

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

by Sylvia R. Gallagher

INTRODUCTION. I've definitely decided to repeat my *Western Mountains and Their Birds* workshop series starting in Jan., 2010. It didn't take much reflection to realize which mountains I need more experience in. So I decided we'd first spend a month right here in southern California, especially Riverside and San Diego counties. Then we'd head for the southern Rockies of Utah, Colorado, New Mexico, and Arizona for the remaining two months. Amazingly enough, that's exactly what we ended up doing.

My husband Jim is a wildlife photographer, with a specialty in birds. I photograph all the other natural history subjects I think I'll need for my workshops--and deputize Jim to get the things that require a long telephoto lens. I also record bird sounds and use them in the aural portions of workshops. Our enthusiastic companion, a miniature poodle named Toby, specializes in barking at everything he perceives--or thinks he perceives--outside the windows. We tow a trailer with a Suburban and stay mainly in public campgrounds--US Forest Service, state parks, etc. I try to find places where Jim can set up a feeding station and attract birds right to our site, but sometimes that's hard in the springtime when the birds don't dare leave their territories.

Thanks go to Jim for editing the entire diary and adding a few paragraphs in their entirety.

5:30 p.m., Tues., April 20, 2010

Cottonwood Springs Cpgd., Joshua Tree NP

We left home yesterday, Monday, April 19, found a campsite here and just rested the remainder of the day. We saw no birds, but hoped for more in the morning at the spring. The wildflowers, which is what brought us here for a few days, are spectacular, with a wide variety in full bloom. Since I didn't notice any that I hadn't photographed on an earlier trip, I decided to devote my time to recording birds.

This morning we got up early and were at the Cottonwood Springs oasis parking lot at 7:00 a.m. It was a nice calm morning, temperature probably in the upper 50s climbing to the low 70s this afternoon, with a gentle breeze starting after about an hour, but it really didn't interfere with my recording.

Right at the palm grove, I was serenaded by a few European Starlings. Curiously enough, that's a bird I've needed better recordings of. This time they were singing solos, with only a few distant House Finches on the tape. Their variety of songs left something to be desired, though. The bird that sang the most kept doing the same motif over and over, with only occasional bursts of more varied song.

A couple of times a Common Raven flew in to its nest high in a palm tree and fed its chicks. I got some nice sounds of the adult's wing-whish and of the youngsters clamoring for food.

After that I walked down the sandy creek bed, hoping that a little water seep I remembered up a side canyon would still be there. Jim stood around a cottonwood tree with a few migrants, but couldn't get any of them to pose, so pretty soon he caught up with me. This was the first time he'd walked with me to "my" water seep. As we approached the side canyon, I started to hear more birds than I had on the walk down--Gambel's Quail, House Finches, etc., so I was pretty sure it was active--and it was!

Southern California and the Southern Rockies Spring and Summer, 2010

We were rewarded by a flock of Lawrence's Goldfinches that had come in for a drink. I got some fairly good recordings, I think. They don't have to be very good to be better than what I have already. I got songs and tinkly flight calls as they flew in and out. Unfortunately they were soon joined by a group of Lesser Goldfinches. House Finches were there all the time. Jim got photos of the Lawrence's, Scott's Oriole, and I don't know what else, for by then I'd wandered off. I got a really nice Mockingbird, some Gambel's Quail song and contact call, and a few other things.

It was a long trudge back up the sandy wash to the truck, for I'm out of shape from doing lots of sedentary work and taking walks on smooth level ground.

We ate an early lunch and then took naps. Since it was only 1:30 when I awoke, I decided to spend the rest of the afternoon working on my materials for the *Learning Mountain Bird Sounds* workshop that I intend to present in spring, 2012. I had everything to work with all digitized, having been working on selecting candidate sound clips since we got home from our fall trip in November. It was nice to be able to do something productive with the rest of the day.

Sitting outside was not an option, for right after noon the 20-30 mph wind that had been forecast arrived and started buffeting the trailer. It's been going strong ever since.

9:15 a.m., Sunday, April 25, 2010 Oak Grove USFS Cpgd., between Aguanga & Warner Springs, San Diego Co.

Wednesday, April 21, it was still pretty windy, but with beautiful scattered puffy clouds. We decided to take a drive through Joshua Tree NP to Twenty-nine Palms and back, stopping here and there. The wildflowers were spectacular most of the way, with vast carpets of Desert Dandelions and others that you had to stop and look at up close. The Ocotillos were in full bloom and also fully leafed out. The hillsides were covered with yellow Brittlebush (*Encelia farinosa*). Birding was so-so.

Thursday, April 22, we decided we'd better move on so as to find a place for the weekend. Our destination was Yucaipa County Park, which sounded like a good place in itself and also a good place from which to take drives up into the San Bernardino Mountains--Forest Falls, Seven Oaks, etc. I was looking forward to spending several days there. Unfortunately, when we got there, we found the place was entirely booked for the weekend and we could only stay one night. We took it for that night, but I didn't have a chance to explore the park at all, for it soon clouded up and rained intermittently the rest of the day. However, I did get Toby bathed, since the place had full hookups.

The campsites are widely spaced, but on an open grassy area with scattered trees. We saw lots of birds right from the trailer window, though, including Lawrence's Goldfinches, Lark Sparrows, Western Bluebirds, and at least a dozen other species. Down below our site was a brushy ditch and across the narrow day-use area from it was a wider riparian area and undoubtedly a creek. Somewhere in the park is a lake with fishing.

Friday morning, April 23, was nice and clear, but we didn't dare linger for fear we might not find a campsite. I'd have loved to spend several hours wandering around the park. We drove pretty much due south through San Jacinto and Hemet and all their traffic. The bypass road I had wanted to take was closed and the detour was right through town, so it was pretty slow. I had picked out several possible places along the road south toward our ultimate destination, Julian. I didn't think we dared turn up there

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

on a Friday! Two of them were private RV parks. The first was off over a hill to the side, so we didn't see it. The second turned out to be an overly manicured, overly priced "RV Resort." The third was where I had sort of wanted to end up anyway, a US Forest Service (USFS) campground. It's in a tiny community of Oak Grove and has the same name. It's a nice enough place situated in a grove of Coast Live Oaks at an elevation of about 2800 ft. We picked a site as far from the highway as possible and it's been nice and quiet. It's not exactly out in the country, though, for there is a cattle ranching operation with overgrazed fields all around. The park itself is quite nice with oaks and also a lot of chamise chaparral with other shrubs I can't identify.

As soon as we got situated, I discovered we were surrounded by another type of tree, too. It looked like some sort of juniper, but with long streamers of bark dangling from the trunks and branches, revealing bright red bark underneath.



Redshank (*Adenostoma sparsifolia*)
Oak Grove USFS Cpgd, San Diego Co, CA



Redshank close-up.
Oak Grove USFS Cpgd, San Diego Co, CA

I tried to find it in my two tree books, the Petrides Guide (Peterson series) which I've loved for years and the new Sibley one. After a while, I recalled that the camping loop we're in is called the Ribbonwood Loop, so I looked up Ribbonwood in the index of both books, with no success. Then in the evening, still bothered by my inability to identify those trees highly distinctive trees, it occurred to me that the foliage looked a little like tamarisk, so I looked that up. Neither book had pictures, but on the same text page as the tamarisk, the Petrides Guide had a tree called Redshank. That piqued my interest and when I read the short paragraph, I came across an alternate name, Ribbonwood. So that's what it is. The book says they're usually shrubs, but occasionally grow as tall as 15-30 ft. Some of these are at least 40 ft. The scientific name is *Adenostoma sparsifolia*. The foliage is rather sparse when compared with junipers and tamarisks,

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

which it resembles. The book says the plant is confined to chaparral below 6000 ft in southern Calif. It's not a conifer and has small clusters of white flowers in July and Aug.

Jim set up his water drip and spread out some birdseed and magic meal, but all he's been able to attract is Western Scrub-Jays and California Ground Squirrels. There are lots of other birds around, including seed-eating Oak Titmice, California Towhees, and Dark-eyed Juncos, but they've shown no interest. My bird list consists of 20 species, including a few that are here because of the nearby pond for cattle. Nothing especially remarkable, though.

We signed up for Fri. and Sat. nights, so the question became what to do on Saturday, April 24. I grabbed Shram's *Birder's Guide to Southern California* and looked for what he recommended in this area. I discovered there was a road about 12 miles south of here called Lost Valley Rd., where Gray Vireos and Black-chinned Sparrows are supposed to be found. It sets out from about two miles north of Warner Springs. The map showed it to be "degraded pavement or good gravel." It turned out to be paved, but neither the map nor the book mentioned that it is only one lane wide with far too few pull-outs. It's also very steep and full of dips and curves. Obviously they'd just slapped some blacktop on top of the old dirt road. The Gray Vireo spot was supposed to be about four miles up the road, so we determined to drive the thing at least that far.

I walked long stretches of the road with my tape recorder and microphone turned high, listening for Gray Vireo songs. I did hear quite a few Black-chinned Sparrows and we tried to bring them in for photos. One gave us a few fly-bys, but the rest totally ignored us. I never heard a Gray Vireo or any sound remotely resembling it's song. Jim did get a nice photo of a Wrentit, which was actually out in the open singing.



Wrentit. near Warner Hot Springs, San Diego Co, CA

I think that may be the first time I've ever watched a Wrentit sing. Its tail quivers up and down in time to the trill. I also heard and recorded some Mountain Quail, which weren't impossibly far away. Other birds were Bewick's Wren, Lesser Goldfinch, Spotted Towhee, California Thrasher, etc.--nothing earthshaking. I was really disappointed not

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

to find the Gray Vireo, for that is one of my major goals on this trip. I only have one set of recordings of that bird, and Jim has no photos.

All along the road there were stands of spring wildflowers. At one place near the start, before it started up the steep grade, there was a carpet of mixed Goldfields and Owl's Clover with a bright green shrubby Redshank/Ribbonwood in the background. It made a beautiful photo.



Goldfields, Owl's Clover, and Redshank
near Warner Hot Springs, San Diego Co, CA

There was lots of Redshank all along the road and it was indeed all shrubby. The area had burned many years ago and the Redshank apparently sprouts from around the base of the plant. In fact, the trees in the campground have that sprouting foliage, especially on trees that have been pruned back so as not to block the camping vehicles.

We saw one really dark swallowtail butterfly nectaring on some Yerba Santa flowers. There was lots of Yerba Santa, but this was the only butterfly. Jim photographed it with film and also his new small, but powerful, digital camera. The photos were excellent, and it looked like the rare Indra Swallowtail, but might have been a form of the Anise Swallowtail. I only brought Kaufman's butterfly book, but it usually turns out to be the best. [Later: it was an Anise.]

Back in the campsite, Jim photographed a lizard, which he ID'd using the reptile book as a Side-blotched. He also got a digital image of an Ash-throated Flycatcher, which flew into the tree right over my head. I was able to observe it at leisure from only about 12 feet. What a privilege. I'd already ID'd it by voice from a distance.

This morning we're sitting around waiting for a reasonable hour to drive the remaining 35 or so miles to Julian. We want to be sure the weekend campers have left. I tried to do some recording before breakfast, but the airplanes, cars, and cattle weren't much help. There's an airport down the road where small airplanes take off with gliders in tow, so there's lots of air traffic. They'll even take paying customers for glider rides, but I decided I didn't want to do that!

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

9:00 a.m., Wednesday, April 28, 2010
William Heise County Park, Julian, CA

Sunday, April 25, we drove through the beautiful spring countryside, which included green pastures carpeted with wildflowers of all colors. It was only 35 miles to Julian, but a fairly slow drive on winding roads. We timed it to arrive here about check-out time in the campground, but it wouldn't have mattered, for ever since we arrived there have only been about four or five other campers in the entire park.

Since this park has been recommended so highly by our birding friends, we decided to sign up for a week if we could. There was no one at the entry booth, so we drove on in to hunt for a site, our favorite method. But first we had to fill our tank with water at the dump station. While waiting for the rig in front of us to finish, up drove a ranger, Roger. When we told him we wanted to stay a week, he said he'd go check which sites would be free next weekend. We failed to tell him that we didn't want an electrical hook-up, because we'd looked at those sites and they're really jammed together. So he drove off again and came back with another list. It turned out that the park practically fills up every weekend, then empties out almost completely in between. There were only a handful of available sites, and when we drove around, we discovered most of them were either too short or too difficult to back into. We tried really hard to get into one and banged up the front end of the trailer a little in the process. Then we drove to another one and with a little jockeying managed to get in. It has the picnic table and bushes all on the left, so we can't watch our feeding station while we eat, but otherwise it's not too bad.

It had taken us at least an hour to get situated, so it was 2:00 by the time we were unhooked. While I fixed lunch, Jim took our payment envelope down to the entrance. It seemed no time later that Roger came back with a confirmation sheet for the site for the week. He's a really likeable, friendly fellow and came by a couple of times later to chat. And yesterday, while we were exploring the park, he and his boss, Mary, stopped by and we found her to be just as nice. We are pleased to discover that this park has no rules against feeding the birds. In fact the camp host, who is also very friendly, has birdseed and syrup feeders set up. It really makes a difference to be in a park where the management isn't forever looking for infractions of the rules.

This park is situated in the upper foothill woodland at about 4000 ft elevation. The main tree in the park is Coast Live Oak, but there are lots of Black Oaks that are just leafing out and a fair number of Coulter Pines. Our site backs up to an opening in the trees with a few newly planted Live Oaks, half of which have died. At first I thought we wouldn't like the site because of the opening, but it's turning out to be rather nice. Our front end faces west and is partly shaded, while our rear end gets the morning sun for its warmth and its photons for our solar panels. Each afternoon it's been warm enough to sit outside in the shade behind the trailer and watch the birds. My bird list so far stands at 30 and nearly all of them have been detected right from the campsite. Jim's feeding station isn't doing very well, though, for most of the birds are busy setting up territories and feeding in their usual places. A flock of Wild Turkeys comes around occasionally, and we're also feeding a few Dark-eyed Juncos, Oak Titmice, and, rarely, a Spotted Towhee.

Monday, April 26, there was essentially no wind all day. I went out before breakfast for an hour or so and did some recording. Although there are no species here I don't already have, every recording should be first rate.

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

After breakfast we had to drive into Julian, mainly to get stuff to patch the front of the trailer where we ran into the tree; rain was forecast for Wednesday, and it arrived last night as predicted. Right now it's foggy, drizzly, and blustery, which is why I'm writing this now instead of prowling around outside. We also did some grocery shopping and found a place with WiFi to check our email. It turned out to be a pie shop, so of course we had to buy one. I bought a frozen one and plan to bake it later this morning. The oven's heat will do double duty of keeping the trailer warm.

We had a lot of email, since it's been a week since we'd checked it. It took a long time to go through it all and answer what had to be answered--about half of it. Our old standby, Pocketmail, which worked on any telephone, went out of business in February, but we didn't discover it until just before our trip, when Jim decided to check it. We only used it on trips. This means we'll not be able to check email as often or as conveniently as we used to. Most private RV parks have WiFi, but we usually frequent government campgrounds of various types.

I spent the afternoon sitting outside enjoying the birds. An Ash-throated Flycatcher spent the better part of an hour flitting from oak to oak (dead and alive) in the little open area behind the trailer. One beautiful Black Oak, which is just leafing out, seemed to attract everything.



The California Black Oak where I detected 19 bird species
Wm. Heise Co. Park, Julian CA

Just for fun, I'm going to list the birds I've seen in that tree alone: American Robin, Mountain Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch, Oak Titmouse, Dark-eyed Junco, Band-tailed Pigeon, Nuttall's Woodpecker, Acorn Woodpecker, Spotted Towhee, American Crow, Common Raven, Western Bluebird, Western Scrub-Jay, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Northern Flicker, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Chipping Sparrow (17 spp.)

Yesterday morning, April 27, it was calm first thing, so I had Jim take me to the top of the upper camping loop (tents only). My plan was to walk the half-mile nature trail, but it was too steep and the steps too tall for my bad knees, so I contented myself

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

with wandering around the campground loops. I did get far enough up the trail to read the first interpretive sign, which was about the 2003 Cedar Fire that burned vast areas of San Diego Co., including 70degrees of this 10,000-acre park. Fortunately they were able to save the canyon where the campgrounds are, so we can only see the dead trees on the upper slopes from our site.

I photographed the Coulter pines. Their cones are gigantic--the largest, heaviest, and prickliest of all North American pine cones. I could see some on the treetops, but none on the ground. (I think I may have one in my collection from Chilao many years ago.) Their needles can be a foot long and are in bundles of three. Later in the morning I found an ancient specimen with really mature bark and photographed it, too. As an added bonus, its bark crevices were dotted with acorns; it's an Acorn Woodpecker granary.

It's still unpleasant outside, and Jim says the thermometer reads 45 degrees, so I guess I'll work on my mountain sounds workshop.

3:30 p.m., Friday, April 30, 2010

William Heise County Park, Julian, CA

I spent the rest of the day Wednesday, April 28, indoors working on my sounds. The temperature never got much higher than the 45degrees indicated above and on top of it, there was a strong wind.

Yesterday, Thursday, April 29, was supposed to be sunny, but still cold and windy, but we awoke to a dense, damp fog swirling all around us. The pavement was all wet, but started to dry after daybreak. After sitting around until around 9:00, hoping it would clear off, we decided to drive into town (5 miles away on curvy roads) and check our email and the weather forecast. This time the library was open, so we didn't have to buy another apple pie--although the first one was excellent.

The weather was still bitterly cold and very windy, but showing signs of clearing a bit. We decided to take a drive through the mountains south of Julian, which I'd never driven through. We drove south on SR 79, then cut southeast on Sunrise Hwy (county rd. S1) through the Laguna Mountains. It was a spectacular drive, and the clouds enhanced the drama of the scenery. We stopped and took a few pictures down into the Anza Borrego Desert.

As the elevation rose from the 4000 ft of Julian to over 6000 ft, we discovered that all the trees and shrubs were covered with a thick layer of ice. We had to stop and photograph that. The first part of the drive was through the area burned over by the Cedar Fire of 2003, so there were no tall trees, but later on we got into unburned areas, where there were tall pines (Jeffrey & a few Ponderosa) along with Black Oaks. We drove through a USFS campground to see if we'd ever want to stay there, but it was badly run-down and didn't look very inviting. Few birds were out and about, but that wasn't surprising, considering the weather. Just before we got out of the icy area, there was a nice road turnout, where the ice on the trees seemed especially thick. At that time the sun was in and out of view and when it was out, it really made that ice sparkle. Each long Jeffrey Pine needle had a thick film of ice on one side of it, not all around it. The ice was many times thicker than the diameter of the needle. The sun was melting the ice, and our truck had been bombarded with pieces of ice for miles.

Southern California and the Southern Rockies Spring and Summer, 2010



Trees covered with ice/
Laguna Mountains, San Diego Co, CA



Jeffrey Pine needles covered with ice
Laguna Mountains, San Diego Co., CA

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

It was about lunch time when we got to I-8. I discovered there was a small community called Pine Valley right off the freeway and we were happy to discover a little diner there, where we had a nice lunch--so much food that we didn't have any dinner that night, just a piece of apple pie.

We drove back to Julian through Cuyamaca Rancho State Park, which burned almost totally in the Cedar Fire. This road doesn't ascend as high as the Sunrise Hwy, so we never saw very many conifers. We saw lots and lots of dead trees, mostly oaks, but also many Coast Live Oaks that were sprouting new growth either from the heaviest trunks or from near the roots. The chaparral has recovered completely and grown rapidly since the burn. It is feared that this area will end up chaparral instead of oak woodland because of the warming climate. Many experts think the trees were stressed and dried out due to many years of drought. The drought also made them subject to insect infestation, which killed some of them, too. The fire just finished the process.

While I was eating lunch, a lens fell out of my new dark glasses; a screw had fallen out and I had no idea where. I was wearing the dark glasses because the night before my regular ones had fallen on the floor and I accidentally stepped on them and broke the frame in a couple of places--irreparably, I thought. I had been hoping to get by with the dark ones (which had the bottom part untinted) and my 99-Cents Store readers until I could get to an optician, but with two pair of glasses out of commission, I had to do something right away. We stopped at the library, where I checked the internet for a place in the closest town of any size, Ramona. I found two places. So this morning we drove 25 curvy miles to Ramona. The eyeglass place was in a shopping center with a drug store and a Stater Bros. market (my favorite), both of which we needed. I was overjoyed when the optician was able to repair the frames and, of course, replace the screw in the dark glasses. She also straightened those 99-cent readers. I was astounded when she didn't charge me anything for the service. (I wouldn't have been without glasses had the frames been a total loss, for my old glasses, which I had with me were in the same style of frame. Those lenses don't work for me, though, because I had cataract surgery after I got them and my eyes are totally different now.)

It was noon by the time we got back to the trailer and the groceries put away. The temperature hasn't exceeded 52 degrees all day, but the wind has died down to a gentle breeze. Jim tried to sit outside a while ago and photograph birds, but came in after a short time.

4:30 p.m., Tuesday, May 4, 2010

Stagecoach Trails RV Park, Shelter Valley, CA (nr. "Scissors Crossing")

After all the inclement weather and the trip to Ramona, the weekend was upon us with all the accompanying campground hubbub. Most of the sites were occupied. During the week I could wander almost anywhere with my recording gear and expect it to be reasonably quiet. I had already decided that the Nature Trail and the hiking trail were both too steep for my knees. I discovered on the map that there was another hiking trail that paralleled a dirt road labeled "Authorized Vehicles Only." It starts from the picnic area and, according to the map, follows Cedar Creek. I decided to try that on Saturday morning, May 1, and it turned out to be a wonderful idea. I had the place to myself and the only extraneous sounds were airplanes. The only drawback was that it was all downhill, which meant I had to be aware that I had to walk back UP-hill.

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

I walked down the trail portion at first. The footing wasn't too bad, but pretty soon it came out to the dirt road. My choice was to continue on the trail and circle back to the noisy campground or to continue walking down the dirt road. I chose the road. It turned out to be excellent birding. On my left all the way was Cedar Creek, which was pretty quiet for a long time, because there was an old dam that had backed it up to sluggish flow. After the dam, it became noisier. On my right was a steep hillside that had had oaks before the fire, but which now had mostly well-grown-back chaparral. Here and there were groves of oaks that had not burned.

I strolled as slowly as possible down that road, recording sounds of common birds. I remember especially getting some really nice "klee-ar" calls from a Northern Flicker. Recently when I was going through all my tapes, I discovered that I didn't have very much of that very common sound. I just had lots of the "quee-quee-quee..." that is mainly given during the breeding season. This surprised me, for "klee-ar" is its most common vocalization. It's a temptation not to record a common sound because I think I already have a lot of it, when that may not be true, as here. I discovered the same thing about House Wren songs. I had quite a few atypical ones, but was short of the ordinary version. I had remedied that on some field trips around Orange County before I left on this trip, but couldn't resist getting a few more of that, too. I know I recorded lots of other common sounds, too, but can't recall them now.

The highlight of my morning was a recording I got of a bird that I've seen thousands of times, but from which I'd never heard anything. One of these birds flew in and perched only about 25 feet above me, giving a sound like a loud, whispered "haaah" like someone exhaling loudly. It repeated this many times, then flew off with a loud swish of its wings. Can you guess what it was? (The answer is at the end of this installment of the diary.)

Walking back up to our campsite was a real chore, but I made it. The day was not as cold as it had been, so I bundled up and sat outside for a while in the late morning and again after my nap in the afternoon. I was happy to add two more birds to the list for "my" Black Oak tree, Black-throated Gray Warbler and Hammond's Flycatcher. That brought the total of birds that spent at least a little time in that tree to 19. Pretty good, when you consider that my total list for the park was 40.

