

**Mini AZFO Scouting Trip To
Beaver Dam Wash and Virgin River, Mohave County, Arizona**

May 30 – 31, 2008

Bob and Janet Witzeman

To reach this remote area, we left Phoenix Friday morning, May 30, driving to northern Arizona through Jacob Lake and Fredonia, then northwest into Utah (through the polygamous towns of Colorado City and Hildale with their huge houses) to St. George and back down southwest on U.S. 15 through the beautiful Virgin River Gorge to the town of Littlefield, AZ (elevation 1858) – about 12 miles n.e. of the Nevada border and about ten miles south of the Utah border (about 400 miles from Phoenix).

From Littlefield we drove northeast on Route 91 to where it crosses Beaver Dam Wash, which flows southeast from Utah and enters the Virgin River at Littlefield. We arrived about 6 P.M., which gave us time to scout the area to see where to bird Saturday morning. There was a housing development south of the bridge over the Wash, which didn't allow access to the Wash, but we were able to see much of the habitat from the bridge.

We camped near the Wash and started birding at 5:30 A.M., walking north for about a mile along the west side of the Wash, which is lined with large old cottonwoods and willows as well as cattails. After walking back south to the road, we birded both sides of the bridge and then north again along the east side of the Wash.

We were surprised to see and hear so many Eurasian Collared-Doves, which outnumbered the Mourning Doves three to one, but then later we had them in southern Utah as well.

I heard one White-winged Dove call once – another surprise. However, according to the *Annotated Checklist of Birds of Arizona* (1981) by Monson & Phillips, "White-winged Dove has been a summer resident in southwest Utah and adjacent Arizona since 1960. It has nested as far north as w. of Valentine in Mohave County." Valentine is farther south, southwest of Peach Springs on Route 66.

The sight of a juvenile Northern Harrier flying low close to the Wash was significant since the breeding status of Northern Harrier in Arizona is not well known.

Finally, we were surprised to see Abert's Towhee so far north, but subsequently read in the *Arizona Breeding Bird Atlas* that "an isolated population of Abert's Towhees occurs within the Virgin River drainage in northwestern Arizona."

After finishing our survey of Beaver Dam Wash, we drove southwest on Route 91 for two or three miles to Scenic Road where we turned east and shortly reached a bridge across the Virgin River. Unlike the lush riparian habitat of Beaver Dam Wash, the habitat along the Virgin River in this area consisted primarily of salt cedar and a few cattails. Except for a colony of Cliff Swallows under the bridge, and a lone Snowy Egret, there was very little birdlife seen or heard here at midday.

Of interest was the sight of a number of isolated and scattered Joshua trees on the ridges around Beaver Dam Wash and Littlefield, near the northern edge of their range – nothing like the dense Joshua tree forests farther south in Arizona and California. There is a Joshua Tree Natural Area just north of the border in Utah.

Species List:

Mallard (2), Gambel's Quail (present in good numbers, including one family of 16 almost grown young), Snowy Egret (1, Virgin River), Turkey Vulture (2), N. Harrier (1 juvenile), Eurasian Collared-Dove (many), White-winged Dove (1 called once),

Mourning Dove (numbers), Greater Roadrunner (1), Black-chinned Hummingbird (4), Ladder-backed Woodpecker (adult feeding young in cavity nest), Western Wood-Pewee (1), Willow Flycatcher (1), Say's Phoebe (2), Ash-throated Flycatcher (2), Western Kingbird (1), N. Rough-winged Swallow (6), Cliff Swallow (colony of about 75, Virgin River bridge), Common Raven (several), Verdin (1 with 1 begging young), N. Mockingbird (1), Bell's Vireo (2 or 3 singing), Yellow Warbler (3 or 4 singing), Common Yellowthroat (several singing), Yellow-breasted Chat (1 singing), Summer Tanager (1 pair), Abert's Towhee (8), Song Sparrow (several seen & heard), Red-winged Blackbird (several seen & heard), Great-tailed Grackle (several seen & heard), House Finch (several seen & heard), Lesser Goldfinch (several pairs with young).

Butterflies: Queen, Spring White, Mourning Cloak

Dragonflies: Flame Skimmer, Green Darner