



## **New Mexico: Enchanted Winter Skies**

### **February 3-10, 2027**



Brown-capped Rosy-Finch © Troy Hibbitts

When the chill of winter settles across the Southwest, New Mexico transforms into a haven for birders seeking dramatic skies, quiet desert trails, and the thunderous wingbeats of thousands of migrating birds. From the snow-dusted peaks of the Sandia Mountains to the golden wetlands of Bosque del Apache, winter birding in New Mexico offers a rare blend of spectacle, solitude, and species diversity. Over the course of our trip, we'll move from high-elevation forests to wide-open wetlands and peaceful desert valleys, experiencing the full range of New Mexico's winter birdlife. Expect breathtaking scenery, exceptional species diversity, and the kind of calm, spacious birding that makes winter in the Southwest so special. With expert guiding, comfortable pacing, and a welcoming group atmosphere, this tour is designed to immerse you in the beauty, stillness, and surprise of New Mexico's cold-season birding. But New Mexico's winter birding is not just about the birds—it's a place

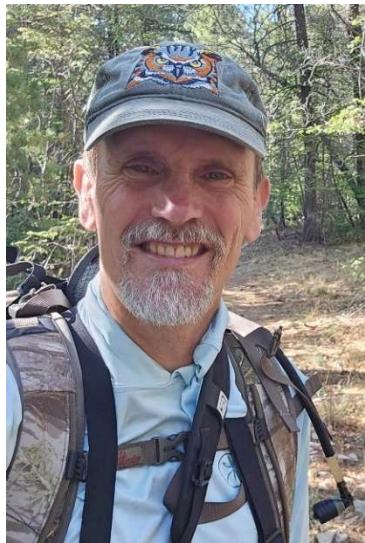
where nature's drama unfolds against a backdrop of adobe villages, ancient cottonwoods, and endless skies. New Mexico in winter offers a soulful, unforgettable experience—one wingbeat at a time.

This 8-day winter birding adventure in New Mexico begins with arrival and orientation in Albuquerque, followed by birding at the Rio Grande Nature Center and the high-altitude Sandia Crest, famous for its Rosy-Finches. The journey continues south to the renowned Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge for spectacular dawn fly-outs of Sandhill Cranes and Snow Geese, and then to Socorro. The next day we explore Elephant Butte and Caballo Lake State Parks, key sites for waterbirds and desert species. After a sunrise at Bosque del Apache, we then travel north to Santa Fe, birding along the way. The Sangre de Cristo Mountains, Los Alamos, and various other hotspots around Santa Fe offer mountain specialties, providing opportunities to spot species adapted to higher elevations and forested terrain. The final full day is a flexible return to Albuquerque, maximizing birding opportunities based on recent sightings, before concluding the tour.

## TOUR HIGHLIGHTS

- Experience the unforgettable dawn liftoff of Sandhill Cranes, Snow Geese, and Ross's Geese as they rise in unison over the Rio Grande Valley.
- Explore the high-elevation forests of Sandia Crest, where all three Rosy-Finch species gather in snowy, alpine scenery.
- Observe an impressive lineup of winter raptors — Ferruginous Hawks, Bald Eagles, Prairie Falcons, and more — hunting across open fields and desert basins.
- Discover the quiet beauty of the Chihuahuan Desert and grasslands, home to Black-throated Sparrows, Curve-billed Thrashers, and other regional specialties.
- Enjoy peaceful winter birding at reservoirs like Elephant Butte and Caballo Lake, rich with grebes, mergansers, and wintering waterfowl.
- Take in New Mexico's dramatic winter landscapes — from snow-tipped mountains to golden cottonwood bosque — all within short, easy travel distances.



