

ITINERARY – By David Walsh & Andrew Gregory

Saturday July 31st

Morning flight from London Heathrow to Phoenix, arriving late afternoon; overnight Phoenix.

Sunday August 1st

Drive east from Phoenix along I60 via Apache Junction to Superior, then south-east for morning birding at Hayden Golf Course in Winkleman and Aravaipa Canyon (lunch). Early afternoon birding in the San Pedro River valley at Dudleyville, before driving to Tucson. Overnight Tucson.

Monday August 2nd

Morning birding in Shannon-Broadway suburban desert area west of Tucson, along Snyder Hill Road and at Avra Valley Sewage Ponds. Birding/lunch at Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum. Break at hotel then late afternoon birding at Sweetwater Wetlands. Overnight Tucson.

Tuesday August 3rd

Whole day birding at various altitudes on Mount Lemmon with stops including Babad Do'ag (saguaros), Rose Canyon, Marshall Gulch, Ski Run Road (near Iron Door Restaurant), the summit and Molino Basin. Overnight Tucson.

Wednesday August 4th

Drive south from Tucson via San Xavier Cemetery for mid-morning birding at Florida Wash. Midday birding and lunch in Madera Canyon with stops near Kubo cabins, the Roundup picnic area and trail, and feeders at Santa Rita Lodge. Drive onwards via Rio Rico to Nogales. Overnight Nogales.

Thursday August 5th

Morning birding at Patagonia Lake State Park and Patagonia Roadside Rest Area. Lunch near butterfly garden in Patagonia village then early afternoon birding at Patons' home. Mid-afternoon break at hotel, then late afternoon walk into Mexico. Overnight Nogales.

Friday August 6th

Visits before and after breakfast to Palo Duro Golf Course Ponds. Transfer to Sierra Vista via Kino Springs Golf Course/Ponds (morning birding) and Sonoita village and grasslands (birding and lunch). Brief mid-afternoon break at hotel then birding at Miller Canyon (Beatty's private area). Overnight Sierra Vista.

Saturday August 7th

Morning birding at Garden Canyon (Upper Picnic Area) and Scheelite Canyon. Lunch in Garden Canyon then early afternoon break at hotel. Late afternoon birding at Sierra Vista Sewage Ponds, Moson Road and Ash Canyon B&B feeders. Overnight Sierra Vista.

Sunday August 8th

Morning birding at Garden and Sawmill Canyons. Lunch at Garden Canyon (Upper Picnic Area). Afternoon break at hotel and early dinner. Evening birding in Ramsey Canyon. Overnight Sierra Vista.

Monday August 9th

Morning birding at Ramsey Canyon. Transfer to Portal via San Pedro River (Charleston Bridge), Tombstone (sightseeing) and Whitewater Draw (midday birding and lunch). Overnight Portal (Cave Creek Ranch).

Tuesday August 10th

Whole day birding in high mountains at Barfoot Junction, Rustler Park and the Crest Trail to Barfoot Lookout (lunch). Overnight Portal (Cave Creek Ranch).

Wednesday August 11th

Pre-breakfast visit to Big Thicket and Jasper's feeders on Foothills Road. Morning birding along Paradise Road, at Rodeo (Cotton Gin) and Willow Tank. Late lunch and mid afternoon break at Cave Creek Ranch then late afternoon walk in South Fork.. Overnight Portal (Cave Creek Ranch).

Thursday August 12th

Pre-breakfast visit to Rodeo (Cotton Gin). Morning visit to high mountains at Barfoot Junction and Meadow. Mid-afternoon break at Cave Creek Ranch. Early dinner then evening birding in Portal area. Overnight Portal (Cave Creek Ranch).

Friday August 13th

Pre-breakfast visit to Paradise Road. Transfer from Portal to Phoenix via Willcox 'Twin Lakes' and Pinal Air Park Pecan Grove. Overnight Phoenix.

Saturday August 14th (extension)

Transfer to Flagstaff via Juniper Tank, Oak Creek Canyon (lunch and afternoon birding at West Fork Trail), Oak Creek Vista and Kachina Wetlands. Overnight Flagstaff.

