

# VIVA LAS VEGAS BIRDING!

## Birding Beautiful Southern Nevada

October 20-26, 2023

A birding tour organized by *Seven Ponds Nature Center* and *Bird Las Vegas*

### Trip Report and Sightings



**DAY 1 - Friday, October 20 - Welcome to Fabulous Las Vegas!** Arrival day is always a bit hectic, with tour participants touching down at different times, early arrivals, flight delays, and so forth. Eventually everyone except Gavin was at the hotel and we had our meet and greet with Alex Harper, who would be our guide for the next five full days of birding. After our meeting, we walked to the nearby PKWY Tavern where we enjoyed our first meal together. Gavin's flight would eventually be cancelled, and unfortunately, he wouldn't be able to join us until dinner on Day 2.

**DAY 2 - Saturday, October 21 - Henderson Bird Viewing Preserve, Clark County Wetlands Park.** We kicked off our desert birding adventure by visiting Nevada's top hotspot: the Henderson Bird Viewing Preserve. Here we enjoyed a slow walk around this amazing preserve, racking up a list of 70 bird species. Highlights included Cinnamon Teal, Gambel's Quail, Western Grebe, Greater Roadrunner, both Anna's and Costa's hummingbirds, White-faced Ibis, Black and Say's phoebes, and Vermilion Flycatcher, among many others.



After lunch in the shade near the visitor center, we headed to nearby Clark County Wetlands Park to round out our birding for the day. Another outstanding park, the afternoon heat (mid-90s) caused bird (and birder) activity to slow considerably. Still, we managed 29 species, including our first looks at Verdin and Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, as well as many interactions with Abert's Towhees – mostly heard only.

Dinner tonight was at a wonderful Mexican restaurant called Chile Caliente—Tacos Y Mariscos, where Gavin met us in the parking lot in good spirits despite his unfortunate delay.

**DAY 3 - Sunday, October 22 - Rainbow Owl Preserve, Floyd Lamb Park at Tule Springs, Spring Mountains lower elevation, Desert National Wildlife Refuge.** After breakfast we headed to the north end of Las Vegas to the Rainbow Owl Preserve, a small patch of undeveloped desert surrounded by suburbia. Here, humans have provided homes for resident Burrowing Owls using cinder blocks and PVC pipes. When we pulled up to the preserve, three Burrowing Owls were there to greet us. These adorable little owls provided us with nearly 30 minutes of entertainment before we moved on to our next stop.



We arrived at Floyd Lamb Park at Tule Springs to find the park filled with hundreds of Boy Scouts, but we managed to claim some open space near the back of the park. Stepping out of the vans we immediately found an accommodating Red-naped Sapsucker in a nearby tree along with an out-of-place Juniper Titmouse. Checking the desert scrub on the outskirts of the park we had wonderful close study of several Phainopepla – both males and female. Eventually we were also rewarded with our best looks at Abert’s Towhees, feeding in the short grass near our lunchtime pavilion.

On our way to Desert National Wildlife Refuge, we made a detour to the foothills of the Spring Mountains. Although road closures would keep us from exploring the forested peaks of this region during our tour, we decided to avoid the early afternoon desert heat by birding up the slopes as far as we could. At our first stop we scored a flock of at least 75 Pinyon Jays working the ridgeline above us. At the resort on Mt. Charleston we found Woodhouse’s Scrub-Jays and a Golden-crowned Sparrow. Near Harris Springs Canyon we were thrilled to be witness to a stunning aerial dogfight between a Merlin and an American Kestrel – what a show!



Eventually we worked our way down to the Corn Creek Field Station at Desert National Wildlife Refuge. Although we didn’t find anything unusual at this rarity-magnet desert oasis, we thoroughly enjoyed ending our day with a beautiful desert sunset.

Heading back toward the bright lights of Las Vegas and our hotel, we stopped for dinner at Thai St. Café, where we enjoyed a fantastic meal.



