

# **WINTER NEW MEXICO**

**JANUARY 3 – 9, 2008**

**LEADERS: BARRY ZIMMER & BOB SUNDSTROM**

**COMPILED BY: BARRY ZIMMER**

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Our 2008 Winter New Mexico tour was very successful in finding an array of highly sought southwestern target birds, but I think it will be the incredible avian spectacles that we witnessed that will be most remembered. During our first afternoon we marveled at a flock of roughly 2,500 Yellow-headed Blackbirds coming in to roost at a marsh in west El Paso. Telephone lines over the marsh were so thick with the blackbirds that we were sure they would snap under the weight. At Caballo Reservoir about a hundred miles to the north we watched a huge flock of Common Mergansers (totaling perhaps 4,000 birds) intermingling with hundreds of Clark's and Western grebes in a huge feeding frenzy. At world-famous Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, we stood spellbound as roughly 40,000 "white geese" (both Snow and Ross's) erupted into flight directly over our heads in a deafening cacophony, and later watched Sandhill Cranes by the thousands feeding and dancing in a corn stubble field less than 50 yards away.

Our final spectacle involved the swirling flocks of rosy-finches atop Sandia Crest near Albuquerque. Nearly a hundred individuals representing all three species (plus the Hepburn's race of Gray-crowned) swirled about the Crest House feeders, allowing us to study these wonderful birds from 15 feet away! In a world of declining bird populations and diminishing habitat, it is so wonderful to know that there are still places where huge numbers of birds can be seen and enjoyed.

As previously mentioned though, these spectacles were not our only highlights. A pair of incredibly responsive Crissal Thrashers at the aforementioned blackbird roost put on an amazing show. The next morning, southeast of El Paso, we had excellent luck with raptors including scope views of Harris's Hawk, Prairie Falcon, and Golden Eagle. Eleven Burrowing Owls, a Greater Roadrunner from about 15 feet, stunning Hooded Mergansers, and a very rare White-winged Scoter capped off the morning. Later, in my yard, we enjoyed Rufous and Anna's hummingbirds, Inca Doves, and Lesser Goldfinches among others.

The next day found us in the scenic Organ Mountains east of Las Cruces. A leisurely hike along a mountain trail here yielded Townsend's Solitaire, Juniper Titmouse, Bushtit, Steller's and Western Scrub jays, Canyon and Rock wrens, and Black-chinned (prolonged scope views) and Rufous-crowned sparrows. Nearby desert areas produced the localized Sage Sparrow in the afternoon, and a local reservoir surprised us with a Cackling Goose.

Moving northward along the Rio Grande we encountered a striking Ferruginous Hawk sitting in a bare field, a stunning male Vermilion Flycatcher hawking insects over the river, and a mixed species flock at Percha State Park that had Hammond's Flycatcher, Bridled Titmouse, Western Bluebird, Phainopepla, and Cedar Waxwing among others. Nearby, two Golden-crowned Kinglets (locally rare) and a Brown Creeper foraged along the riverbanks. The sycamore-lined drainage of Animas Creek harbored a rare Red-headed Woodpecker. Around Elephant Butte Reservoir we added a Sage Thrasher and a small flock of Mountain Bluebirds.

Words can barely describe the experience one enjoys at Bosque del Apache. The continual parade of cranes and geese throughout the day is simply amazing. In addition, a great array of other waterfowl, raptors, and landbirds can be found along the refuge tour loop. Our highlights here included many Ring-necked Pheasants, a very unexpected bobcat, a female Merlin, several Bald Eagles, close studies of Canvasback and Bufflehead, and a Mountain Chickadee.

All in all, our six-day trip yielded nearly 150 species of birds, including 19 species of waterfowl and 13 species of raptors. What better way to start off the new year of birding!

### **Itinerary:**

January 3 - Keystone Marsh, Sunland Park area (40 species)

January 4 - Ascarate Lake, Border Hwy, McNary Reservoir, Hwy 20, my yard, McKelligon Canyon (80 species; 93 total)

January 5 - Aguirre Springs Recreation Area, Jornada del Muerto, Burn Lake, river areas near Old Mesilla (60 species; 115 total)

January 6 - Radium Springs, Hatch, Hwys 185 & 187, Percha State Park, Caballo Lake, Animas Creek (91 species; 134 total)

January 7 - Elephant Butte State Park, Water Canyon, Bosque del Apache NWR (71 species; 141 total)

January 8 - Bosque del Apache NWR, Sandia Crest, Rio Grande Nature Center (55 species; 148 total)

January 9 - departures for home (148 species total)

### **Key:**

E = all areas in and around El Paso, including the valley to the southeast from McNary back into town