Sunday August 15th (extension)

Whole day visit to the Grand Canyon. Overnight Flagstaff.

Monday August 16th (extension)

Birding in Flagstaff (University), San Francisco Peaks at ... Burn, Lower Lake Mary, Upper Lake Mary, Lake Mormon, Lake Ashurst (lunch). Return to Hart Prairie Road in the San Francisco Peaks. Overnight Flagstaff.

Tuesday August 17th (extension)

Return to Phoenix via Pinyon-Juniper west of Stoneman Lake and Montezuma Well. Lunch at Days Inn then early evening flight to London Heathrow arriving early afternoon on 18th.

David Walsh

DAILY DIARY

July 31st

All participants met at the check in queue for flight BA 289 direct to Phoenix. We arrived on time after a pleasant journey with courtesy drinks and a Tuck Box available, making us soon forget the turbulence that stained Gaston more than most. Careful instructions from David made the completion of the Visa waiver form painless for our 4.10 pm landing.

Immigration and Customs were splendidly organised and only a slight problem with the vehicle insurance, aggravated by the refusal to accept a card with the word Debit inscribed, caused any delay. Alamo allowed us to pick our own transport and by 6.10 pm some were in the Days Inn pool watching Inca Doves on the adjacent lawn.

We dined in fifties style, feeding the juke as well as ourselves, whilst Curly had his first milk shake.

August 1st

Breakfast without music took many forms before we headed out of town towards Winkelman. Water and fruit were taken on board before we stopped at Hayden Golf Course. Lark Sparrow, Black Phoebe, Summer Tanager, Brown-crested Flycatcher, Blue Grosbeak and Vermilion Flycatcher were seen well as we had our first taste of Arizona sun. Several brief stops along the road brought no sign of Mississippi Kites in their only territory in the state.

As the temperature rose above 100 F we headed up Aravaipa Canyon. Red-tailed Hawks and Turkey Vultures had dominated the skies so far but a close Gray Hawk was much admired. Cactus Wren thrilled some whilst good views were had of Verdin, Phainopepla, Bell's Vireo and Broad-billed Hummingbird. As yet newcomers to Arizona had no real idea of which birds would reappear so every new species was greeted enthusiastically including Gila Woodpecker. Our other raptor targets seemed elusive but a stop for Great Blue Heron and Lark Buntings led to a 'black' raptor being found in a tree. Eventually it turned out to be a Zone-tailed Hawk which was joined by a parent. However a Common Black Hawk was watched feeding on the ground after disturbing drinking vultures. Already excitement was being generated by the appearance of Flame Skimmers and Two-tailed Swallowtails.

As the first of many storms built up we moved on to the San Pedro River in Dudleyville, finding a Yellow Warbler before we completed our main targets for the day when our only Mississippi Kite soared above us. It was good to meet the landowner who clearly welcomed birders to the area.

Tucson was our destination as we drove away from the clouds to the Hotel Doubletree as splendid inside as it was ugly outside. The ribs selected by some for a dinner starter would have tested a lion!

August 2nd

A \$9 plus tax and tip breakfast at 6.00 am in the hotel's Cactus Rose Restaurant was a splendid way to start the day. By 7.40 we were at Shannon Broadway Boulevard in a cul-de-sac of dual carriageway with a central reservation holding mixed desert plants and flanked by dwellings with similarly endowed gardens. This area produced some astonishing urban birdwatching. As we drove to the dead end to park, Gambel's Quail appeared in coveys, Curve-billed Thrashers were everywhere, Cactus Wren was nesting, with up to four Roadrunners scurrying through one scrubby patch. Male Lesser Goldfinches sparkled at feeders rivalling Pyrrhuloxias and Cardinals as the most colourful bird present. Inca Doves joined their more common congeners. The local builders watched us!

Moving on out of town we stopped at Snyder Hill Road when above the drone of conversation and driving advice the song of a Rufous-winged Sparrow was heard. The bird gave delightful all-singing views for video purposes and was joined by our first Canyon Towhee.

