



*Field Guides Tour Report*  
**Arizona Winter Specialties 2013**

Dec 27, 2013 to Jan 2, 2014  
Dave Stejskal

*For our tour description, itinerary, past triplists, dates, fees, and more, please [VISIT OUR TOUR PAGE](#).*



*Guide Dave Stejskal captured this great image of a Sandhill Crane in flight. It was one of over 8,000 cranes gathered at Whitewater Draw.*

I'm going to have to write a big, fat check to the weatherman for giving us such incredible weather during this very successful, short tour! I couldn't have asked for anything better. Not a drop of rain, hardly a breeze in the air, and a near-perfect temperature range made for some very comfortable birding during our week in southern Arizona. If I could only arrange for next year's trip to follow suit!

While enjoying the great winter climate here, we ended up seeing a big chunk of southern Arizona, and a bunch of great birds along the way! Starting in Phoenix -- the sixth largest city in the U.S. (when did THAT happen?) -- we sampled the wetland habitat at Gilbert Water Ranch, the bleak desert scrub west of Buckeye, extensive agriculture southwest of Phoenix, the xeric plant paradise of Boyce Thompson Arboretum east of Phoenix, and the varied man-made habitats of the Greater Phoenix area. Within all of that, we were rewarded with looks at the scarce and local Le Conte's Thrasher, a wayward male Eurasian Wigeon and Cackling Goose, a tight little group of Ross's and Snow geese, a lost Lewis's Woodpecker, colorful Rosy-faced Lovebirds, and a host of other, more common species indicative of the rich environs here.

Farther south, on our way to Tucson, we stopped for much of a day to bird the productive Santa Cruz flats area, where we found most of what we came looking for: a nice flock of wintering Mountain Plovers, bizarre-looking Crested Caracaras, a lone Prairie Falcon, and a couple of curious Burrowing Owls, not to mention that incredible swirling flock of White-throated Swifts and a lost Greater White-fronted Goose.

Basing ourselves in Tucson for the final four nights of the tour, we made forays to the Huachuca Mountains, the Sulphur Springs Valley, the San Rafael Grasslands, the canyons on the north and west sides of the Santa Rita Mountains, and Patagonia Lake. None of them disappointed, as each held their own treasures. Who can forget the thrill of seeing your lifer Sinaloa Wren taking aim at the group and then flying between us, only then to dart through a culvert to the leaf litter on the other side of the road? And the sight of thousands of Sandhill Cranes, all sounding off not infrequently while they stood in gatherings of 100, 500, or a 1000 birds at the margins of the watery basin at Whitewater Draw. Or the sight of a stunning male Elegant Trogon flying off an unseen perch only to land in plain sight for all to admire at Patagonia Lake? This trip was full of encounters like these, so read on to re-live the rest of them.

Thanks to all of you for joining me on this delightful tour to a region of the world that's very dear to my heart. I really enjoyed sharing the places and the birds that I love with all of you and hope that we can share another adventure somewhere else soon. All the best to everyone and let's hope for a wonderful, bird-filled 2014!

--Dave

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**KEYS FOR THIS LIST**

One of the following keys may be shown in brackets for individual species as appropriate: \* = heard only, I = introduced, E = endemic, N = nesting, a = austral migrant, b = boreal migrant

## BIRDS

### Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)

**GREATER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE** (*Anser albifrons*) – It was quite a surprise to see this one walk up onto the dike out in the middle of the Santa Cruz Flats right after our breathtaking flock of White-throated Swifts!

**SNOW GOOSE** (*Chen caerulescens*) – I suspect that most of the white geese that we saw out at Whitewater Draw were this species, and it was nice to see a few "Blue" Geese (dark-morph Snow Geese) mixed in. If you started birding before the late '70's (like I did), Blue Goose was considered to be a separate species from the Snow Goose. We also had a few other Snow Geese at Palo Verde and at Willcox.

**ROSS'S GOOSE** (*Chen rossii*) – Our only real look was of three adult birds with a couple of Snow Geese at Palo Verde right before lunch in Buckeye. The smaller size, tiny bill, and more rounded head were very evident when compared directly with the nearby Snow Geese. There were also a few of these out at Whitewater Draw, but they were a long way away.

