

Texas and New Mexico

Saturday 5th to Saturday 19th January 2008

Leader:

Mike Read, Hampshire

Trip Diary

Saturday 5th January

Everyone arrived at Gatwick in good time and, once the Continental Airlines desks had opened, we were soon in the departure lounge awaiting our flight. We left a few minutes early and the flight to Houston went very smoothly. At Houston we changed terminal buildings and waited for our onward flight to McAllen. The overcast conditions here seemed to be keeping birds quiet as the only species definitely identified was a Feral Pigeon though a raptor was seen briefly but it disappeared before it could be identified. The flight to McAllen also went smoothly and as we made our landing approach, there was a magnificent sunset to be seen. We drove to Alamo and eventually found our accommodation and after a warm greeting from our host, we had a snack 'supper' and headed to our rooms for a well earned nights sleep.

Sunday 6th January

A few of the group were outside the hotel a little before the scheduled breakfast-time so a walk down the street seemed in order. Common Grackles were frequent, as were Mourning Doves. At least 25 Cattle Egrets were seen descending behind the Alamo Ballroom while House Sparrows and European Starlings were also noted. Best birds here were Sharp-shinned Hawk, Loggerhead Shrike and 3 Green Parakeets.

After breakfast we drove towards Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge and saw a few good birds on the way. These included Northern Harrier, Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel and a possible Merlin as well as a small group of Western Meadowlarks. As we drove into the car park at Santa Ana, the quality birding began immediately when a Long-billed Thrasher ran off into some scrub. After parking, we spent a while watching this bird as well as a Ruby-crowned Kinglet and an Orange-crowned Warbler. As we neared the Visitor Centre a Couch's Kingbird was perched high on a metal tower.

There were many birds visiting the Centre's feeders including Plain Chachalacas, the black-crested form of Tufted Titmouse, Green Jays and a Golden-fronted Woodpecker; all special birds of the Lower Rio Grande Valley. Also here were many Red-winged Blackbirds, a Northern Mockingbird and a Southern Plains Woodrat. We headed off towards the new Tower and before we had gone far, we found a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher and a White-eyed Vireo. Beside part of the trail, Olive Sparrows were frequent and a couple of Great Kiskadees were seen. An Eastern Fox Squirrel scampered off through the bushes and a pair of Harris's Hawks were seen mating high in a tree despite the increasing breeze. From the tower itself we saw Harris's Hawk again as well as a distant flock of unidentified ducks, another Sharp-shinned Hawk, a passing Great White Egret and perhaps 50 or more Turkey Vultures.

We then walked to Willow Lake where the water levels were very low due to the lack of rain. Here we encountered a few ducks but they included Northern Shovelers, Gadwall, Mottled Ducks, Green-winged and Blue-winged Teals and a single female Pintail. A Tricolored Heron

waded patiently in some shallows and 7 White-faced Ibises probed for food in the lake. An Eastern Phoebe perched on various prominent pieces of vegetation and a distant, partly hidden group of waders were identified as Greater Yellowlegs once we got closer to them. While watching more Olive Sparrows, a Lincoln's Sparrow put in a brief appearance but was not seen by all of our group. Lunch was taken back at the Visitor Centre where we again watched the regular procession of birds coming to the feeders.

Once replete we walked through the car park and headed for the pond in the 'Butterfly area'. Here we encountered 3 Solitary Sandpipers and a solitary Greater Yellowlegs! An American Pipit was found beside part of the pond, at least 2 Great Kiskadees gave good views and a Yellow-rumped Warbler was seen feeding. The main 'target' here was Clay-colored Robin and eventually we saw 5 of them! Flushed with success we headed off along the trails to Pintail Lakes but unfortunately, only one 'lake' held water. Here we found another Great White Egret and a few more Blue- and Green-winged Teal. A couple of Tree Swallows flew past as did another Solitary Sandpiper but as the birds here were not up to expectations; we began the walk back towards the car park. We soon had to pause however as Martin found a Nine-banded Armadillo that showed no fear of humans and walked past David at less than a foot range! Many photos were taken of this delightful animal. As we headed onwards, 2 more Armadillos were seen as well as our first Ladder-backed Woodpecker.

We drove back to the hotel for an hours rest before taking a relatively birdless sunset stroll, filled in our checklists and had dinner in the restaurant across the road. We then headed back to the hotel for a well-earned early night.

Monday 7th January

A few clients took a stroll before breakfast and saw similar species to yesterday plus a Golden-fronted Woodpecker leaving its night roost just outside the hotel door. With Falcon State Park our main destination today, we set off on the drive westwards as soon as everyone was ready. As we passed the McAllen area a group of 3 White-winged Doves were seen flying across the road. As we reached less urban surroundings the quantity of birds increased especially those perched on roadside telegraph poles and overhead wires. These included numerous American Kestrels and Northern Mockingbirds plus a few Loggerhead Shrikes. Plenty of Turkey Vultures were airborne and we saw an occasional Green Jay fly across the road from one area of scrub to another. A Peregrine caused a brief pause in our journey, as did the third Crested Caracara of the journey. As we reached the final approach road to Falcon SP we found a good group of Pyrrhuloxias feeding beside the road. While pausing to watch these we added 2 Lark Sparrows, a close Loggerhead Shrike and 2 Ladder-backed Woodpeckers plus, a little further on, an elusive Greater Roadrunner.

After entering the Park we headed for the RV area which is always a good bet if visitors are feeding the birds. After finding another elusive Roadrunner and a Cactus Wren as well as seeing 5 American White Pelicans and a couple of distant Ospreys in flight, we found a very helpful couple who had a number of bird feeders fully stocked. Here, a Northern Mockingbird was actively discouraged from the area as it wanted to dominate all the other birds! Other birds seen included an Altamira Oriole that had a taste for marshmallows, Cactus Wren, Pyrrhuloxias, Northern Cardinals, Verdin, Curve-billed and Long-billed Thrashers as well as many Orange-crowned Warblers.

As we drove on around other parts of the Park we saw a photographer working feeders and here we saw a Golden-fronted Woodpecker and nearby was our first Vermilion Flycatcher. We drove

to the picnic site for lunch overlooking the reservoir and were entertained by regularly passing Ospreys as well as one perched on some dead branches emerging from the water. Another fine male Vermilion Flycatcher was present for much of our stay in the area and we also noted a Great Blue Heron, 6+ Great White Egrets, many American Coots, single Pied-billed, Black-necked and Least Grebes, Ring-billed Gulls, 2 Killdeer, a Spotted Sandpiper and, just before we left, a passing Peregrine. We took a final drive round before heading to our next destination and noted another Roadrunner.

Soon we were looking at the Rio Grande at Salineño but the river level was very high and nothing of interest was noted along its banks. Overhead however there was a regular procession of TVs and amongst them there were 3 Black Vultures and a brief Zone-tailed Hawk. The nearby feeders had a regular succession of birds visiting. These included Tufted Titmouse, 10+ Altamira Orioles, single Audubon's and Hooded Orioles, Chipping and Olive Sparrows, Green Jays, Ladder-backed and Golden-fronted Woodpeckers, White-tipped Doves and the usual 2 species of Thrashers along with a few other species.

The journey back to Alamo went smoothly and sightings included dozens more TVs, numerous American Kestrels and Northern Mockingbirds plus an occasional Loggerhead Shrike or Crested Caracara. This completed a super day out and we then had an excellent meal in a nearby restaurant.

Tuesday 8th January

Today we headed east towards Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge. Except for a single White-winged Dove and a few Turkey Vultures, we saw little of interest until after we had passed Harlingen. Once we were out into the countryside, birds came thick and fast. American Kestrels were the most numerous raptor but we also saw Osprey, Red-tailed Hawk, 4 Crested Caracaras, Harris's Hawk and White-tailed Hawk. Ring-billed Gulls were numerous over a large waterway, a small pool had single Great White Egret and Anhinga and a group of insect-catching Northern Roughwings while along a track we spotted a group of perhaps 10 Northern Bobwhite Quails. The final good sighting before the reserve involved a group of Cattle Egrets that seemed to be landing at a hidden pool. Then about 10 Roseate Spoonbills flew around and joined them – but then promptly disappeared.

