

# Bird Hike to the Placitas Open Space on 4-24-2010

By Hart R. Schwarz

**Short Summary for 2010:** If it hadn't been for the cool, brisk wind that was the nemesis for nine brave souls most of the day, it would have been perfect birding weather. That little fact, plus the reality that migration has barely gotten underway, kept our numbers relatively low, especially the neotropicals that are holding out for somewhat warmer conditions. Even the usual residents were not entirely reliable; many of them are doing a dance of ebb and flow. Some years, species like the Bewick's Wren or the Canyon Towhee are easy to find, while in other years, like the present one, they are not. I really think the long drought is having a cumulative effect, drying things out and limiting the food supply. That is why it is particularly important to be gentle on the land and respect the fragile cryptobiotic soil, which insures that even in a desert almost invisible forces are at work to make the soil productive.

Perhaps the best neotropical bird was the Ash-throated Flycatcher, not because it is rare, but because it just had arrived—perhaps today or yesterday—and it's always good to welcome back a friend that has been gone for about eight months. The other bird of note was a male Mountain Bluebird of brilliant hue that was catching insects in a meadow because there were no juniper berries. This species is most common in winter, but once in a while, especially when the stream is running, they stay to breed, usually high on the sand escarpment—or even in one of our bird boxes.

**The Return of the Great Horned Owls!** Ever since I conducted my bird inventory in 1997/ 1998, the Great Horned Owls have been the wildlife centerpiece of the Open Space. Every year they have successfully nested on the sandstone cliffs—except in 2008. This year the outcome of their nesting effort is uncertain. Three young about a week old were in the nest in early April, but none were detected on the 24<sup>th</sup>. As the edge of the cavity is eroding away and living space inexorably shrinking, it is possible that the young fell out of the nest and that the adults are taking care of them at the base of the cliff. The fact that an adult was seen in the area was a good sign.

**The Open Space Nest Boxes:** Early in 1998 we put up four nest boxes because natural cavities are in short supply for several cavity nesters that include the Juniper Titmouse, the Ash-throated Flycatcher, the Bewick's Wren and, very rarely, a bluebird. Two more nest boxes were put up in 2003, but the net total of boxes on the Open Space is still only four, because we did not replace the box that was destroyed by vandals. In 2010 we didn't check the mesa-top boxes because of our reluctance to brave the swiftly moving waters of Las Huertas Creek. We did however check one of the boxes on the north side of the stream, but found it unoccupied. The Juniper Titmouse has nested here in the past, but apparently they are finding plenty of natural nesting sites, judging by their relative abundance this year.

Species	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	Species	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10
01. Turkey Vulture	1		1		2	1	2	2	29. Bewick's Wren		1	1				4	
02. Sharp-shinned Hawk							1		30. House Wren			2					
03. Cooper's Hawk			1		2	1		2	31. Ruby-crowned Kinglet		1						
04. Red-tailed Hawk							2	2	32. Blue-gray Gnatcatcher		2		1				
05. American Kestrel						1		1	33. Western Bluebird					2			
06. large falcon, species				1					34. Mountain Bluebird			2					1
07. Scaled Quail	2		3		8			1	35. Townsend's Solitaire			1					1
08. Rock Pigeon		30							36. Hermit Thrush			1					
09. Mourning Dove	10	6	7	12	20	5	6	4	37. Northern Mockingbird			6			1		
10. Great Horned Owl	3	3	1+3	1+2	1+4		1+1	1	38. Curve-billed Thrasher	1			1	2			1
11. Black-chin. Hummingbird	2	6	4	1	4	3	2		39. Virginia's Warbler			1					
12. Broad-tailed Hummingbird	2		1	1	3	1	1	1	40. Yellow-rump. Warbler			50					
13. Ladder-back. Woodpecker		2			3	1			41. Western Tanager			2				1	
14. Gray Flycatcher (probable)			1						42. Green-tailed Towhee				3				
15. Say's Phoebe	2	2	2	3	2	4	2	4	43. Spotted Towhee		2		1				
16. Ash-throated Flycatcher					3	3		1	44. Canyon Towhee	1	5	4	7	2	4	2	2
17. Cassin's Kingbird	2		3		1		2		45. Chipping Sparrow			8	4		2	6	5
18. Western Kingbird								1	46. Brewer's Sparrow			4	4		5	2	
19. Loggerhead Shrike				1					47. Vesper Sparrow				1				
20. Western Scrub-Jay	4		2	1	3	4	1	2	48. Lark Sparrow		1	3		3			
21. Pinyon Jay	6	40	8	4	10	6	3	50	49. Black-throated Sparrow	4	1	2	2	4			
22. Common Raven	5	3	1	1	2	3	10	1	50. White-crown. Sparrow	1	1		2				
23. Violet-green Swallow		2	3			3	15		51. Black-headed Grosbeak			1					
24. N. Rough-winged Swallow	6		2		4				52. Brown-head. Cowbird			2			1		
25. Barn Swallow		1	8			1	1		53. Scott's Oriole			2		1		1	
26. Juniper Titmouse	3	7	3	1	4	4	4	6	54. House Finch	4	8	10	9	10	12	4	4
27. Bushtit				5	5	4			55. Pine Siskin	1		1		1	1		
28. Rock Wren	5	4	6	6	2	1	2	1									

## EIGHT YEAR SUMMARY

4-24-10: 22 species and 94 individuals	4-22-06: 24 species and 73 individuals
4-25-09: 23 species and 76 individuals	5-07-05: 37 species and 160 individuals
5-03-08: 24 species and 72 individuals	4-24-04: 21 species and 128 individuals
4-28-07: 26 species and 104 individuals	4-26-03: 20 species and 65 individuals

