

WINTER NEW MEXICO

JANUARY 3–9, 2018



mixed rosy-finch flock, Sandia Crest, New Mexico, January 8, 2018, Barry Zimmer

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By Barry Zimmer

As we pulled into the driveway of my house, we were greeted by an adult male Hooded Oriole on a front yard hummingbird feeder (before we could even get out of the van!). This species is quite rare here in winter, but I had four that had settled in for the season. We enjoyed great views of this orange and black beauty, and then headed to the upper deck patio to view the backyard. A rare female Broad-billed Hummingbird hovered practically in our faces before we could even get in place along the railing. Almost immediately an even rarer Ruby-throated Hummingbird (virtually unknown in the western U.S. in winter) buzzed in and chased the Broad-billed. Lesser Goldfinches swarmed the thistle feeders. A third species of hummingbird appeared, a brilliant male Anna's with its rose-colored head gleaming in the morning light. I headed down to restock the feeders when a female Costa's Hummingbird, accidental in the state, came in to the feeder right in front of me and drank for a couple of minutes, while the group enjoyed scope studies. We had seen four species of hummingbirds in the first five minutes of our visit! Three more Hooded Orioles arrived as a group, and a Steller's Jay sailed over the mesa behind our house. A noisy pair of Cactus Wrens were coaxed into full view, followed by a handsome Spotted Towhee. A dapper little Verdin appeared on the orange slices and posed for scope views as well. Hummingbirds continued to swirl around us allowing repeated views of each species. A Ladder-backed Woodpecker joined the parade of birds, and soon a brilliant male Scott's Oriole (also very rare in winter) magically appeared. In a short hour, we had seen many rarities, as well as some fine southwestern regulars. It was hard to tear ourselves away from my house, but we had many other areas to visit. As we exited the driveway, both Steller's Jay and Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay sailed in for a final send-off.

Of course, the visit to my yard was just a tiny part of our very successful Winter New Mexico tour. We began in west El Paso the first afternoon with swarms of Yellow-headed Blackbirds (an estimated 5,000 seen) heading off to roost sites, and a rare and spectacular Lewis's Woodpecker foraging on a golf course. Other El Paso area highlights on Day Two included a rare Greater Scaup, handsome Hooded Mergansers, three Harris's Hawks, a close Burrowing Owl, a roosting Barn Owl, a pair of Monk Parakeets, a "Prairie" Merlin, Broad-tailed and Rufous hummingbirds (giving us an unbelievable six species on this winter day), a family of Acorn Woodpeckers, a Mountain Bluebird, and two very rare Fox Sparrows among others.

The following day was spent around Las Cruces, a short distance to the north. Desert areas yielded an impressive variety of sparrows (we had 15 species for the day), including Sagebrush, Black-throated, Rufous-crowned, Brewer's, Black-

chinned, and Lincoln's sparrows; Lark Bunting; and Green-tailed, Spotted, and Canyon towhees. Other goodies for the day included a pair of Juniper Titmice from ten feet, 10 Mountain Bluebirds, Sage Thrasher from thirty feet, Townsend's Solitaire, and a rare (for winter) Black-throated Gray Warbler.



Scott's Oriole, my yard, El Paso, Texas, January 4, 2018 © Barry Zimmer

Further upriver, we scoured the farmlands and riparian habitats around Percha Dam and Caballo and Elephant Butte reservoirs: Cackling Geese, Western and Clark's grebes, three magnificent Ferruginous Hawks, loads of Sandhill Cranes, an accidental Mew Gull, California Gull, a stunning Red-naped Sapsucker, all three phoebes, wonderful studies of Bridled Titmouse, all three species of bluebirds (including over 100 Mountains in one spot in a spectacular display), a Rock Wren from ten feet, close scope studies of Crissal Thrasher, more Sage Thrashers, and handsome Phainopeplas.

Water Canyon, to the west of Socorro, produced more Juniper Titmice and Townsend's Solitaires, many Western Bluebirds, and a dozen close Cassin's Finches.