At the Centre's feeders there were lots of Green Jays, Red-winged Blackbirds, Northern Cardinals and Great-tailed Grackles to be seen along with a few Plain Chachalacas, White-tipped Doves and Curve-billed Thrashers. A Great Kiskadee drank from the flowing water feature and it was joined by an Armadillo. As we left the car park to head for the Bayside Drive, a group of about a dozen Northern Bobwhite Quails scuttled across the 'parking lot' and promptly disappeared into the scrub.

As we began the drive towards Laguna Madre birds were a little scarce except for occasional Northern Mockingbirds in the bushes and a few TVs and 2 Black Vultures overhead. Once the sea was in view the situation changed considerably and as we scanned the water we found lots of new species. Groups of Red-breasted Mergansers and Redheads were frequent and there were good numbers of gulls, terns and waders to be seen. These included Ring-billed and Franklin's Gulls, Forster's, Royal and Caspian Terns and Long-billed Curlews, Dunlins, Willets, Ruddy Turnstone, Greater and a Lesser Yellowlegs as well as many Black-bellied (Grey) Plovers. Occasional Ospreys flew past and there were quite a few out on the various logs, islands and sandbanks. Most were feasting on fish they had caught and we took the hint and ate our own picnics overlooking this birdy location. Other species noted in the lagoon included Reddish,

Snowy and Great White Egrets, Great Blue Heron. Pintail, Black-necked Grebe and both species of Pelican (Brown and American White). Overhead another White-tailed Hawk was often seen while the scrub on the other side of the road held House Wren, Verdin and a Hammond's Flycatcher. As we set off on the drive away from the coast, a White Ibis flew rapidly northwards.

As we began the journey back towards the Visitor Centre we saw 3 or 4 Ospreys resting on the ground and a little further on groups of 3 and about 10 Northern Bobwhite Quails flew up from the roadside grassland. A small roadside pool held a group of Redheads and an even smaller pond contained a couple of Long-billed Curlews and a single Willet. As we reached the road, there were a couple of Roadrunners to be seen and one provided good photo opportunities.

We then drove to the Osprey Overlook at Laguna Atascosa where we saw no ospreys! However, the lake did seem full of American Coots and Ruddy Ducks. In an area of shallows were Great White and Snowy Egrets as well as 3 'Herons', Great Blue, Little Blue and Tricolored. To complete the scene here, a Pied-billed Grebe kept popping up near the herons and there were 2 species of wader namely Greater Yellowlegs and Spotted Sandpiper. From here we walked to the Alligator Pond where, needless to say, we found a good-sized Alligator. Also here was a feeding group of Blue-winged Teals and they were accompanied by single Pied-billed and Least Grebes that were constantly diving for items disturbed by the ducks.

We now set off on the journey back to Alamo and not far down the road we noted another Roadrunner and then saw a Diamond-backed Rattlesnake crossing the road. Raptors were the main species seen throughout the rest of the journey and these included Crested Caracaras, Harris's Hawks, Northern Harriers and a couple of 'sparring' White-tailed Kites.

Wednesday 9th January

The first location we were going to visit today was Bentsen Rio Grande Valley State Park. During the journey we noted many Turkey Vultures, a couple of Loggerhead Shrikes and an American Kestrel. Close to the BRGVSP visitor centre we noted good numbers of Great-tailed Grackles plus single Lincoln's Sparrow, Eastern Phoebe, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher and Common Yellowthroat. We also saw Tufted Titmouse, Green Jay, Altamira Oriole, House Wren, Rufous Hummingbird and what turned out to be a Black-chinned Hummingbird.

As we headed along the road into the Park there were frequent assemblages of birds at feeding stations along the way. Each of these held plenty of birds, and other species too! Green Jays, Altamira Orioles, Golden-fronted Woodpeckers and Plain Chachalacas were frequent but at the second lot of feeders, a group of 3 Collared Peccaries/Javalinas were a pleasant surprise. These turned out to be the first of a dozen or so individuals that we saw. A Coopers Hawk was seen close to one set of feeders while calls at another location alerted us to the presence of a Gray Hawk. As we headed towards the lake, a Ferruginous Pygmy Owl was an excellent find and we spent some time admiring this lovely bird and the Northern Cardinals that were mobbing it.

The Kingfisher Overlook lived up to its name as we saw all 3 species (Belted, Ringed and Green) within 5 minutes of arriving there. We also noted a couple of Great Kiskadees, lots of American Coots, Cormorants and Least Grebes. There were also single Anhinga, Lesser Scaup and Ring-necked Ducks noted. After finding a group of about 15 Lesser Goldfinches and a few other birds nearby, we returned to the Visitor Centre for lunch where we were able to observe another Black-chinned Hummingbird, at least 3 Great Kiskadees and a couple of Tufted Titmouse (or should that be Titmouses or even Titmice?!).

The Naturalist at BRGVSP offered to take us out and show us an Eastern Screech Owl. He kindly collected a minibus and drove us to various locations where the birds were normally seen. However despite his best efforts he was unable to show us an owl perhaps because the day was so warm and they were not hole-roosting. He did tell us that an American bittern had been seen close to the entrance to Anzalduas Country Park. Our drive to this location was interrupted as we gained good views of two White-tailed Kites hovering over a grassy field. As we reached the 'bittern pond' there was lots to be seen. There were 10 Least Grebes, some Mottled Ducks, a passing Sharp-shinned Hawk, Great White Egret, Sora, Terrapins and a Muskrat but we could not find the bittern; perhaps it had moved. Within Anzalduas Country Park itself we did see at least five more Armadillos, Green Jays, Tufted Titmouse, Crested Caracara, Long-billed Curlew, Gray Hawk, a group of Ground Doves and at least 15 Inca Doves, a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and at least 3 Fox Squirrels. As we left to begin the journey back to the hotel we had another prolonged look at the pond and eventually managed to locate the American Bittern. On the way back we made a small detour and managed to locate a male and female Northern Harrier.

Thursday 10th January

After breakfast at the Alamo Inn and a farewell from Keith Hackland, we headed to McAllen airport and were soon assembled in the departure lounge. The flight left on time and went smoothly and as we landed at Houston, a Turkey Vulture and a female Northern Harrier were among the birds seen. We went to the El Paso departure gate and, about 30 minutes late, we made our way to our plane. Unfortunately, after sitting there for a while, we were advised that there was a problem with the aircraft and we had to return to the terminal building to await developments. Eventually another plane arrived and we re-boarded and, about 150 minutes late, we set off on our second flight. By the time we had secured our vehicle, the sun was setting over El Paso and much of the journey to Las Cruces was completed in darkness. We arrived at our motel and were soon enjoying a good and, as usual, generous evening meal.

Friday 11th January

In the grounds of our motel at Las Cruces we had good views of White-winged and Mourning Doves before we left and we also saw a number of American Crows. On the way towards the Organ Mountains we glimpsed an American Robin and then had good views of 2 Common Ravens, a Cactus Wren and a group of Black-throated Sparrows.

In the area of the Visitor Centre feeders were attracting a number of birds including White-crowned and Black-throated Sparrows, Canyon and Green-tailed Towhees, Dark-eyed Juncos and Western Scrub Jays. Also seen dashing about in the area were 4 or 5 Cliff Chipmunks. As we began the walk towards Dripping Springs we found lots more Black-throated Sparrows and among them were a few Black-chinned Sparrows too. Also along this walk we noted Bewick's Wren, Lesser Goldfinch, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Verdin and a group of possible Gambel's Quails. When we arrived back at the car park, Martin, who had remained in the vicinity of the car park, told us he had seen a Roadrunner and a Cedar Waxwing. From here we drove to another part of the reserve and saw a Ladder-backed Woodpecker plus repeats of previously encountered species. A quick look along the Baylor Canyon track had us looking at a couple of Red-tailed Hawks perched in a tree and a Canyon Towhee that came to drink near a water pump.

We now began the journey towards Silver City and at the edge of Las Cruces a pond held a few American Coots and a Great Blue Heron. Along the route there were many more Red-tailed Hawks and Greater Roadrunners to be seen as well as a few American Kestrels, Northern Harriers and Ravens (presumably both Common and Chihuahuan). A larger raptor seen to land on a distant 'utility' pole was identified as a Golden Eagle due to the size difference between it and a

raven perched nearby. During our picnic just beyond Deming a female Northern Harrier gave us good views and a White-tailed Jackrabbit were among the sightings.

