

BIRDING ARIZONA & CALIFORNIA

April 15th –27th 2019



Introduction

This trip report is the result of a two-week trip to Arizona and central & southern California. The first week was spent in SE-Arizona, Grand Canyon (one morning) and Las Vegas (one evening); the second week was spent in Central-California (3 days) and in and around Los Angeles. The first week I, Sjoerd Radstaak, was joined by Martijn Hammers and for the second week also Rob Gordijn, Helen Rijkens and Bas Garcia joined. For Rob & Helen, this week was part of their year-long world birding trip. Bas has lived in Los Angeles for a couple of years now with his wife Blanca and their daughter Ada. Bas really knows his spots and we prepared very little for the California part. Most of the information shared here is thanks to him! For Arizona we focused mainly on my personal targets, though we still managed to see almost all possible targets. As for the targets, we dipped on Rufous-capped Warbler, Blue-throated Hummingbird, and Tufted Flycatcher. We didn't try for Rose-throated Becard as we ran out of time. In total we recorded c. 270 species.

In this report I will share some general information and then zoom in on both birding in Arizona and California. In case a target bird was only seen once or twice, it is usually in CAPITALS and underlined. Spots in [] are not necessary to visit, only if time allows. A kmz-file for both Arizona and California is available, please contact me for more information. We used the Sibley's field guide in the field, but also made extensive use of the free Audubon and Merlin apps. Both apps have free sounds available for almost all species! Please feel free to contact me for more information via sjoerdradstaak@gmail.com.

General information

Visa

Every foreign visitor to the USA has to apply for a Visa or use the Visa Waiver program, see <https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov/esta/>. Please note, to get an ESTA is only possible if your country is in the Visa Waiver Program (39 countries) and if you want to stay 90 days or less. In case you applied for an ESTA via this website you get an application number in your mailbox. You need this to retrieve the ESTA and check the status on it via their website. You won't get an email once your ESTA has been approved, so make sure you check on their website before your departure date.

Money & credit cards

Though you would say this shouldn't be too much of a problem in the United States, we encountered quite some problems – mostly with the two of us in Arizona. It turned out we couldn't get gas from the gas station with our credit cards, as we had to enter a 5-digit zip code. A quick check on the internet just now reveals using 90210 (Hollywood) works, 00000 20% of the time and 99999 worked in the past, but not anymore. Canadians reported that entering the numbers of their postal code and adding zeroes also works, but it is unclear if this works for other countries as well. Swedish and Germans have 5-digit zip codes, so it's usually not a problem for them. In most cases, I was generally able to pay with my debit card though Martijn's almost never worked. In shops, our credit cards usually worked. So, to conclude, make sure you take both debit and credit cards and remember the Hollywood-code or ask a friend (which we should have done of course).

Climate

As for the climate I wouldn't recommend visiting Arizona and California during the summer, though August seems to be also the right moment for lots of hummers – but as is late spring. Also, from April to June precipitation is by far the lowest. Both the summer months (July and August) are not only much wetter, temperatures raise over 40 degrees Celsius on average! With so many good grasslands birds to see, I would suggest to go in spring season. Not only the weather is way more convenient in spring, but also sparrows are singing which makes their ID (and thus your life as a birder) much easier.

Logistics

For this trip we booked two cars, both through Sunny Cars (Dutch company). They don't have rentals cars themselves, but organize rentals through international companies like Alamo, Budget, Herz or local companies in 120 countries. In our case we hired through Alamo in Los Angeles and from the airport took one of the many shuttle buses to the Alamo location. In general, we were very happy with the service of both Sunny Cars and Alamo, as we had no problems picking-up the car handing it in, picking up another car and handing that one in a week later. The advantage of it being a big car rental company it that they don't seem to care about one or two scratches extra...

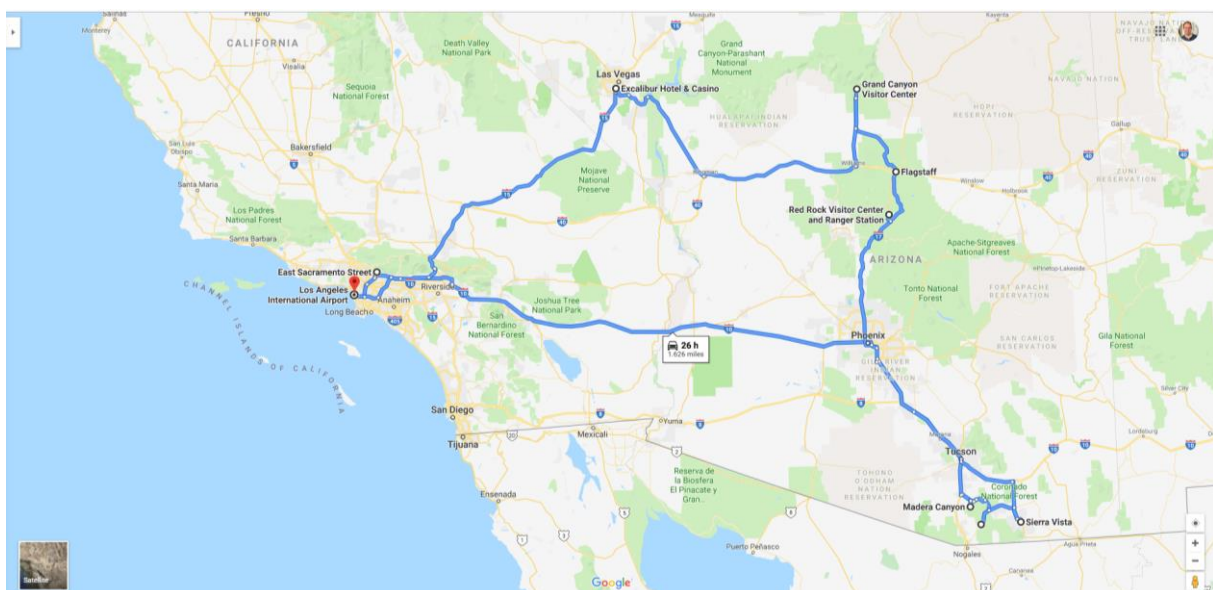
Accommodation

As for the accommodation we camped most of the time, both in Arizona and California. There are many national campgrounds where you can camp for ca 15-20 USD per party. Note that such campgrounds generally have very basic bathroom services, usually only a concrete toilet block (no sewage, shower or water tap). These toilet blocks were surprisingly clean. That's why we did not always camped and also used Booking.com to book rooms in Sierra Vista and Tempe (part of Phoenix) last minute. The latter, Hotel Tempe/Phoenix Airport InnSuites Hotel & Suites, is worth mentioning here as it can be a nice stop (although quite noisy) when driving up north towards the Grand Canyon for example. It's conveniently located next to I-10 which connects Phoenix with L.A. in the west and Tucson in the southeast (all the way to Jacksonville, FL!). In L.A. the four of us booked an Airbnb in Pasadena, type '★ ★ ★Modern 4 beds ★ 2bedrooms/1 bath' Pasadena in your browser and it's your first hit. It's nothing special, but it's clean and relatively cheap and you have your own parking.