**TOUR LEADER:** Troy Hibbitts

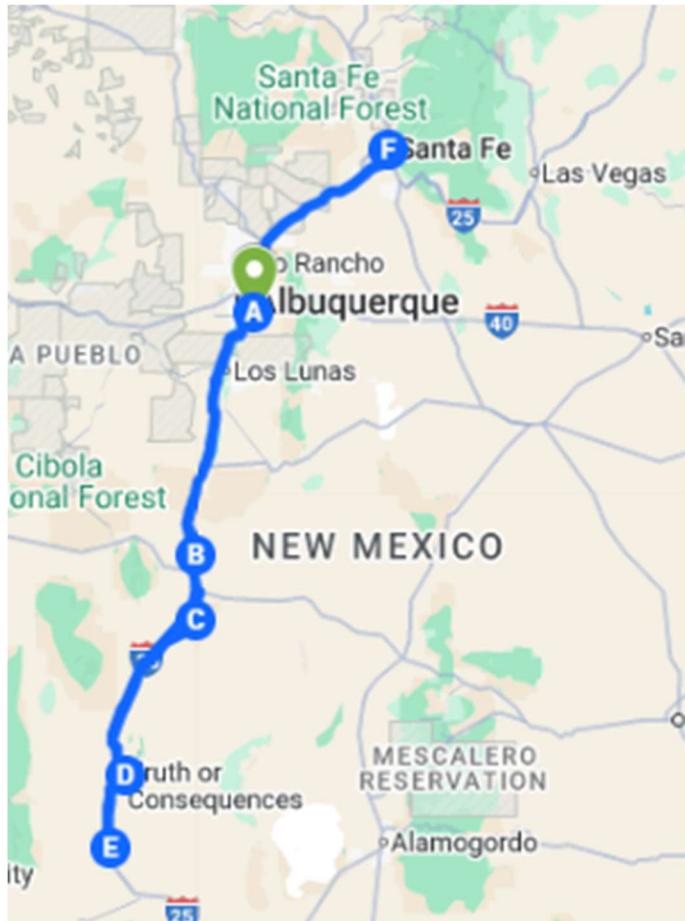
Troy grew up birding on family vacations across the mountain west. After earning his master's degree in evolutionary biology from the University of Texas at Arlington, Troy began a career as a High School Science teacher while filling his weekends and vacation time with birding and general wildlife observation and photography. In addition to birding, he is a leading expert on Reptiles and Amphibians in the southwest, having co-authored three field guides for the state of Texas. He also has somewhat of an eclectic expertise in areas such as dragonflies & damselflies, butterflies, scorpions, and mammals. Troy serves as an eBird reviewer for 5 counties in southwest Texas. He has birded in all of Texas's 254 counties and has many years of birding experience specifically in south and west Texas, as well as in southeastern Arizona.

**TOUR SIZE:** This tour is limited to 8 participants

**DIFFICULTY LEVEL & PACE OF THE TOUR:** This tour is moderately paced (2-3 miles of daily walking) and suitable for most birders with a reasonable level of fitness. Each day involves a mix of short walks on established trails, roadside birding, and some longer excursions at higher elevations, such as Sandia Crest, Santa Fe Ski Area, and the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. While the focus is on maximizing birding opportunities, the itinerary allows for flexibility, cultural stops, and frequent rest periods. Early mornings are common to catch key birding spectacles, and some days include travel between locations, but the overall pace balances active birding with time to enjoy the scenery and local experiences. Participants should be prepared for winter conditions, variable terrain, and some time at higher altitudes. Days generally start with breakfast at the hotel and departure for the field between 6:30 to 7:00 am. We bird throughout the morning, take a break for lunch and resume birding until around 5:00 pm followed by dinner at a local restaurant.

**FINANCIAL INFORMATION:** The tour price is \$3,480 per person in double occupancy. The single supplement for this tour is \$665. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single room accommodations, or if you prefer to share a room but have no roommate and we cannot arrange one for you. The package includes all meals from dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 8, ground transportation during the tour, entrance fees to parks/preserves, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, and guided services provided by the tour leader(s). It does not include travel expenses including but not limited to airfare to and from the tour destination, travel insurance, extended stays (before and/or after the tour), alcoholic beverages, gratuities, and items/expenses of personal nature.

