

## Holiday Highlights

### New Mexico

25 November – 6 December 2017

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**Guests:** Jean Clarke, Jenni Tubbs, Sue Taylor, Barbara and Tony Keville, Jane Nickerson, Connell, Franky and David Perry, Liz and Keith Barton, Pauline Pothecary

#### Day 1: Travel

There is excitement in the air as we meet in Heathrow T3. It is great to see familiar faces and to meet new ones. London is clear and bright as we check in and go through security to departures. We split up here to go and get some breakfast, before meeting at the gate to board our Delta Airliner to Atlanta, Georgia. We have 9 hours before us, so time to enjoy some movies!

We are here in the USA! We have to collect our luggage and drop it again after we have gone through Homeland Security, which, for once, is fairly swift and hassle free. We take the train to our departure terminal and look for somewhere to eat. Once fortified, we board our internal flight to Albuquerque.

We take a shuttle bus from the terminal, once we have collected our luggage, to the car hire centre. There is a bit of a wait as there is only one guy behind the Avis desk at this time of night. Finally we get our keys, find our vehicles, load up and head off to our first accommodation – Casa de Suenos, on the edge of the old town. Here we are met and shown to our spacious rooms, each in a distinct building from each other and all in the old adobe style. We are all exhausted so we head for bed, excited to see what New Mexico will bring us in daylight.

#### Day 2: "Meep, meep!"

The day dawns bright and clear as we explore our new surroundings. There are large trees within and surrounding the complex of buildings that makes up Casa de Suenos and perched in one of these is a fabulous Cooper's Hawk. The long round tail and the piercing orange/red eyes are all clear through the scope.

Breakfast is wonderful. We meet up with Connell, the last member of the group, who has been out here already for a few days. We enjoy our breakfast Burritos, fresh coffee and all in front of a real log fire. Heaven. Then we meet up at the vans to head out for our first adventure. In the trees by the vans we find Lesser Goldfinches, House Finch and the ubiquitous Eurasian Collared Dove, although we are looking for White-winged Dove.

We drive only a short distance to the Rio Grande Nature Centre. We park up and pay the parking fee and enjoy the Red-winged Blackbirds in the trees. There is a woman taking photographs stealthily of something and once asked we realise that there is a Roadrunner just yards in front of her!! Wow! It is sitting on the ground just behind a wooden rail fence. We are so close we can see the ring around the eye and the subtle greens in the plumage. But hang on, what's that on the fence further on? It is another. It drops down onto the ground and slowly creeps off through the fence into the scrub while we listen to the sound of our first Sandhill Cranes.

There is a blind overlooking a large pond and there are good numbers of birds on the water. From here we find both Canada and Cackling Geese, Lesser Scaup, American Wigeon, Mallard, Ruddy Duck and Pied-billed Grebe. We walk along the path to a viewpoint, where we get our first views of a large concentration of Sandhill Cranes. We walk back and take a trail that leads us to the Nature Centre where there are loos and a shop. On route there are some feeders, where we get great views of White-crowned Sparrow, Spotted Towhee and an obliging White-breasted Nuthatch.

There is a large viewing window in the centre's library, as well as other windows onto the lake from around the displays. Out on this bit of the water we add Green-winged Teal, Ring-necked Duck and Gadwall to the list of wildfowl before out at the back a male Hooded Merganser appears. What a bird and a female appears alongside him. There is a smart pair of Wood Duck here also. Back at the feeders there are now White-throated Sparrows and a Fox Sparrow along with a White-winged Dove.

The group is introduced to Jim, one of the volunteers of the Reserve and he kindly takes us on a walk through some of the Reserve that is off limits to the average visitor. It is now very warm and sandy underfoot. We get great views of a Northern Harrier and a Great Blue Heron flies into a Cottonwood. There is a nest box on a pole that Darren goes over to scratch, but with no success. We scan out over a field with scattered trees. In one there are two Western Bluebirds and on the ground Connell finds a Kildeer. We carry on through a bit of woodland, where we encounter a small, mixed flock of Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Mountain and Black-capped Chickadees. There is a Downy Woodpecker here that shows very well. We say a fond farewell to Jim, load up and head around to Subway to buy lunch. There is a small group of Bushtits in the roadside bushes when we park up. Time for a 6" cold cut with jalapeños!

Crossing the Rio Grande we find our way to the Petroglyph National Monument, where in the Visitor Centre we are treated to a very informative short film about the geology and history of the area and the rock carvings in particular. The greatest collection of petroglyphs in the USA created over hundreds of years by the Pueblo tribes of the area.

We drive a short distance to Rinconada Canyon, where we go for a walk under the rock escarpment along which the drawings are found. What is this bird on the fence though? It is a Curve-billed Thrasher and there is another on the roof of the loo! What a beak! We watch them for a while and get brief views of a Green-tailed Towhee out in the sage and then take the sandy trail. This takes us out through the sage flats at the base of the basalt escarpment. We find Northern Flickers amongst the rocks and eventually get good views of the flighty Canyon Towhees. There are little troops of House Finches and the sage is moving with sparrows. Mainly White-crowned but we find Sage Sparrow and Black-throated Sparrow too. A Rock Wren calls and we eventually get good views of this large wren. A Desert Cottontail (rabbit) is relaxing on a rock and Darren finds a Black-tailed Jackrabbit amongst the sage.

On our way back to the car park the sun is beginning to set shining a golden light on the basalt, Darren points out a Coyote up on the ridgeline. It watches as we walk below its position before it lies down. We can now just see its' ears. We make it back to the vans before the gate closes, fortunately and have a cookie before heading back to Casa de Suenos. What a great start we have had.

We head into the fabulous Old Town, just a short walk from the hotel, for dinner at the Hacienda del Rio, a great mix of cuisine but with plenty of chilli for those that want it.

### **Day 3: Sacred Springs and Rosy Finches**

It is another glorious morning in Albuquerque when we walk out to get breakfast. No Cooper's Hawk this morning but there is a pair of White-winged Doves on a nest in a tree in the garden. The bird on the nest is calling and displaying. Superb. A small group of Bushtits are working their way through the garden bushes. The fire and breakfast burritos are wonderful.

