

**Western Field Ornithologists Middle Rio Grande Valley Tour  
16-20 February 2011**

**Trip Notes and Annotated Species List**

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## Daily Itinerary and Notes

This trip was designed to sample the mid-winter avian populations in the interior of New Mexico, including several national wildlife refuges and wildlife management areas, state parks and also the spectacular Sandia Mountains to the east of Albuquerque. Sponsored by Western Field Ornithologists, we had the following participants:

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Areas visited and abbreviations:

Middle Rio Grande Valley – MRGV

Bernalillo County

Rio Grande Nature Center – RGNC  
San Antonio de Padua Open Space – SaDP  
Sandia Crest – SC  
Embudito Canyon – EC  
Albuquerque - ABQ

Valencia County

Taco Bell Marsh – TBM

Socorro County

Ladd Gordon Wildlife Management Area – LGWMA  
Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge – BdANWR

Sierra County

Elephant Butte State Park – EBSP  
Rock Canyon Marina – RCM  
North Monticello Point – NMP  
Percha Dam State Park – PDSP  
Las Palomas Marsh – LPM

### **16 February 2011 Wednesday**

This was considered to be a travel day, since everyone except Pat would be coming in between 10:00 am and 3:00 pm. Pat had come in a day or two earlier and had spent some time birding and getting some photography in at Bosque del Apache NWR before joining the group in Albuquerque. We gathered most of the early arrivals and headed out to a Subway shop for lunch and then to the Rio Grande Nature Center for about an hour or so of birding before heading back to pick up the later arrivals at the airport. Once our group was complete (thanks for the favorable flights on the many different airlines) we then

headed south toward Socorro, our stop for the evening. Along the way we made a quick stop at the "Taco Bell Ponds" in Belen to see what might be about. Well, not much there, and the winds were picking up, and so we continued on to Socorro to check in to our hotel and prepare for the next day. We had dinner at the Socorro Springs Brewery which proved to be a participant favorite, providing a wide variety of local brews and some very good food.

### **17 February 2011 Thursday**

Up early for the hotel breakfast, we were on the road by 7:00 am. Our first stop was at the Ladd Gordon WMA (Socorro Co.) to the north of Sevilleta NWR where we spent the morning. The extreme cold snap that we experienced in early February seemed to have affected a great number of birds or prompted them to move out to other areas, as numbers of sparrows and overwintering passerines were much reduced from when I scouted this area (and indeed in the entire Middle Rio Grande Valley) in late January. There were very good numbers of white geese and cranes however. We had six GREATER WHITE-FRONTED GEESE in the north field of the auto tour loop, several BLUE ROSS'S GOOSE, and at least twenty BLUE SNOW GOOSE in a field which included thousands of Sandhill Cranes and white geese. At the observation blind nature trail area we did locate six Wild Turkey which was a nice bonus. Three TREE SWALLOWS were the first of the season for that area, and about a week early for this area.

At the south end of the riparian area at La Joya WMA (accessed from the Sevilleta NWR exit on I-25 and going south and east along the gravel and dirt road), we also found overwintering sparrows to be much reduced. A two hour search produced no Swamp Sparrows when on the Christmas Count in this area we recorded 9 here. We thought that we heard one or two, but just could not get them to come up for viewing. Nonetheless, we enjoyed the walk and the relatively nice weather in the area for about an hour, and then headed south for our afternoon of birding at Bosque del Apache NWR. We had lunch at the "world famous" Owl Bar and Cantina and I think everyone tried out their green chili cheeseburgers and enjoyed the ambience of this old and quaint landmark.

In the early afternoon, we headed south to Bosque del Apache NWR where took both of the tour loops to see what was about before the evening flight of cranes and geese out from foraging fields back to the safe ponds on the NWR. Some photography at the headquarters and some birding netted us a Pyrrhuloxia and Verdin for the trip. We then went back to the large viewing ponds to try and catch the rising moon at sunset when the geese were flying in, but they were not cooperating for us as the birds didn't show as expected and the cloud layer obscured the moon for about ½ hour. We drove back to the north to the other viewing ponds and then did some spectacular views of the full moon rising over the ponds with hundreds of geese coming in for the evening roost.

Back in to Socorro by 6:00 pm, we all had a nice dinner at Frank & Lupe's, a New Mexican restaurant just to the north of the hotel where we enjoyed some great fare and completed our daily checklist.

### **18 February 2011 Friday**

Up early again, we were on the road by 7:00 am (thanks all!). Driving south, we started the day along the road toward Rock Canyon Marina (Sierra Co.). We found a large flock of sparrows along the road as we approached our destination which we scoped out, discovering that they were mainly BREWER'S SPARROWS (rare here in the winter) and a few Black-throated Sparrows (resident). Near the entry point to the marina, we stopped briefly for looks at a NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD (rare winter) and several SAGE THRASHERS which were a treat for some participants. Our target was to get to the gulls, and so

we drove down to the departure ramp, parked and scoped the several hundred gulls. At the Rock Canyon Marina site, we found the previously discovered juvenile LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL at 8:00 am, but it departed within several minutes after arrival. The adult THAYER'S GULL was present for at least one hour in the morning, as were at least five California Gulls, eight Herring Gulls, and several hundred Ring-billed Gulls. Unfortunately we did not see the previously reported Brown Pelicans, nor did we observe the previously reported adult Lesser Black-backed Gull. On the exit from the marina we spent some time admiring the Sage Thrashers and added Phainopepla and Cactus Wren to the trip list.

