

USA | New Mexico

Bosque del Apache & Beyond

2022 Monday 7th - Wednesday 16th March (10 days)
Small group tour with Chris Charlesworth



Sandhill Crane is one of the species we hope to see during our New Mexico holiday © Brian Small, Limosa

Our birding tour to New Mexico (USA) takes place amidst the dramatic desert and mountain landscapes of the bird-rich Rio Grande Valley. Famed for a string of outstanding wildlife reserves, including the amazing Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, the late winter gatherings of wildfowl and cranes include Snow and Ross's Geese, Buffleheads and Sandhill Cranes. A birdwatching tour to New Mexico in March also adds the exciting prospect of seeing three species of rosy finch, Black, Grey-crowned and Brown-capped, in their mountaintop home, plus Ladder-backed Woodpecker and Chestnut-collared Longspur among a host of localised specialities. In March, the first spring migrants will also be arriving, making for a wonderful trip.

Highlights

- Shake off those winter blues on this spectacular birding tour to the American southwest!
- Superb opportunity to see all three species of sought-after North American rosy finches
- Bosque del Apache for Snow and Ross's Geese, Sandhill Crane, Bufflehead and Cinnamon Teal
- Greater Roadrunner, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Woodhouse's Scrub Jay, Mountain Chickadee
- Plus everything from Rock Wren and Juniper Titmouse to Pyrrhuloxia and Phainopepla
- Wonderfully scenic tour, travelling from desert flats to upland pinewoods and snowy peaks
- Small group tour - maximum 7 participants
- Expertly led by Limosa guide Chris Charlesworth

What's Included?

- Limosa Tour Leader
- 8 nights accommodation at comfortable hotels of good North American standard
- All main meals with drinking water provided during the day
- Minibus transport
- All excursions, entry fees, tour-based tips and taxes
- Checklist of birds for the tour

Outline Itinerary

Day 1

We fly to Albuquerque. Short transfer to our first hotel. Albuquerque (2 nights)

Day 2

Birding at Sandia Crest (3280m) and Rio Grande Nature Centre.

Days 3-5

An easy drive south to Truth or Consequences, birding at Elephant Butte reservoir, Percha Dam and Caballo. Truth or Consequences (3 nights)

Days 6-8

A one-hour drive north returns us to Socorro, where we explore Bosque del Apache, Water Canyon and the scenic Magdalena Mountains. Socorro (3 nights)

Day 9

Return to Albuquerque, birding as we go. Fly Albuquerque to Dallas with onward overnight connection to the UK

Day 10

Late morning arrival in UK



Greater Roadrunner © Chris Charlesworth

Tour Overview

In New Mexico, between Albuquerque and El Paso just 240 miles to the south, the Rio Grande snakes its way south before swinging west along the border between Texas and Mexico on its long journey to the Gulf of Mexico. As well as being supremely scenic, with grasslands merging into arid creosote flats, high mountains swathed in conifers, riparian forests and dry canyons, this region of New Mexico is truly extraordinary for birds in winter. While its wetlands are world famous, there is also a long list of other mouth-watering specialities to look for here in March from numerous birds of prey, Gambel's Quail and Ladder-backed Woodpecker to Say's Phoebe, all three species of rosy finch and Brewer's Sparrow with the latter singing like Skylarks on speed!

Spend a day at the 'jewel in the crown' wetland of Bosque del Apache, just south of the town of Socorro and the superlatives soon run out...

Picture the sun rising over distant hill, rays of light cutting through the clear desert sky as the songs of displaying Killdeer and Western Meadowlarks fill the air and the mirrored surface of the refuge's pools reflect a host of wildfowl.

Many Snow Geese and Sandhill Cranes spend the winter months at the Bosque del Apache Refuge and as spring approaches and they begin their long migration north, their place is taken by brilliant white American White Pelicans. Come early March, hundreds of Tree and Violet-green Swallows will be arriving, bringing with them the first White-throated Swifts and eye-catching Vermilion Flycatchers.

These are but a small part of the wealth of birdlife on offer at Bosque del Apache at this season. As many as 25 species of wildfowl use the wide 'pans' as their winter home, among them Cackling and Ross's Geese, Canvasbacks and Redheads, Buffleheads and Cinnamon Teal, while Northern Harriers float across the fields, eyeing their prey.