We decided to drive straight to Little Walnut Picnic Ground a little beyond Silver City. Beside the road at the edge of town we saw a number of Pine Siskins and a group of Bluebirds that were so back-lit that we could not be sure if they were Eastern or Western. At the picnic ground itself it seemed that perhaps the birds were reducing their activity towards the end of the day. However we did manage to locate about 3 Acorn and a single Hairy Woodpecker to complete our birding for the day, however, on the way back to Silver City we did find a group of 4 Mule Deer.

Saturday 12th January

Today we headed back towards Little Walnut Picnic Ground to begin our day. Common and Chihuahuan Ravens were frequent over the town and a short way up the road various birds were visiting feeders in a couple of gardens. These included Pine Siskins, Curve-billed Thrasher and presumably the same group of Bluebirds that we had seen the previous evening. Better lighting meant that we were able to identify them as Western. Further up the road we saw presumably the same group of Mule Deer that we had seen the previous day except that there were a couple more individuals with them and we also saw a Phainopepla on some overhead wires. At the Picnic Ground itself we again encountered Acorn Woodpeckers but also saw Steller's and Western Scrub Jays, White-breasted and Pygmy Nuthatches and a couple of Golden-crowned Kinglets.

We then headed west from Silver City up over the Continental Divide and on towards the Gila area. Along the way we saw a couple of Roadrunners, a few Red-tailed Hawks and a Killdeer and then added 2 new species namely Brewer's Blackbird and Say's Phoebe. At a small 'frontage' road we took a stroll along beside a small wetland area. This proved to be most productive with sightings of Mallard, Northern Shoveler, Black Phoebe, Sharp-shinned Hawk, American Robins, Northern Flickers, Marsh Wren and Ladder-backed Woodpecker. However the most surprising bird here was a Virginia Rail that flew up from a roadside ditch and along past the group before dropping into a small area of 'cattails' never to be seen again! The final good sighting here was of a couple of White-tailed Deer.

From here we took the road towards Bill Evans Lake and paused for lunch a short way along. A group of White-crowned Sparrows were seen as we arrived but they soon disappeared when a Sharp-shinned Hawk went dashing past. On the way up to the lake an American Kestrel was perched on wires as a couple more Red-tailed Hawks circled above. At the lake itself there were just a few American Coots and a Pied-billed Grebe to be seen so we headed off down the road towards the town of Gila. Due to a missed turning we found a group of about 250 American Wigeon on a small pond close to a house and out in the fields were about 16 Sandhill Cranes. Back on the correct road we pulled up at the Gila River and immediately encountered a group of at least 7 Gambel's Quails. Also noted here were a couple more Red-tailed Hawks and a number of White-crowned Sparrows. Just up river from the bridge we could see 2 small Beaver dams on a side stream but unfortunately there was no sign of their makers.

We began the journey back towards Silver City and took a short detour along the Tyrone/Red Rocks road. Here we saw lots of Western Meadowlarks and White-crowned Sparrows as well as another group of Gambel's Quails to complete the day.

Sunday 13th January

After breakfast we began the journey back towards the Rio Grande Valley. To reach this we had to climb through conifer and juniper forests on Route 152. Western Bluebirds, Red-tailed Hawks and American Kestrels were amongst the first birds encountered and along the way we also noted Northern Flickers, Western Scrub Jays and lots of Dark-eyed Juncos. At the Lower Galinas campground we made a brief pause and found Mountain Chickadee and Golden-crowned Kinglet. As we headed onwards a group of perhaps a dozen Wild Turkeys were noted almost on the roadside. We paused at Emory Pass Viewpoint at 8228 feet above sea level and onwards from here we had good views of an adult Golden Eagle above the road. In Hillsboro we noted a Steller's Jay and at a group of feeders there were lots of Pine Siskins and House Finches. As we reached the more level ground at the edge of the Valley, we saw a couple of Northern Harriers and another Red-tailed Hawk.

We made our way to Percha Dam State Park for lunch and some birding and here we found a number of species including Hairy Woodpecker, Say's Phoebe, Phainopepla, Cooper's Hawk, Green-winged Teal, Black Phoebe, a pair of Belted Kingfishers, Spotted Towhee, Bridled Titmouse and White-breasted Nuthatch. We also had a very brief view of another American Bittern that we disturbed along the riverbank. As we headed back to the vehicle in preparation to depart a group of 3 Sandhill Cranes flew northwards up the Valley. From here we drove to the Cabello Dam area and encountered American Wigeon, Shovelers, Pintails, Western Grebes, Olivaceous Cormorants, Ring-billed Gulls and 9 Great Blue Herons. A pair of Common Goldeneye was duly celebrated as being our first of this species but then we drove up into Cabello State Park itself and out on the lake there was a huge raft of perhaps 700 Common Goldeneye! Also here we noted more Western Grebes, although not every individual was checked and some could have been Clark's Grebe. The best sighting here though was a large group of Gambel's Quails, perhaps as many as 80 of these, no doubt coming to be fed close to an RV. Also seen at this spot was a group of 8 Scaled Quails which had an amazing ability to disappear immediately after we had first seen them! We then drove on up to Truth or Consequences to our hotel and a good meal nearby.

Monday 14th January

Our first port of call today was Elephant Butte Dam area. On the way there we noted a Eurasian Collared Dove and a few Northern Mockingbirds. In the picnic ground just below the dam we encountered a good many species, including the lovely Black-throated Sparrows, a Verdin, a Great Blue Heron and another group of Gambel's Quails. Also here were Say's Phoebe, White-winged Doves, Pyrrhuloxia, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Cactus Wren and a lone Javelina. We then moved up to the main part of Elephant Butte State Park and did a tour around the RV camp ground area. White-crowned Sparrows were amongst the birds coming to a few feeders that were out and a thrasher noted nearby turned out to be a Curve-billed. We continued our drive round and eventually located not one but two Crissal Thrashers. One of these gave excellent and prolonged views. Having only seen one of these birds here in the past this was a good find and then a little further on we found yet another Crissal Thrasher along with another Curve-billed Thrasher. Other species noted here included a couple of Ladder-backed Woodpeckers, more Gambel's Quails, 4 over-flying American White Pelicans and 4 or 5 Rock Squirrels.

From here we drove back into T or C to purchase our lunch and during the drive to Monticello Point we found more Red-tailed Hawks and a few Ravens along the way. From the Point itself we could see lots more Grebes out on the reservoir as well as a group of Ring-necked Ducks. We then headed north on I25 seeing lots more Ravens and a group of 9 Pronghorns along the way. We left the main highway at the 115 junction and drove down to the river just south of here. Things were rather quiet but we did manage to find at least 3 Ruby-crowned Kinglets, a Marsh Wren and briefly saw a couple of Bushtits.

Just after 4.00pm we drove into Bosque del Apache NWR and immediately were seeing lots of birds. A common Snipe was the only wading bird species that we noted but there were ducks of many species on view as well as thousands of Snow Geese and Sandhill Cranes. As it was rather late in the afternoon now we decided that a brief drive round would be in order. This produced views of Red-tailed Hawk and a juvenile Bald Eagle amongst other things. We then headed to Socorro and our hotel which would be our base for the next three nights.

Tuesday 15th January

Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge was to be our venue for the entire day (except breakfast!) and we left the hotel at 6.00am to see the morning flight-out. We saw nothing in the darkness on the drive to the reserve and were just settling in near the flight deck when all of the Snow Geese and Ross's Geese took off from the various ponds. This made a spectacular start to our early visits to this place. To see so many birds in the air against a typical cloudless sunrise was just fabulous. The geese left the area and headed for some roadside pools, where we saw them later, and soon afterwards an adult Bald Eagle landed in a dead tree not far from us. The Sandhill Cranes which had night-roosted close to the flight deck took little notice of this magnificent raptor but some of the ducks (Pintails, Shovelers etc.) seemed understandably nervous. We spent quite a time near the flight deck taking photos and filming the unfolding day before doing a quick drive around the Farm Loop. Here we encountered a few Red-tailed Hawks, 2 or 3 Common Pheasants plus another Bald Eagle before we headed back to Socorro for breakfast passing large quantities of Snow Geese and Sandhill Cranes on the roadside pools.

