



*Field Guides Tour Report*

**New Mexico: Birding the Land of Enchantment 2020**

Jan 18, 2020 to Jan 25, 2020

Doug Gochfeld

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



*A happy group we were, as we stood vigil overlooking the Rio Grande at the end of our week exploring the Land of Enchantment. It was another in a long line of breathtaking landscapes that followed us through the week. Photo by guide Doug Gochfeld.*

The Land of Enchantment is an entirely appropriate name for New Mexico, and for a good many reasons. The most obvious reason is the litany of jaw-dropping, awe-inspiring, breathtaking, spectacular, and “insert-any other superlative” landscapes. From the endless native grasslands to the high desert habitat that flourishes in the mountain canyons, to the impressive mountains themselves, standing sentinel, shoes covered in pinyon-juniper slopes, and robed in bands of ponderosa pine ascending to spruce and fir, over the landscape. From the starkly-cut mesas, with partially frozen waterfalls careening down over their edges in some places, to the mighty Rio Grande, the state’s beating heart, which manifests as its most crucial artery, running New Mexico’s distance from north to south. Anywhere you go in New Mexico, you’re liable to say “wow, look at that!” The enchantment doesn’t end there though, what with a richly fascinating (and old) culture, enchanting architecture that fits perfectly into its enchanted landscape, a unique and exciting culinary tradition and, of course, a fine collection of birds.

Our exploration of the state began in its heart: Albuquerque. We kicked off with a nice round of New Mexican food at a long time local mainstay, and then got down to the business of birding. Our first day saw us cover a great variety of habitat, from the desert mesa all the way up to the highest conifer-laden peak, and from such desert icons as Prairie Falcon, Sagebrush Sparrow, and Rock Wren, to the high mountain specialist Rosy-Finches, and taking a detour to the mid-elevations and Pinyon-Juniper habitats, where hordes of Red-breasted Nuthatches and a pair of Mountain Bluebirds showed well. The next day was the beginning of our trek to the south, but the day wouldn’t be one lost to travel- we punctuated our miles with some excellent sightings along the way. The cold desert landscape at Embudito Canyon gave way to the agricultural landscape of the Estancia Valley, complete with a flock of 150 or more Chihuahuan Ravens, a herd of 52 (!) Pronghorn, and we began to see good numbers of Ferruginous Hawks. As we made our way west and through some excellent native grassland the Ferruginous Hawk parade continued, and we were also treated to looks at Loggerhead Shrike and Prairie Falcon, with our best views of the latter for the tour coming right alongside the road. We ended the day watching hundreds of Sandhill Cranes fly in to roost and settle in for the night on a pond, amid a mix of bugling and squeaking (the immature cranes have a very different call than the well-known typical adult bugle).

Our exploration of the lands south of Bosque del Apache took us down to Elephant Butte Reservoir (at one point the largest man-made irrigation reservoir), and even south of Caballo Lake. Clark’s Grebes side-by-side with their Western Grebe counterparts, a nice comparison of gulls including an

adult Mew Gull, a nice experience with the charismatic Bridled Titmouse (it just sneaks over the border from Arizona into New Mexico) and Acorn Woodpeckers, and a jaw-dropping episode with over a thousand Yellow-headed Blackbirds mixed in with large numbers of European Starlings and other icterids were some of the highlights. The blackbirds provided bright yellow ornamentation as if they were decorating Christmas trees and when they would take part in the wheeling flocks of birds foraging in the fields they added the spice of yellow heads and white wing flashes amidst the otherwise black murmurations. We finished off the day with a thrasher hat trick, seeing Crissal, Sage, and Curve-billed Thrasher all within a tiny span of time and space, before spending another cloud-obscured sunset watching the cranes come in at the Bosque.

