

# BIRDING NEW MEXICO

## Winter Birding in the Land of Enchantment

December 7-14, 2026

A birding tour organized by *Seven Ponds Nature Center* and *Sandia Birding*

From the spectacle of thousands of Sandhill Cranes, Snow Geese, and Ross's Geese at famed Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, three species of rosy-finches found at the snow-capped peak of Sandia Crest, desert birds at Embudito Canyon, pinyon-juniper and ponderosa pine birds in the Magdalena Mountains, to the wide variety of loons, grebes, and gulls found at Elephant Butte Lake, winter birding in New Mexico is considered a must-do trip for many North American birders.



Join us for a mid-winter birding tour in New Mexico: the Land of Enchantment. Mild weather, wintering birds, and high mountain peaks make this a fantastic winter birding destination. New Mexico ranks 5<sup>th</sup> among U.S. Lower 48 states for number of bird species recorded – with only California, Texas, Arizona, and Florida listing more birds. The Rio Grande cuts a green swath through an otherwise arid landscape, acting as a magnet for both migrant and resident birds. Large reservoirs further attract birds such as waterfowl, loons, grebes, gulls, cranes, herons, and more – all drawn to this oasis in the desert. This tour promises to be a fantastic winter getaway as we make our way down the Rio Grande through the Land of Enchantment!

### **TOUR ITINERARY**

Our daily activities will be flexible based on species we've seen to date and recent bird reports, but the following daily outline provides a preliminary plan of how we will spend our days. Our plans are subject to change based on rare bird sightings, weather conditions, and road closures. Note: the birds listed are not intended to be an exhaustive list – just a sampling of what may be found at each location.

### Day 1 – Monday, December 7 – Arrival in Albuquerque

Participants should plan to arrive in Albuquerque today and transfer to our hotel. We'll meet in the hotel lobby at 5:00 PM for a get-acquainted meeting and to discuss plans for the following day before heading out for dinner. *Night in Albuquerque.*

### Day 2 – Tuesday, December 8 – Cibola National Forest, Sandia Crest, Embudito Canyon

We'll start the birding portion of the tour by driving into the sub-alpine zone of the Sandia Mountains overlooking Albuquerque. Resident species we could find here include Steller's Jay, Clark's Nutcracker, Mountain Chickadee, Pygmy Nuthatch, Williamson's Sapsucker, and Red Crossbill. When we reach the crest, we'll have the chance of finding all three rosy-finch species – Black, Brown-capped, and Gray-crowned together! Other less common species we could encounter include Northern Pygmy-Owl and Pine Grosbeak. Embudito Canyon on the west slope of Sandia offers plenty of desert regulars, including Gambel's and Scaled Quail, Crissal and Curve-billed Thrashers, Black-throated and Rufous-crowned Sparrows, Juniper Titmouse, Greater Roadrunner, and Cactus Wren. Eventually, we'll hit the road and head south to Truth or Consequences where we'll make our base for the next two nights. *Night in Truth or Consequences.*



### Day 3 – Wednesday, December 9 – Animas Creek, Percha Dam, Caballo Lake



Today we'll begin at the sycamore-lined banks of Animas Creek, where we could find Acorn Woodpecker, Bridled Titmouse, and possibly Western Screech-Owl. After that we'll visit Percha Dam State Park, a location regarded by many as the best site for landbirds along the entire length of the Rio Grande in New Mexico. A sampling of Percha's resident birds includes Gambel's Quail, White-winged Dove, Greater Roadrunner, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Black and Say's Phoebes, Cactus Wren, and Crissal Thrasher. Winter species of interest to eastern birders include Red-naped Sapsucker, Phainopepla, Pyrrhuloxia, Spotted Towhee, Brewer's Sparrow and several western races of the Dark-eyed Junco. Although all are somewhat sporadic, all three bluebird species can be present in winter as well (Eastern, Western, Mountain). After checking nearby agricultural fields for wintering raptors, possibly including Prairie Falcon and Ferruginous Hawk, we'll continue on to Caballo Reservoir, a host to thousands of wintering waterfowl, cranes and gulls. Regular wintering species here include Eared, Western, and Clark's Grebes, Neotropical Cormorants, many species of ducks, and Bald Eagle. Caballo often hosts a rare gull or two in winter so we'll be sure to scan

the Ring-billed flocks carefully, and we'll be on the lookout for a possible Pacific Loon as well. *Night in Truth or Consequences.*