World-famous Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge lived up to its reputation. We saw an estimated 20,000 white geese (both Snows and Ross's) in

a spectacular morning take-off, roughly 10,000 Sandhill Cranes (many very close), 14 Bald Eagles, and two wonderful rarities—Golden-crowned Sparrow and Eastern Towhee—among many other highlights.

We finished up with a visit to Sandia Crest at 10,600 feet elevation. There we watched flocks of rosy-finches swarm the feeders. All three species were present: Black, Brown-capped, and Gray-crowned, as well as the distinctive Hepburn's subspecies. Steller's Jays and Mountain Chickadees were also frequent visitors.

In all, we tallied 156 species over our six days of birding. We enjoyed spectacular weather with temperatures ranging from 29–71, while much of the country was buried in a deep freeze. Yet another wildly successful visit to the Land of Enchantment!

ITINERARY:

January 3 – El Paso Country Club areas, Sunland Park areas, Crossroads Pond, (34 species)

January 4 - Ascarate Lake, Rio Bosque Wetlands Park, my yard, McKelligon Canyon, Memorial Park, Kiseda home, Sunland Park, El Paso Country Club, drive to Las Cruces (85 species; 88 total)

January 5 - Jornada del Muerto, community near Organ, Aguirre Springs portion of the Organ Mountains/ Desert Peaks National Monument, Farm & Ranch Museum, Mesilla Park, return to Jornada del Muerto (59 species; 110 total)

January 6 – Highways 185 & 187, Caballo Dairy, Percha State Park, Animas Creek, Caballo Lake State Park, west side of Elephant Butte Lake (Rock Canyon Marina) (85 species; 138 total)

January 7 - Elephant Butte Lake State Park (Hot Springs Landing, Rock Canyon Marina, Three Sisters Cove), Water Canyon, Bosque del Apache NWR (70 species; 146 total)

January 8 - Bosque del Apache NWR, Sandia Crest, Rio Grande Nature Center State Park (71 species; 156 total)

January 9 - departures for home (156 species total)

KEY:

E = all areas in and around El Paso
L = Las Cruces, Organ Mountains, Jornada del Muerto, Mesilla Park
P = Highways 185 & 187, Percha State Park, Animas Creek, Caballo Lake State Park, Riverside Campground, Elephant Butte
B = Bosque del Apache NWR
W = Water Canyon
A = Albuquerque, Sandia Crest

bold-faced species indicate birds of rare, casual, or accidental occurrence

underlined species indicate birds of very uncommon occurrence or species which occur regularly but in such low densities as to be easily missed

BIRDS:

Snow Goose (*Chen caerulescens*) E,B----we had an amazing show with 20,000+ birds landing in a small pond right in front of us at dawn and then taking off an hour later; many other huge flocks seen along refuge loop; a fair number of blue morphs mixed in

Ross's Goose (*Chen rossii*) B---a few hundred seen exceptionally well at Bosque; scope views from 75 feet away; tied for second favorite bird of the tour!



Ross's Goose, Bosque del Apache NWR, New Mexico, January 8, 2018, Barry Zimmer

Cackling Goose (*Branta hutchinsii*) P---three near Percha were somewhat of a surprise

Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*) E,P,B,A

Wood Duck (*Aix sponsa*) E,A---stunning; 26 at once

Gadwall (*Anas strepera*) E,P,B,A

American Wigeon (*Anas americana*) E,P,B,A

Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) E,P,B,A----including some of the "Mexican Duck" subspecies *diazi*

