

Trip to Western States - 2008

by Sylvia R. Gallagher

Part 2

Sunday, April 20, 2008
Sunny Flat Campground, Cave Creek Canyon, AZ

No entry.

11:00 a.m., Monday, April 21, 2008
Sunny Flat Campground, Cave Creek Canyon, AZ

Our drive from Sierra Vista via Bisbee and Douglas was uneventful, except for our failure to find a decent looking place for lunch in Douglas. I don't think we found the new main business street, just the old run-down center of town. Perhaps all the new stores were on the road to the border-crossing into Mexico. We had to stop at a roadside pull-off north of there and fix lunch in the trailer. (It's always fun to eat out for variety when we're traveling.)

We got here about 2:30, just after the 2:00 check-out time. Despite being told by Maya that there were lots of spaces, we got the very last site our trailer would fit into. There were a couple of other short ones, but all the rest were occupied, many by tent-campers or those with campers on the back of pickup trucks, who could have used the short ones. On our way up the hill from the main highway 80 we met three RVs, one of which was quite long. We imagined that it had just vacated our site. Fifteen minutes after we were in the site, another largish trailer made the rounds looking for a site and drove out. This campground can't accommodate really long rigs. Our 26-footer is close to the limit, although a few sites seem longer than our number 5. The site is a very nice one. It gets morning and mid-day sun for the solar panels, but filtered afternoon shade from oaks and junipers so it doesn't get too hot. Right now it's very pleasant.

The campground has had considerable upgrading since we were here before (early 1990s I think). Then the roads were uneven and just dirt. We had to ford the creek on an uncertain rocky bottom. Now there's a bridge across the creek and the roads and sites are paved. I think they've made it somewhat smaller, too, and the site we were in is no longer in use.

Jim set up his feeding log, water drip, hummingbird feeder, and (a new item) a dish of grape jelly. Then we took brief naps and went down to Portal to touch base with Maya Decker. Her house is about one-half mile from the main village of Portal and situated on about 4.2 acres. It's an elegant house with beautiful wood and tile work (some new with inlays created by Maya herself) and large rooms. It also has separate buildings where she has her laundry room and garage, but those buildings obviously have room for other uses, too. It's probably larger than she really wanted, but she couldn't resist the setting. On one side of her property is some beautiful riparian woodland with oaks, sycamores, and junipers. The edge of this is right next to the house. On the other side is desert scrub with lots of mesquite. The walled-in yard is nicely landscaped, and she has set up seed and syrup feeders all over the place. To

top it off, she said it's all paid for using the money she got by selling her 1600-square-foot condo in Dana Point. It had an ocean view, but wasn't right on the ocean front.

Yesterday afternoon we sat outside and watched her feeders. I tallied a list of over 20 species in her yard during the hour we were there, including a Peregrine Falcon flying over and a Blue-throated Hummingbird with a nest and two chicks under the eaves outside her office. The list included three species of oriole (Hooded, Scott's, Bullock's) and five species of hummer (Magnificent, Blue-throated, Broad-billed, Broad-tailed, and Black-chinned), two towhees (Canyon and Green-tailed). She's had some pretty rare birds in the three years she's been here, including Berylline and Lucifer hummers. She also enumerated some of the mammals she's seen, including Ringtail, Coatimundi (large family group), and Bobcat. I really can't remember them all. No wonder she loves her place. We're invited back to dinner tonight. Hope I can get this installment finished in time.

Back in 1972, Mother and I stayed in a place called "Cathedral Rock Lodge," which consisted of two new housekeeping units in a single building. When I told Maya about it, she said, "This is that place!" I had a hard time figuring out which part of the place we had stayed in. But all I could really remember is the sliding glass doors that look out at a gorgeous view up the canyon. Maya mentioned some ugly green carpeting in the kitchen area that she took out when she moved in. I think it was there when Mother and I were there, for I do remember green carpeting. It certainly would have been ugly by now if it was there all that time. Maya says the place has had all sorts of uses over the years, including a restaurant. (It's a terrible location for a restaurant, being 1/2 mile off the paved road on an obscure dirt road.)

Portal is a special community because up the canyon is the field research station for the American Museum of Natural History in New York. Many people come here year after year to do research and in the process come to love it so much that they retire in the Portal area. So there are lots of stimulating people and stimulating activities. A marvelous little library, all run by volunteers, is loaded with reference books on all aspects of the area. It also has three computers (we checked our Yahoo email that we use at home) and WiFi for people to use their own computers.

Maya volunteers one morning a week at the library and was there when we went in today. She also belongs to a native plant group and takes classes in painting and woodcarving. She says she's never attended so many potluck dinners in her life as she has since she moved here. She had to go on-line to find new recipes. Her biggest responsibility is as President of the Board of Portal Rescue, the emergency fire and healthcare service, which is working hard to improve these functions. She's made all sorts of new friends and is having a fantastic time.

The main drawback is there is absolutely no place to buy anything, not even simple groceries, closer than Douglas, which is 60 miles away. Maya says she drives down there about once a month and eats lots of canned and frozen foods. She also goes into Tucson occasionally to Costco and Trader Joe's. (She selected Tucson doctors so she'd have to go there occasionally.)

This morning I took a walk on the trail that goes downstream from the campground through dense riparian woodland. I took my tape recorder and got the best recordings ever of Acorn Woodpecker drumming. It had a fantastic sounding board on a hollow sycamore trunk. I also got some excellent Black-throated Gray Warbler songs before the breeze got up. One bird was plucking twigs off a shrub and flying off with them. I followed it and discovered where he was building his nest. It was about 20-25 ft

high in a steep “Y” in a juniper. Although I could see the bird working on the area, it wasn’t a good photo opportunity because too much of it was hidden. Also singing on the cliff-face were Canyon Wrens, one of my favorites. Got back in time for Jim and me to go the post office and library.

On my walk I saw an unusual looking bird in the willows. Yellow Warbler seemed the best ID. It was very bright, signifying a male, yet it had little or no breast streaking. It also looked as though it had a tinge of red on the head. It was silent, unfortunately. I wondered if it might be a southwestern race that I’m not familiar with, but I hadn’t brought either of my warbler books. The Portal library came to my rescue; it had the Dunn and Garrett book on Warblers and there was my bird. It was a perfect match for a male *sonorana*, the common breeding race in the southwest.

Jim stayed by the trailer photographing what came in, most of them species we had in Madera Canyon. His main self-assigned challenge is to photograph the Magnificent Hummingbird as he backs off from the feeder and is showing both of the colors of his gorget. He thinks it can be done and he almost got it once.

Just a few minutes ago Jim came in to tell me about a White-breasted Nuthatch imitating a Cliff Chipmunk that came in to the feeding log. It fanned its wings and spread its tail and made itself look very large. He said this happened twice. [Later: I saw it do it a few times myself—apparently a common behavior.]

