

Bird Hike to the Placitas Open Space on 5-03-2008

By Hart R. Schwarz

Short Summary for 2008: As in so many previous years, it again was a beautiful spring day, with only a slight breeze stirring, as about 15 people, mainly from Placitas, assembled for the annual ramble in search of birds. If one looks at the six-year summary below, this year's tally is quite typical, albeit a little low in overall numbers. Yet, somehow, it felt different, somewhat muted, with few songs and few migrants, precisely at a time when the bulk of migrants is arriving. Only one Rock Wren was encountered and no Black-throated Sparrows, birds that are usually very reliable. I really think the ten-year 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 until a good wet spell revives it. During this dry period, birds are drawn, not surprisingly, to places with water and to the luscious green of deciduous trees, which birds can spot from afar. It wouldn't surprise me that many of the birds we were looking for were visiting the yards and gardens of Placitas. Still, we heard the Brewer's Sparrows sing, and that is always a good thing!

No 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 this year, in 2008. The pair's courting ritual begins in February, and already by early March the eggs are laid; they hatch in early April, and in early May the young are ready to leave the nest. One can only speculate what happened to the birds after at least ten years of steady occupancy, but it is highly probable that they relocated; perhaps they were disturbed, or the prey-base looked more promising elsewhere.

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 2008 we did not check the two mesa top boxes and only one of the two in Las Huertas Canyon. That box, although not currently active, did contain an old Juniper Titmouse nest. Overall, it seems that the boxes on the mesa get the most use and have been occupied by all four species mentioned above, but the boxes below have been occupied only by titmice, as far as we know.

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

SIX YEAR SUMMARY

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

