



S.E. ARIZONA & GRAND CANYON

JULY 28-AUGUST 10, 2004

Trip Report by Adrian Binns

Day 1 / Wednesday July 28: Phoenix Desert Botanical Garden

After holding up most of the group by arriving over 4 hours late, it was not surprising that most opted to go to dinner instead of joining me at the Desert Botanical Garden. Anyway for 4 of us it was a productive hour before sunset, with Cactus Wrens, Gila Woodpeckers, Curved-billed Thrashers and White-winged Doves all seen well feeding on the fruit at the tops of Organ Pipe Cactus; a small family of Verdins moved about the Palo Verde trees while an Abert's Towhee sulked around the bases of bushes. Good numbers of Gambels Quail gave us good looks as a larger Desert Tortoise moved ever so slowly through this beautifully landscaped garden. A Black-tailed Jackrabbit as well as numerous Desert Cottontails rounded out the mammals while a Desert Spiny Lizard and Gila Spotted Whiptail were our first reptiles. A Eurasian Collared Dove was seen cooing on top of a Saguaro while 2 species of gnatcatchers caught our attention, first we heard Blue-grays and then we came across a pair of very cooperative Black-tailed Gnatcatchers only feet from us. As the sun set across the desert Lesser Nighthawks began to appear, dozens of them, some flying right over our heads.

Day 2 / Thursday July 29: Oak Creek Canyon (Garland Bridge, West Fork & Oak Creek Vista); San Francisco Peaks (Snow Bowl & Hart's Prairie Aspen Pond)

Heading north through the Sonoran Desert we left the giant Saguaro's behind and slowly climbed in elevation through Pinyon Juniper and grasslands into Ponderosa Pines before working our way along the stunning scenery near Sedona and along Oak Creek. Our first stop was a scenic spot where the Red Rocks surrounded us. Here a small group of House Finches and a Western Scrub Jay were seen. At Garland Bridge, along Oak Creek there was considerable activity with numerous Black Phoebes flittering about the stream boulders while Stellar's Jays moved about the parking area. Both Western and Summer Tanagers, a young male Bullock's Oriole, Black-headed Grosbeak and a Western Wood Pewee were seen well moving about the Arizona Sycamores that lined the sides of the creek. John also found a Zela Metalmark along the path and a swallowtail species was fluttering near the creek. A little further north we stopped at West Fork, where Lesser Goldfinch were feeding on seed heads in the apple orchard and Common Ravens and Turkey Vultures flew high overhead. The path was relatively quiet with the exception of Yellow Warbler chip notes and the trilling of Broad-tailed Hummingbirds as they flew passed us. In an area of bracken and skyrockets or Scarlet Gilias (*Ipomopsis aggregata*), a Spotted Towhee was singing away and a pair of Acorn Woodpeckers were happily posing atop a snag. Several butterfly species were present including a Mourning Cloak (Camberwell Beauty), Orange and Clouded Sulphur as well as a few Spring Azures. Our final stop along the creek was at the vista, where a Sharp-shinned Hawk moved through at rapid speed and a Townsend Solitaire called briefly before flying well away, but the star of the show was a gorgeous Bramble Hairstreak seen on buckwheat (*Eriogonum umbellatum*).

We had our picnic lunch at the Museum of Northern Arizona on the Rio de Flag trail with numerous Pygmy Nuthatches, Black-headed Grosbeaks and several Lewis' Woodpeckers always in sight. While watching the woodpeckers flying with their oar-like motions and a band of nuthatches apartment hunting we found a small depression in a rock that held a puddle of water, which in turn attracted Pine Siskin's and Gray-collared Ground Squirrels. The grosbeaks were busy feeding on Wax Currant (*Ribes cereum*) berries. A beautiful Abert's Squirrel was also seen coming to one of the feeders. It was now onto the San Francisco

Peaks and the Snow Bowl at 8500' in elevation, where a Mule Deer grazed besides the winding road. Here this afternoon the birds were very quiet with the exception of a Red-tailed Hawk, some Ravens and a few House Wrens. The stunning fir-spruce scenery and vistas on this balmy day made up for the lack of birds. Along Hart's Prairie Road we visited a Quaking Aspen grove with an ever-diminishing pool of water – actually a watering hole for the free ranging cattle. The place was jumping with birds, in particular young Yellow-rumped Warblers, Western Bluebirds, Violet-green Swallows and Western Wood Pewees. The red-shafted race of Northern Flicker was very obvious and a Hermit Thrush was feeding in a gooseberry bush while the red-backed race of Dark-eyed Junco was feeding on the ground. A Hairy Woodpecker and Chipping Sparrow rounded out this nice mixed group.

This evening, after dinner, while John, Jane and I were at the supermarket paying for our goods there was a commotion at the end of the counter, which ended with a scuffle, and a young chap being handcuffed for failing to pay for a bottle jaegermeister!

Day 3 / Friday July 30: Grand Canyon National Park (south rim); Rte 180 & Rte 64; Valle Post Office

The drive into the Grand Canyon was rather uneventful with only a few Red-tails and American Kestrels being seen on telegraph poles and wires. Once inside the park the awesome spectacle of the canyon, not only in sheer size but also in the ever-changing colors of the rocks was soon evident – everyone was in awe. Rock Squirrel were all around us feeding on Pinyon Pine cones; Mountain Chickadees were constantly chattering away and we had eye level views of a young female Black-throated Gray Warbler, while White-throated Swifts flew overhead.