ARIZONA

As for Arizona, birding is fairly straightforward. There are two main areas you'll need to focus on to see most of the Arizona specialties: Santa Rita Mts. and Huachuca Mts. Only if you need Mexican Chickadee, you would need to go all the way to Chiricahua Mts. in the far southeast of Arizona. One needs to visit both the higher areas as well as the areas lower down. In between are only few stops necessary for Gilded Flicker, Mexican Duck, Rose-throated Becard, Scaled Quail and Violet-crowned Hummingbird. As for the mountain targets there are some minor differences: Tufted Flycatcher, Blue-throated Hummingbird and Buff-breasted Flycatcher are almost never seen in the Santa Rita Mts. Olive Warbler also does seem to be easier in the Huachaca Mts. We were told Elegant Trogon is easier in the Santa Rita Mts., but based on the many sightings in the several canyons of the Huachuca Mts. that can't be true. Other true mountain targets which can be looked for in both mountain ranges are Yellow-eyed Junco, Rivoli's Hummingbird, Greater Pewee, Rufous-capped Warbler, Arizona Woodpecker and Grace's Warbler. Species like Painted Redstart, Bridled Titmouse, Mexican Jay and Hepatic Tanager are also be found in lower areas (especially the titmouse and the jay), but all except the tanager are quite common anyway. For Rufous-capped Warbler, Buff-collared Nightjar and Five-striped Sparrow specific areas have to be visited, for all other targets I would say this is not needed. And don't forget trying the owls and Mexican Whip-poor-will at night. Of the owls, the most difficult by far is the Mountain Pygmy Owl – both Elf Owl and Whiskered Screech Owl shouldn't be too much of problem.

In the lowlands around the mountains, the focus should be on sparrows, thrashers, Phyrhuloxia, Chihuahuan Raven, Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, Harris's Hawk, Abert's Towhee, Gila Woodpecker, Gilded Flicker and Scaled-, Montezuma- and Gambel's Quail. The best sparrows are Rufous-winged, Botteri's and Five-striped (canyons) I would say, although both Black-throated and Black-chinned Sparrow (foothills) are also worth raising your binocs for. Late April is a really good time for seeing these sparrows, as they were all singing, which makes ID easy. For the thrashers, focus especially on Crissal Thrasher in the SE and Bendire's around Tucson and Phoenix– and be very early in the morning or very late in the afternoon! Gila Woodpecker, Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, Phyrhuloxia and Gambel's Quail are all fairly easy to find. Abert's Towhee is supposed to be common, but we saw only one in the Paton Center for Hummingbirds. There are stake-outs for Harris's Hawk, Gilded Flicker and Scaled and Montezuma quail to which I will come later. The best areas for lowland grassland birding in the SE we found just N of Madera Canyon, and the 3 Canyons Rd area in Sierra Vista (Botteri's Sparrow). Make sure you visit some feeders in both the highland and lowland areas so you don't miss out on the specialties like Lucifer Sheartail, Broad-billed Hummingbird and Violet-crowned Hummingbird. In total we needed just 4 full days, from starting in the Santa Rita Mts. to Phoenix.



SANTA RITA MOUNTAINS

This involves one of three important mountain ranges in Southeast-Arizona, this one being the closest to Tucson. It includes the famous Madera Canyon, and the less popular Florida Canyon and Box Canyon. The Madera Canyon is where most targets are, the Florida Canyon is one of three places in the USA for Rufous-capped Warbler and Box Canyon is one of two places for Five-striped Sparrow. In between is all good for sparrows. Most of the birding will be on the mountain (Madera Canyon). The other two canyons are lower down but are worth visiting for half a day. All localities are about 40 miles away from Tucson, about a 50 minutes' drive.

Madera Canyon

Getting to/from the Madera Canyon is quite straightforward as there is only one way in and out. Coming in from the north, take exit 63 (Continental Rd) from the I-19. From here, follow this road east and head right here: 31.856567, -110.975415. This is already the Madera Canyon Rd / E White House Canyon Rd. Follow this road and you'll enter the mountains right about here: 31.740844, -110.885851. The turn-off to the left for the Bog Site Campground is here: 31.727587, -110.880665. The campground can be busy in weekends/holidays, so make sure you book ahead (we did not and were lucky). At the camping is where we saw ELF OWL and WHISKERED SCREECH OWL. This is also from where we heard MEXICAN WHIP-POOR-WILL. For the Elf Owl, one can also try along the main road in the nest boxes in the electricity poles. The other owl needed here, MOUNTAIN PYGMY OWL, can be found along the same road too though most sightings come from the parking at the end of this road (31.712905, -110.873713). This is also where several trails start and where we saw our first (and only) RED-FACED WARBLER in a small flock along the Super Trail. Maybe, in retrospect, the Old Baldy Trail is better - as this is where most people go. Grace's Warbler is common here too and we saw most of our Plumbeous Vireos here. Yellow-eyed Junco is at the parking here in Madera Canyon.

However, except for these warblers, most of the target birds can be found basically around the famous Santa Rita Lodge - either around the main road or around the trail that leads to the campground. Mexican Jay, Painted Redstart and Bridled Titmouse are common and can turn up anywhere. Grey Hawk was only seen once, behind the Santa Rita lodge. In a nice flock at the campground we found Townsend Warbler, Black-throated Grey Warbler and Scott's Oriole. Any *Myiarchus* turning up here is probably Dusky-capped Flycatcher. ELEGANT TROGON can be heard anywhere too I think, though we had some problems seeing it. We succeeded in this just across the lodge, right here: 31.724517, -110.879420. The lodge itself holds an amazing bird garden with many feeders. Hummers coming into feed here are mostly Black-chinned, Broad-billed and the occasional Rivoli's Hummingbird. Best bird on the regular feeders here must have been our only Hepatic Tanager, but we also enjoyed Arizona Woodpecker, Black-headed Grosbeak, Mexican Jay, Pine Siskin and more.

