

ARIZONA, NEVADA AND NEW MEXICO 24 AUGUST – 3 SEPTEMBER 2013

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INTRODUCTION

I first visited Arizona in late 2011 but it was not my most successful trip and consequently I decided to return in 2013 and in eight full days managed to connect with **40** (positively identified) species, **22** of which were lifers including an amazing **Ringtail**, **American Badger** and multiple **Black-footed Ferrets**. With a bit more luck I would probably have managed to see at least another 3 species and also saw at least another 5 unidentified rodents/bats. All-in-all it was a fantastic trip despite clocking up just over 2,800 miles!

I had originally planned to also take in Swift Foxes in NE New Mexico but discovering that Jon Hall was due at Cave Creek the day I was due to leave checked into the nearby Portal Lodge for a night and arranged to meet up with Jon. I then spent the last full day driving to Carlsbad to look for Ringtail.

WEATHER

The weather during the trip was certainly extreme with a massive storm system sitting over Arizona for most of my stay. Temperatures peaked at 105F in Phoenix but I also drove through some amazing rain with visibility reduced to 30 metres at times with 2 inches of rain falling in 8 hours in one day in SE Arizona.

GENERAL INFORMATION

As always the relevant pages on Jon Hall's www.mammalwatching.com are the key source of reference & the Arizona and New Mexico Wildlife Viewing Guide provided ideas for different locations to visit.

In addition Paul Carter and Mike Richardson's excellent reports on www.mammalwatching.com were great sources of information.

Note that during the summer New Mexico is an hour ahead of Arizona so bear this in mind if planning to nip across the state boundary to eat or for fuel. Rodeo Tavern can be highly recommended.

ITINERARY

- 24th • London-Las Vegas via Atlanta arriving mid-evening. Transferred to Motel 6 Tropicana.
- 25th • Departed Las Vegas pre-dawn arriving Spring Mountains c. 7 am. Checked out Deer Creek and McWilliams Campground before leaving at 1030.
- Long drive c.230 miles to Seligman (Romney Motel) via Las Vegas and Kingsman.
- Early dinner and spotlighting in Aubrey Valley from 1900-2145.
- 26th • Aubrey Valley 0015-0745 then returned to Romney Motel to sleep.
- 1330 drove east to Flagstaff, arboretum closed on Mondays so checked the forest around the arboretum from 1500-1800 before returning to Seligman for dinner.
- Spotlighting Aubrey Valley 2115-2345 with an amazing lightshow from a storm.
- 27th • 0415-0700 Aubrey Valley and then returned to motel to sleep.
- Left motel and after late breakfast drove south to Phoenix via Prescott arriving mid-afternoon. Late afternoon recce of Papago Park and bat cave area.
- 1900-2000 Phoenix bat cave before returning to Motel 6 Scottsdale for night.
- 28th • 0600-0730 Papago Park.
- 0815-0930 Gilbert Water Ranch before returning to motel checking out at 1100.
- 1100-1500 Drove to Santa Rita Lodge Madera Canyon seeing Antelope Jackrabbit near Continental on route.
- 1500-1830 Santa Rita Lodge
- 1900-2030 Spotlighting between Madera Canyon and Continental.
- 29th • 0630-1100 Madera Canyon
- 1145-1645 Drive to Cave Creek Ranch
- 1900-2100 Spotlighting to South Fork trailhead and back to Cave Creek Ranch followed by spotlighting on foot around ranch.
- 30th • 0430 Brief spotlighting around ranch.
- 0630-0900 Cave Creek Ranch
- 0915-1130 South Fork trail and Southwestern Research Station.
- 1830-2030 (AZ time) Road from Animas to Cloverdale. Arrived back at Cave Creek Ranch at 2200 to find a Black Bear near the office.
- 31st • Early morning returned to Animas for fuel and then spent two hours along the nature trail and road between Portal Ranger Station and Sunny Flats Campground followed by short visit to Southwestern Research Station.
- 1830-2100 (AZ time) Road from Animas-Cloverdale.
- 2130-2200 Sunrise Road south of Rodeo returning to Cave Creek Ranch at 2245.
- 2300-0100 Spotlighting road to South Fork Trailhead and then on to Herb Martyr Campground and back to Cave Creek Ranch.
- 1st • 0900-1400 Road from Stewart Campground to South Fork Trailhead, and Southwestern Research Station.
- 1700-1745 Paradise Road
- 1915-2300 Spotlighting Paradise Road, Foothill Road, Portal-State Line Road and Sunrise Road. Night Portal Lodge.
- 2nd • 0800-0930 (NM time) Checking small mammal traps near Rodeo.
- 0930-1900 Long drive to Carlsbad with short stops at White Sands National Monument and Cathay Canyon Vista near Cloudsfoot on route.
- 2115-2330 Carlsbad Canyon.
- 3rd • 0630-0730 Fruitless search for ground squirrels in Carlsbad.
- 0730-1200 Drove back to Albuquerque for return flight to London via Minneapolis.

