

Scholarship Report

2005 Young Birder Track, Tucson, AZ

Tuesday morning dawned bright and clear in Fort Collins CO where I was staying. I woke with the sun, sleepy, but full of excited anticipation. I would be in Tucson, AZ in just a few hours to attend the first ever Young Birder Track, or YBT at the ABA Convention, for my mom's and my plane was scheduled to get us there by 1:00 pm. We made our final packing adjustments and were off in a hurry to catch our plane. Due to unfortunate circumstances, however, our 1:00 pm landing turned into an 11:00 pm landing.

The next morning, further unfortunate circumstances (our hotel alarm clock never rang) made me miss my 3:30 am departure for the first trip of the Young Birder Track (YBT). The first trip to California Gulch was, or so I heard, a great success, as the young birder group got several excellent birds, including the Five-striped Sparrow which I had desperately wanted to see. Oh well, the day was fun for me anyway as instead of going on the trip, I spent the day attending convention workshops including "Tyrant Flycatchers" with Alvaro Jaramillo and Chris Benesh, and Jon Dunn's "Southeast Arizona Sparrows" workshop. During these detailed lectures, we looked at numerous slides of the many North American species of flycatchers and sparrows that would help me with identification later during the trips.

Thursday morning I was able to wake up on time, thanks to the on-the-dot wake-up call, and was on the bus to Mount Lemmon in the Santa Catalina Mountains at 5:30 am. On the way to Mount Lemmon we, 10 young birders and our leaders Jon Dunn, Steve Howell, Louise Zemaitis, Michael O'Brien, Jennie Duberstein, and Lori Fujimoto, made several stops and observed a good many birds including: Gambel's Quail, a Northern Cardinal, Gila Woodpecker, and a few others. On one stop, we got out at a campground where we picked up Canyon Towhee, Cassin's Kingbird, Phainopepla, and many other birds. We also observed several interesting non-birds including huge swarms of Queen Ants which were fascinating due to their numbers. Unfortunately, we did not see birds feeding on them – what a spectacle that would have been! We also saw a beetle that Louise Zemaitis pointed out. If you stomped down near this beetle, it

stood itself up on its head, and if you stomped again, it keeled over and played dead for a few seconds before getting up and attempting to scuttle away.

When we finally reached our destination, we did some hiking and saw, among other birds, Yellow-eyed Juncos, a flying Zone-tailed Hawk, and finally, Red-faced Warblers. The first Red-faced Warbler that we saw, we only had a fleeting glimpse of. Further up the trail, however, we got great looks at some adult males. (This was lucky as we had gone that way to check out some agitated birds, among which we hoped to find an owl. We didn't see an owl, but we did see the warblers!) On the way down, some of us also had an extensive discussion with Michael and Louise about the identification of a certain butterfly we found along the trail. After our eventful morning of birding, we returned to the hotel and were allowed a short break before our first workshop.

Jon Dunn taught the first workshop on "Tyrant Flycatchers". I was glad to be drilled on flycatchers again, because I know that is one of my weaknesses, and flycatchers are such a difficult bird to differentiate the species. Following that, we had a workshop taught by Michael O'Brien and Louise Zemaitis on "Improving Observation Skills: Sketching and Note-taking". In their workshop, we were shown glimpses of bird slides which we discussed as a group to practice noting size, shape, color, and behavior, then we also sketched the slides. Louise and Michael were encouraging and full of helpful tips and pointers.

Friday's trip was my very favorite. We set out in the morning for the Huachuca Mountains where we would be birding in Carr and Miller canyons. Miller Canyon was the highlight of my trip, as we observed hundreds of my favorite family of birds – hummingbirds. We observed enormous quantities of these beautiful birds, coming to the three feeding stations at Beatty's Guest Ranch, including Anna's, Magnificent, Broad-billed, Costa's, White-eared, Black-chinned, Broad-tailed, Calliope, Rufous, and Blue-throated Hummingbirds (On the way up the canyon, we picked up a Blue-throated Hummingbird who was attracted to our van's Tail-lights!). One of my favorite hummingbirds was a Berylline/Magnificent hybrid, which we all got to observe for some time getting great looks. Also at the Beatty's Guest Ranch, we were treated to a truly

amazing sight – two Black-tailed Rattlesnakes in a vicious duel (or doing a mating dance – there was speculation going both ways)!

The trip to the Huachucas coupled with the other days made my trip to Tucson for the first ever Young Birder Track extremely enjoyable, and I am glad that the ABA included it in this year's annual convention. I would like to thank the ABA Education Program and the Colorado Field Ornithologists, for without their scholarships, I could not have attended the YBT. I would also like to thank the ABA for running the YBT, which I was very fortunate to attend and think was a huge success!

Elise M. S. Becker