## TOUR ROUTE



- 📍 **A – Start/ End:** Albuquerque International Sunport (ABQ)  
Nights 1, 2 & 7: Home2 Suites Albuquerque Airport  
Albuquerque Area: various, including: Sandia Crest, Rio Grande Nature Center, and Sulphur Canyon
- B – Socorro:** Bernardo Wildlife Area / La Joya WMA  
Nights 3 & 4: Holiday Inn Express, Socorro
- C – Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge**
- D – Elephant Butte**
- E – Percha Dam & Caballo Lake State Parks**
- F – Santa Fe Area:** various, including: Randall Davey Audubon Center & Sanctuary, Santa Fe Ski Area, Los Luceros Historic Site, and Los Alamos Nature Center  
Nights 5 & 6: Inn on the Alameda, Santa Fe

## ITINERARY

**Day 1: Arrive in Albuquerque International Airport (ABQ) before 2 pm.** Participants will transfer to the hotel where a room will be reserved in their name. The hotel offers complimentary shuttle service from the airport. If time allows, we will try to get in a few hours of birding at local sites before our evening orientation and welcome dinner. Overnight: Home2 Suites Albuquerque Airport.

**Day 2: Albuquerque area and Sandia Crest.** Today we bird lower lying locations around Albuquerque looking for Pinyon Jay, Sagebrush Sparrow, and Juniper Titmouse before we climb up into the Sandia Mountains, ascending all the way to Sandia Crest. For those willing to brave the cold, Sandia Crest offers one of the most unique winter birding experiences in North America: the chance to see all three Rosy-Finch species—Black, Brown-capped, and Gray-crowned—at a single feeder station. These high-altitude specialties descend from alpine zones to feed, offering rare photographic and observational opportunities. The surrounding coniferous forests also host Mountain Chickadees, Red-breasted Nuthatches, and Townsend's Solitaires, while lower elevations may yield Western Bluebirds and Red Crossbills. Overnight: Home2 Suites Albuquerque Airport.



Mountain Chickadee © Greg Lasley



Sandhill Cranes © Oscar Carmona

**Day 3: Bernardo Wildlife Area, Bosque Del Apache, and Socorro.** Today, we leave Albuquerque and head south towards Bosque Del Apache NWR. No winter birding trip to New Mexico is complete without a visit to Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge. Each dawn, the refuge erupts in motion as tens of thousands of Sandhill Cranes and Snow Geese

rise from their roosts in a synchronized ballet of sound and flight. The refuge's mosaic of wetlands, grasslands, and cottonwood groves also hosts Northern Harriers, Vermilion Flycatchers, and a dazzling array of waterfowl including Northern Pintail, Northern Shoveler, Green-winged Teal, Canvasback, Common Goldeneye, and Ring-necked Duck. Photographers and birders alike flock to Bosque for its golden light and intimate wildlife encounters. Sunset fly-ins are equally mesmerizing, as birds return in waves to settle for the night, silhouetted against fiery desert skies. We will also bird the open lands on the way to Socorro and we'll keep our eye out for Prairie Falcon, Ferruginous Hawk, Golden Eagle, and Chestnut-collared and McCown's Longspurs. If we get into Socorro early enough, we may continue right down to the refuge, to get our first taste of the Sandhill Cranes coming in to roost. Overnight: Holiday Inn Express, Socorro.

**Day 4: Elephant Butte, Caballo Lake and Percha**

**Dam State Parks.** These man-made lakes serve as critical stopover and wintering sites for migratory birds. Their open water, mudflats, and surrounding scrubland create a mosaic of habitat that supports over 300 species annually. We first travel south, birding Elephant Butte Reservoir, the largest man-made lake



Phainopepla © Oscar Carmona

in New Mexico, where we hope to find Clark's and Western Grebes, as well as other waterbirds and waterfowl at the lake. The desert scrub around the lake also supports a rich mix of passerines and raptors such as Cactus and Rock Wrens, Black-throated Sparrow, Phainopepla, Verdin, and Horned Larks to name a few. We then continue south to Caballo Lake and Percha Dam State Parks. Caballo's open water and mudflats attract a variety of wintering and migrating species, including Ross's Goose, Common Goldeneye, Common Merganser, and Ring-billed Gull. Percha Dam spans about 80 acres and features a mix of riparian woodland, open bosque, cultivated fields, and desert scrub. Winter birding at Percha Dam is especially rich, with a mix of resident, migratory species and wintering species such as Phainopepla, Gambel's Quail, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Woodhouse's Scrub Jay, Pyrrhuloxia, and Black Phoebe. Overnight: Holiday Inn Express, Socorro.