Feeling refreshed from our meal we drove back to Bosque del Apache. On the way we saw Mourning Doves, American Kestrels, Harriers, Geese, Cranes and a Coyote. A brief stop at the visitor centre produced good sightings of Gambel's Quails, Say's Phoebe, with lots of White-crowned Sparrows and Dark-eyed Juncos. Needless to say whilst we were in the Centre, a few of the group took the opportunity for a little retail therapy!

From here we drove back into the main part of the Reserve and around the Marsh Loop. At the first observation deck we were able to look over a large pool where ducks were numerous. These included Pintails, Shovelers, and Green-winged Teal plus a number of Canada Geese but nothing new. As we strolled back to the vehicle another group of White-crowned Sparrows and a Say's Phoebe were seen. On a pool between the trail and the road, there was a group of Goosanders, which included at least 2 males and 3 females. A Northern Harrier drifted by as we watched. At the very southern end of the loop, a small pool to the right held good numbers of Snow Geese and Pintails, whilst further out on a field there was a good flock of Sandhill Cranes. To the north of this point a frozen lake was the resting point for a number of male Pintails whilst an area of open water further on held a large flock of ducks. In this area and also up the eastern side of this loop, many photographs were taken of the birds and of the colourful Coyote Willow reflected in the various waterways. Lunch now called and we paused close to the start of some walking trails to eat our picnics.

As we left to drive around the Farm Loop a Sharp-shinned Hawk was in the roadside trees but viewing of this was suspended when an adult Golden Eagle was seen soaring around. This bird was viewed quite sometime before it eventually moved off and was lost from view. From the Coyote Deck we could see a huge gathering of Cranes and Geese. Also on view from here were a couple of Bald Eagles, one adult and one juvenile, a male American Kestrel, 2 or 3 Northern Harriers and a Red-tailed Hawk. Smaller birds seen here included Meadowlarks and Say's Phoebe and then a rather nervous Roadrunner dashed passed below us. At one time the Snow Geese all took to the air, circled round for a while and then gradually returned to their previous

location. This gave an opportunity to estimate their numbers and we reckoned that there were perhaps as many as 20,000 on view from this one point. We continued our drive around the Farm Loop seeing many more Cranes and Geese as we went, as well as a few Northern Harriers and another Bald Eagle. Much time was spent completing this loop and by the end of it, a return to Socorro seemed in order. As we began the journey back along the road, a couple of Mule Deer were noted and the roadside pools again held cranes and geese but this time in much smaller numbers as most of the birds were still out feeding. Back in Socorro we had time to relax for a short while before our evening meal.

Wednesday 16th January

Once again we left the hotel at 6.00am to visit Bosque for the dawn flight but this time we paused at the roadside pools where many of the geese had ended up the previous day. At first most of the birds flew past us and landed on the pools to the west of the road but eventually a few geese joined the Sandhill Cranes to the east of the road. By now only a few of the geese had flown out from their night-roost pools but soon the skies seemed almost full of skein after skein of Snow Geese. Many of them joined their colleagues roosting on the ice-covered pools on both sides of the road. After enjoying this spectacle for a while we drove onto the reserve and did a quick tour of the Farm Loop where we saw many of the same birds as the previous morning, but the highlight surely had to be the 7 Bald Eagles that were in view at one time near the Coyote Deck. This group of birds consisted of one adult and 6 juveniles and as we left the reserve shortly afterwards another adult and 2 more juveniles were in roadside trees. By 8.30am we were back in Socorro and shortly after we headed to the restaurant for a hearty breakfast.

Water Canyon was our next destination and the drive westwards from Socorro was taken at an easy pace in the hope of locating wildlife. A couple of Roadrunners were noted as we went but it was not until we turned onto the Water Canyon road that we saw a group of six Pronghorns. Approaching the campground we saw 3 Acorn Woodpeckers in one tree whilst on the opposite side of the road there was a small group of Bushtits feeding in the Junipers. From the campground we walked some distance up the road but birds were, at first, in very short supply. Eventually we managed to locate a couple of Golden-crowned Kinglets and then we found a Townsend's Solitaire that eventually gave us good views. We strolled back down the hill and passed the vehicle and here we found a good few Western Bluebirds, a White-breasted Nuthatch, Canyon Towhee and Western Scrub Jay. From here we drove towards Magdalena seeing Northern Harrier, Roadrunner and a group of about 50 Horned/Shore Larks. As we took the Kelly Mine road, a group of birds close to some housing caught our attention and these turned out to be Pinyon Jays. Unfortunately they flew off just after our arrival but we noted where they were heading for and by taking another side road, we were soon watching a flock of about 50 feeding in someone's garden. Also noted here were lots of Pine Siskins, House Finch and White-winged Doves and a Greater Roadrunner suddenly appeared, dashed off down the road kicking up dust as it went. We had our lunch close to a small church and here we noted a couple of American Robins, Mexican Scrub Jays and another Townsend's Solitaire before we headed off back through Socorro and on to Bosque del Apache for the remainder of the afternoon.

As we approached the reserve a group of 10 Mule Deer were feeding right beside the road. These provided lots of good photo opportunities including of the fine buck that was with them. Whilst we watched them a Loggerhead Shrike perched nearby and gave brief but good views. As we began our drive around the Farm Loop it was noticeable that many of the pools still had a considerable amount of surface ice. However the areas of open water attracted good numbers of various ducks including Green-winged Teals, Pintail and Shoveler. Two female Buffleheads were seen in some shallows and then further on there were 2 males and another female to be seen. The usual massed cranes and geese were seen as well as a couple of Bald Eagles, Northern

Harriers and Red-tailed Hawks. As we neared the end of the loop we saw a fine male Canvasback and a Lesser Scaup on one of the waterways. After watching some of the geese and cranes flighting back in to roost near the Flight Deck, we began the drive back towards Socorro in the gathering dusk. As we went we kept an eye open for owls but our search was unsuccessful. However we still felt that we had had an excellent days birding in the area.

Thursday 17th January

Once again we headed for Bosque del Apache to witness the marvellous spectacle of the flight out at dawn. We were not disappointed as at first the gorgeous pink glow graced the eastern skies and gradually this turned to gold as the sun peeped over the horizon to start another day. With the roadside pools being totally frozen, no geese or cranes were roosting where we needed them for sunrise photography so we headed into the main part of the reserve and took lots of pictures there. At one time, many thousands of geese took to the air together making the effort of leaving a warm bed all the more rewarding. It really was a spectacular start to the day. Viewing and photography close to the Flight Deck complete we did a quick drive around the Farm Loop seeing at least a couple of Bald Eagles, Ring-necked Duck and Lesser Scaup, American Robin and Great Blue Heron. However, the find of the morning had to be the Black-crowned Night-heron that remained motionless on the far bank of one of the waterways. If we hadn't stopped to watch other birds in this area we might well have missed it! As we headed back towards Socorro thankful of our final visit to Bosque del Apache we saw a couple more Harriers and perhaps the same Coyote that we had seen previously.

After breakfast we loaded up the minibus and began our journey north towards Albuquerque seeing numerous Ravens, American Crows and a few Red-tailed Hawks along the way. Perhaps due to the freeze-up, birds at Sevilleta were few and far between. However we did manage to find Northern Flicker, lots of Dark-eyed Juncos and White-crowned Sparrows, some Pheasants and a female Northern Harrier perched in a tree. As we were leaving we paused to view some more sparrows and juncos and in amongst them found a Spotted Towhee whilst on a nearby piece of vegetation a Downy Woodpecker was intent on securing a meal. After a brief visit to the Visitor Centre where we saw an Antelope Ground Squirrel and a few sparrows coming to feeders, we headed towards Bernardo and a brief stop at the Lad S Gordon Waterfowl Management Area reserve. This seemed a bit like a mini Bosque del Apache and in fact they are trying to create a secondary wintering site for cranes and geese in case of problems on the main reserve. Needless to say geese and cranes were much in evidence around this reserve along with Say's Phoebe, American Kestrel and Northern Harrier but perhaps the best sighting here was of a sunbathing Greater Roadrunner right next to the adjacent railway line. As we left the reserve a group of Gambel's Quails were seen on the roadside.