Box Canyon

Box Canyon is located northwest of Madera Canyon, about 11.5 miles from here (c 30 min). From the turn-off to the campground, drive out north of the canyon and take a right turn (E White House Canyon Rd) after 4.7 miles. From here, it's only dirt roads but it's fine for a normal car. After 0.3 miles take a left turn on Hwy 62 (a dirt Hwy?) here: 31.790003, -110.876568. Hold left again here: 31.781914, -110.853136 and follow this dirt road for another 6.4 miles (c 20 min). This, 31.798338, -110.785602, is the exact spot where we saw a nice pair of FIVE-STRIPED SPARROW. Birding the road here was quite nice, picking up on Cactus Wren, Canyon Wren, Rufous-crowned Sparrow, Golden Eagle, Costa's Hummingbird, Canyon Towhee, Ladder-backed Woodpecker and Black-chinned Sparrow. Lower down, we found our first Lucy's Warbler and Verdin.

The whole area between both canyons is good for sparrows and we birded here twice. Luckily, in our case, most birds were singing. Most common - and most beautiful - is Black-throated Sparrow. One afternoon we picked up on Vesper Sparrow here and (probably) BOTTERI'S SPARROW, the next morning we added Cassin's Sparrow, Chipping Sparrow and RUFIOUS-WINGED SPARROW here. Also, we found more Lucy's Warblers and Verdins this morning. Any *Myiarchus* out here is probably Ash-throated Flycatcher.

Florida Canyon

This canyon is also located northwest of Madera Canyon, but is a bit closer. Basically, it's the same route except go straight at the first GPS-point and follow the E White House Canyon Rd. From here, it's 2.7 miles to the parking on the left (c 10 min). This is also where the trail start: 31.763272, -110.845873. Follow this trail and hold right after the fence. From here, hold left and walk in the direction of the hillsides here. Soon you'll pass a painted water tank, on Google Maps seen here: 31.759500, -110.844340. The area for the RUFOUS-CAPPED WARBLER is 0.3 miles past this water tank on the west-facing slope. We didn't see it there, but this must be around here: 31.757256, -110.843873. The canyon is also one of few places to see BLACK-CAPPED GNATCATCHER, but we did not see it. We were however extremely lucky accidentally bumping into a roosting Flammulated Owl(!), but also enjoyed good views of Bell's Vireo, Northern Cardinal (western range limit), Northern Beardless Tyrannulet, Wilson's Warbler and Rock Wren.

GREEN VALLEY

The city of Green Valley is just 26.7 miles south of downtown Tucson, about a 30 minutes' drive. We visited this city, which you'll pass anyway, for a Lewis Woodpecker and for Gilded Flicker. Descriptions for both will be given, but please note Lewis Woodpecker isn't always there. We found LEWIS WOODPECKER in a tiny park at the northern end of a neighborhood called Madera Highlands, located here (parking): 31.882577, -110.967281. Locating the Lewis Woodpecker was easy in such a small park, but we also did see our only Yellow-headed Blackbird here. Other birds included Vermillion Flycatcher, Gila Woodpecker, Say's Phoebe, Cassin's Kingbird and more. The area for GILDED FLICKER is a neighborhood called Green Valley Foothills. We parked at the W Calle Lecho right here: 31.882577, -110.967281. From here, we walked east, took a right turn (Cll Montanoso), then another right (W Mission Twin Buttes Rd) and walked back to the car by taking another right via the South La Canada Drive. Gilded Flicker was found in a cactus in the garden of the latter road (# 1811) and right where we parked. Gila Woodpecker is common here too and can even be in the same cactus, so make sure you are looking at the right bird. Other birds of interest were our first Gambel's Quails, Pyrrhuloxia, Curve-billed Thrasher, Chihuahuan Raven and – to our surprise – RUFOUS-WINGED SPARROWS.

PATON CENTER FOR HUMMINGBIRDS, PATAGONIA

The Paton Center for Hummingbirds in Patagonia is one of three reliable spots for Violet-crowned Hummingbird, the other two being Ramsey Canyon in the Huachuca Mts and Patagonia Lake. This one, the Paton Center, is conveniently located on the way to the Huachuca Mts; directly along the AZ-82. From Nogales, where the AZ-82 starts, it's 18.5 miles (c 25 min). Take a left here 31.539301, -110.756255 and another left here: 31.540974, -110.757607. Soon after, you'll find the parking on your left hand. Things are pretty straightforward here as the best feeders are just behind the house. Best bird here was undoubtedly VIOLET-CROWNED HUMMINGBIRD, but we only had our only Summer Tanager for the trip here as well as our first Song Sparrow and Anna's Hummingbird. Other birds included Lucy's Warbler, Bridled Titmouse and Curve-billed Thrasher. In front of the house there is a pile of wood on the left (from the parking) attracting many similar birds. The Paton Center was the only place where we saw ABERT'S TOWEE and Zone-tailed Hawk.

WHETSTONE

This is one of three good places for Scaled Quail, the other two being in the Sierra Vista area (see later) and the Appleton-Whittell Research Ranch (31.352052, 110.302437). Whetstone is on the way from Patagonia to all the other spots that are mentioned below. From Patagonia it's almost 31 miles (c 35 min) by just following the AZ-82. At the end of the road take a right turn here: 31.692019, -110.379637 (N Chula Vista Rd). From here, it's just 0.8 miles on this road. SCALED QUAIL is best found around the turn-off with the W Puesta Sel Dol at this point: 31.683624, -110.387383. We saw 6 of them in the garden of # 2097, but they could probably anywhere around here. Other typical birds here included the usual Gambel's Quail, Pyrrhuloxia and Curve-billed Thrasher.

SIERRA VISTA

The town of Sierra Vista lies just east of the Huachuca Mts. described below. The town has a good stake-out for HARRIS' HAWK, so if you still need it may be worth a visit. The Harris' Hawk location looks pretty random, but the birds are still present at the time of writing this report. Coming in from the north on the AZ-92, take a right turn here: 31.496425, -110.257447 (Kachina Trail). Follow this road for 1 mile till the S Cherokee Ave, turn left here after 0.4 miles (E Choctaw Dr) and then park in front of the Sierra Vista United Korean Church (#2250): 31.488704, -110.276078. Just walk around here and see if you can find the birds perched in one of the trees or flying around....