We finished off our southern birding around the Bosque del Apache NWR. We started with a dawn vigil where we bore witness to an excellent spectacle of Snow Geese and Ross's Geese exploding into flight, and then visited the visitor's center's feeders before taking a spin through the auto loop on the refuge. After a lovely and efficient lunch in Socorro we made our way north towards the state capitol of Santa Fe, en route seeing another Prairie Falcon, enjoying a nice comparison of Cackling and Canada Geese, and having a memorable encounter with a couple of Air Force cargo planes and helicopters participating in mid-air refueling drills over the desert. We ended this varied day with another dive into some excellent classic New Mexican cuisine at a stalwart of Santa Fe's local food scene.

The final two days were spent birding around the "Atomic City" of Los Alamos, exploring a bit of Santa Fe's museum-and-arts-rich culture, and then working our way down through Albuquerque. We had a magical morning in Los Alamos surrounded by Townsend's Solitaires and Red Crossbills, with Juniper Titmice, Cassin's Finches, Evening Grosbeaks, and Pygmy Nuthatch keeping us company in turn, and finally getting an exclamation point in the form of a boldly-patterned male Williamson's Sapsucker! Albuquerque produced a fine variety of waterfowl arrayed in their breeding finery at absurdly close range, a flock of Neotropical Cormorants with one of their Double-crested cousins looking very out of place in the midst of its dwarfed congeners, and a continuing local rarity in the form of an American Dipper, which delighted us with the antics that you can only get from a dipper!

It was a splendid week exploring this landscape that I have come to love so much, and it was made all the better by the company of not just the birds but all of you who accompanied me. Thanks for helping to fill this week with much enchantment indeed, and here's to our next encounter somewhere on this bird-laden planet of ours!

-Doug

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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

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## BIRDS

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

**SNOW GOOSE** (*Anser caerulescens*) – Our most awe-inspiring spectacle at BdA was when the white geese exploded off of the ponds at Bosque del Apache in the morning, about half an hour after they had flown in as one giant bunch thousands strong!

**ROSS'S GOOSE** (*Anser rossii*) – In addition to thousands of Snow Geese in the big collection of white geese mentioned just above, were over a thousand of their diminutive, and adorable, congeners. It was great to have such an easy side-by-side comparison of the full range of variation of both of these species.

**GREATER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE** (*Anser albifrons*) – A very worn immature was mixed into the big group of white geese that came in on our morning at BdA, as well as a group of ~18 just south of Albuquerque. The one at BdA seemed to be associating with a young Blue Goose, which was interesting.

**CACKLING GOOSE** (*Branta hutchinsii*) – Good numbers of these diminutive white-cheeked geese around the outskirts of Albuquerque.

**CANADA GOOSE** (*Branta canadensis*) – Plenty of these in plenty of places.

**TUNDRA SWAN (WHISTLING)** (*Cygnus columbianus columbianus*) – A local rarity, we took some leisurely scope views of this handsome swan of the north as it fed out in the open at Bosque del Apache.

**WOOD DUCK** (*Aix sponsa*) – Excellent point blank views of this always-delightful duck in Albuquerque.

**NORTHERN SHOVELER** (*Spatula clypeata*) – Perhaps the most common duck at Bosque del Apache NWR.

**GADWALL** (*Mareca strepera*) – A handful of these scattered around the vicinity of BdA.

**AMERICAN WIGEON** (*Mareca americana*) – A large contingent at Caballo Dairy included at least two individuals with creamy cheeks that were virtually the same color as that "bald" pate of theirs. This morph is colloquially known as "Storm Wigeon", and it was a neat bird to pick out amongst the throngs.

**MALLARD** (*Anas platyrhynchos platyrhynchos*) – Indeed.

**MALLARD X MEXICAN DUCK (HYBRID)** (*Anas platyrhynchos x Anas diazi*) – A very Mexican Duck-like bird in Albuquerque had a green tinge on the head and recurved upper tail feathers, both signs of Mallard ancestry somewhere along the line.

**NORTHERN PINTAIL** (*Anas acuta*) – One of the most common species of duck at BdA.

**GREEN-WINGED TEAL (AMERICAN)** (*Anas crecca carolinensis*) – Liberally scattered around Bosque del Apache.

**CANVASBACK** (*Aythya valisineria*) – We saw a few of these at Bosque del Apache, but had incomparable views (including swimming around with Wood Ducks!) on our final afternoon in Albuquerque.