In front of the hotels on the rim, Arthur picked out some distant black raptors circling and to our surprise it was half a dozen California Condors. Through the scope all the field marks were clearly seen as they soared in view for half an hour. Twenty years ago condors were on the brink of extinction, and in a truly remarkable effort all those remaining were captured and bred. In 2001 a small number were released back into their ancient haunt, here in the Grand Canyon. This year it looks as though a chick is going to fledge, which will bring the total to 46 of the giant birds with 9-foot wingspans gracing the canyon. On several occasions we had one or two fly close by, giving us tremendous looks.

We walked along the rim for about a mile through junipers and pines stopping at occasional spots of colorful flowers such as Indian Paintbrush (*Castilleja spp*) and Linearleaf Hedgemustard (*Sisymbrium linearifolium*). On the way we picked up Western Tanager, Western Scrub Jay, Red-breasted Nuthatch and coming across a flock of Pygmy Nuthatches with a White-breasted amongst them. Funnily enough, our second raptor this morning at the canyon was a Zone-tailed Hawk that flew right by us. Another followed it shortly after, and we had yet to see a Turkey Vulture!! Minutes later we did! A pair of Hairy Woodpeckers were moving about the pines and a Rock Wren made its way across the path in front of us. Several more Black-throated Grays, both actually fine looking males were spotted and we had a small family group of Western Bluebirds. All in all a good mornings walk, especially as we capped it off with a condor flying right over our heads. We took the bus westwards to the Hopi Overlook, in the hopes of getting closer views of the condors, but they seemed to have settled into a midday siesta. Our only consolation was a Peregrine Falcon soaring over the ridge.

After our picnic lunch amongst the towering Ponderosa Pines we headed to the visitors center where Chuck located a group of Bushtits while the rest of us were shopping! Following an excellent presentation on the condors and a final viewing of the canyon as the late afternoon sun was casting ever-changing shadows over the orange and red canyon walls we headed back towards Flagstaff. A male Pronghorn caught our eye as it trotted through the grasslands towards the road. We stopped to view it but soon got distracted by 5 Lark Sparrows in the sage and on the barbwire. Needless to say we lost the male but found 2 females on the other side of the road. Noticing that the native Indian store in Valle had postage stamps, we pulled over to purchase some. Chuck this time found a Mountain Bluebird. With a little more searching 3 Say's Phoebes were sighted and a pair of Western Kingbirds were seen sitting on the telegraph wires. A little further down the road we were able to watch a group of 18 hind and calf Elk. By now the sun was casting it last light over the grasslands and pines, making a stunning scene with the San Francisco Peaks in the background. Jane spotted 2 Coyotes close to the road amongst a herd of cattle, and we soon found Western Meadowlarks that kept popping up on stalks to make sure that the coyotes were

moving on. They were - right into a herd of 20 some Pronghorn, who in turn made sure they did not come close to their calves. On the outskirts of Flagstaff at dusk 4 bull Elk with huge racks were slowly ambling through the pines. It was a great finish to a wonderful day.

Day 4 / Saturday July 31: San Francisco Peaks (Hart's Prairie, Little Spring Meadow, Hochderffer Ranch burnt area, Kendrick Park Road/FR 514, Lockett Meadow); Red Rocks Cattle Pens

Pulling into the supermarket we encountered a policeman handcuffing an older gentleman who was on the ground who was either too inebriated for this early in the morning or had been caught shoplifting. I think it was the later! 2 in 36 hours, not bad for never ever having seen an arrest before!

This morning we continued on where we left off 2 days ago on Harts Prairie Road. Driving through the pines Kathleen spotted a sapsucker, which turned out to be a male Williamson's though our sightings were brief. Also in the area were Mountain Chickadees, a White-breasted Nuthatch and 2 Brown Creepers which we enjoyed watching work their way up several tree trunks. A Plumbeous Vireo was calling non-stop and after tracking it down we watched it as it fed 2 youngsters. A Red-breasted Nuthatch was also seen in the pines, as was a Clark's Nutcracker. A little further along we were in the short grass prairie with large numbers of Western Bluebirds; Chipping Sparrows feeding young and juncos darting about. House Wrens and Pine Siskins were flying between gooseberry bushes while a Williamson's Sapsucker was spotted in the distance. We walked through the grasses and after following him from tree to tree got a wonderful look as he perched horizontally on a branch in the open for us. Walking back we came across a tiny Short-horned Lizard who was so cute! A mile or so further north a gorgeous male Western Tanager lit up a bush and a Green-tailed Towhee was seen flying into a bush on the opposite side of the road, while a Blue-Gray Gnatcatcher flew from a bush in front of us. At the bend in the road at Little Spring the small meadow was ablaze with Western Blue Flax (*Linum lewisii*), Arizona Gilia (*Ipomopsis aggregata*) a pinker version of the skyrocket, MacDougal's Verbena (*Verbena macdougalii*), Hill Lupines and the beautiful Atlantis Fritillary nectaring on thistle. A stop at the burnt pine area only produced 2 Western Meadowlarks, several Wood Pewees and numerous American Kestrels, but the star of the show was a stunning Melissa Blue with wings open on Prostrate Vervain (*Verbena bracteata*). Working our way along Kendrick Road I was shocked to see so many junipers completely striped of vegetation, no doubt due to infestation and consequently we came across few birds. We had lunch at Lockett Meadow in the Mount Humphries' caldera seated next to Yellow Columbines (*Aquilegia chrysantha*), while watching pewees, creepers, a Black Phoebe and Violet-green Swallows. The only butterfly we came across was a Weidermeyer's Admiral that moved through very quickly.