Our next habitat was to be the Avra Valley Sewage Ponds. Here were our first waterbirds starting with a swimming Night Heron, which was initially taken by some to be a decoy. 50 Black-necked Stilts, 31 Wilson's Phalaropes – alas, all in winter plumage – and several Western and Least Sandpipers were the dominant species supported by an Arizonan rarity, a Tricolored Heron.

Lunch was taken at the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum where some enjoyed sparring snakes (a Gopher Snake harassing an unidentified black one) and captive mammals but we found no new birds.

After a break back at the hotel everyone left at 4.20 heading for Sweetwater. At this ecologically friendly inner city processing plant the vegetation had become dominant. Nevertheless helped by a friendly North Carolina birder we enjoyed cracking views of Harris's Hawk, Abert's Towhee and Song Sparrow along with other birds to be seen again. At this stage we had little time to identify the many and varied dragonflies but we did see Common Green Darner (like our Emperor) and Comanche Skimmer (the males being blue and the females yellow).

August 3rd

A planned 7.30 am start after another fine breakfast found us heading into the Santa Catalina Mountains and Mount Lemmon with the knowledge that the road would close for seven hours at 9.00 am. A stop at a viewpoint brought unexpectedly excellent views of a posing Gilded Flicker before we passed through the closure point with minutes to spare.

We parked at Rose Canyon Lake and a walk was threatened, but over two hours later we had moved barely 100 yards from the car park! Almost immediately the first of countless Yellow-eyed Juncos appeared quickly followed by a stunning Red-faced Warbler. Steller's Jay was joined by Acorn, Hairy and Arizona Woodpeckers. A Cordilleran Flycatcher showed well and a Violet-green Swallow perched high in a tree. A Painted Redstart was a delight as Pygmy and White-breasted Nuthatches made their first of many appearances. Bushtits and Mountain Chickadees flocked as Plumbeous Vireos were traced as they called; they were surprisingly attractive through a telescope.

Moving higher to a roadside parking space we added Brown Creeper and Hermit and Townsend's Warblers to our list. Marshall Gulch provided little but a pleasant lunch spot and some Warbling Vireos, together with butterflies including Red-spotted Purple and Pacuvius Duskywing.

Thunder welcomed us to the top of Mount Lemmon where we found House Wren and Red-breasted Nuthatch, typical birds of the highest elevations.

Descending in convoy with the 5.00 pm pace car we halted in the oaks at Molino Basin and coped with the increased heat by seeing Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Hepatic Tanager, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher and Canyon Wren.

We finished with a flourish as a Gray Fox loped across the road as we returned to Tucson.

August 4th

At 7.30 am we left Tucson to go south to our next base on the Mexican border. At the San Xavier Mission we stopped briefly at what, to our eyes, was a garish cemetery. Atop the most prominent monument sat a Burrowing Owl with probably two more in attendance amongst the graves nearby. With reluctance and after consulting the senior Theologian present we erected a telescope for a few minutes before leaving our roadside pitch.

Southwards on a road with metric distances but avoirdupois speed limits we checked a bridge for putative Cave Swallows expecting and finding Cliff before stopping at Florida Wash. Here birds appeared at a steady rate, nearly all of them sitting on isolated bushes. A

male Varied Bunting sang followed by an obliging Cassin's Sparrow which songflighted. Canyon Towhee sat in full view as did a male Lark Bunting and a singing Botteri's Sparrow. Lucy's Warbler flitted and Rufous-winged Sparrow was joined by its Rufous-crowned counterpart. Cloud and no wind had made conditions almost perfect.

Madera Canyon was just a little further along the road and we quickly discovered some productive feeders holding Black-headed Grosbeaks, Bridled Titmice and so on. Nearby were nesting Sulphur-bellied Flycatchers with Western Wood-Pewee. Arizona Sister delighted the butterfly lovers.

Above the final parking lot we walked to enjoy Western Tanager and Mexican Jays whilst some glimpsed the sought after Flame-colored Tanager.

Moving back down the valley a Hutton's Vireo was feeding a Brown-headed Cowbird whilst a scarce for Arizona Rose-breasted Grosbeak came to a feeder.