**RING-NECKED DUCK** (*Aythya collaris*) – Excellent looks at both Caballo Dairy and in Albuquerque, where we got to see the purplish rings around the necks for which they are so named.

**GREATER SCAUP** (*Aythya marila*) – The rarer of the two species of scaup in this region in the winter; we unexpectedly saw a female on our final afternoon of birding in Albuquerque.

**LESSER SCAUP** (*Aythya affinis*) – The more expected species of scaup in New Mexico in the winter, though we still didn't have many. In addition to a few in Albuquerque, there was one with the Ring-necked Ducks at Caballo Dairy.

**BUFFLEHEAD** (*Bucephala albeola*) – Good numbers at Bosque del Apache.

**COMMON GOLDENEYE** (*Bucephala clangula*) – A female at Bosque del Apache was swimming very close to shore, and then shortly after we encountered it, it flew off towards one of the deeper impoundments.



**COMMON MERGANSER** (*Mergus merganser*) – Four drakes were on one of the deeper bodies of water on our first evening on the auto loop at BdA, and then we had a single drake nearby the next day.

**RUDDY DUCK** (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) – A whole lot of these cute and charismatic stiff-tails were doing their diving business on various parts of the BdA refuge.

*Odontophoridae (New World Quail)*

**GAMBEL'S QUAIL** (*Callipepla gambelii*) – Great views at Embudito Canyon in Albuquerque, and then again around the visitor's center at BdA.

*Podicipedidae (Grebes)*

**PIED-BILLED GREBE** (*Podilymbus podiceps*) – We first encountered the species at Elephant Butte Lake, but then also ran into them at BdA and in Albuquerque.

**WESTERN GREBE** (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*) – A great experience with this species, with point-blank views and a nice audiological display, and in fairly close proximity to the next species, for an excellent comparison.

**CLARK'S GREBE** (*Aechmophorus clarkii*) – Elephant Butte Reservoir proved to be the perfect setting to enjoy close comparisons of Clark's Grebes, with their bright yellow-orange bills, extensively pale faces, and salted white flanks, to the very closely related Western Grebes, with their more muted color and contrast palette.

*Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)*

**ROCK PIGEON** (*Columba livia*) – Plenty around urban areas, especially Albuquerque. [I]

**EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE** (*Streptopelia decaocto*) – Scattered everywhere, from urban Albuquerque to the rural ag-land of the Estancia Valley, where they are the most common columbid. [I]

**WHITE-WINGED DOVE** (*Zenaida asiatica*) – These were widely distributed throughout our route, with the highest numbers being in Albuquerque and at the BdA feeders.

**MOURNING DOVE** (*Zenaida macroura*) – A few here and there, mostly around BdA.

*Cuculidae (Cuckoos)*

**GREATER ROADRUNNER** (*Geococcyx californianus*) – The day after watching a cooperative one upon our arrival at Percha Dam, we saw two very nicely at BdA, including one that briefly basked in the sun by facing away, pulling its wings down and fluffing its feathers up to expose the dark feathers and skin beneath for greater heat absorption. Nature in action!

*Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)*

**AMERICAN COOT** (*Fulica americana*) – A few scattered around BdA and Albuquerque.

*Gruidae (Cranes)*

**SANDHILL CRANE** (*Antigone canadensis*) – One of the main attractions of Bosque del Apache in the winter. We saw hundreds of these during each of our days in the area, including several experiences with many birds cavorting at point blank range. The majority of the thousands of cranes on the refuge during our time were in the closed northern part of the refuge, so we had to be content to see those at a distance. Luckily, the hundreds we did experience at close range provided a great experience on their own.

*Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)*

**KILLDEER** (*Charadrius vociferus*) – A handful of these around BdA.

*Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)*

**LONG-BILLED DOWITCHER** (*Limnodromus scolopaceus*) – Three of these were on a mudflat on our second evening visit to BdA.