Our journey this morning takes us east out of the city on the famous Route 66 to skirt the Sandia Mountains. We turn off the highway to head north and pull off at a trail head at Ojito de San Antonio at Cedar Crest. There is a bit of a breeze as we unload and start to walk up the rocky path. It is very quiet for birds as we steadily go up hill. We pass through lots of Juniper and some large Cottonwoods but this area has a rich history of growing fruit and the remnants of the old orchards we passed through at the beginning of the walk. There are old waterways (acequias) here also and these used to provide the original village of San Antonio de Padua with water. We walk past a sign talking about a spring of sacred water when the landscape opens up and ahead, at the base of a tree we can see some bird activity. There are Bluebirds coming down to drink from a small water trough. The numbers of bluebirds quickly becomes beautiful to behold. We can see Pine Siskins as well. We creep forward and try to get closer for photos. Cassins Finches are amongst the Bluebirds adding a touch of pink to the sea of blue. It is' wonderful to watch as the Bluebirds fly off and then reconvene in the trees to descend in small troops to drink. Behind us

a Steller's Jay is showing in a large tree and a Woodhouse's Scrub Jay is jinking around the junipers. Connell spots another bird at the back of the large Cottonwood that the Bluebirds are collecting in. We try and get a view and we find that it is a smart male Evening Grosbeak! Trying to get everyone on it is a bigger challenge and it flies before we all get on it. We carry on watching the comings and goings of the birds from the "sacred water tree" when we get onto a group of Cedar Waxwings in the tree and there, among them, are three Evening Grosbeaks, all females, superb! We all agree that this has been a very special birding experience. It is capped off by a Sharp-shinned Hawk winging over as we start to walk back to the vans.

We stop at a supermarket back on the highway to collect something for lunch. There is not a cloud in the sky, what a place this is. The Sandia Crest Scenic Highway is the road we take. This climbs up the eastern side of the mountains. At Doc Long picnic area we stop for lunch. Before munching, however, we go for a wee walk. The Ponderosa Pines are tall here. We are not walking far when Darren spots a squirrel ahead on the track. It is large, dark and has large ears. It is an Abert's Squirrel. We draw alongside and look for it again. We spy two down in the cut below us. The forest is quiet so we wander back to the vans with another, closer squirrel being spotted on the way. This one climbs a tree above our heads. We have our sandwiches with various varieties of Dark-eyed Juncos, a couple of Ravens and a Red-tailed Hawk who arrives at the wrong time is mercilessly harassed by the Ravens. As we pack up we hear a Downy Woodpecker. Darren taps a tree with a stick and a woodpecker flies in! This one has a yellow belly though – it is a Williamson's Sapsucker! We get a Hairy Woodpecker coming as well. The Downy Woodpecker eventually shows well.

The road winds upwards with views beginning to open up that are tantalising to say the least. At the top car park, at over 10,500 feet up, we don extra hats and gloves and walk out to a viewing area on the edge of the crest. We pass a Steller's Jay on a feeder. The view from the edge is quite breathtaking as we gaze down over Albuquerque and the wide plain of the Rio Grande within which the city sits and out to the far side of the rift where we were yesterday looking for the petroglyphs. The light is intense as we scan for Rosy Finches, the reason we are here. We get fleeting views of a flock of flying finches that vanish behind the main buildings on the crest. We all find the altitude requires us not to rush!

We make our way up to the building, where there is a shop and a café with a terrace! On the terrace there is a tray feeder hanging from a pine and here are the finches. What a collection of browns, greys and pink all in a jumble around the seed. We set up on the terrace and start to go through the birds. Three species of Rosy-finch winter here and we are quickly picking up on the frosty-looking Black Rosy-finches, that some of us are familiar with from Yellowstone. There are Brown-capped Rosy-finches in good number as well. In amongst them are smaller numbers of Gray-crowned Rosy-finch. We scan and scan and

eventually find the race of Gray-crowned called Hepburn's, that has an all grey head. It is delightful, if cold, watching the frenzy of these birds and trying to get everyone onto all the species so that we are all comfortable with the identification. What is it about birds? They just won't sit still! We need to warm up so we move inside and order some hot drinks. These are fab and we can still enjoy the birds through the large windows.

Fortified we load up and head down hill to the Ellis Trail. We are losing light rapidly but we want to try for Three-toed Woodpecker here. We use a bit of tape to try and lure one out but the wind is against us. It is now bitterly cold and only the lonely Raven atop a Ponderosa seems to be content. We push on. Just a little further down hill we walk out to an overlook at Balsam where the view is out to the plains to the east of Sandia. Again, the views are stunning, but it is getting seriously dark now so we head back to the Highway and back to our hotel. Another great day.

Dinner is had back in the Old Town, but at the wonderfully named High Noon, where steaks are the order of the night.

#### **Day 4: Pueblos, Cranes and Socorro**

We are leaving Albuquerque today. Breakfast is as sumptuous as ever in front of the fire and the burritos are better than yesterday. We load the luggage into the vans and head around to Subway to get our lunches before heading back east, past where we were yesterday and out to the town of Moriarty. Darren has got wind of a Turf Farm out here, in the flat lands, that features on a lot of local birders itineraries, so we go for a look. We find the place and park up for a scan. There isn't much happening here, but Darren does find a male Merlin perched on a tree. Around the fields there are flocks of birds moving around but they are all distant. Eventually a group of Horned Larks move close enough to get in the scopes, but we decide to move on and find somewhere else.

Our road from Moriarty takes us south on 41. This is a large area of flat fields and sage-flats so we are just going to work the roads that criss-cross it. Down the wonderfully named Pumpkin Patch Road we find our first Loggerhead Shrike and there are Mountain Bluebirds on the wires. Further south we take Clements road and here there are a good number of Sandhill Cranes not far off the road in the corn field. There is hedge of small trees protecting them from us and this hedge is alive with sparrows, exclusively White-crowned Sparrows. We find our first Ferruginous Hawk on a telegraph pole. They are stunning birds.

Tony had a run-in with some washing up liquid in the morning and his eyes are suffering, so we take the decision to try and find a clinic just to get everything checked out. Just to our south is the small town of Estancia and on the northern limits there is a smart, new clinic – perfect. We get Tony in and the rest of us wander around, use the loos and spot the Curve-billed Thrasher in the car park. Keith and Liz are totally absorbed in the children's cartoons on the telly!

Tony is given the all clear so we pop around the corner to the municipal park in Estancia for our lunch. Jean and Duncan spot a Coot on the pond when we arrive but it doesn't show again. There are American Wigeon and Mallard while we enjoy our subways.

