

Trip Report — New Mexico: Birding the Land of Enchantment 2026

January 31-February 7, 2026 with Sam Wilson



Completely muted in plumage, a fieldmark in itself, Juniper Titmouse is a range-restricted species of the intermountain west and makes up for its plain plumage with a spunky attitude. Photo by guide Sam Wilson.

New Mexico is a land of convergence, and much of its curious history, habitats, and culture can be experienced along the north-south corridor at the center of the state, from Santa Fe to Albuquerque and points south toward the borderlands. While our primary focus was the region's birdlife, we also enjoyed varied habitats, natural monuments, and cultural sites along the way.



We saw two brilliant Vermilion Flycatchers in the same grassy patch at Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge. Photo by participant Dan Blower.

Weather was mild and sunny throughout, and though the birding was generally excellent, we seemed to have missed the bulk of the Sandhill Cranes. Refuge staff reported that, due to unusually warm conditions, the cranes had departed in large numbers a little earlier than usual this year. Birding highlights included incredible concentrations of Snow Geese at Bosque del Apache, all three North American Rosy-Finches at Sandia Crest, three species of thrashers, and a number of desert and mountain specialties found throughout the state. Notable winter highlights included Chihuahuan Meadowlark, Sage Thrasher, Bridled Titmouse, Pinyon Jay, Black-necked Stilt, Vermilion Flycatcher, and a rare Harris's Sparrow.



Ferruginous Hawk is a large, spectacular raptor of open terrain out west. A trip through Estancia valley netted us quite a few at close range. Photo by guide Sam Wilson.

The tour began in Albuquerque with a stop at the ranger station in Cibola National Forest, where we encountered the first of many Townsend's Solitaires. We then drove up to 10,000 feet to the famous (though no longer operating) Sandia Crest House, where we watched in awe as roughly 150 Rosy-Finches descended onto the feeders and surrounding vegetation. It was a truly magical experience to see these montane finches at the only site in North America offering a decent chance to spot all three species together. Black Rosy-Finches outnumbered Brown-capped Rosy-Finches by at least two to one, and we picked out a single Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch among the crowd. The composition of these flocks varies from year to year, and we were fortunate to catch one or two of the Gray-crowns reported this winter.

In the afternoon, we spent time at Rio Grande Nature Center State Park, enjoying some unique urban birding along the river. Waterfowl are generally abundant in the wetlands adjacent to the Rio Grande, and we also found a

variety of western species, including Bushtit, Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay, and Black Phoebe.



Pinyon Jays are quite nomadic and eluded us until the final day, when we had nice looks at a flock at Santa Fe Canyon Preserve. Photo by guide Sam Wilson.

The next day we spent time in open country just east of Albuquerque before heading south, picking out tricky identifications like Chihuahuan Raven and Chihuahuan Meadowlark by their distinctive vocalizations. Raptors were a big highlight of the drive: we spotted half a dozen Ferruginous Hawks, along with Red-tailed Hawks, a Sharp-shinned Hawk, Northern Harriers, American Kestrels, and — most exciting of all — a trio of Prairie Falcons. One particularly memorable encounter involved a female Prairie Falcon chasing down a male with spectacular aerial acrobatics until he dropped his prey. The female caught it mid-air and returned to her perch to eat her stolen meal.

We spent the evening at Bosque del Apache, taking advantage of beautiful evening light to study the massive mixed flocks of Snow and Ross's Geese, as well as a wide variety of waterfowl in the impoundments.



Group shot after a fantastic Rosy-Finch show at the top of Sandia Crest above Albuquerque.

The following day we continued south near the curiously named town of Truth or Consequences, finding several specialties in the morning, most notably a cooperative and inquisitive Bridled Titmouse. Stops at Elephant Butte Reservoir were productive, offering close comparisons of Western and Clark's Grebes, a couple of American White Pelicans far out on the water, and a single Mexican Duck on the Rio Grande. The reservoir also produced a singing Crissal Thrasher that perched in the open for an extended stretch — quite a treat from a bird known for its secretive habits. We wrapped up the day back at Bosque del Apache, where we found two accommodating

Vermilion Flycatchers, striking in the evening light, along with excellent looks at western Marsh Wrens on the edge of a pond.



Bridled Titmouse is only found in a corner of New Mexico and Arizona, and we managed to track down one of these striking parids in a canyon near Elephant Butte reservoir. Photo by participant Dan Blower.