L = Las Cruces, Organ Mountains, Jornada, Mesilla Valley

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

B = Bosque del Apache NWR

W = Water Canyon

S = 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 44,000 at the refuge including many blue morphs  
Ross's Goose E,P,B---several thousand overall; great comparative views with Snows;  
the "white goose spectacle" was tied for second favorite bird of the tour

Canada Goose E,L,B,A

Cackling Goose L---five in with Canadas at Burn Lake

Wood Duck E

Gadwall almost daily

American Wigeon almost daily

Mallard daily, including some of the "Mexican Duck" subspecies

Northern Shoveler daily

Northern Pintail almost daily; over 2000 in one day at Bosque

Green-winged Teal E,P,B

Canvasback E,B---nice studies of a few males

Redhead P---one male at Caballo spotted by Tom

Ring-necked Duck E,P,B

Lesser Scaup E---one male at McNary was our only one of the trip

**White-winged Scoter** E---female at McNary was not only a tour first but a Hudspeth  
County first as well; thanks to Barbara & Russ

Bufflehead E,P,B

Common Goldeneye E,P

Hooded Merganser E---pair at Ascarate was especially nice

Common Merganser E,L,P---flock of about 4000 at Caballo

Ruddy Duck E,P,B---scarcer than usual

Ring-necked Pheasant B---the "White-winged" race; superb views

Gambel's Quail L,P,B---many wonderful views

Pied-billed Grebe E

**Horned Grebe** E---lone birds at Ascarate & McNary; rare

Eared Grebe E---a few hundred at McNary, but none elsewhere

Western Grebe E,P---many hundreds on three reservoirs

Clark's Grebe E,P--- good comparative views with Westerns; by the hundreds

American White Pelican E,P

Double-crested Cormorant P---one at Rock Canyon Marina was our only one of the trip  
Neotropic Cormorant E,P  
Great Blue Heron E,L,P,B  
Great Egret E,L  
Snowy Egret E---not seen by all  
Black-crowned Night-Heron E,B  
Bald Eagle P,B--- great views; a total of eight seen  
Northern Harrier E,L,P,B---seen daily  
Sharp-shinned Hawk L,P,B  
Cooper's Hawk P,B---somewhat scarcer than usual; nice scope views at Socorro  
Harris's Hawk E---nice scope study near Tornillo  
Red-tailed Hawk seen daily including a couple dark morphs, several of the Fuertes race, and possibly a bird of the northwestern race  
Ferruginous Hawk P---oddly only one seen (possibly two); this magnificent raptor was spotted by Russ near Percha, and later, presumably the same bird flew over our picnic lunch site; tied for second favorite bird of the tour!  
Golden Eagle E---scope views of one near Tornillo  
American Kestrel seen daily  
Merlin E---one at Bosque around dusk and a "**Black**" **Merlin** near Sandia Crest  
Prairie Falcon E---nice scope study near McNary  
Peregrine Falcon L---fly by at Stahmann's thanks to Diane  
Common Moorhen E  
American Coot almost daily  
Sandhill Crane E,P,B---an estimated 14,000 at the refuge; spectacularly close views; tied for favorite bird of the tour!  
Killdeer E,L,P,B  
Black-necked Stilt E---one on the river near Sunland Park; only the second time ever for this tour  
Greater Yellowlegs E,P,B---uncommon in winter  
Spotted Sandpiper E,P  
Least Sandpiper E---a lone bird at Keystone was our only one  
Wilson's Snipe E,L---recently split from the Old World Common Snipe; excellent studies thanks to Megan  
Bonaparte's Gull E---lone bird at McNary; uncommon  
Ring-billed Gull E,P  
**California Gull** E---one or two first winter birds at McNary; rare  
Herring Gull P  
Rock Pigeon seen daily  
Eurasian Collared-Dove seen daily---a rapidly expanding species  
White-winged Dove seen daily in numbers (2000 in one day!)  
Mourning Dove seen daily  
Inca Dove E---eight in my yard  
Greater Roadrunner seen daily with a total of seven  
Burrowing Owl E---fantastic studies; eleven in one morning; tied for second favorite bird of the tour