We stop a little further down the road as there is a small group of Pronghorn out on the flats. They are a perfect fit for this habitat. When the Spanish "discovered" this part of the world, the indigenous peoples lived in adobe villages that the Spanish called *pueblos*, so the tribes became known as the Pueblo Indians. The Spanish, through the auspices of the Inquisition, took upon themselves to convert the heathen and built churches by these villages. These Pueblo Missions are now ruins and we head to one after lunch. The ruins at Quarai are some of the best. We park up and use the facilities before heading out to the ruins, past the sign requesting visitors to respect the local Rattlesnakes! The ruins are dominated by the remains of the enormous church, it is a remarkable place. We walk around and within them, thankfully there are no snakes to respect. As we wander back to the car park we find a Canyon Towhee skulking and two Western Bluebirds atop a Juniper.

Time is pressing so we head south to Mountainair where we rejoin the main road again and head west. The views are spectacular, so we stop for a photo as an enormous train passes in the distance. The road takes us back to the Rio Grande and the main Highway south. We stop just shy of the Highway as Darren knows of some roadside pools that are worth checking out by the Reserve of Bernardo. There is no water in the pools this year, they are completely dry, but that doesn't stop the cranes. As we scan we see that there are cranes in the sky to our north and the sound of cranes on the ground behind us. Wave after wave of cranes fly over our heads, as they head to their roost sites. It is a spectacular experience, with a bright moon above us and the light fading, the cranes just keep on coming.

It is dark as we arrive in the town of Socorro, our home for the next few days. We find our hotel and check in. We set a time to meet up to head for dinner and we get some down time before heading next door to Socorro Springs Brewery for dinner. Pizza, Calzone and pasta on the menu tonight!

## **Day 5: A Snowstorm of Geese at Bosque del Apache**

We meet up at the vans at 6am! It is still dark as we load up and drive the short distance south to the world famous Reserve of Bosque del Apache. The sky is reddening to the east as we pull up at the Crane Ponds. Hats and gloves are necessary as it is brutally cold out. We find a space among the hundreds of photographers and set up and wait. We can hear cranes in the dark, thousands of cranes. They are out in the lake in front of us. Most are still asleep but the noise only intensifies as more and more wake. There are two lonely looking Snow Geese at the front of the sleeping throng. As we scan around and look south we are astonished to see that the sky is black with geese coming our way! Skein after skein line the sky and we watch, spellbound as thousands and

thousands of white geese start to pour onto the water in front of us, completely surrounding the cranes. The landscape starts to turn white as this blizzard continues. We start to pick out Ross's Geese from the multitude of Snow Geese and also spot the darker forms of both. The Pintail and Shoveler are completely lost from view. When we think all the geese have arrived we scan again and are amazed to find that the sky to the south is still black with geese! These all arrive and land in and around those already there.

The sun starts to catch the Magdalena Mountains that form the backdrop to our view and they are turning a pinky/orange. The cranes start to depart in small groups, obviously fed up with the noise from the geese! We find Kildeer, Long-billed Dowitcher and Least Sandpiper in the mud in front of us. Small groups of geese start to depart, but we wait. Suddenly the geese go quiet, their heads go up and then a ripple from the back of the flock quickly turns into a roar as the entire flock takes to the air and starts to call. The noise is deafening and the sky has turned white. There are audible gasps from everyone as the flock passes right overhead and disperses to the east. Some of us find this hugely emotional and tears are wiped from eyes and some of us find that we have been holding our breath. Wow, this is a moment never to be forgotten.

Over breakfast we agree that that moment at the Bosque is going to be hard to beat, but we are going to spend the rest of the day in the Reserve and we never know what we might find.

We drive to the Visitor Centre of Bosque del Apache, where we find a photographer stalking their subject. They are Gambel's Quail! These are stunning little birds with their top quiff. There is at least half a dozen of them pecking and scratching in the dust and perched up on a tree like something out of the Twelve Days of Christmas. We make our way into the Reserve building. We are met by a huge photo on the inside wall of an eruption of geese, just like we experienced this morning. There is a small shop, a good display and a large window beyond which are some feeders. We find White-crowned and White-throated Sparrows, Spotted Towhee and more Gambel's Quail. Some of us do some shopping.

Back outside we start looking for birds when suddenly Sue is pointing at the bush right next to us. "What is that?" she asks. We take a look and are astonished to find a female Pyrrhuloxia! If we reach out we could probably stroke it. She sits there for a while, this bizarre looking bird. Like a cardinal that has flown into a window! The beak is stouter and shorter than a cardinal's making it look like it has a squashed face. We can see the red on her tail, crest and edges of her wings. She flies off and lands in some thick bushes where we try to track her down but our good views are over.

We drive through the gate into the Reserve, where we are met with pools either side of the track that are absolutely stuffed with Pintail, extraordinary numbers

of Pintail. We set up our scopes at the Dabbler Deck where we find Ring-necked Duck and our first Redhead. Barbara finds a Bufflehead as we also get onto Lesser Scaup, Pied-billed Grebe and a tricky Canvasback. Sue gets us onto three soaring raptors that turn out to be Bald eagles, one adult and two youngsters. Against the blue sky they are stunning.

We stop for our lunch by the start of a boardwalk. We tuck into our Subways as Darren spots a woodpecker coming along the line of trees. We all get onto it and we find that it is our first Ladder-backed Woodpecker. It drops into some thicker scrub out of view. Not to be deterred Jean, Connell and Liz head off in search and get great views. Once we have eaten we walk along the boardwalk. It takes us across marsh with lots of reeds but very little other than a Pied-billed Grebe. Darren does find us an American Pelican, tucked into the reeds. Very nice.

Further on the South Loop road we come across a pool surrounded by Cottonwoods and small pines. The main pond has a lot of duck in it and there is a nearer channel with a couple of ducks in it. There are cranes with attendant crows feeding under the trees and lots of small birds flitting around, so we disembark for a look. The two ducks in the nearer channel are "Mexican" Duck, a form of Mallard, or a separate species depending on the authorities. There is a very smart, dark Red-tailed Hawk perched on a tree on the edge of the lake. Darren suddenly says he has an Eastern Phoebe! We quickly get it in our scopes but it vanishes before we all get onto it. There are Pine Siskins, American Goldfinches, Western and Eastern Bluebirds. On the bund in front of us there are good numbers of American Pipits and we hear both Greater Yellowlegs and Spotted Sandpiper. The Eastern Phoebe starts to call but we just can't track it down. A phoebe turns up on the initial perch and this is a Black Phoebe! What a haul we are getting here.

Around a corner we find a jam of cars at the side of the road. There are thousands of Sandhill Cranes in the corn fields next to the road. We stop to admire the scene and what a noise! There is a dark raptor in a tree that gets a conversation going but when it flies it turns out to be a dark Red-tailed Hawk. Darren spots a Great Horned Owl perched on a tree-top. It gets chased by a Red-tailed Hawk.