Afterthoughts:

Last night at Maya’s, we saw a couple of cottontails (males?) about three feet apart, staring at each other. Suddenly one made a slight move toward the other, whereupon it jumped four feet straight up. Then both rabbits scurried off into the mesquite.

Maya brings her syrup feeders in at night. One morning she discovered her quart-sized ones completely empty and was told the fruit bats drink it. We’ve been trying to remember bring ours in, too, but one night we didn’t and had no problem.

Interesting plants:

Squawroot, Conopholis alpina, var. mexicana. Seen along trail downstream from campground. It’s yellow cylinders (1+ inch in diameter, 2-3 inches high, in bunches) with little fleshy protuberances sticking out. It reminded me a little of our snowplant in the Sierra Nevada. I looked it up and learned it’s saprophytic on decaying vegetation under oaks (here), also pines, cypress & madrone. [Later I was told it mainly blooms in May, so I saw an early one, and that the bears love it.]

Arizona Penstemon (Penstemon pseudospectabilis). Tall pink stalks all over the campground. Hummers go for it. I wish Jim would try to get one using it, but he says the birds move around too much when they go from flower to flower on the stalk and the penstemon stalks wave in the wind.

Tuesday, April 22, 2008

Sunny Flat Campground, Cave Creek Canyon, AZ

No entry.

4:30 p.m., Wednesday, April 23, 2008

Sunny Flat Campground, Cave Creek Canyon, AZ

Monday evening Maya invited us to her place for dinner. She also invited Noel and Helen Snyder. I had heard of Noel, because he worked for years on the California Condor recovery program. He and Helen are both raptor experts, but interested in all birds. They've written a beautiful big book on the raptors of North America—has beautiful color photos and life histories of all. I saw it in the library. It was an honor to meet them. They've lived in Portal for many years now. We had a very enjoyable evening.

Yesterday morning I mixed up some pancake batter and then stuck it in the refrigerator for an hour, as I usually do. I went out with my tape recorder to find what I could in the campground before everyone else got up. Found a couple of Virginia's Warblers, which could nest in this type of location. Unfortunately they were silent and I haven't seen them since.

Just as I was about to start fixing breakfast, Helen drove up and asked if we wanted to see where a Whiskered Screech-Owl is nesting. Of course, we did. It was a couple of miles down the road and right outside the entrance to the Idlewilde Campground. She said the bird would come out at 7:10 in the evening.

That pretty much dictated the timetable for the rest of the day. I went back to the trailer and fixed those pancakes, along with some bacon, etc. By the time we were through it was approaching 10:00, so I decided I might as well take Toby for a walk on the same trail I'd taken the day before. The weeds aren't too bad—just nice native-looking grasses. Because of our late breakfast and 7:10 date with the owl, I decided we'd eat just two meals and fixed hamburgers around 3:00. It was really hot then and we had little appetite.

Jim wanted to go back to Maya's yard in the late afternoon to see if he could get some birds to pose on her nice agave stalk. (Spent agave stalks are popular decorations in local yards.) We'd no sooner gotten into the yard when a roadrunner hopped up on the wall and posed. Jim got off many shots of it posing in the wall. It eventually came down onto the ground in the yard and wandered around, paying no attention to Jim or to a man who was doing some yard work. Jim also succeeded in getting both Scott's and Hooded Oriole males on the agave.

Our evening date with the owl was fast approaching, so we returned to the trailer. Jim did some photography for about a half-hour, and he stayed at it a little longer than he should have, not allowing enough time to put his gear in the truck. So we dashed down there, arriving at 7:02. Then I discovered I'd left my tape recorder on pause all day, so the batteries were low. I had an awful time changing them—got them in backwards, couldn't get the cover on, etc., all because I was in a hurry. (It turned out that Jim hadn't heard Helen say we were supposed to be there at 7:10 and I thought he had, so didn't remind him.)

By the time I was ready, I was seeing Jim's flash go off. But I got there in time to see the bird perched atop its nest opening in the hollow broken-off top of a sycamore. It was too dark by then to see any distinguishing field marks, but I did hear some soft calls from the bird, which seemed to clinch the ID. It bothered me a little that they were so soft; I thought they were louder than that. They were low enough in pitch that Jim could hear them, too. Jim had his troubles, too. He only got off four shots before his camera stopped working—thinks it might have been low batteries in camera or flash or something. He was pleased to discover that the pictures were good when we got back to the trailer and looked at them in the camera's screen. (He decided to shoot digital instead of film because digital is better in low-light situations and also yields a bigger

image. The nest was a about 35 feet high above the roadway—a bit far away for a good flash.)

This morning we drove up the road past the campground as far as the junction of the road down to a community called Paradise. Just past it is Turkey Creek. Helen Snyder had suggested it might be a good birding spot, but it was pretty dead. I heard or saw just three birds: Brown Creeper (seen), Western Wood-Pewee (heard) and a strongly disyllabic series that sounded more like a Hutton's Vireo than anything else, but was still sort of strange. I recorded it, but may never know for sure. (I recorded a more typical Hutton's Vireo song on the way back—didn't see the bird, though.)

The habitat up there had Ponderosa Pines and some sort of fir mixed in with the oaks, junipers, etc. I suppose it was a thousand feet or so higher. On the way back we stopped and I walked around trying to find something to record. Got a Steller's Jay doing its "whee-oor" call. Don't hear that too often. It was the first Steller's Jay we've seen.

We stopped at the Southwestern Research Station (American Museum of Natural History, New York) to look at their gift shop and bird feeders. I bought a couple of books, but the bird feeders were less interesting than the one in our campsite! The best find, though, was a couple of public telephones. We've been having an awful time sending Pocketmail. Even Maya's land line is temperamental, and Jim has had to dial over and over again to get all messages sent and received. This phone worked beautifully, so we sat right down and answered all our incoming messages and sent them off. On our way back to the campground, Jim set the odometer and discovered it was only a mile above it. (It seemed like two or three on that narrow, winding road, much of which had borderline pavement.)

This afternoon Maya had invited me to a meeting of the local garden club (called Sow What?). Two of their members presented programs. The first one on herbs didn't interest me much, although it was nicely researched, but I had come for the second on some of the native plants in the area. It was very interesting and it identified the penstemon in the campground for sure.

Today an extremely dark bird started coming to our birdseed. Jim wondered if it was some strange new species, but we both finally decided it was just a highly melanistic Cassin's Finch, probably a female since we could detect no color on it. Its head was almost entirely black with the barest hint of the paler outline around the auriculars. Its back was extremely dark, but the streaks showed. The underparts were a bit paler, so the streaks showed better. In shape and size it was indistinguishable from the Cassin's Finches that were also present. It gave Jim lots of opportunities to photograph it.