#### Day 4 – Thursday, December 10 – Elephant Butte Lake, Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge

Today we'll head north towards Socorro, stopping first to check Elephant Butte Lake, a man-made reservoir along the Rio Grande and the largest lake in New Mexico. Like Caballo Lake to the south it's an excellent location for wintering waterbirds and has produced numerous rarities over the years. We'll check for any waterbirds we may still be missing, enjoy the many Clark's and Western Grebes, and keep an eye out for any odd loons or gulls. Time permitting, we may also check for landbirds such as Canyon Wren, Sage Thrasher, and Rufous-crowned Sparrow.



In late afternoon we'll make our first visit to the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, a world-famous birding location we'll come to know well over the next couple of days. On this first visit we'll concentrate our efforts at the north end of the refuge where thousands of Snow Geese and Sandhill Cranes stage before flying into their evening roost sites. The sights and sounds of these flocks passing overhead should provide a memorable end to a great day of southwestern winter birding! *Night in Socorro.*

#### Day 5 – Friday, December 11 – Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge

We'll return to Bosque del Apache today, arriving early in the morning to witness the impressive dawn flight of the refuge's wintering geese and cranes. Located along a nine-mile stretch of the Rio Grande, the refuge includes water impoundments, riparian habitat, and agricultural fields, all of which help attract thousands of wintering birds. It's a great place for winter waterfowl watching and in addition to the Snow Geese, we should find many species of ducks, possibly including the handsome Cinnamon Teal, as well as numbers of tiny Ross's Geese.



Interesting landbirds we could find in brushy areas, around the visitor center or by hiking the Canyon Trail include Gambel's Quail, Loggerhead Shrike, Green-tailed Towhee, Black-throated, Brewer's and Sagebrush Sparrows, and Yellow-headed Blackbird. The refuge and adjacent roads also provide good opportunities for viewing wintering raptors. Northern Harrier, Red-tailed Hawk, and American Kestrel are the most abundant, while Bald Eagle, Ferruginous Hawk, Merlin, and both Cooper's and Sharp-shinned Hawks are also possible. *Night in Socorro.*

## Day 6 – Saturday, December 12 – Magdalena Mountains and north to Albuquerque

We'll begin this day birding the pinyon-juniper and ponderosa pine woodlands in the Magdalena Mountains at Water Canyon. Some of the resident and wintering species we may find include Acorn Woodpecker, Red-naped Sapsucker, Northern (Red-shafted) Flicker, Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay, Juniper Titmouse, Bushtit, Western and Mountain Bluebirds, Townsend's Solitaire, Rock and Bewick's Wren, and Canyon Towhee. Irruptive migrants present some years also include Pinyon Jay, Sage Thrasher, and Cassin's Finch. Mid-afternoon we'll head north to



Albuquerque with stops at Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge for a good shot at Sagebrush Sparrow and at Bernardo Wildlife Management Area for another chance at birds we may have missed. *Night in Albuquerque.*

## Day 7 – Sunday, December 13 – Albuquerque & possibly Santa Fe



Since most of us won't be back in New Mexico anytime soon, we've scheduled an extra "insurance day" to search for the rosy-finches at Sandia Crest. If the weather or road conditions on Day 2 prevented us from reaching the crest – or if we simply didn't see them to our liking – we'll use today for a second chance or better view. This will also give us another shot at some of the harder to find species in the higher elevations. We'll visit Rio Grande Nature Center in Albuquerque. Here we should find a variety of waterfowl on the pond, including Wood Ducks and

possibly Cinnamon Teal. Rarities such as Eurasian Wigeon are sometimes present as well so we'll check carefully. Cottonwood stands on the nature center property are host to a variety of resident and wintering landbirds and we could find both Black-capped and Mountain Chickadees together at the feeders. Depending on our remaining time, we may head to the Santa Fe to visit the Randall Davey Audubon Center, where we could pick up some species we missed earlier in the week, such as Black-billed Magpie, Townsend's Solitaire, Evening Grosbeak, and Cassin's Finch. We'll conclude the day with a final farewell dinner together. *Night in Albuquerque.*