From here it was a long journey south to Red Rocks, north of Tucson, where our target bird was the Ruddy Ground Dove and the habitat... aromatic cattle pens! We were shocked to see the numbers of White-winged Doves as we approached; there were thousands everywhere we looked. Pulling into a known spot to sight the dove, there was a male on the fence. He quickly dropped to the ground to feed and then flushed into a garden. Here we were able to scope this Mexican species before it flew off into the trees. Bronzed and Brown-headed Cowbirds were feeding in the pens while Round-tailed Ground Squirrel entertained us on the opposite side of the road. Driving the roads we came across Inca Doves and a dozen Killdeer besides a pool of water and even flushed another male Ruddy Ground Dove, which we could not relocate.

Day 5 / Sunday August 1: Arizona-Sonoran Desert Museum; San Xavier Mission; Madera Canyon (Santa Rita Lodge)

While loading the van a male Hooded Oriole sat on a telegraph wire for a minute for those that were not at breakfast. We then headed slowly through the beautiful Saguaro National Park West where we had a Coyote cross the road and numerous American Kestrels and Gila Woodpeckers flying between Saguaro Cactus. Several flickers were sighted, these being the red-shafted race of Northern and one Gilded which failed to co-operate to everyone's satisfaction. A small group of Purple Martins were sitting on the arm of a saguaro, no doubt having been raised in one of the many woodpecker holes. We were graced with the presence of the first of what would be many Cactus Wrens today and for a short while we

followed a Black-tailed Jackrabbit as it raced down the dirt road. Just before reaching the museum a covey of some 20 Gambel's Quail crossed the road in front of us.

The Arizona Sonoran Desert Museum is a truly spectacular experience. The outdoor exhibits are outstanding, blending into the natural landscape perfectly. A wide variety of flowering cactus can be seen from the stately saguaros to the diminutive Fishhook Pincushions (*Mammillaria tetrancistra*) with their pretty ring of small pink flowers near the top. Verdin's, Cardinals, Western Tanager, Curve-billed Thrasher, Phainopepla, Gambel's Quail, Hooded Orioles, Brown-crested Flycatcher, Black-throated Sparrow, Black-tailed Gnatcatcher were all seen well along with numerous Cactus Wrens and Gila Woodpeckers, but the stars were undoubtedly the male Varied Bunting that was perched at the top of a bare branch in perfect light about 15 feet in front of us and the male Pyrrhuloxia that posed for us. Lizards were all over the place with Spiny-tailed Iguanas, Zebra-tailed Lizards and Whiptails scurrying about between the vegetation and rocks. In the hummingbird exhibit we were enthralled by the stunning views of Magnificent, Broadbill, Black-chinned and Costa's as well as coming across a female Broadbill on a nest only a foot above the ground in a low overhanging branch. A Harris Antelope Squirrel and good numbers of Lyside Sulphurs were seen as well as a few Queens, a Pipevine Swallowtail and Gulf Fritillary.

Our next stop was to look for Burrowing Owls at the San Xavier Mission but there was not a bird to be seen. From here we headed towards the Santa Ritas only to go through a major dust storm which grounded several vehicles, but once through it we stopped in Green Valley to pick up the essential food for our next three meals and were rewarded with a beautiful Swainson's Hawk trying to negotiate the high winds.

At Santa Rita lodge we spent the remainder of the afternoon watching the feeders with numerous Broadbills and Black-chins doing their best to not be chased off by a lone male Magnificent Hummingbird. Good numbers of Lesser Goldfinch were moving from the feeder to the water fountain while Black-headed Grosbeaks and White-breasted Nuthatch's put in appearances every once in a while. Acorn Woodpeckers kept stashing acorns in the top of the telegraph pole and a party of dozen Bridled Titmouse worked their way up from the lower cabins to near where we were viewing the feeding station. They were soon joined by a single Bewick's Wren. After dinner under the gazebo, we waited for the Elf Owl to appear out of its hole, but all some of us got was a quick flash as it disappeared into the woods behind the cabins. Owls certainly were not co-operating tonight and we could not get a single note out of the three we were hoping for. A ride down the road at dusk produced a flushed bird along proctor Road that was more than likely a Common Poorwill and there was a Sonoran Desert Toad on the road – really slim pickings! After dropping everyone back at the cabins Jane and I headed back down the road, this time we were not skunked. We first came across a Striped Skunk, followed by the black race of Striped; either a Western Hog-nosed or Hooded Skunk – I could not tell as it was walking away from us; and a young Western Spotted Skunk which put on a great show climbing into a hollow near the base of a juniper. It was a 3-skunk night. A first for me!

Day 6 / Monday August 2: Madera Canyon (Kubo House, Grasslands, Florida Wash, Chapuporosa Inn, Old Baldy Trail); California Gulch

Mexican Jays put in their first appearance of the trip when small vocal bands worked their way through the oaks as we walked to the Kubo House before breakfast. Here, a lone tom Wild Turkey greeted us with a wide assortment of gobbles. Western Pewees were calling non-stop and we even found a female on a nest high up in an Arizona Sycamore tree. Black-headed Grosbeaks and White-breasted Nuthatches continued to be numerous while a Plumbeous Vireo called for a short while and a Dusky-capped Flycatcher could be heard high up the canyon.