We then headed south to Percha Dam State Park where we searched for the Brown Thrasher but were unsuccessful in that effort (probable whisper songs heard but no luck with a sighting of this elusive individual). However, we did relocate the previously reported "eastern" WINTER WREN several hundred yards south of the parking area along the river. The bird was along the 8' tall cut bank on the west side of the river about 15' to the north of the picnic site, and responded quickly to taped song and calls. It even perched in the open and sang several complete "eastern" Winter Wren songs in response. We also had one wintering GREAT EGRET fly over us along the river here, and in the woods nearest the dam on the west side of the river we had one HAMMOND'S FLYCATCHER which posed nicely for us (casual in winter).

The wind had come up by noon, with sustained gusts to 25 mph. Las Palominas Marsh did not turn up much of note except for at least thirty TREE SWALLOWS and two VIOLET-GREEN SWALLOWS, an indication that spring was on the way. After lunch we went back to Rock Canyon Marina to re-check the gulls but got blown out by 30+ mph winds. North Monticello Point did not turn up anything of note except for several hundred ducks of the expected species and at least two hundred Canada Geese on the south side of the Point. On the north side of Monticello Point we found at least six CACKLING GEESE and about twenty over-wintering White Pelicans, all of which had been reported earlier.

With a spectacular sunset to our west and great views of the mountains to our east, we headed back north to Socorro for another dinner at Socorro Springs Brewery where we compiled our lists and then called it a night by 9:00 pm.

### **19 February 2011 Saturday**

Checked out of the hotel and then a quick breakfast at a local Denny's, we were on our way to Albuquerque. On the way to the Sandia Crest we stopped for about an hour at the San Antonio de Padua Open Space, located one mile north of I-40 on Highway 14 to the south of Cedar Crest. We found a nice PACIFIC WREN about 100 meters up the muddy trail from the parking area on the east side of the road along the creek. The bird responded to taped calls and song, but still proved to be somewhat elusive. We also had JUNIPER TITMOUSE, several dozen Western Bluebirds and at least 30 calling and singing Townsend's Solitaires in the area.

At the Crest, we watched the many rosy-finches frequenting the area, and I am sure that for most of the participants this was one of the highlights of the trip. Many thanks go out to Nancy and Steve Cox for changing their regularly scheduled day of banding for our group. Several of us also braved the snow and the cooler temperature to look for the American Three-toed Woodpecker in the area, but we dipped on that effort. Several Red Crossbills flew over our group as we were in the woods, but we were not able to get views of the birds. Views and photos of the rosy-finches were superb, and will remain with us for quite a while!

We spent a very windy afternoon in Embudito Canyon looking for the previously reported sparrows, but did not re-locate the Harris's Sparrow. We did find two of the GOLDEN-CROWNED SPARROWS which had been reported earlier, but they were quite difficult to track down in the high winds. We also managed some good looks at the two Cactus Wrens in the area as well as two singing Crissal Thrashers.

Back to check in to the hotel in to the Best Western Rio Grande in Albuquerque, we then piled in to the van and headed north to Las Mananitas, a local restaurant which has quite the storied and checkered history. Good food, a super tour, but no ghosts located for the evening, we then went back to the hotel and prepped for the return home.

### **20 February 2011 Sunday**

Travel day for all, we met people at the hotel for transportation to the airport with the rental van, and also the later departing participants made arrangements for the trip out.

My thanks to all for a great trip, and I hope to see you here again in New Mexico!!

DJK



## Annotated Species List

### ANSERIFORMES: Anatidae

***Anser albifrons* Greater White-fronted Goose.** Six were seen in the field of thousands of geese and cranes at the Ladd Gordon WMA. This is an uncommon species for the MRGV during the winter, with most of the population wintering in the central United States (Texas in particular) and in the Central Valley of California.

***Chen caerulescens* Snow Goose.** Several hundred to several thousand seen at several sites, including LGWMA, BdANWR and the wetland sites to the north of Sevilleta NWR along the La Joya Waterfowl Management Area. At LGWMA, we were able to see at least twenty blue-morph along with several dozen more of this morph at sunset at BdANWR.

***Chen rossii* Ross's Goose.** Hundreds to several thousand seen at several sites, including LGWMA, BdANWR and the wetland sites to the north of Sevilleta NWR along the La Joya Waterfowl Management Area. At LGWMA, we were able to see at least seven blue-morph along with several more of this morph at sunset at BdANWR. While the blue-morph is rarer than the blue-morph of the former species, we have noticed an increase of blue Ross's Goose in the MRGV and in Chihuahua over the past ten years.