Just east of Albuquerque, Sandia Crest rises to 3280m (10,760ft), its summit still encrusted with snow at this time of year. After briefly following the legendary Route 66, we enter the Cibola Forest where our goal is to see all three species

of North America's spectacular rosy finches: Black, Brown-capped and Grey-crowned. These sought-after yet confiding birds really stole the show on our 2019 tour! Steller's Jay, Mountain Chickadee and both White-breasted and Red-breasted Nuthatches should also be present around the feeders as we sip a warming hot chocolate.

Heading south, we explore the lovely landscape of Water Canyon, set amidst the juniper and pine forests of the Magdalena Mountains which is an excellent area for Acorn Woodpecker, Juniper Titmouse, Bushtit and the recently 'split' Woodhouse's Scrub Jay.

Strung out like pearls along the Rio Grande are several productive State Parks, from the small and beautiful Percha Dam south of the town of Truth or Consequences, to the vast Caballo Reservoir, where Cactus and Rock Wrens, Crissal and Curve-billed Trashers, Phainopepla and Pyrrhuloxia (as hard to spell as they are to say!), pink-sided Dark-eyed Juncos and Black Phoebe can all be found.



Ladder-backed Woodpecker frequents arid brush and desert country in the southwestern USA © Chris Charlesworth

We also plan to visit Elephant Butte Lake, where we can compare the 'look-alike' Clark's and Western Grebes amidst an array of thousands of wildfowl.

Out on the plains, where American Kestrels and Loggerhead Shrikes perch on fenceposts, we will go in search of Horned Larks and the exquisite Chestnut-collared Longspur and in March, the males will already be richly coloured before they fly north to breed. We should also see all three species of bluebird: commonest is Western, but Eastern and Mountain also join the roving flocks, hovering above the landscape in search of prey.

And though it is perhaps the spectacle of the Bosque del Apache Refuge that most birders initially come to New Mexico for, it won't take long to discover that this easy-paced tour offers a fabulous journey through a special landscape laden with exciting winter birds!

Guide **Chris Charlesworth** has been 'our man in America' for many years and looks forward to sharing this exciting tour with you.

Daily Itinerary

Day 1

FLY ALBUQUERQUE

Our birdwatching tour to New Mexico begins with a morning flight to Phoenix (Arizona) and then a short onward connection to Albuquerque, New Mexico.

We make the short transfer from the airport to our nearby hotel, which will be our base for the first two nights of the tour. *Night Albuquerque*

Day 2

SANDIA CREST & ALBUQUERQUE

Making an early start from our hotel, we head just to the northeast of the city, where the ski road rises up to Sandia Crest at 3280m (10,760ft). We can drive right up to Crest House, well known amongst birders as a site to see all three species of North American rosy finches: Brown-capped, Grey-crowned and Black!

It is a rare opportunity to look for them and to learn how to separate these most alluring but rather similar-looking species. Numbers do vary from year to year but on our March 2019 tour, the flock numbered over 150 birds! Often by early March, Black is the most common, while the rosy bellied Brown-capped and Grey-crowns have usually reduced in number. Amongst the handsome, rich-brown Grey-crowned we could also spot one or two 'Audreys' which are birds of the "Hepburn's" race, with its greyer face than the interior form.

The feeders at the top also attract Steller's Jay, Red-breasted and White-headed Nuthatches, and Mountain Chickadee and with luck we may encounter American Three-toed Woodpecker and Red Crossbill.

Ploughed and salted, the road that winds up to Sandia Crest affords good birding and we will pause along the way to search for species in the Cibola Forest. Hairy and Downy Woodpeckers, Red-naped Sapsucker, Pine Siskin, the attractive 'Grey-headed' form of Dark-eyed Junco and Brown Creeper are all present in March. Other possible highlights might include wintering Hermit Thrush and Cassin's Finch, plus chances of Mountain and Western Bluebirds, Clark's Nutcracker and, if we are fortunate, Townsend's Solitaire.



The White-winged Dove is likely to be the commonest dove species on our tour © Chris Charlesworth

Picking up lunch on the way, we head around Albuquerque, driving a short section of the famous 'Route 66', to reach the Rio Grande Nature Centre. This refuge from the city life of Albuquerque is set amidst 270 acres of woods, meadows and farmland and many species spend the winter here.

