

AZFO Field Expedition highlights - Greenlee/Graham Cos.

April 28-29, 2007

Trip Report

Six AZ Field Ornithologists (AZFO) members convened at Roper Lake State Park south of Safford late Friday afternoon (27 April). The focus of this Field Expedition weekend was once again to obtain information on the distribution and abundance of birds within the upper Gila River drainage in Greenlee and Graham Cos. Very few bird reports come from this region of AZ, with a noticeable lack during the migration periods.

Roper Lake State Park produced a foraging OSPREY and VIRGINIA RAIL and a cooing LEAST BITTERN immediately adjacent to our camp sites. Early on 28 April, we drove to Duncan in Greenlee Co., split up into two teams, and surveyed through the morning in various sections of the Gila River. The most noteworthy observations included a pair of nesting COMMON BLACK-HAWKS, good numbers of paired MEXICAN DUCKS, a fly-over LONG-BILLED CURLEW, OLIVE-SIDED FLYCATCHER, four species of vireos, including CASSIN'S, AM. ROBIN, a late WHITE-THROATED SPARROW, and a fly-over PINE SISKIN. We also found 11 species of warblers with the best being a rare, lowland record of RED-FACED WARBLER. Other warblers included VIRGINIA'S, TOWNSEND'S, MACGILIVRAY'S, and good numbers of MYRTLE YELLOW-RUMPED. A lingering LEWIS'S WOODPECKER was in the same small grove of pecan trees where we noted one in February!

After a tremendous wind, dust, and lightning storm (I am still trying to get all the dirt out of my ears!) around 1100, we ate lunch in relatively calmness at a park in Duncan which produce of note BLACK-HEADED GROSBEAK, BULLOCK'S ORIOLES and two AMERICAN GOLDFINCHES. We headed over to the east side of the river, checking out agricultural areas and then made several stops north along the river in the Sheldon area. One of the more interesting observations was a fly-over COMMON MERGANSER. Our final stop was in the small community of York. Here, we made a brief visit to a row of willows and large mesquite trees across Hwy. 75 from the Sexton store. Among many Lucy's Warblers we encountered a foraging NORTHERN PARULA (possibly a first county record). From there we headed back to Roper Lake State Park where a NEOTROPIC CORMORANT was observed flying low over the lake and one member noted two FRANKLIN'S GULLS as she headed to her camper.

On 29 April, we visited several locations in Graham County including the Dankworth Ponds (south of Roper Lake State Park) which held few migrants but had another calling LEAST BITTERN and a fly-over calling SOLITARY SANDPIPER. At the Reay Lane Wastewater Ponds in Thatcher, we observed 6 species of swallows, including several BANKS. There were several pairs of BLUE-WINGED TEAL among the many CINNAMON. Shorebirds included LEAST SANDPIPERS, LONG-BILLED DOWITCHERS, BLACK-NECKED STILTS, WILSON'S SNIPE, and about 20 WILSON'S PHALAROPES. Late in the morning, one vehicle headed to Cluff Ranch near the town of Pima. Here we found at least a dozen lowland migrating BAND-TAILED PIGEONS and a COMMON MERGANSER in one of the ponds, but few other migrants. We headed back to Roper Lake State Park and while eating lunch in front of our cabin, one of the better birds on the trip was spotted foraging over the lake, an adult LEAST TERN. Photos were taken of this rarity, just before heading home.

I want to thank the AZFO members from Sierra Vista, Scottsdale and Phoenix that joined this Field Expedition and helped collect data to better understand the distribution of birds in this little birded section of southeastern Arizona.

Good Birding,

Troy Corman
Phoenix, AZ