Jim didn't ever do very well luring interesting birds to his food and water. I think all he got photos of were Dark-eyed Junco, Oak Titmouse, and White-breasted Nuthatch. A Spotted Towhee came in once, but never returned for its portrait. Jim also had to get up all the time to chase a determined female Wild Turkey away from his birdseed feeder log. She always retreated at Jim's approach, but not very far; she'd quickly work her way back as soon as he went back to his chair. Often there was a large gathering of turkeys, about 20 or so, across the road and up the mountainside from us. The males strutting around displaying their wares to the hens, but they didn't allow close approach.

Sunday morning May 2 we sat around the campsite until around 10:30, then hooked up and drove eastward down a steep, winding road to the little hamlet of Shelter Valley, where there was an RV park with full hookups, Stagecoach Trails RV Park (named for the old Butterfield Stage route through here). The drive was only 15 miles, but it probably took us 45 minutes. It's in the edge of the Anza-Borrego Desert, just outside the state park boundary. We wanted a shady site around the edge of the park. The woman in the office gave Jim a totally sunny one, so we looked around and picked

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

out one that was more to our liking and went back and asked for it. She told Jim that we couldn't have it and gave him a map showing which sites were available, but either she didn't explain why or Jim didn't understand why the rest of the sites were off-limits. We looked at all the sites she had circled on the map and didn't like any of them. We were about to go back to the office once more when we came across a man tending the grounds. He explained why all those sites were off limits. The recent huge earthquake near Mexicali had shaken so badly here that much of the underground wiring had broken. Electrical availability in the park is now extremely patchy. He recommended one particular row as being the best available for shade trees. When we drove up there and were looking around, a nice man in the best site told us they were just leaving. How wonderful! We drove right back to the office and snatched it.

Most of the campground is empty. The best locations around the edge have rigs in every other site, most of them with their owners not in attendance. The few people who are here are either away at work all day or very elderly. Jim did walk Toby by one rig which had a ferocious dog (Pit Bull, he thought, but he's not totally familiar with what that breed looks like) tied up outside. It lunged at its tether, growling and barking, and Jim feared it would break free, but fortunately it didn't. We're keeping away from that row now.

The campground is a little run-down, but Jim says the rest rooms are pretty nice, although the plumbing is a little strange. The toilets just swirl the stuff round and round, swallow it, then regurgitate it back up. The sinks have only scalding-hot water, no cold. But the showers are excellent and have both hot and cold water, along with a chair and some hooks to put your stuff on. So he likes that part very well.

Sunday night the temperature got down to 41 degrees and Monday, May 2, dawned clear and calm. We took a walk up the dirt road behind the campground, which sets off right opposite our campsite. It runs up the bajada to the base of the nearest hill, a distance of maybe half a mile. It passes through a beautiful piece of desert, mainly creosote bush, but also lots of cactus starting to bloom plus other shrubs. Not a lot of birds, although I did record Verdin, Black-throated Sparrow, and the beautiful meadowlark-like song of the Scott's Oriole. Actually I think it's prettier than the meadowlark's song. Phainopeplas seem to be nesting in mistletoe in some of the larger creosote bushes, but we haven't figured out where.

I walked farther up the hill than Jim did, and when I came back I found him standing by a small water puddle, where the watering system was supplying extra water to some sickly Fremont Cottonwoods. He said birds were using the puddle occasionally. Later in the day he set up his blind facing the puddle and has spent lots of time sitting in it waiting for birds to come. The puddle is partly fed by a spray of water from a leak in the drip-irrigation hose and the birds love the shower. I think he's gotten Lesser Goldfinch, a Chipping Sparrow with a deformed lump on its head, and a finch-like bird with a "strange face pattern." He doesn't know what it is, but it might be Cassin's. [Later: it was. And he didn't tell me about the Yellow Warbler, which turned out to be my favorite photo.]

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010



Yellow Warbler taking a shower
Shelter Valley, San Diego Co, Ca

The water drip by the trailer is surrounded by birdseed, which is mainly eaten by House Sparrows, but a pair of California Thrashers comes in fairly regularly. Once it was a trio--don't know what was going on there. Other visitors include House Finch, Wilson's Warbler, and just as I was writing this list, a Western Tanager.

Yesterday afternoon the wind got up pretty strong and blew hard until after 10:00. This morning it started up again. We had been going to go to Yaqui Well and Tamarisk Grove, which are only 11 miles from here, but the wind nixed that idea. Jim has spent lots of time in his blind and is there now. I sat outside in the shade this morning working on my embroidery until the wind got too strong. I was going to work on my sounds workshop, but decided to write this up first--and now it's 5:30 and too late to spread that all out. Oh, well.

We've decided to spend the rest of the week here, since we don't want to arrive at a new place just before the weekend. Hope we get some wind-free mornings. Temperature seems to have topped out today at 87degrees and it only got down to 57degrees last night. We're at about 2200 ft and our temperature seems consistently to be about 5 degrees cooler than that forecast for Borrego Springs, which is at 1000 ft. (I can check weather.com using the WiFi hotspot by the office. Unfortunately weather.com has never heard of Shelter Valley, which is not surprising.)

Toby has developed an interesting habit: Whenever Jim stops whatever he is doing--reading, playing his hand-held electronic game, etc.--Toby, who has been lying quietly beside him on the couch, immediately jumps on him, begging for some playtime, petting, anything!

Yesterday morning when I was sitting at the picnic table on the porch of the park office checking 5 days of emails, the resident black cat was lying on the table beside me the whole time. When I finished and closed up my computer to leave, that cat came over and starting nuzzling me and meowing to be petted--just like Toby. Of course, I complied.

This morning when I was sitting among the shrubby junipers under the cottonwoods trying to get some shade and be sheltered from the wind, three California Thrashers flew out of the shrub behind me and underneath my chair into the shrub in front of me. These desert birds are very different in behavior from California Thrashers

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

on the other side of the mountains. It's no wonder that people try to make them into Curve-billeds or Crissal's.

Answer to question posed earlier in this installment: Turkey Vulture.

5:15 p.m., Wednesday, May 5, 2010

Stagecoach Trails RV Park, Shelter Valley, CA (near "Scissors Crossing")

Each morning Jim sprinkles birdseed, including sunflower seeds, on the ground outside the trailer. Our main customers are House Sparrows and occasionally California Thrashers and House Finches. By evening there's still a lot of seed left, but the next morning it's all gone. Last evening Jim decided to sit outside after dinner and try to discover what was harvesting the remaining seed. I thought it was probably a Desert Woodrat because I had seen one out in the desert Monday morning, but Jim wasn't sure. It turned out I was right, and it wasn't hard at all to see the little guy. Jim sat in his chair about ten feet from the seed and turned on his small flashlight periodically. Pretty soon there was the little guy. He told me about it and I turned out all the lights in the trailer and looked out the window. It was easy to see its huge eyes, extremely long tail, and even its white feet. He tried to take some pictures, but plans to tape his flashlight to his camera lens tonight. It'll have to be manual focus because autofocus gets confused in extremely low light. Of course, he'll use flash.

This morning it was again breezy to the point of actually being windy. But I decided to try to do some recording anyway. Since conditions weren't ideal, I let Toby go with me. I was amazed at how good the little guy was. Formerly he'd tug at the leash in order to investigate what interested him or else he'd whine because he wanted to get going. This time he stood quietly several different times. Once I was recording a California Thrasher atop a huge creosote bush and while he was singing, two other thrashers (wife and kid, we think now) meandered out toward us. Toby watched them a while, then started gazing off in other directions, but he didn't move his feet. I really must take him with me more often. He gets antsy being cooped up in the trailer all day.

The wind continued all day, so I decided to stay inside and work on my sounds. Jim has been in his blind by the water puddle and has been rewarded with a minor trickle of migrants--Western Tanager, Lazuli Bunting, Black-headed Grosbeak. The water flow has increased for some reason, so the water isn't as localized as it was, making photography more difficult. The light is hard to adjust for in the morning and mid-day, when the area is in partial shade. It's in full sun in the late afternoon, so he's definitely out there right now. I think I'll go outside myself and sit in the shade behind the trailer, which is also somewhat sheltered from the wind.

4:45 p.m., Saturday, May 8, 2010

Stagecoach Trails RV Park, Shelter Valley, CA (nr. "Scissors Crossing")

It's been several days since I wrote this up--days that sort of run into one another. Jim sits in his blind for hours on end, hoping for something different. I'm amazed at his patience. They turned off the water that was spouting out across the road from our trailer, so the birds have to use our little water drip and birdbath, if they can find it. Drip irrigation is taking place at all the trees and shrubs around the campground and the birds have learned to drink from the little spigots. Usually there is no pool of water, which is as it should be for water conservation. Two (maybe only one

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

today) Black-headed Grosbeak females are our most steady migrant customers, but I occasionally see a Wilson's Warbler and once I glimpsed a male Lazuli Bunting (Jim says he got good photos of male and female when he was monitoring that large puddle.) Our threesome (family?) of California Thrashers is no longer around and I've not seen nor heard them elsewhere in the campground on my walks. They had been high-profile the first few days. They are resident in this area, I know; I wonder where they went.

I think the peak of migration has passed. There's a minor cold front coming through the next couple of days, but I don't think we'll stay around to find out what effect that has.

After seeing the Desert Woodrat so well that first night, Jim has sat outside for a couple of hours the past three evenings, camera ready, hoping for a repeat visit, but has had no success. Every morning except one the seed had disappeared, though.

Thursday was pretty windy all day, so I didn't do much. However, it died down that night and Friday morning was calm. Finally we had the day I'd been hoping for and we were able to go to Yaqui Well. We had a bit of trouble finding the poorly marked road, and then weren't sure how far along the road the parking area for the well was, but we found it all right. The road is across the highway from the Tamarisk Grove Cpgd. and between there and the major junction. The parking lot for the well is about half a mile away on the dirt road. This general area is a primitive campground, so there are a lot of turnouts for campsites along the way. No one was camping at either Tamarisk Grove or along the Yaqui Well road. Later we discovered Tamarisk Grove was closed "due to budget constraints." Too bad.

Yaqui Well was much as it was the last time I visited it many years ago. It's not actually a well today, but rather a grassy depression with a tiny bit of standing water that's invisible unless you're looking straight down through the grass. But in the desert, this feature is a real draw. The area downhill from it is densely vegetated with shrubs, mainly Honey Mesquite, Catclaw, and one other shrub whose name escapes me now, but I remember photographing it years ago at Cottonwood Springs in JTNP.

There were lots of birds around, with Costa's Hummingbirds, including many juveniles, especially numerous. They'd frequently buzz right up and inspect me. I also saw a few Anna's. I found a Verdin building a nest and Jim tried to photograph the bird there, but said the bird came in on the back side and was too quick to appear and then disappear into the nest opening, which is on the bottom. He went back and stood a little way away from the water seep and feels he succeeded in getting nice photos of a female Phainopepla and an attractively perched male California Quail.

I glimpsed a Yellow-breasted Chat near the well and later as I was wandering round through the bushes on the trails, I succeeded in getting some nice long recordings of songs from two different individuals. Recording conditions were quite good--only occasional airplanes and loud vehicles on the highways off in the distance.

After spending the best two hours of the morning at Yaqui Well, we drove back and walked around the empty Tamarisk Grove Campground and picnic area. Not much of interest was there. I did see a couple of White-crowned Sparrows, which I think were Gambel's, although they wouldn't let me get quite close enough to be sure they weren't Mountain. Those two subspecies would probably be equally likely here this time of year.

Since I don't know where there might be a grocery store on our route to our next campground, we drove into Borrego Springs and did some shopping. We had a hard

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

time finding the grocery store. I saw a sign out front of a little mall saying "Center Market," but when we drove into the lot, all I saw was a liquor store with a few groceries. I finally asked someone and they said it was around back. Indeed it was, but it was certainly well hidden. It was a small place and was nearly out of the things I most needed, milk and bread, but I had no choice but to settle for what they had. The half-and-half and some of the milk (a premium priced organic type) were ultrapasteurized, which was nice. I had brought along a large insulated bag and was able to pack my perishables in that and keep them cold with the two cans of frozen orange juice that I'd bought. So it looks like we're set for another week of camping.

This morning it was pretty breezy first thing, but I walked around the grounds for an hour or so before breakfast anyway. I was hoping for some songs from the Lesser Goldfinches, which are always singing in the late afternoon when I'm sitting outside in the wind. No luck. I may have gotten a few "spik" calls from a Black-headed Grosbeak, but that's it. I have enough House Finch, House Sparrow, and Eurasian Collared-Dove.

After breakfast, I washed Toby, defrosted the refrigerator, and just read the rest of the day. Jim has been in the blind, but has had nothing interesting to report, although he's become infatuated with a lizard, which seems to be building a burrow under the feeding log (for birdseed and magic meal) that he carries with him. Maybe I'd better quit and see if I can figure out what kind of lizard it is. [After we got home I ID'd it as a Western Whiptail from the slides.] It's too breezy to sit outdoors and besides it's almost time to fix dinner.

Temperatures all week have been pleasant and haven't gotten out of the 80s in the daytime and usually go down to the upper 50s or low 60s at night. Borrego Springs is much hotter--5 to 10 degrees according to the park manager.

I learned from the manager that this place was purchased in December by some people from the San Diego area, who have plans to fix it up. The place really has promise; it's an oasis of cottonwoods on the treeless desert. The grounds do need manicuring and the swimming pool and exteriors of most buildings could use some sprucing up. The restrooms and laundry room look very nice and inviting. The place really has promise. It's now listed in Trailer Life guide, which it wasn't before, and that ought to bring them some business. It should attract snowbirds who want to be far from civilization, but want the convenience of full hookups. (For all we know, maybe it does now. It's pretty late in the season.)

3:15 p.m., Tuesday, May 11, 2010 **Hurkey Creek Park (Riverside Co. park), nr. Idyllwild, CA**

Sunday, May 9, we drove a succession of beautiful back roads, arriving here around noon. We first inspected the Lake Hemet RV park across the road, owned by the water district. Although it had a section of full hookups, they were jammed together and many of the sites were occupied by junky old trailers surrounded by assorted collections of stuff. The place has some non-hookup sites along the lake, but they were on barren ground with very few trees. Only one or two loops were open and they were crowded. Furthermore, to get to them, there must have been 20 of the worst speed bumps we've ever driven over. The idea of having to cross those whenever we wanted to go in or out wasn't very appealing. The gate attendant had given us a fifteen-minute pass to look around. I think it only took us ten, most of them on those speed bumps.

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

So we drove 0.3 mile farther to Hurkey Creek Campground, where we knew there would be no hookups. When we entered the park, there were several cars lined up at the gate waiting to pay for day-use, but the line disappeared quickly because at least two people were processing the line. Our first impression of the park was a crowded turf-and-trees urban park with a huge children's play apparatus in the middle of the lawn, but we knew we wouldn't find anything better. We discovered we had arrived an hour before check-out time from the campground and two hours before check-in time, but the attendant knew his campground and assigned us to as close as they had to what we always ask for, "a site that backs into the bushes on the edge of the park." We're on the edge of the park and the site backs up to bushes, but there are only a couple of them beside us. The bushes on the other side of the fence are really attractive and wildflowers of many kinds are growing between them. However, they keep the park grounds mowed down, as we discovered when we watched the huge, noisy, drive-around lawn mower crash into the edge of the bushes on Monday. Unlike the velvety green turf in the day-use section, there isn't much "lawn" in the campground, so the lawn mower raised a huge cloud of dust as it maneuvered around.

The campground is dotted with lots of tall Jeffrey Pines and assorted other native trees, so is really quite attractive. After check-out time we've pretty much had the place to ourselves. We asked to stay through Friday night, but were told they were fully booked for next weekend, so settled for Sunday through Thursday. We plan to go home next weekend for a couple of days, then set out again.

Jim set out his bird-feeding concession and was immediately inundated by a steady coming and going of Steller's Jays and Western Scrub-Jays. He's been photographing them plus the Western Gray Squirrels and assorted House Sparrows, European Starlings and Brewer's Blackbirds. I actually commissioned him to photograph the starlings, for we don't have any really good shots of those birds at this stage of their plumage year: their bills are entirely yellow and most of the white spots have worn off.

Yesterday morning, Monday, May 10, I walked the hike-&-bike trail that leads out of the far end of the campground. It follows Hurkey Creek and passes through coniferous woodland for about a mile, then comes out into chaparral. I was interested to discover that Redshank (Ribbonwood) is a dominant plant in this chaparral, too. Curious that I'd never been aware of it before. There's also lots of manzanita and other shrubs. Between the shrubs are carpets of goldfields, a couple of blue flowers I haven't figured out yet, and occasional patches of paintbrush and Owl's Clover. All this beauty could be in the campground if they didn't mow it all the time! I probably hiked about a mile and a half up the trail when I came to a place where water was running across it making it too difficult for me to cross. Actually, the entire trail was pretty badly eroded everywhere. That spot had a half-buried 15-inch galvanized pipe that the water was supposed to run through, but it had found a different course.

I carried my tape recorder, but didn't get very much due to a rather stiff breeze plus the sound of the water in the creek. The breeze kept most of the bird activity down, too, although I found a few species, most of which I'd seen other places on this trip. My particular goal was to find a White-headed Woodpecker and record its drumming. I really need that sound for my mountains sounds workshop. In fact that's going to be a major goal here and in the Lake Arrowhead area where we plan to go next. I have all the other sounds of that bird well, but was amazed to discover I have no drumming. Unfortunately, I saw no sign of that bird on the trail.

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

I tried to sit outdoors in the afternoon, but gave up after about an hour because it was too cold. Today was even colder. I don't think the temperature got above 58degrees and it's been pretty windy. I took Toby for a long walk around the campground after breakfast and was pleased to discover an Olive-sided Flycatcher and a migrating Townsend's Warbler. I didn't carry my recording gear because it was too windy. It was also very cold--not much higher than the 38degrees of last night. I was happy to get back to the nice warm trailer and spend the rest of the morning there. Around 11:00 we took a short drive and discovered a couple of back roads that I think I'll walk on the next two mornings.

5:15 p.m., Thursday, May 13, 2010

Hurkey Creek Park (Riverside Co. park), nr. Idyllwild, CA

It turned out I spent two mornings on one of those roads, Apple Canyon Rd. It starts out right outside the entrance to Hurkey Creek Park, just off the main highway and goes up through pines, then chaparral for about three miles. Three camps are on the road, the first a Ronald McDonald Camp for kids with cancer, the other two a Seventh Day Adventist one and a Zen one--what a pair of contrasts!

Yesterday, Wednesday, May 12, we drove most of the way up the road and stopped at a trailhead that leads to the Pacific Crest Trail and other places. It starts out along a creek, so I walked it about 100 ft until it ascended into the chaparral. There I encountered a Hermit Warbler, a migrant, for they don't breed this low or this far south. From there I walked down the road, with Jim driving along from turnout to turnout. I recorded a few sounds, but nothing memorable. There were some Black-chinned Sparrows, but never very close and, besides, I already have that bird very well from other trips. I also photographed a lot of the wildflowers. Later I tried to figure them out, but discovered I hadn't brought any of my mountain flower books. I guess I didn't think they'd be in bloom this early, but here we're only 4400 ft. I pooped out when we reached the part with the pines, but we did stop at one place where there were two beautiful snags, which I just had to photograph. I discovered what I thought was a Pygmy Nuthatch entering one of the holes in the taller one, but couldn't be sure it wasn't an Oak Titmouse. I definitely heard Pygmy Nuthatches in the area, because I recorded some of their calls and compared them with known ones later in the afternoon.

This morning, Thursday, May 13, I had to go back to those snags and try to find out for sure if it was Pygmy Nuthatches I saw go into that hole and also to try to improve my recordings. I was correct about the nuthatches, but they weren't very vocal, even though I stood around a half hour or so. Across the road from there was more open, flat, Jeffrey Pine woodland with scattered snags. I decided to check them out and after wandering maybe 200 yd back into the forest found a beautiful one with a Pygmy Nuthatch pair coming and going regularly. Best of all, the nest was only about half as high as it was in that other one. I probably stood there an hour recording the birds as they came in. They always came and went as a pair and one bird would perch at the entrance of the hole, sometimes calling softly, then enter it for a while. The other bird perched on a branch nearby and made a variety of calls. I presume it was the female that entered the nest and the male that stood guard.

For a while I thought there were two nuthatches entering separate holes and one standing guard, but after a few visits, I was able to figure out that the other bird was an Oak Titmouse. It always came and went with the nuthatches and went off in the same

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

direction. Usually it popped into its hole quickly, but once it perched outside and did a series of rough churring calls. This brought the mate out of the hole. She fluttered her wings and begged and was fed by him, then re-entered the hole. The perched bird flew off again with the two nuthatches. Really interesting behavior. I had gradually moved closer and closer to the snag and watched this behavior from right underneath it. The nest holes were about thirty feet high.

Another highlight of the morning was a Red-tailed Hawk that called and called from treetops very close to me. Either I was closer than I'd ever been to one or this bird's cries were more tremulous and extended than usual. The bird would cry at least eight or ten times from one treetop, then fly to another equally close one making a slightly strangled version of the call as it flew. Then it would call some more from the next treetop. Later I saw two birds circling around together high in the sky. I never saw the nest, but I didn't look for it.

While I was standing under the nuthatch/titmouse tree a pair of California Quail meandered in through the fairly dense shrubby understory and at one point were only ten feet from my microphone, giving their hard metallic contact clucks. Then the male hopped up on a shrub maybe twenty ft away and called his "wow" and "Chicag" and, rarely, "Chicago" calls.

All the while I was recording these birds, a steady parade of airplanes flew overhead. We're obviously under a major flight path from the LA basin to points east. I recorded anyway, except then the planes were especially loud. I think I can remove a lot of this low roar when I digitize the sounds. Around 10:00 the breeze got up and the swish of wind through pine needles is harder to separate from bird calls, so I finally gave up. This location wasn't very far from the campground. Jim had taken me out there around 7:30 am and I knew I could walk back. On the way back I passed some open sagebrush, which was wholly devoid of bird life. However, I did encounter a flock of Pinyon Jays where the road passed the group campground and also saw an American Kestrel fly out of a tall snag near where the road crosses Hurkey Creek.

I think that snag is the only one in the park. All the rest of the dead trees have been cut off to three-foot stumps. I don't know if they cut them down for aesthetic or safety reasons, but if they'd only leave them 15 or 20 feet tall, they could rot away and birds could use them. That snag I had spent so much time watching also had a starling nest, and a pair of Western Bluebirds and a pair of House Wrens were hanging around it, although I didn't see any concrete evidence of nesting while I was there. That really demonstrated how important dead trees are to birds.

Nights have been cold--29degrees yesterday morning and 38degrees today--but the last two days have been warmer than earlier in the week, topping out around 70degrees instead of in the upper 50s. The cold days were also pretty windy all day long. The last two days I've had several calm hours in the morning.

Today has had intermittent cloudiness. Right after lunch the sky had thin clouds and occasional thicker ones. At exactly 1:00 pm (high noon standard time) Jim went outside the trailer. What he saw outside sent him dashing back in to get his digital camera--and me. He showed me a brilliant "rainbow" which was in a more or less horizontal line between some trees. I grabbed my film camera and both of us photographed it. Then Jim happened to look directly overhead and saw that the noonday sun had a ring around it, which was also a rainbow, but much dimmer. Apparently thin icy clouds in our atmosphere were refracting the light. He then dashed to get his Canon film camera, a camera that can be pointed directly at the sun without

Southern California and the Southern Rockies Spring and Summer, 2010

damage to one's eyes or ruining the picture, and took several shots of the ringed sun. He was able to show us the digital shots of the nearly horizontal "rainbow" at the time but it wasn't until we got home a couple of months later that we saw the film shots.



