

Naturalist Journeys – Arizona & Utah
16 – 24 September, 2011 – Daily Journal
Greg Smith, Guide, Wynne Browne, Assistant Guide
And 10 participants

Fri., Sept. 16 - Arrival in Phoenix, AZ

After meeting at the airport, we headed north on our way to the Grand Canyon. The weather was mild and the skies clear as we caught our first glimpse of this ten-mile wide wonder. The sun was setting as we celebrated our outstanding welcome dinner at the the gracious and historic El Tovar Restaurant. And that sunset was outstanding!



Sat., Sept. 17 - Grand Canyon NP

After a hearty breakfast we drove to the new park Visitor Center and then the Yavapai Geology Museum. From there we hiked the rim trail with its excellent interpretive displays that let us walk “through time”. For two miles we watched as the canyon shared view after view. Our hike dipped and rolled with the erratic rim as we watched the different layers change hues



as the sun rose higher in the sky.

A circle of cavorting Common Ravens croaked loudly drawing our attention skyward. And there in their midst soared the largest and rarest bird in North America, an adult

California Condor. With wings set, it glided directly overhead and slowly disappeared to the northeast. A great start to our trip!

Our next stop was the shuttle up to Hopi Point where we watched the late afternoon sun light up and then change the color of every layer of sandwiched rock in the canyon. The shadows were a deep purple, while the sunlit walls conformed to various shades of pastel. It is almost surreal to experience that magic on a calm night in northern Arizona...

Sun., Sept. 18 – Zion NP

After a delicious breakfast we headed east to drive from one side of the canyon to the other. We stopped at the Desert View watchtower and wandered from level to level marveling at the design and decoration of the structure created by Mary Colter. We spent more time than planned, but the building and its interior did its best to capture our imagination.

We made it to the entrance gate at Zion under a sunny sky that made for excellent looks at the sculpted sandstone. But it wasn't the sandstone that caught our attention as we entered the park.

Zion has a population of about 100 Desert Bighorn Sheep. We pulled around a curve and were fortunate enough to see a ram and a ewe right next to the road. As we looked up the side of the slope here were a few more rams and a number of



ewes! What a treat to see such a rare mammal right along side the road!

As we drove off, we really had to focus on the scenery, but our minds were still with the sheep. After a few stops we started to realize we needed to photograph the spires and multi-colored bands of slick rock. Checkerboard Mesa is one of Zion's many stunning vistas, and the drive in from there unfolds in a most intriguing way. Finally we made it through the big tunnel and headed to our lodging for the next two nights – the Desert Pearl Inn. Nice lodging and splendid view, and at this time of year, we appreciate its location with more hours of daylight and precious sun outside the canyon.

Mon., Sept. 19 – Zion National Park

Half of the group started the day with a shuttle ride up to the top of the canyon that was home to the Virgin River. It was a very breezy morning in the canyon making birding opportunities a challenge; but not too much of a challenge, as an immature California Condor sat atop a snag at Big Bend. A definite treat for everyone, as this was a much longer look than the one in the Grand Canyon that just soared by.

Making several stops along the way, we finally made it to the top where we hiked the paved walkway that paralleled the swollen Virgin River. Today no one was going to hike up the Zion Narrows where the river was concentrated by two immense sandstone walls; there was just too much water.

The other group spent the morning exploring the eastern half of the park. More desert bighorn sheep and lots of geology in the Checkerboard area. We did a short hike and talked about the adaptation of the different desert plants and also spent some time exploring the tracks left in the sand by the park's four-legged residents.

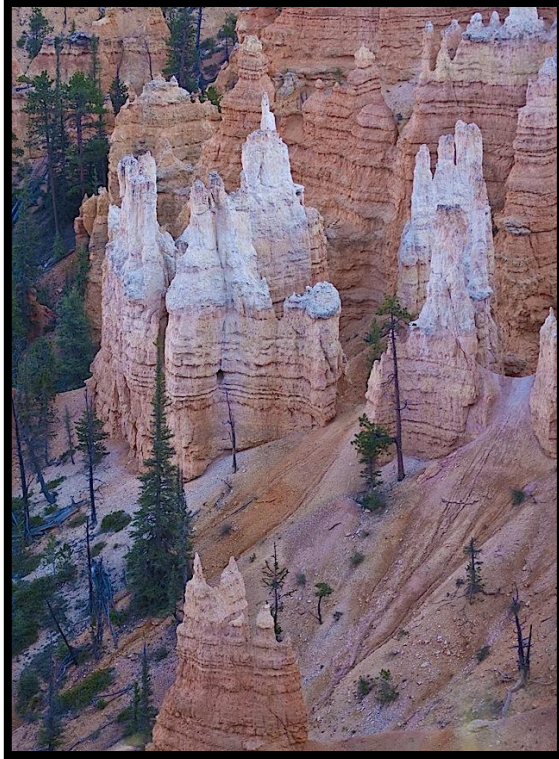
After we all had lunch, each group reversed its exploration of the park. The immature California Condor was still enjoying the view at Big Bend as an adult soared by for a brief view. It was a little on the warm side and I think we all envied the cool air the condors were experiencing!