Wildfowl to watch for include Ring-necked Duck and Lesser and Greater Scaup, with 'landlubbers' such as Greater Roadrunner, Western Bluebird, White-breasted Nuthatch, Spotted Towhee and House Finch attending the Centre's busy feeders. In the sedges and reeds, we may spot an elusive Marsh Wren. Bewick's Wrens are also present and Audubon's Warblers overwinter, as do Bushtits and Black-capped Chickadees.

Nearby is the Petroglyph Monument at Rinconada Canyon, where a short walk at the end of the day might produce Crissal Trasher or the smart Black-throated Sparrow.

Returning to our Albuquerque hotel for a second night, maybe we will pass along another section of 'Route 66', though by now we should already have got our kicks! *Night Albuquerque*

Days 3 - 5

TRUTH OR CONSEQUENCES

Leaving Albuquerque this morning, we plan to travel a couple of hours south to the wonderfully named town of Truth or Consequences. We may pause now and then to stretch our legs as laybys in New Mexico often hold various sparrows, including the dainty Brewer's. We will also be keeping a keen eye open for Scaled Quail in the roadside scrub as we pass.

South of Socorro, we divert to pay our first visit to the famous Bosque del Apache reserve to look for wintering Snow Geese and Sandhill Cranes. Having checked in at the lively (for birds) Visitor Centre, we will drive the north loop track to check the pans and fields. No doubt, we will stop many times as we go, for the reserve is an oasis for wildlife.

Continuing south, 'T or C' is an excellent centre from which to explore key birding areas in the Rio Grande Valley, including Percha Dam State Park and Caballo Reservoir to the south of town. These two sites are not only beautiful state parks in their own right but two of the best places for landbirds in New Mexico and we will spend time over the next two days gently walking through them searching for feeding parties.

Percha Dam is small but perfectly formed, its mix of riparian woodland and contrasting desert scrub is home to a wide variety of birds. Extensive stands of cottonwood trees attract large numbers of wintering birds and we will hope to see species such as Gambel's Quail, White-winged Dove, Greater Roadrunner, Black Phoebe, Chihuahuan and Common Ravens, the plush-capped Verdin and the king-sized Cactus Wren, all the while hoping that we're not the one to spot and have to call out either Pyrrhuloxia or Phainopepla! The yellow-throated Audubon's Warbler can be especially numerous at Percha Dam and often something unexpected turns up, so birding here is always exciting!

Both Elephant Butte and Caballo reservoirs are large and great places to look for wildfowl and gulls, including Bufflehead amongst the diving ducks. Out on the lakes, a mix of Clark's and Western Grebes can often be seen, along with Hooded and Common Mergansers (Goosander). Around the shores many other wildfowl gather, the most numerous being American Wigeon and Green-winged Teal. Peregrines and Northern Harriers hunt the shores and Buff-bellied Pipits can be seen by the water's edge.

Below the dams, two recreation parks, Paseo del Rio at Elephant Butte and Riverside at Caballo, offer chances to watch Northern Rough-winged



The fabulous Pyrrhuloxia © Chris Charlesworth

and Violet-green Swallows, Verdin, Rock Wren and Western Bluebird. The desert-dwelling Ladder-backed Woodpecker is quite common here and, in March, we also have chances of the exquisitely patterned Red-naped Sapsucker and the slender, more subtly marked Say's Phoebe. *Three nights Truth or Consequences*

Days 6 - 8

SOCORRO: BOSQUE DEL APACHE & THE MAGDALENA MOUNTAINS

We bid farewell to Truth or Consequences this morning and take an easy drive back north (about an hour) to Socorro. A three-night stay here will enable us to devote plenty of time to the wonders of the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, its 57,000 acres playing host to numerous birds in winter.

Keeping our fingers crossed for fine weather (March here averages only two days with rain), mornings at Bosque del Apache consist of early starts as this is the best time of the day for light and bird activity. As the desert sun lifts above the distant eastern mountains and the first hint of daybreak tints the sky, the sun warms the air and the crisp desert light strikes the surface of the pools and canyons about the reserve.