**ACKLING GOOSE** (*Branta hutchinsii*) – Turns out that the tiny Canada Goose that we saw on that first afternoon at Gilbert Water Ranch was indeed this species. It's considered a rarity in AZ in winter.

**CANADA GOOSE** (*Branta canadensis*) – All of these were in the Phoenix area.

**GADWALL** (*Anas strepera*)

**EURASIAN WIGEON** (*Anas penelope*) – A visit to far n.w. Phoenix got us our looks at this vagrant wigeon. There are usually a few of these among the numbers of wintering American Wigeon each year in the Phoenix area, but they've been hard to come by this year. Great looks among the hordes of Neotropical Cormorants and Common Mergansers!

**AMERICAN WIGEON** (*Anas americana*)

**MALLARD** (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – Most of our mallards were these typical looking birds throughout our route.

**MALLARD (MEXICAN)** (*Anas platyrhynchos diazi*) – The only "Mexican" Mallards that we found this year were at Patagonia Lake on our final afternoon of the tour. These birds hybridize frequently with typical Mallards, and you see all sorts of plumage combinations here, but these birds might actually be closer genetically to Mottled Duck (another close relative to the Mallard in the s.e. U.S.).

**CINNAMON TEAL** (*Anas cyanoptera*) – A few stunning adult males were seen on the first and last days of the tour.

**NORTHERN SHOVELER** (*Anas clypeata*)

**NORTHERN PINTAIL** (*Anas acuta*)

**GREEN-WINGED TEAL (AMERICAN)** (*Anas crecca carolinensis*)

**CANVASBACK** (*Aythya valisineria*) – A single female in the Santa Cruz Flats where we saw our Mountain Plovers.

**REDHEAD** (*Aythya americana*) – A distant pair at the Santa Cruz Flats.

**RING-NECKED DUCK** (*Aythya collaris*) – Unbelievably close looks at Encanto Park in Phoenix! We still couldn't see the ring on the neck...

**LESSER SCAUP** (*Aythya affinis*)

**BLACK SCOTER** (*Melanitta americana*) – This female bird has been around on the same pond since November. Two days after we saw her, she decided to leave for good!

**BUFFLEHEAD** (*Bucephala albeola*) – A few 'Dufflebags' on Patagonia Lake on our final day of birding.

**COMMON MERGANSER** (*Mergus merganser*) – I was expecting a few of these on this trip, but not the 100's that we saw up at Arrowhead Ranch! A remarkable sight for AZ!

**RUDDY DUCK** (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) – This and the Northern Shoveler were the only two ducks that we recorded every day on the tour.

### Odontophoridae (New World Quail)

**GAMBEL'S QUAIL** (*Callipepla gambelii*) – Surprisingly few of these charismatic birds during the tour.

### Podicipedidae (Grebes)

**PIED-BILLED GREBE** (*Podilymbus podiceps*) – It was great to hear them calling from the reeds at Patagonia Lake.

### Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

**NEOTROPIC CORMORANT** (*Phalacrocorax brasilianus*) – In the not-too-distant past, you would only expect to see one or two of these birds at this season in the state - and usually only at Patagonia Lake. Now, seeing 100's in a day in the Phoenix area is pretty normal! The other Western states are soon to be overwhelmed by this species, I fear.

**DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT** (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) – Far outnumbered in the Phoenix area by the above species. It was nice to see the breeding-plumaged birds at Encanto Park - I wonder if they'll nest there?

### Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

**GREAT BLUE HERON** (*Ardea herodias*)

**GREAT EGRET** (*Ardea alba*) – The numbers we saw at Arrowhead Ranch where the Eurasian Wigeon was were really impressive. Fishing must be good!

**SNOWY EGRET** (*Egretta thula*) – While the birds we saw in the Phoenix area were normal for this season, the bird that we saw distantly at Patagonia Lake was unusual.

**CATTLE EGRET** (*Bubulcus ibis*) – I was expecting more in the Phoenix area.

**GREEN HERON** (*Butorides virescens*) – A couple of colorful adults in the Phoenix area.

**BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON** (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) – These were doing their best to hide from us on that first afternoon at the Gilbert Water Ranch.

### Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)

**WHITE-FACED IBIS** (*Plegadis chihi*) – We could even see the red eyes and reddish facial skin on some of the adults (who don't have any white in the face at this season).

Cathartidae (New World Vultures)

**BLACK VULTURE** (*Coragyps atratus*)

**TURKEY VULTURE** (*Cathartes aura*) – On this tour, Turkey Vultures only winter regularly in the Phoenix area.

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

**WHITE-TAILED KITE** (*Elanus leucurus*) – These were a beautiful distraction for us while we tromped through the grass looking for Baird's Sparrow. This species, once a mega-rarity in the state, is a regular breeder in the state in small numbers (and only since the early '80's).

**GOLDEN EAGLE** (*Aquila chrysaetos*) – Thanks to another birder (Wezil Walraven), we were able to watch this species being harassed by a Common Raven at Whitewater Draw. Thanks, Wezil!

**NORTHERN HARRIER** (*Circus cyaneus*) – It was nice to finally see one of these perched on the ground.

**SHARP-SHINNED HAWK** (*Accipiter striatus*)

**COOPER'S HAWK** (*Accipiter cooperii*)

**HARRIS'S HAWK** (*Parabuteo unicinctus*) – Our best looks were as we were leaving the Santa Cruz Flats area for our hotel in Tucson.

**RED-TAILED HAWK** (*Buteo jamaicensis*) – Man, we sure saw a bunch of Red-tails on this tour - they seemed to be everywhere. Our plumages ranged from the darkest brown (almost black) birds to extremely pale birds known as Fuertes's Red-tailed Hawk.

**FERRUGINOUS HAWK** (*Buteo regalis*) – Darn it - the only bird we ever saw was that distant soaring bird at the Santa Cruz Flats. Not a good winter for this species in s.e. AZ.

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

**SORA** (*Porzana carolina*) – If you happened to be watching, an adult bird swam across a small opening in the cattails at Patagonia Lake on our final afternoon.

**AMERICAN COOT** (*Fulica americana*)

Gruidae (Cranes)

**SANDHILL CRANE** (*Grus canadensis*) – We certainly got an eyeful - and an earful - of this one at Whitewater Draw. I figure there were easily 8000-9000 birds in the basin, with other birds flying in from the north during the entire time we were there. Quite a sight!

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

**KILLDEER** (*Charadrius vociferus*)

**MOUNTAIN PLOVER** (*Charadrius montanus*) – We had super luck with this bird at the sod farm in the Santa Cruz Flats area this year, with upwards of forty birds present on the sod during our visit. Numbers here fluctuate from year to year - and from day to day - so we were very fortunate.

Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets)

**BLACK-NECKED STILT** (*Himantopus mexicanus*) – Lots of these elegant shorebirds on our first afternoon of birding.

**AMERICAN AVOCET** (*Recurvirostra americana*) – Much scarcer than the above in winter in the state than the above stilt, we enjoyed several of these, sporting their gray winter hoods, at the Gilbert Water Ranch on the first afternoon.

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

**SPOTTED SANDPIPER** (*Actitis macularius*)

**GREATER YELLOWLEGS** (*Tringa melanoleuca*)

**LESSER YELLOWLEGS** (*Tringa flavipes*) – It was nice to see a side-by-side comparison with the above Greater Yellowlegs near Palo Verde s.w. of Phoenix. This species is quite scarce in the state during the winter months, so it was a surprise to find three of them!

**LONG-BILLED CURLEW** (*Numenius americanus*) – We found a big flock of these huge shorebirds near Palo Verde, where they seem to winter regularly now.

**LEAST SANDPIPER** (*Calidris minutilla*)

**LONG-BILLED DOWITCHER** (*Limnodromus scolopaceus*) – Lots on our first afternoon at Gilbert Water Ranch.

**WILSON'S SNIBE** (*Gallinago delicata*) – Our best was seen from the van as it sat motionless in the cut alfalfa field near Palo Verde.

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

**RING-BILLED GULL** (*Larus delawarensis*) – Several at Whitewater Draw were the only ones. Any gull in AZ other than a Ring-billed is a pretty good bird.