MAMMAL LIST

Nomenclature follows *Mammals of North America* (Kays and Wilson)

- | | | |
|----|---------------------------------------|---|
| 1 | Desert Cottontail | Aubrey Valley, 6, 6, 9 and 26 seen on night drives. Two Phoenix Bat Cave and 10+ Papago Park. 10+ Gilbert Water Ranch. Singles Continental and Animas. |
| 2 | Eastern Cottontail | One near Southwestern Research Station. |
| 3 | Antelope Jackrabbit | Two (fabulous animals) 5-6 miles beyond Continental at 1430 and three between miles 1 & 5 while spotlighting the same evening. |
| 4 | Black-tailed Jackrabbit | Counts of 7 and 1 in Aubrey Valley, two Papago Park and 1-2 Sunrise Road. |
| 5 | White-sided Jackrabbit | Three between 37 and 40 miles south of Animas. Excellent close range views of two. |
| 6 | Abert's Squirrel | One near Flagstaff Arboretum. |
| 7 | Arizona Grey Squirrel | 3+ Chuparosa Inn, Madera Canyon. Note these do not look like the illustration in Kays & Wilson. Check out other illustrations before you look for them. |
| 8 | Red Squirrel | One Cathay Canyon Vista. |
| 9 | Gunnison's Prairie Dog | Six Aubrey Valley. |
| 10 | Rock Squirrel | Four Santa Rita Lodge & 2+ Chuparosa Inn, Madera Canyon. Singles Cave Creek Ranch & Southwestern Research Station. |
| 11 | Round-tailed Ground Squirrel | Three Papago Park. |
| 12 | Golden-mantled Ground Squirrel | Spring Mountains, one Deer Creek, 10+ around McWilliams Campground, 8+ Flagstaff Arboretum area. |
| 13 | Gray-collared Chipmunk | 13+ Flagstaff Arboretum area. |
| 14 | Gray-footed Chipmunk | One Cathay Canyon Vista. |
| 15 | Cliff Chipmunk | Singles near Sunny Flats Campground and Southwestern Research Station. |
| 16 | Palmer's Chipmunk | Two McWilliams Campground, Spring Mountains. |
| 17 | Paramint Chipmunk | 3+ Deer Creek, Spring Mountains. |
| 18 | Desert Pocket Gopher | One White Sands National Monument. |
| 19 | Bailey's Pocket Mouse | Two trapped near Rodeo. |
| 20 | (Sonoran) Desert Pocket Mouse | Three trapped near Rodeo. |
| 21 | Merriam's Kangaroo Rat | Based on habitat, several south of Animas. |
| 22 | Ord's Kangaroo Rat | Five Aubrey Valley. |
| - | Merriam's/Ord's Kangaroo Rat | One near Continental, others Foothills Road, Sunrise Road, between Rodeo & Animas and between Portal & Rodeo. |
| 23 | Banner-tailed Kangaroo Rat | One Sunrise Road and another probable 7 miles west of Animas. |
| 24 | Bushy-tailed Woodrat | One Aubrey Valley. |
| 25 | Brush Deermouse | One trapped at Cave Creek Ranch. |
| - | Rodent sp? | Several mice were seen along the road south from Animas and along the Carlsbad Cavern road, and unidentified rats at Cave Creek Ranch and along the road south from Animas. |
| 26 | Mexican Free-tailed Bat | 100s Phoenix Bat Cave. |
| - | Bat sp? | Bats around the feeders at Santa Rita Lodge and Cave Creek ranch were presumably Mexican Long-tongued and suspected Western Pipistrelle were |