Northern Shoveler (*Anas clypeata*) E,P,B,A
 Northern Pintail (*Anas acuta*) P,B
 Green-winged Teal (*Anas crecca*) E,P,B,A
 Canvasback (*Aythya valisineria*) P,B,A
 Redhead (*Aythya americana*) E---flock of thirty or so at Ascarate were our only ones
 Ring-necked Duck (*Aythya collaris*) E,B,A
Greater Scaup (*Aythya marila*) E,B---very close views of a female at Ascarate and a fly-by male at Bosque; rare
 Lesser Scaup (*Aythya affinis*) E,A
 Bufflehead (*Bucephala albeola*) E,B
Hooded Merganser (*Lophodytes cucullatus*) E,B---an impressive twenty one total; superb studies in Albuquerque
 Common Merganser (*Mergus merganser*) E,P----much scarcer than usual
 Ruddy Duck (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) E,B,A
 Gambel's Quail (*Callipepla gambelii*) L,P,B---over a hundred total
 Pied-billed Grebe (*Podilymbus podiceps*) E,B
 Western Grebe (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*) P----many hundreds
 Clark's Grebe (*Aechmophorus clarkii*) P---good scope views at Elephant Butte (side-by-side with Westerns)
 Rock Pigeon (*Columba livia*) seen daily
 Eurasian Collared-Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*) seen daily---a rapidly expanding species
 White-winged Dove (*Zenaida asiatica*) seen daily with many hundreds total
 Mourning Dove (*Zenaida macroura*) seen daily
 Greater Roadrunner (*Geococcyx californianus*) P,B---only two seen, but great views of both
Broad-billed Hummingbird (*Cynanthus latirostris*) E---female in my yard made several, very close appearances; very rare (third time ever for this tour)
Ruby-throated Hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*) E---immature male at my house provided one of very few winter records for the western U.S., as well as a tour first!
Anna's Hummingbird (*Calypte anna*) E----five total including two brilliant adult males



Anna's Hummingbird, Kiseda yard, El Paso, Texas, January 4, 2018, Barry Zimmer

Costa's Hummingbird (*Calypte costae*) E----great views of female at my house; only the third time ever for this tour!
Broad-tailed Hummingbird (*Selasphorus platycercus*) E---female seen briefly by some at Kiseda's
Rufous Hummingbird (*Selasphorus rufus*) E---immature male at the Kiseda house; very uncommon to rare in winter
Virginia Rail (*Rallus limicola*) B---heard only the last morning
American Coot (*Fulica americana*) E,P,B,A
Sandhill Crane (*Antigone canadensis*) P,B,A---an estimated 10,000 wintering at the refuge this year and an additional 4000+ seen in other areas; spectacularly close views



Sandhill Crane, Bosque del Apache NWR, New Mexico, January 7, 2018, Barry Zimmer

Killdeer (*Charadrius vociferous*) E,P,B

Spotted Sandpiper (*Actitus macularius*) P---uncommon in winter; one at Riverside Campground

Greater Yellowlegs (*Tringa melanoleuca*) E,P,B---five total; uncommon in winter

Least Sandpiper (*Calidris minutilla*) E---flock of 10 at Rio Bosque

Wilson's Snipe (*Gallinago delicata*) P---scope views of three at Riverside Campground; uncommon

Mew Gull (*Larus canus*) P---winter adult at Elephant Butte was an excellent find; only the second time ever for this tour!

Ring-billed Gull (*Larus delawarensis*) E,P

California Gull (*Larus californicus*) P---pronlonged study of winter adult at Elephant Butte; very uncommon to rare

American White Pelican (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*) P---thirty or so off Rock Canyon Marina

Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*) E,P,B

Great Egret (*Ardea alba*) E,P---very uncommon in winter here, but we had two in El Paso & one at Riverside Campground

Snowy Egret (*Egretta thula*) E---as with Great Egret, this species is very uncommon here in winter; we had four at the El Paso Country Club

Black-crowned Night-Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) E,L---three Ascarate and one near Radium Springs

Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) P,B---15 total, including ten in view at once at Bosque fighting over a goose carcass
 Northern Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*) E,L,P,B---eighteen total, including a striking male
 Sharp-shinned Hawk (*Accipiter striatus*) E,B---two total
 Cooper's Hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*) E,P---four total
Harris's Hawk (*Parabuteo unicinctus*) E---three at Rio Bosque; uncommon
 Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*) seen daily in numbers (60 total)
Ferruginous Hawk (*Buteo regalis*) P---superb studies of this elegant raptor; three total; tied for second favorite bird of the tour!



