



Las Vegas

November 4-11th 2007

Participants: Paul Stewart, Tony Stewart, & the lads from the Jubilee Pub – Fawdon.

Background:

This trip was primarily a drinking and gambling trip to one of the most exciting cities in America, but it also offered the opportunity to do a bit of birding in between hangovers. We flew from Newcastle to Las Vegas via London and Los Angeles and arrived at night to the stunning spectacle of a neon lit Vegas. McCarron International Airport is a short distance from the famous strip. We collected our hire car which was a metallic orange Hummer – 10 mile to a \$1.62 gallon (well we were in Vegas after all) and headed for our hotel the *New York New York*. This hotel was modeled on the New York Skyline and is just one of many incredible hotels on the strip.



New York New York Hotel

Most of the birding sites we had planned to visit were gleaned from James L Boone's excellent website - <http://www.birdandhike.com/>. This site is a valuable tool for anyone visiting Las Vegas and contains information on wildlife, geology, rock art, hiking and aircraft

Corn Creek ***N36.4383 W115.3575***

This site is a desert oasis off highway 95 is approximately 30 minute drive of North West Las Vegas. We had a couple of visits to Corn Creek during the week. Being an oasis we knew that the natural spring water would be a magnet for birds. We walked the ¾ mile loop searching the pond area and paddocks for birds.

First birds noted were Western Meadowlark and Loggerhead Shrike followed by several American Robins and Dark-eyed Juncos. Other species included Phainopepla, Bewicks Wren, Gray Flycatcher, Ruby-crowned Kinglet and two species of Sparrow – Sage and White-crowned.

An unusual bird, way off course, was a Great Northern Diver which was causing the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service a major headache. It turns out that the small pool that the diver landed on contains a remnant population of the endangered Pahrump Poolfish (*Empetrichthys latos latos*). Pupfish are having a hard time throughout the Southwestern U.S. deserts as springs, creeks, and ponds dry up from overuse and drought. Corn Creek is a refuge habitat for the fish and the diver was happily devouring them. The U.S.F.W.S mounted a rescue operation to catch and relocate the Diver to a more suitable stretch of water as it was unable to take off from the small spring pond.



Great Northern Diver

Acting on a tip off from a local birder we revisited Corn Creek later on in the week and got cracking views of a Great Horned Owl which had taken up residence. Other birds seen were Common Crackle, Yellow-rumped Warbler (Audubon's race) and Sharp-shinned Hawk.

Lee Canyon ***N36.3164 W115.6743***

Another site, off highway 95, IS Lee Canyon. This rises to an elevation of almost 9000 feet. The warm winter sun of the desert floor was a distant memory as we headed higher and higher and the temperature plummeted. But the drive was worth it with lots of great birds seen. Highlights included 3 species of Nuthatch – Pygmy, White & Red- breasted, Mountain Bluebird, Western Scrub Jay, Bushtit, Cassin's Finch, Pine Siskin, Clarks Nutcracker, Ladder-backed & Hairy Woodpeckers and Steller's jay.

We checked the meadows area and a few of the trails at the top of the road, but no new species were found. The area is said to be good for Band-tailed Pigeon and Lewis's Woodpecker which we dipped.



Steller's Jay, Clarks Nutcracker & Pine Siskin

Henderson Bird Viewing Preserve [N36.07514 W115.00147](#)

This was a belter of a site which was situated in the city of Henderson South East of Las Vegas. We made two visits to the site which is a working sewerage works. Birders are made welcome and they have a great visitors centre staffed by knowledgeable volunteers.



Again there were lots of great birds on site with a good mixture of waterbirds and passerines. Highlights were Verdin, Crissals Thrasher, Belted Kingfisher, Costas & Anna's Hummingbirds, Aberts Towhee and several Gambel's Quails. Water birds included large flocks of Lesser Scaup and Black-necked Grebes. Other ducks included Pintail, Greater Scaup, Green-winged and Cinnamon Teals. There were plenty of stunning Buffleheads and both Snowy Egret and Green Heron were common. Two species of Sparrow were added to the trip list - Song & Brewer's. Waders here included Western, Least and Spotted Sandpipers



Anna's Hummingbird



Gambel's Quail

A delightful lady called Je-Anne, a volunteer at Henderson, gave us directions of a site in a North Las Vegas for Burrowing Owl, so we headed off up I95 to the Durango junction. In a residential area we found a small colony of the Owls which had recently had the misfortune of being almost wiped out by a builders Earthmover which buried three quarters of the birds alive before locals could put a stop to the drivers actions.



Burrowing Owl

Other sites visited during our stay were Clark County Wetlands Park which was situated along Tropicana Avenue from the New York New York. This fledgling site was under construction with six miles of paths and trails being created. There was an excellent visitor's centre staffed by local volunteers. The birding was excellent with lots of great birds including several Verdin and Le Contes Thrashers.

We also made the long journey to the south rim of the Grand Canyon where besides the sheer breathtaking spectacle of the Canyon itself we saw Mountain & Black-capped Chickadees, and Ferruginous Hawk. Because of a cold spell the week before when a large amount of snow fell the resident Californian Condors at Bright Angel Lodge had flew south to warmer climes. The Glass Bridge at Grand Canyon West was an unforgettable experience, owned and operated by the Hualapai Indians. Rock Wren and Raven were seen at the bridge



Raven

We also drove the Lake Mead Birding Trail and visited the Overton Wildlife Management Area. There were lots of water birds here with two species of grebe seen – Western and Clarks. Other good birds included House Finch, Buff-bellied Pipit, Black & Says Phoebe, Northern Mockingbird and Gilded Flicker.

Conclusion

A most surprising return of 100 birds made birding around Las Vegas very enjoyable. The sites we visited, Grand Canyon apart, were all within easy reach of the Strip. And the birds were relatively easy to see. Armed with an iPod and a good selection of bird calls, the trip list would have been greater.

Las Vegas – Luck be a Lady

Tony Stewart