**SPOTTED SANDPIPER** (*Actitis macularius*) – Percha Dam (indeed on the dam itself!).

**GREATER YELLOWLEGS** (*Tringa melanoleuca*) – A few of these scattered around BdA.

*Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)*

**MEW GULL (AMERICAN)** (*Larus canus brachyrhynchus*) – We lucked into an adult roosting on the tires off of the main marina at Elephant Butte Reservoir. This a rarity in the state, though roughly annual in the Elephant Butte/Caballo Lake area.

**RING-BILLED GULL** (*Larus delawarensis*) – Thousands on our day trip to Elephant Butte, Caballo Dairy, and surrounds.

**HERRING GULL** (*Larus argentatus*) – One adult in with the Ring-billed Gulls at Elephant Butte. In fact, it was right next to the Mew Gull, so that we had a great comparison of three species of white-headed gulls lined up in a row, providing a nice teachable moment.

*Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)*

**NEOTROPIC CORMORANT** (*Phalacrocorax brasilianus*) – At least one at Elephant Butte, way in the distance with the Double-crested Cormorants, and then the roles were reverse in Albuquerque, where there were at least nine of these at one site, in comparison to one interloping Double-crested Cormorant.

**DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT** (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) – The expected cormorant species at Elephant Butte, we saw around 20 of these way in the distance across the lake, but then we had an unexpected one at very close range in Albuquerque, where they are rare in the winter.

*Pelecanidae (Pelicans)*

**AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN** (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*) – A nice surprise at Elephant Butte Reservoir were three of these behemoths, one of which was quite close and somehow managing to hide its massive figure amidst the flooded vegetation among which it was floating.

*Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)*

**GREAT BLUE HERON** (*Ardea herodias*) – A few scattered around BdA.

**BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON** (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) – One juvenile at the Tingley fishing lake.

*Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)*

**GOLDEN EAGLE** (*Aquila chrysaetos*) – We saw one on a utility pole while driving back along the interstate from Elephant Butte (but we couldn't stop), and another made a brief appearance over Water Canyon a couple of days later.

**NORTHERN HARRIER** (*Circus hudsonius*) – Pretty common around BdA, and then one while driving out of White Rock.

**COOPER'S HAWK** (*Accipiter cooperii*) – Perched in a few places, almost always adjacent to bird feeders!

**BALD EAGLE** (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) – The ones at BdA were to be expected, but the immature circling around the entrance to Water Canyon was a bit of a surprise.

**RED-TAILED HAWK** (*Buteo jamaicensis*) – The variety of different colors and patterns on the Red-tailed Hawks we encountered during the tour was a real treat, especially to those from the east, where Red-tailed come in just one flavor for the most part.

**FERRUGINOUS HAWK** (*Buteo regalis*) – Ferruginous Hawk is the regal buteo indeed, and we had very good experiences with perhaps a dozen individuals on the day we drove down from Albuquerque to Socorro.

*Picidae (Woodpeckers)*

**WILLIAMSON'S SAPSUCKER** (*Sphyrapicus thyroideus*) – A bold, bright male Williamson's Sapsucker was the big punctuation mark on an already splendid morning of birding in Pueblo Canyon.

**ACORN WOODPECKER** (*Melanerpes formicivorus*) – It was off to Animas Creek for a couple of gregarious groups of these enthusiastically charismatic woodpeckers.

**DOWNY WOODPECKER** (*Dryobates pubescens*) – Water Canyon.

**LADDER-BACKED WOODPECKER** (*Dryobates scalaris*) – Excellent views of at least three of these together early on in our walk in Embudito Canyon.

**HAIRY WOODPECKER** (*Dryobates villosus*) – As this visually distinctive Rocky Mountain taxon is restricted to conifers, we saw it at Sandia Crest, Pueblo Canyon, and Water Canyon.

**NORTHERN FLICKER (RED-SHAFTED)** (*Colaptes auratus cafer*) – Scattered throughout our tour route.

*Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)*

**AMERICAN KESTREL** (*Falco sparverius*) – Around BdA.

**MERLIN (PRAIRIE)** (*Falco columbarius richardsonii*) – One of these ripped through Caballo Dairy, putting the blackbirds and seagulls all into a tizzy.

