Phoebe** P---rare was one in Percha near the dam  
 Say's Phoebe E,P,B  
 Loggerhead Shrike L,P---only six total; declining?  
 Steller's Jay W,A---subspecies *maculophya*  
 Western Scrub-Jay L,P,W---subspecies *woodhouseii*; a likely future split from the one in California  
 American Crow L,P,B,A  
 Chihuahuan Raven E,L,P  
 Common Raven P,W,B,A

Horned Lark P---fly-by of large flock at Three Sisters  
**Tree Swallow** B---two at dawn at the refuge were a big surprise for mid-winter  
 Black-capped Chickadee A  
 Mountain Chickadee A---we also had a hybrid Mountain x Black-capped at the nature center  
 which was very interesting  
 Bridled Titmouse P---fantastic views of this striking species at Animas Creek; tied for  
 favorite bird of the tour  
 Juniper Titmouse W---superb views of this species as well  
 Verdin L---oddly, only one seen, but it put on a spectacular show  
 Red-breasted Nuthatch L,A---three in Mesilla Park  
 White-breasted Nuthatch P,W,A  
 Brown Creeper A---our last new bird at the nature center!  
 Cactus Wren E,L---seen best in my yard  
 Bewick's Wren A---somewhat incredibly only one total was seen, that being the last  
 afternoon at the nature center  
 Ruby-crowned Kinglet L,P,W  
Eastern Bluebird B---very uncommon; small flock on refuge tour loop  
 Western Bluebird P,A---spectacular views near Hatch  
Townsend's Solitaire W--- great scope views  
Hermit Thrush P---very uncommon this far north in winter; spotted by Mike  
 American Robin E,L,P,B  
 Northern Mockingbird E,L,P  
Sage Thrasher P---sporadic; we had an incredible 27 in one day near Elephant Butte; voted  
 the third favorite bird of the tour  
 Curve-billed Thrasher E,L,P---nice views  
 Crissal Thrasher L---unsurpassed views on the Jornada of this typically skulking species;  
 spotted by Mike  
 European Starling seen daily  
 American Pipit E,P,B---great studies at Rio Bosque  
 Phainopepla E,P---many nice studies  
Chestnut-collared Longspur W---flock of 80 or so near Water canyon with some perching on  
 fence for amazing study; tied for second favorite bird of the tour  
 Orange-crowned Warbler L---very uncommon in winter; spotted by Bob  
 Yellow-rumped Warbler E,L,P--- the Audubon's subspecies  
 Green-tailed Towhee L---three on road into Aguirre Springs  
 Spotted Towhee E,B---my yard, the refuge headquarters, and the nature center  
 Rufous-crowned Sparrow L---incredible prolonged scope study  
 Canyon Towhee E,L---one in my yard and five at Aguirre Springs  
**Cassin's Sparrow** L---rare in winter; a good find  
 Chipping Sparrow L,P  
 Brewer's Sparrow L---about 40 on Aguirre Springs entry road  
Black-chinned Sparrow L---quick views for some of one; uncommon; snow across road  
 prevented us from getting to best area for this species  
 Vesper Sparrow L---about 10 on entrance road at Aguirre Springs  
 Black-throated Sparrow L---the handsomest sparrow?  
Sage Sparrow L--- nice views of the interior race *nevadensis*

Savannah Sparrow P---one briefly by some  
**Grasshopper Sparrow** L---very rare were four birds near Aguirre Springs  
 White-crowned Sparrow seen daily in numbers  
 Dark-eyed Junco daily, including Gray-headed, Oregon, Slate-colored (one thanks to Erica)  
 and Pink-sided races  
 Pyrrhuloxia E,L,P---several good views  
 Red-winged Blackbird E,P,B,A  
Eastern Meadowlark W---uncommon at this season  
 Western Meadowlark P,B  
 Yellow-headed Blackbird E,P---incredible sight of about **8,000+** gathering to roost in west  
 El Paso  
 Brewer's Blackbird E,L,P  
 Great-tailed Grackle daily  
 Brown-headed Cowbird E,P  
**Hooded Oriole** E---stunning male overwintering in my yard; accidental in winter here  
Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch two seen on Sandia Crest in with nervous rosy-finch flock, one of  
 which was a Hepburn's race  
Black Rosy-Finch about fifty at Sandia Crest; great scope views of males  
Brown-capped Rosy-Finch about 8 at Sandia Crest mixed in with other flighty rosies!  
 House Finch daily  
Red Crossbill A---two flocks overhead on Sandia crest; uncommon & sporadic  
 Pine Siskin W,A---fly-overs  
 Lesser Goldfinch E,L---best in my yard  
 American Goldfinch L,B---uncommon  
 House Sparrow almost daily

total species - 140

### **Mammals:**

Desert Cottontail---three total  
 Rock Squirrel---two total  
 chipmunk species---about four at Sandia Crest, possibly Least Chipmunk  
 Muskrat---by some at nature center  
 Coyote---four total, including one eating a woodrat  
 Mule Deer---sixteen total

total species - 6

### **Significant others:**

"Doug" the dog  
 snow, fog & black ice---we had some challenging weather!  
 an escaped male Red-crested Pochard at Ascarate  
 an unusual variety of fresh burritos in east Las Cruces