Around the next bend there is a critter at the side of the road. What is it? Blimey, it is a skunk! A Striped Skunk. We stop and watch, thrilled that this normally nocturnal animal is out and about in daylight and only yards from us. It looks like a walking toilet brush!

We finish our day at the Flight Deck as thousands of Snow Geese are coming in to roost and then lifting off again to find somewhere more suitable. The day started and ended with huge numbers of Snow Geese and what a day it has been. Let's celebrate at Socorro Springs?



## Day 6: Hair-raising tracks and more geese

Our day starts with a return early morning visit to the Crane Ponds at Bosque del Apache. It is bitterly cold again as we unload and there are fewer photographers to provide warmth. There are masses of cranes in the water and the lake is covered with Pintail. The brightening sky to our south is, again, black with geese. Their trajectory to the pond takes them right over our heads, low. It is another breathtaking goose experience. The noise of their wings and calling is extraordinary as the water quickly turns white again as the geese land in a blizzard of white feathers. We go through the Ross's and Snow Geese again and Darren finds us a smart Coyote looking on expectantly towards the geese. We can almost see it licking its lips. The geese start to depart, but not in a great eruption this morning but in dribs and drabs. Each group is hundreds strong so they leave in mini eruptions. Before long they are all gone. The coyote lies down.

We order our Subways after breakfast and head west towards the Magdalena Mountains. The road climbs out of Socorro and then levels off on a high plain surrounded by mountains. We stop at a road junction for a scan around but there is only a lonely Raven to keep us company here. We carry on up the Water Canyon Road. There is a Loggerhead Shrike on the overhead wires that gets us to stop. We enjoy the shrike and have a look around. There is a roadside pool that is attracting House Finches down to drink and a beautiful Coyote walks up a small bluff and poses majestically at the top. The House Finches are perching on cactus making them look like strange fruit, at least to Jane they do. We get onto a Roadrunner out in the scrub but it zooms off in that peculiar, horizontal pose of theirs.

At the start of the canyon there is a ruined homestead and we park up here. We are surrounded by Juniper, so we have a look for Juniper Titmouse. The rock face of the canyon looks good for Canyon Wren and after a little persuasion we get one perched up, looking good through the scopes. A big wren all rusty looking. There are House Finches and Western Bluebirds flitting around and a couple of scrub jays are poking around the ruins. Liz gets onto a Juniper Titmouse that has come in to investigate the calling that is coming from Darren's phone. We follow her directions, but it is mobile and we only get fleeting views of it before it vanishes. A troop of Bushtits are working through the junipers.

We stop further up the road where the valley floor is way beneath us and the Pinyon Pines are roadside. This place looks good for woodpeckers. Darren tries the call of Pygmy Owl to see if anything will respond. A Juniper Titmouse flies up onto a bare branch looking most put out. It is joined by another and we get great views of this neat little bird. The road then comes to a junction at a campground where there are some handy loos. We explore here for a while and add White-breasted Nuthatch to our list. This bird flies over our heads and neatly deposits a package on Duncan's hat! We get a Northern Flicker and a smart Hairy Woodpecker here.

The road ahead becomes more of a track and heads up the mountain to an Observatory. We head on up and the track quickly becomes more challenging for the vehicles. The group becomes more silent in the van as we climb our slippery-slidey way. The views back down to the plain are awesome but taking one's eyes from the road ahead is not a good idea here! Just short of the Observatory the track levels at an opening in the forest, a bit of alpine meadow, if you will. It is a good place for lunch, so we gratefully clamber out and breathe a sigh of relief and tuck into our subs. Spicy Italian with jalapeños the leader's choice.

What goes up must come down and so we turn around and leave the place that we dubbed, "Single Raven Mountain" and head back down to firmer ground and Socorro, where we drop off those who would like a little down time at the hotel. Once we have refuelled the vans we head back to Bosque del Apache for the rest of the afternoon.

The pools at the Reserve entrance are filled with Pintail and Coot as before, but the numbers of Mallard appear to be increasing. Near Eagle Scout Deck we scan out over the lake. There are good numbers of Gadwall, Shoveler and Lesser Scaup. A Northern Harrier wings in and perches not far from us on a dead branch. Bufflehead are out in good numbers, but over to their right we find a couple of stonking male Hooded Mergansers. They are getting frisky and are displaying, throwing their heads back and expanding the outrageous hood they have. It is wonderful to watch.

As the light begins to fade we stop at Willow and Coyote Decks, where there are large numbers of cranes dropping in to roost. It is spectacular and we have to rush to beat the gate closure! We do and make it back to Socorro in good time for everyone.

Our dinner date is back at Socorro Springs again. Tonight's experience will be much different to the previous two though. For starters only half the group deserve to get their drinks and as for food, well we might as well go through the back and cook it ourselves! It does take a while, but they are obviously short staffed and anyway, we want longer to celebrate Sue's birthday!!

## **Day 7: Elephant Butte and Las Cruces**

We are leaving Socorro this morning and heading south, so we have a well earned lie in on this Connells's birthday – happy birthday!

After breakfast we load up the vans with the luggage, pop around to Subway to order our lunches and then hit the highway, heading south. The landscape that we travel through is straight out of a Western movie, huge creosote plains with distant mountains around us.

The Rio Grande is dammed to the south of Socorro at Elephant Butte creating a large lake. We want to explore this area so we take a track that takes us towards Monticello Point, within the State Park. This takes us through a wide expanse of Creosote-dominated semi-desert. It is fabulous to stop here and take in the vast landscape. We get a Black-tailed Jackrabbit and there are a couple of Northern Flickers and some Ravens flitting around. The road deteriorates from here as it drops towards the lake, there are deep water-cut runnels that make progress interesting from here, but we make it. We look out over the arroyo where there at least three Northern Harriers flying around. We drive through the wash to the southern point where we park and walk down the boat ramp towards the water. On our way we hear Rock Wren and get great views of this handsome Wren out on the tarmac and in the scrub and we also find a fine Say's Phoebe.

Out on the water there are lots of American Wigeon, Gadwall, Coot and grebes. Jean finds a single Pelican, but we soon realise there is a whole raft of them! There are hundreds of Red-winged Blackbirds around them. There are two Greater Yellowlegs around there as well but these are harder to spot. Darren finds a Double-crested Cormorant. We start to go through the grebes a bit more thoroughly, trying to separate any Clarke's Grebes from the more abundant Western Grebes. This we do but not to everyone's satisfaction! A pelican flies past, caressing the surface of the water with its belly as it glides, majestic.