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

**ROCK PIGEON** (*Columba livia*) [I]

**EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE** (*Streptopelia decaocto*) – First found in the state only in 2000, this one is now everywhere! [II]

**WHITE-WINGED DOVE** (*Zenaida asiatica*) – A single bird on the wire in Elfrida north of Whitewater Draw was our only group sighting. They're very local in the state in the winter months (most are now in Mexico).

**MOURNING DOVE** (*Zenaida macroura*)

**INCA DOVE** (*Columbina inca*) – This tiny dove has experienced a dramatic decline in its Arizona population, especially in s.e. AZ., in the last two decades. No one is sure what caused the decline, but it's perhaps most noticeable in Tucson.

**RUDDY GROUND-DOVE** (*Columbina talpacoti*) – WOOHOO!! Our slow walk around the pond at Whitewater Draw yielded great looks at this recent invader from Mexico. It's awfully similar to the Common Ground-Dove (which we never saw), but the combination of a dark bill, lack of scaling on the underparts and head, and the presence of those thin black streaks on the scapular feathers all point to this one over Common.

Cuculidae (Cuckoos)

**GREATER ROADRUNNER** (*Geococcyx californianus*) – We were fortunate with this charismatic desert species with at least five of them seen well.

Tytonidae (Barn-Owls)



**BARN OWL** (*Tyto alba*) – Carrie spotted our first bird roosting in the leafless willows at Whitewater Draw.

*Strigidae (Owls)*

**GREAT HORNED OWL** (*Bubo virginianus*) – The bird we flushed from the side of the road in the Santa Cruz Flats sure was a surprise!

**BURROWING OWL** (*Athene cunicularia*) – Thanks to Melody Kehl for pointing out our first bird at the sod farm - we had to get the van positioned just right to see it well. Our next bird just down the road wasn't nearly so bashful and gave us super views!

*Apodidae (Swifts)*

**WHITE-THROATED SWIFT** (*Aeronautes saxatalis*) – WOWWW!!! I don't think I've ever seen a winter flock of these quite as large as the one we watched in the Santa Cruz Flats. I wouldn't be surprised if there were more than 1000 birds there flying above the agricultural fields. What a memorable sight!

*Trochilidae (Hummingbirds)*

**MAGNIFICENT HUMMINGBIRD** (*Eugenes fulgens*) – Our first bird, a female, was a big surprise in Huachuca Canyon away from any visible hummingbird feeders. Our other two, both males, were more expected in the winter up in Madera Canyon at the feeders.

**ANNA'S HUMMINGBIRD** (*Calypte anna*) – Typically the most common winter hummingbird species along our route.

**BROAD-BILLED HUMMINGBIRD** (*Cynanthus latirostris*) – A couple of female-plumaged birds at Boyce Thompson Arboretum were nice to see in December!

*Trogonidae (Trogons)*

**ELEGANT TROGON** (*Trogon elegans*) – YESSSS!!!! We had been told that this was around, but we started to lose hope as the afternoon progressed. Suddenly, our gorgeous adult magically appeared next to the trail, giving all fabulous views in the scope! This bird wouldn't nest in this habitat, but it seems to be a regular winterer in the Patagonia Lake area. What a great bird to finish this lovely winter season tour with!

*Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)*

**BELTED KINGFISHER** (*Megasceryle alcyon*) – Our best was the bird in the scope at Whitewater Draw.

*Picidae (Woodpeckers)*

**LEWIS'S WOODPECKER** (*Melanerpes lewis*) – I wasn't really sure how this was going to pan out, but it worked great! Seeing this beautiful montane species wintering in the palms in front of the state capitol in downtown Phoenix was really memorable!

**ACORN WOODPECKER** (*Melanerpes formicivorus*) – Especially nice views of this one at the feeders in Madera Canyon.

**GILA WOODPECKER** (*Melanerpes uropygialis*) – The default resident woodpecker in the lowlands of s. Arizona.

**YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER** (*Sphyrapicus varius*) – Just as we were about to leave the Arboretum, this vagrant sapsucker put in an appearance for us.

**RED-NAPED SAPSUCKER** (*Sphyrapicus nuchalis*) – Only a few birds here and there during the tour.

**LADDER-BACKED WOODPECKER** (*Picoides scalaris*) – The best were in the leafless willows at Patagonia Lake on our last afternoon.