**PRAIRIE FALCON** (*Falco mexicanus*) – Prairie Falcon can be a bit of a ghost, so when we found one on our first morning of birding around Albuquerque we were pretty happy. We then found one on each of the next three days, for a very excellent count of four individuals!

*Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)*

**BLACK PHOEBE** (*Sayornis nigricans*) – We saw one very well at Percha Dam, and also had one at Shining River.

**SAY'S PHOEBE** (*Sayornis saya*) – The bird at Embudito Canyon was a mild surprise, and then we had a few more around BdA.

*Laniidae (Shrikes)*

**LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE** (*Lanius ludovicianus*) – A couple were on wires during our trip from Albuquerque to Socorro, and we had another along the road the next day.

*Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)*

**STELLER'S JAY** (*Cyanocitta stelleri*) – The bold and bright jay of the upper reaches of the mountains of the southwest, we encountered these great birds at Sandia Crest and around Los Alamos.

**WOODHOUSE'S SCRUB-JAY (WOODHOUSE'S)** (*Aphelocoma woodhouseii nevadae*) – Good experiences with several birds at Embudito Canyon.

**AMERICAN CROW** (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) – Almost every day.

**CHIHUAHUA RAVEN** (*Corvus cryptoleucus*) – We had a scattered few individuals at Caballo Dairy, BdA, and Percha Dam, but our very good experience was the big flock of in excess of 150 individuals in the Estancia Valley, including scope views and comparisons with a couple of nearby and greatly outnumbered Common Ravens.

**COMMON RAVEN** (*Corvus corax*) – We got a BINGO with this one, seeing it on every birding day of the tour, and in habitats ranging from open desert around BdA to the montane conifer forests around 10,000 feet up.

*Paridae (Tits, Chickadees, and Titmice)*

**BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE** (*Poecile atricapillus*) – Only in Albuquerque along the Rio Grande, where this species is the default of the two chickadee species that occur in the area.

**MOUNTAIN CHICKADEE** (*Poecile gambeli*) – Excellent views at Sandia Crest and Water Canyon.

**BRIDLED TITMOUSE** (*Baeolophus wollweberi vandeveneri*) – Our main target at Animas Creek, and after some titmouse-less minutes we ultimately connected in a big way, with great views of a couple of these in a low bush around knee-level.

**JUNIPER TITMOUSE** (*Baeolophus ridgwayi*) – We found a pair of these pinyon-juniper habitat specialists just as we were leaving Pueblo Canyon.

*Alaudidae (Larks)*

**HORNED LARK** (*Eremophila alpestris*) – We crossed paths with surprisingly few of these during our trip through the Estancia Valley.

*Aegithalidae (Long-tailed Tits)*

**BUSHTIT (INTERIOR)** (*Psaltriparus minimus plumbeus*) – A flock of 12-15 were in Pueblo Canyon.

*Regulidae (Kinglets)*

**RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET** (*Regulus calendula*) – Animas Creek, Pueblo Canyon and Shining River.

*Sittidae (Nuthatches)*

**RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH** (*Sitta canadensis*) – This species' distribution is closely tied to conifers in this region, and we saw that borne out in both of our experiences with the species. In addition to having these amid the nuthatch trio around Los Alamos, we had perhaps as many as 15(!) individuals around Sulphur Canyon in the Sandias.

**WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH (INTERIOR WEST)** (*Sitta carolinensis nelsoni*) – One or two of these were visiting the feeders at Sandia Crest, and then we also encountered them around Los Alamos, including in the presence of both of our other species of nuthatches.

**PYGMY NUTHATCH** (*Sitta pygmaea*) – They put on a good show at Pueblo Canyon, and then a great show at Water Canyon as part of the three-species-of-nuthatch-in-a-single-tree event!