We have our lunch at the nearby caravan park just uphill from where we are. It is great looking out over all the creosote and cacti to the distant mountains. Once finished we move south, winding past numerous arroyos and some fabulous road signs warning us not to drown if the road is flooded! We get great views of White-winged Dove on wires as we drive into Rock Canyon Marina, Darren's van heads down towards the water but the other van gets waylaid by a group of close Gambel's Quails, right by the van. They are not bothered by us at all and with the windows down we can hear them calling to one another. Liz has spotted a bird in a tree so we reverse slightly for a look. It is a Cooper's Hawk and it is intent on the quail! As we watch it launches from the tree and stoops straight for the quail and as they are between the hawk and ourselves, it looks like the hawk is coming straight at us. The quail scatter and the hawk lands on the ground and looks about. It then runs off trying to scare the quail out from the bushes! Wow!

Meanwhile, down at the water's edge, Darren and crew have been sorting the grebes out, so when the rest of us arrive we get to go through the two species again and this time to everyone's satisfaction. We wander up a sandy rise, with Tony up ahead. He reaches the crest first and starts hollering back down to us and pointing. We look up and passing behind him flies an Osprey carrying a very large fish!! Tony was lucky enough to watch the catch taking place.

Driving on, Darren wants to take us to a picnic spot by a dam on the river. We pull into Paseo del Rio and stretch our legs some more. There are loos here, which we put to good use. As we walk around the site we hear the scolding of a wren so we try and coax the blighter out. It is a Bewick's Wren but, true to form, it only shows briefly and not to the whole group. Down on the muddy water's edge we scan and find American Wigeon, Gadwall, Kildeer and a Great Blue Heron. Further up there are some smaller birds popping out of the bushes to come and drink. They are mainly Robins but one smaller bird appears – a Hermit Thrush. Suddenly we hear a Belted Kingfisher and we get a flash as it darts by behind the trees. We try to relocate it but no luck. Further up Darren spots a Ladder-backed Woodpecker and, finally, this one gives itself up and we get great views.

As we walk we become quite strung out, which is slightly annoying when Sue spots a bird in a tree, Liz identifies it, Frankie has lost her voice so can't shout and finally Keith yells, "Phainopepla!" Great teamwork from the back! By the time the rest of us are trying to get onto it, it is in the air and flying away from us. The wing shape and big white panels are distinctive though. At the end of the site there are some abandoned buildings with a small pine plantation in front, there are Ruby-crowned Kinglets in here and we briefly get onto a Red-breasted Nuthatch as well as a White-breasted Nuthatch. A smart Say's Phoebe keeps us company and the whole while an Osprey has been perched on a telegraph pole clutching the remains of its lunch.

Time is pressing so, after another visit to the facilities, we get back on to the highway and take the last leg of our journey to the second largest city in New Mexico, Las Cruces. We find our hotel and check in. TJ at the desk kindly phones Ruby Tuesday's to make a reservation for us this evening. It is only a short walk away and the food is good and varied. One can also order a 24 ounce beer!

## **Day 8: The hunt for Burrowing Owl; Santa and the Organ Mountains**

It is another glorious day in New Mexico when we meet up for a pre-breakfast amble looking for Burrowing Owl. These cute owls have been spotted in ground near the hotel in the past so we go for a look. There is a dam rises behind the hotel with a track on the top so we walk that scanning down beneath us onto the scrubland behind the dam. Las Cruces is waking up to the fact that it is Saturday and a couple of early-bird runners are spotted. A Northern Harrier is out and about and a Red-tailed Hawk is perched. House Finches are everywhere and a Black-tailed Jackrabbit washes itself on the track below. We get great views of Mourning Dove and Savannah Sparrow but, try as we do, we cannot find a Burrowing Owl.

We have a leisurely breakfast and then meet up again to head out for the day. Darren has a tip off about another site for Burrowing Owl, so we head out through suburbia to try and find it. We pass Pecan groves on the hunt for the

road. We eventually take Big Tree Road that ends at a few houses where there are numerous No Trespassing signs. It doesn't feel good so we turn around. There are plenty of White-winged Doves around though! Is this the end of the search for the Burrowing Owl? Yes. Oh well, we tried and have seen a bit of Las Cruces. We head instead to the State Park of Mesilla Bosque, but we haven't gone very far when Duncan turns the ship around as he has seen an owl-shaped lump on top of a sandy bank. We retrace our steps and turn in where there is an Old Folks Home. We park and take a look at the sandy bank opposite the home. There is still a lump on top, but it turns out to be a Rock Squirrel! It is showing nicely though and more closely related to ground squirrels and prairie dogs than true squirrels. While we watch a Mockingbird flies into a nearby tree and shows off beautifully. This is followed by a Curve-billed Thrasher and the two disappear into the same berry-laden bush, so the stop is worth it after all.

Back on track we cross the muddy trickle that is the Rio Grande. From the bridge we can see some peeps on a sand bar. We stop and have a look. An American Kestrel graces an overhead wire while we get to grips with the peeps. They are 22 Least Sandpipers.

We drive along the entrance road where a Roadrunner makes an appearance on the top of the bank alongside and then we park at the Visitor Centre. In the car park we get great views of both Curve-billed Thrasher and Loggerhead Shrike. We are hugely surprised when we walk through the gate to the main Visitor Centre and are met by none other than Santa himself!! Gosh he is tall. There are handshakes all round and Jane encourages Darren and Duncan to put in an early present request for Mountain Lion! There is also free hot chocolate that we surprisingly take too, given the warm conditions. We make use of the facilities and the hospitality, take a look around the Visitor Centre and then take a walk around some of the Reserve. The paths are quite narrow and with bushes close to the edge that makes it quite tricky for a group of our size. We carry on and despite the vegetation we still manage to find great views of Northern Harrier and a superb, perched Cooper's Hawk. Other species seen were White-crowned Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Bewick's Wren and House Wren. We get another dragonfly species here, the rather impressive Great Spreadwing and Darren tries to get us onto an unusual, greenish flycatcher that unfortunately does not hang around; Cordilleran Flycatcher maybe? Who knows.