**DAY 4 - Monday, October 23 - To Arizona and the Hualapai Mountains.** Heavy rains and hurricane-force winds several weeks earlier caused road closures in the Spring Mountains, limiting our access to the pinyon-juniper clad foothills. In order to reach elevations where ponderosa pine dominates, we had to drive across the state line into Arizona. En route we made a stop in the bleak habitat favored by a key target bird: LeConte's Thrasher. In this area we found Loggerhead Shrike, Western Meadowlark, Brewer's Sparrow, Horned Lark, and – eventually, with great effort and patience – a couple distant LeConte's Thrashers. Although a long way off, everybody was able to see this desert thrasher through the scopes.



Arriving in the beautiful Hualapai Mountains, we were happy to put on an extra layer and enjoy the cool mountain air. Surrounded by majestic ponderosa pines, this habitat offered the opportunity to see birds that would be impossible in the desert scrub of the Las Vegas Valley. Here we found Acorn Woodpeckers aplenty, Bushtit, Pygmy Nuthatch, Williamson's Sapsucker, Mountain Chickadee, Cassin's Finches by the dozens, Red Crossbill, Pine Siskin, Lesser Goldfinch, Western Bluebird, and (down the road a bit) Spotted Towhee and Crissal Thrasher. At one point Alex's keen ears picked up an unusual call, which he struggled to attach to anything expected. His brain rapidly flipped through the rolodex of bird sounds he has stored over many years of birding, and finally landed on...Olive Warbler?!? And, sure enough – there it was! Neither olive nor a warbler, this oddly named bird was nonetheless a highlight of our day, being both out of range and out of season.



Happy with our day's birding success, we headed back to Nevada, where we stopped in Boulder City to enjoy dinner at the Cornish Pasty Co. before settling in at our hotel.



**DAY 5 - Tuesday, October 24 - Las Vegas Wash, Lake Mead.** Our first stop of the day was along the Las Vegas Wash at Pabco. Here we saw nearly 50 species and enjoyed a leisurely walk along the wash, with Alex interpreting various plants and other features along the way.

Two days prior a rare Yellow-footed Gull was refound at Lake Mead's 33 Hole Overlook. This wandering gull was first spotted at Lake Mead in the spring of 2022 and has been



seen sporadically since. The October sighting was the first since July. We decided to make an effort for this gull, which breeds in the Gulf of California near Baja Mexico and wanders north in small numbers to the Salton Sea in California. We made the  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile walk down toward the lake and set up our scopes. On the way we spotted a Green-tailed Towhee – the first of our tour. On the water we found numerous waterfowl, wading birds, and shorebirds. We had nice comparisons of Western and Clark’s grebes. There were also many gulls – including a young Thayer’s-type Iceland Gull – but the remainder of

the gulls were Ring-billed and California. Our prized target was nowhere in sight. We continued our vigil as the sun climbed higher in the sky and the mercury climbed higher in the thermometer. After nearly two hours we were contemplating heading out, when suddenly Alex shouted, “There it is! Yellow-footed Gull!” We watched this beast of a gull fly in, circle the flock, and land among its lesser cousins. We all enjoyed lengthy scope views before eventually deciding to head back up to the parking lot, happy with our success. The expensive view provided a great backdrop to our lunch in the picnic shelters near the parking lot.



We made additional stops along Lake Mead at Boulder Beach and Hemenway Harbor before taking in the respite of air conditioning at the visitor center. As we were leaving, a couple of enchanting Black-throated Sparrows entertained us right next to the building – a nice bonus to a great day of birding!

We opted for dinner in Boulder City once again, this time taking in barbeque at Fox BBQ before making our way back to Henderson.

**DAY 6 - Wednesday, October 25 - Searchlight area, Wee Thump Joshua Tree Wilderness.** Heading south out of Las Vegas, our final day of birding started in the small town of Searchlight, where we were able to get our first look at the Curve-billed Thrashers that make this area their home. From there we headed out into the Wee Thump Joshua Tree Wilderness of the newly established Avi Kwa Ame National Monument. Venturing by foot into the Joshua tree forest, we were all captivated by this amazing desert community. Here we found Ladder-backed Woodpecker and a plethora of sparrows, including Chipping, Black-throated, White-crowned, Vesper, and dozens of Brewer’s. While we were not able to track down our target species – Gilded Flicker – we were pleasantly surprised by a flushed Barn Owl!