Portion of larger rainbow around sun
Hurkey Creek Co. Park, Riverside Co, CA



Smaller rainbow around sun
Hurkey Creek Co. Park, Riverside Co, CA

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

[After we came home Jim spent some time Googling various internet sites, hoping to find a one that could identify by name the two phenomena we had seen and photographed. Finally he found a site in England, Atmospheric Optics (atoptics.co.uk), that was exactly what he was looking for. He e-mailed a picture of each effect to them and received a prompt reply from Les Cowley, who identified the horizontal "rainbow" as a portion of a halo called a "circumhorizon arc" and the ring near the sun as a "22 degree halo." This website is an extremely interesting one that has pictures of all kinds of weird sunlight and moonlight aberrations and explains in detail what is causing each of them.]

Our campsite is still attracting the same customers I listed in my preceding installment, mainly the two jay species plus an occasional visit from a pair of California Quail. When Jim was sitting at the site's table he would flick out peanuts to the jays. One of the Western Scrub-Jays got to landing on the table and finally came in several times to snatch a peanut from Jim's extended fingers. (The rest of the jays only picked them up from the ground when he flicked them their way.) But the big surprise was an Acorn Woodpecker, which must have observed the action from afar; it landed on the table and walked right past Jim's peanut-holding hand and selected a peanut from a small pile of peanuts on the table that were about a foot from Jim's chin, grabbed it, and flew off. Of course, Jim loved that. Oak Titmice are around, but haven't come in for seed. I saw one foliage-gleaning while I was outside this afternoon. No doubt it's feeding young somewhere, for it flew off with a mouthful, presumably insects.

5:15 p.m., Friday, May 21, 2010

Dogwood USFS Campground, nr. Lake Arrowhead

Last Friday, May 14, we had to leave Hurkey Creek Cpgd. because all the sites were reserved for the weekend. We had planned a detour home at some point on this trip and this was the weekend for it. So we spent three nights there. I did laundry and shopping. Jim did some gardening and, especially, planted another bunch of tomato plants. We also attended a lecture Sunday afternoon that we had wanted to hear--John Avise of UCI (also former Sea and Sage board member) speaking on evolutionary biology to a Center for Inquiry meeting in Costa Mesa.

Monday morning after the rush hour traffic had passed, we drove up here to the Lake Arrowhead area. Linda Gray, one of my long-time students, lives here now and for years has been wanting us to come up and let her show us around. So we finally did. Just before we left home, Linda called and said we shouldn't come because it was terribly foggy, but we really didn't want to sit around home and figured the fog would be gone by the time we got to the grade. Unfortunately it wasn't, so we crept up that hill for many miles in really thick fog--so thick that it was difficult to see the signs for junctions, etc. Fortunately, it lifted a bit just before we got to the tricky intersection into the campground. However, it was intermittently foggy and drizzly all the rest of the day Monday and all day Tuesday.

We went into Blue Jay searching for a WiFi cafe and settled for McDonalds. The WiFi was complicated to access and the food was atrocious. Now Jim understands why I'll never let him stop at one when we're on the road.

Linda has been grooming Toby ever since we got him, so we spent Tuesday morning at her house, where I bathed him and Linda clipped him. Her house is a trim A-frame surrounded by beautiful conifers. The living level is at about mid-height in the

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

trees and she has feeders of various types outside her huge windows and sliding glass doors. It was fun to sit inside and watch the passing parade of birds. Jim brought his camera and wandered around outside the house. The main thing I wanted him to get [and he did] was Merriam's Chipmunk. The chipmunks were high profile and going in and out of a crack in a tree. Today, Friday, Linda told me there are three babies running around her deck playing follow-the-leader.

After the grooming, Linda took us to the Lake Arrowhead Country Club for lunch--excellent food. She's a member and enjoys the opportunity to do all the summer sports that she loves--golf, tennis, and swimming. She also enjoyed the opportunity to get acquainted with some of the summer residents of Lake Arrowhead. She says many of the members have another home in the desert.

Wednesday Jim remained at the trailer because he doesn't like to drive all over the place hunting for birds. He hoped to find some in our campsite now that the weather had cleared up. Linda took me to a couple of her favorite birding spots. Heap's Peak Arboretum and Nature Trail was my favorite. It's a 0.7-mile loop through forest and chaparral and passes by a little spring and seep. I didn't record anything special, but the place really has promise and I'd love to return there sometime. After that she took me down a long dirt road to a place by a creek that sometimes has interesting birds, but this time it was relatively uninteresting. Of course, it was almost noon by then.

Thursday Linda took me down SR 138 to Lake Silverwood State Recreation Area, which must be around 3500 ft in elevation, based on the vegetation, although I couldn't find a figure in the park brochure. [When I was editing this, I looked up the elevation--3355 ft. So I made a pretty good estimate.] We checked out several day-use areas for birds. The first few were duds for various reasons--lack of parking due to construction, a noisy lawn-mower, and, at the third place, a simple lack of birds. We then drove around the campground, but I decided it isn't a place to bring our trailer. Although the sites are nicely backed up into the bushes, they're too short. I think this is because the road to the lake from both directions is not recommended for longer trailers and RVs. Certainly I'd never haul it down from Lake Arrowhead and Linda says the road from there to I-15 has a stretch like that, too--steep with very sharp curves.

The final place, Oak Grove day-use area I think it's called, was the highlight of our visit to these low-elevation mountains. There was a huge colony of Acorn Woodpeckers (20 to 40 birds) engaged in what could only be called an orgy. They were flying all around, chasing one another. It was hard to figure out exactly what was going on, but there was a lot of wing fluttering by females, copulating, and incredible calling. I think rival males were competing for the opportunity to mate with the females, but much of the action was hidden behind the leaves of the fully-leafed-out Black Oaks in which the action took place. The sounds were incredible. Besides the usual "yacup-yacup" and "Woody Woodpecker" calls, there was an upslurred "braying" sound that I've only heard on a few commercial recordings and never recorded. It seemed to occur mainly when the action was most vigorous, but I'll have to look up what it actually means, for I never saw a particular bird actually doing it. It always came from somewhere up in the treetops behind foliage. Linda thinks she heard it from a bird flying from one place to another, but isn't positive the sounds came from the bird she saw. Anyway, I must have about 20 minutes of that wonderful sound. Recording conditions were wonderful, too--just a slight breeze and very little traffic and airplanes. [After we got home I looked it up in *The Birds of North America*, but it wasn't much help. The syllables they used to

Southern California and the Southern Rockies Spring and Summer, 2010

describe the sounds didn't any of them sound like what I called braying, and there were no sonograms.]

Last evening we took Linda out to dinner at a coffee shop (Bill's) in Blue Jay. It turned out that it is the other place in town that has WiFi. So Jim and I went back there this morning for breakfast--excellent--and used it. We also discovered that it was accessible out behind the place, so I went back later in the day and used it again to check a web site that just wouldn't open in the morning. (I'm planning the next leg of our trip and have been in contact with Larry Tripp, who lives near St. George, Utah. He's a former student who has moved over there and become one of the small number of superior birders in that part of the country. I see his rare birds credited regularly in *North American Birds*.) Tomorrow we have to leave this campground due to prior weekend reservations (the story of our life on this trip!) and plan to spend the entire day driving over to southwestern Utah, where we hope to get a campsite through the Memorial Day weekend. Larry has recommended a group of USFS campgrounds, some of which are "first come first served." They're only about 20 min from where he lives, and he has promised to help us find the Gray Vireo and other interesting birds.

10:15 a.m., Thursday, May 27, 2010
South Juniper USFS Cpgd., Pine Valley, UT

I haven't brought this up to date for several days because we're in a spot where the sun never quite shines fully on our solar panels and our batteries are getting 0.1 volt lower each day. Jim has hooked up the truck to the trailer and we hope that'll boost our batteries a bit. Meanwhile I'm writing this using the computer's battery and hoping it'll last.

We left Lake Arrowhead around 7:30 a.m. on Sat., May 22. There was a little fog at first, but nothing like what we encountered on our way up. It was a very cool day for the Mojave Desert, with a high of only 82degrees in Mesquite, NV, where we spent the night. We had thought we might drive all the way to Larry's home in Veyo, a little ways beyond St. George, but Jim was tired, so we stopped. We ended up in a brightly lit, but otherwise spacious RV park behind the Casa Blanca Resort & Casino. Of course, they had it arranged so Jim had to traipse in the front door and all the way across the smoky casino to find the registration desk.

That evening Jim suggested we eat at one of the casino's restaurants and I discovered one of them had a buffet, which Jim loves. Although the casino was smoky, the restaurant was not, and the buffet was very good. Lots of nice shrimp, crab legs, prime rib, plus a huge assortment of salads, other entrees, desserts, etc., for \$14.95. I'm afraid we ate our money's worth! Best of all, I didn't detect any garlic in anything I took.

The only drawback to the place was that the promised WiFi just didn't work, and we tried it several places around the grounds.

Sunday morning, May 23, we didn't want to get started too early, since we didn't have much farther to drive. I defrosted the refrigerator, which really needed it, and we got on the road around 10:00. After losing an hour when we crossed the border into Utah, it was close to noon when we pulled into Larry's place in Veyo, a semi-rural community on SR 18 between St. George and Enterprise. He was kind enough to let me access my email and check the weather forecast for the next ten days on his computer. He also took me on a tour of his general area and showed me where he has

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

recently seen Gray Vireos--only a half-mile from his house! He also showed me a number other birding spots that he likes.

But we were getting hungry and anxious to get a campsite. He recommended the Pine Valley area, which is about 9 miles north and 12 miles east of Veyo. It has a number of USFS campgrounds. We thought we'd have no trouble finding a site, but one entire campground had a sign, "Not Suitable for Trailers," at the entrance, and the other two had lots and lots of double and triple sites. Most of them were very shady, and we need sun for our solar panels. We selected a site that showed promise of being sort of sunny, but it is pretty short and we had to back all the way into it to get level. And right above the solar panels is a flat spray of Ponderosa Pine foliage, so we get only filtered sunlight at best. Most places, even if it's only a little while, if we get some full sun, our batteries charge up completely.

During our days here, each morning the voltage has been just a little lower than it was the preceding day at the same time, so we've been afraid we wouldn't last the eight days we're going to stay here. To be on the safe side, Jim plugged the truck and trailer together and ran the truck engine for 30 minutes. After he unplugged, we discovered the voltage had jumped from 12.1 to 12.7 volts. What a relief that it works. (Before we got our new solar panels, this fix was apparently out of order--along with a lot of other things. Our old system never did work right.)

Pine Valley is a really beautiful camping area, despite the limited sites. [Later we discovered another camping loop with large site and that they are building still another.] From our windows we can see up the slope to the beautiful snow-covered Pine Valley Mtns., and down the slope to a rapidly flowing creek, which I think is the Santa Clara River. It's pretty, but it's noise pretty much puts me out of the bird-sound-recording business--and there doesn't seem to be much of any place I can walk and get away from it.

The weather the first two days was very cold, and we even had a snow shower starting just before dark on Sunday night. The next morning, there was a dusting of it on all the plants, but it melted when it struck rocks or the road. Of course, I had to take a lot of pictures of the truck coated with snow, as well as the trees and shrubs.



Snowy campsite
Pine Valley, UT

Southern California and the Southern Rockies Spring and Summer, 2010

The snow was all melted by mid-morning. The day was mostly cloudy and very cold--not above the mid-40s. We stayed inside most of the time, watching the Black-chinned (male and female) and Broad-tailed (female only) hummingbirds, which picked up on Jim's syrup feeder as soon as he put it out. We were particularly enthralled by the way the male Black-chin courted the female while she was crouched *on the ground*. I didn't realize that hummers perched on the ground.

Tuesday morning, May 25, I took my recording gear and walked up a road near the campground to where there are some summer homes and a trailhead. I hoped to get away from the creek noise by going uphill, but I mostly got away from the birds, too. While the creek was still really loud, I saw a probable Gray Flycatcher (dropped its tail a lot) and recorded its "whit" calls. But shortly afterwards I heard the song of a Dusky (could have been Hammond's, but habitat is wrong), so either both species are here or I was wrong about the Gray. Both Gray and Dusky give "whit" calls. I'll have to compare what I recorded with known calls of each species to be sure. Unfortunately I didn't hear the Gray song, which is what I really wanted.

The weather forecast I copied off the internet at Larry's house predicted strong wind on Wed. through Friday, and it got a head start on Tuesday afternoon. That has really put a damper on our birding. Yesterday morning, Wed., May 26, rather than sit in the trailer, we decided to drive one of the roads Larry recommended. It started out near Pine Valley and went north to a small community of Pinto. There we picked up another road that went west to SR 18. It ascended up into the pinyon-juniper habitat, then down along the edge of a grassy valley and back up again. I got out and walked several short stretches and, despite the wind, detected several birds, including Virginia's Warbler. I had Jim catch up with me because I had seen an unusual chipmunk scurry into a brush pile beside the road. Jim parked there, didn't see the chipmunk, but succeeded in getting a nice digital image of a male Mountain Bluebird.



Mountain Bluebird
North of Pine Valley, UT

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

Meanwhile, I was seeing the Virginia's Warbler in the top of the willows below the road. When the wind stops, we definitely plan to go back to that area. (Later I looked up the chipmunk and it's a Cliff Chipmunk. We have Uintah Chipmunks in our campsite in the pines.)

The 12-mile-long road to Pinto became narrower and narrower, but the 8-mile road from there to the highway was nice and wide, but horribly washboarded. Both are dirt roads. I had brought my insulated bag, so we drove north 8 miles to the town of Enterprise, where I bought a few groceries.

On our way back south, we stopped at the memorial to the pioneers who were slaughtered in the infamous Mountain Meadows Massacre of 1857. I really wanted to see how Utah and/or the Mormon Church interpreted this disgraceful incident in their history. (A caravan of pioneers headed for California from Arkansas was slaughtered by a group of Mormons and/or Indians--sign said both. To make matters worse, after slaughtering some of them, they told the rest they'd have safe passage back to Cedar City, then led them a few at a time away from the rest and systematically slaughtered them, too. Only a few children under the age of 7 were spared. Most of them were sent back to Arkansas, and a couple may have stayed in Utah and been adopted.) It wasn't until 1990 that they put up a suitable monument, both at the place where most of the people were hurriedly buried and at the overview near the highway. The interpretive signs seemed accurate as far as they went, but they didn't really get into the controversy as to whether the massacre was directed by John D. Lee acting alone or under the instructions of Brigham Young himself. (In fact, none of the names of those responsible were given, although all the names of the people massacred were there.) I've read elsewhere that there is some evidence of Young's complicity. It also didn't mention that Lee was executed several years (I think) later for the massacre, but that no one else suffered any consequences. Many think Lee was a scapegoat and that his conviction was a way of sparing the entire Mormon Church from blame.

At the grave site, there were a couple of sprays of plastic flowers. One had been placed there by descendants of one of the families killed--perhaps descendants of one of those young children who had been spared.

This morning the wind was still howling, so we just went for a drive into Veyo to the post office and also to take a look at the Baker Dam Reservoir campground, where we will probably go when we leave here. It's very close to the place Larry showed me for Gray Vireo, and right on the access road to the campground I saw similar habitat, so they may be there.

Jim's bird-feeding operation has been slow to take off, but every day it seems we get another species. Black-headed Grosbeaks became our first regular customers, then yesterday we got a female-type Cassin's Finch. When we came back this morning there was a male, too. A Chipping Sparrow wanders through occasionally, but I have yet to see it recognize that it's walking in birdseed. A Western Tanager female took a drink once, as did a White-breasted Nuthatch. One morning when I raised the blinds a Mule Deer was feeding on birdseed and magic meal from the log. We see up to eight female and young deer from time to time and one of the females is huge. There are supposed to be Red Crossbills and Grace's Warblers here, but I have yet to see one.

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

9:15 p.m., Sunday, May 30, 2010
South Juniper USFS Cpgd., Pine Valley, UT

Friday, May 28, was a total waste. The wind blew all day long and we didn't feel like exploring any other places, so we just sat in the trailer. It was nice and sunny, so we didn't have to use any of our precious electricity, though. We did go down to the community of Pine Valley for lunch at an attractive looking restaurant we'd seen while driving by--the only one on the north side of the road. It was very good--and we were happy to discover it had WiFi. We went back several times before our stay was over there. They were very gracious even when we didn't eat there.

Finally, on Saturday, May 29, we awoke to a wonderful stillness. We left a note to Larry, who had said he'd try to drop by on the weekend, and set off to try to relocate the Mountain Bluebird and Virginia's Warbler that we'd found the other day on the road from Pine Valley to Pinto. To our great disappointment, there was a strong, cold north wind blowing through the pass where the birds had been. I stood in the shelter of a juniper for 15-30 minutes, but saw nothing but a Song Sparrow. Jim sat in the truck by the brush pile the bluebird had perched on and saw nothing. So we drove back slowly. I got out and walked a few stretches, but there was wind everywhere and no birds.

The wind earlier in the week had been from the west and it blew right up our west-facing canyon, but this north wind didn't get up there, hence the calm morning.

When we were almost back to the paved road, we met Larry, who had found my note. I hopped in with him and Jim went off to do his email at the restaurant. Larry took me to a most unprepossessing place by the gravel pit, but there we found both Grace's and Virginia's Warblers. I got some sound from each. It was at the mouth of the canyon, so there was some wind, and also some water sounds from a nearby creek.

Then he showed me a good dirt road that parallels the main road up the canyon. It runs from beside the equestrian campground and comes out just past the Pines campground. (We had looked at it when we came earlier in the week, but it had a "Trailers Not Recommended" sign at the entrance. We drove through it without the trailer later in the week and discovered why--and also that it was very shady.)

Today, Sunday, May 30, it was really and truly calm most of the morning. Finally, after a week of waiting, I could do some recording. We drove up the dirt road to its crest just past the Pines Campground and I got out and walked the rest of the way, while Jim paced me in the truck. There were lots of birds, especially along the first part of the route. Some were species I already have lots of sounds from, like Green-tailed Towhee, Warbling and Plumbeous vireos, etc. But the highlight of the morning was an outstanding recording of a Grace's Warbler. I was standing in a thicket between some pines and the little thing flew out and landed briefly on the ground only six feet away from me, then hopped up in a tree only twelve feet away and sang briefly. Most of my recordings were from perhaps 25 feet, but that's good, too.

When we got to the mouth of the canyon, we drove over to the gravel pit, but found it to be just as windy there as yesterday. I got a few more so-so songs from that Grace's Warbler and heard the Virginia's a couple of times far up the hillside. Tomorrow morning I plan to go there first thing.

Jim's feeding station added a couple of Pine Siskins on Thursday and a Mourning Dove Friday, but the Black-headed Grosbeaks have left. Nothing new came Saturday or Sunday.

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

Last evening after dinner a group of four or five children, the oldest being a girl of around 15, and ranging down from there in age to maybe 5 or 6 years old, came by the trailer and knocked on the door. While out for a walk, they had picked up a hummingbird in the middle of the road. They thought it was a baby. Although they were camping in a different campground, they had seen our hummingbird feeder when they were scouting for a site and hoped we'd know what they should do for it. My heart sank, for I really didn't think there was much they could do. A boy about age 12 had picked it up and was holding it cupped in his two hands. I asked to see it, so he opened his hand carefully and in the short glimpse I had I could see it was an adult female Black-chinned. Then it surprised us all by suddenly flying off. That was a relief, and I told them that it had probably collided with something and been stunned. They thought it was caught in something, which kept it from flying. Whatever the reason, I suspect the warmth of the boy's hands had revived it, so it all had a happy ending. The kids stayed around for some time afterwards, the two older ones, especially the girl, asking lots of questions about hummingbirds, the reason for our water drip, etc. I told them that we photographed and recorded birds, so they wanted to know what sounds hummers make. Etc. I was really impressed with those youngsters!

9:45 p.m., Tuesday, June 1, 2010
Baker Reservoir BLM Cpgd, N of Veyo, UT

Although it seems this is being written very late, we're really still living on Pacific Time. The sun rises late and sets late, and it's too nice sitting outdoors to fix dinner much before 8:00 or 8:30. Tonight the wind didn't abate until around then, and I had decided to grill hamburgers, but we didn't eat much earlier last night because neither of us wanted to walk Toby until the cool of the evening had set in--and it had been 84degrees.

Yesterday morning, May 31, was Memorial Day. We stayed in our Pine Valley Campground until after lunch because we didn't want to get to our new place, only 20 miles away, before those campers had left, and I knew check-out time was 2:00 pm.

We returned to the gravel pit area where I had found both Grace's and Virginia's warblers with Larry. This time I could only hear Grace's. I recorded it, played it back, and it came in closer for me to record again better. Then I played that back a few more times and with very little messing around, the bird got the idea that it was supposed to pose for the photographer. I think Jim got some pretty nice pictures, although they're all pretty much a front view of the body, but with the head held at various positions.

Southern California and the Southern Rockies Spring and Summer, 2010



Grace's Warbler
Pine Valley, UT

We were pretty pleased with this because Jim had only photographed that warbler once before. (It was near Show Low, AZ, and he didn't know what he had photographed until we got the slides back at the end of the trip and I identified the bird. Jim doesn't pay much attention to field marks when he's busy trying to get photos, because he knows he--rather, I--will figure it out from them.)

We left that campground right after lunch--and the day immediately started to go downhill. We hadn't driven more than about a quarter of a mile when the camp host for another campground waved us to stop. It turned out Jim had forgotten to raise one of the trailer jacks that keep it from bouncing around when we're inside. After a bit of dragging it back and forth with the direction of the kind host, he got it straight enough to raise, but it's ruined. He has another one at home, but didn't bring it, so we'll have to look for an RV supply store in St. George tomorrow.

The dump station is 5.2 miles down the road from the camping area--mileage supplied by our camp host. Of course, we had to stop there. After we left it, Jim discovered he didn't have his dark glasses on. When we got a chance, which wasn't right away, we stopped and looked all over for them. Jim figured they must have dropped out of his pocket when he was dumping. I knew he had had them on before that because he has to take them off to read the odometer (they're Polaroid). The dump station is sort of back in the junipers and, according to the camp host, "Someone ran into the sign a couple of years ago and it hasn't been replaced." We hoped he hadn't dropped those prescription glasses where someone would run over or step on them. But we were in luck, for as soon as he got out of the truck at the station, someone handed him the glasses. The vehicle that was dumping had approached the station from the opposite direction, and I think they'd seen us parked beside the road and, when we appeared, knew exactly why we had come back. So that misadventure turned out all right, except that we were disappointed that the dump station didn't have any potable water for us to fill our empty tank.

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

We continued on to our destination. When we pulled up to the self-registration booth, I immediately caught sight of the sign "Water Not Supplied." We had to have water if we were to stay there. We had an empty propane tank, and I'd seen a sign in Veyo five miles farther that said a gas station/trailer park had it. But when we got there, it turned out it only had those exchangeable cylinders and couldn't fill ours. They let us fill our water tank, though, and Jim hoisted our other propane tank and it still seemed pretty heavy, so we figured we'd have no trouble for the two or three days we planned to stay at Baker Reservoir.

We returned to the campground and found a nice site among the junipers with a beautiful view of the mountains in the distance. It's a double site, but it only cost us \$6 a night with our Golden Age Pass. It would have been only \$3 for a single, but the extremely friendly camp hostess told us it was OK to occupy the double because she didn't expect very many people during the week.