Nearing Nogales we searched a dry 'wetland' at Rio Rico counting six Black-bellied Whistling Duck and some Cassin's Kingbirds.

Dinner in a Mexican restaurant a few yards from the border was, eventually, a fine experience.

August 5th

The Holiday Inn complimentary breakfast put everyone in good spirits as we followed a tortuous route to Patagonia Lake. Conditions were again still and cloudy but the early birding was slow with Neotropic Cormorants the pick of the species. Bewick's Wren then appeared as Yellow-billed Cuckoo flew by and the noisy Yellow-breasted Chats showed well to some. A Yellow Warbler was accompanied by a juvenile and a Bell's Vireo sang well. An excited brace of American birders then directed us towards a Jaeger Tours group who were watching Black-capped Gnatcatcher at the nest with the available front and rear views clinching the identification. Tail from one side of the gully, and head and bill from the other! Careful video was taken of this Arizona rarity. As we left the site after excellent views of Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet we learned that the nest had only been found 30 minutes earlier – we were, again, in the right place at the right time.

Down by the lake a Green Heron flew by and a male Summer Tanager showed well. Dragonflies were plentiful and we identified Red-tailed Pennant, Blue Dasher and Desert Whitetail – we had no book to help us with the bluets (damselflies).

Back along the trail, our only Least Bittern climbed up a distant reed and a Great Egret fished alongside.

Soon after noon we headed for Patagonia Roadside Rest Area, once the haunt of becards, but now home to obliging Thick-billed Kingbirds, Hooded Orioles and a family of Gray Foxes.

Lunch at Patagonia provided stamps and a Gulf Fritillary in the specially prepared butterfly garden.

A hot vigil in the Paton's backyard was rewarded with Anna's, Black-chinned and Violet-crowned Hummingbirds together with Common Ground Dove and other frequently seen birds.

After a walk across the border to experience the Mexican half of Nogales, another Mexican meal was much enjoyed back in the USA.

August 6th

Some early risers visited Palo Duro Golf Course Ponds finding much to amuse in the forms of Sora, Green and Night Heron. The lazy bones ticked the Sora after breakfast on the way to Kino Springs Golf Course.

From essential shade, scanning produced much. Tropical and Cassin's Kingbirds showed well; Lazuli Buntings were a delight, whilst Vermilion and 'Western' Flycatchers, Black and Say's Phoebes, Northern Flicker, Northern Rough-winged and Tree Swallows provided fine entertainment. American Kestrel, Cooper's, Gray and Zone-tailed Hawk had all been

seen before but a couple of Black Vultures were new for the trip. A Stick Insect sat on a tree near the car park.

We bought lunch at Patagonia before what for us was a relatively long drive across grassland with a rest area at Sonoita giving great views of Grasshopper Sparrows, Western Meadowlark and the first of hundreds of Western Kingbirds. Another stop produced singing Lark Sparrow and a daylight feeding Common Nighthawk as well as a really obliging Botteri's Sparrow. A large Mule Deer with antlers munched well nearby.

At Sierra Vista we took a 50 minute break before we went to Miller Canyon. Swainson's Hawk was noted twice before we made contact with the obliging Tom Beatty who for \$20 let us enter his private garden to watch the few hummingbirds present in this poor season for the birds. The usual suspects showed well before, as predicted, a stunning male White-eared Hummingbird appeared on the nominated feeder just a sneeze length from the nearest observer. A splendid finish to a varied day.

August 7th

The alarm went in the form of a Curve-billed Thrasher at 5.36 am. However we had a gentle start before passing through the military checkpoint and entering Fort Huachuca.

The grasslands at the base of Garden Canyon held the expected Western Meadowlark and Cassin's Sparrows but we had more serious business.

At the Upper Picnic Area, there were many Western Wood Pewees as well as Hepatic Tanager, Hutton's Vireo and a splendid second year male Elegant Trogon enjoyed by all.

We headed up Scheelite Canyon on the shady side stopping for Bridled Titmouse, Painted Redstart, Brown Creeper and Spotted Towhee. Canyon Wren was in constant earshot and butterflies abounded. After about three-quarters of a mile with a rise of about 900 feet we found a male Spotted Owl just a few yards from the path. He sat, looked and preened oblivious to our presence – *Bird of the Trip* again! On the way down we enjoyed Apache Spiketail flying up and down the stream, very similar to our Golden-ringed Dragonfly from the UK.