Also, we tried one morning in Sierra Vista for CRISSAL THRASHER just south of Sierra Vista. We wanted to try along the 3 Canyons Blvd starting here: 31.409074, -110.240847 (to the right), but this neighborhood is a fenced community and there is a gate just about half mile in. Not wanting to waste our precious early morning birding time, we tried to find the thrasher here in the grasslands. We did not find the thrasher, but we found some a nice singing BOTTERI'S SPARROW right here: 31.407401, -110.234466. Also we had good views of a singing Brewer's Sparrow here, as well as the regular Black-throated Sparrow and Cactus Wren. Please also note both meadowlarks occur here.

Another good spot is the yard of Robert Galluci. His yard holds several specialties, including SCALED QUAIL. Especially for photography this is a great opportunity to capture some great shots. His yard can be visited for \$10 and booking can be made via <https://www.facebook.com/RobGsYard/>. Otherwise, he can also be contacted via mobile (5169966200) or email (robert@rgallucci.com). We ran out of time for a visit and did already see Scaled Quail before, so unfortunately, we had to let go on a visit.

HUACHUCA MOUNTAINS

This mountain range exists of several canyons, all of which are birdy. From north to south they are Huachaca Canyon, Garden Canyon, Ramsey Canyon, Carr Canyon, Miller Canyon, Hunter Canyon and Lutz/Ash Canyon. All are accessible from the east. All canyons are regularly visited (see eBird) and most target birds are to be found anywhere in these canyons. We saw our target species by visiting Carr Canyon, Miller Canyon (Spotted Owl) and Hunter Canyon (Rufous-capped Warbler). We only visited the Ash Canyon Bird Sanctuary for Montezuma Quail and Lucifer Sheartail mostly. Most accommodation options are found in the Ramsey Canyon, including some with nice feeders. If you're into camping, Carr Canyon may be your best option. Staying in Sierra Vista is also convenient for visiting the canyons.

Carr Canyon

From the AZ-92 running north/south through Sierra Vista, take a right turn (from N) here: 31.453593, -110.257513. For the first 1.5 miles this road, E Carr Canyon Road, is paved but hereafter it's a dirt road. If you want to camp all the way up, the Ramsey Vista Campground, it's another 6.3 miles (c 35 min). If you prefer to stay little lower, like we did, drive up to the Reef Camground, which is 4.9 miles (c 25 min). The dirt road slowly ascends the mountain, with many hairpin bends. We had no real problems driving up in a small car, but as the road is bit rough having a vehicle with higher clearance might be a good idea, though not necessary. The Reef Campground is surrounded by forest and thus a good start in the morning for OLIVE WARBLER, BUFF-BREASTED FLYCATCHER and GREATER PEWEE. We saw all three of them on our first morning, the Olive Warbler being the toughest to get. Grace's Warbler is common here as well, and we saw Yellow-eyed Junco, American Bushtit (ssp. *minimus*), Hammond's Flycatcher, Rivoli's Hummingbird and Hairy Woodpecker (trip AZ-only) here too. We walked all the way to the top and then back via a trail higher up, but only ending up seeing Arizona Woodpecker (second), Spotted Towhee (first), Plumbeous Vireo, Brown Creeper, Painted Redstart, Hutton's Vireo and Bewick's Wren (first). We only needed one morning here and as it was terribly cold and windy at night, we were happy to move on.

Miller Canyon

The exact location of a pair of SPOTTED OWL is not on eBird and as this probably is for a reason, it will not be shared online here. In case you want to visit this location, please contact me for further details. In this canyon, we saw our only male and female BROAD-TAILED HUMMINGBIRD near the parking. For this, and the owl, the entrance from AZ-92 is right here: 31.429017, -110.240835 (E Miller Canyon Rd). From there, it's 2.5 miles (c 10 minutes) to the parking at the end of this (mostly) dirt road. From here, continue walking and hold left, go through the gate (and pay \$5) and take the bridge over the creek. On a small outcrop there is a small cabin where there are some feeders. This is where we had at least 4 Rivoli's, 5 Black-chinned and 2 Broad-billed Hummingbirds.

Hunter Canyon

This canyon is one of the few spots in the USA where RUFIOUS-CAPPED WARBLER are regularly seen. For the Hunter Canyon, take a right turn here from the AZ-92: 31.405213, -110.240867 (E Hunter Canyon Rd). From here, follow the dirt road for about 1.4 miles (c 5 min) and park at the end. From here, walk the only trail (forest trail?) starting from here. Follow this trail (visible on Google Maps) till you hit the forest, somewhere around here: 31.400418, -110.272959. This whole stretch of forest from here is good – according to a local AZ bird guide present at the scene. Visiting this place around noon wasn't the best idea and we did not see the birds. Not many other birds around, though we did pick up on our only Virginia Warbler (HO) and our first Hermit Warbler.

Ash Canyon

Though this place is called Ash Canyon here, there is no actual need to visit the canyon. Just before, out in the lowlands, there is Ash Canyon Bird Sanctuary. This garden with bird feeders was owned by Mary Jo Ballator, who sadly passed away just weeks after our visit in April. To my latest knowledge, family members are committed to keep the garden open. It will be closed for June, but it is scheduled to re-open in July. To get here, take a right turn from the AZ-92 here: 31.394179, -110.234885. Follow the S Turkey Track Rd / E Spring Rd for 0.5 mile and park outside the sanctuary. Pay \$10 at the gate and for the quails take a seat at the left. Please note the quails are really shy. We weren't lucky to see them at the feeding station, but were fortunate enough to see a pair of MONTEZUMA QUAIL just outside the fenced yard. If you just want to see the bird, take a seat on the extreme right so you can look behind the fence too. Other people we met saw these good-looking birds crossing the road near the sanctuary parking. The other target bird here should be LUCIFER SHEARTAIL on the feeders. We spent one full afternoon here and half a morning, before seeing the quails. Other nice birds around include: Green-tailed Towhee, Brown-headed Cowbird, 3 male species of oriole, Calliope Hummingbird (trip-only), Rivoli's Hummingbird, Pyrrhuloxia, Brewer's Sparrow, Lincoln's Sparrow (first), Bewick's Wren, Verdin and Lazuli Bunting. Just outside the reserve we had good views of our only Greater Roadrunner in Arizona, after seeing two from the car in California.

TUCSON AVRA WEST

Though there are several reliable spots to see BENDIRE'S THRASHER, this is the one where we saw it. This place is found west of Tucson, close to amazing Saguaro National Park. Directions to here depend on where you are coming from, but if you come in from the south (I-19), take a left turn on the AZ-86 and then hold Saguaro Nat. Park and Tucson Mountain Park and go right here: 32.171596, -111.071479. If you still need GILDED FLICKER, check eBird for this stretch as they are around. Once you hit the N Sandario Rd here: 32.248203, -111.218217, you are entering prime habitat of the thrasher and this is where observations are along the road. Try here (mostly past the basin) or continue driving, go right at the end and go left once you hit the asphalt road. Though they can turn up anywhere, we parked here: 32.291712, -111.304282 and headed south (N Trico Rd). We heard two Bendire's Thrashers singing in the late evening and had good views right here: 32.281952, -111.304293.