27	Bobcat	seen at Phoenix Bat Cave and several other sites. One between Portal and Rodeo and another probable in Carlsbad Cavern.
28	Coyote	Counts of 2, 4 and 1 in Aubrey Valley.
29	Gray Fox	One seen twice at Cave Creek Ranch and singles seen both nights about 35 miles south of Animas.
30	Black Bear	One at 30m range near the office at Cave Creek Ranch at 2200 one evening.
31	Ringtail	Fabulous close views for almost 10 minutes in Carlsbad Cavern, a fantastic animal.
32	Raccoon	Four 31 miles south of Animas and a single near the amphitheatre in Carlsbad Cavern.
33	American Badger	Fabulous views of one at dawn on my second morning in Aubrey Valley. Quickly disappeared down a burrow when first seen but quickly squeaked out and great scope views for over 10 minutes. Another dead on the road near Lordsburg.
34	Black-footed Ferret	3+, 3 and 1 seen on night drives in Aubrey Valley. Four were not much more than eye-shine but one watched at close range at the entrance to a burrow and two others seen well running around in the open for several minutes.
35	Striped Skunk	Madera Canyon, one Chuparosa Inn and two coming to bait at Santa Rita Lodge. Two near Portal.
36	Pronghorn	Six Aubrey Valley, ten south of Chino Valley.
37	Collared Peccary	One Aubrey Valley.
38	Elk	30+ near Flagstaff Arboretum, 3 east of Cloudsfoot.
39	Mule Deer	10+ both nights south of Animas. 25 deer in Carlsbad Caverns were all assumed to be Mule Deer but not all were seen at close range. All those seen well were Mule Deer.
40	White-tailed Deer	Three Madera Canyon, up to 10 Cave Creek Ranch, one near Southwestern Research Station, and 2-3 near Stewart Campground. Three Cathay Canyon Vista.

THE SITES

Spring Mountains, Nevada

- I visited the same two areas recommended by Jon Hall on mammalwatching.com and spent the night before in Las Vegas. McWilliams Campground is 47 miles from the junction of I-15 and I-95 in Las Vegas via route 156. You can access the Spring Mountains along routes 157 and 156 but the 156 is the quicker route.
- **Paramint Chipmunks** were easy on the slopes opposite Deer Creek Picnic Site and **Golden-mantled Ground Squirrel** was also seen there.
- **Palmer's Chipmunk** was more difficult as McWilliams Campground was officially closed for construction and I could only find lots of **Golden-mantled Ground Squirrels** in the surrounding area. After a fruitless 90 minutes I discreetly walked onto the campground and quickly found the chipmunks and more ground squirrels.



Aubrey Valley Seligman (Arizona)

I spent two nights in the Aubrey Valley west of Seligman and spent c.14 hours spotlighting over the two nights at different times of the night. I concentrated on the area between mile posts 130 and 120 but particularly between 128 and 123 where I saw several **Black-footed Ferrets**, at least three to the south of the road between 127 & 125, and at least three to the north of the road between 123 and 126. I also saw **American Badger** at its burrow to the south of the road at dawn between 126 and 125, **Pronghorn**, **Javelina (Collared Peccary)** and most unexpectedly a **Bushy-tailed Woodrat** on a rocky outcrop about 6 miles west of Seligman. I only spent an hour or two in the valley in daylight hours and saw six **Gunnison's Prairie Dogs** but they are much commoner than this and I would have seen far more had I spent more time there.

Although there is a lot of traffic on the road particularly at dawn and dusk it caused my no real problems and I think locals are used to people spotlighting along the road. One morning I did unfortunately see two hunters trying to hunt Pronghorns with a very convincing decoy.

The variation between sessions was very interesting with several **Black-tailed Jackrabbits** being seen on the first session but only one in total on the other three, and several **Ord's Kangaroo Rats** being seen on the last session but not on the first three. The table below shows the variation between sessions.