After lunch in Searchmont we made a quick loop around the Searchlight Sewage Treatment Ponds, where we had great looks at a very accommodating Sagebrush Sparrow – our only one of the tour. On the way back to Las Vegas we took a detour into the El Dorado Canyon area where we spotted White-throated Swifts and a Golden Eagle above the canyon. Near the ghost town of Nelson, while searching for Cactus Wrens, we had an encounter with a film crew who were setting up a video shoot for what we were told was France’s biggest rock star. Included was a “wolf” which was trained to be a part of the video. We never saw the rock star, but on our way back to US-95 we did pass a large limousine headed toward the video location.



After arriving back at our hotel in Henderson, we walked back to PKWY Tavern for an encore dinner, enjoying one another’s company for the final time on this tour.

**DAY 7 - Thursday, October 26 - Goodbye, Las Vegas.** Everyone headed their own way this morning: most to the airport for their homebound flight; Doris and Richard to Death Valley National Park before flying home to Jacksonville the following day; Jane and Steve began their day-trip drive home to Colorado; and Gavin – well, Gavin was dropped off at Henderson Bird Viewing Preserve at 7:00 AM, where he was able to enjoy three hours of birding before heading to the airport for his flight to Palm Beach – so at least he was able to explore this wonderful preserve after all.



## LEADER & GUIDE

- **Daryl Bernard** – Executive Director  
*Seven Ponds Nature Center*
- **Alex Harper** – Professional Birding Guide  
*Bird Las Vegas*



## PARTICIPANTS

- **Gavin Awerbuch** – Hypoluxo, Florida
- **Karen Flanagan** – Clawson, Michigan
- **Doris & Richard Ganzhorn**– Jacksonville, Florida
- **Mary Jane Garza**– Colorado Springs, Colorado
- **Jan Giesken**– Lapeer, Michigan
- **Lynne Holmberg**– Traverse City, Michigan
- **Jane Pedersen & Steve Somora**– Durango, Colorado
- **Judy Vogel** – Midland, Michigan

## LODGING

Comfort Inn & Suites Henderson—Las Vegas



## RESTAURANTS

PKWY Tavern – Henderson – October 20

Chile Caliente--Tacos Y Mariscos – Las Vegas – October 21

Thai St. Cafe – Las Vegas – October 22

Cornish Pasty Public House – Boulder City – October 23

Fox BBQ – Boulder City – October 24

PKWY Tavern – Henderson – San Antonio – October 25



## BIRDING LOCATIONS

### Saturday, October 21

- Henderson Bird Viewing Preserve
- Clark County Wetlands Park

### Sunday, October 22

- Rainbow Owl Preserve
- Floyd Lamb Park at Tule Springs
- Kyle Canyon Road
- Spring Mountains NRA—Resort on Mt. Charleston
- Harris Springs Canyon
- Desert NWR—Corn Creek Field Station

### Monday, October 23

- Fairway Dr. & Garden Rd. (AZ)
- Hualapai Mountain Park (AZ)

### Tuesday, October 24

- Las Vegas Wash—Pabco Trailhead
- Lake Mead NRA—33 Hole Overlook
- Lake Mead NRA—Boulder Beach
- Lake Mead NRA—Hemenway Harbor
- Lake Mead NRA—Visitor Center

### Wednesday, October 25

- Searchlight (town)
- Wee Thump Joshua Tree Wilderness
- Searchlight—Sewage Treatment Ponds
- El Dorado Canyon area