PHOENIX

Just W of Phoenix, there is a spot where LeConte's, Bendire's and Crissal Thrasher can be found. Coming in from L.A. on the I-10, take exit 103 called '339th Ave'. From here drive 5.5 miles south and take a left at the W Salome Hwy. From here, it's only 0.7 miles to a parking actually called 'Thrasher Spot Parking Area'. Due to time constraints we did not visit this site. We tried for Crissal Thrasher in the Base & Meridian Wildlife Area in Phoenix on our way to the Grand Canyon. For this, we parked here 33.378611, -112.307815 and walked the dirt road over the Gila River. We didn't find the thrasher, but we had our first BLACK-TAILED GNATCATCHER here at the entrance, two RIDGWAY'S RAILS in the pond on the left and our only Brown-crested Flycatcher, Common Moorhen, Green Heron and Neotropic Cormorant.

FLAGSTAFF & GRAND CANYON

If you have plans visiting the Grand Canyon, you most likely drive up north along I-17 in Phoenix. On your way there you pass some birding spots where we stopped for Woodhouse's Scrub Jay, Juniper Titmouse, American Dipper, Evening Grosbeak and more. The first stop we made is the Red Rock Visitor Center. For a visit, drive 101 miles (c 1h25m) out of Phoenix and take Hwy 179 paralleling the I-17. After 5.8 miles the Red Rock Visitor Center is on your right hand. Park here and walk the Woods Canyon Trail starting here: 34.756203, -111.763397. It didn't took long to find our first Juniper Titmouse, but you'll see more of them in the Grand Canyon. Our best bird here was our trip-only GREY VIREO and we did see our first Woodhouse's Scrub Jay. Heading up north you'll pass through some nice villages and amazing landscapes. After 20.5 miles (c 35 min), take a left turn here: 35.000345, -111.737250. We parked at the start and walked to the Oak Creek where AMERICAN DIPPER is sometimes seen. We did not see it, also checking the Cave Springs Campground (along the creek) close by.

From here, we drove about 15.8 miles (c 22 min) to a neighborhood holding EVENING GROSBEAK (till late May this year). Park nearby here 35.173450, -111.674421 and walk to the back of the houses. The house is owned by Mr. Crouse and he is fine with birders visiting his garden. He lives in the second (greenish) home down from where you walk between the houses (between #1121 and #1129). We only spent here a few hours late afternoon and did, unfortunately, not see the birds, but they show up almost on a daily basis – usually in the morning. We enjoyed our time here seeing our first Pygmy Nuthatches and Mountain Chickadee and only Downy Woodpecker and 'RED-BACKED' JUNCO of the trip. From Flagstaff, it's another 80 miles (c 1,5 hour) to the famous Grand Canyon. We spent a few hours here in the morning, mostly enjoying the spectacular views but also more Woodhouses's Scrub Jays, Juniper Titmouses, Pygmy Nuthatches, White-throated Swifts (love them!) and a surprise Broad-winged Hawk!

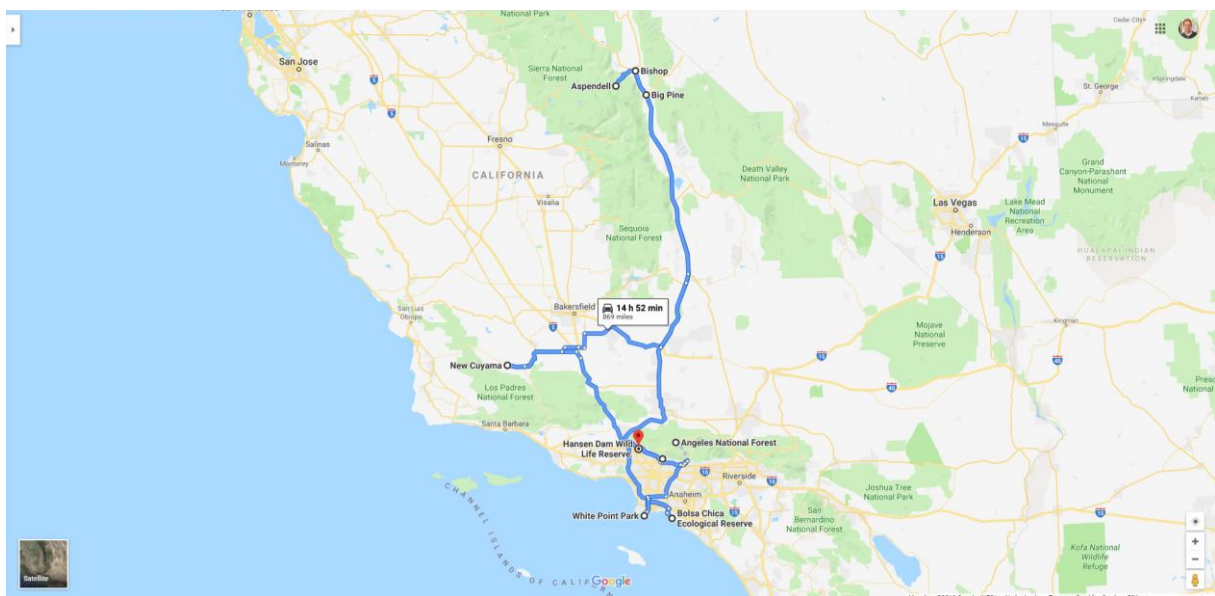
LAS VEGAS

We didn't do any proper birding in / around Las Vegas itself, but tried here for our last shot at CRISSAL THRASHER. Coming in from the east, we decided to focus on either the Henderson Bird Viewing Reserve or the Las Vegas Wash. Both are close, but with the reserve being small we focused on that one first. However, this reserve is only open daily till 2 P.M during spring, fall and winter (from 6 A.M, 7 A.M in winter). In June, July and August only open till noon. Anyways, we then tried the more extensive Las Vegas Wash. We focused on the Pabco area, park at the Pabco Trailhead: 36.086376, -114.985391. From here, we crossed the river via the dam and then went right (a trail paralleling the Telephone Line Rd N of it). After 1/3 a mile or so a Crissal Thrasher responded to our tape. Also, a Black-tailed Gnatcatcher was seen here.