Our early morning at Bosque del Apache brought an explosive goose flight at sunrise, a group of javelinas rooting along the refuge drive, a Greater Roadrunner (running across the road, of course), and several Pyrrhuloxias at the feeders. A stop along the old highway in suitable habitat produced a group highlight — a Sagebrush Sparrow — on our way back up to Albuquerque. We saw Cactus Wren at Embudito Canyon, along with beautiful looks at Black-throated Sparrow and Rufous-crowned Sparrow. We continued on to Santa Fe, capping the day with a fantastic New Mexican dinner at la Plazuela at the city center.



Crissal Thrasher is one of three western thrashers we saw extremely well on the tour. Photo by participant Dan Blower.

Morning at Pueblo Canyon near Los Alamos was excellent, producing a suite of new birds including Juniper Titmouse, Pygmy Nuthatch, Evening Grosbeaks (mostly flyovers), a couple of different Dark-eyed Junco subspecies, and an unexpected wintering Sage Thrasher. We spent additional time at the Los Alamos Nature Center and saw Cassin's Finch and Mountain Chickadees. The highlight of the morning came from the Nature Center overlook, where I spotted a pair of bobcats working their way through the forest understory. Unfortunately, not everyone in the group was on hand to see them, but a lucky few enjoyed excellent views as the cats moved down-canyon through the woodland.

Los Alamos is, of course, home to the famous national laboratory where the atomic bomb was developed, and it remains an active research facility today. We had lunch in town and walked among some of the historic markers and

sites, reflecting on the area's sobering history. In the afternoon, we drove back down to Santa Fe, making time to visit the town square as well as the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, local art studios, and other attractions.



Acorn Woodpecker is one of the gaudiest woodpeckers in the west. Though not as common in some regions, we saw a few in both the northern and southern parts of New Mexico. Photo by participant Dan Blower.

The next morning was quite cool up at the Randall Davey Audubon Center, where we searched for a variety of finches and sparrows. One of our key targets remained elusive until we reached the Santa Fe Canyon Preserve, where we were lucky enough to hear the raucous calls of a large flock of Pinyon Jays. This declining species specializes in the region's pinyon pine woodlands but is highly nomadic and often difficult to pin down, so we savored the chance to spend time with them on the last day of the trip. Watching a flock of roughly 90 birds lift off and stream across the landscape was a fitting way to close out our birding.

Heading south, we stopped along the Rio Grande at a known location for a rare Harris's Sparrow that had been seen on the floodplain. We walked the river and waited patiently near the brush pile where the bird had taken up temporary residence. Our patience paid off: this large, distinctive sparrow emerged to feed on seed several times, making the hot walk well worth it!

On the final evening we enjoyed dinner at one of Albuquerque's celebrated restaurants, the Artichoke Café.

Mammals seen on tour:

Canyon Bat (*Parastrellus hesperus*)
Desert Cottontail (*Sylvilagus audubonii*)
Cliff Chipmunk (*Neotamias dorsalis*)
Texas Antelope Squirrel (*Ammospermophilus interpres*)
Common Rock Squirrel (*Otospermophilus variegatus*)
Abert's Squirrel (*Sciurus aberti*)
North American Red Squirrel (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*)
Coyote (*Canis latrans*)
Bobcat (*Lynx rufus*)
Collared Peccary (*Dicotyles tajacu*)
Mule Deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*)
White-tailed Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*)

You can see my complete trip report on eBird at this link:

<https://ebird.org/tripreport/473002>

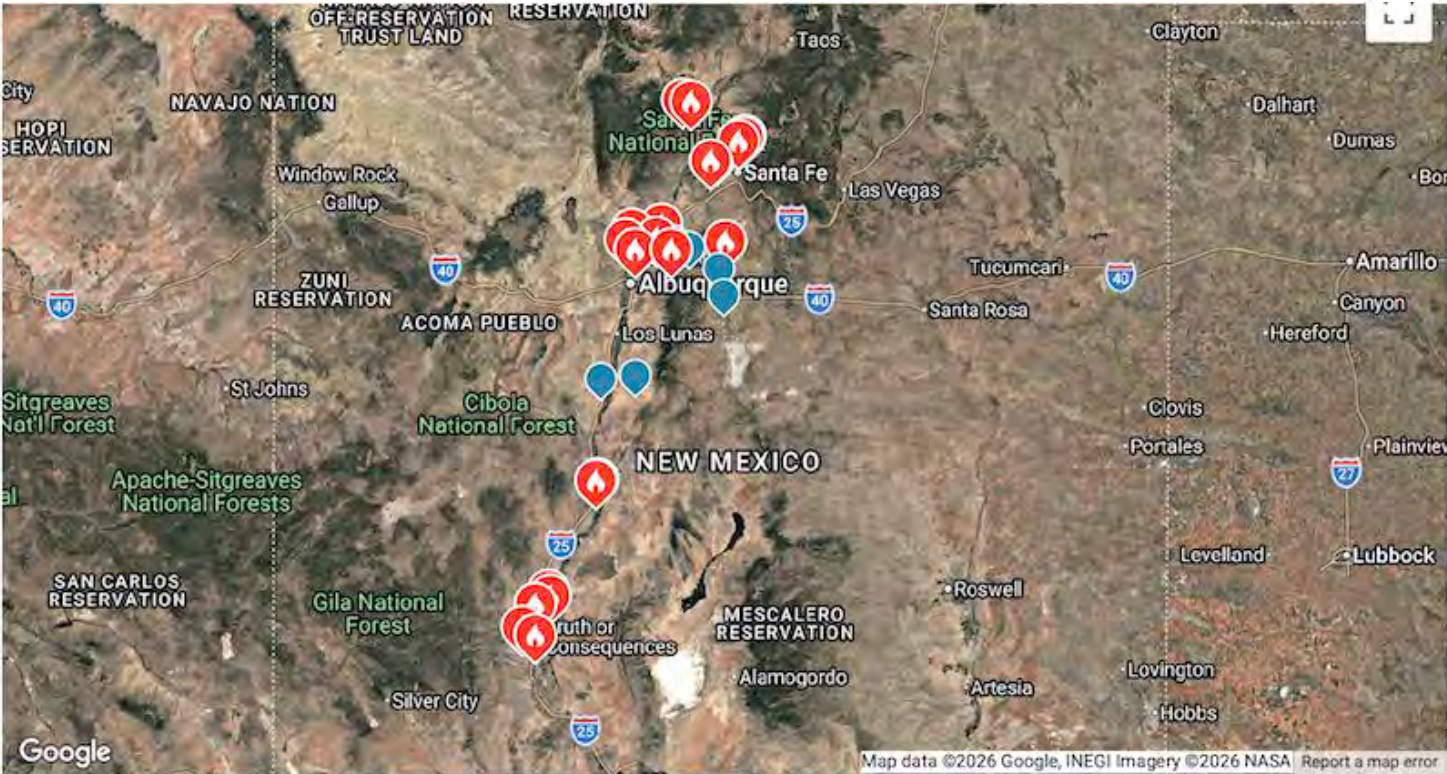
You can download a combined PDF of this page and the eBird report at this link: <https://fieldguides.com/triplists/nmx26TRIPLIST.pdf>

-- Sam



Field Guides Birding Tours—New Mexico, 2026 (with Sam Wilson)

1 – 6 Feb 2026 (6 days) Link-only



New Mexico, United States
Bernalillo | Los Alamos | Santa Fe | Sierra | Socorro | Torrance
Sam Wilson



For a narrative summary of this tour, including a Field Guides photo gallery and additional media for this trip...

124

29

[Species Observed](#)[Checklists](#)

Species Observed

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1900	Snow Goose	<i>Anser caerulescens</i>	▶  3
1050	Ross's Goose	<i>Anser rossii</i>	▶  3
15	Cackling Goose	<i>Branta hutchinsii</i>	▶  1
160	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	▶  5
8	Wood Duck	<i>Aix sponsa</i>	▶  1
3	Cinnamon Teal	<i>Spatula cyanoptera</i>	▶  2
726	Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>	▶  5
386	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>	▶  6
110	American Wigeon	<i>Mareca americana</i>	▶  3
270	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	▶  7
1	Mexican Duck	<i>Anas diazi</i>	▶  1
821	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	▶  4
98	Green-winged Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	▶  5
16	Redhead	<i>Aythya americana</i>	▶  3
66	Ring-necked Duck	<i>Aythya collaris</i>	▶  5
9	Lesser Scaup	<i>Aythya affinis</i>	▶  3
30	Bufflehead	<i>Bucephala albeola</i>	▶  4
2	Common Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>	▶  2
30	Common Merganser	<i>Mergus merganser</i>	▶  1
155	Ruddy Duck	<i>Oxyura jamaicensis</i>	▶  3
4	Gambel's Quail	<i>Callipepla gambelii</i>	▶  3
13	Wild Turkey	<i>Meleagris gallopavo</i>	▶  1