Jim put out his bird feeding and watering concession, but all we've had are lots of Black-chinned Hummingbirds at the syrup and an occasional visit from a Rock Squirrel. I'd really been hoping for the Woodhouse's form of the Western Scrub-Jay, which some think should be a separate species from our California ones. I also wanted the Juniper Titmouse. I've heard both birds in the area once in a great while, but they haven't come close enough for me even to see them. Oh, I forgot to mention that Jim got some nice photos of the jay at the gravel pit not far from where he photographed the Grace's Warbler, but I have yet to get any recordings. They seem to be much more quiet and secretive than the California ones, although the camp hostess says they come to her site when she puts out bread crumbs.

There is a camp host, too, but we think the wife does most of the work. She's Hispanic and a retired teachers' assistant from the San Diego schools, where she did a lot of translating, especially between teachers and parents. Her husband is a retired navy man. He's friendly, but she's *really* friendly. This afternoon she came by our site and chatted for at least half an hour.

The main bird we came here for was the Gray Vireo. Larry Tripp had showed me exactly where to find them--only a half-mile from his home and right across the highway from where he works at his brother's motorcycle parts manufacturing plant. This morning we went to the area with a Stokes recording to play. I got out of the truck and, after hearing nothing, tried it. After just one playing the bird flew right in and started to sing. So Jim got out with his camera and I tried playing the recording in various locations so as to get the bird to perch at the right angle from the sun and not hidden in foliage. We were fairly successful with that bird, but after a while it quit responding to the tape.

So we drove another hundred yards on up the road and found another one, which was even more cooperative. In fact the best shots were of the bird perched right over my head.

Southern California and the Southern Rockies Spring and Summer, 2010



Gray Vireo
Veyo, UT

I got great recordings and Jim feels the photos will also be excellent, so we were pretty excited. This second bird responded better to playback of its own voice than it did to the commercial recording of some other bird. I can't remember if the first one did, too, but this was not the first time I've had that experience.

The Gray Vireo was a life bird for Jim, since he only counts birds he photographs. The only other time I had recorded it was at Beaver Dam Summit (also in this part of Utah) many years ago. That bird would do nothing but fly-bys, always landing too far away for pictures. As I said above, these birds perched extremely close, sometimes too close, as, for example when it perched right above Jim's head. That's not a problem for recording, but it definitely is for photography!

We came back to the campground and in the afternoon I heard a Gray Vireo right from the campsite singing for about a minute. I didn't try to do anything with it because by then the wind had gotten up. The morning had been almost totally calm.

After my success with the Gray Vireo, I decided to try the commercial recording of the Juniper Titmouse. To my surprise, after I played the song inside the trailer to find out exactly what it sounds like, I got a response from a bird about 100 ft away outside. Even though the wind had gotten up by then, I decided to try to record it, but when I got my recording gear on and played that recording outside, I could get no response. I did hear a bird give exactly two songs once more in the middle of the afternoon, but that was all. Tomorrow morning I intend to try again.

9:30 a.m., Saturday, June 5, 2010 Kaibab CampeRVillage, Jacob Lake, AZ

We're back on standard time here in Arizona, so it's actually 10:30 on the Utah time we've been living on.

Wednesday, June 2, I got up early and made some pancake batter to set in the refrigerator, but didn't even bother to make the bed. Then I set out with my Stokes tape

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

of the Juniper Titmouse, hoping to wake one up, so I could record it. I wandered around the camp loop, then into the riparian area near a ditch that seems to bypass the reservoir. I played the tape several times, but got no response. Then, some time after I'd given up on it, I heard one that sounded just like the tape. He changed to a different song after a while, and I recorded it. I brought him closer with a replay of *his* song. Just as with the Gray Vireo the day before, the playback of the actual bird's song worked much better than the commercial recording. The recordings were from pretty close to the bird, so should be fairly good. They're not going to be super, though, because of the highway noise from one direction and the heavy flow of water over the spillway of the dam down by the reservoir. But, they are my first recordings of that bird, so I'm pretty happy.

After a late breakfast, we decided we'd done all we could in this part of Utah--and had achieved two of my major goals for this trip. Besides, the forecast was for much hotter weather, and the preceding day had been pretty warm. So we hooked up and drove down to St. George, got the broken jack replaced, did some major grocery shopping, and bought propane. It was about noon when we left town--and 88degrees. Since we had eaten a big breakfast late, we decided to drive a ways and gain some altitude and cooler weather before eating lunch. We stopped in Hilldale, Utah, one of the twin towns on the border with Arizona (the other is Colorado City), that are the home of the notorious fundamentalist, polygamist Mormon sect. (Warren Jeffs was convicted of sexual crimes against minors by forcing them to wed older men against their will, etc.) The cafe was called the Merry Wives Cafe, with a cute sign out front. We had planned to eat inside, but it was full, so we took our sandwiches out to the trailer to eat--excellent club sandwiches--full of meat and cheese and with slices of cucumber added, something I really liked and must remember. It also came with outstanding French fries. We ate about half of each, saved the fries for dinner and the sandwiches for the next day. The young woman/girl who took our order was dressed in the old-fashioned way with her long hair wrapped around her head. Jim, who waited inside for the food to be fixed, said many of the customers in the cafe were in the same garb.

It was fairly pleasant to eat in the trailer, for the temperature was only 82 degrees and there was a brisk breeze. Still it was nice to climb still higher and get up into the Midmountain Forest (Ponderosa Pines) of the Kaibab Plateau. The CampeRVillage RV Park is about a half-mile from the junction of the main east-west highway (US 89Alt) and the spur road that goes south to the North Rim of the Grand Canyon. Access is via a gravel road. The park is set in the pines, although the sites are rather bare. We got a really nice, wide site that backs up to the natural forest, interrupted only by the continuation of that gravel road. Jim set up his feeding station and for at least 24 hours all we had were Uintah Chipmunks, which he had photographed well in Utah. We were happy we had signed up for only two nights.

Thursday, June 3, we took a picnic lunch--the rest of our Mormon sandwiches--and headed for the North Rim of the Grand Canyon. I went into the visitors center while Jim hiked down the steep, quarter-mile paved trail to Bright Angel Point. Later, I considered following him, but the slant was hard on my knees and the sheer dropoffs here and there exacerbated my acrophobia, so I didn't go very far. We then drove out to Pt. Imperial, where we took in the view and ate our lunches. We didn't go out to Cape Royal, which would have been 15 miles farther on a steep, narrow winding road. Since we'd been there before, Jim didn't want to go again, and I really didn't object.

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

On our way we checked out the DeMotte USFS campground, which is closer to the canyon than where we're staying, but really didn't like it. It's pretty open because they've removed a lot of trees in order to cram the sites close together. It's up higher--in the spruce/fir area, rather than the Ponderosas, and I even heard a Williamson's Sapsucker drumming right in the campground while we were there. Jim couldn't see any sites where he could put up a feeding station very well. It doesn't take reservations, so we could probably find a site if we time our arrival right.

The highway from Jacob Lake to the Grand Canyon is very good. It starts out in the Ponderosa Pine forest, then passes through several miles of burn area from the "Outlet Fire," a management fire that got out of control. Then it ascends into the Upper Montane Forest (spruce/fir) for many miles. This is interspersed with large expanses of meadow with occasional small pothole lakes. These resulted from the collapse of limestone caves into sinkholes. There are no streams or rivers on the Kaibab Plateau. All the water comes from snowmelt. (The road is usually closed from sometime in Oct. until mid-May). According to one of the roadside interpretive signs, the forest is gradually encroaching on the meadows. One interpretive sign explained in detail how this process works. Here is the text:

MAINTAINING MOUNTAIN MEADOWS

Forest seems to be on the march here, invading this meadow at the rate of one foot per year, but the Outlet Fire in spring, 2000, may have slowed the forest's advance. Before the fire burned this area, forest was encroaching on better-drained, drier soils along the edge of the meadow. The invading trees dry out the soil even more, making it harder for meadow plants to compete. Next tree saplings begin to flourish in the new shade of these larger trees. And then, as trees drop their acidic needles, the soil becomes less alkaline than meadow plants require. Excluding fire from this ecosystem helped trees invade the meadow.

Many factors create and maintain natural open meadows. Deer graze them. Small mammals dig for shelter and food. Melting snow and rain make it too wet for tree seeds to germinate. Tree seedlings may not tolerate full exposure to sunlight. Natural soil toxins and the high alkaline content of meadow soils keep most woody plants out and some seedlings--like Ponderosa Pine seedlings--simply can't compete with well established grasses.

Predators, such as Mountain Lions, Coyotes, foxes, and many birds of prey, often hunt where meadows and forests converge. Quaking Aspens may reproduce quickly after fires, such as the Outlet Fire.

Just before the brink of the canyon, the road descends into mostly Ponderosa Pines again, but still with a component of spruce/fir. I didn't try to ID the trees, but think there are some true firs, such as White Firs, as well as the pseudo-firs known as Douglas-Firs. I don't know what kind of spruces there are. [Later: almost certainly Engelmann Spruce.]

One of my main reasons for coming to the North Rim of the Grand Canyon was to try to find a Kaibab Squirrel for Jim to photograph. It's a subspecies of Abert's Squirrel (the tassel-eared animal) that is only found there. It's tassel-eared like the rest, but it is very dark gray, even blacker on the underparts (unusual reverse countershading), but with its beautiful bushy tail almost totally white--an incredibly beautiful animal. There's a little bit of dark reddish brown down the middle of the back.

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

We didn't see any at the canyon, but when I was sitting outside the trailer in the late afternoon, I saw one climb down the trunk of a tall Ponderosa and scamper off! We didn't have to get them at the canyon; they're right here! Jim went over to the office to find out if anyone was feeding them and found himself face to face with the target animal at ten feet hanging head-down from a tree trunk adjacent to the office--and he hadn't brought his camera. Once inside the office, he learned that an employee whose trailer is right next to the office puts out dog food every morning and that the squirrels usually scratch on the door at 6:30. We had been planning to leave on Friday morning, June 4, either to go on east or to find a "dispersed" campsite out in the forest by ourselves. (I'd even inquired at the USFS office where a good place might be.) But we thought we might have a better chance at a half-domesticated one right here. Besides, we really like our site, and having full hookups for a change is a nice luxury. So Jim went in and paid for two more nights--through the weekend. (The park seemed to be full last night, Friday, but a lot of people have left this morning, so I think we're dealing more with long-term vacationers doing the national parks of the west, rather than weekenders.)

Yesterday morning, Friday, June 4, Jim was on the picnic table over by the office before 6:30 waiting for the Kaibab Squirrel to show. He drank a cup of coffee, but didn't take time for breakfast. He was still there at 9:00 when I saw one climb down a tree near the trailer. I watched it disappear behind the rear of the trailer and hoped it was heading for the food at the office, but much to my astonishment, it came into *our* campsite. I quickly radioed Jim and he came back and shot a lot of digital images, but by the time he switched to film, the squirrel had left. I was really disappointed, for I much prefer slides to digital. It didn't come back the rest of the day, perhaps because the campground was really busy. (Jim never did eat breakfast, but he did take time for lunch.)

I've been sitting outside all afternoon every day and gradually more and more species have been turning up. In addition to the Uintah Chipmunk and the Kaibab Squirrel, we're getting an extremely dull-colored Golden-mantled Ground Squirrel. It has almost no gold, and its lateral stripes are all gray--no black as on those found farther north and west. I'm really happy that Jim is getting photos of it, for we only have pictures of the bright ones--and plenty of them!

The birds are gradually finding the food and, especially, the water. The birds that have come in only for water include Western Bluebird, Pygmy Nuthatch, Western Tanager, and even Cassin's Finch. That bird usually gobbles up birdseed, but not here. The male and female come down together or separately, drink water, and leave. The Bluebirds (male and/or female) invariably come in at the same time as the Pygmy Nuthatches, reminding me of the way the Oak Titmouse and Pygmy Nuthatches came and went together in the Garner Valley near Idyllwild. A single "Gray-headed" Dark-eyed Junco comes in frequently for birdseed and water. Jim saw a White-breasted Nuthatch over by the office.

This morning, Saturday, June 5, we got up early and ate breakfast. Then I set out on a long walk on a really nice trail through the forest that runs a mile from the RV park to the businesses at the junction of the two highways. There were lots of birds flying about and singing, and at the beginning there was no wind. After that it was intermittent. I got songs from several more Grace's Warblers; the forest was full of them. I also got some music from Plumbeous Vireos. I discovered one place where there were some dead trees and Western Bluebirds and Pygmy Nuthatches were in the

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

vicinity both when I was coming and going, but I never saw one enter any of the holes in the trees. I think they're probably incubating now, so there's not much coming and going necessary.

Around 9:00 Jim called me on the radio to report that the Kaibab Squirrel had arrived in our campsite. After that I heard no more from him. I think it was because I disappeared down the far side of a rise; when I got back he told me he'd tried to contact me to report that he'd really gotten the animal well on film this time--2 rolls worth! Better yet, it came back and has been here most of the time I've been writing this up.



Abert's Squirrel (Kaibab form)
Jacob Lake, AZ

Jim puts the birdseed thickest near his feeding log, and we've been entertained by the Kaibab Squirrel chasing away all the chipmunks, as well as the junco. Right now, the chipmunks are keeping their distance, but they're there, ready to sneak in when the squirrel's back is turned.

Maybe the reason the squirrel has been around so much is that the campground really cleared out this morning--amazing for a Sat. The two sites next to us are empty.

I don't know how many rolls of squirrel shots Jim has now, but he's still at it.

9:15 p.m., Wednesday, June 9, 2010 **Mavreeso USFS Campground, San Juan NF, CO**

At 12:30 a.m. Sunday morning, the site two down from us at Jacob Lake became no longer empty. A rental motor home arrived noisily and, of course, had trouble backing into that rather narrow site bordered by two trees. But they had even more trouble unfurling their tightly coiled water hose, hooking up their sewer and plugging in their electricity. Two men discussed the problem, whatever it was, in loud voices for a long time. I can see why they might want to plug in the electricity, but why couldn't the other two things wait until morning? I'm sure all they were going to do then was to go to bed and these things have holding tanks! I was happy to be able to complain about them to the man who was driving around checking all the sites to be sure they were paid guests. He said the people would definitely be spoken to about their behavior.

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

We've really been impressed by how well run this campground is. They have lots of trash cans and empty them regularly. One afternoon we put a large box beside one of the trash cans and it was gone in a couple of hours. The man who escorts people to their sites and helps them fit their rigs in between the trees and rocks is a genius. We were sorry to leave that beautiful place with its towering Ponderosa Pines, its beautiful squirrels, its variety of birds, and its friendly, capable staff.

Sunday, June 6, was a day of driving about 315 miles. We went east across the scorching desert, through Navajo land most of the time. The roads were acceptable, except near the end where they became rough, and it was a nice clear day, so we could enjoy the scenery, where there was any. We stopped at a forgettable roadside cafe for lunch and ate it in the truck with the A/C on, for by then it was approaching the 99degrees high we experienced a bit later.

After descending from the Kaibab Plateau, the drive was desert until just before we got to Cortez, Colorado. I had picked out an RV park in Dolores north of there because that town is about 700 ft higher than Cortez. I hoped it would be cooler, and it was; elevation was about 7,000 ft. We stayed three nights at the Dolores River RV Park and really liked it. We signed up for one night at first, but soon decided to stay for three. The front part is a typical park with pull-through sites, but many of them have trees. Along the back are sites that back up to a pond produced by diverting the Dolores River, which is just beyond the ponds. We were fortunate to get the end site in the row, next to one of the park roads. Across the road and a couple of sites down was the next trailer. All the sites on the back row are nicely shaded by lots of tall Narrowleaf Cottonwoods, and most seem to be occupied by people there for the summer, based on all the potted plants and decorative items they have around their RVs.

It didn't take us long to discover that there were birds everywhere in that campground. I ended up with a list of 31 species. Highlights were Cordilleran Flycatcher and Evening Grosbeak. There must have been at least twenty Evening Grosbeaks coming to feeders at the trailer about 3 sites away across the little road. Those people were obviously there for the season, for they had huge containers of flowers in their site and lots of seed and syrup feeders out. One afternoon I took my chair over to the site next to theirs in order to record the Evening Grosbeaks, which staged in the cottonwoods overhead and did their two types of calls--a strong whistle and a reedy trill. (These birds rarely, if ever, sing. If they do have a song, it's just a short, soft thing between mates, but authorities differ on whether they have a song at all and there are no known recordings of it.)

The people were away when I went over there, but soon came back in their truck. When they got back, I said hello and explained that I was recording the birds that were coming to their feeders. The man said, "How many did you count?" I guess he thought that I was making a record of the species instead of recording their sounds. I explained about my microphone, but he just walked off before I could finish what I was saying. The woman paid no attention to me at all. Furthermore, she chose the next hour to "mow" the grass in her site, blade by blade, with a string trimmer. I don't know why they were so grumpy. I certainly had every right to sit in that vacant site 40 ft from theirs. Anyway, I waited her out and pretty soon they drove off again in their truck, and I resumed recording those Evening Grosbeaks. Some of the birds were very close to my microphone. I hope the sounds will be good and that I'll be able to delete some of the sounds of the river, the wind in the cottonwoods, and the other birds (see below). The sharp whistled call (termed the "loud flight call," although it's not necessarily given in

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

flight) of the Evening Grosbeak varies geographically and I'll be interested to compare what I got here with the other two types I have, recorded in the northern Sierra Nevada near Yuba Pass and in the North Cascades of Washington.

I had hoped Jim would be able to get photos of the birds swarming all over their feeders, but after the way they acted, we decided not to ask them. The birds never came to our birdseed. In fact, the only bird we got was a single Red-winged Blackbird. I saw Cassin's Finches, Pine Siskins, and Chipping Sparrows at those people's feeders, too, but we have plenty of shots of them.

I sat outside lots of the time we were in that RV park, facing different directions and watching the behavior of different birds. Other high-profile species included American Robin (first singer in morning, last at night), a Warbling Vireo that sang incessantly until I wanted to wring its neck, a Yellow Warbler that was almost as bad, a House Wren that I was told was nesting in the trailer hitch of a fifth-wheel a few sites away from us, a White-breasted Nuthatch and a Red-naped Sapsucker that sometimes foraged on the trunks of trees less than ten feet from me, and also a couple of less welcome species, Eurasian Collared-Dove and Brown-headed Cowbird. Curiously enough, there were no orioles, although the habitat looked perfect.

While in that area, I also did some necessary chores like getting caught up on our email (we had a WiFi signal that reached the trailer--the first on this trip), laundry (wonderful laundry room and very reasonable price), defrosting refrigerator, and shopping in the Cortez Wal-Mart. We did the latter after eating dinner one night in a Mexican restaurant we'd spotted on our way up. I forget its name, but it's on the northeast corner of the main east-west highway and SR 145 that goes to Dolores. Food was very good and the decor was very elaborate and gaudy. We discovered from the menu that they have a number of other locations in Colorado and New Mexico.

Monday morning, June 7, we drove up SR 145, then cut off on a road that leads to two USFS campgrounds. We always like to scout those things before dragging our trailer up some iffy road. One of them was listed in Trailer Life Guide, but we liked the other one, Mavreeso, better. Both have a few electrical sites and do not take reservations--our kind of place. We met the hosts, who used to live in Huntington Beach, and liked them very much; they have a huge number of hummingbird feeders around their trailer and are attracting a horde of Broad-tailed Hummingbirds. They don't know a lot about birds, as we discovered when they described a bird, which we identified for them as an Evening Grosbeak. We told them we'd be back Wednesday. They didn't think anyone would arrive in the interim.

Today, Wed., June 9, we hauled the trailer the 20 miles or so up to the Mavreeso Campground. One of the two sites we'd liked best was occupied, so we took the other one. We had no sooner gotten parked when I looked on the ground under the tall conifers and discovered it was absolutely covered with cones. At first I thought they were Douglas-Firs, but I couldn't see any snake-tongue-like bracts on them. They had to be Blue Spruce. When we were in Colorado two years ago, we (or rather, I, for Jim is uninterested in trees) searched all over for a campground set in Blue Spruce. These trees like narrow, moist canyons at moderate elevation. That's where we are, and the West Dolores River runs full and fairly loud about 50 ft from our trailer. We're at an elevation of 7,600 feet and in a heavily forested, steep-walled canyon. There are a few Narrowleaf Cottonwoods mixed in with the Blue Spruce on the forest floor.

The canyon is oriented east-west, so it gets June sun most of the day. I suspect it gets very little sun in the winter. I had thought it might be too shady to attract many

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

birds, but there are actually a fair number flitting about. Best is a Hammond's Flycatcher, which perches nice and low on dead foliage in the trees. Jim got a few shots of it and I hope he can get some more. We signed up for four nights--only \$12.50 a night with electricity and Golden Age pass.

So far only the hummingbirds have found our feeding station, but sometimes we have to wait a while for action.

This trip has been remarkably free of pesky insects, not even many flies. At Dolores River RV Park we'd get a few mosquitoes if we stayed out in the evening or if we walked back into grassy "dogwalk" that runs beside a very still pond. One day a truck drove through the park with a spray nozzle on the rear, spraying for mosquitoes, so I guess that's why we weren't bothered by them.

The only insects that turned out to be a problem were some largish gnats (or whatever) that were all around us when we were photographing the Gray Vireos near Veyo. It didn't occur to us that they might bite, but they were so pesky that I had Jim bring me the can of DEET when he went back to the truck for something. But that evening we began to see tiny red spots here and there on our skin. A couple of days later they had become big, itchy welts. I had a line of them across my forehead right under where my hat band comes and also some around my waist band and on my ankles. They bothered us for over a week and Jim still has a big itchy welt on his arm that he thinks dates from that day, but must be from a different species, for all his other ones have gone away.

4:45 p.m., Friday, June 11, 2010
Mavreeso USFS Campground, San Juan NF, CO

We just had our first thunderstorm of the trip (I think). At least it's the first one in a long time. Jim had just finished straightening up the jumble of stuff in the truck and putting away the chairs, etc., when it hit. Good timing! It's over now and brightening up. He bought a 50-lb bag of birdseed at WalMart the other day, planning to give it to the hosts in our campground when we left. We didn't give it to them when we arrived, hoping to lure all the seed-eaters to our site while we're here. Unfortunately the only seed-eaters we've attracted are about four Golden-mantled Ground Squirrels; no birds. I hear Steller's Jays, Pine Siskins, and Song and Lincoln's sparrows, but they're apparently reluctant to leave their tenuously established territories.

Yesterday, Thursday, June 10, we stayed in the campground and I explored it thoroughly. Jim tried to photograph the Hammond's Flycatcher that likes to forage from the trees in our site, especially a small Narrow-leafed Cottonwood with a scraggly bottom and lots of nice perches. He says he got off a few more shots, but would like to get more.

I wandered the grounds and recorded a few sounds, but the wind in the trees and the rush of the creek prevented any sounds from being very good. I hope I'll be able to edit the sounds and remove some of this extraneous noise, but these types of sounds have a high frequency component that can be hard to delete. Also the number of species is disappointing. The only sound I'm getting that I really think I'll be able to use is the "peek" call of the Hammond's Flycatcher. Our bird never sings--just calls, but calls are what I have very few of.