***Branta hutchinsii* Cackling Goose.** A common to abundant overwintering species on the eastern plains of New Mexico, this species has been increasing in the Middle Rio Grande Valley during the last two decades. Most of the group had at least one-hundred at the RGNC on the first day, and then several more scattered about at LGWMA and at the north end of EBSP.

***Branta canadensis* Canada Goose.** Common winter resident throughout northern and central New Mexico, we enjoyed views of from 25 to several hundred at various stops on the trip. The highest total was of several hundred along Monticello Point at the north end of EBSP.

***Aix sponsa* Wood Duck.** Fifteen or twenty were at the RGNC observation pond on the first day, where they regularly over-winter.

***Anas strepera* Gadwall.** Common winter resident to the MRGV, we observed between five and one hundred at several stops, with most being seen at Monticello Point at the north end of EBSP.

***Anas americana* American Wigeon.** Fairly common winter resident throughout northern and central New Mexico, we observed between five and one hundred at several stops, with most being seen at Monticello Point at the north end of EBSP.

***Anas platyrhynchos* Mallard.** Common winter resident throughout the MRGV, we observed between five and several hundred at most stops on the tour. Several pair of "Mexican Mallard" were seen at BdANWR and at NMP, a possible future split by the AOU Checklist Committee.

***Anas cyanoptera* Cinnamon Teal.** Uncommon winter resident to the MRGV (most winter to the south in southern New Mexico or in Chihuahua), we had about twenty-five individuals at both BdANWR and EBSP.

***Anas clypeata* Northern Shoveler.** Common winter resident throughout the MRGV, we observed between five and several hundred at most stops on the tour.

***Anas acuta* Northern Pintail.** Common winter resident throughout the MRGV, we observed between five and several hundred at LGWMA, BdANWR and at north Monticello Point at EBSP.

***Anas crecca* Green-winged Teal.** Common winter resident throughout the MRGV, we observed between twenty-five and several hundred at several stops on the tour.

***Aythya valisineria* Canvasback.** One was located on the Candelaria Wetland Pond at the RGNC on the first day, the only one that we located on the tour.

***Aythya collaris* Ring-necked Duck.** Uncommon to fairly common winter resident to the MRGV, we saw between five and ten at BdANWR and at North Monticello Point at EBSP.

***Aythya marila* Greater Scaup.** A very good find for the MRGV, one was at the RGNC on the first day. Of note, after the tour concluded, one male and one female were seen here throughout the remainder of the winter period.

***Aythya affinis* Lesser Scaup.** Two were at the RGNC ponds on the first day, the only ones that we located for the tour.

***Bucephala albeola* Bufflehead.** Uncommon winter resident to the MRGV, we had several at LGWMA along the Rio Grande, and several more while touring BdANWR.

***Bucephala clangula* Common Goldeneye.** Rare winter resident to the MRGV, one female-plumaged bird was in the flock of waterfowl at Las Palomas Marsh, and quickly departed when we flushed the large group.

***Lophodytes cucullatus* Hooded Merganser.** Always a favorite, one male was at the RGNC in Albuquerque on the first day. This bird remained all winter.

***Mergus merganser* Common Merganser.** Fairly common to common wintering species to the MRGV, we saw up to twenty-six in the deep waters of EBSP.

***Oxyura jamaicensis* Ruddy Duck.** Uncommon to fairly common wintering species within the MRGV, we observed up to six individuals at several sites, including TBM, BdANWR and EBSP.

#### **GALLIFORMES: Odontophoridae**

***Callipepla gambelii* Gambel's Quail.** Common permanent resident from central New Mexico to the south, we found ten coming in to a feeder at a house overlooking the Rock Canyon marina at EBSP.

#### **GALLIFORMES Phasianidae**

***Phasianus colchicus* Ring-necked Pheasant.** (1) One seen in Albuquerque near the Bosque Open Space along Rio Grande Blvd. on the last day as we approached the hotel.

***Meleagris gallopavo* Wild Turkey.** Six were seen well at the LGWMA near the parking area along the riparian walk.

**PODICIPEDIFORMES: Podicipedidae**

***Podilymbus podiceps* Pied-billed Grebe.** Up to eight at several different locations on the tour, with the high count recorded at BdANWR.

***Aechmophorus occidentalis* Western Grebe.** Of the hundreds of *Aechmophorus* grebes at EBSP, many were of this species but they were too far out on the lake for good looks. Hundreds winter each year at this locale.

***Aechmophorus clarkii* Clark's Grebe.** Several hundred were seen at EBSP and at the N. Monticello Point at EBSP. OF the two *Aechmophorus* grebes wintering on the lake, this species is the more common.

**PELECANIFORMES: Phalacrocoracidae**

***Phalacrocorax brasilianus* Neotropic Cormorant.** Six were seen at Rock Canyon Marina at EBSP, one of which was beginning to show the distinctive white border around the base of the bill. Once common to the MRGV, this species can now be decidedly hard to find, but the reasons are unknown.