We now completed the journey up to the Rio Grande Nature Centre on the northern edge of Albuquerque. After our picnic lunch we enjoyed good views of 2 White-breasted Nuthatches around the edge of the car park and close to the centre we were able to see good numbers of Wood Ducks, Green-winged Teal, a Lesser Scaup and 3 or 4 Spotted Towhees beneath the feeders. Another new species here was a Black-capped Chickadee but this bird did prove rather elusive so it took a while for everyone to get to see it. Around the nature trail we began by finding more Wood Ducks on the waterway and then out near the main river we located another Downy Woodpecker and a rather confiding Northern Flicker. Out on the river itself was male Goosander and a Spotted Sandpiper teetered its way along the riverbank where a Black Phoebe was feeding. Our final new species of the trip, an American Goldfinch was seen briefly before we made our way back to the Visitor Centre and then on to our hotel for the group's final night in New Mexico. To finish the trip we had a fine evening meal at a nearby restaurant but returned to

the motel in time to complete our packing for the start of the journey home the following morning.

Friday 18th January

After a brief early morning breakfast, we drove to Albuquerque airport with plenty of time for the check-in and 10.40am flight to Houston and then onwards on an overnight flight back to Gatwick.

SPECIES ACCOUNTS

BSP = Bentsen Rio Grande Valley State Park; BdA = Bosque del Apache NWR; RGNC = Rio Grande Nature Centre in Albuquerque;

BIRDS

GUANS AND CHACHALACAS

Plain Chachalaca *Ortalis vetula* At least 20 at Santa Ana. Also seen at Salineno and BSP.

NEW WORLD QUAILS

Scaled Quail *Callipepla squamata* A group of about 8 seen briefly at Caballo Dam State Park on 13th

Gambel's Quail *Lophortyx gambelli* A good trip for this species which was seen on 7 successive days from 11th with over 100 on 13th including about 80 at Caballo
Northern Bobwhite *Colinus virginianus* Seen in various locations on 8th when we went to Laguna Atascosa NWR

PHEASANTS & ALLIES

Wild Turkey *Meleagris gallopavo* At least 10 seen in a group near the Gallinas Camp Ground on 13th
Common Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus* Seen at BdA on 15th, 16th & 17th and at Sevilleta on the latter date

WILDFOWL

Snow Goose *Anser caerulescens* Thousands seen at BdA each day that we were there including a single flock of perhaps 20,000 birds.

Ross's Goose *Anser rossii* Good numbers seen at BdA each day we were there

Canada Goose *Branta canadensis* Seen on 5 days from 13th
Wood Duck *Aix sponsa* About 14 males & 10 females at RGNC on 17th

Gadwall *Anas strepera* 2 on 6th at Santa Ana then noted on 5 days from 13th

American Wigeon *Anas americana* At least 250 near Gila on 12th then seen on 13th & 15th

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* Seen on 6th at Santa Ana and then on 6 successive days from 12th

Mottled Duck *Anas fulvigula* Noted on 6th at Santa Ana and then on 9th at BSP

Blue-winged Teal *Ana discors* Noted on 6th, 8th & 9th in the Lower Rio Grande Valley

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata* At least 6 at Santa Ana on 6th then noted on 6 days from 12th

Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	A female on 6 th at Santa Ana was our first. Also seen on 8 th at LA and then seen at BdA from 13 th where the species was very numerous and confiding
Green-winged Teal	<i>Anas carolinensis</i>	Seen at Santa Ana on 6 th then noted in good numbers on 5 days from 13 th
Canvasback	<i>Aythya valisineria</i>	One male at BdA on 16 th
Redhead	<i>Aythya americana</i>	Just noted on 8 th at Laguna Atascosa
Ring-necked Duck	<i>Aythya collaris</i>	1 on 9 th at BSP, 8+ on 14 th at Elephant Butte State Park then a female at BdA on 15 th and a male at RGNC on 17 th
Lesser Scaup	<i>Aythya affinis</i>	1 on 9 th at BSP, 1 on 16 th at BdA and 1 at RGNC on 17 th
Bufflehead	<i>Bucephala albeola</i>	2 on 13 th at Caballo Dam SP then seen on the next 4 days at BdA
Common Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>	A pair near Caballo Dam on 13 th were our first but soon after we saw a huge flock of about 700 on the main lake!
Hooded Merganser	<i>Lophodytes cucullatus</i>	A pair was seen at BdA on 15 th & 16 th but the next day we could only find the male
Common Merganser	<i>Mergus merganser</i>	2 males & 3 females seen at BdA on 15 th & a male seen at RGNC on 17 th
Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>	1 male at BdA on 15 th was the only sighting
Ruddy Duck	<i>Oxyura jamaicensis</i>	Seen in large numbers on 8 th at Laguna Atascosa and then seen at BdA on 15 th
GREBES		
Least Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus dominicus</i>	1 at Laguna Atascosa on 8 th and a few at BSP the following day
Pied-billed Grebe	<i>Podilymbus podiceps</i>	Noted on 8 days 3 in Texas & 5 in New Mexico
Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>	Singles seen at Falcon State Park on 7 th and at Laguna Atascosa on 8 th
Clark's Grebe	<i>Aechmophorus clarkii</i>	Not specifically identified but there were almost certainly some present at Caballo & Elephant Butte Lakes
Western Grebe	<i>Aechmophorus occidentalis</i>	Certainly identified at Caballo on 13 th and at Elephant Butte on 14 th
IBISES & SPOONBILLS		
American White Ibis	<i>Eudocimus albus</i>	Just a single adult bird seen at Laguna Atascosa on 8 th .
White-faced Ibis	<i>Plegadis chihi</i>	7 on Willow Lake at Santa Ana on 6 th
Roseate Spoonbill	<i>Ajaia ajaia</i>	At least 6 on the approach to Laguna Atascosa NWR on 8 th .
HERONS, EGRETS & BITTERNES		
American Bittern	<i>Botaurus lentiginosus</i>	1 eventually found at Anzaldulas on 9 th and another glimpsed at Percha Dam on 13 th .
Black-crowned Night-heron	<i>nycticorax nycticorax</i>	A juvenile bird seen at BdA on 17 th .
Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	At least 20 seen close to the Alamo Inn on 6 th where the species was also noted on the following three mornings.
Great Blue Heron	<i>Ardea herodias</i>	Noted on 9 days in small numbers with the most being 9 at Cabello Dam on 13 th .
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	Just noted in the Lower Rio Grand

Reddish Egret	<i>Egretta rufescens</i>	Valley on five days.
Tricoloured Heron	<i>Egretta tricolor</i>	A few seen at Laguna Atascosa on 8th 1 at Santa Ana on 6 th and a few at Laguna Atascosa on 8th
Little Blue Heron	<i>Egretta caerulea</i>	2 at Laguna Atascosa on 8 th .
Snowy Egret	<i>Egretta thula</i>	A few at Laguna Atascosa on 8 th and 1 at BSP on 9th
PELICANS		
American White Pelican	<i>Pelecanus erythrorhynchos</i>	At least 8 at Falcon Dam State Park on 7 th then also seen on 8 th at Laguna Atascosa and 4 on 14 th at Elephant Butte 4 at Laguna Atascosa on 8 th .
Brown Pelican	<i>Pelecanus occidentalis</i>	
CORMORANTS		
Neotropic Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax brasilianus</i>	Noted on 7 th at Falcon State Park and then at Caballo on 13 th and Elephant Butte on 14 th .
Double-crested Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax auritus</i>	2 on 6 th at Santa Ana, then seen on next 2 days.
ANHINGAS		
Anhinga	<i>Anhinga anhinga</i>	1 on 8 th on the way to Laguna Atascosa & 2 at BSP on 9 th .
NEW WORLD VULTURES		
Turkey Vulture	<i>Cathartes aura</i>	Seen every day in the Lower Rio Grande Valley on 6 th -10 th .
American Black Vulture	<i>Coragyps atratus</i>	2 on 7 th , 1 on 8 th and at least 2 on 9 th in various parts of the LGV
FALCONS & CARACRAS		
Northern Crested Caracara	<i>Caracara cheriway</i>	3 on 7 th during the trip to the Falcon Dam. 7 on 8 th at Laguna Atascosa and also noted on 9 th at BSP.
American Kestrel	<i>Falco sparverius</i>	Seen every day from 6 th , except 10 th .
Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>	A bird possibly of this species was seen on the way to Santa Ana on 6th
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	1 on 7 th during the journey to Falcon State Park where we saw another as we finished lunch.
KITES, HAWKS & EAGLES		
Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	At least 10 seen on 7 th at Falcon SP and a similar number were at Laguna Atascosa the following day.
White-tailed Kite	<i>Elanus leucurus</i>	3 on 8 th at Laguna Atascosa and 2 on 9 th between BSP and Anzaldulas.
Bald Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>	Noted on 14 th , 15 th , 16 th & 17 th at Bosque with a max. of 10 on 16 th .
Northern Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>	Seen every day except 5 th & 7 th .
Sharp-shinned Hawk	<i>Accipiter striatus</i>	This sparrowhawk look-alike was seen on 5 days in various locations
Cooper's Hawk	<i>Accipiter cooperii</i>	First seen at BSP on 9 th , then on 12 th 15 th and 17 th .
Harris's Hawk	<i>Parabuteo unicinctus</i>	Small numbers noted on 6 th , 7 th , 8 th and 9 th in the LRGV
Gray Hawk	<i>Asturina nitida</i>	2 individuals seen at BSP on 9 th .
Zone-tailed Hawk	<i>Buteo albonotatus</i>	Just a single bird at Salineño on 7th
White-tailed Hawk	<i>Buteo albicaudatus</i>	At least 6 seen during our visit to Laguna Atascosa on 8 th .
Red-tailed Hawk	<i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>	Common. Seen on 10 days.

Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	1 distant bird on 11 th was disappointing but followed by good views on 13 th and 15 th .
RAILS, GALLINULES & COOTS		
Virginia Rail	<i>Rallus limicola</i>	Just a single sighting in a damp area to the west of Silver City on 12 th .
Sora	<i>Porzana carolina</i>	3 at Anzaldulas CP on 9 th .
Common Moorhen	<i>Galinula chloropus</i>	Noted on 3 days in the RGV and on 13 th at Cabello SP
American Coot	<i>Fulica americana</i>	Noted on 7 th , 8 th & 9 th in the LRGV and then seen every day from 12 th .
CRANES		
Sandhill Crane	<i>Grus canadensis</i>	At least 16 seen on 12 th near Gila, 3 on 13 th at Percha Dam, then thousands at BdA from 14 th – 17 th .
PLOVERS & LAPWINGS		
Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	Fair numbers seen at Laguna Atascosa on 8 th .
Killdeer	<i>Charadrius vociferus</i>	1 on 6 th during our visit to Santa Ana, then seen in small numbers on 7 th , 8 th , 12 th and 13 th .
SANDPIPERS		
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	Singles at BdA on 14 th & 15 th
Long-billed Curlew	<i>Numenius americanus</i>	A few seen during our trip to the coast on 8 th and then a single bird at Anzaldulas on 9 th .
Greater Yellowlegs	<i>Tringa melanoleuca</i>	Seen on 6 th , 7 th & 8 th in the LRGV and then a single bird at BdA on 15 th .
Lesser Yellowlegs	<i>Tringa flavipes</i>	At least 1 seen on 8 th at Laguna Atascosa
Solitary Sandpiper	<i>Tringa solitaria</i>	4 at Santa Ana on 6 th .
Spotted Sandpiper	<i>Actitis macularius</i>	Seen 3 days in LRGV and on 13 th at Percha Dam and 14 th at Elephant Butte
Willet	<i>Catoptrophorus semipalmatus</i>	Just noted on 8 th at Laguna Atascosa.
Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	6 on 8 th at Laguna Atascosa
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	A small flock seen at Laguna Atascosa on 8 th .
GULLS, TERNS & SKIMMERS		
Ring-billed Gull	<i>Larus delawarensis</i>	Noted on 7 th & 8 th in the LRGV and Laguna Atascosa respectively, then seen on 13 th , 14 th & 15 th in 'Upper' RGV
Franklin's Gull	<i>Larus pipixcan</i>	At least 2 at Laguna on 8 th .
Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>	A few seen at Laguna Atascosa on 8 th .
Royal Tern	<i>Sterna maxima</i>	A few seen at Laguna Atascosa on 8 th .
Forster's Tern	<i>Sterna forsteri</i>	A few seen at Laguna Atascosa on 8 th .
PIGEONS & DOVES		
Rock Dove (Feral Pigeon)	<i>Columba livia</i>	Seen every day
American Mourning Dove	<i>Zenaida macroura</i>	Seen every day except 5 th & 10 th .
White-winged Dove	<i>Zenaida asiatica</i>	Noted on 8 days in widely separated locations.
Inca Dove	<i>Scardafella inca</i>	A flock of 15 seen at Anzaldulas on 9 th
Common Ground-dove	<i>Columbina passerina</i>	Noted on 8 th at Laguna Atascosa, 9 th at Anzaldulas and 12 th near Silver City.
White-tipped Dove	<i>Leptotila verreauxi</i>	At least 2 on 7 th at Salineño, then seen on the next 2 days.
Eurasian Collard Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	1 on 14 th at Elephant Butte and 2 on 16 th at Magdalena.

NEW WORLD CUCKOOS

Greater Roadrunner *Geococcyx californianus* 4 on 7th during the trip to Falcon SP, 5 on 8th, at least 15 during the journey to Silver City, then seen on 12th, 15th, 16th & 17th.

TYPICAL OWLS

Ferruginous Pygmy Owl *Glaucidium brasilianum* 1 well seen in BSP on 9th; a good find!
Great Horned Owl *Bubo virginianus* 1 glimpsed in the headlights on the way to BdA on 17th.

HUMMINGBIRDS

Black-chinned Hummingbird *Archilochus alexandri* 2 at BSP on 9th
Rufous Hummingbird *Selasphorus rufus* 1 at BSP on 9th.

GIANT KINGFISHERS

Green Kingfisher *Chloreceryle americana* 1 at Kingfisher Overlook at BSP on 9th
Ringed Kingfisher *Megaceryle torquata* 1 at Kingfisher Overlook at BSP on 9th.
Belted Kingfisher *Ceryle alcyon* 1 at BSP on 9th, 2 at Percha Dam on 13th and 1 at Elephant Butte on 14th.

WOODPECKERS

Acorn Woodpecker *Melanerpes formicivorus* 3 on 11th at Little Walnut Picnic Site where we also saw it the following day, then 3 at Water Canyon on 16th.
Golden-fronted Woodpecker *Melanerpes aurifrons* Seen on four days in LRGV from 6th.
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker *Sphyrapicus varius* 1 at Anzaldulas CP on 9th.
Ladder-backed Woodpecker *Picoides scalaris* Seen in one's and twos on 6 days.
Downy Woodpecker *Picoides pubescens* 1 at Sevilleta and 1 at RGNC, both on 17th
Hairy Woodpecker *Picoides villosus* 1 at Little Walnut PG on 11th and 1 at Percha Dam on 13th.
Northern Flicker *Colaptes auratus* Seen on 6 successive days from 12th.

TYRANT FLYCATCHERS

Eastern Phoebe *Sayornis phoebe* Noted on 4 successive days from 6th.
Black Phoebe *Sayornis nigricans* First seen on 12th west of Silver City, then seen on 4 days after that.
Say's Phoebe *Sayornis saye* 6 near Silver City on 12th, then seen on the remaining 5 days.
Hammond's Flycatcher *Empidonax hammondi* A single bird seen on 8th at Laguna.
Vermilion Flycatcher *Pyrocephalus rubinus* 2 males seen on 7th at Falcon SP
Great Kiskadee *Pitangus sulphuratus* Good numbers seen on 4 full days in the LRGV.

Couch's Kingbird *Tyrannus couchii* A single bird seen at Santa Ana on 6th

SHRIKES

Loggerhead Shrike *Lanius ludovicianus* Small numbers seen on 10 days.

VIREOS

White-eyed Vireo *Vireo griseus* At least 2 at Santa Ana on 6th and a further 2 on 9th at BSP

JAYS & CROWS

Green Jay *Cyanocorax luxuosus* Good numbers seen in the LRGV on four days from 6th.