Tues., Sept. – Bryce Canyon NP

We took a run up Kolob Terrace Road hoping to intersect with Utah 14. It was wonderful scenery as we climbed higher toward Kolob Reservoir. Beyond the reservoir we started to see aspens in fall color. Not a huge number, but enough to light up the hillsides. And then we got distracted as a Northern Goshawk flew across the road – the first of three on this trip!



After having lunch in Cedar City we started up Utah 14 towards Cedar Break National Monument. Cedar Breaks is at an elevation of over 10,000 feet. The air is clean, but warm and the scenery was just a taste of what is ahead in Bryce! We got back in the vans and birded our way to our next national park.



We did make it to Bryce Canyon National Park with a stop in Red Rock Canyon, which was being lit up by the late afternoon sun. Exquisite corals and reds were glowing. The Sevier River was flowing freely as faraway clouds let loose with torrential downpours. The pronghorn near our night's lodging was a fitting finish to our day.

Wed., Sept. 21 – Bryce NP

The morning was bright and clear, so we headed to the rim of the amphitheater to see what birds were foraging in the morning sun. A Grace's Warbler, Say's Phoebe and a very docile White-breasted Nuthatch (and other species) all gave us great looks. Then it was time for breakfast before we split into smaller groups for hiking and birding!

Those that went hiking did the Queen/Navajo loop while those of us that went birding found more birds and then headed over to the local town, the local Utah prairie dog town.

This endangered species' distribution is limited to the SW corner of Utah. From a population of 90,000, trapping and poisoning has dwindled their population to less than 3300. The park is a safe haven for this once common animal.

We took a lunch up to Rainbow View and settled into the 9000 foot elevation prior to our afternoon hike. We were off to see the bristlecone pine about a mile away. They were fascinating,



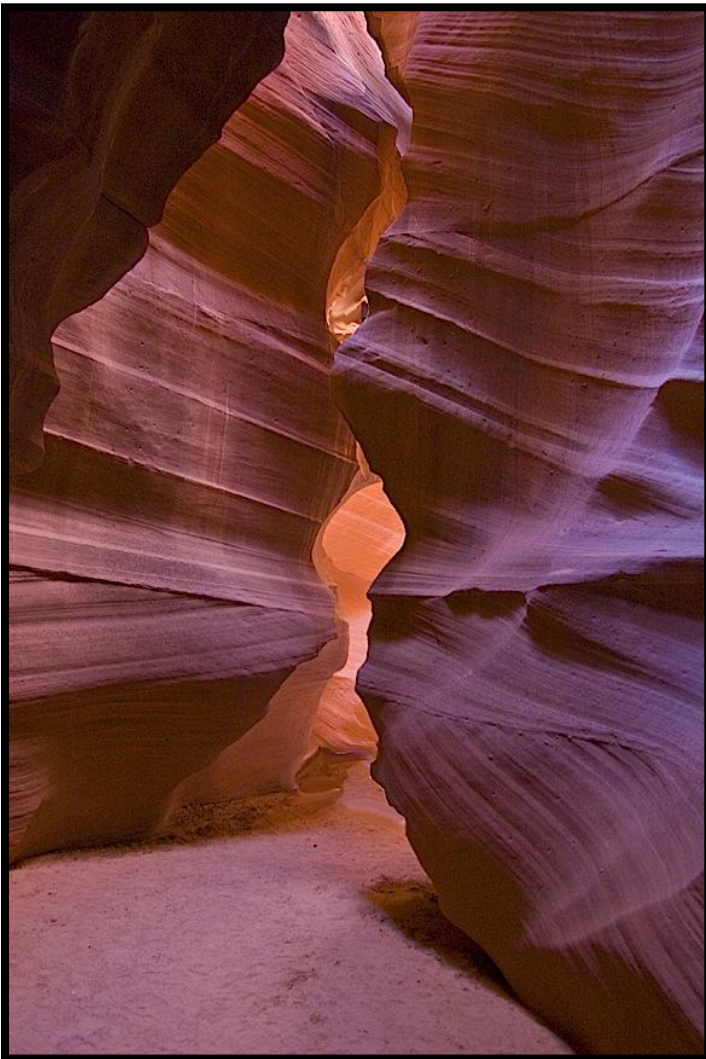
but it was their dead brothers and sisters that stole the show. Their skeletons positioned against the blue sky and clouds made for striking photographs. Another highlight and an exceptional one!