***Phalacrocorax auritus* Double-crested Cormorant.** Several were seen at EBSP both at the Rock Canyon Marina site and some distant birds at the south end of the lake.

**PELECANIFORMES: Pelecanidae**

***Pelecanus erythrorhynchos* American White Pelican.** A total of seventeen were at EBSP, both at Rock Canyon Marina and at the N. Monticello Point location at the north end of EBSP.

**CICONIIFORMES: Ardeidae**

***Ardea herodias* Great Blue Heron.** One or two seen on several days during the tour, most notably at N. Monticello Point at EBSP.

***Ardea alba* Great Egret.** A good find for this season at this location was one adult at PDSP, where considered rare in the winter months.

**FALCONIFORMES: Accipitridae**

***Elanus leucurus* White-tailed Kite.** One seen just north of the entrance to BdANWR by Rich was later reported by birders throughout the winter season. Unusual for this far north, but this irruptive species has been undergoing wide fluctuations in distribution and numbers within New Mexico during the past two decades, and it seems that we are now in another upswing, particularly in the southern half of the state.

***Haliaeetus leucocephalus* Bald Eagle.** A very impressive total of eight were at LGWMA, and an additional two were at BdANWR and EBSP the next day. This species is considered to be uncommon but regular in the MRGV during the winter season.

***Circus cyaneus* Northern Harrier.** Fairly common to common winter resident throughout the MRGV, we saw birds on each of the days of the tour, with a high count of twelve at BdANWR.

***Accipiter striatus* Sharp-shinned Hawk.** Uncommon winter resident to the MRGV and foothills, one was seen at Embudito Canyon on the last full day.

***Accipiter cooperii* Cooper's Hawk.** Uncommon to fairly common permanent resident and winter visitor to the MRGV, we found this species in several areas during the trip, with a high of two seen at BdANWR in Socorro County on 17 February 2011.

***Buteo jamaicensis* Red-tailed Hawk.** Common permanent resident and winter visitor, we observed between one and nine daily throughout the tour, with a high count on nine at BdANWR.

***Aquila chrysaetos* Golden Eagle.** Uncommon permanent resident in the mountains and foothills surrounding the MRGV, the population increases during the winter months as wandering individuals and northern winterers enter the Valley. We observed one at the LGWMA on the first full day of the tour.

#### **FALCONIFORMES: Falconidae**

***Falco sparverius* American Kestrel.** Fairly common permanent resident to the MRGV and common during the winter months when northern individuals move in to the Valley. We recorded between one and three individuals at several sites throughout the trip.

***Falco mexicanus* Prairie Falcon.** Uncommon to rare permanent resident to the foothills surrounding the MRGV. Slightly more common during the winter months when northern individuals move in to the Valley. We recorded one at EBSP at the north end of Monticello Point nearing sunset.

#### **GRUIFORMES: Rallidae**

***Fulica americana* American Coot.** Common permanent resident to the central and southern portions of the state, we had this species at nearly all sites with water and appropriate habitat throughout the trip. A high of seventy-five were seen at BdANWR on 17 February 2011.

#### **GRUIFORMES: Gruidae**

***Grus canadensis* Sandhill Crane.** Common to abundant winter resident to the MRGV from late October through early March. We recorded this species throughout the trip, with high counts in the thousands at LGWMA and BdANWR on 17 February 2011. Both Greater and Lesser Sandhill Cranes were observed. The Lesser and Greater Sandhill Cranes are quite distinct, their divergence dating roughly to the Late Pliocene or Early Pleistocene, some 2.3–1.2 million years ago. It seems as if glaciation fragmented off a founder population of the Lesser Sandhill Crane, because during each major ice age its present breeding range was frozen year-round. Conceivably, they might be considered distinct species already, a monotypic *G. canadensis* and the Greater Sandhill Crane *G. pratensis*, which would include the other populations. Though the Sandhill Crane is not considered threatened as a species, the three

southernmost subspecies are quite rare (Cuban, Florida and Mississippi Sandhill cranes). While the migratory birds could at least choose secure breeding habitat, the resident populations could not, and many subpopulations were destroyed by hunting or habitat change. However, initially the Greater Sandhill crane proper suffered most from persecution; by 1940 probably fewer than 1,000 birds remained. They have since increased greatly again, though with nearly 100,000 individuals they are still less plentiful than the Lesser Sandhill Crane, which numbers over 400,000 individuals, making the species the most plentiful crane alive today.

#### **CHARADRIIFORMES: Charadriidae**

*Charadrius vociferus* Killdeer. Fairly common permanent resident and winter visitor, we found up to twelve at BdANWR on 17 February 2011 and two on a sandbar at LPM on 18 February 2011 before being blown away by the strong winds that day.

#### **CHARADRIIFORMES: Scolopacidae**

*Actitis macularia* Spotted Sandpiper. Uncommon in the northern and central portion of the state during the winter, we heard one flying over while at BdANWR.