**ARIZONA WOODPECKER** (*Picoides arizonae*) – After hearing a couple of these, we finally scoped a nice male pecking away in an oak near Patagonia. Formerly called the Strickland's Woodpecker.

**NORTHERN FLICKER (RED-SHAFTED)** (*Colaptes auratus cafer*) – All of ours were the old "Red-shafted" Flicker.

*Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)*

**CRESTED CARACARA** (*Caracara cheriway*) – I was getting a little nervous, but Christine finally spotted one of these on the ground next to a field in the Santa Cruz Flats after our picnic lunch. Another circuit brought out more of these for looks, with our daily total up to seven birds when it was all over. This was the last 'falcon' on our only five falcon day of the tour!

**AMERICAN KESTREL** (*Falco sparverius*)

**MERLIN** (*Falco columbarius*) – We usually get a few of these lean, mean flying & eating machines on this tour, but we had to be happy with our one bird at the Santa Cruz Flats this year.

**PEREGRINE FALCON** (*Falco peregrinus*) – A couple of these were seen quite well. Arizona was long thought of as a stronghold for this species in the U.S., especially when this bird was in serious trouble several decades ago.

**PRAIRIE FALCON** (*Falco mexicanus*) – We only had one, but it was quite a look next to the road on our way down to the Santa Cruz Flats.

*Psittacidae (Parrots)*

**ROSY-FACED LOVEBIRD** (*Agapornis roseicollis*) – The ABA officially ruled on this one about a year and a half ago, adding it to the list of 'countable' North American birds, and the only place to reliably see it in the ABA region is in Phoenix. Great looks! [I]

*Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)*

**HAMMOND'S FLYCATCHER** (*Empidonax hammondi*) – A single bird taking the sun in the early morning hours at Huachuca Canyon after we had seen the wren.

**GRAY FLYCATCHER** (*Empidonax wrightii*) – An excellent study at Patagonia Lake. Often the most common of the *Empidonax* flycatchers in winter in AZ.

**BLACK PHOEBE** (*Sayornis nigricans*) – The western U.S. counterpart of the Eastern Phoebe.

**SAY'S PHOEBE** (*Sayornis saya*) – We saw more of these than any other flycatcher along our route this year, which is pretty typical.

**VERMILION FLYCATCHER** (*Pyrocephalus rubinus*) – I can never get enough of these!

**ASH-THROATED FLYCATCHER** (*Myiarchus cinerascens*) – Linda spotted one of these at our thrasher spot west of Phoenix. Nice looks!

*Laniidae (Shrikes)*

**LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE** (*Lanius ludovicianus*) – Daily.

*Vireonidae (Vireos)*

**HUTTON'S VIREO** (*Vireo huttoni*) – This Ruby-crowned Kinglet look-alike was seen best at Florida Canyon.

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

**MEXICAN JAY** (*Aphelocoma wollweberi*) – Until recently, this one was known as the Gray-breasted Jay - after it's name was changed from Mexican Jay. I don't know why checklist committees mess with conventional names as much as they do.

**COMMON RAVEN** (*Corvus corax*) – All of the ravens that we saw on this tour looked like Commons to me.

Alaudidae (Larks)

**HORNED LARK** (*Eremophila alpestris*)

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

**TREE SWALLOW** (*Tachycineta bicolor*) – A flock of about twenty birds in Palo Verde was unusual there for the season. Normally, you might find one or two of these lingering locally.

Paridae (Chickadees and Tits)

**BRIDLED TITMOUSE** (*Baeolophus wollweberi*) – Cutest bird of the trip?

Remizidae (Penduline-Tits)

**VERDIN** (*Auriparus flaviceps*) – A common denizen of desert thornscrub throughout the lowlands of s. Arizona.

Aegithalidae (Long-tailed Tits)

**BUSHTIT** (*Psaltiriparus minimus*) – We found a big group of these as we exited the San Rafael Grasslands and headed for Patagonia. These birds are of the interior race, which has brown ear coverts and gray crowns - just the reverse of the coastal race.