After breakfast we headed down Madera Canyon road and into the grasslands, which were very green, to look for the *Amophila* sparrows. A Rufous-winged Sparrow was soon spotted and it was followed by good looks at the very plain Botteri's. Cassin's were singing all around us and after a little work one was spotted skylarking or as Arthur liked to say "pipiting". Eventually we had one in the scope. Three down 2 to go, though they would have to wait till later in the afternoon. A Loggerhead Shrike was perched on an Ocotillo and Tom spotted a small flock of Lark Buntings, which turned out to be about 30 strong moving through the grasslands. At Florida Wash there was a Bell's Vireo calling non-stop that was in a

very weird and scruffy plumage. A Lucy's Warbler, several Varied Buntings and Phainopepla's and a family group of Blue Grosbeaks were also seen. By mid morning we returned into the cool of the canyon and stopped at the Chapuporosa Inn where the owners kindly let us view the birds and butterflies from the patio. There were numerous butterflies taking a liking to Obedient Plant, including Arizona Skipper, Dull Firetip, Common Sootywing, Zela Metalmark as well as a White-lined Sphinx Moth. A small Praying Mantis was also seen devouring a metalmark. A female Blue-throated Hummingbird put in a brief appearance before spending time chasing other hummers. It was probably too late in the morning to expect too much from the Old Baldy Trail, and all we got out of it were Golden-banded Skippers and a Two-tailed Swallowtail, the Arizona State butterfly.

On the way into California Gulch we came across a group of two dozen Lark Sparrows and in a kettle of vultures we found a Black Vulture, Red-tailed Hawk and a juvenile Golden Eagle, but we got the most amusement from a Roadrunner that darted away as fast as he could occasionally skipping into the air for short distances. It took 40 minutes to drive the 3.5 miles over rough rocky terrain at excruciating slow pace into California Gulch but we made it in one piece. The landscape here is simply stunning, very green with thick desert vegetation throughout with a backdrop of a massive rock outcropping. Varied Buntings were flying about in all directions and Five-striped Sparrows were in full song as soon as we were in the well-vegetated steep gulch. We moved from one bird to another failing to see one, until the fifth bird cooperated and sang near the top of a shrub for all to see very well. A Thick-billed Kingbird was a surprise as it landed on an Agave stalk. I later found out that a pair had nested here this year. While leaving the area feeling very satisfied with the afternoons hike we were serenaded by several more Five-striped Sparrows. Cassin's Kingbirds were spotted on the hillside as we walked out. After having a picnic dinner a short distance away with Ladder-backed Woodpeckers, Roadrunners and Yellow-billed Cuckoo's calling we stayed until 8:15PM waiting to hear the Buff-collared Nightjar. By the time the sun was setting, there was a great deal of distant thunder and lightening and the sky was getting very dark with the exception of a large white cloud that pierced the evening's sky. Common Poorwills, two of them, were heard calling for about 10 minutes each but the hoped-for nightjar failed to show or even call, so we called it a day. The long drive back was punctuated with a 30" Tiger Rattlesnake crossing the road, which got everybody very excited especially as we even heard it rattle. A rather large Tarantula was next and shortly after the very large ears of an Antelope Jackrabbit caught our attention as we drove by.

Day 7 / Tuesday August 3: Madera Canyon (Kubo House, Mine Vault Trail, Santa Rita Lodge); Green Valley Waste Water Treatment Plant; Rio Rico Agricultural Fields; Kino Springs; Paton's House

Several of us joined Chuck at the Kubo House to look for the tanager, but once again it was a no-show, though Chuck now feels that he did hear it call yesterday. On the walk back down we had our first looks at a Hutton's Vireo that was working its way around the trunk of an oak tree.

After breakfast we returned to walk the Vault Mine Trail but as we got out the van two Plumbeous Vireos were chattering away and showed very well, while the Hutton's Vireo got away a Painted Redstart put in a brief appearance. Walking up the gently climbing and stony trail we heard numerous Painted Redstarts, saw Black-headed Grosbeaks, Acorn Woodpeckers, Mexican Jays, Sulphur-bellied Flycatchers, and Bridled Titmouse. Dusky-capped Flycatchers were heard giving their plaintive calls but never came close enough for us but we did get to chase an empid which we were pretty sure was a Cordilleran Flycatcher. Half a mile up the canyon we heard Elegant Trogons calling, at least 2 of them though it may have been as many as three. It was not long before we had a stunning male eye level on the other side of the wash, calling and moving about, even coming to within 20 feet of us at one stage. It was a magical moment. A Painted Redstart was located at the bottom of the wash and eventually came into full view for half the group. That made it 2 of the 3 'red' birds that we were aiming for this morning. The Red-faced Warbler would have to wait for another day.

By mid day we were at the Green Valley Waste Water Treatment Plant where one of the ponds had a female Mallard, numerous Killdeer, and of far more importance 2 Wilson's Phalarope, an uncommon bird for here a Short-billed Dowitcher in breeding plumage, several Western Sandpipers, a Greater Yellowlegs, Barn Swallows, Red-winged Blackbirds and a Spotted Sandpiper. Finally some shorebirds for the trip list!

At Rio Rico we visited some agricultural fields and only came up with a Great Blue Heron and the brilliant male Vermillion Flycatcher that was sitting near a Cassin's Kingbird.

After winding our way to Kino Springs we were well rewarded with 3 Grey Hawks calling and one of them, an adult was seen being chased by a kingbird. A female Vermillion Flycatcher was around the first pond and both male Summer Tanager as well as Blue Grosbeak brightened up the rather sparse surroundings. Beside the golf course we had a small group of raptors kettling, which included a Grey, Zone-tailed and Red-tailed Hawk right above our heads, giving us great comparisons of size and shape. The golf course pond held a pair of Black-bellied Whistling Ducks, a Great Egret and about twenty colorful Lazuli Buntings. We were able to sort out the differences between the more common Cassin's and rarer Tropical Kingbirds.

Our final stop was at the Paton's residence where from the shaded awning we sat and watched an assortment of hummingbirds including the gorgeous Violet-crowned that showed on a regular basis. Hummers were not the only birds about; there was considerable activity at the feeders with a Common Ground Dove, Inca Dove, Gambel's Quail and Ladder-backed Woodpecker. For most of us the amazing sight of a Yellow-breasted Chat singing out in the open on a number of occasions was a rare treat. Both cowbirds and a Thick-billed Kingbird rounded out a nice relaxing few hours before a late afternoon thunderstorm turned the grasslands yellow against the dark gray sky.