Got back here around 3:00 and sat outside until it occurred to me I should be writing this diary.

Temperatures each day we've been here have been in the middle to upper 80s, then down into the 40s at night. The trailer gets uncomfortably warm for several hours in the early afternoon. We use lots of covers at night and keep the front part of the trailer warm for Toby.

8:15 p.m., Thursday, April 24, 2008
Sunny Flat Campground, Cave Creek Canyon, AZ

Last evening Jim tried again to get the Whiskered Screech-Owl, but it wouldn't show itself. We had a late dinner after he got back. Today, he went by the area in the morning and found the bird was sitting at the top of its broken-off snag nest looking at him. He dashed back to the truck for his camera, but the bird had retreated to its nest when he returned. Finally, late this afternoon around 5:00, we both went down there. He drove past the nest, then back. We paused and looked up and discovered it was out in view, so we parked. I stayed in the truck so as not to spook it. He walked quietly back there and fired off four shots with his film camera. When I asked him why he hadn't used his flash, he discovered he'd forgotten to turn it on. So he went back and fired off four more with the flash. Then I decided it was safe for me to go take a look, but when I got there it had disappeared down into the cavity again. But I'd had a pretty good view through the truck windshield.

This morning Maya came around 8:45 to go birding with me. We went up to the end of the South Fork road. There's a sign saying, "No recording gear," which really irritates me. What they really mean is no playing of bird calls. But I got chased out of a place for simply carrying my gear one time, so am a bit "gun-shy" about these signs. However, Maya said to pay no attention to the signs. Many of the expert birders do it and there's a lot of controversy about the sign. It really just means, "Don't chase the Elegant Trogon with your tape." Anyway, I carried my gear and did some recording, but didn't play back anything, although I'd have liked to.

There was one sound that really puzzled us. It sounded a lot like a Nashville Warbler, but we kept hearing the sound all over the place. Finally we found the bird; it was a Grace's. It had a two-part song, about the same tonal quality and cadence as a Nashville's. I'll have to play them both together sometime (not tonight because I'm tired; and besides I'm using my computer on battery and it might not last).

I heard no trogon. While we were outside chatting with some other campground birders, we got the news that a trogon had been seen and heard right down at the entrance to our campground this morning. Then it flew off upstream, but not before the man in site number 1 got a picture.

After we did South Fork, Maya took me up the road toward Herb Martyr Campground. It starts out just beyond the Southwest Field Station. Except for a couple of rough fords (dry), it's a nice wide, relatively smooth gravel road—much better than the road over the top of the mountain that we gave up on yesterday.

We stopped several places. In one spot an extremely tame Dusky-capped Flycatcher gave me a serenade, sometimes as close as six feet from my microphone. I thought I had found the nest, but Maya thought the nest was a different place. The bird had flown off by then, but we sat around and waited to see if it would come back. It didn't. However, I plan to take Jim to that spot. The bird would have been easy to photograph this morning and maybe it'll stick around the area.

A little farther along we found a Black-chinned Hummingbird on a nest. It, too, should be easy to photograph. A Bushtit nest was in the same little tree, but it was pretty well concealed. (Bushtits are much less common here than in California. I seldom notice their calls.)

Late this afternoon, after Jim's success with the Whiskered Screech-Owl, we went to a place where a Northern Pygmy-Owl was being seen. We hung around that area a long time, whistling our best imitations of the bird. No luck.

5:30 p.m., Friday, April 25, 2008
Sunny Flat Campground, Cave Creek Canyon, AZ

Update on the Saw-whet Owl I tried to see at Catalina State Park: I got an email this week from Terry Hill, who checks the internet regularly and sends me reports. She discovered a report “that someone who stayed this weekend [April. 20-21] at Catalina State Park found out that the owl was found dead by a park volunteer a couple of weeks ago. It was found 1/2 mile down the bridal [sic] trail from where it had been roosting and appeared to have been predated upon. The volunteer moved the owl to the side of the trail, continued on and when he/she returned later, the owl body was gone.” Too bad, but at least that explains why I couldn’t find it. All this probably happened before I got there.

This morning Jim wanted one more opportunity to photograph in Maya’s yard, this time with morning sun. He spent several hours there and seemed happy with what he got. Everything looks great on that agave. Her yard has uncountable numbers of orioles: Scott’s, Bullock’s, and Hooded, as well as Northern Cardinal and Pyrrhyloxia. Other birds are less flashy.

I forgot to mention that she has an *oriantha* White-crowned Sparrow among her small group of maybe half a dozen *gambelii*. It’s interesting to compare them at close range. In addition to having the black stripes on the face connect between the eye and the bill, the *oriantha* seems bulkier, a colder gray, and with bolder white head stripes.

I went along with Jim and wandered her neighborhood recording whatever I could find. Probably my best recordings were of a Curve-billed (possibly Crissal; I have trouble telling them apart) Thrasher, Gambel’s Quail, and Dusky-capped Flycatcher. None of them will be wonderful, for there was quite a breeze, and the White-winged Doves are never inaudible. Got a few snippets of Bell’s Vireo, indicating the presence of that bird in her neighborhood. The *arizonae* subspecies seems in much better shape than our Least in California.

This afternoon Maya invited me to go with her to the weekly “sewing group.” Since I enjoyed the garden club the other day, I decided to go and meet the local people in a more informal setting. There were probably at least 20 women there. Unfortunately I had to sit off from the main group in order to have enough light to see my embroidery. The others there obviously knew the light would be poor and brought something that didn’t take much light; most of them were knitting, yet Maya had told me that several of them do exquisite quilting and had showed me photos she had taken of some of their work on her computer. A few brought no handwork at all and had just come to chat. It was a pleasant afternoon, and several of them came over and talked to me for a while. Portal really is a special community.

As evidence of the last sentence, the “sewing group” today was hosted by a dear nonagenarian, Penny Johnston, who dragged a long respirator cord all around as she did her hostess duties. Others helped her, too, as she served pie and beverages. I asked her how she did her shopping and she said there were people who either bought things for her or took her with them when they drove to Douglas. At the post office on the way home, I met a 97-year-old man, who was also very sharp and looked much younger. Maya told me he was the main spearhead behind raising money for buildings to house the new firefighting equipment.

As I’ve driven around the area with Maya, I’ve come to realize that she knows who lives in just about every house we pass, both in the Portal area and way up the canyon past the Research Station. That she’s accomplished this in three short years is a real tribute to her. It’s obvious that she’s very happy with her move from Orange County, and I’m happy for her.

8:00 p.m., Saturday, April 26, 2008
Sunny Flat Campground, Cave Creek Canyon, AZ

In terms of Jim's photography, I think this may be the best day of the trip.