*Troglodytidae (Wrens)*

**ROCK WREN** (*Salpinctes obsoletus*) – Most Rock Wrens move a bit to the south for the winter, so they tend to be scarcer around the high desert during the winter. Fortunately we had good extended views of this iconic bird of the desert southwest as it poked around its typical rocky habitat on our very first birding excursion around Albuquerque (a later encounter around Elephant Butte was not as satisfying).

**MARSH WREN** (*Cistothorus palustris*) – A couple of these were skulking around the base of the ramp up to the Dabbler/Diver deck at BdA.

**BEWICK'S WREN** (*Thryomanes bewickii*) – One showed fairly well but was overshadowed by the Bridled Titmice at Animas Creek, and then Lois had one the next day at the refuge.

#### Cinclidae (Dippers)

**AMERICAN DIPPER** (*Cinclus mexicanus*) – A picture perfect culmination our targets was the American Dipper that was spending the winter along the canal at the Shining River bosque trails adjacent to the Rio Grande in Albuquerque. We got to see it frolic in the stream in all of its dippery glory, running this way and that UNDER the surface all the while performing its signature up-and-down bobbing.

#### Sturnidae (Starlings)

**EUROPEAN STARLING** (*Sturnus vulgaris*) – Seen most days, but we did manage to miss it on our birding day around Los Alamos. [I]

#### Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers)

**CURVE-BILLED THRASHER** (*Toxostoma curvirostre*) – Point blank views at Embudito Canyon, and then again at Rock Canyon.

**CRISSAL THRASHER** (*Toxostoma crissale*) – Crissal Thrasher can be a really difficult bird to get a good look (or any look) at. After a frustrating experience at Embudito Canyon, we had a great time with one on our arrival evening at Bosque del Apache. Of course, when it rains it pours, so the next day we had another great experience with at least TWO individuals down at Elephant Butte Reservoir. We got to watch them chase each other around their desert habitat and then had scope views of a close singing bird which we ended up walking away from while it was still singing in the open!

**SAGE THRASHER** (*Oreoscoptes montanus*) – Another great thrasher experience was the one we had with a Sage Thrasher bathing, seemingly heedless of our proximity to it, in a freshly produced rain puddle adjacent to Elephant Butte Reservoir.

#### Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

**WESTERN BLUEBIRD** (*Sialia mexicana*) – We saw these in several locations through the week, but our most memorable encounter was certainly on our first afternoon in the foothills of the Sandias.

**MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD** (*Sialia currucoides*) – Great comparison views of a pair with neighboring Western Bluebirds in the lowlands near the Sandias, and then a small flock in White Rock which included a couple of males in their full ethereal blue dress.

**TOWNSEND'S SOLITAIRE** (*Myadestes townsendi*) – A fantastic showing by several of these sleek, understatedly elegant thrushes at Pueblo Canyon.

**AMERICAN ROBIN** (*Turdus migratorius*) – Most common around Pueblo Canyon

#### Bombycillidae (Waxwings)

**CEDAR WAXWING** (*Bombycilla cedrorum*) – A flock of these flew over while we were bluebirding in the shadow of the Sandias on our first afternoon.

#### Ptilionotidae (Silky-flycatchers)

**PHAINOPEPLA** (*Phainopepla nitens*) – We had very good views of this mistletoe-obligate species which is the only member of the Silky-Flycatchers to call the USA home.

#### Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

**HOUSE SPARROW** (*Passer domesticus*) – Scattered here and there in settled areas, including the ag-land of the Estancia Valley. [I]

#### Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)

**AMERICAN PIPIT** (*Anthus rubescens*) – A huge flock came in while we were watching the river just downstream of the dam at Percha Dam. They swirled around and most of the birds dropped into the rocky river itself, where they energetically foraged among the small rocks that make up this dam-adjacent part of the river.

#### Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies)

**EVENING GROSBEAK** (*Coccothraustes vespertinus*) – Another nice surprise was a small group of these finches wielding their hefty bills that came in to join us while we were already in solitaire and crossbill heaven at Pueblo Canyon.