Further up, the road proved impossible for our low clearance vehicles and with a storm threatening we retreated to the hotel for a break.

Sierra Vista Sewage Farm was our target at 3.00. Modern and odourless there was little open water but nevertheless Sora was noted, Lazuli Buntings were common and Bank Swallow joined Northern Rough-winged in a small roost. Yellow-headed Blackbirds were present in some numbers whilst Common Yellowthroat finally showed well.

Along Moson Road, Swainson's Hawks were on top of poles and obligingly tame. A short distance up Turkey Road we came to Mary Jo's house in Ash Canyon. A warm greeting relaxed everyone and the target bird, a male Lucifer Hummingbird, made a two minute appearance as distant Turkeys clucked before the rain almost came.

August 8th

As usual some prowled early but it was 8.00 am before we were again in the Huachucas enjoying Blue Grosbeak, Lark Sparrow, Loggerhead, Roadrunner and so on in the grasslands. We drove high into Garden Canyon but with the road deteriorating we decided to walk the final stretch and were well rewarded for our efforts. However, initially birds (apart from a Peregrine) were scarce so butterflies got much attention. Nearing the road end noises were followed resulting in a female Montezuma's Quail being watched scurrying and flying in the roadside meadow. A Greater Pewee looked huge with an American Robin feeding young nearby, and Nashville Warblers formed part of a mixed flock. Climbing higher, the Cabin area at the entrance to Sawmill Canyon seemed empty, but perseverance brought good views of Buff-breasted Flycatcher, Painted Redstart and Black-throated Gray Warbler. As we drifted down via the cave paintings, butterflies (including some not on the list) continued to appear before three young Coatimundis

playing by the river provided a spectacular finish to a splendid walk. Later a Sonoran Whipsnake sped across the road whilst a Common Collared Lizard was identified.

A welcome rest was followed by an early meal at the much admired Denny's but by 6.25 pm we were off with Wezil Walraven into Carr Canyon. Near the fruit shop we searched for a Berylline Hummingbird's nest and with a little assistance managed to see mother and babies in the gathering gloom. Soon after sunset, Wezil called for Whip-poor-wills. They responded in numbers and flew around us, occasionally perching. With darkness imminent we moved down the valley and he lured Western Screech-Owl into torchlit scoped views. Finally his piece de resistance involved calling to a Whiskered Screech Owl which sat above us for ages, twice being joined by the more harshly spoken female.

Back at the hotel Wezil offered T shirts whilst cold beer or wine appeared from one room before the occupants headed off into town where later.....

August 9th

Transfer day – we were back at the Berylline nest by 8.30 am where we were joined by a Turkey. Soon after, we headed for the much praised San Pedro River at Charleston Bridge. We saw little in the way of birdlife but a Terrapin was new and butterflies abounded.

Next it was off to Tombstone and Boot Hill Cemetery. Culture of a strange kind, as everything was much too clean compared with what it must have been in the bad old days – still, some of the grave inscriptions were not so!

Our next stop was Whitewater Draw, a wintering ground for thousands of birds including Sandhill Crane. It was hot but the site proved very attractive. Two Great Horned Owls flew off as we approached the Dutch Barn equipped with seats and tables for birders, but one bird sat and roosted on the eaves throughout our visit making several American groups who dipped on this species very envious. White-faced Ibis, Avocets, Wilson's Phalarope, Long-billed Dowitcher, Western Sandpiper, Long-billed Curlew and Sora were on the pools together with our first Shoveler. A flycatcher called allowing us to identify it as Pacific-Slope. Also in the bushes were many Lazuli Bunting together with Black-headed Grosbeak, Yellow and Wilson's Warbler and hirundines. Back on the ponds, the dragonflies included Blue-eyed Darner and Wandering Glider as well as different saddlebags. On the way out along Coffman Road we spotted a Collared Dove – this introduced species continues to head westwards.