*Tringa melanoleuca* Greater Yellowlegs. Uncommon in the central and southern portions of the state during the winter, we found six at BdANWR, which was a good total there. These birds had been located on the BdA Christmas Bird Count two months earlier and had over-wintered.

*Gallinago delicata* Wilson's Snipe. Uncommon to fairly common winter visitor to all open-water habitats, we observed three in the nearly dry riverbed while at PDSP on the 18<sup>th</sup> of February.

#### **CHARADRIIFORMES: Laridae**

*Larus delawarensis* Ring-billed Gull. By far the most common wintering gull species in the MRGV, we found up to five hundred at the Rock Canyon Marina at EBSP on 18 February.

*Larus californicus* California Gull. Quite uncommon during the winter, we found three at the Rock Canyon Marina at EBSP on 18 February.

*Larus argentatus* Herring Gull. Uncommon during the winter, we found up to nine at the Rock Canyon Marina at EBSP on 18 February. It is regular here, but numbers can vary greatly during subsequent winters.

*Larus thayeri* Thayer's Gull. Quite a good find for New Mexico, one adult was over-wintering at the Rock Canyon Marina at EBSP and we were able to study this individual at length.

*Larus fuscus* Lesser Black-backed Gull. A fairly uncooperative juvenile which was over-wintering at Rock Canyon Marina at EBSP was seen briefly in the morning by a few participants before it packed up and departed to the nearby landfill for the day. We did not re-locate it later in the day when we returned in the high winds of the afternoon. An adult which was seen earlier in the week was not located, and was probably foraging out on the lake or at the landfill as is often the case with the gulls at this site.

#### **COLUMBIFORMES: Columbidae**

***Columba livia* Rock Pigeon.** Common permanent resident in all urban and suburban habitats throughout the state, we recorded several to many on each day that we paid attention to the species (which was rarely, I'll have to admit).

***Streptopelia decaocto* Eurasian Collared-Dove.** Common permanent resident now in all 33 counties within the state, we recorded up to ten daily in most urban and suburban habitats.

***Zenaida asiatica* White-winged Dove.** Common summer resident and uncommon winter resident to the MRGV, we recorded up to twenty at BdANWR and at Rock Canyon Marina.

***Zenaida macroura* Mourning Dove.** Common to abundant permanent resident throughout the state, we recorded this species at nearly all sites on all days, with a high count of over one-hundred at LGWMA on 17 February 2011.

#### **CUCULIFORMES: Cuculidae**

***Geococcyx californianus* Greater Roadrunner.** Uncommon permanent resident, or at least widely dispersed and inconspicuous within the MRGV, we located a single bird at BdANWR on 17 February 2011.

#### **PICIFORMES: Picidae**

***Picoides scalaris* Ladder-backed Woodpecker.** Fairly common to common permanent resident in the MRGV from Albuquerque south into Chihuahua and Texas. We recorded between one and two individuals at BdANWR, EBS, PDSP and at Embudito Canyon.

***Picoides pubescens* Downy Woodpecker.** Fairly common to common permanent resident to the MRGV and further to the north within the state, we found two at the RGNC on the first day, seen by those on that portion of the trip as we awaited the arrivals of other participants.

***Picoides villosus* Hairy Woodpecker.** Fairly common permanent resident to coniferous forests throughout the northern and central part of the state, we had one at the RGNC where they come down for the winter in very small numbers.

***Colaptes auratus* Northern Flicker.** Common permanent resident and/or winter visitor to most habitats within the MRGV. We recorded up to twelve individuals on the trip (LGWMA) and were had this species on all days of the tour.

#### **PASSERIFORMES: Tyrannidae**

***Empidonax hammondi* Hammond's Flycatcher.** Unlike southern Arizona, where up to three *Empidonax* species can be seen during the winter, southern New Mexico shelters many fewer individuals of that genus. Of the three that have been reported from riparian oases and traps during the winter, Gray Flycatcher is usually the most frequently reported, with fewer numbers of Hammond's and Dusky (rarest). We had one Hammond's in the trees near the campground at PDSP on 18 February 2011, which all were able to see well and enjoy.

***Sayornis nigricans* Black Phoebe.** Fairly common permanent resident and winter visitor to the MRGV, we had up to four at PDSP and one each at EBSP and LPM.

***Sayornis saya* Say's Phoebe.** Fairly common permanent resident to the MRGV, we recorded this species at nearly every stop, and had a high count of three at LGSWM on 17 February 2011.

#### **PASSERIFORMES: Corvidae**

***Cyanocitta stelleri* Steller's Jay.** Common permanent resident to coniferous forests (rarely in the lowlands during the winter months), we had several while in the Sandia Mountains on 19 February 2011.

***Aphelocoma californica* Western ("Woodhouse's") Scrub-Jay.** Common permanent resident to the foothills of all mountains in the state, we found up to four at Embudito Canyon on 19 February 2011.

***Corvus brachyrhynchos* American Crow.** Common to abundant during the winter months, we recorded them daily in nearly all habitats. In the winter, large evening roosts can record up to several thousand in a small patch of riparian woodland along the Rio Grande.

