

East Mojave weekend trip

April 4-5, 2009

Leader - Steve Sosensky

Sea and Sage Audubon held our annual trip to the East Mojave Preserve on Saturday and Sunday, April 4 and 5.

Saturday was not as warm or as calm as predicted, but we managed most of our target species, missing only Gilded Flicker, Crissal Thrasher, and Pinyon Jay.

In the sage area southwest of the south intersection of Black Canyon Rd and Wild Horse Canyon Rd, we found two Bendire's Thrashers and a Le Conte's Thrasher. The reported pair of Crissals near the entrance to the Hole-in-the-Wall Visitor's Center did not respond to recordings. A lone Chukar was on the rocks above the HitW Picnic Area, as were several Rock Wrens. The ranger at the Visitor's Center told us of a Black-chinned Sparrow at the Picnic Area reported the day before, but it was not there when we were.

On the way up Wild Horse Canyon we found another Bendire's Thrasher and a large mixed flock of White-crowned and Brewer's Sparrows.

At Mid Hills Campground, we found two Juniper Titmice uphill from campsite 15, at the southern end of the junipers. Also in this area were a Woodhouse Scrub Jay and one of the surprises of the trip, a Long-eared Owl. A Scott's Oriole was between Mid Hills and Black Canyon Rd. Several runs up and down Cima Rd failed to yield Gilded Flicker. We did see some flickers, but never got close enough to make an ID.

Sunday started out calmer, though still somewhat windy. At Kelso Station, we exited our cars to find a Yellow-headed Blackbird on the power lines above the tracks, accompanied by a Red-winged Blackbird, a Kestrel, and a Eurasian Collared-Dove. Across Kelbaker Rd, we birded the northern row of tamarisks. Just past the caged in area, we found two Lucy's Warblers and flushed surprise #2, a Swainson's Hawk.

We then took Cedar Canyon Rd across to Ivanpah Rd, and then New York Mtn Rd to Caruther's Canyon. On the way in, we had three more elusive flickers. This was my first visit to Caruther's, and I'm sorry I waited so long. This place is beautiful! The trees included pinyon pine, juniper, and live oak all in the same place. We almost immediately heard Spotted Towhee and Woodhouse Scrub Jay, and while looking for Juniper Titmouse, heard singing Black-chinned Sparrows. We had at least five on territory. Two of our group did manage to find a Juniper Titmouse, but we could not refind them. The canyon also looks like it could be good for Gray Vireo, but playing calls did not turn up any.

A stop at Baker Sewer Ponds proved fruitless for birds.

Our final stop was at Zzyzx. Other than another Lucy's Warbler singing, there was nothing remarkable of the avian variety. However, on the way in, we saw a flock (herd?) of 22 Desert Bighorn Sheep.

—Steve Sosensky