Species	25 th 1900-2045	26 th 0015-0745	26 th 2115-3445	27 th 0415-0700
Desert Cottontail	6	6	9	26
Black-tailed Jackrabbit	7	1	0	0
Gunnison's Prairie Dog	0	6	0	0
Ord's Kangaroo Rat	0	0	0	5
Bushy-tailed Woodrat	1	0	0	0
Coyote	2	4	1	0
American Badger	0	0	0	1
Black-footed Ferret	0	3+	1	3
Pronghorn	0	6	0	0
Collared Peccary	0	1	0	0

Flagstaff Arboretum, Arizona

I visited Flagstaff one afternoon from Seligman a round trip of 150 miles but unfortunately the arboretum with its relatively habituated squirrels is closed on a Monday so I had to concentrate on the surrounding forest.

The Arboretum is located 4 miles south of Route 66 on scenic and rustic Woody Mountain Road, on Flagstaff's west side. The first mile of Woody Mountain Road is paved and the remaining 3 miles are unpaved Forest Service road, but suitable for all vehicles.

From Flagstaff:

Take Route 66 west through town. When you reach the last stoplight in town (Woodlands Village Boulevard), continue on Route 66 about a mile to Woody Mountain Road. Turn left and continue 4 miles to Arboretum.

From I-17/I-40:

From I-40 west, take exit #191. Turn right at stop sign at end of off-ramp. This is Route 66 eastbound. Drive about 2 miles to Woody Mountain Road. Turn right and continue 4 miles to Arboretum.



I first checked Paul Carter's track (NF390-A) 0.9 miles before you reach the arboretum and easily found **Gray-collared Chipmunk** here. I then found further chipmunks and **Golden-mantled Ground Squirrels** along the main track between here and the arboretum. I then concentrated on the track opposite the arboretum about 100 metres past the arboretum entrance. **Gray-collared Chipmunks** and **Golden-mantled Ground Squirrels** were common but no sign of Abert's Squirrels. I then decided to drive this track bearing right at the first two obvious forks and then left at a point where the right hand option was closed by a barrier. At this point I unexpectedly found a herd of 30+ **Elk** and eventually found a single and not overly obliging **Abert's Squirrel** about 3 miles from the arboretum after 3 hours in the area.

Phoenix, Arizona

I visited three sites in Phoenix in temperatures of up to 105F. I used the Motel 6 on Camelback Road in Scottsdale as a base which was ideal for the first two sites but about 22 miles from the third.

Phoenix Bat Cave.

The bat cave, home to huge numbers of **Mexican Free-tailed Bats**, is part of the flood diversion ditch near the intersection of Camelback Road and 40th Street. When you get to Camelback and 40th Street, park in the gas station, cross the canal and walk west down the canal for about 1/2 a mile. Alternatively you can park closer by crossing the canal and taking the first turn on the left and parking somewhere along this road and cutting park through to the canal.

Walk down the canal until you see a football pitch set back to your right. At this point I saw **Desert Cottontail** and some sort of ground or antelope squirrel that bolted down one of the many small burrows in the area. At this point is a gate with a no entry sign. The viewing point for the bats is another 100 yards on the right hand side and is clearly signposted. At this point you can look

down on bats swarming around the 'cave' entrance but to be honest the better experience is standing by the first gate and having bats streaming over you. The freetails were already starting to swarm before sunset but most emerged 30 minutes after sunset. Some smaller bats, presumably **Western Pipistrelle** emerged and starting feeding around the nearby bushes and canal before sunset along with large numbers of Nighthawk.

Papago Park

I visited Papago Park next to the zoo as it was open from dawn, while the more frequently visit adjacent Desert Botanical Gardens, only opens at 0700. In hindsight it would probably have been better visiting Gilbert Water Ranch first but you might get tied up in commuter traffic doing it this was round and there were some long tailbacks in the opposite direction when I then visited Gilbert.

Park in the zoo car park and wander around the area between here and the botanical gardens. In 75 minutes I found three **Round-tailed Ground Squirrels** (although according to the *Mammals of Arizona* these are late risers), two **Black-tailed Jackrabbits** and several **Desert Cottontails**. Harris's Antelope Squirrel also occurs but I did not stay to look for them.

Gilbert Water Ranch

In the SE of Phoenix at the junction of Guadalupe and Greenfield Road I arrived around 0815 and it was already red hot and although the birding was good I failed to find Mike Richardson's Arizona Cotton Rats in an hour long visit. The only mammals seen were the ubiquitous **Desert Cottontails**. The ranch is open from 0600 to 2200 and I suspect the spotlighting could be good here so it might be worth visiting here after the bat cave.