***Corvus cryptoleucus* Chihuahuan Raven.** Fairly common permanent resident in the lowlands and grasslands of central and southern New Mexico, we had several groups during the trip. A high count of twenty-five was noted on 18 February 2011 near PDSP.

***Corvus corax* Common Raven.** Common permanent resident to the foothills and mountains throughout the state, this species moves down-slope during the winter to add identification challenges to local birders. We recorded between two and fifteen of this species nearly at all sites during the trip.

#### **PASSERIFORMES: Alaudidae**

***Eremophila alpestris* Horned Lark.** Common permanent resident and winter visitor, we had small groups throughout the trip, particularly while at PDSP and at EBSP in the middle of the tour.

#### **PASSERIFORMES: Hirundinidae**

***Tachycineta bicolor* Tree Swallow.** Common migrants in the MRGV, we had this species at several areas on the tour. A maximum count of thirty at LPM in Sierra County on 18 February 2011 was a bit earlier than normal for date of first observation for the state.

***Tachycineta thalassina* Violet-green Swallow.** Interspersed with the Tree Swallows at LPM, we picked out two of this species for the only sighting for the trip.

***Stelgidopteryx serripennis* Northern Rough-winged Swallow.** A lone individual was heard calling and then was seen flying over the Rio Grande below PDSP when we were studying the Wilson's Snipe in the riverbed.

**PASSERIFORMES: Paridae**

***Poecile atricapillus* Black-capped Chickadee.** Fairly common permanent resident to the oak and cottonwood/willow riparian zones of the state, we had two at the RGNC on the first day for the only sighting for the trip.

***Poecile gambeli* Mountain Chickadee.** Fairly common permanent resident to the foothills and coniferous forests in the northern and central portions of New Mexico, we had one at the RGNC and several more while in the Sandia Mountains.

***Baeolophus ridgwayi* Juniper Titmouse.** Always a treat, we lured one out into the open while at the San Antonio de Padua Open Space in the Sandia Mountains using Michael's iPhone with apps, a most impressive use of technology!

**PASSERIFORMES: Remizidae**

***Auriparus flaviceps* Verdin.** Uncommon in the MRGV between Hatch and BdANWR, and then much more common to the south from there, we were able to locate single individuals at three different locales: DbANWR; EBSP; and PDSP.

**PASSERIFORMES: Aegithalidae**

***Psaltriparus minimus* Bushtit.** Fairly common to common permanent resident to the MRGV, we were able to find up to twelve at three different locations, with most coming from the Sandia Mountains.

**PASSERIFORMES: Sittidae**

***Sitta canadensis* Red-breasted Nuthatch.** Common permanent resident to the coniferous forests throughout the state, we found five on the last day in the Sandia Mountains while looking for the elusive American Three-toed Woodpecker.

***Sitta carolinensis* White-breasted Nuthatch.** Common permanent resident to the lowlands, foothills and mountains of central and northern New Mexico. We found scattered individuals at most locations on the trip, with a high count of three at San Antonio de Padua in the Sandia Mountains.

***Sitta pygmaea* Pygmy Nuthatch.** Common permanent resident to the mountains throughout the state, we had several on the last day in the Sandia Mountains while seeking out the American Three-toed Woodpecker.

**PASSERIFORMES: Troglodytidae**

***Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus* Cactus Wren.** Uncommon permanent resident to the MRGV, becoming more common to the south of Socorro. We found one calling while at the Rock Canyon marina at EBSP, and then a pair in Embudito Canyon, quite far north for this species.

***Salpinctes obsoletus* Rock Wren.** One calling bird was found on the cliffs at the Rock Canyon Marina at EBSP.

***Thryomanes bewickii* Bewick's Wren.** Fairly common permanent resident to the MRGV, becoming more common to the south of Socorro, we had several at most sites that we stopped at throughout the trip. Percha Dam seemed to be the high count, even with the high winds we recorded five there.

***Troglodytes pacificus* Pacific Wren.** Most unexpected was one which responded to tape playback at the San Antonio de Padua Open Space in the Sandia Mountains, where we obtained quick views on several occasions. This bird was not seen later in the week or throughout the winter there. New Mexico had specimens for both this and the following species, but much still needs to be learned about the status and distribution of Pacific and Winter wrens in the Southwest.

***Troglodytes troglodytes* Winter Wren.** A previously discovered individual was re-located by our group to the south of Percha Dam at PDSP on 18 February 2011. All got great views of this bird as it called and then sang several complete songs for the group.

#### **PASSERIFORMES: Regulidae**

***Regulus calendula* Ruby-crowned Kinglet.** Uncommon to fairly common winter visitor to the MRGV (dependent on weather), we found a lone individual at PDSP just below the dam. This winter saw few over-wintering individuals in the MRGV.

#### **PASSERIFORMES: Turdidae**

***Sialia mexicana* Western Bluebird.** A real treat was finding and studying up to twenty-five individuals at the San Antonio de Padua Open Space in the Sandia Mountains on 19 February 2011.