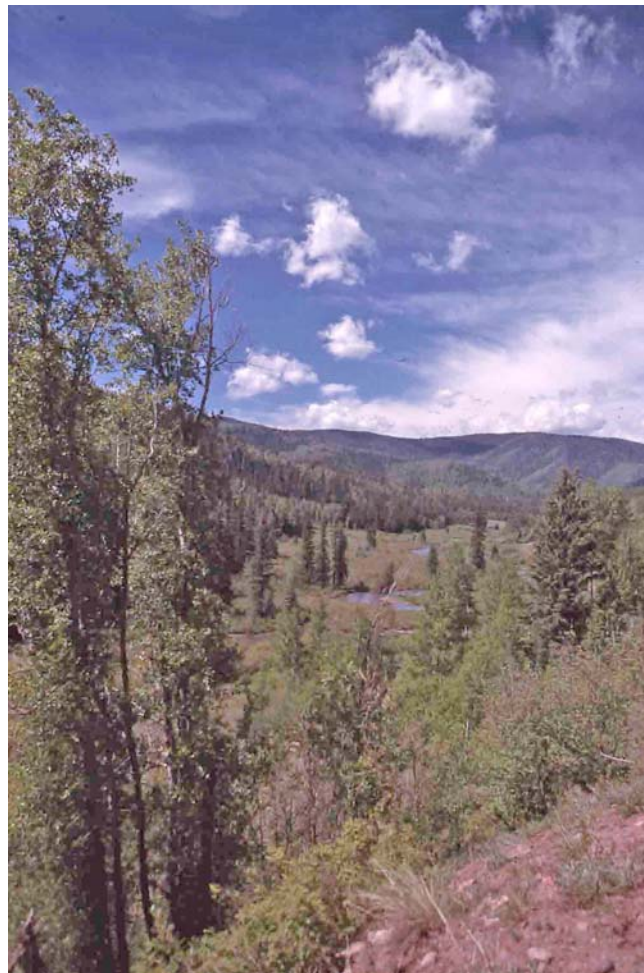
Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

I recorded one distant disyllabic call that sort of resembled a Western Tanager, but really wasn't right for that. Playback yielded no response, so I don't know what it was.

This morning, we drove about 20 miles northeast, mostly on a gravel road. This very scenic drive followed the West Dolores River upstream to a small meadow area with a willow wetland in the middle. Mountain Bluebirds and Northern Flickers were using a small snag in the middle. Much of the land beside the river is small tracts of pasture with houses and mailboxes. It looks as though people live there all year. We even saw the mail carrier's jeep. There were also a few that looked like summer homes. One house was much larger and more luxurious than all the rest and very beautiful. Its driveway was exactly where the pavement ended on our way up. Could someone have influence with the highway department?

I tried to walk a few stretches and do some recording, but the wind was too strong, and I gave up and just took pictures of the scenery: beautiful river valley with aspens and conifers on the mountainsides on each side and bare mountains with some snow remaining in the distance. Jim drove nice an slowly and we really savored the drive.



West Dolores River valley
San Juan National Forest, CO

Southern California and the Southern Rockies Spring and Summer, 2010

Just as I was finishing this, a pair of Cassin's Finches came in to the birdseed. Finally some birds!

8:45 p.m., Sunday, June 13, 2010
Mavreeso USFS Campground, San Juan NF, CO

We saw those Cassin's Finches, especially the male, off and on the rest of the day Friday, but not since.

Saturday, June 12, there were thundershowers with pea-sized hail, starting the preceding evening and lasting nearly all day. I worked on my Mountain Sounds workshop for several hours.

Late in the afternoon it cleared up somewhat and imagine my joy to look out the trailer window and discover a female Evening Grosbeak perched on one of the sticks of the tripod that Jim Bungee-cords together to hold his water drip bag. Jim happened to be outside the trailer at the time and was able to grab his big camera from the truck and snap a few pictures. Later her mate came in. I can't remember how well he did with her then, but today he's gotten both of them very well. Just before dark a second female came in. Females differ considerably from one bird to another, varying in the amount of yellow. Our original female was almost entirely gray; the new one had a bit more yellow. Field guides usually show the extremes possible, but there is actually a continuum in the amount of yellow on them. Males all look pretty much alike, bright.



Evening Grosbeak, male
Mavreeso USFS Cpgd, San Juan Nat. Forest, CO



Evening Grosbeak, the duller female
Mavreeso USFS Cpgd, San Juan Nat. Forest, CO

Late this afternoon one of the Red Squirrels we've been seeing from the trailer off in the distance came close enough for Jim to photograph it. Rocky Mtn. Red Squirrels aren't very red--just a strip of dull rust down their gray backs and some that's a bit brighter on their legs.

Southern California and the Southern Rockies Spring and Summer, 2010



Red Squirrel
Mavreeso USFS Cpgd, San Juan Nat. Forest, CO

The one here is even less red than the one in Kaufman's Mammal book, probably because we're in the southern Rockies. I recall seeing really red ones in the east and in the far north (Inuvik in northwestern Northwest Territories).

I spent a lot of time with my microphone aimed at the open window of the trailer, hoping for some sounds from them, especially the so-called "loud flight call". All I got was a little of the "soft trill." I know I did get the "loud flight call" at the Dolores River RV Park, but I was hoping for one without a lot of other birds. I suspect the reason these birds don't call is that there are only two of them. I think it's sort of an aggressive sound.

This morning I had Jim take me 1.3 miles up the road to the West Dolores Campground and I walked back to our campground. I hoped the river wouldn't be too noisy, since the road was high above it and a little bit back from it in spots, but it was pretty bad. I did a little recording, but got nothing memorable. Saw a few new birds that aren't in our campground, including Olive-sided Flycatcher and Williamson's Sapsucker. I was hoping the Williamson's would call or drum. I could use more of that, but all he did was forage up one pine tree trunk after another. (The south-facing slope has Ponderosa Pines, while the Blue Spruces are mainly on the valley floor and a little way up the north-facing slope.)

By the time I got back to the trailer it had clouded up again and we had a very brief bit of tiny hail, but it had become too windy to do any more recording. Both Saturday and Sunday were quite cold--probably not out of the 50s. Last night the temperature got down to 34degrees--probably because it was clear in the early morning.

4:00 p.m., Wednesday, June 16, 2010
Cayton USFS Cpgd, between Rico and Lizard Head Pass on SR 145

We stayed over Sunday night, June 13, so Jim could perhaps get more pictures of the second, brighter, female Evening Grosbeak, but it didn't come back. He did get a

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

few more shots of the Red Squirrel, though he doesn't think they'll be as cute as the ones he got Saturday. It clouded up and rained/hailed a bit in late morning. Before that I walked to the end of the campground and back hoping for more sounds, but didn't get anything memorable.

We left shortly before noon check-out time and drove only thirty miles to our present location. This involved driving back about six miles along the West Dolores River to SR 145, which ascends gradually up the main Dolores River to Lizard Head Pass, 10,250 ft. The Cayton Campground is just a few miles before the pass at 9,400 ft. The road is excellent, the ascent gradual, and the pass very broad, making for an easy route across the mountains. The "main" route on the AAA maps is US 550, which runs from Durango through Silverton and Ouray. Jim and I took it a few years ago without the trailer and I swore I'd never drive it again. It's very narrow and clings to the edge of the cliff for many miles, often without a guard rail. When we took it, we returned via SR 145, so I knew it to be a nice gentle road. Despite this, it's extremely scenic, with beautiful mountains and valleys at every turn.

Our host at Mavreeso had told us Cayton Campground is very nice and that it was just redone a couple of years ago. It's not mentioned in Trailer Life, but is listed in AAA. That book says it lacks hookups, so we were delighted to discover that one entire loop of 19 sites has electric boxes. Although we can do without electricity, it's nice to be able to use the electric space heater, blanket, and microwave oven. The sites are huge, suitable for any size of RV. Actually they are too huge, with far too much unvegetated gravel around each site. It really isn't necessary to have gravel under the slide-outs of your monster RV.

Here at this higher elevation and more open location, the Blue Spruce trees are replaced by Engelmann Spruce, one of the commonest trees at high elevations in the Rockies. Although I think I have photos of this tree, I took more just to be prepared for my upcoming workshop.

The remainder of the afternoon on Sunday, we had intermittent rain, so we just stayed inside. It was pretty cold, too. That night it got down to 30degrees.

Since I was running low on groceries, especially frozen orange juice, we drove north about 25 miles to Telluride yesterday, Tuesday, June 15. I took my computer and was able to access my email at the public library. Although we had been told of another grocery store in town, I found a decent one catty-corner from the library, so did my shopping there. It's obviously one that only the locals patronize, for its exterior is most unprepossessing, but inside it turned out to have an adequate selection of what I wanted. Prices were a little high, but the location is remote and, after all, it is Telluride, one of the most "in" places in Colorado.

We walked one block over to the main street and hunted for a lunch place, finally settling for a little sandwich stand in an arcade. Afterwards I patronized the local bookstore, but only found one book that looked interesting.

We both find towns like Telluride to be a big turn-off. Lots of young people and their dogs seem to gravitate to the place in the summertime, or maybe all year because of winter skiing. I don't know what they do for a living, but there were certainly a lot of them. Some sort of "festival" is taking place now, for we saw a couple of signs directing people to "festival parking," so that may be why all the people are in town. Anyway, we didn't have trouble finding parking one block off the main drag right in front of the library. Even the library attracted some strange characters, for out in front were parked a lot of dogs and pretty soon out came their owners, some guys who looked as though they

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

might be homeless drifters. They had been inside using the rest rooms. The library itself was very nice and I was able to use my own computer with their WiFi. Jim hadn't brought his, thinking he'd use one of their computers. However, they limited him to only 15 minutes. He said that was enough, although he might have written to someone else if he'd had more time.

We were glad to be out of there and back on the open road heading for Cayton Campground, which isn't anywhere near full.

The setting here is beautiful, but unfortunately the only birds we've been able to attract to our site are a Broad-tailed Hummingbird and a single Steller's Jay. This morning I walked the half-mile from the campground to the main highway, through meadow and bits of spruce woodland. Jim had taken that walk with Toby late yesterday afternoon and said there were a lot of birds. Unfortunately today was pretty windy, so I didn't see many. I tried for a few behind a little hill, but didn't get much. My bird list has only 16 species, and all of them I had also seen at Mavreeso Campground. I had 30 species in all at Mavreeso. I had hoped for some high-elevation birds here, but that was not to be. Again we're beside a rushing river, so recordings are so-so even when the wind isn't blowing. We've decided to leave tomorrow.

Started

10:15 a.m., Sunday, June 20, 2010

Crawford (Reservoir) State Park, Crawford, CO

Finished

9:40 p.m., same day

Shady Creek RV Park, Cedaredge, CO

Before leaving Cayton Campground on Thursday, June 17, we drove 7 miles south to the tiny community of Rico, where we found WiFi available outside a tiny coffee bar. We bought a couple of sweet rolls as "thanks," but before we left noticed several other cars parked around the place, computers in laps and no sign they were patronizing the business.

We had 130 miles to drive, much of it on rather slow mountain roads. We stopped Montrose to do some grocery shopping in a gigantic City Market, which I discovered is a Kroger, just as is our Ralphs. It took an age to find the items on my list, it was so huge, but the staff stocking the shelves were very helpful. There was a Denny's right across a little side street from the market, so we decided to eat lunch there and not try to find something more interesting. From Montrose, we drove north to Delta, then east to the park, which is a little past the town of Crawford. This took quite a while because of a long construction zone enroute. The park has two sections, one with electricity and one without. We tried for an electric site and thought we were going to luck out because the man at the gate, whose main job was checking boats, told us there were sites available through the weekend. However, when we looked at the sites he listed, they all had reserved signs. Then we met up with the host, whose printout of reservations was a day later and he said all sites were reserved for the weekend. So we drove back to the no-hookup section and were quickly met by its host, who looked over his printout and discovered there were only three RV sites left there that were free for the weekend. We quickly settled for the only one that was long enough for our trailer. (The other two ended up with tiny pop-up tent trailers.)

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

Then there was the complication of how much to pay. The boat-checking man at the other campground had said that we had to pay \$6.00 just to be in the park plus half of the regular camping fee to camp, because we were seniors. The host at the one we ended up in said there are no senior discounts, so we took his word for it. Then it turned out we were supposed to put \$6.00 in one envelope and \$16.00 in the other and pay separately for each of the three nights. One of the hosts also told us we were OK for the weekend, because the state doesn't accept reservations for less than three days in advance. We paid for one night to start.

We're at just a little over 6,000 ft here, and the days have been pretty warm. The first two afternoons the outside temperature was in the mid-80s and the trailer got up into the 90s because it was broadside to the sun. I sat outside beside the roofed-over picnic table during the hottest part of the day, but Jim stayed inside with Toby. We ate dinner each night after the sun went down--nearly 9:00. Fortunately it cooled off quickly then. Nights were in the 50s.

Now why did we come to this crowded campground beside a reservoir with a lot of boats roaring around? It's the closest place I could find to the North Rim of the Black Canyon of the Gunnison. We visited there many years ago and I've always wanted to go back. Then we drove to it from some distance away and were only able to spend a few hours there. There's one small campground in the park on this side and I recalled that it was quite shady, but not how big the sites were. Friday morning, June 18, we drove out there--11 miles of good, but fairly slow, road, half unpaved. The campground has only 13 sites, most of them extremely short and suitable only for tent-campers. There was one site free that was long enough for us, but it was anything but level and seemed to be in full shade, so our solar panels wouldn't do their job. We reluctantly decided we'd just have to stay at Crawford Reservoir. If we'd found a site, we had intended to sign up for it, put a chair in it, and immediately go back and get the trailer.

Since we weren't going to camp there, we spent the rest of the morning viewing the canyon from the various overlooks. First we walked the Chasm View Nature trail, which starts out from the campground. It couldn't be more than a quarter of a mile long, but we spent over an hour there. Of course, part of its length was along the brink of the precipice, which drops abruptly to the rapidly flowing Gunnison River far below. According to the brochure, the canyon is 1723 feet deep at that point (as much as 2700 ft other places) and only 1100 feet wide. We read on a sign at another viewpoint that this canyon is the deepest for its width of any in the world. (If you've never visited this national park, go! It's very impressive. The South Rim is better for a first visit, although it's more crowded.) The river has an unusually steep drop, so it's a good rock-cutter. The river itself flows through a volcanic dome, which was apparently pushed up gradually while the river retained its course through the middle of it. This dome drops off steeply on the south side--as we've discovered when we've climbed the grade to reach it on previous trips--but much more gradually on the north side; in fact we hardly noticed that we were climbing.

The nature trail passes through beautiful pinyon-juniper habitat (Two-needle Pinyon and Utah Juniper) with some of the largest and oldest specimens of these trees in existence. I took quite a few pictures of that habitat for my upcoming workshop, since PJ, as they call it, will be the lowest elevation habitat that I intend to cover. When I was near the canyon edge, the roar of the Gunnison River far below was quite loud, but away from there, recording conditions were excellent. I think I'll be particularly happy

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

with the Plumbeous Vireo, Black-throated Gray Warbler, and (surprising to me) Hermit Thrush songs that I got.

After that we drove the rim road, a narrow but nicely graded, gravel road. It's wide enough to meet another vehicle anywhere, but you have to slow down. This rim is much more infrequently visited than the south one, so we encountered almost no other tourists, quite a contrast to the much more popular south rim. There we've always made a point of doing our sightseeing really early in the morning to avoid the crowds and their inane conversations. Illustrative of the obscurity of the place, when I asked the campground host at Crawford Reservoir State Park where the turn-off for the Black Canyon was, he didn't know and obviously had never been there. He tried to tell me how to get to the South Rim--a *long* ways away by road! The map showed the turn-off right in the town of Crawford, but when I later looked in the ABA Bird-finding Guide to Colorado, I discovered it's actually just south of the lake where we were camped and we had approached from the north. After we got on the road, the turns were clearly marked and we had no trouble getting there.

I did some nice recording at several of the viewpoints, especially Green-tailed Towhee and more Plumbeous Vireo (very common). At one stop ("Balanced Rock") I recorded two sounds that I couldn't identify. One I thought, and hoped, was a Virginia's Warbler, but the other really puzzled me. It was a two-parted song with just four notes, the last two faster and lower-pitched than the first two. The quality was noticeably fuller than that of the probable Virginia's Warbler. I didn't try playing either of them back in the interest of completing the drive and hoped I could figure them out later.

After a late lunch and a nap curtailed by the heat and Toby's barking at every passing dog-walker, I sat outside the rest of the afternoon in the shade by the picnic table. Light was good for embroidery. I didn't even try to fix dinner until after the sun went down around 8:30. It was just too hot. Even early-to-bed Jim concurred with that decision.

The drive out to the Black Canyon from Crawford State Park has lots of turns, but all segments head either south or west. Furthermore, there were lots of nice fence posts and wires, and trees and shrubs all along--potential bird perches for photography. So when we returned to the park on Saturday, June 19, I drove very slowly and Jim tried to get some pictures, but I don't think he got anything. We even saw a pair of Hairy Woodpeckers, along with Vesper and Lark Sparrow, Western Meadowlark, etc.

Just before the park entrance there is a huge tract of BLM land set aside as a preserve for the Gunnison Sage Grouse. A rough one-lane dirt road traverses the land and we drove it a short distance. I really didn't expect to see a grouse this late in the season, but walked a portion of it hoping for some other sagebrush scrub species. I did get fair (too much breeze) recordings of Vesper and Brewer's Sparrow and Green-tailed Towhee. Also I photographed the habitat.

After giving up on that area, we drove back to the Canyon Rim drive we took the day before. I thought maybe I could figure out what those two unknown sounds were from the day before. One of the two birds was singing right where I'd had it. I recorded it again and this time played it back. Jim stood beside me, camera ready, but it mostly did the fly-bys, landing out of sight each time. I finally got a couple of glimpses--enough to clinch the identification of it as a Virginia's Warbler, just as I had thought. Unfortunately Jim got no photos. The habitat is rather dense shrubby Gambel Oak, with "trees" averaging five to ten feet high. We were able to walk around through it, but with difficulty. There was only one place to get into it from the road--and just inside that

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

entry point, the ground was littered with tissue; people had used it as a toilet, even though there are restrooms at both ends of the short drive.

The morning was still young and it wasn't too hot yet, so I decided to walk the road back toward the entrance. It was all down-hill, making for easy walking at that 6,800-ft elevation. I got a nice bit of sound from what was almost certainly a "Woodhouse's" Western Scrub-Jay. Then a little farther along I heard the same four-note song that I'd had the day before where the Virginia's Warbler was. This time I recorded it and played it back. It popped up once, giving me an unmistakable view: a Lazuli Bunting. That's about the shortest song I've ever heard from that bird, but he consistently did nothing but that song. I've heard two-parted songs from that bird before and confused them with MacGillivray's Warbler, but never a two-parted song with only two notes in each part. Although he gave me only one look, he continued to sing and I got some pretty good recordings. My students will surely be as puzzled as I was when I use them as practice sounds sometime.

When we left for our morning's birding yesterday, June 19, it was at least two hours after sunrise and imagine our astonishment to find two Great Horned Owls perched on the utility wires beside the highway right outside the campground. These wires had lots of slack in them, the road was elevated, and the wires were over an overflow pond of the reservoir. The owls were at least 100 yards apart, but still were probably mates. Even though it was sort of against the sun, Jim took several photos.



Great Horned Owl
Crawford Reservoir, CO

This morning, June 20, I decided to get up at first light and try to get out and do some recording before the campers and the breeze got up. The dawn chorus--of House Finches--awoke me around 5:15--so I got up and out well before sunrise. My first destination was the place where the owls were. This time there was only one. I had to go back to the trailer for something, so I told Jim it was there and he thought he'd go over there by himself, without me driving, and try to get some more pictures.

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

Meanwhile I busied myself recording the House Finches and the aggressive "chuck" notes of a Brewer's Blackbird that flew all around my head when I passed a certain spot along the trail. I had always thought Brewer's Blackbirds nested in trees, but there were none very near to that particular spot. I just now looked it up in Kaufman's *Lives of North American Birds* and discovered that although they usually nest in trees, they may use tall grass--and that's what was on the land it was defending. There were trees in the general area, but not close by.

By that time Jim was dressed and getting ready to drive over to the owl place. Suddenly I started hearing cattle off in the distance. I thought it was strange I hadn't been hearing them all the time. The sound got louder and louder and pretty soon we saw a long line of them being herded down the road, led by a pickup truck and followed by a couple of people on horseback accompanied by two Australian Shepherd dogs. The herd must have been at least a quarter mile long and all were bellowing and bawling loudly. Many of the animals were half-grown calves and they made the most commotion, but their mothers were by no means silent.

Of course, that parade went right past the spot where the owl had been perched earlier. After they had left, I looked on the wire where it had been and didn't see it and radioed the information to Jim.

I continued on with my birding, but of course the din of all those cattle passing aroused the entire campground and everyone was outside their tents and tent-trailers talking in loud voices. So much for good recordings. I got a few Red-winged Blackbird calls, a lot of Western Meadowlark songs and calls, and two types of calls from some Spotted Sandpipers. I'm not sure if any of them will be usable because of the talk, though. The shoreline trail continued north from the campground, so I took it as far as the day-use area, which was still empty. Unfortunately there weren't many birds along the trail (a very narrow strip below the raised highway and next to the reservoir) nor in the day-use area.

I did hear one flicker, but failed to record it. The first time it gave a typical "quee-quee-quee . . ." series. The second time it started with a strange version of that and then went into an amazing variety of extended harsh sounds. I thought I was recording it, but I unfortunately had failed to turn up my recording volume and missed it. It was extremely close and I mistook what I was hearing directly for what I was hearing through my earphones. I never actually saw the flicker, for the tree was too dense. I'm wondering if I was hearing a begging juvenile.

I radioed Jim to come and pick me up, for by that time I was half a mile or more from the campsite. Since it was so handy, on the way back Jim decided to drive past the campground entrance and see if by chance the owl was still out. It was! This time it was atop one of the not-too-high poles that the wires were strung from. He had me drive up to it and he shot photos of it from two different angles. They'll be sort of side-lit and hopefully not too bad.

We went back to the trailer, had a late breakfast and then hung around for an hour or two longer. Our drive today was only about 40 miles and we wanted to be sure any weekenders at our destination had left.

We got to Cedaredge around noon and are in the Shady Creek RV Park, a place where we stayed in early June, 1990. (I was able to find the date because I remembered a Yellow Warbler song I recorded nearby and have used in several workshops over the years. I have all my workshop materials in my computer.) It's a small private campground with lots of cottonwoods (Fremont and Narrowleaf) and a six-

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

foot-wide creek running along the rear. We were able to get a site backing up to the creek with a savannah-like habitat of tall grass and trees on the other side. Quite pretty. Unfortunately the foreground is less interesting: the sites are entirely covered with deep gravel and there is no vegetation beside the creek, so Jim really can't find a spot to put out his bird-feeding set-up and expect any customers. I don't know if he's even tried yet.

So far I haven't seen or heard a single bird, although to be fair, we entered the trailer and turned on the air-conditioner and left it on until almost dark. Both of us took really long naps. I think the lack of rest the past three days had gotten to us. We've eaten late and gotten up early to go birding before it got too hot, and the afternoons have been poor for napping, as I explained earlier.

Trailer Life lists this place as having cable TV and WiFi. They need to change their description. The cable TV company went out of business, and Jim couldn't get anything over the air except in Spanish. The WiFi is only available at a picnic table way out front by the road. (TL should have said "WiFi hotspot," not "WiFi."). The bench was far too low for comfortable working at a computer keyboard and sagged even lower in the middle. When I tried it after dinner, I discovered that the password they gave me wouldn't work. I had found it illegible and asked to have the symbols clarified, too. Unfortunately, the owners had apparently gone out for the evening, so checking email will just have to wait.

There's supposed to be a rest room, too, according to TL, but Jim couldn't find it. (I never use the ones in campgrounds, preferring the trailer's bathroom.) Considering the lack--or apparent lack--of amenities, we think the \$32.00 per night that they charge is rather high. I think we paid only \$33.00 at Dolores River RV Park a week or so ago, and it had everything.