**GRAY-CROWNED ROSY-FINCH (HEPBURN'S)** (*Leucosticte tephrocotis littoralis*) – While we expect to see dozens of rosy-finches, we did NOT expect to see as many Hepburn's Rosy-Finches as we did. They made up perhaps half of the Gray-crowneds, and perhaps a quarter of the overall total of rosy-finches. Not bad for a taxon that spends much of its life in the Cascades of the northwest. The big gray cheek patches on these made them stand out very obviously in the flock.

**GRAY-CROWNED ROSY-FINCH (GRAY-CROWNED)** (*Leucosticte tephrocotis tephrocotis*) – A good number of these were mixed into the rosy-finches visiting the feeders at Sandia Crest.

**BLACK ROSY-FINCH** (*Leucosticte atrata*) – Black Rosy-Finches made up about 50% of the flock of rosy-finches atop the Sandias, and we had some real stellar looks at this stately finch.

**BROWN-CAPPED ROSY-FINCH** (*Leucosticte australis*) – The hardest of the rosy-finches to pin down this year was the USA endemic Brown-capped, though we did all get nice views of a couple of individuals on a couple of visits to the feeders by mobs of rosy-finches.

**HOUSE FINCH** (*Haemorhous mexicanus*) – Plenty encountered in our travels, and they were even doing quite a bit of singing as if in anticipation of spring.

**CASSIN'S FINCH** (*Haemorhous cassinii*) – A few of these were around Los Alamos, including a couple of very vocal singing males.

**RED CROSSBILL** (*Loxia curvirostra*) – We had a good study of a few Type 2 (Ponderosa Pine) Red Crossbills during our idyllic morning session in Pueblo Canyon.

**PINE SISKIN** (*Spinus pinus*) – A couple of flyover encounters, but none perched. Not a big year for irruptive finches in the lowlands, or the region in general.

**LESSER GOLDFINCH** (*Spinus psaltria*) – Elephant Butte Reservoir and Bosque del Apache.

**AMERICAN GOLDFINCH** (*Spinus tristis*) – Percha Dam and Bosque del Apache. The latter location gave us some very nice side-by-side comparisons between American Goldfinch and Lesser Goldfinch.

*Passerellidae (New World Sparrows)*

**DARK-EYED JUNCO** (*Junco hyemalis*) – Widespread.

**DARK-EYED JUNCO (OREGON)** (*Junco hyemalis montanus*) – We encountered this widespread western junco taxon in most of our places with junco flocks in the lowlands.

**DARK-EYED JUNCO (PINK-SIDED)** (*Junco hyemalis mearnsi*) – Many of our lowland juncos were of this taxon.

**DARK-EYED JUNCO (GRAY-HEADED)** (*Junco hyemalis caniceps*) – In their normal coniferous habitat at Sandia Crest and Pueblo Canyon.

**WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW (GAMBEL'S)** (*Zonotrichia leucophrys gambelii*) – One of, if not the most common species of sparrow in our travels.

**WHITE-THROATED SPARROW** (*Zonotrichia albicollis*) – A few of these were coming to the feeders at BdA, which is likely the single most reliable spot in the region for this eastern species, occurring here at the western edge of its range.

**SAGEBRUSH SPARROW** (*Artemisiospiza nevadensis*) – A great experience with a troop of these often skulky birds on our first morning of birding! This taxon was elevated to full species status a few years ago, when Sage Sparrow was split up into two species (the Bell's Sparrow complex, and the sagebrush habitat specialist Sagebrush Sparrow).

**SONG SPARROW** (*Melospiza melodia*) – Fairly widespread, especially in brushy habitats near water.

**LINCOLN'S SPARROW** (*Melospiza lincolni*) – At least one of these was among the Song Sparrows in Pueblo Canyon.

**CANYON TOWHEE** (*Melospiza fusca*) – We encountered these in several places, with good views in Albuquerque and Los Alamos, where we even had one drinking the morning condensation off of the top of our van!

**RUFIOUS-CROWNED SPARROW** (*Aimophila ruficeps*) – Our first morning of birding produced a couple of very cooperative individuals of this species.