CENTRAL & SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

For central and southern California, it depends on how much you want to drive, assuming you will start in Los Angeles. For our trip, we also tried to see as many new species for the four of us. About a 6-hour drive from L.A. you can find species like Sage Grouse, Sooty Grouse, Pinyon Jay, Clark's Nutcracker, Black-backed Woodpecker etc. – all species you won't find near L.A. at any time. Some species like American Dipper and Mountain Bluebird can be found here year-round, so if your visit is in Spring or Summer it will boost the trip list for sure. I would say the first two species, the grouse, are already worth the trip. Please bear in mind these both species are best to be found in spring and are hard – if not impossible – to see during the other seasons, when they are not vocalizing and displaying. Between L.A. and these central mountain ranges (where most targets are) you can easily catch up with Yellow-billed Magpie and Californian Condor, found just north of L.A. The latter site, for the condor (see below), seems also a good site for Tricolored Blackbird in the breeding season, as we saw many flocks. One can also include a stop for LeConte's Thrasher and Bell's Sparrow close to here. From there, drive up to area of Bishop where all the other target birds can be found. As you can read lower down too, all the birding spots are conveniently close to this lovely village. On your way to/from there, you can pick up on Juniper Titmouse (Oak Titmouse is common elsewhere in CAL).

Around Los Angeles a visit to the San Gabriel Mts., part of the Angeles National Forest, is needed to pick up target species like Mountain Quail, White-headed Woodpecker, Thick-billed Fox Sparrow and four species of owl (Spotted Owl, Northern Pygmy, Northern Saw-whet Owl and Flammulated). Both Red-breasted and Williamson's Sapsucker can be found here, though in our case we couldn't reach the area of the latter species as the road to the top was still blocked due to snow – even in late April! Birding here is pretty rewarding as you will easily pick up other (possible) target species like Wrentit, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Mountain Chickadee, Green-tailed Towhee, MacGillivray's Warbler etc. Around L.A. one can also opt to visit the Hansen Dam for Yellow-breasted Chat and Blue Grosbeak, just arriving by the time we were there. Both are all over the USA, but Lawrence's Goldfinch is pretty easy here too as we saw several groups. Not surprisingly, in L.A. itself a visit to the coast is needed for Californian Gnatcatcher and – of course – species like Brandt's Cormorant, Pelagic Cormorant, Surfbird, Black Turnstone, Wandering Tattler and Heermann's Gull. In April, many Pacific Loons were migrating north. Bolsa Chica, a wetland in Orange County, will bring you Ridgeway's Rail and many Elegant and Least Terns. A total of 6 days is more than enough: 3 for the trip up north and 3 for the days near L.A. – and you will still have plenty of time left in the afternoon to explore the city, have a beer (or two), etc..



CUYAMA VALLEY

This area involves three spots, from west to east: New Cuyama, Bitter Creek National Wildlife Refuge and Maricopa. Species include Lawrence's Goldfinch, Yellow-billed Magpie, Californian Condor, Tricolored Blackbird, LeConte's Thrasher and Bell's Sparrow. All three spots are close to each other (around 30 miles from NC to M) and can be done in half a morning. From L.A. this is about a 2,5-hour drive northeast of town, a total of 126 miles. One will get in from the east and as a very early start is strongly advised for Maricopa (thrashers...), start here, then drive all the way west and work your way back east.

Maricopa

A good place to look for LECONTE'S THRASHER and BELL'S SPARROW. In Maricopa, take the CA-33 up north for about 1.7 miles, take a right turn (Kerto Rd) and park just north of next crossing (only 0.2 miles) with the Petroleum Club Rd, right here: 35.085431, -119.398679. From here, follow the dirt road to the northwest and we soon found both our targets. Look for Prairie Falcon all the way from Maricopa to New Cuyama too. We found a seemingly good spot (continuously hunting) right here: 34.934111, -119.609443.

New Cuyama

A good spot for LAWRENCE'S GOLDFINCH and YELLOW-BILLED MAGPIE. This spot is just about 33.5 miles from Maricopa (c 40 min). Follow the CA-166 south of Maricopa and drive all the way to New Cuyama. Past the village and take a left turn here: 34.984291, -119.782851 (Wasioja Rd). Follow this road for 3.6 miles and park here: 34.951530, -119.818333. The valley on the right hand is good for the magpie, the whole area for the goldfinch (we did not see it here). Other species we found here were our only GOLDEN-CROWNED SPARROW, Oak Titmouse, American Bushtit and Nashville Warbler. For the goldfinch one can also try the Richardson's Park in New Cuyama. We found all three species of Goldfinch here including 4 Lawrence's: 34.945247, -119.683639.

Bitter Creek National Wildlife Refuge

One of the few spots for CALIFORNIAN CONDOR, conveniently located between New Cuyama and Maricopa. From the former town to the lookout for the condor is 23.1 miles (c 30 min). Drive back to Maricopa and take a right turn here: 34.960991, -119.447606 (Hudson Rach Rd). Start to look for the condors here, till Valle Vista Campground – about 12 miles in. From the start, we drove in and parked another 8.4 miles in: 34.904162, -119.376736. From here we found a group of condors perched on the foothills north of here. Quite far away though we had good scope views (bring a scope!), also in flight. Between this lookout and the CA-166 we found several pure flocks of TRICOLORED BLACKBIRDS.

BISHOP AREA

This area includes separate spots for Sooty Grouse, Sage Grouse, Black-backed Woodpecker / Mountain Bluebird, Grey-crowned Rosy Finch and Pinyon Jay. All sites are on the east flank of the central mountain ranges in California. Bishop is about 4 hour drive up north from L.A. (266 miles) and 4h10m from Maricopa (256 miles). If you opt to start early in the Cuyama Valley, you can actually still bird the first birding spot (Sooty Grouse) just south of town on the same day.

Big Pine Creek

A good spot for SOOTY GROUSE and AMERICAN DIPPER. Coming in from the south (US 395) take a left turn here in Big Pine: 37.164528, -118.289529. Take the first right, go left again and follow the W Crocker Ave west out of town. This road will soon be named Glacier Lodge Rd. From BP it is 9.7 miles (c 25 min) to the first spot. Basically, the idea is to bird the patchy mixed forests along the creek. As there are many campgrounds here, park near there and start walking from there. We birded the Big Pine Canyon CG and the Big Pine Creek CG (where the road stops). We found Sooty Grouse calling in the evening right here: 37.122408, -118.439438. Dippers were found at both campgrounds, one breeding under the bridge here: 37.124891, -118.436870. Other species of interest here were Mountain Chickadee, Clark's Nutcracker, Red-breasted Sapsucker and Thick-billed Fox Sparrow. Please not Chukar is introduced here, so be aware you might flush one or two and think for a sec it's a grouse.