Day 8 / Wednesday August 4: Fort Huachuca (Garden Canyon, Sawmill Canyon and Scheelite Canyon); Miller Canyon (Beatty's B&B)

We spent a good seven hours in Garden Canyon having great success and getting out just in time as a major storm with 'nickel' sized hail rained on us just as we were returning to the van after having seen the Spotted Owl. The grasslands had singing Botteri's Sparrows all over the place and we heard 2 Cassin's. A pair of Scaled Quail walked along the road in front of the van at one stage and everyone was finally able to get good looks at Ladder-backed Woodpecker as it was searching for insects in the base of an Agave stalk. At one point we had no less than a dozen kingbirds around us as well as 2 Lark Buntings in breeding plumage. The upper picnic area produced numerous Sulphur-bellied Flycatchers, 2 Elegant Trogon's one of which was seen briefly; Western Wood-Pewee's too numerous to count and a few Black Phoebe. Perched on a snag was a juvenile Cooper's Hawk and soon we located its nest just over the road when one bird flew in to it. A small group of Bushtits were also seen. Kathleen found a Horse Hairworm that fascinated us, swimming on top of a small puddle of water. It was about a foot long and about as thin as a strand of hair. Driving further up the canyon a stop along the road produced a calling Arizona Woodpecker, Stellar's Jays and a Scott's Oriole that flew across the road, never to be seen again, but it was the pair of Hepatic Tanagers (as it turned out they were the only ones of the day) that caught our attention, giving us good views as they sat in plain view in a pine tree.

It was a pleasant morning in the 70's and partly sunny as we walked the wide open path through the pines, oaks and junipers of Sawmill Canyon coming across a pair of calling Bewick's Wrens which in turn led to a juvenile Grace's Warbler and a Painted Redstart. Moments later we had a stunning look at a singing Yellow-eyed Junco only feet away from us. Arizona Woodpeckers, which had eluded us at several sites over the previous few days, were seen well at one of the campsites. Hutton's Vireos and Mexican Jays were heard on and off and we came across numerous butterflies including California Sisters, 'Siva' Juniper Hairstreak on Wright's Bluets (*Houstonia wrightii*), 'Arizona' Juvenal's Duskywing and Bordered Patch's. Our target bird here was the Buff-breasted Flycatcher and it took a little work, but we eventually came across one chipping; chased it down on the hillside amongst the pines and oaks and had some good views. Sometimes the birding gods work in mysterious ways as we did not have a buff-breast for over an hour and then find several more as we returned to the van, actually giving us even better views than earlier. Lunch was taken on the boulders at Sawmill, and was very peaceful until the silence was broken when Chuck screamed "snake" as he went to place his foot down on a rock and thought he was about to step on a snake. It turned out to be nothing more than a beautiful harmless Canyon Treefrog!

The half hour walk up Scheelite Canyon was slow and steep, but we all made it. Today the 'Mexican' Spotted Owl was at the 5/8th mile marker and no more than 30 feet from us but with its back turned. Occasionally it would turn its head for wonderful views. Even though it was out in the open

Kathleen managed to spot a dead woodrat (I presume) about 3 feet away from the owl, before seeing the owl! Obviously it was going to be dinner for the bird.

At Beatty's, we were in hummingbird heaven – Rufous, Black-chinned, Anna's flashing its crimson head dress, Broad-tail, Broadbill, Magnificent, Blue-throated and White-eared. All of them spent a great deal of time chasing each other around before visiting the feeders or perching on a branch for us to see all their brilliant colors and the 'real big' one a male White-eared Hummingbird. I was astounded to notice that the numbers of hummers seemed really low. At this time of the year they are normally queuing up to sip nectar, but today we had to wait for even one to show up at a feeder.

Day 9 / Thursday August 5: Patagonia Lake State Park; Patagonia Butterfly Garden; Beatty's B&B; Ash Canyon B&B

Sometimes the birding gods shine on you like they have never done before. While working out the trails on the map at Patagonia Lake State Park, Rhoddy overheard me say something about a trail going off up the hill at this point. It was just a point of reference as we headed towards Nutting's Wash. Working our way through and under low Mesquite trees and their branches we heard a gnatcatcher call. It was a good start as it was a Black-tail, and we hoped to locate a Black-capped in the vicinity. We then also realized that Rhoddy was no longer with us. I called out for her and she replied. Unbeknownst to us she had taken the trail up the hill, (thinking that is where we were headed) and turned around to follow the direction of our voices. Within a short distance she ran into a few others who just happened to have located a pair of Black-capped at a nest! Soon we were on our way to join her and were shown the nest with a male sitting on it. His tail cocked up and in full view seen very well from one side of the tree, and his long bill and black cap from the other side. How lucky could we be? Being perfectly honest it would have required a Herculean effort to locate just one bird amongst the dense thicket. We built a cairn for others to see as a marker before moving on to bird around the lake. Yellow Warblers, Yellow-billed Cuckoos and Yellow-breasted Chats were calling all around us. The stunning Vermillion Flycatcher posed nicely along the edge of the mesquites and was joined by a Cardinal and Pyrrhuloxia. At the gnatcatcher spot a Northern Bearded Tyrannulet came in giving its plaintive single note call and once we had located it, it gave its normal 4-note call. Its mate then joined it before moving on. A Bewick's Wren was near the cattails and both Common Yellowthroat and Green Heron were working their way in and out of the cattails. On the lake there were many American Coots, a lone Pied-billed Grebe and Moorhen as well as about a dozen Neotropic Cormorants.