We drive to the local Subway to grab some lunch and it takes forever as the staff are obviously in no hurry. We are on holiday so don't suppose we are either, but it is frustrating. Once we have food in the vans we burn some rubber and head towards the fabulous Organ Mountains that form such a majestic backdrop to the city. There is a picnic site at Tortuga Hill and we eat there. The Creosote and Mesquite all around us is such a boy's dream, making it feel like we are in a John Wayne movie! We find a Rock Wren here and Darren gets us onto a little group of smart Black-throated Sparrows. We all get great views of these handsome sparrows.

We drive on to the Visitor Centre and car park at Dripping Springs. We have a bit of a walk from here so we get going. There are White-crowned Sparrows everywhere and a Loggerhead Shrike is perched on the water tower. The Organ Mountains loom over us as we walk uphill and closer. They get their name from the early Spanish settlers who thought the great spikes and folds of the mountains reminded them of the great cathedral organ pipes of Europe. These mountains however were created by volcanic action 32 million years ago and dominate the Chihuahuan desert from which they rear.

We stop at various places along our steady climb. The golden grasses and Soaptree Yuccas make for a fabulous landscape. Along our way we find Lincoln's, White-crowned, Chipping, Black-throated and Rufous-crowned Sparrows along with Spotted Towhee, Northern Flicker and both Grey-headed and Pink-sided forms of Dark-eyed Junco. We stop at an area where there are lots of scolding birds. We can hear wrens and sparrows and a Say's Phoebe is joining in. We cannot find what they are agitated about, it certainly isn't the Mule Deer happily munching in front of us. Jean spots a bird and in the scope it reveals itself to be a Cactus Wren, wow what a size it is! Getting others on to it proves more difficult and it doesn't hang around. We don't see it again! We march on as the light is fading although the dying sun turns the mountains a rich golden colour as it strikes them. Liz finds us a Pyrrhuloxia amongst the bushes and we finally reach the remains of the sanatorium right at the foot of the cliffs. What a place. It was built originally as a resort with ballroom and everything, including native dancing. It was converted into a sanatorium from which these ruins are the last remnants. The light on the mountains is superb as we take in the surroundings. There is a high flock of birds above the ridge that on investigation reveal themselves to be swifts! There must be over 30 of them, but what are they? On reflection, the only species that they are likely to be is White-throated Swift.

The stomp back starts. It is getting dark fast. Frankie and David have already turned back but thankfully we all make it back to the vans safe and sound. Frankie and David have been listening to the hooting of a Great Horned Owl and direct us to it. The sound is wonderful with the craggy landscape around us. We pile in and head off downhill. As we drive a Great Horned Owl cruises past Duncan's van and crosses the road ahead to be swallowed up by the dark, as if it is seeing us off. Fabulous.

Dinner tonight is at Uno. A diner that is efficient, but the consensus of opinion is that Ruby Tuesday's is better. There tomorrow then.

## **Day 9: Organs and White Sands**

Some of the group are up and about pre-breakfast under a crisp, blue sky. The rest of us use the time to rest and enjoy breakfast. We head out to the vans and enjoy the Great-tailed Grackles that are fighting over a piece of rock-hard pizza! The White-winged Doves are rather beautiful too.

We lose time at the local Subway as the bread isn't cooked yet, so the guides leave the group and go and fill the vans up with fuel. We load up and head out east through the pass on the southern edge of the Organ Mountains. There is a pull off at the top of the pass, where there is a surface to air missile pointing at the sky! This enormous piece of weaponry is here to commemorate the missile bases that are in the desert below us and visible from our location. There are lots of birds flitting about the gully below us. Mainly juncos and sparrows but Liz gets onto a *Pyrrhuloxia* so we follow her directions. Great views are had, but there are two! They both give us a bit of a run around but eventually we all get great views of these great looking birds.

We turn onto the Aguirre Springs Road, where we find a spot to pull off and scan about. The landscape here is superb with the mountains looming behind us and the grass/agave slope leading our eyes down to the desert beyond is another wow moment. Duncan is quickly onto a small bird that looks like a Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, so we set up the scopes and follow directions. It flits about briefly and then vanishes for good! The agave where the Gnatcatcher was to begin with now has another, larger bird on it. We train our optics there and discover a fabulous Cactus Wren. It is much closer than the previous, brief bird and this one doesn't move. We all fill our boots with this huge wren. There are some small birds flitting around the vans as we return to load up, one of them is a Brewer's Sparrow that Frankie and David have spotted.

We continue up to the campsite, where we park briefly to pay and get a Mockingbird on a dead tree. We park properly and go for a walk around the main campsite road loop. We discover another magic tree! This one has White-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Golden-crowned Kinglet (like a Firecrest) and Dark-eyed Junco in or around it. Further on the walk we also find Ruby-crowned Kinglets and a Say's Phoebe.

Over lunch, back at the vans, Duncan spots some little birds one of which is a Black-chinned Sparrow! He calls everyone over and we try everything to lure this bird back out but to no avail. We get a flight of Gambel's Quail, Keith spots a Roadrunner and a smart Steller's Jay is perched up behind us.

We drive down into the Tularosa Basin, past the missile base, with the Sacramento Hills to the east and the San Andres Mountains behind us. There is a large power line adjacent to the highway and we keep our eyes on the poles in case raptors are perched up. Frankie spots a bird on a pole and we identify it as a Prairie falcon, but it is passed us before we have a chance to stop. Darren then radios to say there is a large raptor perched ahead, so we pull off the road and take a look. It is large and dark and through the scopes we can see the golden/flame nape. It is an adult Golden Eagle. Wow, they are so much darker in the South West, almost black in colour. We admire it for a while and then move on.

Because we are relatively close to the Mexican border, Homeland Security have checkpoints on the main highways and we have to filter through one now. The security guards ask for our passports, but they are quite chirpy and we pass on with out anyone being sent to Guantanamo.

Out here in the Tularosa Basin, in the Chihuahuan Desert lies an impressive National Monument and it is to this that we now arrive. We want to be here for the sunset and, hopefully, the moonrise as tonight there is supposed to be a super moon. This is the White Sands National Monument, 57 square miles of gypsum sand, pure white like snow. The rivers that carry the gypsum end in the desert, a bit like the Okavango in Botswana, there is no way out of the Tularosa Basin. The dunes move over time and we can't wait to get our boots sandy. We go into the Visitor Centre where there are loos and a couple of retail therapy zones before we head into the site proper and park at a trail head, where a trail enters the edge of the dune system, where there is more vegetation and where any wildlife is likely to be found.

It is quite spectacular to be out in this habitat, pure desert. Nothing stirs other than the vague breeze through the sparse vegetation. There are various interpretation boards giving info about the wildlife of this desert but it is winter and most of the wildlife is nocturnal. Needless to say we don't find anything but the experience is awesome.

