

# BIRDING NEW MEXICO

## Winter Birding in the Land of Enchantment

December 7-14, 2018

*A birding tour organized by Seven Ponds Nature Center*

From the spectacle of thousands of Sandhill Cranes, Snow Geese, and Ross's Geese at famed Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, three species of rosy-finches found at the snow-capped peak of Sandia Crest, desert birds at Embudito Canyon, pinyon-juniper and ponderosa pine birds in the Magdalena Mountains, to the wide variety of loons, grebes, and gulls found at Elephant Butte Lake, winter birding in New Mexico is considered a must-do trip for many North American birders.



Join us for a mid-winter birding tour in New Mexico: the Land of Enchantment. Mild weather, wintering birds, and high mountain peaks make this a fantastic winter birding destination. New Mexico ranks 5<sup>th</sup> among U.S. states for number of bird species recorded – with only California, Texas, Arizona, and Florida listing more birds. The Rio Grande cuts a green swath through an otherwise arid landscape, acting as a magnet for both migrant and resident birds. Large reservoirs further attract birds such as waterfowl, loons, grebes, gulls, cranes, herons, and more – all drawn to this oasis in the desert. This tour promises to be a fantastic winter getaway as we make our way down the Rio Grande through the Land of Enchantment!

### **TOUR ITINERARY**

Our daily activities will be flexible based on species we've seen to date and recent bird reports, but the following daily outline provides a preliminary plan of how we will spend our days. Our plans are subject to change based on rare bird sightings, weather conditions, and road closures. Note: the birds listed are not intended to be an exhaustive list – just a sampling of what may be found at each location.

**Day 1 – Friday, December 7 – Arrival in Albuquerque** Participants should plan to arrive in Albuquerque today and transfer to our hotel. We'll meet in the hotel lobby at 7:30 p.m. for a get-acquainted meeting and to discuss plans for the following day. Night in Albuquerque.

**Day 2 – Saturday, December 8 – Sandia Crest and the Embudito Canyon** We'll start the birding portion of the tour by driving into the sub-alpine zone of the Sandia Mountains overlooking Albuquerque. Resident species we could find here include Steller's Jay, Clark's Nutcracker, Mountain Chickadee, Pygmy Nuthatch, and Red Crossbill. What really makes winter birding at the Sandia Crest exciting to birders, however, is the very real chance of finding all three rosy-finch species – Black, Brown-capped and Gray-crowned together! Other less common species we could encounter include Northern Pygmy-Owl and Pine Grosbeak. Embudito Canyon on the west slope of Sandia offers plenty of nice desert regulars, including Gambel's and Scaled Quail, Crissal and Curve-billed Thrashers, Black-throated and Rufous-crowned Sparrows, Juniper Titmouse, Greater Roadrunner, and Cactus Wren. Eventually, we'll hit the road and head south to Truth or Consequences where we'll make our base for the next two nights. Night in Truth or Consequences.



**Day 3 – Sunday, December 9 – Animas Creek, Percha Dam, and Caballo Lake** Today we'll begin at the sycamore-lined banks of Animas Creek, where we could find Acorn Woodpecker, Bridled Titmouse, and possibly Western Screech-Owl. After that we'll visit Percha Dam State Park, a location regarded by many as the best site for landbirds along the entire length of the Rio Grande in New Mexico. A sampling of Percha's resident birds includes Gambel's Quail, White-winged Dove, Greater Roadrunner, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Black and Say's Phoebes, Cactus Wren, and Crissal Thrasher. Winter species of interest to eastern birders include Red-naped Sapsucker, Phainopepla, Pyrrhuloxia, Spotted Towhee, Brewer's Sparrow and several western races of the Dark-eyed Junco. Although all are somewhat sporadic, all three bluebird species can be present in winter as well (Eastern, Western, Mountain). After checking nearby agricultural fields for wintering raptors, possibly including Prairie Falcon and Ferruginous Hawk, we'll continue on to Caballo Reservoir, a host to thousands of wintering waterfowl, cranes and gulls. Regular wintering species here include Eared, Western, and Clark's Grebes, Neotropic Cormorants, many species of ducks and Bald Eagle. Caballo often

hosts a rare gull or two in winter so we'll be sure to scan the Ring-billed flocks carefully, and we'll be on the lookout for a possible Pacific Loon as well. Night in Truth or Consequences.