Anna's Hummingbird E---female in my yard; uncommon  
**Rufous Hummingbird** E---adult male and immature male in my yard; very uncommon to rare in winter  
 Belted Kingfisher E,P  
**Red-headed Woodpecker** P---stakeout immature bird in Animas Creek; only the third ever for this tour!  
 Acorn Woodpecker P,W  
 Red-naped Sapsucker E---female near McNary spotted by Marlene  
 Ladder-backed Woodpecker E,L,P,B---several nice views  
 Downy Woodpecker B,S  
 Northern Flicker E,L,P,B; the "Red-shafted" variety  
**Hammond's Flycatcher** P--- rare in winter  
 Black Phoebe E,L,P  
 Say's Phoebe daily  
**Vermilion Flycatcher** P---a gorgeous male near Percha thanks to Diane  
 Loggerhead Shrike L,P,B---seemed scarcer than usual  
**Hutton's Vireo** E,L---superb studies of a bathing bird in my yard; also a pair at Aguirre Springs  
 Steller's Jay L,W,A---subspecies *macrolopha*; very close studies  
 Western Scrub-Jay E,L,W---subspecies *woodhouseii*  
 American Crow L,P,B,S  
 Chihuahuan Raven E,L,P  
 Common Raven W,B  
 Horned Lark P---distant views of a flock near Percha  
**Tree Swallow** E---eight distantly at McNary were unexpected in mid-winter  
 Mountain Chickadee B,W,S---our first feeding on a cattail stalk!  
 Bridled Titmouse P---nice views of this striking species at Percha; tied for second favorite bird of the tour  
 Juniper Titmouse L,W---responsive pairs at Aguirre Springs and Water Canyon  
 Verdin P---much scarcer than usual  
 Bushtit L,W  
 Red-breasted Nuthatch L,S---a lowland invasion by this species  
 White-breasted Nuthatch P,W  
Brown Creeper P---sporadic  
 Cactus Wren E,L,P  
 Rock Wren L,P  
 Canyon Wren L---great view of singing bird at Aguirre Springs  
 Bewick's Wren E,L,P  
House Wren P---uncommon in winter  
**Golden-crowned Kinglet** P---two below eye level at Percha were a real bonus!  
 Ruby-crowned Kinglet seen daily  
 Western Bluebird P,W  
Mountain Bluebird P---4 near Elephant Butte were quite unexpected in this non-invasion year  
Townsend's Solitaire L,W---great looks at four at one time at Aguirre Springs; erratic  
 Hermit Thrush L,W---heard only

American Robin L,P,W  
Northern Mockingbird E,L,P,B  
Sage Thrasher P---one bird at Rock Canyon Marina  
Curve-billed Thrasher E,L,P---several superb views, especially in my yard  
Crissal Thrasher E,L,P---excellent studies of four; tied for favorite bird of the tour  
European Starling seen daily  
American Pipit E,P,B---great views at Percha  
Cedar Waxwing L,P  
Phainopepla E,P---nice studies  
Yellow-rumped Warbler E,L,P,B---the Audubon's subspecies  
Spotted Towhee E,L,P,B  
Canyon Towhee L  
Rufous-crowned Sparrow L  
Chipping Sparrow P---two at Percha were the only ones  
Brewer's Sparrow P---a down year for this species (like most sparrows) with only 11 seen  
Black-chinned Sparrow L---fantastic scope views of this localized species  
Black-throated Sparrow L,P---the handsomest sparrow?  
Sage Sparrow L--- nice scope views of the interior race *nevadensis*  
Savannah Sparrow E,B  
Song Sparrow P,B  
Lincoln's Sparrow E---not seen by all  
White-throated Sparrow L---very uncommon  
White-crowned Sparrow seen daily  
Dark-eyed Junco seen daily, including Gray-headed, Oregon, and Pink-sided races  
Pyrrhuloxia E,L,P---many good views  
Red-winged Blackbird E,L,P,B  
Western Meadowlark E,L,P,B  
Yellow-headed Blackbird E---incredible sight of about 2500+ going into roost in west El Paso  
Brewer's Blackbird seen daily  
Great-tailed Grackle almost daily  
Brown-headed Cowbird E  
**Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch** about 12 seen on Sandia Crest, including three of the Hepburn's race; as with all the rosy-finches may not be seen on future trips due to road conditions or the birds just not being present  
**Black Rosy-Finch** about 14 seen very close at Sandia Crest feeders  
**Brown-capped Rosy-Finch** about 57 seen at Sandia Crest, almost at arm's length!  
House Finch seen daily  
Red Crossbill P---one flyover in the T or C hotel parking lot was seen by a couple of people  
Pine Siskin P,B  
Lesser Goldfinch E,P  
American Goldfinch B  
House Sparrow seen daily

total species - 148

**Mammals:**

Desert Cottontail

Black-tailed Jackrabbit

Rock Squirrel

Texas Antelope Squirrel

Mule Deer---great studies at Bosque

**Bobcat**---nice views for one van at Bosque del Apache; rarely seen

Coyote

**Collared Peccary** (Javelina)---two seen by Russ only near Elephant Butte; rare here

total species - 8

**Significant others:**

the tumbleweed snowman