**SPOTTED TOWHEE** (*Pipilo maculatus*) – Bosque del Apache hosted several of these, especially around the feeders, and we had others in the north, including at Pueblo Canyon.

*Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)*

**YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD** (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*) – We were more-than-pleasantly surprised to be greeted by huge numbers of Yellow-headed Blackbirds when we visited Caballo Dairy. We ended up estimating at least 1,200 individuals, and they were outnumbered at the site perhaps only by European Starlings and maybe Ring-billed Gulls.

**WESTERN MEADOWLARK** (*Sturnella neglecta*) – In the southern part of our route we encountered these in several locations.

**RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD** (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) – Large numbers at Caballo Dairy and at BdA, most of which were males.

**BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD** (*Molothrus ater*) – A handful in the mass of icterids and starlings at Caballo Dairy.

**BREWER'S BLACKBIRD** (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*) – We had these in a few places, including small numbers in the Estancia Valley and a big group just outside Caballo Dairy.

*Parulidae (New World Warblers)*

**YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER (MYRTLE) X YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER (AUDUBON'S) (INTERGRADE)** (*Setophaga coronata coronata* x *Setophaga coronata auduboni*) – One seen briefly at Percha Dam, giving an intermediate "chip" call and having a mostly plain off-white throat, but with a tinge of yellow, and more than a hint of the Myrtle Warbler throat pattern.

**YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER (AUDUBON'S)** (*Setophaga coronata auduboni*) – A few of these around Albuquerque, but sparser than normal.

*Cardinalidae (Cardinals and Allies)*

**PYRRHULOXIA** (*Cardinalis sinuatus*) – A few folks connected with this species at the BdA visitor's center, but a Cooper's Hawk was standing watch over the feeders for much of our time there, so we didn't get any repeat performances from many of the songbirds that had been visiting the feeders upon our arrival.

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## MAMMALS

**EASTERN COTTONTAIL** (*Sylvilagus floridanus*) – These look virtually identical to the more widespread-in-the-region Desert Cottontail, but they tend to favor the riparian habitats around BdA.

**DESERT COTTONTAIL** (*Sylvilagus audubonii*) – Scattered here and there around the arid habitats of the I-25 corridor through which we traveled.

**BLACK-TAILED JACKRABBIT** (*Lepus californicus*) – Our best views of this huge bunny were a couple of these in close proximity on our very first birding excursion of the tour, on the outskirts of Albuquerque.

**CLIFF CHIPMUNK** (*Tamias dorsalis*) – At least one of these was moving about the boulders below the overlook at White Rock.

**ROCK SQUIRREL** (*Spermophilus variegatus*) – One of these was perched on the edge of a large boulder on a ridge above Embudito Canyon, seemingly waiting for, and then basking in, the first direct rays of winter sunlight to make it over the mountains.

**ABERT'S SQUIRREL** (*Sciurus aberti*) – A regional specialty, we saw a couple of these big, pointy-eared squirrels in the lower reaches of the Sandias. Those elf-like ears make for a very distinctive animal.

**RED SQUIRREL** (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*) – A couple of these were at high elevations, notably with one gorging itself on the feeder at Sandia Crest.

**COYOTE** (*Canis latrans*) – A Coyote was stalking across the grassland at the edge of the pools that hundreds of Sandhill Cranes were roosting in at Bosque del Apache on our first evening with the cranes.

**NORTHERN RACCOON** (*Procyon lotor*) – One was scurrying down the street in downtown Santa Fe as we returned from dinner on our first evening in town!

**MULE DEER** (*Odocoileus hemionus*) – A couple of sightings of this big, brawny deer around the wildlife drive at Bosque del Apache, including a group lounging in the shade of the bosque and a big stag who had us waiting as it proudly crossed the road.

**PRONGHORN** (*Antilocapra americana*) – A herd of a whopping 52 individuals of this staple of the American Southwest were shimmering off in the distance in the Estancia Valley.

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## ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

**Totals for the tour: 125 bird taxa and 11 mammal taxa**