62	Rock Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	*	▶  3
6	Eurasian Collared-Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	*	▶  1
34	White-winged Dove	<i>Zenaida asiatica</i>		▶  9
7	Mourning Dove	<i>Zenaida macroura</i>		▶  6
1	Greater Roadrunner	<i>Geococcyx californianus</i>		▶  1
145	American Coot	<i>Fulica americana</i>		▶  7
1559	Sandhill Crane	<i>Antigone canadensis</i>		▶  7
1	Black-necked Stilt	<i>Himantopus mexicanus</i>		▶  1
9	Killdeer	<i>Charadrius vociferus</i>		▶  3
3	Long-billed Dowitcher	<i>Limnodromus scolopaceus</i>		▶  1
1	Spotted Sandpiper	<i>Actitis macularius</i>		▶  1
42	Greater Yellowlegs	<i>Tringa melanoleuca</i>		▶  4
57	Least Sandpiper	<i>Calidris minutilla</i>		▶  2
105	Ring-billed Gull	<i>Larus delawarensis</i>		▶  4
4	Pied-billed Grebe	<i>Podilymbus podiceps</i>		▶  2
60	Western Grebe	<i>Aechmophorus occidentalis</i>		▶  2
5	Clark's Grebe	<i>Aechmophorus clarkii</i>		▶  2
8	Neotropic Cormorant	<i>Nannopterum brasilianum</i>		▶  2
4	Great Blue Heron	<i>Ardea herodias</i>		▶  3
4	American White Pelican	<i>Pelecanus erythrorhynchos</i>		▶  2
1	Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>		▶  1
1	Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>		▶  1
3	Sharp-shinned Hawk	<i>Accipiter striatus</i>		▶  3
4	Cooper's Hawk	<i>Astur cooperii</i>		▶  3

7	Northern Harrier	<i>Circus hudsonius</i>	▶  5
6	Bald Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>	▶  3
15	Red-tailed Hawk	<i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>	▶  7
5	Ferruginous Hawk	<i>Buteo regalis</i>	▶  3
1	Red-naped Sapsucker	<i>Sphyrapicus nuchalis</i>	▶  1
7	Acorn Woodpecker	<i>Melanerpes formicivorus</i>	▶  2
4	Downy Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates pubescens</i>	▶  3
3	Ladder-backed Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates scalaris</i>	▶  3
5	Hairy Woodpecker	<i>Leuconotopicus villosus</i>	▶  4
35	Northern Flicker	<i>Colaptes auratus</i>	▶  14
8	American Kestrel	<i>Falco sparverius</i>	▶  5
3	Prairie Falcon	<i>Falco mexicanus</i>	▶  1
4	Black Phoebe	<i>Sayornis nigricans</i>	▶  4
9	Say's Phoebe	<i>Sayornis saya</i>	▶  6
2	Vermilion Flycatcher	<i>Pyrocephalus rubinus</i>	▶  1
4	Loggerhead Shrike	<i>Lanius ludovicianus</i>	▶  4
90	Pinyon Jay	<i>Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus</i>	▶  1
21	Steller's Jay	<i>Cyanocitta stelleri</i>	▶  2
26	Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay	<i>Aphelocoma woodhouseii</i>	▶  8
2	Black-billed Magpie	<i>Pica hudsonia</i>	▶  2
709	American Crow	<i>Corvus brachyrhynchos</i>	▶  5
3	Chihuahuan Raven	<i>Corvus cryptoleucus</i>	▶  1
53	Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	▶  13