Sittidae (Nuthatches)

**WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH (INTERIOR WEST)** (*Sitta carolinensis nelsoni*) – There may be a split coming up for this one soon, so you'll need to keep track of where you see them.

Certhiidae (Treecreepers)

**BROWN CREEPER** (*Certhia americana*) – The briefest of looks.

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

**ROCK WREN** (*Salpinctes obsoletus*) – On the rocks (of all places!) in Florida Canyon.

**CANYON WREN** (*Catherpes mexicanus*) – Nice views of a couple of birds at Boyce Thompson Arboretum.

**HOUSE WREN** (*Troglodytes aedon*)

**MARSH WREN** (*Cistothorus palustris*) [\*]

**BEWICK'S WREN** (*Thryomanes bewickii*) – This one is much more common in the West than it is in the East.

**CACTUS WREN** (*Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus*) – Our state bird was a little tough to come by this year, with only a few seen in Florida Canyon. Easily the largest wren in the U.S.

**SINALOA WREN** (*Thryophilus sinaloa*) – YESSSS!!!! This little waif from Mexico was first discovered at this spot in late August of this year and it's stuck around ever since - even building a nest! Thanks to Laurens Halsey for sharing this bird with our group when we arrived! This bird represents only the 3rd record for the U.S., so it was a great one to see with all of you.

Poliophtilidae (Gnatcatchers)

**BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER** (*Poliophtila caerulea*) [\*]

**BLACK-TAILED GNATCATCHER** (*Poliophtila melanura*) – Nice views of this lowland desert species at the thrasher spot west of Phoenix. The mostly dark undertail, the call, and the short bill distinguish this one from the next, with which it occurs at some sites.

**BLACK-CAPPED GNATCATCHER** (*Poliophtila nigriceps*) – Not one, but two of these rare Mexican gnatcatchers were enjoyed by the group on our last two days of the tour. The first one took some work and some luck - the 2nd just took some luck. Those short outer tail feathers, the relatively long bill, and the calls identify this one.

Regulidae (Kinglets)

**RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET** (*Regulus calendula*)

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

**WESTERN BLUEBIRD** (*Sialia mexicana*) – The birds at the water trough near the San Rafael Grasslands were particularly nice.

**TOWNSEND'S SOLITAIRE** (*Myadestes townsendi*) – Thanks to Tommy DeBardeleben for pointing this sleek thrush out to our group as we ascended the trail at Florida Canyon.

**HERMIT THRUSH** (*Catharus guttatus*) – We had plenty of these once we left the Phoenix area.

**AMERICAN ROBIN** (*Turdus migratorius*) – Only one American Robin for all of our efforts!

Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers)

**NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD** (*Mimus polyglottos*)

**BENDIRE'S THRASHER** (*Toxostoma bendirei*) – That encounter at the thrasher spot w. of Phoenix was pretty disappointing, so I was glad to spot another from the van on our way into Whitewater Draw. Very similar to the next species, but it always looks warmer in color and it often cocks its tail like a N. Mockingbird when it's on the ground (unlike Curve-billed).

**CURVE-BILLED THRASHER** (*Toxostoma curvirostre*) – Usually the most common of the thrasher species in s. Arizona.

**LE CONTE'S THRASHER** (*Toxostoma lecontei*) – WOOHOO!!!! After striking out on the west side of Salome Highway, we tried our luck north of Baseline Rd. Bingo! We all had great views of a bird perched up checking us out. The toughest of the *Toxostoma* thrashers to see in N. America.

Sturnidae (Starlings)

## **EUROPEAN STARLING** (*Sturnus vulgaris*) [I]

### Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)

**AMERICAN PIPIT** (*Anthus rubescens*) – Very few of these this year.

### Ptilonotidae (Silky-flycatchers)

**PHAINOPEPLA** (*Phainopepla nitens*) – A very handsome species that, for part of the year at least, is a mistletoe obligate.

### Peucedramidae (Olive Warbler)

**OLIVE WARBLER** (*Peucedramus taeniatus*) – One of the more pleasant surprises on this short trip was finding one of these birds in with a mixed insectivore flock at the bottom of Huachuca Canyon where we saw the Sinaloa Wren.