We finished the day with dinner at the Bryce Canyon Lodge before watching the sunset take another colorful swipe at the amphitheater.

Thurs., Sept.22 – Antelope Canyon and Lake Powell

We left Bryce Canyon early today so we could be in Page, AZ before our one PM tour of Antelope Canyon. We climbed into the truck and headed out to the Navajo Nation reservation with our guide Carl at the south end of Antelope Canyon.

This section of the canyon has a big sandstone barrier that impedes the passage of water down canyon. But water always finds a way, and here it has created a slot canyon. A narrow slot no more than six feet wide and 50 – 60 feet in height is the only escape route for the water charging downstream. This was our hike!



The inside of the canyon has been smoothed by high velocity water being forced through the narrow channel. Smooth sandstone revealing layered colors of iron-stained rock. We followed the route further and further back into the slot. Here and there a shaft of sunlight lit the floor, a sharp contrast to walls of the slot. Sand rolled in from the top after a breeze cooled the sweat on our faces. We made it to the end of the canyon before turning around and retracing our steps to the entrance of Antelope Canyon.

Time to head to our rooms at the Lake Powell Resort!

Fri., Sept. 23 – Rainbow Bridge

After an early breakfast we boarded the Ethel B for the fifty-mile ride on Lake Powell to Rainbow Bridge. It took us

two hours as the early morning sun lit up the buttes and plateaus that surrounded the lake. Rocks took the shape of camels, cobras and more. We turned to starboard and entered a narrow channel with walls towering over 400' in height. We slowly motored further back into the channel until the floating dock we tied up to prevented us from going any further.

The hike back to Rainbow Bridge is only half a mile, but the scenery never stopped being impressive. And then the bridge appeared. This is the largest natural bridge in North America and spans a canyon over 200 feet in width. The softer Navajo sandstone was eroded away leaving the harder arch rock standing.



Arches on solid walls are a common sight in this sandstone country. Slabs of rock peel off the vertical walls in rounded pockets. You won't see angled breaks in sandstone, as there isn't any structural support in this weak rock to support that kind of fracture (Besides, small grains of sand and silt get washed out between the lenses of sandstone). So arches with their inherent structural strength are all that we see.

But a bridge is all about erosion. The incessant pounding of water on a relatively weak material creates most sandstone arches!

It took us a little longer to return to the marina but it was a gorgeous day, so we didn't mind! We did get back in plenty of time to get ready for our farewell dinner that we celebrated that evening at the resort! Tomorrow, a four hour drive back through beautiful saguaro desert to reach the Phoenix airport for departures home. Great trip!

2011 Arizona/Utah BIRD & ANIMAL LIST

X = Extension

Canada Goose – **A family group along the Sevier River were the only ones we saw.**

X Mallard – **Only a few scattered on the Navajo Reservation.**

X Northern Shoveler – **A group of eight on a pond in Ganado.**

X Green-winged Teal – **The best look was on a pond in Ganado.**

Bufflehead – **Very rare on this trip, but three were on a pond along the Sevier River.**

X Ruddy Duck – **Three were seen on a pond in the Ganado area.**

X Wild Turkey – **A group of eight were along side the road over to Lucashaki.**

Eared Grebe – **Most common at Broadview Lake – alternate plumage on everyone!**

Double-crested Corm – **An adult & immature gave us comparisons on the Rainbow Bridge boat.**

Great Blue Heron – **The best look a individual at Kolob Reservoir.**

California Condor – **We saw a total of four of our biggest vulture in the Grand Canyon area!**

Turkey Vulture – **Common and always seen in the air as they migrated south**

Osprey – **This aerial fish hunter was seen twice on the trip, both times perched.**