Continental and Madera Canyon, Arizona

Madera Canyon lies about 30 miles south of Tucson. Take I-19 south from Tucson (bizarrely the road signs on this stretch are all in kilometres not miles) and leave I-19 at exit 63 for Continental. Head into Continental and turn right at the intersection in town towards Madera Canyon.

I stayed at Santa Rita Lodge about 10 miles from Continental and others have stayed a further mile up the road at Chuparosa Inn. Both are relatively expensive and to be honest there is little to be gained by staying at them if you are on a budget in which case you would be better staying 15 miles away in Green Valley and driving in.

The key spots are as follows.

- The road beyond Continental School is a key site for the terrific **Antelope Jackrabbit**. I easily found two 5-6 miles from the school on my way in at 1430 and saw three 1-5 miles from the school when spotlighting the same evening. I also saw a small kangaroo rat, **Ord's or Merriams** before torrential rain brought spotlighting to an end.
- The road from here up to the Madera Canyon picnic area was good for **White-tailed Deer** but I found nothing else during an hour long spotlighting session.
- The feeders at Santa Rita Lodge are good for Arizona Grey Squirrel although I only saw **Rock Squirrel** here. The hummingbird feeders were excellent for bats, presumably **Mexican Long-tongued** at night, and I easily baited in **Striped Skunk** here. Apparently a Ringtail had been seen several times near the casitas in recent weeks but not while I was there.
- The trail between Santa Rita Lodge and Chuparosa Inn are good for Arizona Grey Squirrels but not while I was there and Paul Carter saw Gray Fox near the amphitheatre.
- The feeders at Chuparosa Inn were excellent for **Arizona Grey Squirrel** (note if you are using *Mammals of North America*, Kays and Wilson the illustration of AGS is quite misleading) and I also saw **Rock Squirrel** here. I also saw **Striped Skunk** at night but the

Ringtail present during Mike Richardson's visit earlier in the year had not been seen for some time.

Cave Creek Canyon, Arizona.

This area which comes highly recommended by Jon Hall, Mike Richardson and Paul Carter was probably the biggest disappointment of the trip. I spent three nights at Cave Creek Ranch where the owner Reed Peters was extremely helpful but with the exception of a **Black Bear** the mammaling was disappointing in part because most of the feeders were taken down at night to discourage bears. The fourth night was spent at the nearby Portal Lodge which was 50 dollars a night cheaper and has the benefit of having a café on site. The road at the Rodeo Tavern eight miles away is also good.

Arriving from the west the shortest route is from San Simon and across the mountains but due to the torrential rain which would have made some of the streams impassable in a 2WD I took the longer route via Road Forks and I-80. Note I-80 has numerous speed traps!

It is worth refuelling at Road Forks as it's easy to rack up the miles in this area and the nearest fuel to Portal is at Animas. There is fuel 24/7 as you enter Animas from the west but only if you have a US-issued credit card. Other than that you need to re-fuel during opening hours remembering that New Mexico is an hour ahead of Portal in the summer months.

While I was there there were plagues of locusts on the road and lots of tarantulas and the whole area is a herpetologists dream as evidenced by the numbers staying at the ranch and research station. I saw four species of snake in one night including both **Mojave** and **Western Diamondback Rattlesnakes**.

During the days there I visited the following areas in Arizona and adjacent New Mexico.