It's 10:30 now. I've worked on this write-up three different times in the course of the day--morning, before dinner, and just now. It seems a lot has happened during the past three days.

9:00 p.m., Tuesday, June 22, 2010
Shady Creek RV Park, Cedaredge, CO

The next day we resolved some of the problems indicated above. It turned out the owner had given me the wrong WiFi password--but that didn't work either. She suggested another, but that didn't work. Then she called the company and after several hours of frustration on her part came back with still another, the one she really wanted. She hadn't told me before, but the WiFi works in some of the campsites, as well as out front, so we didn't have to walk all the way out to the saggy tables by the road, just across the parking lot to an empty site closer to the transmitter. I could plug my computer into the utility box; there was a place to plug in up front, too.

I found the bathroom for Jim, but it wasn't exactly complete. It was a cutesy little two-room red building with a washer and drier in the front room (\$2.00 to wash, didn't notice amount to dry, again too expensive! I paid \$1.25 to wash in big machines at Dolores River RV Park, can't remember amount to dry) and a shower and toilet in the back room. Back room doesn't lock, so someone could walk in on you. Room lacks wash basin or mirror. There was no sign on the door telling you it was the restroom, so it's no wonder Jim didn't find it. I saw the "no pets" sign, so figured I could go in, so I did

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

and discovered what it had. Jim uses the toilet occasionally, but has decided to bathe and shave in the trailer.

Enough bitching about the RV park. Actually it isn't really a bad place--nice and shady, big sites, pretty setting, etc. I'd return here if I was in the area. And maybe by then they'll have their WiFi problem solved. She said they really want to get it so it works in all sites and have been having problems with the company. It also isn't their fault that the cable TV company went out of business. However, they *could* lower their rates!

Yesterday, Monday, June 21, we drove up to the top of Grand Mesa, a very short distance away on an excellent road. According to the brochure I've had in my files for a long time, it "is known as the 'largest flattop mountain in the world' and serves as a major watershed for Western Colorado..." It was a beautiful drive, ascending through pinyon-juniper, Gambel oak scrub, aspens, then Engelmann Spruce forest. Much of the forest still has snow on the ground in the shade of the trees, but not out in the open. Large portions of the top are dotted with lakes, "over 300" according to the brochure. We discovered that the capacity of some of them has been enhanced with earthen dams, obviously to hold more water for the surrounding area. The scenery was beautiful everywhere. We had been hoping to camp up there for a few days, but only one campground was open, the rest not opening until June 30. That campground wasn't very inviting--crowded sites, quite a few campers, remaining sites short or unlevel, some snow still on the road, etc. I took a walk around inside a closed campground farther along and found it to be quite nice. Sites widely spaced, had a mix of sun (for solar panels) and shade.

There is a rather large Visitor Center next to the open campground, where the mesa starts to level off (it's never really flat on top), but it was closed for remodeling. I suspect some of the campers were people working on the place. I suppose they plan to have it finished when the rest of the campgrounds open.

The road ascends to 10,800 ft before descending to Grand Junction. We turned around a few miles past the summit at the closed campground I just described. All of the campgrounds listed in the AAA and TL guides are at the 10,200 or 10,300 foot elevation. We saw quite a few birds at the high elevation. Best were Clark's Nutcrackers (first on the trip) and a Swainson's Hawk circling around. I was really surprised at this latter bird, but don't know if it's unusual or not and have no way of finding out now.

On our way back, we tried driving a gravel road that was on the tourist map and goes out 12 miles to "Land's End Visitor Center," but gave up after no more than a mile. The road was nice and wide, but with the worst washboarding I've ever encountered. I hope they plan to grade it before the recreation area opens.

Part way down the grade, we found another gravel side road, the "Old Grand Mesa Rd." It ascended up through aspen forest. We drove it maybe a mile. Then I got out and walked down it almost to the main highway, hoping to record some birds. I heard Ruby-crowned Kinglet and Warbling Vireo and a few others, but never very close. By then the wind had gotten up, so I didn't even try to record anything. Furthermore, the road was quite steep and the firm dirt surface was covered with round rocks that kept twisting my ankles or rolling under my feet if I wasn't careful. It really wasn't much fun.

We got back to Cedaredge around 11:00 and did a little shopping, all successful. I even found the ice cube tray I've been looking for for several weeks. It had to be short enough to fit in the freezing compartment of the trailer's refrigerator. The one I was

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

using was split. The clerk in the Ace Hardware Store sent me to "Something for Everyone," a hodgepodge of used, new, and consignment merchandise of all kinds. I found just what I was looking for and they came in sets of four trays for only \$0.85. The cheapest price I'd seen was \$1.47 for one at Wal-Mart, but they were out of them. Amazing little store.

Afternoons have been quite hot, but not too uncomfortable in the shade because of a good breeze. I sat outside, but Jim remained inside and turned on the AC when he got too hot.

This morning, Tuesday, June 22, was by far the highlight of our stay here. When we were here 20 years ago, we learned from the campground owner that the local Audubon Chapter was having a field trip the next day, so we decided to join them. They took us part way up Grand Mesa, but I couldn't figure out yesterday where it was they stopped. Then they took us to Fruit Growers Reservoir in Eckert, six miles south of Cedaredge. I can't recall all I saw there then, but remembered it was a nice spot. I definitely recorded a Yellow Warbler there, for I still use it as one of my introductory sounds in several of my workshops because it has all three song types of that bird. I wanted to return to the place. I had a write-up from *Winging It*, June, 1996, which told how to get there. (That account was later published in a guide to U.S. Bureau of Reclamation Sites, but I left that book at home.)

There are two points of access, but we only took the north one which crosses the shallow north end of the reservoir. To get there turn east off of Colorado SR 65 on N Road in the center of Eckert. This road name isn't well marked, but is just south of the Big E Market and across the street and a bit north of the turn is a huge stone Presbyterian church. We had no trouble finding the turn, even though the road was very narrow at first. The reservoir is only about a mile away from the turn.

The write-up says to park at the top of the hill and walk down along the road to the reservoir, but we discovered that there are now a lot of places right beside the choicest wetlands where you can get a vehicle off the road. I think the road was unpaved before and that these features were added when they paved it. There are even a couple of Audubon-placed interpretive signs.

I had Jim take me up the hill at the far side of the reservoir and I walked with my back to the sun down to the wetlands and on to where the road starts uphill again, a distance of not more than a quarter to a half mile. Despite the short distance, I spent three hours along that road and ended up with 60 to 90 minutes of sound. It was wonderful! Lots of birds and no wind! There was traffic, but not too bad; I had long periods with no vehicles at all. The variety of species I got was amazing.

Starting out, there were Ring-necked Pheasants calling from various distances. Those exasperating birds never call twice in a row, just once every five to ten minutes. I kept recording--and getting nice Western Meadowlark songs, "quirk" and rattle calls--hoping for a really close pheasant, but think I only got mid-distance and far-off birds.

When I reached the water, there were birds everywhere. I think I must have spent half an hour or longer standing in just one spot, aiming my microphone in various directions. Sometimes it was at Pied-billed Grebes, which also only call once in a while. Sometimes it was Western Grebes. There were four of them (2 pairs) not far out in the shallow water, and I was amazed at the variety of their sounds. I heard lots of sound I'd never heard before--or never attributed to Western Grebes anyway. Some seemed to be courtship calls between mates, others just general calls, still others aggressive calls

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

when the male (probably) of one pair tried to get the attention of the female (probably) of the other pair. Those grebes were my main reasons for hanging around that spot so long, but while I was waiting for them I got all sorts of other species:

A very unusual two-parted Common Yellowthroat song (all other COYEs were doing typical songs, so it wasn't a regional dialect);

Yellow-headed Blackbird calls of single individuals, not the usual cacaphony from a colony

A Willow Flycatcher doing such a strange call that I couldn't tell whether it was a "fitz-bew" or "prrit." Hope I'll be able to figure it out from the tape. There was quite a bit of COYE, YHBL and traffic noise during some of it. Wonder if it was a different subspecies than I have. I've listened to recordings of Southwestern Willow Flycatcher (*extimus*) and it's very different-sounding from that and also from others I've recorded in North Dakota and the Pacific Northwest. [After I got home I looked it up in *The Birds of North America* and it's probably the subspecies *adastus*, which is not found in the far west. BNA said it's questionable whether *extimus* occurs in southwestern Colorado, and we were far north of that corner of the state.]

A flock of a dozen Gadwalls flew over, calling all the time.

A pair of Killdeer flew over twice, calling all the time.

Willetts, Snipe, Great Blue Heron, and probably others I can't think of now.

I also heard one or two Yellow Warblers, but all seemed to be doing their commonest song, type I, so I didn't make a real effort to record them.

After letting me out part way up the hill at the east end, Jim drove down to one of the parking pullouts overlooking the reservoir. It was rather boring for him for a while because the birds on the reservoir were all way out of range for his longest lens. But, as luck would have it, a soaking-wet, red-haired weasel appeared right outside his driver's-side window. Fortunately, he had his small Canon PowerShot digital camera (he calls it his toy camera) on the truck's console. It was perfect to use because shooting at a six-foot range was no problem for it. He got three quick shots of the animal as it passed by. He showed me the pictures later and it was much darker than any weasel I've ever seen, probably because it was all wet from fishing or bathing.



Long-tailed Weasel
Fruitgrowers Reservoir, Eckert. CO

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

Jim said that during the time he sat there another lighter-gray weasel passed by him three times, but it was across the road and ran by so rapidly that he was never able to get a photograph.

After standing out in the increasingly hot sun for three hours, I was exhausted and took a nap as soon as I got back to the trailer around 11:00, while Jim went off and got a haircut.

Late in the afternoon I had to bathe Toby, even though it was pretty hot. The voltage here is too poor to run the AC and the hair drier at the same time, so I just dried him a little and figured he'd be cooler if he remained damp for a while.

This evening we ate a very good steak and shrimp dinner at RJ Steakhouse half-way between Cedaredge and Eckert. It looks like a roadhouse inside and out and features country-rock music *a la* Terlingua, TX (fortunately not as loud), but the clientele was mainly local folks, and the campground owners had the place on their handout page of local restaurants they recommend. We had planned to eat at the Apple Orchard Cafe just around the corner from the campground, but they were closed today, even though they usually only close Sunday and Monday. That place was also on "the list."

It's almost 10:30 and I'm exhausted. Guess I'll read a few pages in my book, then go to bed.

10:45 a.m., Friday, June 25, 2010

San Luis Lakes SP, nr. Mosca, CO

The morning we left Cedaredge a pair of deer, including a male with a nice velvety rack, wandered through the RV park and apparently crossed the creek and hopped the barbed wire fence. We had seen a doe the day before across the creek. Seemed strange to see them right in town, but of course town is mainly just what's along the main highway.

Wednesday, June 23, was a day of driving. We got an early start because we had 235 miles on mountain roads ahead of us, including 11,250-foot Monarch Pass. The truck chugged up the grade at about 35 mph in second gear, with occasional assistance from first gear. We stopped in the large parking area at the top of the pass. There's a tourist facility there with food and gift shop, but Jim went in and discovered they had a very limited menu and just a counter at which to eat it, so I fixed lunch in the trailer. After descending from Monarch Pass, we turned south at Poncha Springs and were soon in the high-desert San Luis Valley (7,500 ft).

It's a very lightly settled area. We had planned to buy gasoline in Poncha Springs, but forgot because I was looking for a grocery store (no luck). I saw there were several little towns ahead, so figured we'd get some at one of them. But after we came to the third one with no gas station, we decided to stop at the post office and inquire if there was some in the next town or if we should detour off our route to Saguache. The postal worker, probably the postmistress herself, said many gas stations were going out of business because they couldn't afford to install the new tanks now required by state law. She wasn't sure if the station in the next town, Hooper, was open, so called the post office there. They checked it out and called her back. It was open and pumping gas. With my binoculars I could read the mileage sign to that town, and Jim was quite confident we still had 17 miles worth of gasoline in our tank. When Jim filled the tank, he discovered we'd made it with still some gas to spare. The gas station also had a

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

convenience store, where I settled for the only loaf of bread in stock, Wonder Bread wheat--marginally better than Wonder Bread white, I guess. It's a big loaf--guess I'll have to make some French toast to use it up.

We got to San Luis Lakes State Park around 2:00 in the afternoon. It was hot and the barren sagebrush-covered desert was terribly uninviting. The greenish-yellow water in the lake didn't enhance our impression either. We had another option, a commercial RV park with full hookups ten miles farther, so we went and looked at it. They had one site free through the weekend, so we went and looked at it. It turned out that all the sites were pull-throughs lined up side-by-side as close together as they could jam them. Each site had a puny cottonwood tree in it. We decided to return to the state park, which had widely spaced sites, pull-throughs beside the campground roads. It does have electrical hookups and we've learned to do without water and sewer.

The place uses self-registration, so we drove around the various loops trying to find a site and discovered that they all were reserved for Friday and Saturday nights--every one of them. We wanted to visit the nearby Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve, so decided to sign up for two nights and try to find a commercial campground in some town for Saturday and Sunday. zzz

The next day after we came back from our morning's visit to the national park, we decided to go to the office and find out if the place was indeed full for the weekend. By then no further reservations could come in, since the state limits them to at least three days in advance. When we got in the office, the ranger told us the site we were in was actually reserved for Thursday night by one party and for Friday and Saturday by another; the reservation cards had been put in the slot with the wrong one on top. So we had to depart that site right away. Fortunately he keeps two sites out of the reservation system for emergencies--mainly people who discover the site they reserved is too long for their RV. He let us have one of them, so we're fixed for the weekend. It isn't as nice as the one we were in--lots of foot traffic to the showers and no official trail, so ground is trampled and the shrubs are widely spaced.

The main desert birds we've seen from our campsites have been Horned Lark, Sage Thrasher, and Brewer's Sparrow. So far none of them have used either the birdseed or the water. However, we are getting lots of visits from Colorado Chipmunks, and just a few minutes ago, a Thirteen-lined Ground Squirrel.

Yesterday morning, Thursday, June 24, we drove to the Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve to find out what it was all about. We stopped first at the Visitors Center and took the half-mile nature trail out from there, figuring we should do it before it got hot. I pass by desert vegetation on somewhat stabilized dunes. Many plants were identified and the signs described the various ways they cope with the heat and cold. Very interesting; I photographed many of them. I was especially impressed by an Apache Plume shrub with a few white flowers left and many of them having gone to seed. These long fuzzy seed "pods" are the plumes. Really pretty and unusual looking.

Southern California and the Southern Rockies Spring and Summer, 2010



Apache Plume
Great Sand Dunes National Monument, CO

Then we went inside the visitors center and looked around and watched the excellent interpretive video, which covers the park in various seasons. The dunes are the tallest in North America--up to 750 ft tall. They have formed in the northeast corner of the valley. They're not snowy white like the calcium sulfate dunes we saw last fall at White Sands near Alamogordo, but rather a reddish beige color. They formed where they are because the prevailing winds are from the southeast--and very strong, especially in the springtime. Sand is washed out of the nearby Sangre de Cristo Mountains, keeping them replenished. In fact there is an active creek on each side of the dunes. People who want to climb the dunes have to wade Medano Creek, which is about 100 yards wide and very shallow.



Dunes & distant forest fire
Great Sand Dunes Natl. Monument, CO



Medano Creek & dunes with people playing
Great Sand Dunes Natl. Monument, CO

Playing in the dunes is apparently the main attraction here and may be the reason the campground is all reserved for the weekend. We saw a lot of people even on a Thursday.

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

There is a campground in the national park and our book said it doesn't take reservations. It has no hookups, but we decided to look at it anyway because at that time we thought we'd not be able to stay all weekend at San Luis Lakes State Park. We were told that the non-reservable loop fills up between 7:30 and 8:30 every morning (different time depending on who was telling us). We drove through the loop and discovered very few sites that were long enough for our trailer. Many of the shorter sites had some shade, but the long ones did not. We decided we'd rather take our chances at an in-town RV Park than try for those. The temperature has been in the upper 80s each day and we really want to use that AC, because the trailer is always at least five degrees hotter than the ambient temperature.

We checked out a nature trail through a forest of cottonwoods and aspens, but it was steep, had lots of mosquitoes, and by then it was getting to be rather hot. So we went back to the campground, moved the trailer, and settled down to keep cool for the rest of the day. I bought two books in the visitors center. One is an account of what life was like for a Hispanic family with 12 children in the 1920s and 1930s. The other is a very nice, brand new (2009) bird-finding guide to south-central Colorado. I spent a lot of time with both books, enjoying the first and using the second to plan our birding in this area. The bird guide, *Birding Hotspots of South-central Colorado*, by John J. Rawinski, seems to be self-published. If it's not available on-line, the author's address is 239 Cotten Lane, Monte Vista, CO 81144. I paid \$16.95 for it. The author is a highly respected Colorado birder and has served on their Bird Records Committee. He's also an excellent photographer, and many of his photographs were on the walls in the visitors center at the national park.

Late in the afternoon, when there was some shade beside the trailer, I went outside for a couple of hours. The sky was full of beautiful puffy clouds that were apparently failing to develop into the predicted thunder showers. The view across the lake and desert to the dunes and the 14,000-foot Sangre de Cristo mountains was really beautiful. I tilted back my reclining chair and just enjoyed the changing scene of clouds and their shadows on the mountains. A Common Nighthawk was soaring around high in the sky and "peenting," and occasionally I caught sight of it. I also saw occasional birds flying low across the lake, gulls mostly, but one flock of cormorants.

A lightning-caused forest fire has been burning in the Sangre de Cristos since June 6. We worried when we got here that it might be affecting the National Park, but were told it was still quite far away. We did see a lot of fire trucks in the visitors center parking lot when we got there before the place opened, but they soon drove out to do their work. I think they've been letting it burn, since it's in the back-country. The first night we were here, there was quite a bit of wind and it really flared up--lots of puffy smoke high in the sky, and we could actually see the flames after dark.

Just north of the state park there is a large state wildlife area, which is supposed to be an excellent birding spot. However, it is closed to visitors during the breeding season, which doesn't end until July 15. We were planning to drive 30 miles to some of the refuges mentioned in the book this morning, but when we awoke it was quite windy. So I decided to take Toby instead of my tape recorder and go for a long walk along the lake shore of the state park portion of this area--no trail but not too hard to walk through the low vegetation, even with Toby. Birds were scarce (park ranger said fewer birds are nesting in the refuge this year, probably because of the cold, late spring), but I did see a few Ruddy Ducks, Avocets and a Killdeer. A small flock of non-breeding (according to

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

bird list leaflet) gulls contained Ring-billed, California, and Franklin's. The latter were in full breeding plumage, even though they don't breed here.

After I got almost to the end of the accessible lakeshore, I radioed Jim to come and pick us up. I didn't want to walk back on the stony-gravel road or redo the longer route along the lakeshore. Besides, the heat of the day was setting in. It's now 12 noon and Jim said the temperature outside is up to 86degrees already.

9:00 a.m., Sunday, June 27, 2010

San Luis Lakes SP, near Mosca, CO

Saturday morning, June 26, we decided to explore the areas mentioned in Rawinski's book in the vicinity of Monte Vista, 30-40 miles from San Luis Lakes. He mentioned Home Lake and the adjacent Rio Grande State Wildlife Area as good spots for Southwestern Willow Flycatcher. The latter is closed until July 16, but I walked all around Home Lake listening for the flycatchers in the willows, but detected none. It was a pretty walk and the day was cool with beautiful puffy clouds. I did get a kingfisher rattle for my trouble. (Actually my walk was in two segments, part before and part after we visited the NWR discussed below.)

After that we drove south from the town of Monte Vista six miles to the Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge. Unlike the state ones, they allowed entry, and we drove the three-mile tour road--and wished it were longer, but the refuge isn't very big. A good portion of the route went beside a pond with cattails. There was a good variety of waterfowl. Jim photographed a female Redhead with a brood of chicks and also some male Buffleheads in full breeding plumage, some in display posture. They were a little far away, but should still be useful.

In the upland portions of the refuge, I got a beautiful Western Meadowlark song and I think Jim got a few photos, too. Later we had a Sage Thrasher, which was a little far away for pictures, but I think Jim popped off a couple of shots anyway.

In the afternoon the clouds got bigger and we had several periods of very strong wind, but no rain. The wind blew up quite a bit of sand, too. We had the windows open because the day wasn't as hot as it's been and before we realized it, all surfaces in the trailer were covered with a film of fine grit.

This morning dawned clear and calm, so I decided to take a walk with my tape recorder before the rest of the campground awakened. Unfortunately there were a few early risers, clattering around getting breakfast or chattering to their companions. I did get a pretty nice solo from a Brewer's Sparrow, but my Sage Thrasher recitative song was interrupted in spots by the campground noise.

In order to get away from the noise, I left the campground and walked north along the road that parallels the lake--toward the closed refuge. Just before the locked gate I found a Sage Thrasher perched on a fence. I also heard a reedy chirp occasionally and tried to record it while looking through my binoculars to see if it came from the bird I was looking at. I never was sure, even though the bird let me walk as close as 20 feet from it. A bit later I heard a Sage Thrasher song off in the distance. Then the close thrasher flew a short distance away and landed on the top of a fence perpendicular to the road and interacted briefly with a juvenile that I had not noticed. That apparently was the reason it (she?) hadn't flown away when I got so close. It might have been the juvenile that was giving the chirping call. Anyway, they both flew down and disappeared behind the desert shrubs.

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

I walked back and fixed breakfast. Afterwards Jim drove to my thrasher spot in the truck and is trying to photograph them right now.

8:30 p.m., Thursday, July 1, 2010

Palisades USFS Cpgd, between South Fork and Creede, CO

It's been four days since I last wrote this up-too long. I hope I can remember it all. Sunday morning, June 27, Jim was gone a long time and came back very pleased with the results of his thrasher hunt. The birds were right where they had been when I found them earlier and he got photographs of both the adult and the juvenile--on film and with his new little digital camera. The only thing he was disappointed about was that he only got back views of the juvie.



Sage Thrasher
San Luis Lakes State Park, CO

As soon as he got back, we hooked up and drove the short distance into Alamosa and got a site at the KOA. Then we did some grocery shopping, eyeballed a possible restaurant for dinner, and checked out the Alamosa National Wildlife Refuge, where I wanted to go the next morning. We ate dinner in the restaurant we had checked, Oscar's Mexican Restaurant. It's an absolutely enormous place, but very few people were eating there besides us. They feature a buffet on a couple of nights later in the week and I supposed the locals come in for that. We both ordered a combination plate and agreed it was not very good. Everything tasted the same and neither of us could even figure out which item was which--even the chile relleno.

Monday morning, June 28, we spent several hours at Alamosa NWR, the turnoff for which is about a quarter mile west of the KOA, then a couple of miles south--very handy. I had read in Rawinski's bird-finding guide that the Rio Grande Nature Trail is an excellent place to find Southwestern Willow Flycatchers. I had listened to their calls on Keller's *Birds of California* CD the night before and was prepared to listen for the distinct difference between them and those of other subspecies, which which I'm more familiar. Southwesterns are endangered.

Southern California and the Southern Rockies Spring and Summer, 2010

The nature trail is two miles long and I walked maybe a mile and a half. I waved my microphone around, listening but not recording, most of the way, but heard nothing resembling that bird. The farther I walked, the more open the habitat became, and I really think if the birds were there, they'd be in the first half-mile. As I was walking back, I decided not to be so picky and record some of the other birds that were there. Conditions were excellent--little wind and no roads anywhere near, just an occasional airplane. So I got some nice mixtures, but of fairly common birds.