Ferruginous Hawk, Percha Dam, New Mexico, January 6, 2018, Barry Zimmer

Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*) E---a roosting bird at Rio Bosque was a first in many years on this trip
 Great Horned Owl (*Bubo virginianus*) L---pair roosting at the Farm & Ranch Museum; fantastic views
 Burrowing Owl (*Athene cunicularia*) E---great scope views of two at Ascarate; uncommon & declining
 Belted Kingfisher (*Megasceryle alcyon*) E,B---three total; best at Ascarate
Lewis's Woodpecker (*Melanerpes lewis*) E---we saw this beautiful species on both of the first two days at the El Paso Country Club; very rare

Acorn Woodpecker (*Melanerpes formicivorus*) E,P---several nice studies (best was a group of three clustered together at the El Paso Country Club); thirteen total

Red-naped Sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus nuchalis*) P---two total, but one particularly well at Animas Creek; tied for favorite bird of the tour!



Red-naped Sapsucker, Animas Creek, New Mexico, January 6, 2018, Barry Zimmer

Ladder-backed Woodpecker (*Picoides scalaris*) E,L,P,B---thirteen total

Downy Woodpecker (*Picoides pubescens*) A---one at the nature center; our last new bird of the trip

Hairy Woodpecker (*Picoides villosus*) P,A---two were at Percha where rare

Northern Flicker (*Colaptes auratus*) E,L,P,B,A; the “Red-shafted” variety

Monk Parakeet (*Myiopsitta monachus*) E---great study of a pair at Ascarate thanks to John K.; expanding in this area

American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*) seen daily; 36 total

Merlin (*Falco columbarius*) E---female at Ascarate, of the locally rare *richardsonii* subspecies (the “Prairie Merlin”)

Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) E---adult perched high over Ascarate Park on radio tower; very uncommon in winter

Black Phoebe (*Sayornis nigricans*) P---one seen during lunch at Percha

Eastern Phoebe (*Sayornis phoebe*) P---scope views; locally rare

Say’s Phoebe (*Sayornis saya*) L,P,B---nine total

Loggerhead Shrike E,L,P,B---seven total; declining

Steller's Jay (*Cyanocitta stelleri*) E,P,A---this species invaded the lowlands en masse this fall/ winter; our first was seen in my yard; an impressive 28 total for the tour; subspecies *maculophaga*

Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay (*Aphelocoma woodhouseii*) E,L,W,B,A---this recently split species (from the old Western scrub-Jay) also invaded the lowlands; we had 17 total

American Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) E,L,P,B,A

Chihuahuan Raven (*Corvus cryptoleucus*) E,L,P,B

Common Raven (*Corvus corax*) P,W,B,A

Horned Lark (*Eremophila alpestris*) W

Black-capped Chickadee (*Poecile atricapillus*) A---our only one spotted by Victor at the nature center

Mountain Chickadee (*Poecile gambeli*) A---about 15 at Sandia Crest and a few at the Rio Grande Nature Center feeders

Bridled Titmouse (*Baeolophus wollweberi*) P---we had wonderful views of this localized species at its very eastern limit; tied for the second favorite bird of the tour!