We started out by going up Herb Martyr Road (turn off to the left just past Research Station; its entrance is on this road) to the places Maya took me a couple of days ago. The first stop was a small parking area on the left precisely at the sign warning of the second cattle guard. There we had found a Dusky-capped Flycatcher the other day and seemed to be investigating possible nesting cavities and calling constantly. Today when we got there all was silent. I realized I had the calls of that bird right at the end of what I recorded when I wandered around Maya's neighborhood yesterday. So I backed up the tape and played a little. Pretty soon two birds came in—don't know if they were rivals or mates, but both were calling. The birds flitted around here and there, but just as before, occasionally perched low and in the clear. One even checked out a nice cavity—different from the two Maya and I saw the other day. I played the tape off and on, but soon it became apparent that the birds were going to stay in the area and fly around, perching here and there without any assistance from a recording. This seemed the best place for photos of all the places where I've seen the birds, because the trees aren't too tall and the junipers aren't as thick as those elsewhere. Jim's first shots were "up-the-tail" ones of the bird almost overhead in a tree. When it seemed as though he didn't need me to play the tape, I walked down the road a ways and back with Toby, leaving Jim to get more pictures. This he did, although he doesn't think he got the ultimate pose. We think he spent about an hour and a half in that area.

As a bonus, once a Brown-crested Flycatcher came in. Of course, it was much bigger than the Dusky-capped (9 inches vs. 7 inches). It flitted around a bit, then flew down and landed on the ground in a nice sunny spot. Jim shot a few frames of it.

Our next stop was the place Maya called the "old girl scout camp." To reach it, we continued along the same road maybe a half-mile, passing a campground on the left. Just before the road makes a sharp right turn and heads steeply up the hill away from the creek, there is a barricaded road straight ahead. We parked on the approach to that road and walked in along it. There we had found the Black-chinned Hummingbird still incubating eggs in a small juniper. It wasn't super-high and Jim was able to photograph her on it. I'm happy to have this nest photo because the only Black-chin nest we have photos of has the outside coated with tan fuzz off the underside of California Sycamore leaves. This had some sort of gray coating and it didn't seem as thick. Maybe fuzz isn't as plentiful in Arizona. Most California Black-chin nests are very smooth looking.

While Jim was photographing the nest, I walked on up the trail and got a super-close recording of a Plumbeous Vireo song. Also recorded a strange harsh and squeaky run-together jumble of notes. I played it back to try to figure out what bird was doing it, but got no response. Another one of those mystery sounds that I have all too many of.

By then it was 11:00 and getting fairly warm, so we came back and spent the rest of the day at the trailer. It seems that every day we are here new birds come in to our feeding station. Yesterday it was a pair of Gambel's Quail. This morning it was a Rufous-crowned Sparrow. This afternoon Jim got photos of both plus a Yellow-eyed Junco and a Virginia's Warbler. Both had been in the area, but hadn't come in to the food or water. Lazuli Buntings—several males and females—have been regulars for

several days. Late this afternoon a bright male Indigo came close, but didn't actually come in. This is a somewhat unusual bird for this area, and I'll email Maya about it and she can decide if it should be reported and to whom. Once during the late afternoon I looked up into the tops of the oak trees—easy to do in my nice reclining chair—and discovered four species of warbler foraging more or less together: Yellow-rumped, Virginia's, Townsend's and Black-throated Gray. I almost missed them because the treetops are usually full of the 20-30 Pine Siskins and Cassin's Finches on break between trips to our birdseed. Late in the day a female Arizona Woodpecker came into the oak tree where Jim has his Magic Meal and foraged on various small limbs. It didn't find the food, but kept coming back. I wouldn't be surprised to see her eating from our handout tomorrow—if the Acorn Woodpeckers don't chase her away; they chase the big, brash Mexican Jays. [Later: we never saw her again.]

I just counted up my bird list. So far I've found 72 species in the general area. Of these 41 were actually detected (heard and/or seen) from our campsite and several more from the trails out from here. My best guess is that Jim has photographed at least 23 of these species. (He tries to get a token shot of everything that'll pose—just to be able to see how many species he *can* photograph in one place.)

We were planning to leave tomorrow, but may stay one more night. All the goodies that came in during the late afternoon made it seem a shame to leave.

Sunday, April 27, 2008

Sunny Flat Campground, Cave Creek Canyon, AZ

No entry.

4:00 p.m., Monday, April 28, 2008

Roper Lake State Park, Safford, AZ

While I was writing the previous installment of this diary, Jim was outside with his camera set up trying to see and photograph what was cleaning up the grape jelly dish every night. It is extremely dark in the canyon with its steep walls and no moon, so we turned on the lights in the trailer and let them shine out the windows. Since the experience was Jim's, I asked him to describe it, and you'll find it at the end of today's account.

We had planned to leave on Sunday morning, but Jim's experience on Saturday night made him want to try to improve on his setup, so we stayed one more day. In the morning I had Jim drive me to the top of the South Fork road—about 1 1/4 mile away from the trailer. I took Toby with me, hoping he wouldn't whine too much when I was trying to record. There was little to record, and he wasn't too bad. I just have to take him in order to get him used to long stops on the trail/road. About all I was able to record was some distant Grace's Warblers near the start of the walk. After that the wind got up pretty strong and recordings wouldn't have been worth much. I did hear calls of the Elegant Trogon occasionally, but each time the bird did its call sequence only once. Then I'd walk along another 5-10 minutes and hear it again—just once. So I never got a recording at all. Fortunately I have some pretty good trogon recordings from another trip. But at least I can now put it down on my list for this trip. I was told by Noel Snyder, whom I met along the road, that the birds are still searching for just the right nest cavity and are ranging all up and down the creek. (As I mentioned before, one was even

photographed from the bridge to Sunny Flat Campground very close to our trailer one morning.)

Noel also told me that he and Helen had decided that the screech-owl near the Idlewilde Campground was a Western, not a Whiskered. A day or so earlier they had told us they had their doubts. Now they were sure. They had compared photos with those they took last year when a *bona fide* Whiskered nested in that cavity. This bird was definitely larger. Then as a clincher, they heard it call one evening, and it was definitely Western. (My recording was definitely a Whiskered, but you will recall that I was concerned about how soft it sounded. I just got a recording of a different bird from the one in the nest.)

The day was cool. In fact, my hands got too stiff to embroider outdoors around 4:00 and I went inside. Jim stayed out, but we got no new additions to our bird list.

This morning, Monday, Jim decided he had better write up his nocturnal experience while it was still fresh in his mind. This took a couple of hours. I took Toby for a short walk out from the campground, conversed with the neighboring camper/birders and read. Then came a knock at the door and the question, "Are you Sylvia? I'm Jim Davis." Jim Davis was the professor from Minnesota who created the little periodical called *Interpretive Birding Bulletin* that I and my Observing Birds students liked so well. It encouraged birders to really watch behavior, not just appearance. He discontinued it several years ago.