On the long and picturesque drive towards New Mexico the fourth Roadrunner of the day was seen and we made a brief stop at the Geronimo Memorial before reaching Cave Creek Ranch at 5.00 pm.

Portal Shop proved an ideal place for dinner and breakfast with a choice of cuisine and liver and onions every evening if you so wished.

August 10th

Our first morning at Cave Creek dawned fine and sunny. The feeders outside the office were loaded with a mixture of enticing substances. Mealworms in a plastic container on the porch proved attractive to Acorn Woodpecker and Cactus Wren with the spillage luring Bewick's Wren and Spotted Towhee to within a few feet of observers. As always, Lesser Goldfinch festooned feeders joined by Black-headed Grosbeak, Hooded Oriole and Hairy Woodpecker. Nearby White-tailed Deer and Cliff Chipmunk came to nibble.

Before breakfast at Portal our only Calliope Hummingbird graced the feeders.

Heading up into the Chiricahua Mountains towards Rustler and Barfoot Parks, we stopped to inspect flocks of small birds in the well spaced trees. Mexican Chickadee was present in satisfyingly large numbers joined by the ubiquitous Nuthatches – White-breasted, Pygmy and the equally tiny Red-breasted. Red-faced, Hermit and Grace's Warblers were again well seen together with a Yellow-rumped Warbler.

A walk to Barfoot Lookout was essential and the final views were stunning. Peregrine appeared with large numbers of White-throated Swifts and we had a tantalising glimpse of Short-tailed Hawk.

The stroll down brought more of the same, plus a Ruby-crowned Kinglet, with the birding becoming increasingly enjoyable as we all became familiar with so many of the birds.

August 11th

The earliest risers saw little until the feeders were serviced at about 6.00 am. The usual birds were present but an unexpected Juniper Titmouse came to the office feeder.

It was obviously going to be hot so we tried Big Thicket before breakfast, a lowland area of trees and scrub. A Gray Flycatcher showed to many, but Crissal Thrasher to only one. Nearby, Dave Jasper's feeders were more productive with male Black-headed Grosbeak, Black-throated Sparrow, Cardinal, Pyrrhuloxia, Lark Sparrow and, new for us, Bullock's Oriole and Western Scrub-Jay.

Post breakfast found us in the unfortunately named Paradise Road where Scott's Orioles feeding on Agave were the only stars, although we were pleased to find more Juniper Titmice in the cemetery.

The heat persuaded us to head for Rodeo and a couple of Solitary Sandpipers were found on the remains of Willow Tank, a usually wet pond. On a derelict cotton farm, Barn Owls were roosting ghost-like in the old feeder pipes from a rice store and another Crissal Thrasher appeared to this morning's spotter only again!

A break at 3.00 pm gave some feeder time with a female Western Tanager at the waterfall proving an interesting sight.

Later we drove towards the Ranger Station at South Fork where it had apparently been a major problem to find Trogons – we didn't have a sniff. An Apache Fox Squirrel and an excellent Grace's Warbler rounded off a fairly quiet day.

August 12th

A 6.00 am start took nearly everyone to yesterday's cotton farm graveyard along Gin Road off the often impassable Stateline Road. The sun's direction meant that it was impossible to see the roosting Barn Owls so we concentrated on thrashers. Almost immediately a Bendire's Thrasher sat atop a bush for some time. A Crissal Thrasher was heard singing and gave three obliging chances for everyone to see it looking long tailed and weird billed but actually weighing less than Curve-billed. A Loggerhead put in a brief but close appearance together with Bullock's Orioles. The journey to breakfast was enlivened by a perched Scaled Quail – at last! A Land Tortoise was captured and exhibited at breakfast.

Full as usual after a healthy meal we headed once again towards Onion Saddle and Barfoot Park. We drove slowly near the research station and were successful as many had great views of a male Montezuma Quail which crossed the road. Near Barfoot Junction, the expected birds were about and in addition a splendid male Olive Warbler showed well for some time pleasing everyone. Then the Short-tailed Hawk sailed round giving great views from below. Crossbills called as they flew over. At Barfoot Meadow, Sleepy Orange butterflies provided further excitement whilst on the way down a Dull Firetip by the road was unexpected.