- **Cave Creek Ranch** – the ranch, 2-3 miles beyond Portal, has lots of potential, see JH, MR & PC's reports on www.mammalwatching.com. I saw very little other than **White-tailed Deer** which were semi-resident around the feeders, **Gray Fox** twice on the first evening near the office, a **Black Bear** at 2200 on the second evening near the office, and **Rock Squirrel** (with a remarkably large tail) on the feeders near the office. I did a fair bit of spotlighting for Ringtail etc but only saw one unidentified rat away from the immediate vicinity of the office and baiting on all three nights was unsuccessful. Bats, presumably **Mexican Long-tongued**, were around the hummingbird feeders until they were taken down each night. Jon Hall trapped a **Brush Deermouse** near Reed's house.
- **Portal** – I saw nothing around Portal itself other than two **Striped Skunks** half a mile west of the café but Western Spotted Skunk have been seen behind the post office and a Javelina was seen near the café while we were having dinner one evening.
- **Nature trail Portal Ranger Station to Sunny Flats Campground** – a site for Mexican (Apache) Fox Squirrel but not while I was there although I did see **White-tailed Deer** near Stewart Campground.
- **South Fork trailhead access road and trail** – as above although a birder did see a squirrel one morning while I was there.
- **Southwestern Research Station** – another good site for the squirrel and they were being seen while I was there but seemingly only very early in the day. I saw **Rock Squirrel** and **Cliff Chipmunk**, and **Eastern Cottontail** and **White-tailed Deer** nearby at night.
- **Loop from Portal to Paradise and back via Foothills road**. Looks excellent but only **Merriam's/Ord's Kangaroo** rats at night.
- **Road from Portal to Rodeo** – one **Bobcat** and several small kangaroo rats at night.
- **Rodeo** – trapping nearby turned up **Bailey's & (Sonoran) Desert Pocket Mice**.

- **Sunrise Road** – drive south from Rodeo along I-80 to the state line and then continue another 3 miles to Sunrise Road on the right at mile 412. The road is gated so please close the gate behind you. Small **Merriam's/Ord's Kangaroo Rats** are common and I had a great views of **Banner-tailed Kangaroo Rat** on the first visit.
- **Rodeo-Animas** – plenty of small kangaroo rats and other rodents plus a probable **Banner-tailed Kangaroo Rat** to the west of Animas.
- **South of Animas, New Mexico** – the area 35-40 miles south of Animas towards Cloverdale, after mile 20 it becomes a gravel road, is well known for **White-sided Jackrabbits**, I easily saw three plus **Gray Fox** and 10+ **Mule Deer** 37-40 miles south of Animas, four **Raccoons** 31 miles south of Animas and lots of presumed **Merriam's Kangaroo Rats**, and other small rodents on the drive back to Animas.

White Sands National Monument, New Mexico

In southern New Mexico to the north of I-70 about 20 miles west of Alamogordo the park has a \$3 entrance fee and four nature trails/boardwalks. I was there in the scorching heat of the early afternoon and only spent 20 minutes on the Interdune Boardwalk where Spotted Ground Squirrel has been seen before, according to information at the visitor centre it is common in the park, but I was unsuccessful. I did however have good luck in finding a **Desert Pocket Gopher** excavating its burrow in the soft sand before it buried itself again. Yellow-faced Pocket Gopher also occurs in the park but is apparently much rarer.

Cathay Canyon Vista, New Mexico

Take highway 82 east from Alamogordo for 17 miles to Cloudsfoot. In Cloudsfoot turn south on NMH 130 and after 1.7 miles turn right on NM6563 towards Sunspot. After c.12 miles the car park is on the right hand side of the road. From the car park tracks head straight on, and off to both the right and left. I easily found **Gray-footed Chipmunk** on the short trail straight ahead of the car park although views were brief. I also found **White-tailed Deer** here and **Red Squirrel** along the trail to the right. On the drive to Carlsbad I found three **Elk** along highway 82 to the east of Cloudsfoot.

Carlsbad Cavern NP, New Mexico.

I visited Carlsbad Cavern in the hope of seeing Ringtail (Jon Hall had seen five two evenings earlier) and Hog-nosed Skunk. I failed to find the skunk but had fantastic views of a **Ringtail** on the right hand side of the entrance road a mile from the entrance, a probable **Bobcat** on the other side of the road three miles further on, a **Raccoon** near the amphitheatre at the end of the road (this is a well-known site for viewing over a million Mexican Free-tailed Bats) and 25 **Mule Deer** and several unidentified mice along the road.

I stayed in Carlsbad but it would have been easier to stay in the Rodeway Motel in White City which is 20 miles south of Carlsbad on highway 62, at the start of the entrance road to the canyons. From here you can spotlight for seven miles up to the amphitheatre car park.

Carlsbad, New Mexico

I spent about an hour from dawn trying to track down Mexican Ground Squirrels in Carlsbad but had no joy and had to leave for the drive back to Albuquerque. In hindsight I could have stayed longer as the 280 mile drive only took 4 ½ hours but hindsight is a wonderful thing and to be honest I did not have precise directions and was probably looking in the wrong area. Check out Jon's new 2013 report for accurate directions.