How did he know me? I loved the content, but was distressed by the poor editing job—so poor that it almost made me not trust the academic content. Finally I screwed up my courage and wrote him what I hoped was a diplomatic letter. A short time later, he *telephoned* me and we had a long conversation about what both of us were doing in educating birders. He resolved to improve the appearance of his publication—and he did. After it got better, I rounded up a lot of subscriptions for him among my students. We were all disappointed when it went defunct.

How did he know I was in the campground? I'm not quite sure, but I was talking to some other birders and helping them with the identity of some of the sounds. I also told them of my trip diary. I think they knew Jim Davis and told him about it and he recognized my name.

Jim Davis told me the reason he discontinued the publication was that his wife, who was also on the faculty in Minnesota, died. She had edited the bulletin and their marriage was also the only thing that tied him to one spot. He really didn't like the world of academia and decided to buy an RV and go on the road full time for a while. This he has been doing for several years. He's doing a lot of videotaping of behavior and is writing a series of books on the subject and encouraging others to shoot video, too. He's creating a small website which will have good examples of bird video. He also is doing behavior-watching workshops around the country, but has sort of stopped them until he gets his books out. He inquired about the possibility of doing one in Orange County, but didn't want to compete with what I'm doing. I told him everyone welcomes a different approach—and his videotaping aspect of the subject should attract students. We'll see what develops. Anyway, I was excited to meet the man, whose philosophy matches mine so closely. He's really a delightful person.

We left Cave Creek Canyon around 10:30, hoped our gasoline would last until we got to a station (it did), ate a forgettable lunch in a Quiznos at the gas station, then continued on to Safford, where we found a satisfactory site at Roper Lake State Park south of town. The sites are in desert scrub with some fairly large mesquite trees, but

not much shade for the campsites. There's also a fairly large lake with some reeds around the edges—heard Red-winged Blackbirds (big deal!). It was 3:30 by the time we got our holding tanks dumped and our trailer situated in a site. Since it was pretty warm, we just holed up in the trailer and turned on the A/C.

A few minutes ago Jim called my attention to some Gambel's Quail unusually high in a mesquite tree outside our window. They were running their bills along the blossom stems that are still in bud and apparently eating them.

After eight days of dry-camping, it's sort of nice to have A/C and TV. They even have CNN over the air and Jim is busy getting caught up. What I heard sounded just the same as what we heard a week ago: Clinton and Obama still sniping at each other, tornadoes in the east.

Our reason for coming to Safford is to do some necessities—laundry, various types of shopping, a medical test for Jim that his Dr. said he had to get monthly, etc. Those we'll do tomorrow.

JIM'S NOCTURNAL ADVENTURES (written by Jim):

We had noticed that each night while we were camped here that small saucer-dish that we put out to attract orioles came up empty every morning despite having some grape jelly in it when the sun went down. This gave me the idea that this would be the perfect time to stay out in the evening and try to photograph the creature, or creatures, that were licking the dish clean every night. So Saturday night, April 26, I set up my camera focused on the saucer and pulled up a chair and sat out after dark came. About an hour later I saw a skunk appear and approach the dish. It was so dark that I could not really tell if the skunk was in focus or not, but I squeezed the camera button anyway hoping that it was. Bummer, the camera refused to fire. I finally figured out I had forgotten to turn off the autofocus feature on the camera that only allows the camera to expose the film when it is actually focused on something. I sat there a while longer but then gave up when no new subjects appeared.

The next night, Sunday, April 27, I decided on a different approach: I set up the camera on a tripod, focused on the dish, and turned the darned autofocus off. I attached a long remote switch cord to the camera which allowed me to sit in a chair about ten feet from the dish. Night came at around 7:30 and I was in the chair and ready to go. About one hour later I was startled by what I saw suddenly out of the corner of my left eye. Yikes! It was my first skunk and it had come from behind me walking by me only about 6 inches from my left shoe! In the semidarkness it looked like its body was the size of a half-grown house cat but it sported a humongous tail that appeared to me to be a least two feet tall and very wide. It headed straight for the jelly dish but apparently had not seen my script. I had assumed that it would approach the dish as the one the night before did, but instead it climbed up on the rock on the opposite side from where I had my camera focused. I fired the camera anyway hoping at least to get half the skunk, hopefully its head, in the picture. The flash startled the animal and it made a hasty departure and disappeared into the darkness.

About 15 minutes later the same thing happened again. Another small skunk, plume extended, on the same trail, came by—this time stopping to sniff my left shoe—and fortunately for me, decided it wasn't edible. It continued on its way and also took up a position on the wrong side of the dish. I made noise with my foot, hoping it would look around, which it did, and I fired away with the camera, hoping at least to get this one's head in the picture, too. That blast of light sent this skunk on its way, too.

But, believe it or not, a little while later, skunk 3, the same size as the other two, came through on the same trail, still only 6 inches away from my left foot!. When I looked down on him when he was right next to me, his plume virtually exploded. The reason why? When I looked back up forward (I was sitting at the bottom of a 4-step stairway), I was eyeball to eyeball with skunk number 4 who had appeared five feet right in front of me as if by magic. What was happening was that each skunk was trying to out-plume the other. One apparently did and they left the scene in a high-speed chase. No pictures of those two!

A little while later skunk 5 came in also from behind me but a couple of feet away as it passed. (I should say that it was so dark that I could not make out any distinct features of any of these skunks, but they all showed black and white in various designs.) Anyhow, skunk 5 made his way to the dish and positioned himself much better than the previous two. I think I got some decent pictures of him.

Another 20 minutes went by and skunk number 6, appearing somewhat larger than those previously seen, made his appearance farther away on my left. He went into the small area where I had been feeding the birds all week. There it appeared to be scrounging up uneaten sunflower seeds. After doing that awhile he climbed up on the pile of rocks that I had my rock birdbath on and drank from it, filling his water tank. After that it actually came down to the jelly dish and positioned itself properly for the camera. It allowed many pictures, showing no notice of the flashes. It finally ambled off.

The last skunk, number 7, came in at about 11:00 and acted very similarly as skunk 6 did except for doing some rooting with its nose around the weeds on the border of my bird-feeding area. What he was looking for is beyond my ken. He did find a few sunflower seeds in the feeder area before he made it to the feeder dish. I had gone in the trailer just before he came and put another big gob of grape jelly in the dish. Skunk 7 ate every morsel of the jelly before he left, but paid for it in photos. He, too, remained totally oblivious to the photo flashes. I wondered though what his stomach thought about such a large intake of grape jelly for such a small animal. It may have kept him up all the next day.