A quick stop at the Patagonia butterfly garden produced good looks at Pipevine Swallowtail; a Black Swallowtail caterpillar on fennel, which showed us its forked scent gland when we touched it; a Gulf Fritillary and a Lyside Sulphur. Meanwhile Chuck went birding around the park and came across a Hermit Warbler.

The afternoon was spent feeder watching at Beatty's, where all the usual suspects were observed including great views of White-eared Hummingbird and a young male Calliope. At Ash Canyon B&B we watched a male Lucifer's as the skies darkened and the thunder got louder and lightening closer, as if it was cast from the heavens. A female was equally dazzling and everyone got to see a hybrid Berryline's – Magnificent as well as a Calliope. What was interesting to note, was that both Tom and Mary Jo felt that based upon the amount of sugar water they were using a day, the hummingbird activity was at about 10% compared to the previous year – a 90% drop in activity! Even though the storm was now heading away from us it got dark very early, especially by the time we reached Ramsey Canyon to go night birding. Several 'Southwestern' Whip-poor-will's were calling and showed for a brief moment in the spotlight, but we could not get any owls to call at all.

Day 10 / Friday August 6: Sierra Vista Environmental Operations Park; San Pedro House; Holy Trinity Monastery south of St. David's; Ramsey Canyon

With a name like Environmental Operations Park, it must be something worth checking out, and we did. It was nothing more than a fancy name for a sewage treatment plant! But it did have at least one goody – Yellow-headed Blackbirds that were seen perched on the rushes and flying across the four ponds

that were mostly covered in vegetation. Red-winged Blackbirds were also there in good numbers and we did get to see the beautiful Lazuli Buntings once more.

The sky was threatening once more this morning and by the time we reached the San Pedro House we were right on the edge of the storm. The light rain gave us a chance to stand under the picnic shelters and watch Common Ground Doves, Ladder-backed Woodpecker and even a Blue Grosbeak feeder at a tube feeder, which is not something that you see often. One of the hummingbird feeders had as many as a dozen female and juvenile Black-chins queuing up for a drink and this is more like the activity one would expect at a feeder at this time of year. Once the storm passed we headed down the trail and along the river all the way to Kingfisher Pond, before returning. A juvenile Cooper's Hawk was heard calling and then seen very well as it perched near the river. In one scope view we had Blue Grosbeak, Lesser Goldfinch and a male Indigo Bunting. Cassin's Kingbirds and Vermillion Flycatchers seemed to be everywhere and we came across a small group of Rufous-crowned Sparrows feeding near the base of a Mesquite tree. At the Cottonwood grove we followed a Yellow-billed Cuckoo that was calling and came across a begging young Great Horned Owl that was sitting out in the open on a low overhanging branch. Grassland Desert Whiptails were scurrying about the path; a small Southwestern Woodhouse Toad hopped across the path and between my feet, while a Sonoran Mud Turtle was found meditating on a path. Butterflies were plentiful with Black Swallowtail, Queens, Ceraunus Blue, Checkered White and Orange Sulphur all seen well.

A quick run north before lunch to look for Mississippi Kites produced 2 wonderful birds soaring right over the road and our heads, right where I had hoped they would be. Sometimes one is very lucky and the looks we had were tremendous. We followed this with lunch at the park in Tombstone while a gunfight was going on less than a block away. Walking the Old West (1880's) section of town several members of the group were 'apprehended' for not having permits to take photographs and duly hung!

The afternoon was spent at Ramsey Canyon and again the skies were very gloomy with some drizzle at one stage. The hummingbird activity was very slow and the reported Berylline's did eventually show for a very happy Chuck well after most of us had moved up the canyon trail. "Coues'" White-tailed Deer were seen at regular intervals and we came across a pair of Eastern Cottontails. A Painted Redstart flashing his white wing patch and tail is always a wonderful sight but it was the Acorn Woodpeckers that caught our attention. Having been quiet all afternoon they suddenly got very vocal and were scolding something. Eventually the culprit showed himself, and it was nothing more than a Arizona Gray Squirrel descending a tree. No doubt the woodpeckers felt threatened than the squirrel would take 'their' acorns.

Day 11 / Saturday August 7: San Pedro Inn; Douglas; Willow Tank; Cave Creek Ranch; Portal

We finally found a perched Swainson's Hawk facing us, which allowed us to see the contrasting dark and light colors as well as the light throat. On Hereford Road leading to the San Pedro Inn several Roadrunners raced across the hot tarmac and found shade beneath a creosote bush or mesquite tree. A family group of Gambel's Quail including about 9 day old chicks caught our attention as they worked their way along the roadside ditch and the absolutely dapper Black-throated Sparrow was sighted perched on top of a mesquite. We had a lovely stroll around the grounds of the Inn, picking up the 'Lilian's' race of Eastern Meadowlarks, Cliff Swallows, a Northern Rough-winged Swallow, Canyon Towhee, Tropical Kingbird side by side with a Cassin's, Black and Say's Phoebe's and a female Cinnamon Teal which made a very brief landing on the pond before flying off. The Barn Owls had fledged a day or so ago and we could not locate them in any of the Cottonwood trees which was a shame.