Bridled Titmouse, Animas Creek, New Mexico, January 6, 2018, Barry Zimmer

Juniper Titmouse (*Baeolophus ridgwayi*) L,W---wonderfully close studies of a pair at Aguirre Springs (where very uncommon) and three more in Water Canyon
Verdin (*Auriparus flaviceps*) E,L,P---best in my yard feeding on orange slices; five total

Bushtit (*Psaltiriparus minimus*) B,A---flock of thirty at Bosque in the cattails and another 15 or 20 at the Rio Grande Nature Center (an unusual location for this species)

Pygmy Nuthatch (*Sitta pygmaea*) A---seen by Ken & Nancy at Sandia crest; rarely seen on this tour in spite of being resident in this region

Red-breasted Nuthatch (*Sitta canadensis*) L,P,A---another lowland invader this winter; we had five in view at once in Mesilla Park

White-breasted Nuthatch (*Sitta carolinensis*) E,L,P,A---yet another lowland invader; ten total; the Rocky Mountain subspecies *nelsoni* (a possible future split)

Brown Creeper (*Certhia americana*) P---two or three along the river at Percha; very uncommon

Rock Wren P---unsurpassed views at Elephant Butte

Canyon Wren (*Catherpes mexicanus*) L---heard only; tough in winter

Marsh Wren (*Cistothorus palustris*) E,B---one heard at Ascarate and another briefly seen at Bosque

Bewick's Wren (*Thyromanes bewickii*) E,L,P---six total

Cactus Wren (*Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus*) E,L---exceptionally well in my yard

Ruby-crowned Kinglet (*Regulus calendula*) E,L,P,W,B

Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia sialis*) P---about thirty in Animas creek; irregular

Western Bluebird (*Sialia mexicana*) L,P,W,A---stunning views at Percha & Water Canyon

Mountain Bluebird (*Sialia currucoides*) E,L,P---lone female at Ascarate, ten or so in a flock at Aguirre Springs, and an incredible show of **100+** at Elephant Butte with birds swarming the junipers; tied for favorite bird of the tour; irregular and often absent entirely

Townsend's Solitaire (*Myadestes townsendi*) L,W---three total

Hermit Thrush (*Catharus guttatus*) P---very uncommon this far north in winter; one at Percha

American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*) E,L,P,W,B,A

Curve-billed Thrasher (*Toxostoma curvirostre*) E,L,P,B---excellent views of several; eight total

Crissal Thrasher (*Toxostoma crissale*) P---after much effort & worry, we had prolonged scope studies at Elephant Butte thanks to Victor; always tough



Crissal Thrasher, Elephant Butte, New Mexico, January 7, 2018, Barry Zimmer

Sage Thrasher (*Oreoscoptes montanus*) L,W---unsurpassed vies at Aguirre Springs and another seven birds in Water canyon; missed completely some years

Northern Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*) E,L,P---eight total

European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) daily

Cedar Waxwing (*Bombycilla cedrorum*) E,L-----flock of 66 in the El Paso Country club the first afternoon; also two in Mesilla Park

Phainopepla (*Phainopepla nitens*) P---many good views; ten total

House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) daily

American Pipit (*Anthus rubescens*) P

Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch (*Leucosticte tephrocotis*) A---six at Sandia Crest, including one of the Hepburn's race (found by Julia); spectacular!

Black Rosy-Finch (*Leucosticte atrata*) A--- about 45 at Sandia Crest; superb views

Brown-capped Rosy-Finch (*Leucosticte australis*) A---20+ at Sandia Crest with the other rosy-finches; great views

House Finch (*Haemorhous mexicanus*) daily

Cassin's Finch (*Haemorhous cassinii*) L,P,W---male at Radium Springs, female at Percha and flock of a dozen in Water Canyon; another irregular invader that came to the lowlands this winter