One thing that I haven't mentioned was that between skunk sightings I found myself absolutely flabbergasted in looking at the stars in the heavens. Being far from any city virtually hundreds of stars were visible and literally dozens appeared brighter than our planet Venus appears to us in the city. In discussing this with Sylvia, she said that she read somewhere that one's night vision takes at least an hour to reach its full power and I'm sure that's what happened to me that night. A night I'll surely always remember, in more ways than one.

Despite being long past my bedtime (ask Sylvia), I couldn't bring myself to quit, but I should have, since number 7 was the end of the skunk parade. It was almost midnight when I finally called it quits and carried my equipment inside. I haven't mentioned it but the temperature outside dropped to the low 40s that night and I hadn't really dressed for that cold a temperature so I was fighting off the shakes most of the time when the action was taking place—but it was certainly a once-in-a-lifetime experience that was well worth my discomfort.

I did wake up the next morning with my feet still freezing but that's another story, which I'm sure Sylvia can't wait to tell you. [Note from Sylvia: I left that part out in order not to embarrass him, but with this opening, here goes. Normally when he climbs into bed he has to carefully crawl across me to get to his side, then flops down uneventfully. This time for some reason—probably utter exhaustion—he became 90° disoriented and couldn't find his pillows. Instead, he hauled all the covers loose at the foot of the bed,

feeling for them. I finally straightened him out, but didn't realize what he had done to the covers—3 blankets and a down comforter pulled aside. No wonder he couldn't get warm. But you must remember he had been photographing from the time he finished breakfast at around 8:00 a.m. until midnight, with time out for meals and a very short after-lunch nap. Also, he was chilled to the bone when he came in. AND his normal bedtime lately has been no later than 8:00.]

During our stay at Cave creek campground I was befriended by an elderly (about my age) photographer who was camped just across the road from our trailer site. During the week we traded tips about where certain birds in the area might be found. About the end of the week we were there, the subject of skunks came up. Later Sylvia brought out her mammal book and we were amazed at the odd skunks that the book showed living in this small part of Arizona—four species, with multiple variations on each.

Tuesday, April 29, 2008
Roper Lake State Park, Safford, AZ

No entry.

8:00 p.m., Wednesday, April 30, 2008
Arcadia USFS Campground, Mt. Graham Rd., AZ

Monday evening after I wrote the last installment, it had cooled off enough to take Toby for a walk. There is a short trail from our camping loop to the day-use area parking lot. From it there is a short causeway to a man-made island with trees, grass, and a bit of beach. The island had some mildly interesting birds on it. The causeway went right through a nice piece of shoreline marsh. I heard coots and another sound that I dismissed as just one more coot call; they have so many. It was sort of rail-like, but I know all the rail calls. However, when I got out the SE Arizona bird-finding guide and read the section on this park, it mentioned Least Bitterns nesting in the marsh. I hadn't even thought of that and I don't think I've ever heard one in the field—at least not very well. I got out the commercial recordings and was thrilled to discover that that was what I had heard.

Tuesday was a very hot day. We did all the laundry, shopping, bed-making (no back problem this time, but I was very careful) and finished around 2:00. Late in the afternoon (around 6:00) when the sun was low, I took my recording gear over to the marsh to listen again to that strange sound and decide if it was Least Bitterns. It was, and there were a lot of them—all over the marsh. One was very close to the trail. I tried to get some nice recordings, but human noises bedeviled me almost the entire time—squalling toddlers who had been “swimming” in the lake and needed to go home to bed, and then when they'd all left a carload of young men with a booming radio playing Mexican music. That was the end of the recording.

This morning, my internal clock awoke me at 4:40, when dawn was just breaking. I got up and walked over to the marsh and had it to myself. Even more Least Bitterns were calling, including that close one. I wasn't able to get any solos, though, for there were lots of sounds from Red-winged Blackbirds, Great-tailed Grackles, House Sparrows, House Finches, White-winged and Inca doves, American Coots, Mallards (“funny ducks” mainly), Bullfrogs, and a variety of more sporadic sounds. But at least

they were natural sounds, not man-made. I was very pleased to get my first Least Bittern recordings ever.

Last night it was warm all night long, and the wind blew off and on the whole time, so it was unpleasant to have the windows open and the vent cover rattled when I tried to open that. I tried to sit up as late as possible, hoping it would cool off, but the lake midges, moths, and assorted other insects had found a way through the cracks around the window frames—or wherever, and were crawling all over me. I had all the windows closed and the A/C on to try to forestall them because they had been bad the night before with the windows open. But just as many seemed to be coming in. (High in the mountains tonight, there are even a few left that we brought with us.)

Our mountain camping/birding at Madera and Cave Creek canyons had been at around 5000 feet in elevation. I wanted to find a southern AZ campground that was at least 1000 ft higher and try to get up into the pines. The Arcadia Campground (USFS), the first one on the road up Mt. Graham, looked promising. Maya had gone online and printed out an information sheet for me on the place. We were a bit leery of it, for it said it had a 21-foot trailer limit, and ours is 26 feet. But we often find that doesn't mean there are *no* longer campsites. Also I had noticed that the road climbed from about 3200 ft to 6700 ft in less than 12 miles. We wondered how steep the road would be and if the truck could haul the trailer up it. So right after breakfast we did what we have done many times before in such situations, take the truck up without the trailer and check things out.

It turned out to be a very nicely paved road, and the grade, although fairly steep, was steady. There were no super-steep places. The switchbacks, which we had been warned about in the literature, although numerous, weren't that tight. It took about a half-hour to drive the 11.6 miles, though. Just as we had suspected, the Arcadia Campground had several sites long enough for us. So we decided to give it a try and went back and brought the trailer up with no difficulties. I wouldn't recommend it for a rig much longer than ours, though.

With all the driving up and down and up the mountain, plus hooking up and unhooking, it was almost noon by the time we were settled. By then the wind was really getting strong. (A general wind advisory is in effect until 8:00 tonight because of a cold front passing to the north of here. Everywhere is windy.) The wind raised the dust and blew the ashes from old campfires all over the place. The temperature was in the 60s (vs. the upper 80s down below), so we were happy to stay in the closed-up trailer all afternoon.

Jim set up his feeding and watering concession. Not much came in until late afternoon, then we started to get a trickle of birds. American Robin and Steller's Jay found our stuff, but Dark-eyed (Gray-headed) and Yellow-eyed juncos, Hairy Woodpecker, Hermit Thrush, Plumbeous Vireo, and Yellow-rumped Warbler are in the area. I thought I heard a Grace's Warbler when we scouted the campground before going back for the trailer. Olive and Red-faced warblers should also be up here. I hope the wind will die down by morning so I can do some recording.

We can't stay here too many days because the place doesn't have any water and our tank will last only 4 days maximum if we're very careful. Also, the campground is pretty shady from tall Ponderosa Pines, so our solar panels may not do their job as well as in other places we've been.