While I was doing that, Jim drove the very short tour route and said there was very little open water visible and he got nothing of interest--so he just sat in the truck and waited for me to return.

We checked out of the KOA around 10:30 and drove westward in US 160, stopped for lunch at a Pizza Hut in Monte Vista; we love the lunch buffets that these restaurants often have in small towns and wish the ones around home were more than just take-out places. We continued on to South Fork, then turned north on SR 147. Nine miles up that road is the Palisades Campground, where Terry and John Hill spent a couple of weeks in August, 2008. She kept a thorough diary of that trip and I had brought along a print-out of it. In her diary, she evaluated *all* the campgrounds in this entire area. The one they stayed in sounded the best to me, so we hoped to get one of the thirteen sites. We found three sites free that were sunny enough for our solar panels and selected #3. They stayed in #4, which was nice, too.

Check-out time there is 1:00 and we got there before 1:30. It was raining pretty hard when we arrived, but the center of the campsite was still dry, so we knew the previous occupants had just left. Within a few minutes of our arrival, #4 was also occupied. The place doesn't take reservations, so we're set for the upcoming July 4 weekend; we immediately paid for a week. The site is a beautiful back-in far from neighbors and has a fantastic view of the Rio Grande. On the highway side of the campground are nearly vertical palisades of volcanic rock that were cut by the river. On the other side is a steeply slanting slope covered with conifers--Blue Spruce and a few Limber Pines near the bottom, Engelmann Spruce farther up. The campground itself is on a narrow bit of river floodplain (no danger of flooding because there are reservoirs upstream). Our site has several Blue Spruce and one Limber Pine. Farther back from the river are Ponderosa Pines. In between the trees are lots of shrubs and low annuals, mainly Wild Roses in full bloom.



Campsite and palisades
Palisades USFS Cpgs.
Between South Fork and Creede, CO



Rio Grande from trailer window
Palisades USFS Cpgs.
Between South Fork and Creede, CO

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

The rain quit while we were napping and I spent the rest of the afternoon outdoors enjoying the scene. We feel so fortunate to be in such a beautiful place and really thank Terry for doing such a thorough job on her diary.

Tuesday morning, June 29, we didn't do a whole lot. I took a walk around the campground loop looking for birds after the sun had surmounted the steep cliff to the east--nothing remarkable, maybe 15 species. Then we drove north to Creede, a delightful old silver (mostly) mining town. It has a lot of tourist shops, but also regular home-town shops like a nice True-Value Hardware store. The feel of the place is totally different from the funky snootiness we sensed in Telluride and we really like the little town. I went to the combination Forest Service office and Visitors Center, picked up a number of maps and brochures. I asked the man in charge if there was WiFi available anywhere in town. He didn't know, but a woman who happened to be standing there told me we could get it at the Old Firehouse Restaurant. I asked her if the food was good, and she told me it was. So even though it was only around 11:00, we decided to eat there. I had a wonderful chicken salad, and Jim had a too-greasy patty melt, but at least one of us was pleased. The WiFi worked without snag.

We also were pleased with some of our other purchases: (1) Jim had lost one of his felt hats--must have blown out of the truck at some stop. There was a sports clothing store in town with a large selection of hats, including one like the one he lost. (2) The campground water comes out of an old-fashioned hand pump with an opening at least an inch and a half in diameter--too large to insert in the opening of our six-gallon plastic water bottle. So we needed a funnel. The hardware store had just about every kind of funnel made, and Jim found one that should do the job. We haven't used it yet, because we had carried the water bottle with us and filled it at the town dump station--and I got very wet in the process. (3) I'm running low on books and inquired about a bookstore. I was sent to a little take-out restaurant, which had several shelves of books for sale. I think they are just the ones the owner bought because they sounded interesting and she put them on sale after reading them herself. She knew the contents of all three of the ones I selected. I wasn't able to get my usual women's history type, but I'd hate to run out of something to read.

Wednesday morning, June 30, we drove one of the roads Terry and John took--up toward the source of the Rio Grande. It involved driving past Creede about 20 miles, then veering off on a USFS road to Rio Grande Reservoir. The road was unpaved and pretty rough with lots of washboard and embedded rocks. It was also narrow in spots. It passed a variety of habitats, including another reservoir before Rio Grande Reservoir. It also passed by an area with lots of willows and multiple beaver dams. It might be a good stretch of road to walk, except there's quite a bit of traffic. We drove maybe 15-20 miles out the road and decided to turn around shortly after we got to Rio Grande Reservoir. The road was being graded and looked like it would be pretty much the same for the entire length of the long reservoir. The source of the river is high up in a pass beyond the end of the reservoir. The road across the pass was used in early days and is now passable only by four-wheel-drive vehicles.

Along the way we stopped several times to look over the ducks on the two reservoirs. There was a good variety, with many Lesser Scaup. I was surprised to discover that they breed this far south. Kaufman's map shows southern Colorado as the farthest south they breed. At one of the best duck stops, we encountered a man

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

with binoculars--a rare breed around here, we've discovered. He was obviously counting the ducks because every so often he went over and wrote something down on a form he carried. I asked him if he was doing a Breeding Bird Survey route. I think he was quite surprised at my knowledge of that activity. I did those routes myself for twenty years or so and shared that fact with him. I didn't want to interrupt his count, but I think he really welcomed the chance to chat with a real birder and we talked quite a while. He's a wildlife biologist for the USFS. His name is Randy, but I didn't quite catch his last name.

I told him we had purchased John Rawinski's book and found it excellent. He told us John used to work for him as a soil scientist in the US Forest Service before he retired a year or so ago and said he'd pass on our complimentary evaluation of the book next time he saw John. I quizzed him about where to find several species we were looking for, especially American Three-toed Woodpecker, which I want more than anything. He said, "They're all over the place now." The reason is that the spruce budworm is killing vast tracts of drought-impacted Engelmann Spruce trees. In fact the trees on the opposite side of the reservoir from us were dying. He said they looked healthy just last year. He suggested Shaw Lake as a possible place and showed us where it was on the map. He said the road was better than the one we were on.

Today, Thursday, July 1, we headed for Shaw Lake. To get there we drove south on SR 147 to US 160, then west about ten miles to the USFS road that goes to Big Meadows Campground and Reservoir. Beyond the turnoff for that, the road ascends steeply in a series of switchbacks to Shaw Reservoir and then on beyond for maybe eight more miles. There were a few places where some of the trees were dead or dying, but no large stands of nothing but dead trees. (We'd seen a place like that off in the distance the day before.) I walked several long stretches of road looking and listening for their characteristic calls and drumming, but failed to find any woodpeckers except flickers. I recorded a nice mix of birds a couple of places and got a song that I really think is a three-parted Orange-crowned Warbler song. I heard songs sort of like this in northern California last year. I tried playing the song back and once saw a small form fly from one alder to another, but never got a real look at it. The terrain where it was extremely steep, so there was no way I could descend and play the song from its territory. It did activate its rival on an adjacent territory, because after playback I could hear two birds doing essentially the same song.

I took lots of pictures of the spruce forest, both healthy and dying, as well as some photos of the beautiful Shaw "Lake." Jim and I wondered if there hadn't been a lake there originally and they'd made it bigger by building a dam.

This road was dirt just like the one the day before and it was *not* any better than that one--lots of washboard and embedded rocks as well as being quite narrow and steep in spots. I find such roads very frightening and Jim gets angry with me for asking him to drive in the middle of the road instead of way over on the right-hand side next to the drop-off. (He could always move over if we met another vehicle.) He thinks if he gets way over he'll avoid some of the washboard. I'd rather have bumps than have the edge of the road give way or Jim's hand slip a bit on the steering wheel.

This afternoon I sat outside as I usually do, but this time I watched the neighbors (two older adults and two younger adults) in the next campsite cook hamburgers on their propane grill. The younger woman brought out a plate of burgers that must have been at least six inches across and an inch or more thick. The older man (her father?)

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

was the chief chef. He put them on the grill, closed the lid, and cooked them for a long time on one side. Then he turned them over, smashed them good with the spatula, and cooked them a long time on the other. Then his daughter(?) came out and they turned them over again a couple of times, smashing as much juice as possible out of them each time. Then they cooked them some more! (I wish I'd timed the intervals.) Finally the daughter brought out a paper plate and loaded it with four balls of cremated cow that looked to be no more than three inches in diameter. They ate them inside the motorhome. I can imagine how awful they must have been--all dried up and shrunken.

9:00 p.m., Saturday, July 3, 2010

Palisades USFS Cpgd, between South Fork and Creede, CO

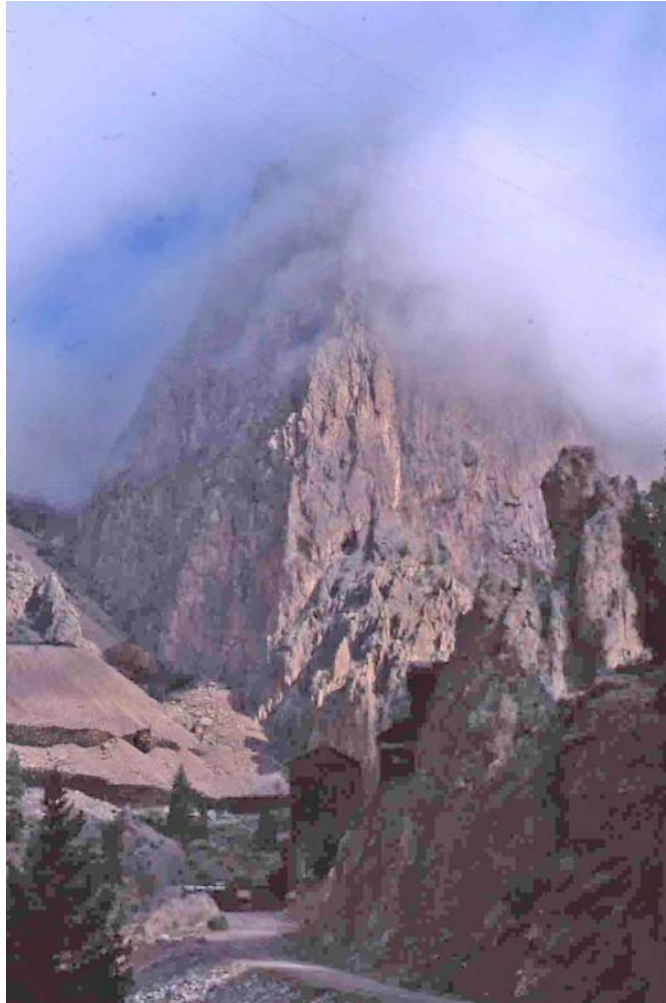
There's not much to report about yesterday, Friday, July 2. We drove down to South Fork, visited their meager farmers market (bought some nice tomatoes and a loaf of bread, which was OK but lacked enough salt). Then we spent the rest of the morning doing laundry at a poorly maintained laundromat and checking email at the local library, a beautiful new-looking building. As we drove back up the canyon, we encountered a quicky rainstorm, which was just about over by the time we'd driven the nine miles. In the course of the afternoon and night, we had three or four more showers. In between showers, it cleared off to just puffy clouds, so our solar panels are doing just fine. At mid-day we're getting as much as 8.4 amps and our voltage has reached its maximum every day. It's nice not to have to conserve on lights in the evening.

Today we took the "Bachelor Historic Tour" of the mining district in the mountains north of Creede. I had purchased a comprehensive description of all the stops at the Visitors Center a few days earlier--only \$1. The road is extremely steep and very narrow for long stretches; usually the steepest, narrowest ones have the scariest drop-offs beside them. I found it quite intimidating, but Jim took it all in stride, as usual. (I've had an abnormal fear of heights--acrophobia--ever since my parents took me for a walk out on the Golden Gate Bridge in a strong wind when I was around 11 years old.) Even so, I was really glad I went, for the scenery was spectacular and I don't think I've ever been so close to old mining areas. Mining in the area started in 1891 and continued until the 1970s.

The tour road ascends on Forest Road 503 right at the end of the main business street in Creede by going up a narrow canyon with a creek on one side and tall cliffs and spires on either side. The multicolored cliffs and spires actually lean over the canyon at about a 10 degrees angle, I'd estimate. At the first stop, morning clouds still lingered around the tops of the cliffs, making for dramatic photos.

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010



**Old Commodore Mine area
Above Creede, CO**

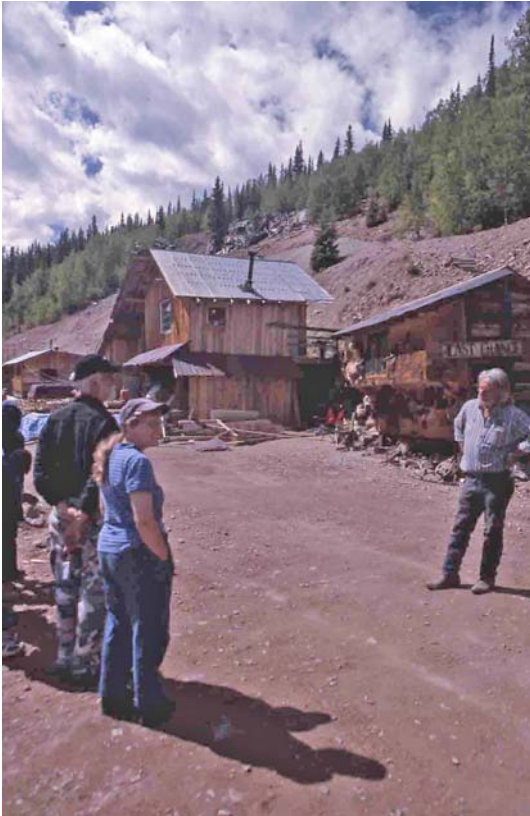
At one stop we parked beside the ruins of a couple of remaining buildings of the Commodore Mine and far above, at the top of a steep slope of tailings, we could see the remains of the Last Chance Mine, both very productive in their time. At other spots we saw the remains of less successful ventures. At the top of the grade there is a 2.3-mile spur road up to the Equity Mine, but we didn't take that. The tour concludes by descending on FR 504. If we'd taken the entire tour, it would have been 17 miles, but we drove only about thirteen.

Part way down FR 504, we saw a home-made sign to "Last Chance Mine - One-Half mile." That hadn't been mentioned in the brochure, but we decided half a mile couldn't be too bad. It was a pretty awful road--extremely bumpy, but probably passable even in a sedan, certainly OK in our high-clearance Suburban. It ended at the buildings we'd seen earlier from far below. They were located on an extremely narrow shelf on the very steep, high mountainside with barely enough room to park. I worried the whole time we were there about how we were going to turn around.

A sixtyish man with bushy hair and beard came out to greet us and the van in front of us, which had a lot of people in it of all ages. He explained that he had been allowed to purchase the mine just for the back taxes, which amounted to less than \$3,000, with the understanding that he would restore the place and convert it into an

Southern California and the Southern Rockies Spring and Summer, 2010

interpretive museum. It had been in the hands of the same family for multiple generations and they really wanted it to be in good hands. The man told us the history of the place and his purchase of it, then explained the restoration he'd done and was in the process of doing. He had a lot of minerals for sale, not just local, but from all over; we weren't interested in buying any of them, but we did give him a donation to help with his restoration work. He only has the area open for visitors on weekends (summer only, of course, for we were probably at least 10,500 ft in elevation there) so he can work on it the rest of the time.



**Last Chance Mine and owner
Above Creede, CO**



**Commodore Mine from Las Chance mine far above
Above Creede, CO**

From there the road descended just about as steeply as it came up, first through aspens, then grasslands. There were many places where we had a sweeping view of the Rio Grande Valley and Creede far below. I probably took too many pictures.

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010



Creede and Rio Grande Valley from historic-tour route

4:15 p.m., Tuesday, July 6, 2010
Sky Mountain Resort RV Park, Chama, NM

Saturday, July 4, was the first Independence Day in my life that I didn't hear a single firecracker. There are strict laws against them in the National Forest areas we've been in. There is great fear of forest fires for good reason, although we saw no evidence of recent burns, not even the controlled type. Those sick, desiccated spruce trees must be ideal tinder.

This was our last day in the Palisades Campground and we'd done all the things I really wanted to do. So I hauled out Terry's diary one more time and read about Miners Creek Rd., a short spur northward that takes off just beyond Creede. We drove it up about three miles. It started out through private grassland in transition from ranches to very isolated private vacation homes on huge tracts of land. One homeowner had put out a lot of bluebird houses. I did see one Mountain Bluebird, but all the boxes I looked at were occupied by Tree Swallows. Although the bluebird perched fairly close to me, it didn't vocalize.

Farther up the road enters the National Forest, where boondocking is permitted in the riparian woodland beside a creek. Terry had remarked that it looked like a nice place to camp. A lot of people had thought so, too, for the place was jam-packed with small RVs and tents. I had thought I might walk that part of the road, too, but figured that the camping noise plus the creek noise would make for very poor recordings. So we drove back and I walked a long stretch of the aforementioned grassland. The only good recording was of a male Vesper Sparrow proclaiming his territory atop an isolated shrub, giving me an excellent recording. His mate flew in eventually and he departed. I strongly suspected they had a nest in the shrub. Jim monitored it for a while, but didn't see either bird.

There was still a lot of morning left when we finished with that road. I asked Jim if he'd rather go back to the trailer or drive 20 miles farther to look at a waterfall. He wasn't too excited about another drive, but even less excited about going back to the

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

trailer and its meager supply of birds at his feeder. Since the road was all paved, we went--and were really glad we did!

About half way out SR 147 we caught sight of a number of cars parked just off the road. At first I figured there must be a good fishing hole nearby, but as we drove past, I discovered everyone was looking up the slope at a herd of Rocky Mountain Bighorn Sheep. When Jim heard this, he turned around at the next available spot and drove back. By this time all the cars had left and no more stopped the whole time he was photographing those animals. They allowed reasonably close approach and with his longest lens he was able to get nice frame-filling images--as many as he wanted. Eventually they decided to meander off, probably because Jim was getting a bit too close. There was a barbed-wire fence where they were and the animals were on both sides of it when we got there. In order to go off together, some of them had to jump the fence. Jim realized this and was ready to try for a shot of one jumping. He thinks he got the picture, although it may be out of focus from motion. [It was good.]



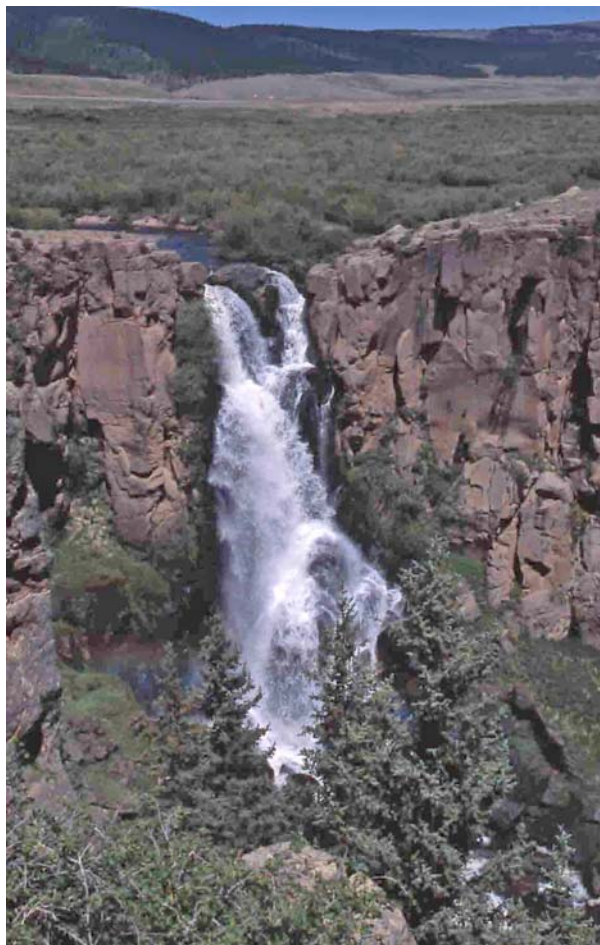
Rocky Mountain Bighorn Sheep
Upper Rio Grande Valley, CO

As the animals filed off more or less single file, I counted them. There were thirteen beautiful rams, some with huge sets of horns, others younger. They were a bit shaggy because they were shedding. In fact, one would occasionally rub against a shrub, apparently to rid itself of some of the itchy excess wool.

We continued on to the North Clear Creek waterfall and it turned out to be well worth the drive. As it cascaded down, the water bounced off of rock outcroppings here and there. There was a broad green swath on either side, where mosses and other water-loving plants were growing. A couple of times I saw a Dipper foraging in the sides of the waterfall. I hoped I'd see it go to its nest, but each time it disappeared up the creek at the top. The rocky cliff face on the opposite side of the canyon had a lot of overhangs, and each one contained several Cliff Swallow nests. It's not often that you see a Cliff Swallow actually nesting on a cliff.

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010



**North Clear Creek Falls
Upper Rio Grande Valley, CO**

As we drove back to the trailer, I looked for the sheep again and saw them several hundred yards away from the road lying down.

Monday, July 5, we drove 100 miles, first south to South Fork, then east to Pagosa Springs, and then south to Chama, New Mexico. There are several RV parks in Chama, but we finally settled on the only one that had WiFi. One other one had a "WiFi hotspot," which means you have to go to a particular place in the campground to use it.

En route we saw two bears. The first was half-way up a roadcut a short distance east of Wolf Creek Pass. A lot of cars were stopped looking at it, but there was no place to park on our side of the road. The other was a cub (not super-young) that ran across the road in front of us when we were driving from Pagosa Springs to Chama. Fortunately it was far enough in front of us that we didn't even have to slow down.

Sky Mountain Resort turned out to be a very nice place, with about half the sites next to or under a grove of large Narrow-leaf Cottonwoods. We got a site that was fairly far (for a private RV park) from its neighbors. We had no sooner backed into the site when we started spotting birds, first a White-breasted Nuthatch, then some Lewis's Woodpeckers and a Red-naped Sapsucker. Yellow Warblers, Warbling Vireos and an occasional Cordilleran Flycatcher are singing in the trees. We decided we had to stay here longer than the two days we'd originally planned. Unfortunately when we checked

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

with the office, we found this site was only available for three nights, so we'd have to move to a less desirable place Thursday.

We had been planning to go to Bandelier National Monument next. It doesn't take reservations for their campground, so we figured if we arrived Thursday, we'd be OK. But when I checked their website, which I wouldn't have done if we didn't have WiFi in our trailer, I discovered their campground is closed for the summer for refurbishing and their Visitor Center is also closed for remodeling, with a few displays in another building. There are no other campgrounds near there. After a bit of discussion, we decided to stay here through Saturday night, even though we have to move to a different site after three days.

Our reason for coming to Chama is its easy access to Cumbres Pass, where there are reputed to be American Three-toed Woodpeckers. Trujillo Meadows, Colorado, is less than fifteen miles from here. Since we won't be in such a nice site after three days, we decided to stay around the campground while we have the nice site and drive up into the mountains after we move. Today, Tuesday, July 6, it was kind of nice to just mess around all day and relax a little. The temperature is in the upper 70s-- a bit warm in the trailer, but nice outside where there is a breeze. And that's exactly where I'm going to go now that I've written up this segment of my diary. Toby needs a bath, but it's too hot to use that hair-drier. Tomorrow!

10:00 a.m., Thursday, July 8, 2010 **Sky Mountain Resort RV Park, Chama, NM**

We've really been enjoying our campsite while we have it and haven't left it except for brief shopping excursions. Birds are all over the place. Yesterday afternoon Jim finally gave up attracting the Lewis's Woodpeckers to the Magic Meal on the stumps right next to the trailer and put some in the grooves in the bark of trees a little farther out. In no time it was found and ever since there's been a steady stream of the birds coming in to the Magic Meal. Jim had photographed them with his new little digital camera and also on film, with and without flash.