From the Inn we headed north along the fields to the Cottonwood lined San Pedro River. A Botteri's Sparrow was in full song very close to us, while Vermillion Flycatchers never seemed to be out of sight. A handful of butterflies were around including Clouded, Orange and Cloudless Sulphurs, Queens, 4 Monarchs, several Northern Cloudywings and a Western Pygmy Blue. As we approached the river a Great Horned Owl was seen fleeing its roost and flying a short distance to another Cottonwood where it perched in full view and had to put up with 5 Cassin's Kingbirds mobbing it. Along the river a female Summer Tanager and three Lazuli Buntings sat up for us to see while Yellow Warblers and Common Yellowthroats flew about. A smaller yellow warbler was spotted and tracked down till we all got good looks at one of the season's first Wilson's Warblers. The walk along the river was very pleasant and a welcome break from the

mid-morning heat. Our lunch stop was in a park like setting in Douglas with a couple of spread out seats and no tables. A Eurasian Collared Dove and Inca Doves were seen as well as our first Giant Swallowtail.

While driving into the Chiricahua's we could see that the weather was taking a turn for the worse, the skies were pretty dark with occasional thunder. By the time we reached Cave Creek it was spitting and for the next hour or so we had on and off rain, but it did not slow us down. We did the feeder watch with several Cliff Chipmunks and a Mexican Woodrat scurrying about picking up fallen birdseed. With the exception of the lack of numbers of hummers it was a busy place. Acorn Woodpeckers, Mexican Jays, a family group of Gambel's Quail including (again) 9 young, Canyon Towhees, Black-headed Grosbeaks, Cactus Wren, Bridled Titmouse and a Juniper Titmouse which was a surprise at the feeders, a female Summer Tanager, Spotted Towhee, Band-tailed Pigeon, Blue-throated Hummingbird and the ubiquitous Lesser Goldfinches. We followed that with a pre dinner walk through downtown Portal picking up a beautiful male Hooded Oriole, 3 Pine Siskins and seeing half a dozen Blue-throated Hummingbird's chase each other. Just as we were going into dinner a group of about a dozen Collared Peccaries crossed the road and disappeared into someone's yard.

Our evening search on this cool night for owls and snakes produced an Elf Owl heard calling once and a Striped Skunk, Collared Peccary, Coyote and Great Plains Toad.

Day 12 / Sunday August 8: Chiricahua's (Foothills Road, Road to Paradise, Paradise Cemetery, George Walker House, 181/Paradise junction, Barfoot/Rustler Park junction, Barfoot meadow, Rustler Park, Cave Creek ranch)

Those that made it on the pre breakfast walk were treated to a surprisingly good assortment of birds including a stunning male Western Tanager, Cactus Wrens and Canyon Towhees, 2 Gambel's Quail, a singing Black-throated Warbler very close to us, a female Phainopepla, Blue Grosbeak and a Crissal's Thrasher that flew in and perched atop a juniper for a minute before descending to the ground. It was rather amusing that once we had finished our breakfast we left the privacy of our 'room' only to find that David Attenbrough was having his breakfast in the main room. He is here in the Chiricahua's filming ants of all things for his BBC invertebrate series.

After breakfast we took the road to Paradise through the agaves, mesquites and junipers, stopping periodically for Western Tanager, Western Scrub Jay, a singing Rufous-crowned Sparrow, Warbling Vireo only feet away from us in a low shrub and 5 Scott's Oriole that briefly visiting several flowering Agave stalks before flying off. The cemetery produced the first of many Lark Sparrows that were seen this morning, a cooperative Juniper Titmouse in what else...a juniper and a Say's Phoebe. Crossing the bridge in 'town' a juvenile Cooper's Hawk showed well and a raucous gang of Mexican Chickadee let everyone know that they were around. The George Walker House feeders had Pine Siskins at the feeders as well as a single Juniper Titmouse. Again, as with everyone's hummer feeders the numbers were well down and Rebecca had only banded 5 today, mostly Rufous, well down from what she was hoping for.

At the intersection of 181 and Paradise Road the habitat was now oaks and pines with a beautiful cascading stream (thanks to the recent rains) and in spite of the noise of 4 or 5 gunshots nearby (someone hopefully target shooting) there was a family of Hutton's Vireos that were begging for food, American Robin, Hermit Thrush and our only Mexican Chickadee that showed well even if it was at the very top of a pine. The slow winding climb through the oaks to Onion Saddle was very quiet with the exception of two stops, each for a perched Red Crossbill, one male and then a female. We came across a very nice mixed flock while walking through the pines with small patches of Mexican Silene (*Silene laciniata*) near the intersection of Barfoot and Rustler. Yellow-eyed Junco were walking about the needles at the bases of the trees, while Western Bluebirds sat on the broken pine branches and Red Crossbills could be heard calling as they flew over on several occasions. Violet Green Swallows were very common flying above the tops of the trees. Three flycatchers were seen well, Western Wood Pewee of course; what was more than likely a Cordilleran Flycatcher and an actively feeding Greater Pewee. It was nice to see Pygmy Nuthatches again and there was at least one White-breasted around. As we were mostly looking down slope we saw a Northern Flicker fly through the woods and a pair of Hairy Woodpeckers worked a number of the tree trunks. We really had not come across many of the high elevation warblers and it nice to see two species, a Hermit and a Grace's Warblers, even if it was only two birds!

We had lunch in the gorgeous setting of Barfoot Meadow where we managed to see a light morph Short-tailed Hawk make one pass along the north rock face. As we stood in the meadow keeping one eye to the sky the other was focused on a Striped-wing Sphinx Moth making the rounds from one Western Pink Vervain (*Moradilla glandularia bipinnatifida*) plant to another.