An early supper at 5.00 pm enabled us to roam locally. A family of Javelina were the main attraction until the mother and father of an electrical storm appeared above the mountain and entertained us royally for nearly two hours. As night fell Common Poorwills called and some were seen along with small bats.

We did the bird list in the usual chalet with beer or coffee for those wanting it. Gaston attended in the sitting position.

August 13th

Following yesterday's early morning success we were on Paradise Road soon after 6.00 am seeing Cooper's Hawk on the way. However Mother Kelly's doorstep might have been more comfortable as we struggled to pin much down. A flycatcher 'got away', some Bullock's Orioles showed and Virginia Warblers gave views but not of our accustomed quality. Breakfast was a welcome relief. 'Form is temporary, class is permanent' was the consolation offered to our Birdwatching Becks.

By 9.20 am we were on the road to Phoenix. In New Mexico Loggerhead was a grip-back for two members.

Soon after 11.00 am Willcox provided a splendid lake graced by 56 Long-billed Curlews, 90 Ruddy Ducks, 60 Wilson's Phalaropes, Californian and Ring-billed Gulls, three Black-necked Grebes, four Green-winged Teal, one Lesser Scaup, one Semi-palmated Plover and two Black Terns. The nearby golf course held Yellow-headed Blackbirds, a swimming Night Heron and Scaled Quail giving another grip-back for the twosome.

The first rain that would do more than wet a fag paper fell as we drove on stopping for coffee and an American Kestrel. At the jets' graveyard near Pinal Pecan Grove, we were surprised but delighted by a flush of Horned Larks on a maize field from which a Roadrunner dashed into a huge cotton field.

Petrol was needed and one attempt was thwarted by the friendly soul whose only English consisted of the phrase 'No cheques' – a Bushman presumably.

The pool at Phoenix was enjoyed by some but soon after John had bought us all a farewell glass of wine – charged to Gaston's bill accidentally – the lights went out removing dinner from the agenda although Curly had a free Milkshake.

August 14th

Saying farewell to Gaston and John, we moved off north towards Flagstaff. Birding began at Juniper Tank where insects took their toll. Rock Wren was new, a mystery call proved to be Gambel's Quail, and Red-tailed Hawks gave their best show yet. Further along, Chipping and Black-throated Sparrows fed together.

We took the scenic route through Sedona but thousands of Americans were understandably escaping the heat of the lower valley preventing us from parking anywhere near a Dipper site. Eventually we walked up the West Fork of Oak Creek Canyon finding Indigo Bunting – as planned – Western Tanager and self-service apples.

At the scenic Oak Creek Vista, purchases were made and we enjoyed perched Band-tailed Pigeon and Blue-gray Gnatcatcher.

Near Flagstaff, Kachina Wetland was in good condition when we arrived (we discovered later that it was soon to be flooded and less attractive). Here we met John Prather whose reports we had been following on the net.

Savannah and Vesper Sparrows showed well together with Marsh Wren and, unexpectedly, MacGillivray's Warbler. Western Bluebirds perched and flew. Purple Martins and various hirundines appeared. On the soon to be flooded mud at least four Virginia and three Sora Rails gave telescope views. A marvellous end to a transfer day was made all the better by the sighting of the Galaxy Diner almost next to our hotel on Route 66. It was surf and turf for some but a good time for all later that evening.

Andrew Gregory

August 15th

"Awesome" is an overworked word these days, but it well describes the Grand Canyon – a truly awesome place. Apart from David, none of us had been there before, and for some the visit was the realization of a lifetime's ambition. We took the eastern route from Flagstaff, and our first stop was at the Little Colorado River Canyon – a very impressive place in itself, and a foretaste of things to come.