***Myadestes townsendi* Townsend's Solitaire.** Wonderful views of up to thirty individuals were had by the group while birding the San Antonio de Padua Open Space in the Sandia Mountains on 19 February 2011.

***Turdus migratorius* American Robin.** Depending on the fruit crop, a common to abundant winter visitor to the MRGV lowlands. We recorded up to ten on several days and in several locations, with the high count at PDSP.

#### **PASSERIFORMES: Mimidae**

***Mimus polyglottos* Northern Mockingbird.** Fairly common to common summer resident and an uncommon winter resident to the MRGV, we found three near the entrance of the Rock Canyon Marina at EBSP, where they were defending territories based on the availability of the juniper berries in the area.

***Oreoscoptes montanus* Sage Thrasher.** An irruptive and irregular winter resident to the MRGV, we were quite pleased to discover up to twelve near the entrance of the Rock Canyon Marina at EBSP, where they were defending territories based on the availability of the juniper berries.

***Toxostoma curvirostre* Curve-billed Thrasher.** Common permanent resident to the MRGV, we found them at several locations on the trip, with a high count of two while at the Rock Canyon Marina at EBSP.

***Toxostoma crissale* Crissal Thrasher.** Fairly common permanent resident to the foothill habitats of the MRGV and on the west side of the Sandia Mountains, we found two singing in the high winds at Embudito Canyon on 19 February 2011.

**PASSERIFORMES: Sturnidae**

***Sturnus vulgaris* European Starling.** Common permanent resident to all urban settings in the MRGV, we recorded them nearly daily while on the tour.

**PASSERIFORMES: Motacillidae**

***Anthus rubescens* American Pipit.** Common winter visitor to the MRGV to all fields and agricultural lands, and along lakes and reservoirs. We found up to twenty at LPM in Sierra County on 18 February 2011 where considered common in winter.

**PASSERIFORMES: Ptilonotidae**

***Phainopepla nitens* Phainopepla.** Uncommon to the MRGV, and usually only found from well south of Socorro, we found two at the entrance of the Rock Canyon Marina at EBSP and an additional seven at PDSP below the dam.

**PASSERIFORMES: Calcariidae**

***Calcarius ornatus* Chestnut-collared Longspur.** Fairly common to common winter visitor to the MRGV and throughout southern New Mexico, we had about twenty fly over us in the high winds while looking at the birds at the north end of EBSP and a North Monticello Point.

**PASSERIFORMES: Parulidae**

***Dendroica coronata* Yellow-rumped Warbler.** Fairly common to common winter visitor, we recorded one at the RGNC and an additional six at PDSP for the only sightings for the tour.

**PASSERIFORMES: Emberizidae**

***Pipilo maculatus* Spotted Towhee.** Fairly common to common permanent resident and winter visitor, we had between three and nine individuals at several sites while on the tour, with the high count at BdANWR.

***Pipilo fuscus* Canyon Towhee.** Fairly common permanent resident to the rocky foothill habitats throughout the state, we found three very accommodating individuals at Embudito Canyon for all to enjoy. Certainly look quite different than California Towhees!

***Spizella passerina* Chipping Sparrow.** Uncommon to fairly common winter visitor to the MRGV and to the southern portion of the state, we found one flock of fifteen at the LGWMA within Sevilleta NWR on 17 February 2011.

***Spizella breweri* Brewer's Sparrow.** Uncommon to fairly common winter visitor to the MRGV and to the southern portion of the state, we found this species in three areas on the tour, with a high count of forty birds at North Monticello Point at EBSP on 18 February 2011.

***Pooecetes gramineus* Vesper Sparrow.** Irregularly encountered in the MRGV during the winter, as most individuals winter further to the south near Las Cruces and Deming in most winters. We found a total of two while at PDSP on 18 February 2011.

***Amphispiza bilineata* Black-throated Sparrow.** Common permanent resident to the Chihuahuan Desert habitat of the MRGV and in southern New Mexico, we found this species at several sites. The high count was of eight individuals at EBSP.

***Passerculus sandwichensis* Savannah Sparrow.** Fairly common winter visitor to the MRGV, we found them at four sites in the middle of the tour, and recorded a high count of fifteen birds at the N. Monticello Point and Rock Canyon Marina of EBSP.

***Melospiza melodia* Song Sparrow.** Fairly common to common winter visitor to the MRGV and to southern New Mexico. We found the species to be common while at LGWMA and at BdANWR where we counted fourteen and fifteen individuals respectively.

***Melospiza lincolni* Lincoln's Sparrow.** Uncommon to rare in the MRGV during the winter, particularly in the Albuquerque to Socorro area, we found one at LGWMA and two others at PDSP where more expected in the winter.

***Zonotrichia leucophrys* White-crowned Sparrow.** Common to abundant winter visitor to the MRGV and to southern New Mexico, we observed this species in a wide variety of habitats on each day in the field, with a high of at least sixty at LGWMA on 17 February 2011.