After a rest back at the ranch we headed to the George Walker house in the hopes of seeing Montezuma Quail and Band-tailed Pigeons. The former never showed and five pigeons were seen in flight flying along the stream. A Black-tailed Jackrabbit kept us amused on the journey back as he kept trying to stay ahead of the van yet did not really want to leave the road. His large ears with black spots at the tips and black stripe on the tail very evident as he eventually made it off the road. On the way to dinner we encountered a Bobcat coming out of the vegetation from the ranch property and briefly stop in the middle of the road for everyone to see, before turning back and disappearing out of sight. Wow! The after dinner search for night life was once again very slow. A Striped Skunk was lurking about the ranch as well as on road north of the ranch; a Poorwill flew in front of the van and after a very large Desert Toad was spotted, he managed to vanish by the time we backed up to look for him.

Day 13 / Monday August 9: Chiricahua Mountains (Foothills Road, junction 181/Paradise, Pinery Canyon Campground); Chiricahua National Monument; Willcox Playa

Greater Roadrunners entertained us along Foothills Road this morning swaying their tails from side to side as they ran away from us. Coyote's were heard serenading us on two occasions before they no doubt 'turned in' for the day. We watched a Western Kingbird pound away at a Sphinx moth trying to kill it before devouring it and a rather large group of Gambel's Quail crossing the wash all in single file on their way to Dave Jasper's feeders. I found out later that Arthur and Brenda who had decided to stay in before breakfast, had a Great Plains Skink in their kitchen which was playing hide-and-seek with them.

At the intersection with the road to Paradise we were determined to locate the Red-faced Warbler. We worked the surrounding area coming across birds in ones and twos, mainly Painted Redstarts to begin with. Several Plumbeous Vireos were singing and every once in a while would show themselves as did a Hutton's Vireo. A Red-faced alighted for a second on an oak branch above us and then vanished. Up the slope Hermit Thrushes and American Robins were seen and Red-breasted Nuthatch and Mexican Chickadee could be heard calling but still no Red-faced. A Black-throated Gray was seen well and an astounding 5 Brown Creepers were all around us giving us excellent views. Then out the blue a red flash streaked across the road and perched in front of us. There he was in all his glory working his way along the branches of a young Gambel's Oak, then onto a lower pine limb and back to the oak, then over to an Agave and back again. For 5 minutes this simply stunning bird left us in awe. At Pinery Canyon we came across a male Red Crossbill high up in a spruce tree feeding on a cone. We watched as he picked it off, held it in his foot and proceeded to pick and eat each seed.

After having lunch in the scenic Chiricahua National Monument and viewing the rhyolite rock pinnacles at 7000', basically these are what remains after wind and water have eroded the surrounding rock, we headed out of the mountains and down to the desert and the Willcox Playa. It seemed as though the recent rains had filled the pond up leaving only a short and narrow stripe for shorebirds to feed on. About a dozen Western and Least Sandpipers were scurrying about as well as one Baird's. In amongst them were numerous Killdeer and a single Semi-palmated Plover, the Killdeer's smaller looking 'cousin'. A number of Wilson's Phalarope's, mostly juveniles, were on the water, though we did get to see a small group go around in circles stirring invertebrates up to the surface. We had hoped to find a variety of waterfowl, but only managed a small group of Cinnamon Teal, two Green-winged Teal, a female Shoveler and a female Greater Scaup. The stars of playa were undoubtedly the American Avocets, some of which were still with buffy-orange breeding plumage headdress as they worked the shallow edges of the pond. Dapper Black-necked Stilts, though fewer in numbers than the avocets, seemed to prefer the far side of the pond while 2 Eared (Black-necked) Grebes were diving amongst the numerous American Coots and 4 species of swallows were hawking insects over the water. Working our way around the waters edge we came across 3 Long-billed Dowitcher's and a 1st year California Gull as well as an adult Ring-billed Gull.

The journey to Tucson was rather uneventful with the exception on a Swainson's Hawk that somehow managed to avoid colliding with a semi tractor-trailer along I-10. After dinner we visited a

nearby practice range and while hordes of people were hitting balls every which way we paid attention to the bright halogen lights that drew about a dozen Lesser Nighthawks. We watched as some flew very close to us while others seemed to either play with moths or were practicing trying to catch them. Either way it was a great way to end the day.

Day 14 / Tuesday August 10: Sweetwater Wetlands; Red Rocks Cattle Pens

We had a most enjoyable couple of hours at Sweetwater Wetlands, the wastewater treatment plant in northern Tucson. We began and finished with Harris Hawks, the first being seen on our drive in and again when it perched on a bare tree branch above its nest. The gentle walk along the path took us around ponds of various depth and vegetation. Song Sparrows, Common Yellowthroats, Yellow Warblers, Great-tailed Grackles were common sights in the cattails and rushes while American Coots, Moorhens, Cinnamon Teal and 'Mexican' Mallards dotted the ponds. The lobed feet of the coot were seen well through the scope, as was the red band at the top of the moorhen's leg. Why is that there in any case? Male Ruddy Ducks with their outrageous bright blue bills were a common sight. It was nice to finally have everyone see Abert's Towhee well. Actually there were several about and one in particular was busy scratching, as all sparrows do, for seeds along the path. Arizona Desert Whiptails, often in pairs were busy working their way along the edge of the paths often disappearing into the vegetation while a wide assortment of dragonflies caught our attention. The Roseate Skimmer took top honors for being the most beautiful with it's gorgeous magenta abdomen while I was most enthralled with the Wandering Glider that seemed to be able to hover in one place for what seemed like ages.

Our final stop was to the Red Rocks cattle pens to see if John could get a better look at the Ruddy Ground Dove. Turning off the highway a White-tailed Kite caught my eye but alas we could not relocate it, possibly perching in the mesquite trees out of sight. We had better luck with the dove as a female was preening in the Palo Verde tree besides the water tank. It was wonderful ending to a superb trip that covered the varied habitats and extensive flora and fauna of this amazing part of the country.