

Tonto Natural Bridge State Park Report

Tuesday, September 12, 2017

Leader: Dan Bohlmann

We had an ideal day with blue skies and a few floating clouds to make for great pictures. Our first bird of the day was Roadrunner waiting for us near the second meeting site at I17 and Carefree Highway. He was trying to decide whether to step out onto Carefree Highway and do a slow 45 mph or to hop on the freeway and join the speedy 90 mph crowd. Fortunately the loud click of Vera's camera shutter scared him back into the desert.

When we arrived at Tonto Natural Bridge we went straight to the overlook looking 300 feet straight down. As we stared into the abyss the birds began showing up around us. First it was the Scrub Jays and then a female black-chinned hummingbird, followed by a Boat-tailed Grackle. Then we had a small bird show up in a tree right in front of us. We all got good looks, but it took us some time to agree as to what type of Vireo it was - a Cassin's since it was quite yellow on the breast. We didn't see the usual high numbers of swallows and swifts flying in and out of the Bridge (which looks more like a tunnel) but only a few Violet-green Swallows and a White-throated Swift.

We then walked around some of the grassy areas on top of the tunnel and found a bright female Cardinal hiding in some brush. We trekked over to the other side of the tunnel and on the way over on the mountain side we heard some familiar bird songs. A White-breasted Nuthatch, a Mountain Chickadee, a Ladderback Woodpecker and a Summer Tanager. From the overlook of the other end of the Bridge/Tunnel you could see a whole wall of travertine (caused by water dripping down limestone). The only other place I've seen it is at Havasupai in the Grand Canyon. We decided that it was time to head over to the fern grotto which involves a 300 foot drop down stairs to the bottom of the canyon which mercifully is all shaded by trees. When you reach the bottom you find that you are 20 degrees cooler and are showered with a fine mist from all the water coming from springs above you on the canyon wall. The wall is covered with

ferns and all sorts of water loving plants. We climbed slowly back up the stairs after admiring this paradise for awhile. We walked back to our cars and in the process saw several other birds in the meadows around the complex. We saw a group of Vesper Sparrows, a Western Bluebird flying by, a Gila Woodpecker, several Eurasian-collared Doves, a Raven, a Western Tanager female, a kettle of Turkey Vultures and finally a Bronzed form Common Grackle or Brewer's Blackbird or Bronzed Cowbird depending on who you talk to. We can all agree it was a male with yellow eyes.

We had a very nice invitation for lunch for all seven of us. Nancy Kroening had seen my write-up for this trip and she called me and invited us to stop at their Condominium in Payson. She kindly fixed us a great lunch with soup and sandwiches, all kinds of fruit and vegetables and on top of that three desserts. Wow, what a kind, wonderful treat that was! Thank you so much, Nancy! We even picked up a few more birds at the lakes she lives near. We added Canada Geese, American Coot, and Mallard making a total of 23 species.

Attendees were: Lyndon and Mary Keefer, Lana Brown, Barbara Bean, Vera Markham, Fran Baughman and Dan Bohlmann, Leader