Bald Eagle – **A fifth year bird was soaring over the Kolob terrace area.**

X N. Harrier – **Two separate males were seen hunting over the Navajo reservation.**

Sharp-shinned Hawk – **An individual landed right next to our van in Zion at a traffic stop.**

Cooper's Hawk – **One individual was seen circling in the sky as it tried to gain altitude in Zion.**

N. Goshawk – **We saw a total of three of the biggest Accipiter on this trip.**

Red-tailed Hawk – **Our most common raptor, but only a dozen seen on two weeks.**

X Golden Eagle – **One seen soaring as we drove the highway in Colorado.**

American Kestrel – **Not common, but the males we saw were stunning.**

Peregrine Falcon – **One bird seen flying along the Grand Canyon rim.**

American Coot – **Seen on a pond along Kolob road.**

X Killdeer – **Our best looks were of birds on gravel roads adjacent to water.**

X American Avocet – **A group of six on Many Farms Lake.**

X Long-billed Dowitcher – **Three were Many Farms Lake.**

California Gull – **A single bird was on Panguitch Lake.**

Rock Pigeon – **Seen regularly around farm buildings.**

X Band-tailed Pigeon – **Three flew by us at Walnut Canyon National Monument.**

Eurasian-collared Dove – **They are coming... and now they are here.**

Mourning Dove – **Usually seen flashing across our windshield as we drove Utah's back roads.**

Eurasian-collared Dove – **They are coming... and now they are here.**

Greater Roadrunner – **Great looks at one individual in the campground at Lake Powell.**

White-throated Swift – **A few were seen along the rim of the Grand Canyon.**

Black-chinned Hummingbird – **Seen feeding on flowers at the Desert Pearl Inn.**

Broad-tailed Hummingbird – **A female made an appearance at some roadside wildflowers in Zion.**

X Red-naped Sapsucker – **We got good looks at an immature female at Painted Desert NP.**

Ladder-backed Woodpecker – **One bird was seen along the trail at the Grand Canyon VC.**

Hairy Woodpecker – **We had a number of good looks at both males and females.**

N. Flicker – **The most common woodpecker of the trip. Seen most days.**

X W. Wood-Pee-wee – **Only one was seen at the Hubbell Trading Post.**
Black Phoebe – **Seen at Zion NP along the Virgin River.**
Say's Phoebe – **Seen foraging along Kolob Road.**
X Loggerhead Shrike – **Only one was seen and that was perched on a wire in NE AZ.**
Pinyon Jay – **A number of large groups flew in front of us along the Grand Canyon.**
Steller's Jay – **Seen sparingly anytime we were in the pines.**
W. Scrub Jay – **Scattered throughout the trip, mostly in the pinyon/juniper woodland.**
Clark's Nutcracker – **Not common, but the best look was along the Rim Trail in Bryce NP.**
Black-billed Magpie – **Only one along the Sevier River.**
American Crow – **Only two were seen in Tusayan on our way into Grand Canyon NP.**
Common Raven – **Everywhere foraging on anything.**
Horned Lark – **Stunningly absent from good habitat, but we did see a small group of five.**
Tree Swallow – **One of the swallows over the Grand Canyon.**
Violet-green Swallow – **One of the swallows over the Grand Canyon.**
X Barn Swallow – **The only swallow seen over Many Farms Lake.**
Mountain Chickadee – **Scattered through the pine woodland.**
Bushtit – **Seen by a few on Kolob Road.**
Verdin – **One was seen at Red Rock Canyon.**
Red-breasted Nuthatch – **Seen well at Maswik Lodge.**
White-breasted Nuthatch – **Very good looks at an individual in the Maswik Lodge area.**
Pygmy Nuthatch – **We all had our best looks at a large flock in Bryce Canyon NP.**
X Cactus Wren - **Seen at the Painted Desert NP.**
Rock Wren – **We saw a number, but the best look was at Goosenecks State Park.**
Canyon Wren – **Along the Virgin River in Zion NP.**
House Wren – **best look was while birding in the morning at Maswik Lodge.**
X Marsh Wren – **Only one and that was at a pond in Ganado.**
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher – **Three were seen along the San Juan River near Mexican Hat.**
Western Bluebird – **Best looks at migrating flocks were along the Rim Trail in Bryce NP.**
Mountain Bluebird - **These Azure-breasted Prairie Hoverers were scattered throughout our trip.**
Townsend's Solitaire – **Very good looks at an individual flycatching along the Rim Trail in Bryce.**
American Robin – **Our most common thrush and right up there for being commonly good looking.**
X N. Mockingbird – **Only one and it was on the Navajo reservation.**
X Sage Thrasher – **Good looks in Shonto on the Navajo Reservation.**
European Starling – **What can we say, everywhere.**
X Yellow Warbler – **With a flock of warblers adjacent to a pond in Ganado.**
Yellow-rumped Warbler – **In our face looks along the Rim Trail in Bryce NP.**
X Lucy's Warbler – **A brief look at an individual along the San Juan River near Mexican Hat.**
Grace's Warbler – **Very good looks at a male along the Rim Trail in Bryce NP.**
Wilson's Warbler – **The only one seen was on our first morning at Maswik Lodge.**
Green-tailed Towhee – **A quick glimpse of one on upper Kolob Road.**
X Spotted Towhee – **A nice male along the San Juan River near Mexican Hat.**
Chipping Sparrow – **Ubiquitous for the sparrow clan on this journey.**
X Clay-colored Sparrow – **Two were seen with other *Spizella* in the Canyon de Chelly campground**
Brewer's Sparrow – **Sporadic sightings in the appropriate sagebrush habitat.**