We drive further on and we enter a sea of sand. It looks like we are driving in the Highlands in the depths of winter. The sand is all over the road making it look iced and it is piled at the side of the road as if the snow plough has just been through. It is a remarkable place. We head right into the heart of the Reserve and park up. We don a couple of extra layers and then walk up into the vast sea of white. It rolls away and around us in great folds of sand 10 metres or so high. Camera shutters are already snapping as the sun begins to sink down behind the San Andres Mountains. The super moon isn't going to happen though as there is far too much cloud cover to the east. The colours above the mountains intensify into deep oranges and reds that stretch out over the entire western horizon. This is quite simply one of the most stunning experiences of this guides life! We are all moved by being here, in the desert, but if we are to make it out of the gate in time then we have to go. We reluctantly make our way back to the vans and head out onto the highway back to Las Cruces. Before we crest the pass between the Organs and the San Andres Mountains we can see the super moon in the mirrors of the vans. By the time we get back to the hotel it is shining clear and it certainly does seem much brighter. What a day!

Our last night in Las Cruces is back at Ruby Tuesday's, where we are well looked after and where more than one of us partakes in the 24 ounce beer to quench the desert-parched thirst!



## Day 10: Return to Socorro

There are some hardy among us who go for an early morning explore before breakfast, but the majority enjoy a relaxing morning. We are leaving Las Cruces today as we return to Socorro for a last night. It is remarkable how quickly time has flown.

Breakfast done, packing complete, we load the vans with the luggage and head out onto the highway, pointing north. We say our farewells to Las Cruces as we leave. We break up our journey by turning west at a town called Hatch. As we pass Hatch we see the sign welcoming us to the "Chilli Capital of the World!" The road west leads to a town called Nutt! We don't go that far as there is a seasonal pool between the two towns. We find it and pull both vans off the busy road. This must be the only water for miles and there are good numbers of birds on the water. On inspection they are mainly Mallard but with a handful of sleepy Shoveler. While we scan a couple of young Snow Geese and a pair of adult Ross's Geese float into view. Meadowlarks are flitting around all over the place and one or two look very white tailed. David sees a very lucky Coyote dash across the now very busy road. Truck after truck thunders by. There are lots of small birds flitting in the near bushes and flying down to the road. There are lots of White-crowned Sparrows, but Darren picks out a smart Cassin's Sparrow. A flock of birds lands on the edge of the road, what are they? Are they more sparrows? No, it is a flock of Lark Buntings! The white edges to the wings really stands out. They to and fro the whole time we are here.

Darren then finds some distant Horned Larks as a Northern Harrier appears really close. This one is a smart male, the first male of the trip. We watch him for a while. A Curve-billed Thrasher appears on top of a bush right in front of us and a Loggerhead Shrike graces the top of a bush a little further away. Suddenly, as more trucks thunder by, we hear what sounds like curlew. We all start to scan around and then, wow, we pick up on a flock of over 90 Long-billed Curlew as they pour out of the sky to drop down to the water to drink! What a sight. They make themselves comfortable on the water's edge for a while and then take off again to continue their journey. What a magic moment that was!

A particularly large truck, with an animal catcher on the front, passes. The wave of air as it passes throws Liz's, Keith's and Duncan's scopes to the ground. The eyepiece on Duncan's scope gets sheared off! Thankfully the other two are ok and that this has happened towards the end of the holiday, but it hurts all the same!

But what a nerdy-birdy place this is! They keep on coming. Both Lincoln's and Savannah Sparrows add to our sparrow haul and the Ravens are all Chihuahuan so we can get stuck right in to the identification (nasal bristles). Another thrasher makes an all too brief appearance at the base of a bush, showing rufous, but it vanishes and isn't seen again. We still have a distance to go and more birding to do so we had better drag ourselves away from Nutt-Hatch playa!

In Hatch we stock up on Subways for lunch. *"Do you want anything else on that Sir?" "Yes, some jalepeños and don't be scared!"*

We drive a little further north to Percher Dam State Park. There is a caravan park here as well as it being on the birding trail. We are back alongside the Rio Grande (roll your rrr's) and among tall Cottonwoods. There is a dam on the river and plenty of space to explore before lunch. Lots of White-winged Doves are flying around as we start to walk when suddenly Darren gets us onto a male Phainopepla flying. We watch to see where it will land, but we all lose it. Where has it gone? Darren then loses it himself, shouting, "Vermilion Flycatcher!" What?! We look to where he is pointing and there, on the overhead wire ahead of us, is a bright red flycatcher! Wow what a colour as we get it in the scopes and there are high-fives and smiles all around. This species has only a toe-hold as a breeding species in New Mexico and this is winter! It flies down to a clump of dead branches and perches there and is quickly joined by a female Phainopepla. The cameras are now red hot and memory cards are having to be changed to keep up with this moment.

A Red-breasted Nuthatch is spotted in the pine behind us and that draws our attention away from the flycatcher. The nuthatch is joined by a Ruby-crowned Kinglet and a Kestrel perches on a telegraph pole, but the flycatcher, oh my, what a bird. And it is still there!

A Ladder-backed Woodpecker flies into a Cottonwood and with a bit of perseverance we all get good views of this very stripy woodpecker. A little further on (now we have drawn ourselves away from the VERMILION FLYCATCHER) Connell spots a Black Phoebe low on a branch near a motor home. Darren spots a cat-like mammal and is off in pursuit, we all follow. We don't see anything but a guy in an RV reckons there are a few feral cats around. We have lunch at the play park and then explore a bit more along the river edge. One Cottonwood has a Downy Woodpecker and three Brown Creepers in it, along with American Goldfinch.

The road north calls us and so we hit the highway again and head north to Bosque del Apache for the rest of the afternoon. It is wonderful to be back and Mallard numbers have gone through the roof since we were last here. At Willow Overlook we enjoy the blizzard of Snow Geese as they drop into a lake adjacent to the Flight Deck. There are good numbers of Bufflehead in front of the geese and they are getting frisky, but the Pintail numbers are still ridiculous. A lovely harrier drifts by and drops in close and starts to preen. This species has been a bit of a totem bird for us this trip, we have seen it on most days. We carry on to Coyote Deck as the sun begins to set behind the Magdalenas and the cranes are filling the pools in front of us. As the sky reddens and more and more cranes arrive we realise that we have to get to Socorro, tonight. It is with immense difficulty that we drag ourselves away from here, in fact we nearly have

to drag David off the deck. The sunset is stunning as we leave and head for the hotel in Socorro.