Steller's Jay *Cyanocitta stelleri* Seen on 12th & 13th in the Silver City area
Western Scrub Jay *Aphelocoma californica* First seen on 11th at Dripping Springs then seen on four further days.

Pinyon Jay *Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus* At least 60 seen at Magdalena on 16th
American Crow *Corvus brachyrhynchos* Seen on 7 successive days from 11th.
Common Raven *Corvus corax* Seen on 6 days from 11th excluding 16th
Chihuahuan Raven *Corvus cryptoleucos* Only definitely identified on 11th & 12th near Silver City but probably seen after that too.

WAXWINGS & ALLIES

Cedar Waxwing	<i>Bombycilla cedorum</i>	Just a single bird seen on 11 th at Dripping Springs.
Phainopepla	<i>Phainopepla nitens</i>	2 near Silver City on 12 th and 1 at Percha Dam on 13 th .
TITS & CHICKADEES		
Black-capped Chickadee	<i>Parus atricapillus</i>	At least 1 at RGNC on 17 th .
Mountain Chickadee	<i>Parus gambeli</i>	Seen at Lower Galinas Campground on 13 th & at BdA on 15 th .
Bridled Titmouse	<i>Parus wollweberi</i>	2 or 3 in bushes beside the river at Percha Dam.
Black-crested Titmouse	<i>Parus bicolor</i>	Seen at Santa Ana on 6 th , Salineño on 7 th then at BSP on 9 th .
PENDULINE TITS		
Verdin	<i>Auriparus flaviceps</i>	First seen on 7 th at Falcon SP, then seen on four further days through the tour.
SWALOWS & MARTINS		
Tree Swallow	<i>Tachycineta bicolor</i>	At least a dozen sightings at Santa Ana on 6 th , then also seen on 7 th & 9 th .
Northern Rough-wing	<i>Stelgidopteryx serripennis</i>	Only seen on 8 th on the way to Laguna Atascosa.
BUSHTITS		
American Bushtit	<i>Psaltriparus minimus</i>	2 on the way to Bosque del Apache on 14 th and also seen in Water Canyon on 16 th
LARKS		
Horned (Shore) Lark	<i>Eremophila alpestris</i>	A flock of at least 50 seen on 16 th to the west of Water Canyon.
KINGLETS		
Golden-crowned Kinglet	<i>Regulus satrapa</i>	Our first were 2 at Little Walnut Picnic Ground on 12 th . Also seen on 13 th & 16 th
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	<i>Regulus calendula</i>	Small numbers noted on 9 days.
WRENS		
Cactus Wren	<i>Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus</i>	Seen on 7 th at Falcon State Park and also on 11 th at Dripping Springs and 14 th at Elephant Butte.
American Rock Wren	<i>Salpinctes obsoletus</i>	Just a single individual seen near Elephant Butte on 14 th .
Marsh Wren	<i>Cistothorus palustris</i>	Seen on 12 th to the west of Silver City and also heard on 14 th & 15 th .
Bewick's Wren	<i>Thryomanes bewickii</i>	2 seen at Dripping Springs on 11 th and 1 on 17 th at the RGNC.
House Wren	<i>Troglodytes aedon</i>	Noted on 6 th , 8 th & 9 th in the LRGV
GNATCATCHERS		
Blue-grey Gnatcatcher	<i>Poliptilia caerulea</i>	2 at Santa Ana on 6 th and also seen at BSP on 9 th .
NUTHATCHES		
White-breasted Nuthatch	<i>Sitta carolinensis</i>	First seen at Little Walnut Picnic Ground on 12 th , then seen on 4 further days.

Pygmy Nuthatch	<i>Sitta pygmaea</i>	At least 2 at Little Walnut Picnic Ground on 12 th .
MOCKINGBIRDS & THRASHERS		
Northern Mockingbird	<i>Mimus polyglottos</i>	Commonly seen in the LRGV on four days and then seen on 11 th at Dripping Springs and 14 th at Elephant Butte.
Long-billed Thrasher	<i>Toxostoma longirostre</i>	This southern speciality was seen on each of the four full days in the LRGV.
Curve-billed Thrasher	<i>Toxostoma curvirostre</i>	Seen on 2 days in the LRGV and also on 12 th to the west of Silver City and 14 th at Elephant Butte.
Crissal Thrasher	<i>Toxostoma crissale</i>	3 seen at Elephant Butte on 14 th .
STARLINGS		
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	Noted on 10 days.
THRUSHES		
Western Bluebird	<i>Sialia mexicana</i>	First noted on 11 th near Silver City then noted on 12 th , 13 th & 16 th .
Townsend's Solitaire	<i>Myadestes townsendi</i>	A single bird in Water Canyon on 16 th was followed by another later that day in the Kelly Mine area.
Clay-coloured Robin	<i>Turdus grayi</i>	Five seen at Santa Ana on 6 th .
American Robin	<i>Turdus migratorius</i>	A single bird glimpsed in Las Cruces on 11 th then also seen on 12 th 13 th 16 th & 17 th
OLD WORLD SPARROWS		
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	Noted every day from 6 th .
WATAILS & PIPITS		
American Pipit	<i>Anthus rubescens</i>	Singles seen on 6 th at Santa Ana 7 th at Falcon State Park & 15 th at BdA and with a flock of 8 on 13 th at Percha Dam.
FINCHES & ALLIES		
Pine Siskin	<i>Carduelis pinus</i>	Seen on 11 th & 12 th near Silver City on 13 th in Hillsboro and 16 th in Magdalena.
American Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis tristis</i>	Just a single bird on 17 th at Sevilleta.
Lesser Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis psaltria</i>	12 on 9 th at BSP, then seen on 13 th & 15 th .
House Finch	<i>Carpodacus mexicanus</i>	First noted on 11 th at Dripping Springs then seen on the next 6 days..
NEW WORLD WARBLERS		
Orange-crowned Warbler	<i>Vermivora celata</i>	First seen at Santa Ana on 6 th . Common at Falcon State Park on 7 th then seen on a further 3 days.
Yellow-rumped Warbler	<i>Dendroica coronata</i>	Noted on 6 days in widely separated locations.
Common Yellowthroat	<i>Geothlypis trichas</i>	3 at BSP on 9 th .
NEW WORLD BLACKBIRDS		
Audubon's Oriole	<i>Icterus graduacauda</i>	A single bird at Salineño on 7 th .
Altamira Oriole	<i>Icterus gularis</i>	Seen on 7 th at Falcon State Park and Salineño and also on 9 th at BSP.
Hooded Oriole	<i>Icterus cucullatus</i>	A single bird at Salineño on 7 th .
Red-winged Blackbird	<i>Agelaius phoeniceus</i>	Common in the LRGV on 4 days then seen from 12 th onwards.
Brewer's Blackbird	<i>Euphagus cyanocephalus</i>	At least 20 on 12 th to the west of Silver City and also seen on 14 th & 15 th .
Common Grackle	<i>Quiscalus quiscula</i>	Commonly seen on 9 days.
Great-tailed Grackle	<i>Quiscalus mexicanus</i>	Seen on 7 th , 9 th & 11 th .
Western Meadowlark	<i>Sturnella neglecta</i>	Frequently encountered (on 10 days) in fair numbers.