**Day 4 – Monday, December 10 – Elephant Butte Lake and Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge**

Today we'll head north towards Socorro, stopping first to check Elephant Butte Lake, a man-made reservoir along the Rio Grande and the largest lake in New Mexico. Like Caballo Lake to the south it's an excellent location for wintering waterbirds and has produced numerous rarities over the years. We'll check for any waterbirds we may still be missing, enjoy the many Clark's and Western Grebes, and keep an eye out for any odd loons or gulls. Time permitting, we may also check for landbirds such as Canyon Wren, Sage Thrasher and



Rufous-crowned Sparrow. In late afternoon we'll make our first visit to the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, a world-famous birding location we'll come to know well over the next couple of days. On this first visit we'll concentrate our efforts at the north end of the refuge where thousands of Snow Geese and Sandhill Cranes stage before flying into their evening roost sites. The sights and sounds of these flocks passing overhead should provide a memorable end to a great day of southwestern winter birding! Night in Socorro.

**Day 5 – Tuesday, December 11 – Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge**

We'll return to Bosque del Apache today, arriving early in the morning to witness the impressive dawn flight of the refuge's wintering geese and cranes. Located along a nine-mile stretch of the Rio Grande, the refuge includes water impoundments, riparian habitat, and agricultural fields, all of which help attract thousands of wintering birds. It's a great place for winter waterfowl watching and in



addition to the Snow Geese, we should find many species of ducks, possibly including the handsome Cinnamon Teal, as well as numbers of tiny Ross's Geese. Interesting landbirds we could find in brushy areas, around the visitor center or by hiking the Canyon Trail include Gambel's Quail, Loggerhead Shrike, Green-tailed Towhee, Black-throated, Brewer's and Sagebrush Sparrows, and Yellow-headed Blackbird. The refuge and adjacent roads also provide good opportunities for viewing wintering raptors. Northern Harrier, Red-tailed Hawk, and American Kestrel are the most abundant, while Bald Eagle, Ferruginous Hawk, Merlin, and both Cooper's and Sharp-shinned Hawks are also possible. Night in Socorro.

**Day 6 – Wednesday, December 12 – Magdalena Mountains and north**

**to Albuquerque** We'll begin this day birding the pinyon-juniper and ponderosa pine woodlands in the Magdalena Mountains at Water Canyon. Some of the resident and wintering species we may find include Acorn Woodpecker, Red-naped Sapsucker, Northern (Red-shafted) Flicker, Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay, Juniper Titmouse, Bushtit, Western and Mountain Bluebirds, Townsend's Solitaire, Rock and Bewick's Wren, and Canyon Towhee. Irruptive migrants present some years also include Pinyon Jay, Sage Thrasher and Cassin's Finch. Mid-afternoon we'll head north to Albuquerque with stops at Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge for a good shot at Sagebrush Sparrow and at Bernardo Wildlife Management Area for another chance at birds we may have missed. Night in Albuquerque.



**Day 7 – Thursday, December 13 – Albuquerque & Santa Fe**

Since most of us won't be back in New Mexico anytime soon, we've scheduled an extra "insurance day" to search for the rosy-finches at Sandia Crest. If the weather or road conditions on Day 2 prevented us from reaching the crest – or if we simply didn't see them to our liking – we'll use today for a second chance or better view. This will also give us another shot at some of the harder to find species in the higher elevations. We'll visit Rio Grande Nature Center in Albuquerque. Here we should find a variety of waterfowl on the pond, including an impressive

concentration of Wood Ducks and possibly Cinnamon Teal. Rarities such as Eurasian Wigeon are sometimes present as well so we'll check carefully. Cottonwood stands on the nature center property are host to a variety of resident and wintering landbirds and we could find both Black-capped and Mountain Chickadees together at the feeders. Depending on our remaining time, we'll head to the Santa Fe to visit the Randall Davey Audubon Center, where we could pick up some species we missed earlier in the week, such as Black-billed Magpie, Townsend's Solitaire, Evening Grosbeak, and Cassin's Finch. We'll conclude the day with a final checklist session and farewell dinner together. Night in Albuquerque.