We continued to follow the road across the plateau, parked the minibus, and walked along an almost level path. Suddenly the landscape opened up, the ground fell sharply away, and there before us was the Grand Canyon itself – an amazing sight. Desert View is the most easterly vantage point, giving a broad vista across the whole Canyon, looking north to Marble Canyon, from where the Colorado River enters, and west through the Grand Canyon itself. Under a cloudy sky there was still an early-morning mist. What must the earliest explorers have felt when they came quite unexpectedly upon this incredible place? Plenty of time to absorb the scene, and for some to climb the nearby tower, before we moved on, westward, stopping at other viewpoints on the way. Lipan Point in particular gave magnificent views. At Grandview Point we wandered a little way down the trail which eventually leads to the bottom. It's something like a mile down - so far that we needed a telescope to be able to watch canoeists shooting the rapids. After a lunch break in the woods, we were off to the airport for a flight over the Canyon in a 6-seater Cessna 207. By this time the sun had broken through, showing off the Canyon's rock in all its varied colours. At its deepest point, the rock is the oldest on the face of the planet.

We were tourists today, not birders, but we could hardly visit the Canyon without hoping for at least a glimpse of California Condors. They are creatures of habit, and their daily alarm clock is set for four o'clock, so promptly at four we went down to The Lookout, and there, sure enough, we saw five of them rising on a thermal before setting off into the distance. From the Ranger we learned about the on-going project to save these wonderful birds from the brink of extinction.

The plan was to have an early supper and then walk to Hopi Point to watch the sunset. The first part of the plan worked out well – we had a really excellent meal – but then the storm broke. The lightning was spectacular, but there was to be no sunset. Instead it turned into one of the coldest summer days recorded there, and in the foyer they even lit a fire. Time for a quick shop, a last look out as the rain swept down the Canyon, and then we decided to head for home.

All was not over, however. Pronghorns were seen by the road then, halfway to Flagstaff, as darkness was falling, David saw a Common Nighthawk as it flew over the road. Quickly parking, we watched several of them hawking low for moths and other insects. It was the icing on the cake at the end of a memorable day.

Jeremy Walsh

August 16th

At 7.45 am we left for the Northern Arizona University just round the corner from the hotel. Very soon Lewis's Woodpecker and Western Tanager were seen feasting on fruit. A great start!

Our next destination was above the Snow Bowl not far out of town. A roadside stop brought the expected birds including our last views of some favourites. However our destination was the Leroux Burn, where we anticipated woodpeckers in the damaged trees. Indeed Northern Flicker together with Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers showed well, but there wasn't a hint of Three-toed. A pair of Olive-sided Flycatchers gave fine views catching some large insects before stunning them effectively and Clark's Nutcrackers flew and perched for us. Rufous Hummingbirds fed on the thistles thriving in the open land produced by the fire. An arriving storm suggested that we take cover so we drove down avoiding the rain as we did successfully for most of the rest of the day.

At Lower Lake Mary we saw our only Pintail whilst the Upper seemed to hold only Osprey. Lake Ashurst produced a dozen White-faced Ibis, some delightful Baird's Sandpipers (at last), more Ospreys, Long-billed Dowitcher, Western Scrub-Jay and Spotted Sandpipers.

Lake Mormon was dry but several hundred Elk enjoyed the resulting grazing.

Revisiting Upper Lake Mary we were startled by the appearance of an adult Bald Eagle (which breeds there, we later discovered). A Forster's Tern showed well on a buoy so that all the relevant features could be noted.

As rain fell we drove back into the hills towards the Hart Prairie where we found an open habitat with trees, bushes and an Aspen plantation.

In the open area an abundance of Bluebirds, Robins, Flickers and Green-tailed Towhees fed on the fruiting bushes. Band-tailed Pigeon and Peregrine flew over, whilst a MacGillivray's Warbler 'tic ticked' in the bushes, showing occasionally.

A walk in the Aspens produced Pine Siskin, before on the journey back to another swinging night on Route 66 we saw up to 15 Common Nighthawks heading for the feeding grounds.

August 17th

A calm journey south was enlivened by some short stops; we found several Western Scrub-Jays but no Pinyon despite the prime habitat, but later all were excited by the National Monument at Montezuma Well where our only big fish of the trip were ticked - Carp and Catfish?

After a final meal in the hotel diner and a clean up in a courtesy room we dropped off the vehicles and caught an early evening plane, arriving at Heathrow the following afternoon.

Andrew Gregory