Yellow-headed Blackbird	<i>Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus</i>	Just identified on 15 th in a mixed flock of blackbirds at BdA.
BUNTINGS, NEW WORLD SPARROWS		
Lincoln's Sparrow	<i>Melospiza lincolnii</i>	Seen at Santa Ana on 6 th , at BSP on 9 th and at Percha on 13th.
White-crowned Sparrow	<i>Zonotrichia leucophrys</i>	Seen in good numbers on 7 successive days from 11th.
Dark-eyed Junco	<i>Junco hyemalis</i>	Seen in good numbers on 7 successive days from 11th.
Savannah Sparrow	<i>Passerculus sandwichensis</i>	Seen on 8 th at Laguna Atascosa and also on 9 th , 12 th & 15 th .
Chipping Sparrow	<i>Spizella passerina</i>	Just seen at Salineño on 7th.
Black-chinned Sparrow	<i>Spizella atrogularis</i>	Just seen at Dripping Springs on 11th.
Lark Bunting	<i>Calamospiza melanocorys</i>	A few seen on our way into Falcon State Park on 7th.
Black-throated Sparrow	<i>Amphispiza bilineata</i>	Seen at Falcon State Park on 7 th , at Dripping Springs & other areas on 11 th and at Elephant Butte on 14 th .
Rufous-crowned Sparrow	<i>Aimophila ruficeps</i>	Just noted on 11 th at Dripping Springs.
Spotted Towhee	<i>Pipilo maculatus</i>	First seen on 13 th at Percha Dam, then seen on 3 further days.
Canyon Towhee	<i>Pipilo fuscus</i>	First noted at Dripping Springs on 11 th and also seen on 16 th in Water Canyon and at Magdalena.
Green-tailed Towhee	<i>Pipilo chlorurus</i>	At least 3 seen at Dripping Springs on 11 th .
Olive Sparrow	<i>Arremonops rufivirgatus</i>	Noted on 4 successive days in the LRGV.
GROSBEAKS, SALTATORS & ALLIES		
Northern Cardinal	<i>Cardinalis cardinalis</i>	Noted on 4 successive days in the LRGV.
Pyrrhuloxia	<i>Pyrrhuloxia sinuatus</i>	First seen on 7 th at Falcon State Park and Salineño and also seen on 8 th , 9 th , 11 th , 14 th & 15th.

MAMMALS

CARNIVORES – DOGS

Coyote *Canis latrans* Single animals seen on 15th at BdA and 17th on the journey to Albuquerque.

EVEN-TOED UNGULATES – Peccaries

Collared Peccary *Tayassu tajacu* Approximately 20 on 9th at BSP then 8 on 12th at Gila and a single on 14th near Elephant Butte dam.

EVEN-TOED UNGULATES – Deer

Mule Deer *Odocoileus hemionus* 4 on 11th near Silver City were our first then noted on the following 6 days.

White-tailed Deer *Odocoileus virginianus* Just 2 seen on 12th to the west of Silver City.

EVEN-TOED UNGULATES – Pronghorn

Pronghorn *Antilocapra americana* 9 seen during the drive to BdA on 14th then 6 on 16th near Water Canyon.

RODENTS – Squirrels

Tassel-eared Squirrel *Sciurus aberti* 2 on 11th and 2 on 12th at Little Walnut Picnic Ground.

Eastern Fox Squirrel *Sciurus carolinensis* 2 on 6th at Santa Ana and also seen on 9th at BSP.

Rock Squirrel *Spermophilus variegatus* Half a dozen seen on 14th at Elephant Butte State Park.

Antelope Ground Squirrel *Ammospermophilus leucurus* Just a couple seen on 17th at Sevilleta Visitors Centre.

Cliff Chipmunk *Tamias dorsalis* A few seen at Dripping Springs on 11th and also noted on 16th in Magdalena.

RODENTS

Southern Plains Woodrat *Neotoma micropus* Seen on 6th, 7th & 9th in the LRGV and on 15th at BdA (in previous reports this species was wrongly identified as Bushy-tailed Woodrat).

Muskrat *Ondatra zibethicus* Just a single animal seen at Anzaldulas on 9th.

LAGOMORPHS

Black-tailed Jackrabbit *Lepus californicus* Just noted on 13th in Silver City

Desert Cottontail *Sylvilagus audobonii* Noted on 11th, 13th & 16th.

Nine-banded Armadillo *Dasypus novemcinctus* 3 on 6th at Santa Ana were a pleasant surprise but then 1 on 8th at Laguna and at least 15 on 9th At BSP & Anzalduas. Giant Armadillo shells (really corrugated iron drainage tubes) were disallowed on later days!! .

REPTILES

American Alligator *Alligator mississippiensis* Just a single seen at Laguna Atascosa on 8th.

Lizard

W. Diamond-back Rattlesnake *Crotalus atrox* 1 small snake of this species was seen crossing the road Just after we left Laguna Atascosa on 8th.

Terrapins spp. Half a dozen terrapins of an unknown species were seen at Anzalduas on 9th.

BUTTERFLIES

Species noted during the trip:

Cloudless Sulphur
Monarch spp.
White Skipper
Zebra (*Heliconia* species)

PLANTS

<i>Acourtia wrightii</i>	Brownfoot
<i>Agave lechuguilla</i>	Century plant
<i>Agave palmeri</i>	
<i>Ageratum</i> spp	Blue mistflower
<i>Aphanostepha skirrholoasis</i>	Arkansas lazy daisy
<i>Artemisia tridentata</i>	Big Sagebrush
<i>Baccharis glutinosa</i>	Seepwillow baccharis
<i>Dasyilirion leiophyllum</i>	Sotol
<i>Datura</i> spp.	Thorn-apple
<i>Dicliptera vahliana</i>	Dicliptera
<i>Dyssodia pentachaeta</i>	Parralena
<i>Echinocactus horizonthalonius</i>	Barrelcactus
<i>Fouquieria splendens</i>	Ocotillo
<i>Helianthus annuus</i>	Common sunflower
<i>Houstonia micrantha</i>	Small bluet
<i>Huaco cenizo</i>	Turk's cap
<i>Juniperus communis</i>	Common juniper
<i>Juniperus deppeana</i>	Alligator juniper
<i>Lantana horrida</i>	Calico bush
<i>Larrea tridentata</i>	Creosotebush
<i>Nolina erumpens</i>	Beargrass
<i>Opuntia imbricata</i>	Walking stick cholla
<i>Opuntia phaeacantha</i> var. <i>discata</i>	Prickly pear
<i>Phooradendron cockerellii</i>	American mistletoe
<i>Phragmites australis</i>	Common reed
<i>Pinus edulis</i>	Pinyon pine
<i>Pinus ponderosa</i>	Ponderosa pine
<i>Populus deltoides</i>	Eastern cottonwood
<i>Prosopis grandulosa</i>	Mesquite
<i>Salix exigua</i>	Coyote or Sandbar willow
<i>Solonum elaeagnifolium</i>	Nightshade
<i>Symphyotrichum divaricatum</i>	Annual aster
<i>Tillandsia usneoides</i>	Spanish moss
<i>Typha latifolia</i>	Reed Mace
<i>Vigna luteola</i>	Wild cow pea
<i>Yucca elata</i>	Narrow leaved yucca
<i>Yucca schidigera</i>	
<i>Yucca torreyi</i>	Broad-leaved yucca
	Wild Olive

*What a fabulous tour this was! With ***species of birds in a wide range of habitats and locations at times we didn't know which species to look at first.*

The Lower Rio Grande Valley was, as always, excellent. We saw most of the species that have a little blip of distribution up into the USA in this tiny corner of Texas. These south-western specialities included Plain Chachalacas, Crested Caracaras, White-tailed and Zone-tailed Hawks, White-tipped and Inca Doves, Ferruginous Pygmy Owl, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Vermilion Flycatcher and Great Kiskadee, Clay-coloured Robin, Long-billed Thrasher and three species of Kingfisher. In this region we also had three species of oriole for the first time on a Texas/New Mexico trip. Altamira and Audubon's we had seen previously but Hooded Oriole was a new one. The weather here was warm, even hot at times, and provided a great change from what was being experienced back in England!

New Mexico also provided wonderful weather. Clear skies and almost constant sunshine were only slightly marred by the cooling north-east winds. Again we had many good bird species and can you really beat the wildlife spectacle of Bosque del Apache? To see perhaps 15,000 Sandhill Cranes overall and as many as 22,000 Snow Geese in one field of view at the same time is just amazing. Add to this a large variety of other species including lots of sightings of Greater Roadrunner, Bald Eagle and a wide range of other birds then you realise this was a very special tour indeed.

Finally, it goes without saying that there was plenty of humour on this Mike Read-led tour! However, on this occasion most of the humour seemed to be coming from the clients. How can so many laughs be gained from such innocent topics as tyre marks on the road, hand-cleaning tissues and blackberry picking? And then there were also comparisons to certain Muppet characters. Not within the group of course but of folks we met along the way. You wouldn't believe the likeness! What an entertaining fortnight.

Can I really put up with so much laughter on a future tour? Holy mackerel!!! You bet I can. I sincerely hope to see all of you again on future tours.

*Mike Read
January 2008*

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