Lake Crowley

This is the spot for SAGE GROUSE, SAGEBRUSH SPARROW and SAGE THRASHER. It is located around 35 miles (c 40 min) NW of Bishop, just next to US 395. Head NW on this road and then take a right turn here: 37.618655, -118.823275. Drive 1.2 mile on the Benton Crossing Rd and then park on the right-hand side of the road: 37.632546, -118.811587. This road is open only from the last weekend of April, but after a single call we were more or less told we could also walk in from where we parked. From there, walk the N Landing Rd (dirt road) to the east. Hold right near the Y-fork and then make a sharp right back after 1.8 miles. Follow this for about 0.2 miles and check the plains south of here (in front of the mountains). This is where the lek is. Make sure you'll be there early (it's freezing cold!), as all the birds - nearly 50 in our case - left the plains before 7 AM already when we were there. On the way in we heard and, on our way, out we easily found Sagebrush Sparrow and Sage Thrasher, but also Vesper-, Brewers- and Savannah Sparrow.

Inyo National Forest

A forest area further NW of Lake Crowley good for BLACK-BACKED WOODPECKER, WHITE-HEADED WOODPECKER and MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD. On the US 395, head further northwest and drive 12.7 miles (c 15 min) before going right here: 37.735605, -118.970484 (Owens River Rd.). Drive another two miles before you reach Big Springs Campground. Right at this area we found White-headed Woodpecker, as well as Clark's Nutcracker, Cassin's Finch, Red-breasted Sapsucker, American Dipper (near the bridge) and Pygmy Nuthatch. From here we followed the Big Springs Rd and birded the area where the forest was burned and there were many dead trees – typical habitat for Black-backed Woodpecker. We soon found one right here: 37.754813, -118.939182. We also found Townsend's Solitaire here. Once heading back to US 395, one comes across an open area on your right-hand side. This is where you might find Mountain Bluebird. We found a nice pair right here: 37.747048, -118.956422. Another Townsend's Solitaire was found here, together with our first female Purple Finches.

US 395 – Pinyon Jay

This place is located right along the US 395 and does not seem to have a name, but it's a good place for PINYON JAY. From Inyo National Forest drive back towards Bishop for 26.1 miles (on US 395, c 25 min). Park at the start of the road here: 37.529828, -118.629494. This road soon becomes a dirt road after. Walk for about 0.6 miles in the direction of the pines. This is where we easily found a couple of these lovely jays, even at the middle of the day. I don't think coordinates are needed, but this is where we found our first pair: 37.523387, -118.628618.

Aspendell

This small village is located in the upped foothills (2570m) of Mt. Emerson and is the spot for GREY-CROWNED ROSY FINCH, though usually only in the winter season. Luckily there were still around (usually till May, when most snow is gone), and we found two of them along the Iris Drive where there are many feeders, see 37.238131, -118.597724. Other birds on the feeder were Red-winged and Brewer's Blackbird, Brown-headed Cowbird, Pygmy Nuthatch, Cassin's Finch and more. From Bishop head out west on the W Line St and then follow CA-168 (same road) to the southeast. From Bishop it's 16.7 miles and it will only take you 20 minutes.

Airport Rd, Bishop

This road east of town is a good spot to look for BLACK-BILLED MAGPIE. From Bishop take the E Line St / Poleta Rd (opposite of where you'll come from) and turn right after 1.5 mile, on the crossing with the Airport Rd at this point: 37.361493, -118.367844. From here, head south and for sure you'll come across a couple of them soon. We found a total of five birds in five minutes.

Black Mountain

This spot, just northwest of Big Pine, is a good spot for JUNIPER TITMOUSE. It's almost right opposite of the where one will head west for the Sooty Grouse. From the village of Big Pine it's 13.1 miles (c 20 min) along the CA-168. The turn-off is right here: 37.173458, -118.290211. We then parked here: 37.283844, -118.155181 and found 'our' target bird in less than one minute. One can do this on the way in or out from Bishop.

[Pearsonville]

This place is 2 hours south from the Bishop area and can be visited on your way back to L.A. if time allows. We birded here for BLACK-CHINNED SPARROW – our main target bird here. Coming from the north (US 395) we took a right turn here: 35.815551, -117.874304. Drive for about 1.8 mile and parked here: 35.813658, -117.905367. From there walk the dirt road to the west. Our main target bird was found here: 35.813094, -117.915080. We walked all the way to 35.813094, -117.915080 seeing Rock Wren, Bell's Sparrow, Costa's Hummingbird, Dusky Flycatcher and Black-throated Sparrow (lower down).

LOS ANGELES AREA

Birding around Los Angeles will take you into the San Gabriel Mountains for one morning and several evenings, and another morning for the Ridgway's Rail, then Californian Gnatcatcher and all the coastal species. From the spot for the rail, Bolsa Chica, to the gnatcatcher is only 20.7 miles (c 50 min). The Cabrillo Beach is conveniently located in between and next to the gnatcatcher is another spot for coastal birds. If time allows, visits the Hansen Dam Wildlife Reserve for Lawrence's Goldfinch and more.

[Lake Palmdale]

On the way back from the central mountains we visited Lake Palmdale for CLARK'S GREBE. This is about 60 miles north of L.A. (c 55 min), north of Angeles National Forest. On CA-14 take 'Avenue S' coming in from the north and turn left at the end of the exit lane. Drive 0.7 miles and turn right at 5th St E. You'll soon get to the Palmdale Fin & Feather Club, ask for permission to scan the lake from their grounds and you'll find your target bird. This bird is more of an inland bird, but we found one in a group of Western Grebes too near L.A.

Bolsa Chica

Bolsa Chica is an ecological reserve wetland in the southern part of L.A., right along the coast and close to Long Beach. Best species here is probably RIDGWAY'S RAIL; other targets could be Pacific Loon, Least and Elegant Tern. If one drives in from the north a good point to stop is the parking near the Bolsa Chica Conservancy (Interpretive Center), located here: 33.711278, -118.061237. It is in the corner of the Warner Ave and Pacific Coast Hwy. From here walk a short distance to the water. From here we had Black Skimmer, Willet, Marbled Godwit etc. Another parking is located along the Pacific Coast Highway further south, right here: 33.695603, -118.046539. From here a trail is heading northeast to a viewing point, located here: 33.698463, -118.044032. The boardwalk is good for the rail, and we even found some without taping. The viewing point is good for the aforementioned other species, plus Western Grebe, Black Brant, etc.