**Day 5: Bosque del Apache NWR to Santa Fe.** We will begin our day very early, aiming to arrive at Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge in time to witness the breathtaking spectacle of geese and cranes taking flight at sunrise. This awe-inspiring event offers a rare opportunity to observe the synchronized movements of these birds as they rise from their

roosts, filling the sky with sound and motion. After sunrise, we will continue birding throughout the Bosque del Apache area, adjusting our plans according to the weather and the presence of various bird species. The refuge's diverse habitats provide excellent opportunities for spotting winter residents and migratory waterfowl. Once our birding in Bosque del Apache is complete, we will head north through Albuquerque toward the state capitol, Santa Fe. Throughout the journey, we will stop at promising locations to observe birdlife along the route, making the most of the varied landscapes and habitats encountered. Overnight: Inn on the Alameda, Santa Fe.

**Day 6: Sangre de Cristo**

**Mountains and Santa Fe.**

The Sangre de Cristo Mountains are the southern sub-range of the Rocky Mountains, stretching from Santa Fe north to the Colorado border. We will start off by driving up towards Los Alamos, northwest of Santa Fe. Between the Jemez Mountains, which overlook Los Alamos, and the canyons in and around the city, we will have the opportunity to observe a wide array of species, including Mountain Bluebird, Williamson's Sapsucker, Pygmy Nuthatch, Red Crossbill, Lewis's and Acorn Woodpeckers, and perhaps Pinyon Jay and American Three-toed Woodpecker. We will spend the late afternoon exploring some of the cultural attractions in the city of Santa Fe. Overnight: Inn on the Alameda, Santa Fe.



Mountain Bluebird © Greg Lasley

**Day 7: Santa Fe to Albuquerque.** Today, our journey takes us south as we make our way back to Albuquerque. The specific locations we visit and the pace of our travels will be shaped by the birds we have already observed and any notable species that have recently been reported along our route. This flexible approach ensures we maximize our opportunities to encounter target birds and experience the rich diversity of habitats New Mexico has to offer. We anticipate arriving in Albuquerque in the late afternoon, concluding a day focused on discovery and adapting to the ever-changing rhythms of winter birding. Overnight: Home2 Suites Albuquerque Airport.

**Day 8: Tour Conclusion & Departures.** The tour concludes today after some morning birding in the Albuquerque area. Airport drop-off by no later than 12 pm. Participants may arrange departing flights from Albuquerque International Sunport (ABQ) after 2pm.

## TARGET SPECIES

While we cannot guarantee sightings of the birds listed below, we believe that encountering these species is likely during this tour.

Clark's and Western Grebes	Brown-capped Rosy-Finch
Ferruginous Hawk	Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch
Golden Eagle	American Three-toed Woodpecker
Prairie Falcon	Black-throated Sparrow
Gambel's Quail	Sagebrush Sparrow
Burrowing Owl	Brewer's Sparrow
Red-naped Sapsucker	Snow Goose
Woodhouse's Scrub Jay	Sandhill Crane
Pinyon Jay	Ross's Goose
Bridled and Juniper Titmice	Pygmy Nuthatch
Townsend's Solitaire	Bald Eagle
Sage and Crissal Thrashers	Black-billed Magpie
Green-tailed Towhee	Brewer's Blackbird
Black Rosy-Finch	And many more!

**REGISTRATION & PAYMENTS:** To register for this tour you will need to complete an online reservation form. The non-refundable deposit for this tour is \$300 per person. All payments, including initial deposits and final balances, may be made by credit card through PayPal, check, money order, or bank/wire transfer. Deposits are due 14 days from the date you submit your reservation form. The remaining balance is due as soon as the tour confirms or 60 days prior to the tour start date, whichever comes first. We will invoice you accordingly.

**Please read our Terms and Conditions for more information before booking any of our tours or services. Our Terms and Conditions include important information about how we operate our tours, including cancellation policy, travel insurance, health and fitness requirements, and more.**