We only paid for one night because when we arrived with the trailer, chain saws were grinding away at dead wood in the forest behind us. Jim asked them if they were

going to be working tomorrow, too, and they didn't know. However, they knocked off work pretty early—perhaps because of the wind—and were no problem after around 1:00.

8:15 p.m., Thursday, May 1, 2008
Arcadia Campground, Mt. Graham Rd., AZ

Instead of dying down, the wind seemed to get stronger until around 10:00 or 11:00. Our front awning is rather decrepit, so I finally went out and closed it, something that hadn't seemed necessary earlier. Maybe the wind changed direction.

This morning wasn't totally calm, but there were fairly calm intervals between gusts. I went out for about an hour between 6:00 and 7:00, but it was really too early for there be much of anything singing. The campground is in a shady glen, and the Ponderosas are very tall. Western Tanagers in the treetops were about it, and I don't need them.

After breakfast I climbed the hill behind site 14 (we're in site 12), thinking that from there I might be able to see birds in the treetops. That proved to be a good idea. After about an hour of recording ordinary birds, I heard a new sound. For quite a while it was just "do-re" over and over. Then it did a new motif, and, although I hadn't heard the bird in at least 20 years, I immediately recognized that the "do-re" I had been hearing was the first part of the "José María" of the Greater Pewee. In fact, the bird was still called the Coues' Flycatcher when I last heard it. Of course, I recorded it, approached it and recorded it some more. Finally, I turned the recording volume way up and got a few calls so loud that they were in danger of being distorted. Then I went and got Jim. (We had forgotten to use our radios.)

He set up his camera aimed at where we hoped the bird would land, and I played the loud recordings. We waited and waited. Then Jim said, "I see the shadow of a bird in front of me. Is there something behind me?" He couldn't look for it, for he'd have been looking directly at the sun. I looked a bit, and there the bird was—very close. I played it some more and every time it came in, it landed right over our heads—impossible to photograph. The perch where he wanted it was on a tree that grew out of about an 80° slope, but I got as close to the edge of the precipice as possible and played it again. This time the bird gave Jim a reasonable shot. After a while it became less and less necessary to play the recording. The bird was in its territory and just went about its business. Occasionally it landed on a nice perch and got its picture taken. We must have worked on that bird for a couple of hours.

Once a second bird came in, and a brief aerial scuffle ensued.

In addition to the "José María," the bird also occasionally gave a series of extended trills, sort of like running your fingernail across the teeth of a comb. The trill didn't always stay on the same pitch, just as running your fingernail across a comb results in a higher pitch if you do it faster. This sound was very soft, and I was lucky to hear it once when the bird wasn't more than ten feet from my microphone.

We finally decided there was no way to improve the photos and sounds we had. (The only thing that could have improved my sound was for the wind to die down, and that wasn't going to happen.)

I spent the last hour of the morning sitting on the site 14 picnic bench in the sun (it was a cold day—never higher than mid 60s, I'd judge) overlooking a sort of glade with a few more deciduous trees (mostly Arizona sycamores only partly leafed out) than the rest of the area. I had put my tape recorder away and taken Toby for a walk at that

time. Then I heard a song that reminded me a bit of an Indigo Bunting's. It was a multiparted song with two notes each of about 4-6 different types [The next day: I looked at sonograms of the commercial recordings of this bird, and they do indeed fit the above description with the exception that some of the very shortest motifs are repeated more than twice. Even so, that's a great way to remember the song and most of the motifs are indeed in pairs. It's very fast—almost too fast to count.] Finally, in desperation I “pished” a crude imitation of it. Up came a Red-faced Warbler and perched briefly only about 15 feet in front of me and at eye level.

I was so sure it would come back that I went and fetched my tape recorder and Jim at the same time. I tried “pishing” it again, but it wouldn't come. Furthermore, I couldn't even hear it off in the distance. In desperation we tried playing the sound from a commercial recording. Still no response. After about 10-15 minutes, Jim gave up and went back to photographing a House Wren trying to insert sticks that were too long into its nest cavity. I sat there at that picnic table for another 45 minutes, but never saw nor heard the bird again. Too bad. We really wanted that one, too.

Regarding that House Wren: Jim later told me that he had photographed it when it came in front of his blind and paused for two seconds, which is all Jim needed as he was tracking him with through the camera lens at the time. At home Jim said that when he has tried to photograph them in the backyard, he was never successful because they never, never would hold still long enough. After photographing this wren, an odd thing happened: It flew back in and landed on an exposed twig and faced Jim, looking straight at him as though he was trying to figure out what the flash light was all about. The bird continued stare at the blind even as Jim took several more flash pictures of it, staying there for more than 2 minutes before leaving. A really odd happening.

By then the wind had gotten up pretty strong, and the afternoon was hopeless, so we just stayed inside as we did yesterday. Jim was hoping to photograph the pair of Steller's Jays we saw yesterday, but we scarcely saw them. We were sure we had them hooked on sunflower seeds. I'd have liked to get a photo of this form. It seems to have more white in its face pattern (especially one bird of the pair, perhaps the male) than is typical of the Rocky Mountain subspecies, which we've photographed in Colorado. This could be a different subspecies, but I'll have to wait until I get home to look it up.

It's almost 9:00 and the wind is still blowing, but not as strongly as last night. It's supposed to be calmer yet tomorrow. We plan to stay here one more night. Our water seems to be holding up (tank wasn't full when we arrived, but we brought 6 gallons in a plastic container), and despite the shady site, our solar panels are doing a pretty good job.

4:15 p.m., Friday, May 2, 2008
Arcadia Campground, Mt. Graham Rd., AZ

Again last evening the wind blew until after I went to bed. But this morning was nearly calm, and even in the afternoon (now) it is only a gentle zephyr. What a relief.

I spent the morning wandering around the campground and environs recording birds. This time I wasn't able to get very close to a Greater Pewee, but I heard one or two in the distance—up slopes I had no hope of being able to climb. I got a very close solo performance from a Western Tanager—call and a bit of song. Even though I have recorded that bird many times, I wonder if any are as good as this. Hairy Woodpecker's “pik” call was very close, too. I missed the rattle every time, though.

Behind our site and accessible by a different road off the highway is the group campground. I found that it was quite different in habitat from where we are. It seems to be on a northeast-facing slope and very dark and cool. There were lots of Douglas-Firs there. A Red-faced Warbler was singing all over the area—and not much else except a distant woodpecker (Hairy or possibly flicker) drumming. I recorded the warbler a long time and think what I got is very nice. I plan to drag Jim up there tomorrow. Today he was so nicely set up in his blind that I hated to do it. I did hear the Red-faced Warbler singing again near our campsite, but by the time Jim was set up there, it had drifted on. It didn't respond to playback of its own song any better than the one yesterday did to the commercial recording. (Both birds, the one near our campsite and the one in the group campground, responded initially to simple pishing, but wouldn't come in repeatedly to that.)