3	Black-capped Chickadee	<i>Poecile atricapillus</i>	▶  1
21	Mountain Chickadee	<i>Poecile gambeli</i>	▶  5
1	Bridled Titmouse	<i>Baeolophus wollweberi</i>	▶  1
7	Juniper Titmouse	<i>Baeolophus ridgwayi</i>	▶  2
1	Verdin	<i>Auriparus flaviceps</i>	▶  1
300	Horned Lark	<i>Eremophila alpestris</i>	▶  1
7	Bushtit	<i>Psaltiriparus minimus</i>	▶  2
1	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	<i>Corthylio calendula</i>	▶  1
11	White-breasted Nuthatch	<i>Sitta carolinensis</i>	▶  5
12	Pygmy Nuthatch	<i>Sitta pygmaea</i>	▶  3
4	Red-breasted Nuthatch	<i>Sitta canadensis</i>	▶  2
2	Brown Creeper	<i>Certhia americana</i>	▶  1
1	Canyon Wren	<i>Catherpes mexicanus</i>	▶  1
2	Marsh Wren	<i>Cistothorus palustris</i>	▶  1
2	Cactus Wren	<i>Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus</i>	▶  2
71	European Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i> *	▶  3
7	Curve-billed Thrasher	<i>Toxostoma curvirostre</i>	▶  4
1	Crissal Thrasher	<i>Toxostoma crissale</i>	▶  1
1	Sage Thrasher	<i>Oreoscoptes montanus</i>	▶  1
1	Northern Mockingbird	<i>Mimus polyglottos</i>	▶  1
99	Western Bluebird	<i>Sialia mexicana</i>	▶  9
2	Mountain Bluebird	<i>Sialia currucoides</i>	▶  1
13	Townsend's Solitaire	<i>Myadestes townsendi</i>	▶  4

552	American Robin	<i>Turdus migratorius</i>	▶  14
13	Cedar Waxwing	<i>Bombycilla cedrorum</i>	▶  2
16	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i> *	▶  2
4	American Pipit	<i>Anthus rubescens</i>	▶  3
4	Evening Grosbeak	<i>Hesperiphona vespertina</i>	▶  1
1	Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch	<i>Leucosticte tephrocotis</i>	▶  1
100	Black Rosy-Finch	<i>Leucosticte atrata</i>	▶  1
40	Brown-capped Rosy-Finch	<i>Leucosticte australis</i>	▶  1
200	House Finch	<i>Haemorhous mexicanus</i>	▶  15
1	Cassin's Finch	<i>Haemorhous cassinii</i>	▶  1
8	Pine Siskin	<i>Spinus pinus</i>	▶  4
11	Lesser Goldfinch	<i>Spinus psaltria</i>	▶  2
3	American Goldfinch	<i>Spinus tristis</i>	▶  2
3	Chipping Sparrow	<i>Spizella passerina</i>	▶  1
2	Black-throated Sparrow	<i>Amphispiza bilineata</i>	▶  1
147	Dark-eyed Junco	<i>Junco hyemalis</i>	▶  28
87	White-crowned Sparrow	<i>Zonotrichia leucophrys</i>	▶  9
1	Harris's Sparrow	<i>Zonotrichia querula</i>	▶  1
1	Sagebrush Sparrow	<i>Artemisiospiza nevadensis</i>	▶  1
3	Savannah Sparrow	<i>Passerculus sandwichensis</i>	▶  1
15	Song Sparrow	<i>Melospiza melodia</i>	▶  6
5	Canyon Towhee	<i>Melospiza fusca</i>	▶  2
1	Rufous-crowned Sparrow	<i>Aimophila ruficeps</i>	▶  1

- 17 **Spotted Towhee** *Pipilo maculatus* ▶  7
- 25 **Western Meadowlark** *Sturnella neglecta* ▶  4
- 1 **Chihuahuan Meadowlark** *Sturnella lilianae* ▶  1
- 510 **Red-winged Blackbird** *Agelaius phoeniceus* ▶  7
- 1 **Brown-headed Cowbird** *Molothrus ater* ▶  1
- 80 **Brewer's Blackbird** *Euphagus cyanocephalus* ▶  1
- 100 **Great-tailed Grackle** *Quiscalus mexicanus* ▶  2
- 10 **Yellow-rumped Warbler** *Setophaga coronata* ▶  3
- 2 **Pyrrhuloxia** *Cardinalis sinuatus* ▶  1

HYBRIDS

- 4 Mallard x Mexican Duck (hybrid) *Anas platyrhynchos x diazi* ▶  1

ADDITIONAL TAXA

- 2 Mallard/Mexican Duck *Anas platyrhynchos/diazi* ▶  1
- 300 Western/Clark's Grebe *Aechmophorus occidentalis/clarkii* ▶  1
- 18 Western/Chihuahuan Meadowlark *Sturnella neglecta/lilianae* ▶  1