Lewis's Woodpecker
Chama, NM

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

Just a few minutes ago he said he didn't see how he could improve on what he has, so now he's sitting in front of the hummingbird feeder trying for shots of the Rufous, which just showed up yesterday. He's becoming bolder and bolder and chasing the Broad-tails away frequently. He's a bit of a fliberty-gibbet and flits around a lot, but occasionally he perches.

I've been trying to record the Lewis's Woodpeckers. They're mainly silent, but yesterday morning I got two interacting and giving their high, metallic chatter, as well as the "yik" and "yik-ik" calls. This morning I tried again and after an hour's effort got one "yik-yik-yik..." series. This isn't the best place to record due to river, highway and campground noise. There's usually a breeze and the least bit of stirring rattles cottonwood leaves, even these Narrow-leafed ones. I think my recordings will challenge my Raven Lite sound-editing software.

Yesterday right after lunch I decided to go to the visitors center, store and produce stand up the road. That was when the sky decided to produce a ten-minute deluge and I got sort of wet, even though I had an umbrella. They've been forecasting a 30-40degrees chance of thunder showers everywhere we've been for days, but this was the first we've had. It gradually cleared up the rest of the afternoon. Today we have scattered clouds and may get rain later on. Temperatures everywhere we've been for the last ten days have been delightful--highs in the 70s and lows around 50. We had quite a bit of afternoon wind at Palisades Campground due to the canyon we were in, but here it's been quite calm, just a light breeze. Mosquitoes have been only a moderate annoyance and a few dabs of DEET have worked. Jim hates the odor of it and won't use it, so he complains more about them.

4:30 p.m., Saturday, July 10, 2010
Sky Mountain Resort RV Park, Chama, NM

Because the site we were in was reserved for the weekend, we had to move around mid-day Thursday, July 8. Our new site is a back-in with huge trailers on either side. However, it backs right up to a dense strip of Narrow-leaf Cottonwood woodland with a lot of dead trees and an impenetrable thicket of understory plants. There's a fence with two thick white horizontal rails demarking the RV park from the thicket. There's also an ancient cottonwood growing on our side of the fence near the rear of the site. Jim was very pessimistic about our getting any birds in the new place, but I thought the proximity to the thicket and the presence of the cottonwood on our side might mean we'd get birds here, too.

I started raining in mid-afternoon and rained lightly the rest of the day, so we didn't get much action. However, late in the day a family of Black-capped Chickadees discovered the birdseed. It consisted of a parent and three youngsters. The juveniles are easy to tell from the adult because they have nice crisp, wide, white feather edges on their wings and scapulars. The adult looks much darker because she(?) is worn. In some places on her breast, the dark down is even showing through. This family has been with us off and on ever since.

Southern California and the Southern Rockies Spring and Summer, 2010



**Black-capped Chickadee photo - juvenile with worn adult
Chama, NM**

The Lewis's Woodpeckers, which had been so wary about coming close to our trailer in the other site are now eating from the feeder log and from crevices in the cottonwood, where Jim has put Magic Meal. Other species that have been coming from time to time are Red-winged Blackbird, Black-headed Grosbeak, and Steller's Jay. And just a few minutes ago, Jim announced that he'd had two brief visits from a Black-billed Magpie. He put up his blind around noon today, so that may account from the visit from the wary magpie. It takes courage for such a big, rangy bird to come down to such a cramped area. And Corvidae are certainly wary.

Yesterday morning, Friday, June 9, we drove up to the Trujillo Meadows area near the top of Cumbres Pass on SR 17. It's just across the border in Colorado and the bird-finding guide had listed it first as the place to look for American Three-toed Woodpeckers. It's a beautiful drive on an easy grade from Chama. The previous day's rain had gone and the sky was beautifully clear, with puffy clouds developing late in the morning. Just past the pass there is a turn-off on a wide, but sometimes bumpy, dirt road. We drove straight to the end of the road, where there is a reservoir. At the upper end of it there is a lot of marsh and wet meadow, and well back from them is a forest of very healthy-looking Engelmann Spruce, etc. I recorded some of the meadow birds, especially White-crowned Sparrow, Lincoln's Sparrow, and Pine Siskin.

Then I had Jim drive me to the top of the grade--a short distance back from the meadow--since I wasn't anxious to walk up-hill at 10,000+ feet elevation. From there I walked off and on some more as we drove back toward the main highway. Part way back is the turn-off to the campground, but the road to it was closed. We had known it would be, for the RV park owner in Chama had told us it was closed for refurbishing. I wasn't even tempted to walk in, for I could hear the roar of heavy equipment back there; we also met a couple of huge trucks that were probably carrying sand or gravel.

We saw nothing but healthy spruce forest along the road. If there were some sick ones by the campground, we'll never know. I got a few more recordings, especially a nice long sequence of Hermit Thrush. It was interesting to notice the pattern of consecutive songs, which are essentially the same motif but transposed into a wide variety of different keys. Invariably if it transposed to a lower key on one song, it went to a higher key on the next one. Never did it go lower, then lower still, or higher, then higher still. It was always higher, then lower, then higher, then lower, etc., but using many different keys. Beautiful. Where I was recording the thrushes, there were several

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

other birds also singing, so some of my recordings were nice mixes, containing Warbling Vireo, American Robin, and Ruby-crowned Kinglet, too.

The weather was clear the rest of the day, becoming partly cloudy by the end. In the middle of the night it started to rain lightly and was still doing it when we awoke. So we got up sort of late and had a leisurely breakfast. I made French toast from some of that Wonder Bread wheat bread I'd been forced to buy a couple of weeks ago and which was taking up room in my freezer.

After breakfast we took a short drive south and checked out a road that the Visitors Center had said was good for wildlife. It follows the Brazos River upstream and passes through a variety of habitats--pasture, riparian woodland, pinyon-juniper, Ponderosa pine forest. There are a lot of homes on the upper part of the road, many of them vacation homes. Most of them were very nice looking--and a great many of them were for sale. The recent recession has obviously impacted this region severely. (We also saw three defunct restaurants in tiny Chama yesterday.) The only wildlife we saw was a variety of interesting looking small mammals beside the road. (I wondered if some of them might be Gunnison's Prairie-Dogs, one of the results of the splitting of the White-tailed. The range map in Kaufman's *Mammals* guide shows them here.) We'd have liked to stop and check some of them out, but the road was narrow and without a shoulder or pullouts in many areas. I wish I could walk the road, but there'd be no easy way for Jim to follow me in the truck. Although the traffic wasn't heavy, we still didn't want to stop right on the pavement. It wouldn't have been possible to walk back into the habitat, for it was fenced-off pasture.

Then we drove out to take a look at Heron Lake State Park. It has quite a few non-reservable EW sites and we wanted to see what they are like. The place was essentially full today, but we saw quite a few nice sites and most of the weekend campers will probably be going home tomorrow. It's located in a pinyon-juniper-pine woodland habitat with sagebrush, so there's the possibility of Juniper Titmouse and other species of that habitat. The lake only allows sailboats and low-power fishing boats, so it should be quiet.

Sky Mountain RV Park is owned by Bill and Julia Rosner and Julia runs the office. She is not a birder, but with the aid of previous campers has compiled a bird list for the "campground and Chama Valley area." She also has copies of a list she got off the internet for Northcentral New Mexico. She says an Audubon group compiled that one. These lists are free handouts in the office. Both lists are flawed (names misspelled and order wrong), but hers has a few birds not on the regional list and a few missing. I heard Warbling Vireos all over the place, but the list has Bell's, which is not on the regional list at all, nor do field guide maps show it anywhere near. We saw a lot of Brewer's Blackbirds, but also several Common Grackles. The latter are not on the list, probably because people just dismissed them as more Brewer's Blackbirds. There are also several other birds on her list which probably could have occurred as accidentals in this area, but are not on the regional list: Field Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, and Rose-breasted Grosbeak. I always hesitate to criticize people's bird lists, but since she is not a birder, I thought she'd want to know that her list is flawed. She was overjoyed when I offered to clean up her list. She also asked me if I thought maybe she should have a list just for this park instead of including the surrounding area, too. I agreed, for the list of what we've seen in the few days we've been here is pretty amazing--and we're here in early July when all birds present are probably breeding. So I took her list, corrected the spelling & punctuation, put the birds in the right order using

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

having a long revival-type church service in the evening. At night there would be intervals of music, then silence (probably during a long sermon), then more music. The first night it ended at 10:30, but the last two nights it lasted until 11:30. From what I could hear, it was some sort of Christian rock music designed to fire up the Holy Spirit in those teen-agers. I stayed up until it was over each night, for I was sure I'd not be able to go to sleep. Jim went to bed during the quiet (sermon?) period and the resumption of the drumming didn't awaken him.

3:15 p.m., Tuesday, July 13, 2010

Heron Lake State Park, NM

When I took the bird list to the office Sunday morning, July 11, it turned out Julie had gone for the day and her husband didn't have any idea how to work her computer. So I'll have to mail it to her when I get home. We don't carry a printer with us.

I asked permission for us to stay past noon check-out, and Bill said it was fine for us to stay until 1:30 or 2:00, as we wanted to. The check-out time at Heron Lake State Park is 2:00 and we wanted to be sure all the weekenders had left. Also, Jim wanted to spend the morning photographing the birds in our campsite. He didn't get anything new, but I know he took more shots of the chickadee family and the Lewis's Woodpeckers. One of them had an usually pale collar and he'd been wanting to get a better picture of it for days. He'd seen it at the other site, but finally it turned up at the new one. He shot it with his digital camera and on the little screen it looked to be quite white on the nape, but with the typical gray feather edges on this sides. It'll be interesting to see it on a good screen.

When we got to the state park, we discovered that there were still a lot of sites occupied and many people spent the night. However, the site we had decided was our first choice had been vacated. We had thought it would get afternoon shade, but it turned out the shade is actually in the morning. The campground is a large circle, so it's hard to keep track of directions. I had used the map to figure it out, but the the map didn't have north at the top. There were actually two maps on the brochure and one had north in the upper right corner and the one I had used showing the campsites had it in the lower right corner. How stupid! Furthermore that map was absolutely square, so there was not reason for it not to be consistent with the top one. The next morning I cut out that square and Scotch-taped it in so the two were consistent.

But by then the damage was done! The hot afternoon sun beat on the right side of the trailer and the AC really didn't do its job. Later we discovered it wasn't just the angle, but the voltage was very low. Even at 6:00 the next morning when I checked the voltmeter, the voltage was even with the low end of the green on the gauge and went down dramatically whenever I put a load on it. I'm not sure it's good for the AC to use it when the voltage is low, but we've been doing it anyway and it seems to be working OK. Yesterday and today I clothes-pinned some blankets in the west windows of the trailer and it has been comfortable.

Another problem with having the trailer face the hot afternoon sun is that it's extremely hard to get the door open. We've had this problem before and have finally figured out that the high temperature is expanding the material that the door or door-jam or entire side of the trailer (don't know which) are made of and that's what's making the door stick. Certainly it never happens except when it's very hot. And the official temperatures have been in the upper 80s the last several days. The nights cool down

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

into the lower 50s and it remains pleasant all morning, although we tend to seek shade in the late morning.

Because of the heat, we remained in the trailer the rest of the day after we arrived Sunday and when I ventured out late in the day I heard very few birds--just an occasional American Crow or distant Spotted Towhee.

Monday morning, July 12, I awoke at first light and listened for bird sounds. I heard a distant robin and a closer Spotted Towhee. Remembering how quiet it had been in the heat of the day Sunday, I decided I'd better get up and do whatever recording I could. There's a nature trail that starts out between site 12 and 13 (we were lucky to be so close to it). It extends out onto a point of high ground to an overlook of the lake, which is actually one of a series of reservoirs in Colorado and New Mexico where they store Colorado River water that has been piped to the eastern side of the Continental Divide. The habitat along the trail, and also all through the campground, is a beautiful mix of Two-needle Pinyon, Rocky Mountain Juniper, and Ponderosa Pine, with an understory of much Gambel Oak and some Mountain Mahogany.

I recorded a lot of Spotted Towhee sound and a little bit from other species. Then when I got to the point, I started hearing a song that puzzled me. The bird repeated essentially the same long (maybe 1-2 sec) song over and over. It was a jumble of fairly pleasant finchy notes with lower, harsher ones interspersed at even intervals several times in the song. The pitch range was more or less that of a House Finch, but it was definitely not that. When I heard it, the sun had still not risen and the lighting was pretty gray. I finally caught sight of the bird and saw that it had a thick silvery bill and seemed to have a rufous patch on the wing, but otherwise looked black or very dark gray. Its crown feathers were elevated giving it a flat-headed look with a square cut-off at the rear. I couldn't think of anything it could be but a Blue Grosbeak, but what would one of those be doing in a pinyon-juniper-pine habitat. Far below I could see a drying-up inlet with tamarisk clumps and open weedy areas; that's where the bird belonged, if that's what it was. Eventually the sun came up and the bird kindly flew in closer to where I was standing and I was able to see the rest of the field marks, especially the blue. I did some playback, but I don't think the bird paid any attention to it; it just flew in anyway. A short time later it flew away.

I went back and fetched Jim from the trailer--had forgotten to set up radio contact. After selecting and putting together the camera gear he wanted to use, it was probably fifteen minutes later when we got back out there. I didn't hear the song any more, but tried playing back the tape I'd gotten--to no effect. I left Jim out at the point and went back to the trailer to fix breakfast. Just before I got to the trailhead, I heard a commotion of flicker "kleear" calls and stopped to record it. I had no sooner turned on my tape recorder when a bird dropped down and proceeded to feed a couple of well-grown nestlings no more than 15 ft from where I was standing. The youngsters put up a fuss while being fed and when the parent left, they started doing the "kleear" call--with less sweep and fullness than the adult version, but just as much amplitude.

After the feeding session was over, I went back out to the point and fetched Jim. (We still didn't have those radios.) He hadn't seen the grosbeak and was really happy when he saw the nest. The cavity was only about five feet off the ground and was in a location with excellent morning light. He spent the rest of the morning there and all morning today, too. Parent flickers don't feed their young very often, maybe hourly, so it entailed a lot of tedious waiting. As he was watching the nest, he began to think one of the chicks was about ready to fledge. He had his camera on a tripod close to the nest

Southern California and the Southern Rockies Spring and Summer, 2010

and was triggering his shots remotely from farther back. He said he sat for two hours with his binoculars to his eyes and his finger on the shutter release, hoping to get a shot of the moment that young bird fledged. The bird did indeed fledge and he photographed it with his film camera, so we'll have to wait to see if the pictures are any good. The other baby looked ready to fledge, too, so Jim sat in full sun for another hour hoping it would also leave, but it didn't. It seemed to really want to, for it spent a lot of time on the edge of the nest, fluttering its wings, etc., just as its sibling had. [Later: He didn't get the actual fledging, but he did get some nice shots of the two juveniles in the nest opening, one about ready to fledge.]



Northern Flicker - chicks
Heron Lake State Park, NM

When I looked at the slides, I realized that these birds were actually Red-shafted/Yellow-shafted intergrades--mostly Red, but with a red nuchal (nape) band.]

We arose early this morning and I got Jim out to the point before sunrise. The Blue Grosbeak was singing there again at that time, but disappeared soon after sunrise. It sang from several perches, but never from the close one I'd seen it on the day before. Last evening as I was sitting outside just before sunset, I could hear the distant song of a Blue Grosbeak, so Jim is going back out to the point at that time tonight and may get a chance for a photograph. It's sort of a long shot, but who knows? It's not really too far away, maybe 150 yd from the trailer.

I tried to do a little recording this morning, but since it was quite breezy, I didn't expect much. So I relented and took Toby along. When I got out to the point where the grosbeak was singing again, I tried to record it, but Toby couldn't stand to be stationary and gave a little whine every few seconds and I couldn't make him stop. I wish he'd realize that he'd get to go lots more often if he'd be quiet!

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

After breakfast I had to defrost the refrigerator. I'd hoped to let it go until we get home in a few days, but realized it was just too icy. Then I went out and took a lot of pictures of the PJP habitat (pinyon-juniper-ponderosa) for my mountains workshop. The rest of the morning I sat outside and worked on my embroidery.

Last evening a very young fledgling Woodhouse's Western Scrub-Jay discovered the Magic Meal outside the trailer--our first and only feeding station customer except hummingbirds. I also saw it this morning when I rounded the trailer carrying my chair and it didn't fly away as I watched it. Right now Jim is sitting inside the trailer where it's cool, with the window open and pillows stuffed into the opening except where his camera protrudes. He thinks he's getting visits from one or two adults, and maybe also the juvie from yesterday and this morning. [He only got photos of juveniles and that's all I saw.]

5:00 p.m., Sunday, July 25, 2010

Home

We've been home over a week now and it's high time I wrote up the last few days of our trip.

Wednesday, July 14, was a day of driving 460 miles. We returned to Chama, then headed west to the Farmington area (horrible-looking oil country and town). From there we went south to Gallup, where we ate a late lunch at a Golden Corral--one of those all-you-can-eat buffet restaurants. From there we drove I-40 to Flagstaff, where we ended up at Greer's Pine Shadows RV Park. Most of the sites there are occupied by people who are there for the season and they had only one site left--right across from the office and next to the laundry-room/community meeting room and backed up to the main highway. We were so tired that we took it, although we could have driven a mile or so farther and found another one. This site was nice and shady and that other RV park only promised "some shady" sites. It actually turned out better than we had hoped, although I had to go out and turn off the porch light in the community room every evening after the people left from their card parties, birthday parties, etc. (The laundry function closed at 8:00, according to the sign.) Also, Flagstaff brags that it was the first city in the world to fight light pollution--and it's true. All their street lights and lighted signs have lights that are directed straight down, so our bedroom really wasn't too brightly lit at night.

As soon as we got in, I called my friend Bea Cooley, to see if we could get together anytime in the next couple of days. It turned out she was free on Friday morning, so we made a date for breakfast and birding. The rest of the day--and there wasn't much left by that time--we did nothing. We also ate nothing, having stuffed ourselves at lunch time.

Besides seeing Bea, another goal for Flagstaff was to make one more try for the American Three-toed Woodpecker. I had a 2001 book on bird-finding in the Flagstaff area and it recommended one place above all others for the bird, a 1996 burn area. Even though that burn was pretty old, I decided to check it out anyway. It's USFS Rd. 151 that turns off of US 181 and then returns to it farther up. We went to the 2nd turn-off, which is 18 miles north of Flagstaff. The road is a slightly-traveled gravel one and the burn area is between one and two miles from the main highway. On Thursday, July 15, I walked about 1.5 miles of the road and the habitat certainly looked right (for a change) for the woodpecker. The fire had skipped around, leaving small patches of

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

singed trees as well as areas that were completely burned. Many of the dead trees had been sawed off and removed, but a lot had been left standing as snags. Mountain Bluebirds were using some of them, for I saw a couple of family groups. They were pretty shy, but I tried to get some recordings of their calls. I also had a few Pygmy Nuthatches. Recording conditions were quite good, although a breeze got up later in the morning. Of course, we saw no Three-toed Woodpeckers.

It got pretty hot later in the morning and ended up in the high 80s for the day. After our birding, we did a little shopping and returned to the trailer for the rest of the day. The temperature didn't cool off much that night and it was sort of muggy.

Friday morning, July 16, Bea came about 6:30 and we went to an excellent local restaurant for breakfast. I forget the name of the place, but it's in a strip mall and was practically full of local customers by the time we left. It's not the type of place tourists would notice.

Bea had recalled that there was a controlled burn that got out of control a couple of years ago near Williams and she thought that might be just the right timing for finding Three-toed Woodpeckers. She kindly drove me over there; Jim preferred to stay behind and do some shopping. We went to the USFS office in Williams and got directions and drove around in the area a while. It turned out that the part we drove through was the portion that didn't get out of control, for there were almost no dead trees. The fire had just cleared out the understory, as planned. That was good for the forest, but not something to attract woodpeckers. I actually think the area is too low for Three-toes, for it was mostly pine and parts of it were in transition to pinyon-juniper. We did most of our birding from the car, partly because of the unpromising habitat and partly because it was pretty warm.

I've been amazed in all my searches for Three-toed Woodpeckers that I've seen almost no Hairy Woodpeckers either. They're less picky about their forest, so this surprises me.

As we were driving back to Flagstaff, Bea casually mentioned the "prairie dog problem" they have in her neighborhood just north of Flagstaff. I knew that the only prairie dog in that area had to be Gunnison's, an animal I really wanted to get photos of. (It's a species of special concern with a declining population in parts of Colorado and New Mexico, but seems to be holding its own in Arizona and New Mexico.) I asked her if Jim could get close to them and she told me it would be very easy. So after lunch--and a humdinger of a thunder shower that really cooled things off--we drove to her place, which has widely spaced homes on lots that must be an acre or two in size. We had to wait around a while for the animals to come out after the rain, but they finally did, and Jim got lots of photos.

Southern California and the Southern Rockies Spring and Summer, 2010



Gunnison's Prairie-Dog
Flagstaff, AZ

Meanwhile, I showed Bea the Raven Lite sonogram-making software in my computer. She was really interested in it.

I first met Bea (or thought it was the first time) at a Birding by Ear workshop with Luis Baptista at the Yuba Pass Field Station of CSU San Francisco many years ago. She reminded me, though, that we actually first met at Denali National Park in 1992, and that she and her husband had been camped next to us when we had a grizzly bear visit our site. I think she remembered us because it was "our" bear, and she was just one of several neighboring campers. She reminded me that some years ago when we got together, Jim told his bear story, as he likes to do whenever given the opportunity and it sounded familiar to her. We compared dates in our diaries and it turned out we were indeed there on the same date.

Yesterday I got an email from Bea that they'd had an even more severe thunder shower and that a deluge of mud had swept through their tract on Tuesday and had broken through her garage door and then the wall in the rear of the garage and left fourteen inches of "the most viscous and vicious mud imaginable." It also left an inch of mud in the room next to the garage, but fortunately the rest of the house was OK. The garage was full of tools and stored possessions, so I can imagine the mess. Her home is below a pass between two volcanic peaks and the area above her tract had just had a severe fire, denuding the land. (It was still burning at higher elevations when we were there, but I'm sure the noon thunderstorm must have completely extinguished it.) She told us she had been evacuated for three days just a few weeks ago--and now this! She didn't need any more stress in her life either, for her husband had just died a few months earlier.

Saturday, July 17, we drove home. I always fear we'll have a flat tire or other mechanical problem when we drive across the desert in the summertime. Despite our early start, it was over 100degrees from just before Needles almost to Anaheim. As we passed Yorba Regional Park, the temperature read 99degrees, but by the time we got home it was in the low 70s. How wonderful to live in Huntington Beach, with it's strong sea breeze.

Although the yard was overgrown with weeds, we were amazed to discover that the tomato plants are taller than Jim and covered with green globes. They're ripening later than usual this year because so far it has been a cool summer with a heavy marine layer most days. Jim had thought he'd finally planted those tomatoes far enough apart

Southern California and the Southern Rockies

Spring and Summer, 2010

that he could get between the plants to pick them, but again they've grown together into one huge jungle--even bigger than ever because they had more room to spread!

Although the sun was shining when we got home, ever since then it's been overcast most of the time, with just a little afternoon sun the last couple of days--perfect weather for washing countless loads of clothes and rugs (me), weeding the yard (Jim), and cleaning the house and trailer (both of us).

Time to get started labeling 30 rolls of slides, describing 13 hours of sounds, and planning my workshop on Western Mountains and Their Birds, which starts in January.