SOUTHERN IDAHO AND THE CASSIA CROSSBILL

June 14-19, 2018

When the Cassia Crossbill, found only in the South Hills and Albion Mountains of Idaho, was promoted to full species status by the American Birding Association, I began receiving emails suggesting the time was right for a run to the north for this new species, other birds, and scenery of Southern Idaho. And finally after a year of plotting, planning, and procrastination the tour was organized and filled with five clients plus Brandon and myself. After spending some time in the South Hills, we did not need to go to the Albion Mountains, we ended up with scope views of many Cassia Crossbills.

After a night in Boise we made our way southeast toward the small town of Twin Falls where we would spend the next two nights, however, we detoured before Twin Falls and headed straight to Porcupine Springs Campground and a meeting with crossbills. Shortly after arriving we began to hear and see small flocks of Cassia Crossbills flying about and eventually settling on the tops of nearby lodgepole pines allowing scope views. We enjoyed this for the next hour or so as the Cassia Crossbills continued to call and settle on new nearby perches. It is estimated there are only about 6,000 Cassia Crossbills in these two areas, the total population of the Cassia Crossbill.

While enjoying the cool crisp air at Porcupine Springs and Diamondfield Jack Campgrounds we watched Hammond’s and Cordilleran Flycatcher, Violet-green Swallow, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Yellow-rumped warbler, Western Tanager, Cassin’s Finch and Pine Siskin. A close flyby Northern Goshawk quickly got our attention and quieted down the nearby song birds. As we worked our way toward Twin Falls we encountered the ubiquitous Black-billed Magpie, Northern Rough-winged, Bank, and Tree Swallows aplenty, Swainson’s, Ferruginous, and Red-tailed Hawks, Western Kingbird, and Lazuli Bunting.

On our way to a hummingbird feeding station in the mountains we passed through farmland and sagebrush were we found California Quail, Northern Harrier, numerous Swainson’s Hawks, more Red-tailed Hawks, American Kestrel, two Prairie Falcons, three Burrowing Owls with one kiting, and a lone flyby Long-billed Curlew. Once in the mountains at the hummingbird location we watched numerous male Calliope, Black-chinned, and Broad-tailed hummingbirds. We also scared up two Lewis’s Woodpeckers, Red-naped and Williamson’s Sapsuckers, finally good looks at Mountain Chickadee, but had to settle for only hearing MacGillivray’s Warbler. On our return trip we ate lunch and spotted Bullock’s Orioles, and in the sage we watched Sage Thrashers, one on the road, and Brewer’s Sparrow.

As we worked our way back to the Capital of Idaho, Boise, we made several stops viewing lava flows, Wood Duck, Gadwall, Cinnamon Teal, Common Merganser, Black-crowned Night-heron, and Belted Kingfisher. The two Great Horned Owl young on a branch at a roadside rest was intriguing as was the nearby perched Common Nighthawk. California Gull, Black-necked Stilt, American Avocet, Wilson’s Phalarope, and Forester’s Terns we found at Blacks Creek Bird Preserve, however, the Long-eared Owls were not.

For our last day of birding in Idaho we traveled to a private residence in Idaho City where feeders were stocked with plenty of seed, suet, and sugar water. The big hit was the male White-headed Woodpecker that came to the feeders several times allowing stunning views. Other birds at the smorgasbord included Hairy Woodpecker, Red-breasted and White-breasted Nuthatch, Black-headed Grosbeak, Spotted Towhee, Cassin’s Finch, and Pine Siskin. Working our way back to Boise we spotted Gray Jay, Dusky Flycatcher, Gray Catbird, Yellow, Yellow-rumped and Townsend’s Warblers, Yellow-breasted Chat, Western Tanager, and Lazuli Bunting.

Brandon and I will be returning to Idaho in June 17-22, 2019 for a repeat performance. Please contact David if you are interested in participating.