***Zonotrichia atricapilla* Golden-crowned Sparrow.** Very rare winter visitor to the MRGV, with one or two reported each winter. We were fortunate to relocate the two which had been discovered earlier in Embudito Canyon on the west side of the Sandia Mountains on the last day of the tour. Not really exciting for California birders, but one of the best birds of the tour given the location!

***Junco hyemalis* Dark-eyed Junco.** Fairly common to common winter visitor to the MRGV, we observed one to several at most stops on the tour. The most common subspecies was "Pink-sided" followed by "Slate-colored" and "Oregon."

#### **PASSERIFORMES: Cardinalidae**

***Cardinalis sinuatus* Pyrrhuloxia.** Uncommon to fairly common permanent resident to the southern section of the state, we heard two different individuals calling but were not seen. One was at the cactus garden at BdANWR and the second was at PDSP.

#### **PASSERIFORMES: Icteridae**

***Agelaius phoeniceus* Red-winged Blackbird.** Common to abundant winter visitor to the MRGV and to southern New Mexico, we observed hundreds and even thousands which in the middle portion of the tour at TBM, LGWMA, BdANWR and at EBSP.

***Sturnella neglecta* Western Meadowlark.** Common permanent resident and winter visitor to dry grasslands, abandoned agricultural fields and scrublands of the MRGV and southern New Mexico. We recorded this species on most days, with a high count of at least seventy-five on 18 February 2011 while at PDSP.

***Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus* Yellow-headed Blackbird.** Uncommon and somewhat irregular in occurrence in the MRGV and southern New Mexico, a good find was the ten birds at the Eagle Deck overlook at BdANWR on the late afternoon of 17 February 2011.

***Euphagus cyanocephalus* Brewer's Blackbird.** Common to abundant winter visitor to the Valley, we found thousands of birds at the LGWMA and at N. Monticello Point at Ebsp, with scattered individuals and small flocks throughout the trip.

***Quiscalus mexicanus* Great-tailed Grackle.** Common permanent resident to all urban and suburban habitats in the MRGV and southern New Mexico, we recorded scattered individuals and small groups on 17 February 200. A high count of nineteen was noted at BdANWR on that day.

#### **PASSERIFORMES: Fringillidae**

***Leucosticte tephrocotis* Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch.** Fairly common winter visitor to the higher elevations of the Sandia Mountains within the past ten years. We observed at least twenty-five of the Interior race *L. t. tephrocotis* at the Sandia Crest on 19 February 2011. Additionally, we were able to see and photograph several of the Hepburn's race *L. t. littoralis* mixed in with the flocks of rosy-finches as they came in for feeding and to be captured and banded. For a touching story about and behind the rosy-finch banding project, see the following link or the pdf attachment included with this mailing: <http://audubonmagazine.org/features1005/citizenscience.html>

***Leucosticte atrata* Black Rosy-Finch.** Fairly common to common winter visitor to the Sandia Crest within the past ten years. We observed at least fifty while at the Crest House on 19 February 2011, and some good photos were obtained while there.

***Leucosticte australis* Brown-capped Rosy-Finch.** Uncommon winter visitor to the Sandia Crest, this is the rarest of the three rosy-finches to frequent the area. Ironically, it is the one species which breeds the closest to New Mexico. We observed five birds intermixed with other species while at the Crest House on 19 February 2011.

***Carpodacus cassinii* Cassin's Finch.** Irregular and irruptive winter visitor to the mountains, foothills and lower elevations of the MRGV, several participants heard one while at the San Antonio de Padua Open Space in the Sandia Mountains on 19 February 2011. Later in the winter and early spring, this species staged a noticeable movement in the foothills and lowlands, with dozens being seen or heard almost daily in the Albuquerque area.

***Carpodacus mexicanus* House Finch.** Common permanent resident to all mid- and low-elevation habitats within the MRGV, we recorded them at all stops on each of the days while on tour.

***Loxia curvirostra* Red Crossbill.** Fairly common but unpredictable and irruptive, this species can be conspicuous in some years and virtually absent in others. We caught brief glimpses of four fly-overs while at the Sandia Crest looking for the American Three-toed Woodpecker. Five calling individuals flew over the Embudito Canyon parking area while we were getting back in to the vehicles. Call-type was not determined.

***Carduelis pinus* Pine Siskin.** Fairly common permanent resident to coniferous forest habitat throughout the state, we had a flock of ten in the Sandia Mountains at the San Antonio de Padua Open Space site.

***Carduelis psaltria* Lesser Goldfinch.** Common permanent resident in the MRGV, we only found two at the LGWMA. This was two weeks after the coldest winter storm in over fifty years, and we wondered whether the weather events could have affected this species' distribution this winter.

***Carduelis tristis* American Goldfinch.** Rare summer resident in high-elevation riparian habitats in northern New Mexico, but fairly common to common winter visitor to the MRGV. We recorded three while at the LGWMA for the only sightings of the tour.

#### **PASSERIFORMES: Passeridae**

***Passer domesticus* House Sparrow.** Common permanent resident to the MRGV, we recorded one or more at most urban and suburban settings throughout the tour.