### Calcariidae (Longspurs and Snow Buntings)

**CHESTNUT-COLLARED LONGSPUR** (*Calcarius ornatus*) – That flyover flock really disappointed us by hunkering down in the grass on the other side of the fence, refusing to put up again. Where's a remote-control Northern Harrier when you need one? A bad longspur year this year.

### Parulidae (New World Warblers)

**ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER** (*Oreothlypis celata*) – Briefly for some at Patagonia Lake.

**COMMON YELLOWTHROAT** (*Geothlypis trichas*) [\*]

**YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER (MYRTLE)** (*Setophaga coronata coronata*) – The only Yellow-rumped Warbler that we saw at Huachuca Canyon was this form, which ought to be split again from Audubon's Warbler sometime soon.

**YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER (AUDUBON'S)** (*Setophaga coronata auduboni*) – All of the other Yellow-rumps that we saw were this Western form.

**BLACK-THROATED GRAY WARBLER** (*Setophaga nigrescens*) – Like the Orange-crowned, briefly seen by some at Patagonia Lake.

**TOWNSEND'S WARBLER** (*Setophaga townsendi*) – Nice looks at this one in the same mixed species flock with the Olive Warbler in Huachuca Canyon.

### Emberizidae (Buntings and New World Sparrows)

**GREEN-TAILED TOWHEE** (*Pipilo chlorurus*) – Several fine looks at this handsome bird.

**SPOTTED TOWHEE** (*Pipilo maculatus*) – Great looks at this split from Eastern Towhee (formerly known as Rufous-sided Towhee).

**RUFIOUS-CROWNED SPARROW** (*Aimophila ruficeps*) – A few of these got up with the Black-chinned Sparrows in Florida Canyon for some great views.

**CANYON TOWHEE** (*Melospiza fusca*) – When I started birding, this was called the Brown Towhee, which was eventually split into three species (California, Canyon, and White-throated).

**ABERT'S TOWHEE** (*Melospiza aberti*) – Great views, especially on that first afternoon at Gilbert. The World range of this one is almost entirely restricted to Arizona (the lower Colorado R. drainage).

**RUFIOUS-WINGED SPARROW** (*Peucaea carpalis*) – A quick stop for some Phainopeplas near Madera Canyon produced fine views of this local species.

**CHIPPING SPARROW** (*Spizella passerina*)

**BREWER'S SPARROW** (*Spizella breweri*) – Nicely on the road into Whitewater Draw.

**BLACK-CHINNED SPARROW** (*Spizella atrogularis*) – One of BJ's big target species was this handsome and local species, which we saw extraordinarily well in Florida Canyon. I don't think this species breeds in this spot, but later in the winter and early spring, these birds will start singing here.

**VESPER SPARROW** (*Poocetes gramineus*) – An excellent study in the San Rafael Grasslands right next to the van.

**LARK SPARROW** (*Chondestes grammacus*) – This gorgeous sparrow was only seen in the Santa Cruz Flats area.

**BLACK-THROATED SPARROW** (*Amphispiza bilineata*) – Maybe the most handsome of the myriad Arizona sparrows.

**SAGE SPARROW (INTERIOR)** (*Artemisospiza belli nevadensis*) – Sage Sparrow was just recently split into two species, the Sagebrush Sparrow and the Bell's Sparrow. This split was anticipated and it looked like the i.d. would be pretty straightforward, but no one anticipated that one of the races that we all thought was closest to nevadensis, would end up being aligned with Bell's Sparrow. Working out the i.d. of the two, since they winter together here, is proving to be rather difficult. Having said that, I'm sure that the only birds that we saw well were these Sagebrush Sparrows and not Bell's.

**LARK BUNTING** (*Calamospiza melanocorys*) – This is a particularly bad winter for this species in the region, so we were lucky to get the good look at that one winter-plumaged male that we found near Whitewater.

**SAVANNAH SPARROW** (*Passerculus sandwichensis*) – This was likely the most common sparrow out in the San Rafael Grasslands this year.

**BAIRD'S SPARROW** (*Ammodramus bairdii*) – While we didn't come up empty, our looks were pretty dismal of this scarce and local wintering species out in the grasslands. The consensus out there is that it's a poor year for Baird's Sparrow in s.e. Arizona.