## Day 8 – Monday, December 14 – Departure Plan your departure for any time today.



## TOUR LEADERS



**Daniel Bernard** is an avid New Mexico-based birder and guide. Born and raised in Michigan, Daniel developed a passion for birding in his early twenties which soon came to define the following years of his life. In 2025, Daniel embarked on an undertaking known as "People, Places, Birds" during which he spent the entire year traveling the country on a quest to get to know the People, Places, and Birds of every Lower-48 state. After the year was over Daniel settled in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and founded *Sandia Birding*, guiding day trips and leading birding tours throughout New Mexico.

**Daryl Bernard** is a long-time birder and amateur naturalist who loves being outdoors and embraces every opportunity to share nature with others. He enjoys organizing and leading trips and tours and strives to ensure that every participant has a thoroughly memorable experience. Daryl has organized and led numerous birding field tours throughout North America, many local birding trips in Michigan, and bird walks for Seven Ponds as well as birding festivals. Daryl is the Birding Field Tour Leader for Seven Ponds Nature Center in southeast Michigan



## ACCOMMODATIONS

Lodging for this tour will be in a handful of different locations, utilizing Comfort Inns (or comparable):

- Night 1 – Albuquerque
- Nights 2-3 – Truth or Consequences
- Nights 4-5 – Socorro
- Nights 6-7 – Albuquerque

## LOCAL TRANSPORTATION

We will travel in a 15-passenger van. Since we will be packing up a few times throughout the tour, we ask that you travel as lightly as is practical. This will help maximize space in the vans.

## FEE and REGISTRATION INFORMATION

- Tour Fee: \$1975 per person in double occupancy
- Single Supplement: \$TBD (subject to availability; due within 30 days of confirmation)
- Deposit: \$500 due upon registration
- Final Payment Due: November 1, 2026
- Group size is limited to **8 individuals** and early registration is encouraged

## WHAT THE TOUR FEE INCLUDES:

- full guide service – Daniel will be with us every step of the way
- hotel accommodations for seven nights
- all meals from dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 8 of the tour
- ground transportation in a single 15-passenger van

- all park entrance fees
- eBird checklist sharing for those who use eBird
- pre-tour information and a post-tour trip report
- eBird checklist sharing (for those using eBird)

**WHAT THE TOUR FEE DOES NOT INCLUDE:**

- your airfare to/from Albuquerque, New Mexico
- snacks and additional drinks
- alcoholic beverages
- laundry
- other items of a personal nature
- gratuity for local birding guide services (optional)

**ONLINE REGISTRATION WILL OPEN FOR SEVEN PONDS MEMBERS ON  
TUESDAY, AUGUST 4, 2026 at 9:00 AM**

**ONLINE REGISTRATION WILL OPEN FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC ON  
TUESDAY, AUGUST 11, 2026 at 9:00 AM (if space remains)**

Registration for this tour will take place online at [www.sevenponds.org](http://www.sevenponds.org) with a \$300 deposit due at the time of registration. At the Seven Ponds home page, go to Programs then Seven Ponds Field Tours and select the New Mexico Birding Field Tour registration button. Upon successfully completing your online registration you should receive an email confirmation immediately. Participants will be sent a registration form to complete and return.

For more information, contact Daryl Bernard at  
989-513-5195 (cell)  
or via e-mail at [dbernard@sevenponds.org](mailto:dbernard@sevenponds.org)

**ALL PHOTOS PROVIDED COURTESY of DAVID STIMAC ([www.davidstimac.com](http://www.davidstimac.com))**

*Cover: Bosque del Apache NWR / page 2: Gambel's Quail, Greater Roadrunner / page 3: Sandhill Cranes, Snow & Ross's Geese at Bosque del Apache NWR / page 4: Mountain Bluebird, Cinnamon Teal, Sandhill Cranes / page 6: Pyrrhuloxia, Say's Phoebe, Ross's Goose*