Having checked we try and book at the Socorro Springs again, but thankfully they are too busy. We find room a little further up the strip at the Roadrunner Steakhouse. What a fitting place to eat our final dinner. The food is excellent and the staff are very obliging, superb.

## **Day 11: A Final Snowstorm of Geese**

For those that wish to we are heading back down to Bosque del Apache for one last, early morning goose-fest. As we leave the vans at the Crane Ponds and make our way to a viewing point, it is obvious that the weather has changed. There is a lot more cloud in the sky and the wind is northerly, making it bitterly cold. The cranes are in their usual position in the water, but the Pintail have gone. In fact we get flocks of Pintail overhead flying south. The sky to the south is thick with geese and, right on cue, they come in, skein after skein after skein. It is truly magical, an experience that will live long in the memory and feed the soul. The geese turn the water in front of us white and as the sky lightens and the cranes vacate, then it is the turn of the geese. Like previous visits this happens in large dribs and drabs, but each minor explosion is a sight to behold!

After breakfast we make sure all our luggage is in the vans, we have all passed back our room keys and have our passports. With all that completed we hit the road for Albuquerque. We reach the airport in good time and drop everyone at departures. We say our farewells to Connell who is grabbing an earlier flight and then Darren and Duncan take the vans back to the hire centre and get the shuttle bus back to rejoin the group. We check in and find a comfortable place to do the final checklist and cast our votes, this was always going to be tough.

**Species of the Trip:** Having given everyone three species the winner was Snow Geese with Sandhill Cranes, Northern Harrier, Hooded Merganser and Gambel's Quail coming in behind. A couple of votes for Vermilion Flycatcher (an outrageous looking piece of kit according to Tony) and Roadrunner and then some singles for Golden Eagle, Bufflehead, Long-billed Curlew, Coyote and Striped Skunk.

**Place of the Trip:** This was won hands-down by Bosque del Apache with a couple of votes for White sands and a single for the Pueblos Mission at Quarai.

**Magic Moment:** This is usually very personal, but for this trip the snowstorm of geese at Bosque del Apache was very nearly unanimous. A vote for the Osprey catching a fish, a vote for the final sunset and cranes and another for the sunset at White sands.

We all agree that this has been a superb trip, so let's do it all again in Arizona in 2019!

Our journey home takes us back to Atlanta, which is now very wet indeed, where we catch our overnight flight to London Heathrow. Once we collect our luggage we say our fond farewells. Thank you all for making this a trip to remember, not just for the amazing scenery and wildlife, but for your constant good humour, fun and laughter. From Darren and Duncan, Merry Christmas and may our paths cross again soon.

## SPECIES LIST

### BIRDS

Pied-billed Grebe  
Western Grebe  
Clarks Grebe  
White Pelican  
Double-crested Cormorant  
Great Blue Heron  
Canada Goose  
Cackling Goose  
Snow Goose  
Ross's Goose  
Wood Duck  
Mallard  
Mexican Duck  
Gadwall  
Pintail  
American Wigeon  
Northern Shoveler  
Cinnamon Teal  
Green-winged Teal  
Canvasback  
Redhead  
Ring-necked Duck  
Bufflehead  
Lesser Scaup  
Hooded Merganser  
Ruddy Duck  
Northern Harrier  
Sharp-shinned Hawk  
Cooper's Hawk  
Red-tailed Hawk  
Ferruginous Hawk  
Golden Eagle  
Bald Eagle  
Osprey  
Merlin  
American Kestrel  
Prairie Falcon  
Gambel's Quail  
American Coot  
Sandhill Crane  
Killdeer  
Greater Yellowlegs  
Long-billed Curlew

Dunlin  
Least Sandpiper  
Long-billed Dowitcher  
Ring-billed Gull  
Herring Gull  
Mourning Dove  
Collared Dove  
White-winged Dove  
Feral Rock Dove  
Greater Roadrunner  
Great Horned Owl  
White-throated Swift  
Belted Kingfisher  
Downy Woodpecker  
Hairy Woodpecker  
Ladder-backed Woodpecker  
Red-shafted Northern Flicker  
Black Phoebe  
Eastern Phoebe  
Say's Phoebe  
Vermilion Flycatcher  
Loggerhead Shrike  
Steller's Jay  
Western Scrub Jay  
Common Raven  
Chihuahuan Raven  
American Crow  
Horned Lark  
Juniper Titmouse  
Mountain Chickadee  
Black-capped Chickadee  
Bushtit  
Red-breasted Nuthatch  
White-breasted Nuthatch  
Brown Creeper  
Bewick's Wren  
House Wren  
Cactus Wren  
Rock Wren  
Canyon Wren  
Golden-crowned Kinglet  
Ruby-crowned Kinglet  
Townsend's Solitaire  
Mountain Bluebird  
Western Bluebird  
Eastern Bluebird

American Robin  
Hermit Thrush  
Northern Mockingbird  
Curve-billed Thrasher  
American Pipit  
Phainopepla  
Cedar Waxwing  
Yellow-rumped Warbler  
Pyrrhuloxia  
Spotted Towhee  
Canyon Towhee  
Rufous-crowned Sparrow  
Cassin's Sparrow  
Sage Sparrow  
Black-throated Sparrow  
Brewer's Sparrow  
Chipping Sparrow  
Savannah Sparrow  
Vesper Sparrow  
White-throated Sparrow  
White-crowned Sparrow  
Fox Sparrow  
Song Sparrow  
Lincoln's Sparrow  
Dark-eyed Junco (Pink-sided)  
Dark-eyed Junco (Oregon)  
Dark-eyed Junco (Gray-headed)  
Lark Bunting  
Western Meadowlark  
Eastern Meadowlark  
Brown-headed Cowbird  
Red-winged Blackbird  
Brewer's Blackbird  
Common Grackle  
Great-tailed Grackle  
Evening Grosbeak  
Gray-crowned Rosyfinch  
Brown-capped Rosyfinch  
Black Rosyfinch  
Cassin's Finch  
House Finch  
Red Crossbill  
Pine Siskin  
Lesser Goldfinch  
American Goldfinch  
House Sparrow

## **MAMMALS**

Coyote  
Striped Skunk  
Rock Squirrel  
Tassle-eared Squirrel  
Mule Deer  
Pronghorn  
Desert Cottontail  
Black-tailed Jackrabbit  
White-tailed Antelope Squirrel  
Texas Antelope Squirrel