Late in the morning I sat at the picnic table in the site near ours (#14; ours is #12; #13 is a tent site way off through a patch of poison ivy!) and watched the birds in the little ravine. This ravine has always seemed more birdy than any place else in the area. Finally I discovered why. I saw a male Western Tanager, joined soon after by a second, fly down to the bottom of it and start flailing its wings. A quick binocular check revealed a couple of puddles of water. There was a little spring down there. So that was the reason for the activity. Jim went down and checked it out and debated going down there to photograph, but decided to stick to his water drip. I think that was a good idea, for I never saw any other birds go to the spring.

I recorded a long piece from what I think is a Plumbeous Vireo, but it sounded strange. I think it may have been imitating some motifs from the Dusky-capped Flycatcher and possibly the Greater Pewee.

I'd been wondering about the song of the Yellow-eyed Junco. Is it distinguishable from the typical Dark-eyed's trill. While sitting at the picnic table, I heard a song that almost reminded me of a Bewick's Wren's, except it was much lighter and didn't start with the breathy intro note. When I recorded it and played it back to the bird, in came a Yellow-eyed Junco and did a softer version of the same song right over my head. The fact that this bird's song is so different from the Dark-eyed's is undoubtedly an important reason why these birds that look so much alike are separate species.

I used a lot of battery power looking at sonograms on Raven Lite. I discovered it takes lots more power than simple word-processing. My computer says I'd better quit pretty soon. I hate to hook up to the inverter when we're getting so little solar electricity. Other places where we've been camped in full sun, I did it frequently.

We plan to go back down to Safford tomorrow for one night in a commercial RV park with EWS (electric, water, sewer) hookups. There we can wash Toby, recharge the computer, our trailer batteries, and Jim's many photography batteries, do a little more shopping, and indulge Jim's weakness for a monster dinner at Golden Corral. There's one really close to that RV park. Sunday we'll drive north to Show Low and leave behind the wonderfully special birds of southeastern Arizona.

4:45 p.m., Saturday, May 3, 2008
Lexington Pines MH and RV Park, Safford, AZ

I didn't think I'd find any reason to bother writing an installment today, but this morning was quite special. I had planned to take Jim up to the group campground to try for the Red-faced Warbler, but a group came in last night and occupied it. Furthermore they seemed to be a work group and were chopping wood, loading it on trucks, and

generally making a racket. It was a beautifully calm morning, but even though I arose at 5:00 a.m., they were already talking loudly and generally ruining things for that.

I took Toby for a long walk, then decided to see what came in to the just-leafing-out sycamores near site 14. Jim decided to join me since he didn't think anything new would come to his feeding station and I had had Red-faced Warbler there a couple of times before. We stayed there most of the morning and were amazed at the parade of birds. The period from 8:30 to 10:00 was the most active and during that period I think I either heard or saw all the birds I'd found the whole time we were in the campground—plus a few new ones. Sometimes there would be so many bits of focused motion in the trees that it was hard to decide which one to focus on. Best of all, the Red-faced Warbler wandered in of its own accord several times (it won't come to playback). Of course, warblers are never still, but Jim did pop off quite a few frames and he feels one of them may be very good. A Grace's Warbler also came by a few times and on one occasion spent a little time out in the open. Those shots are "iffy."

Jim was happy to get those birds, but both of us were really thrilled to see such a variety of species. We had our binoculars out all the time, looking at Black-throated Gray and Wilson's warblers; Plumbeous, Hutton's, and Warbling vireos; Red-breasted, White-breasted, and Pygmy nuthatches; Greater Pewee and Dusky-capped Flycatcher; and on and on.

Oh, I almost forgot: Around 2:30 this morning I awoke and heard what sounded like a Spotted Owl. I tried really hard to make it into a dog up in the group campground, but it was a Spotted Owl. First I heard a lower-pitched leisurely (ca. 2-sec duration) "wuh-wuh WOOH" (all vowel sounds short), then from farther away a somewhat higher version of the same. I interpreted these as male, then female. Then the "male" seemed to fly over closer to the "female," and I heard a duet. Finally it was the "female" only for quite a while. The whole thing was over in five minutes. As always, I debated whether to get dressed and put on my recording gear and go outside. I decided against it and it turned out to be OK. I wouldn't have made it outside in time—and I wouldn't have been able to enjoy the sounds either.

This morning I looked up the descriptions of the Spotted Owl sounds in the various sources I had with me. (I didn't dare play the CDs because my computer batteries were low and so were those in the trailer.) Kaufman and the account that went with the CD disturbed me because they called the sound "deep." To me "deep" means low-pitched, and it was actually rather high for an owl. Sibley simply said "resonant," and that was a good word. Natl. Geographic simply likened it to a barking dog. I even took the trouble to look up "deep" in the dictionary that Jim always brings along, and it agreed with me that it means low-pitched, not hollow, full, resonant, etc.

It's been years since I've heard a Spotted Owl.

One thing puzzled us about the birds in the campground: Several species—American Robin, Hermit Thrush, both juncos, House Wren and maybe others—spent lots of time wandering around and pecking at the blacktop pavement on the campground road and in the sites. What were they finding there to eat that wasn't more numerous on the unpaved ground? Did the falling cones from the Ponderosas release their seeds better when they hit the pavement? Was the bare asphalt easier to find ants on? Was the food hidden under the layer of pine needles on some of the bare dirt (but much of the dirt was bare)? Whatever the reason, all the birds listed were incredibly tame and you could walk right past them without sending them to cover.

We ate an early lunch and drove down to Safford. The RV park is just as we expected—lots of closely packed RVs. It does have a few small trees. And it does have WiFi, so we spent quite a bit of time this afternoon on email. Jim said the shower is great. The RV park has cable TV and cost us less than \$20.

Later.

We did indeed indulge ourselves at Golden Corral (buffet). I had to laugh at Jim's choice of items: three servings of seafood, heavy on the shrimp; three servings of dessert. My selections were more balanced, but I still ate too much.

It was Saturday night in Safford, and all the ranch hands in their huge cowboy hats were eating far more than we were at the Golden Corral. These big burly guys loaded plate after plate of food. Only one "cowboy" was not big and burly, but his hat was every bit as broad-brimmed as all the rest, and his small, narrow face and slender physique were lost underneath it. Of course, cowboys never take off their hats indoors. Where would they put them?

There is a lot of cattle ranching around here, but the drought is having a severe effect. I read quite a bit about it a year or so ago when I read Sandra Day O'Connor's extremely interesting autobiography of her early years.

Tomorrow we leave southeastern Arizona. This seems a good stopping place for this installment of the diary. Besides, I just got an email from Nancy Kenyon that they're going on a three-week vacation soon, so I'd better get one to her before they leave.

[End of Part 2]