Vesper Sparrow – **Just a few migrants were present for this common nesting bird of the prairie.**

Lark Sparrow – **A few individuals scattered throughout the trip in appropriate habitat.**

Savannah Sparrow – **Where the habitat was just grass, we would sight a few of these individuals.**

X Song Sparrow – **Best look was at an individual that was at the pond in Granado.**

X Lincoln's Sparrow – **As above...**

White-crowned Sparrow – **All of these sparrows that we saw were the first of the SB migrants.**

Dark-eyed Junco – **Not common but always seen in pine woodland.**

Summer Tanager – **Only one, but a stunning male at the Desert Pearl.**

Western Tanager - **Only females made their presence known, and there were just a few of them.**

Black-headed Grosbeak – **The best view was an individual foraging along Kolob Road.**

Lazuli Bunting – **A subtle looking first year female was foraging at our feet in the Grand Canyon.**

X Red-winged Blackbird – **A small group of females were at the pond near Granado.**

X W. Meadowlark – **Best look was at an individual near a pond in Monument Valley.**

Brewer's Blackbird – **We found these birds wandering aimlessly in the sagebrush flats.**

Great-tailed Grackle – **Uncommon and usually around restaurants or shopping centers.**

X Brown-headed Cowbird – **Two different flocks did their best no to land anywhere near us...**

X Bullock's Oriole – **A female was near the pond by Ganado.**

House Finch – **Uncommon, but sporadic throughout the trip.**

Red Crossbill – **Heard and briefly seen at the lodge in Bryce NP.**

Lesser Goldfinch – **Sporadic on the trip, but the most common of the two goldfinches.**

American Goldfinch – **We saw males that were falling out of their spring plumage.**

Pine Siskin – **A few at the Lodge in Bryce NP.**

House Sparrow – **Usually seen around eateries in the small towns we visited.**

TOTAL = 107

MAMMALS

X Black-tailed Jackrabbit – **Seen along side the road in the Navajo Reservation.**

Desert Cottontail – **Really good looks at one in the campground at Lake Powell.**

Abert's Squirrel – **The squirrel in the Grand Canyon.**

Golden-mantled Ground Squirrel – **Our best look was during the morning bird walk in Bryce NP.**

White-tailed Antelope G Squirrel – **In the right habitat, they were very common!**

Rock Squirrel – **These were along most of the trails we hiked.**

Utah Prairie Dog – **The dog town in Bryce NP and at Hubbell Trading Post gave us good looks.**

Least Chipmunk – **The smaller of the two chipmunks in the Grand Canyon were common.**

Cliff Chipmunk – **This species seemed to be more furtive than the Least.**

Desert Bighorn Sheep – **Stunning looks at both rams and ewes in Zion NP.**

Mule Deer - **Everywhere.**

White-tailed Deer – Only three were seen on the road near Panguitch Lake.

Elk – Up close looks along the roads in the Grand Canyon during crepuscular hours.

Pronghorn – Good looks, actually great looks in Bryce NP!

Bat sp. – Always lots of individuals flying around during the early evening hours.

Total = 15