Cabrillo Beach, L.A. Harbour

The pier next to the beach, Cabrillo Beach Pier, usually hold both PELAGIC and BRANDT'S CORMORANT at the end and is good for WANDERING TATTLER, BLACK TURNSTONE and SURFBIRD. By late April most of them are gone, but some seem to spend the summer here. Usually some HEERMANN'S GULLS are around. Coming in from the Shoshonean Rd, park at the Shoshonean Rd Parking or – maybe better – the Stephen M White Dr Parking at the start of the pier. From here, scan all the piers for the targets. We found all but the Surfbird here. If you think the cormorants are a bit far away, make sure you visit the spot below too. Other birds of interest we saw here were Pacific Loon (migrating), Common Loon, Surf Scoter and both Western and Clark's Grebe.

White Point Park

Only 3.9 miles drive (ca 15 min) to the west is White Point Park, good for both CALIFORNIA GNATCATCHER as well as all aforementioned shorebirds plus BLACK OYSTERCATCHER. For the gnatcatcher park at the end of the W Paseo Del Mar (33.716056, -118.315313). From here, walk through the Botanical Garden / White Point Nature Education Center and Preserve to the Grassland Loop Trail. We soon found a male here. Also, some nice males Allen's Hummingbird were found here. For the shorebirds head back out but turn left here (33.716529, -118.318283) and go right again immediately at the roundabout (Kay Fiorentino Dr). Park down below and the each and scan the rocky areas for the shorebirds and cormorants. We had good views of all these, including a very confiding Surfbird!

San Gabriel Mountains

These mountains are located just north of Los Angeles and easily reached via Glendale/Pasadena. It's the place to be for MOUNTAIN QUAIL, WHITE-HEADED WOODPECKER and four species of owl: SPOTTED, NORTHERN PYGMY, NORTHERN SAW-WHET and FLAMMULATED. The best place for an early start is the Chilao Visitor Center / Campground for the quail. To get here follow the CA-2 for about 26 miles (c 40 min), take a left turn here: 34.326373, -118.002654 and park on the right hand soon after coming in. Or slowly follow this road further in. You'll soon hear many Mountain Quails (in the right time of the year, of course) and some areas are a bit open and easy to scan – that doesn't mean the quails are easy to find too! We had the best views here: 34.329522, -118.015712. Also White-headed Woodpecker here, as well as our first Wrentit, Western Tanager (trip-only), Mountain Chickadee, Olive-sided Flycatcher (trip-only) and Purple Finch.

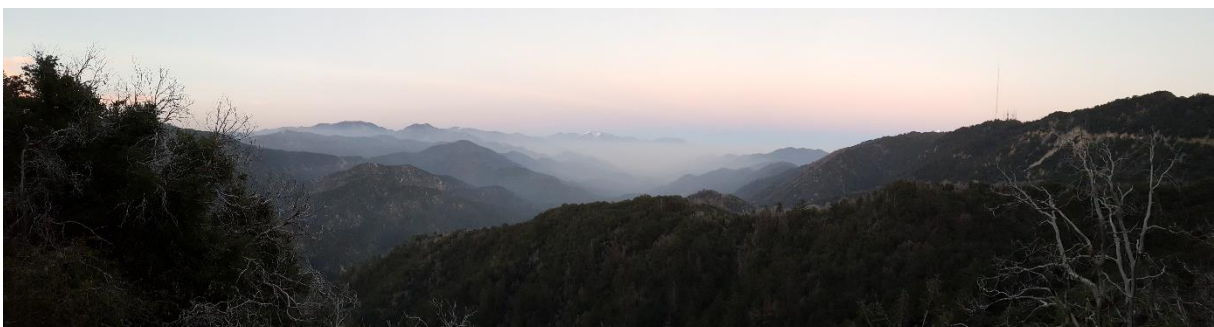
Back on the CA-2 you can opt to drive further up north for about 8.5 miles (c 15 min) to the Buckhorn Campground, park here: 34.343797, 117.909642 and look for warblers. In the right time this place seems to attract warblers and we found Wilson's, Townsend's, Hermit and MacGillivray's Warbler. We found them all but Wilson's here: 34.347259, -117.911705. This is typical habitat for the latter warbler, but here is also good Thick-billed Fox Sparrow and Green-tailed Towhee.

For owling you have to visit several spots. Flammulated Owl can only be found up high, Spotted Owl is usually low. For the former we started the furthest we could get: 34.357109, -117.850964. After this point the road was closed due to the snow. From here we both walked this road up and down and made several stops between here and the Buckhorn Station Day Use Area, located here: 34.346574, -117.921013. This is also one of the stake-outs for Northern Pygmy Owl. Northern Saw-whet Owl can turn up anywhere here. Another option is to bird the Mt Wilson Red Box Rd, starting here: 34.258395, -118.105204. This is much closer to L.A., but it's too low for Flammulated Owl. However, Spotted Owl can be heard in the valley down below. A spot for Northern PO in 2019 was 34.252323, -118.099970. We heard up to three Northern Saw-whet Owl and more Western Screech-Owls between the start of the road and this point: 34.250943, -118.094830. Unfortunately, all HO and we didn't hear Flammulated Owl, Northern Pygmy Owl and Spotted Owl at all.

Hansen Dam Wildlife Reserve

This reserve lies just north of L.A. It's not a must-visit and not the most attractive location, but it holds good numbers of LAWRENCE'S GOLDFINCH. Also, it's a nice introduction to the 'Californian' endemics like the California Trasher, California Towhee, California Scrub Jay and Wrentit. Other than that, we visited it mainly for Yellow-breasted Chat and Blue Grosbeak – only finding the former. Blue Grosbeak isn't easy here, but it is in the eastern part of the USA. The chats were just coming in when we were there but are also all over the USA. If you want to go, we parked here: 34.273269, -118.384158. The chats are usually south or east of the lake, we found one here: 34.265127, -118.377968. In total we came across four flocks of goldfinches. Other birds of interest were Bell's Vireo, Spotted Towhee, Allen's Hummingbird, American Bushtit, Song Sparrow (CAL-only), Lazuli Bunting and Pacific Slope Flycatcher. Birding is just fine here, though the reserve itself isn't quite what you expect from a reserve. We birded here a couple of hours on our very last morning, before heading back home. It was a great trip!

July 2019



Santa Rita Mountains, part of Angeles National Forest