**SONG SPARROW** (*Melospiza melodia*) – Much paler than what you're used to seeing.

**LINCOLN'S SPARROW** (*Melospiza lincolni*) – Nicely at the Boyce Thompson Arboretum.

**WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW (MOUNTAIN)** (*Zonotrichia leucophrys oriantha*) – We found one adult bird with other White-crowns in the Santa Cruz Flats area. In most years, this form, which breeds in the Rockies and in the Sierra Nevada, is absent from Arizona in the winter months.

**WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW (GAMBEL'S)** (*Zonotrichia leucophrys gambelii*) – Not a great year for this one, though we did see it every day.

**DARK-EYED JUNCO** (*Junco hyemalis*) – Almost all of the birds we saw on this tour were the "Gray-headed" Junco, which breeds in the s. Rockies. I saw at least one male "Oregon" Junco at the feeders in Madera Canyon.

**YELLOW-EYED JUNCO** (*Junco phaeonotus*) – The bird at the feeder in Madera Canyon was a nice surprise there.

### Cardinalidae (Cardinals and Allies)

**HEPATIC TANAGER** (*Piranga flava*) – Another nice find at the feeders in Madera Canyon was this colorful male. Most of the Hepatic Tanagers that

breed in s. Arizona winter in Mexico.

**NORTHERN CARDINAL** (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) – Brighter red, longer crested, and longer tailed than birds in the East.

**PYRRHULOXIA** (*Cardinalis sinuatus*) – Ah, yes. The elusive Paradoxical. We finally caught up with this beauty in Florida Canyon.

#### Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)

**RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD** (*Agelaius phoeniceus*)

**EASTERN MEADOWLARK (LILIAN'S)** (*Sturnella magna lilianae*) – It appeared that all of the meadowlarks that we saw in the San Rafael Grasslands were this distinctive form of the Eastern Meadowlark. There's still talk of splitting this one from Eastern.

**WESTERN MEADOWLARK** (*Sturnella neglecta*) – Darker overall, with less white in the tail than Eastern here.

**YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD** (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*) – One of the early highlights of the trip was seeing that huge flock of blackbirds and cowbirds, most of which appeared to be this striking species, wheeling over the agricultural field near Palo Verde.

**BREWER'S BLACKBIRD** (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*) – Memorable looks at the feedlot near Santa Cruz Flats.

**GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE** (*Quiscalus mexicanus*) – This one was actually unknown in the state prior to the 1930's. Now, it's everywhere in the state and it continues to expand to the north and west.

**BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD** (*Molothrus ater*)

#### Fringillidae (Siskins, Crossbills, and Allies)

**HOUSE FINCH** (*Haemorhous mexicanus*)

**LESSER GOLDFINCH** (*Spinus psaltria*) – Our only goldfinch this year, sadly.

#### Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

**HOUSE SPARROW** (*Passer domesticus*) **[1]**

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## **MAMMALS**

**DESERT COTTONTAIL** (*Sylvilagus audubonii*) – At the Gilbert Water Ranch on our first afternoon. Longer eared than other cottontails.

**ROCK SQUIRREL** (*Spermophilus variegatus*) – A single deep in the vegetation at Boyce Thompson Arboretum.

**ROUND-TAILED GROUND SQUIRREL** (*Spermophilus tereticaudus*) – Several of these very plain squirrels out in the Santa Cruz Flats.

**ARIZONA GRAY SQUIRREL** (*Sciurus arizonensis*) – These were simply causing trouble at the feeders in Madera Canyon.

**ARIZONA COTTON RAT** (*Sigmodon arizonae*) – We spied a couple of these in the brushy undergrowth at the Gilbert Water Ranch on our first afternoon.

**COYOTE** (*Canis latrans*) – If you were watching the road as we left Tucson on the final morning, then you may have seen this one cross the highway in front of us.

**WHITE-TAILED DEER** (*Odocoileus virginianus*) – These aren't the nuisance here that they are in the East and Midwest.

**PRONGHORN** (*Antilocapra americana*) – Seen by Carrie in the grasslands outside of Sonoita on our final morning.

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## **ADDITIONAL COMMENTS**

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**Totals for the tour: 170 bird taxa and 8 mammal taxa**