We will spend much of the next two days exploring the loop roads around the reserve, enjoying the spectacle of waterfowl and other species including Western Meadowlarks singing from the tops of bushes, small mixed flocks of bluebirds perched on fenceposts and crowds of showy Red-winged Blackbirds.

Up to 25 species of wildfowl use the wide 'pans' as their winter home, among them Canada, Snow and Ross's Geese, Canvasback, Redhead, Green-winged, Blue-winged and Cinnamon Teal, bobbing Ruddy Ducks, Ring-necked Duck and Lesser Scaup. Waders forage along the water's edge with Killdeer, Least Sandpiper, Wilson's Snipe, Long-billed Dowitcher and Greater Yellowlegs all regularly present in early March. Red-tailed Hawks survey the busy scene from prominent dead branches and Northern Harriers quarter the marsh, while marauding Peregrines and Cooper's Hawks create panic amongst the gatherings of wetland birds.

Around the information centre, Gambel's Quail and various sparrows feed and woodpeckers can include Ladder-backed, as well as Northern Flicker and Red-naped Sapsucker. We have a good chance of spotting the impressive Great Horned Owl and the abundance of easy prey also attracts scavenging Coyotes.



A Steller's Jay surveys the grasslands © Chris Collins

Both Black and Say's Phoebes overwinter in the area and March sees the arrival of the season's first brilliant Vermilion Flycatchers, all of which are well worth looking out for from and around viewing platforms as we drive the 'loops'. The first flocks of hirundines also appear over the wetlands in March, with chances of Cliff, Northern Rough-winged, Barn, Tree and Violet-green Swallows.

On one afternoon, we will head up into Water Canyon in the lovely Magdalena Mountains, rising up through the grasslands and out into forest and montane scrub. Along the way we will look for Prairie Falcon, Loggerhead Shrike and Horned Lark. Soon the grasslands give way to pinyon-juniper woodland at the entrance to Water Canyon. This habitat is one of the more extensive vegetation types found across the southwestern US and here occurs as nearly pure stands of pine or juniper or a mix of the two.

Three juniper species are found in the canyon: One-seed, Rocky Mountain and Alligator. The sociable Acorn Woodpecker occurs here and we should also find the attractive (and recently 'split') Woodhouse's Scrub Jay, striking Bridled Titmouse and endearing Mountain Chickadee as well as Bushtit and Juniper Titmouse, two species unceremoniously dismissed in the *Sibley Field Guide* as 'drab grey birds of the arid Southwest'. With any luck, the nomadic Pinyon Jay will also come our way.

The flat grasslands around about offer our best chance to find the superb Chestnut-collared Longspur, before it heads north to breed in the northern prairies. By March, the males should have acquired their smart spring colours and the numbers present are often good. Alongside them, pink-shawled and mustard-faced Horned Larks scuttle, whilst bold American Robins and beautiful Mountain Bluebirds perch along the fence lines. *Three nights Socorro*

Day 9

RETURN TO ALBUQUERQUE, FLY TO UK

It is only a one-hour drive today from Socorro to Albuquerque, so we will have time to enjoy some final birding as we return north.

Late afternoon departure from Albuquerque with our onward overnight flight back to the UK.

Day 10

ARRIVE IN UK

Early afternoon arrival at London Heathrow, where our tour concludes.

Trip Information

Group Size Max 7 participants & 1 leader

Birds 130-160 species

Accommodation 8 nights accommodation in New Mexico, in comfortable US-style hotels of good North American standard. All rooms have private facilities.

Meals All main meals are *included* in the tour price, commencing with dinner on arrival in Albuquerque on Day 1 and concluding with lunch prior to departure from New Mexico on Day 9.

Food is good, varied and plentiful. Breakfasts are usually buffet-style at the hotels. Lunches will generally be picnics though we may sometimes visit a local restaurant or diner. In the American fashion, evening meals will usually be taken at a local restaurant since many North American hotels lack in-house restaurant facilities.

Our tour price also **includes** the expected 15-20% gratuity for all meals in North America.

Walking Walks are short and mostly easy, although moderate at times in the mountains. Birding at Water Canyon and Caballo Reservoir involves a bit of walking (some uphill) but will be done at a gentle pace. At Bosque del Apache, we drive the loops, getting out of the vehicle regularly to view from the bunds or viewing areas.