**Day 8 – Friday, December 14 – Departure** Plan your departure for any time today (check-out before noon).



## TOUR LEADERS



**Bill West** is a professional birding guide based in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where he has lived since 1980. Bill has been birding for 55 years. He has worked for Massachusetts Audubon Society and has guided for the Smithsonian, Nature Conservancy, Santa Fe Newcomer's Club, and, since 1996, for WingsWest Birding Tours (his own company). Bill's tours cover all of New Mexico, western Mexico, including the Copper Canyon, and northern Ecuador.

**Daryl Bernard** is a long-time birder who loves being outdoors and embraces every opportunity to share birds and nature with others. He enjoys organizing trips and tours, and strives to ensure that every participant has a thoroughly enjoyable experience. Previous Seven Ponds birding field tours organized by Daryl include Colorado, the Texas Lower Rio Grande Valley, and Monterey, California, in addition to many local birding trips in Michigan. Daryl is the Executive Director at Seven Ponds Nature Center in Lapeer County, Michigan.

**Nancy Kautz** has been a naturalist at Seven Ponds Nature Center for over a decade. She is a passionate birder, but equally interested in all aspects of natural history. A consummate interpreter, Nancy takes every opportunity to help others enjoy the natural world around them. In preparation for this trip she will not only be studying the birds and bird songs of New Mexico, but the plants and other animal life as well. Nancy has been a leader on many Seven Ponds natural history field tours, and recently helped lead the Texas LRGV tour.

## ACCOMMODATIONS

Lodging for this tour will be in a handful of different locations:

- Night 1 – Albuquerque
- Nights 2-3 – Truth or Consequences
- Nights 4-5 – Socorro
- Nights 6-7 – Albuquerque

## LOCAL TRANSPORTATION

We will travel in two large vans. Since we will be packing up a few times throughout the tour, we ask that you travel as lightly as is practical. This will help maximize space in the vans.

## FEE and REGISTRATION INFORMATION

- Tour Fee: \$1650 per person in double occupancy
- Single Supplement: \$350 (subject to availability)
- Deposit: \$300 due within three weeks of registration
- Final Payment Due: November 1, 2018
- Group size is limited to **13 individuals** and early registration is encouraged

## WHAT THE TOUR FEE INCLUDES:

- full guide service – Bill will be with us every birding step of the way
- hotel accommodations for seven nights
- all meals from breakfast on Day 2 to breakfast on Day 8 of the tour
- ground transportation in two large vans
- all park entrance fees
- pre-trip information and a post-trip mailing with a list of all species observed by the group
- eBird checklist sharing (for those using eBird)

## WHAT THE TOUR FEE DOES NOT INCLUDE:

- your airfare to/from Albuquerque, New Mexico
- snacks and additional drinks
- alcoholic beverages
- laundry
- other items of a personal nature
- gratuity for local birding guide services (optional)

**TELEPHONE/ON-SITE REGISTRATION WILL OPEN AS FOLLOWS:**  
**SEVEN PONDS MEMBERS – TUESDAY, AUGUST 7, 2018 at 9:00 a.m.**  
**NON-MEMBERS – WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 8, 2018 at 9:00 a.m.**

To register for this tour, please call SEVEN PONDS NATURE CENTER at 810-796-3200 or visit the nature center in person. Please note that some field tours fill up very quickly.

Registered participants will be mailed a registration form to return with their tour deposit.

For more information, contact Daryl Bernard at 810-796-3200 or 989-513-5195 (cell) or via e-mail at [dbernard@sevenponds.org](mailto:dbernard@sevenponds.org)

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*Cover: Bosque del Apache NWR / page 2: Gambel's Quail, Greater Roadrunner / page 3: Sandhill Cranes, Snow & Ross's Geese at Bosque del Apache NWR / page 4: Mountain Bluebird, Cinnamon Teal, Sandhill Cranes / page 6: Pyrrhuloxia, Say's Phoebe, Ross's Goose*