## TRIP BIRDS – 137 (your personal total may differ)

Canada Goose

Wood Duck

Blue-winged Teal

Cinnamon Teal

Northern Shoveler

Gadwall

American Wigeon

Mallard

Northern Pintail

Green-winged Teal

**Redhead**

Ring-necked Duck

Lesser Scaup

Bufflehead

Common Goldeneye

Hooded Merganser



Ruddy Duck

**Gambel's Quail**

Pied-billed Grebe

Horned Grebe

Eared Grebe

Western Grebe

Clark's Grebe

Rock Pigeon

Eurasian Collared-Dove

Mourning Dove

**Greater Roadrunner**

White-throated Swift

Anna's Hummingbird

Costa's Hummingbird

Virginia Rail

Sora

Common Gallinule

American Coot

American Avocet

Killdeer

Long-billed Dowitcher

Greater Yellowlegs

Least Sandpiper

Ring-billed Gull

**Yellow-footed Gull**

California Gull

Iceland Gull





Double-crested Cormorant

Least Bittern

Black-crowned Night-Heron

Snowy Egret

Green Heron

Great Egret

Great Blue Heron

White-faced Ibis

Turkey Vulture

Osprey

Golden Eagle

Northern Harrier

Sharp-shinned Hawk

Cooper's Hawk

Red-shouldered Hawk

Red-tailed Hawk

**Barn Owl**

Great Horned Owl

Burrowing Owl

Belted Kingfisher

Williamson's Sapsucker

Red-naped Sapsucker

**Acorn Woodpecker**

Ladder-backed Woodpecker

Hairy Woodpecker

Northern Flicker (red-shafted)



American Kestrel

Merlin

Peregrine Falcon

Prairie Falcon

Black Phoebe

**Say's Phoebe**

**Vermilion Flycatcher**

Loggerhead Shrike

Pinyon Jay

Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay

Common Raven

**Mountain Chickadee**

Juniper Titmouse

Verdin

Horned Lark

Barn Swallow

Bushtit

Ruby-crowned Kinglet

White-breasted Nuthatch

Pygmy Nuthatch

Red-breasted Nuthatch

Brown Creeper

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher

Black-tailed Gnatcatcher

Rock Wren

House Wren

Marsh Wren





Bewick's Wren

European Starling

Curve-billed Thrasher

LeConte's Thrasher

Crissal Thrasher

**Northern Mockingbird**

**Western Bluebird**

American Robin

Cedar Waxwing

**Phainopepla**

Olive Warbler

House Sparrow

American Pipit

House Finch

Cassin's Finch

Red Crossbill

Pine Siskin

Lesser Goldfinch

Chipping Sparrow

Brewer's Sparrow

Black-throated Sparrow

Dark-eyed Junco

White-crowned Sparrow

Golden-crowned Sparrow

Sagebrush Sparrow

Vesper Sparrow

Savannah Sparrow



Song Sparrow

Lincoln's Sparrow

**Abert's Towhee**

Green-tailed Towhee

Spotted Towhee

Yellow-headed Blackbird

Western Meadowlark

Red-winged Blackbird

Brown-headed Cowbird

Brewer's Blackbird

Great-tailed Grackle

Orange-crowned Warbler

Common Yellowthroat

Yellow-rumped Warbler



## **MAMMALS**

Desert Cottontail

Black-tailed Jackrabbit

California Rock Squirrel

**Cliff Chipmunk**

Canyon Bat

Wild Burro

Elk

**Coyote**





## AMPHIBIANS & REPTILES

American Bullfrog

Red-eared Slider (turtle)

Ornate Tree Lizard

**Western Whiptail** (lizard)



## OTHER FAUNA

**Western Pygmy Blue**

(butterfly)

Monarch (butterfly)

**Flame Skimmer** (dragonfly)

Tarantula Hawk (wasp)

Praying Mantis

Armored Stink Beetle





# **NOTABLE FUNGI & FLORA**

**Desert Shaggymane (mushroom)**

**Beavertail Cactus**

**Buckhorn Cholla**

**Teddy Bear Cholla**

**Joshua Tree**

**Mojave Yucca**

**Desert Marigold**

**Creosote Bush**

**Screwbean Mesquite**

**Catclaw Acacia**

**Pinyon Pine**

**Ponderosa Pine**



Photos courtesy of Mary Jane Garza, Doris and Richard Ganzhorn, Jan Giesken, and Daryl Bernard