Upland roads are ploughed and salted to give access to the mountain ski resorts during wintry conditions. The road to Sandia Crest reaches a maximum elevation of 3280m (10,678ft), where we spend a couple of hours looking especially for the rosy finches.

Trails are generally good, though may be rocky and uneven in places, and some vegetation can be spiny. Wear comfortable waterproof walking shoes with stout corrugated soles for grip.

Maximum elevation this tour: We reach a height of c.3280m (10,760ft) at Sandia Crest, in the Sandia Mountains above Albuquerque.

Weather March is a great time to visit New Mexico, as there is very little chance of rain and days are mostly sunny with little cloud. With cold air coming down the Rio Grande Valley from the north, winter temperatures at Albuquerque are rather low and in March, typically between 1-16C (34-61F). As the air is dry however, usually it doesn't feel too cold. Nonetheless, you should come prepared with warm winter clothing, and the possibility of some snow at altitude above Albuquerque. As we journey south towards Socorro and Truth or Consequences, on some days the weather can feel rather warmer, with highs on some afternoons in March up to 15-21C (59-69F).

Flights Due to the pandemic, it is proving extremely difficult to predict future flight prices and schedules. As a result, we have taken the decision to price our holidays as excluding all international flights.

To keep the process as simple as possible for our clients, however, we are now working closely with a dedicated agent at Travel Counsellors who will be able to advise you on which flights we are recommending for each holiday and he will be able to book these for you.

Please note there are no direct flights from the UK to New Mexico, so a change of planes is necessary in the US.

Ground Transport By air-conditioned minibus.

Tour Cost

2022 (10 days):

Land only cost: £2595

Deposit: £500

Single Supp: £695

Cost includes

- Limosa Tour Leader
- 8 nights accommodation in New Mexico
- All main meals (with drinking water provided)
- Minibus transport
- All excursions, entry fees and permits
- All tour-based tips (inc. gratuities for meal) and taxes
- Checklist of birds for the tour.

Cost excludes

International flights, insurance, ESTA (c.US \$14), airport snacks/meals, drinks & other items of a personal nature.

About Your Guide

Chris Charlesworth began birding at the age of ten, with a passion for birds that has remained with him and ultimately inspired him to organise and guide birding tours.

Residing in Canada, in British Columbia's beautiful Okanagan Valley, Chris has travelled and guided extensively throughout his native North America, and has also led tours to Australia, South Africa, Panama, Trinidad & Tobago, Mexico and Peru. Since earning his 'Limosa wings' in 2005, Chris has led the majority of our tours across the pond to destinations like Arizona, Texas, California, Washington State, Alberta, Oregon, Point Pelee, and the Canadian Rockies.

What you Say.....

“Thoroughly enjoyed a lovely trip..... Loved ‘the Owl Café’, I think it may become a Limosa favourite....”

CG, New Mexico tour

“Chris has excellent people skills and is inclusive of all members of the group, whatever their birding skills. Brilliant identification skills, too. We would definitely travel with Chris again... We are confident that “Limosa” knows what it is doing and does it to a very high standard.

Reliable and efficient, and pleasant too! Thank you for a great holiday.”

L&AP, Texas Coast tour



Gambel’s Quail: there are good chances of seeing this delightful species on multiple occasions during our tour

© Chris Charlesworth

How To Enquire

Due to the considerable uncertainty created by the pandemic, Limosa Holidays are not currently accepting bookings for any trips, however, you are welcome to contact us either by email or phone to register your interest in any of our holidays.

Whilst some tour companies may be willing to take a deposit from you and say a trip is a “confirmed departure”, our approach is going to be to wait a little longer as we consider this both honest and realistic.

Once we are confident that the trip can run, we will be in touch to confirm your place and ask for a deposit.

We do encourage you to register your interest as we are expecting considerable demand, once the consensus is that it is safe to travel again.

Any Questions

Please do not hesitate to contact us by email or phone. Our office is generally open from 09:30-17:30 but you are welcome to contact us outside these times too. We are happy to take calls in the evening and at weekends but if no one is available the call will go to our answerphone.

Thank you for your interest in our tours. We do hope that you will be able to join us once the pandemic is over and we look forward to hearing from you.