Pine Siskin (*Spinus pinus*) P,W---three total

Lesser Goldfinch (*Spinus psaltria*) E,L,P,W---best in my yard; 24 total

American Goldfinch (*Spinus tristis*) P,B---generally uncommon & easily missed

Orange-crowned Warbler (*Oreothylpis celata*) E---Ascarate
Common Yellowthroat (*Geothlypis trichas*) E---Ascarate; rare in winter
 Yellow-rumped Warbler (*Setophaga coronata*) E,L,P,A---the Audubon's subspecies
Black-throated Gray Warbler (*Setophaga nigrescens*) L---eventually good views for all of a male in Mesilla Park; very rare in winter; yet another tour first!
Green-tailed Towhee (*Pipilo chlorurus*) L---one spotted by Victor at Aguirre Springs was our only one of the trip; uncommon
Eastern Towhee (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*) B---one at Bosque feeders was not only a tour first, but a first for me in the state!
 Spotted Towhee (*Pipilo maculatus*) E,L,P,W,B,A---24 total
 Rufous-crowned Sparrow (*Aimophila ruficeps*) L---cooperative birds (five total) at Aguirre Springs
 Canyon Towhee (*Melozona fusca*) L,W---only two the entire trip; best at Aguirre Springs
 Chipping Sparrow (*Spizella passerina*) L,P
 Brewer's Sparrow (*Spizella breweri*) L,P---a decent year for this species with 31 seen
Black-chinned Sparrow (*Spizella atrogularis*) L---excellent, close views; seven at Aguirre Springs; uncommon
 Vesper Sparrow (*Pooecetes gramineus*) L,P---seven total; best on the Jornada
 Black-throated Sparrow (*Amphispiza bilineata*) L,P---eight total; the best looking sparrow in the US?
Sagebrush Sparrow (*Artemisiospiza nevadensis*) L---fantastic views of this recently split species (formerly called Sage Sparrow) from about fifteen feet away; two seen
 Savannah Sparrow (*Passerculus sandwichensis*) P,B
Fox Sparrow (*Passerella iliaca*) E---nice scope study of two of the *iliaca* subspecies (Red Fox Sparrow) at Rio Bosque; rare
 Song Sparrow (*Melospiza melodia*) E,B---oddly, only three seen on the trip
 Lincoln's Sparrow (*Melospiza lincolni*) E,L---only three seen, but good views
White-throated Sparrow (*Zonotrichia albicollis*) B---four total at Bosque; generally rare to very uncommon in the Southwest
 White-crowned Sparrow (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*) E,L,P,B,A
Golden-crowned Sparrow (*Zonotrichia atricapilla*) B---at the Bosque visitor center feeders; very rare in the state
 Dark-eyed Junco (*Junco hyemalis*) E,L,P,W,B,A---including Gray-headed, Oregon, and Pink-sided races
 Pyrrhuloxia (*Cardinalis sinuatus*) E,L,P,B---eleven total
 Red-winged Blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) E,P,B,A
Eastern Meadowlark (*Sturnella magna*) W---one flushed along the entry road out of Water Canyon; uncommon
 Western Meadowlark (*Sturnella neglecta*) L,P,B

Yellow-headed Blackbird (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*) E,P---about
5,000+ gathering to roost in west El Paso the first afternoon
 Brewer's Blackbird (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*) E,P
 Great-tailed Grackle (*Quiscalus mexicanus*) E,L,P,B
 Brown-headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*) E,P
Hooded Oriole E---two males and two females overwintering in my yard made
 repeated appearances; accidental in winter here



Hooded Oriole, my yard, El Paso, Texas, January 4, 2018, Barry Zimmer

Scott's Oriole E---hanging out with the Hoodeds for the winter; accidental and
 a tour first

Total species – 156

MAMMALS:

Texas Antelope Squirrel (*Ammospermophilus interpres*)----one at Aguirre
 Springs
 Rock Squirrel (*Spermophilus variegatus*)---three total
 Desert Cottontail (*Sylvilagus audubonii*)---six seen
 Black-tailed Jackrabbit (*Lepus californicus*)----three total
 Mule Deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*)---two at Bosque were our only ones

Total species – 5

BUTTERFLIES:

Unidentified blue---possibly Spring Azure

Species - 1

SIGNIFICANT OTHERS:

Bigfoot (& his impressive salmon) sighting near Elephant Butte

Temperatures ranging from 29 – 71 (overall superb weather)

Rosca de Reyes---Julia is throwing the tamales party!

The Crest House incident