

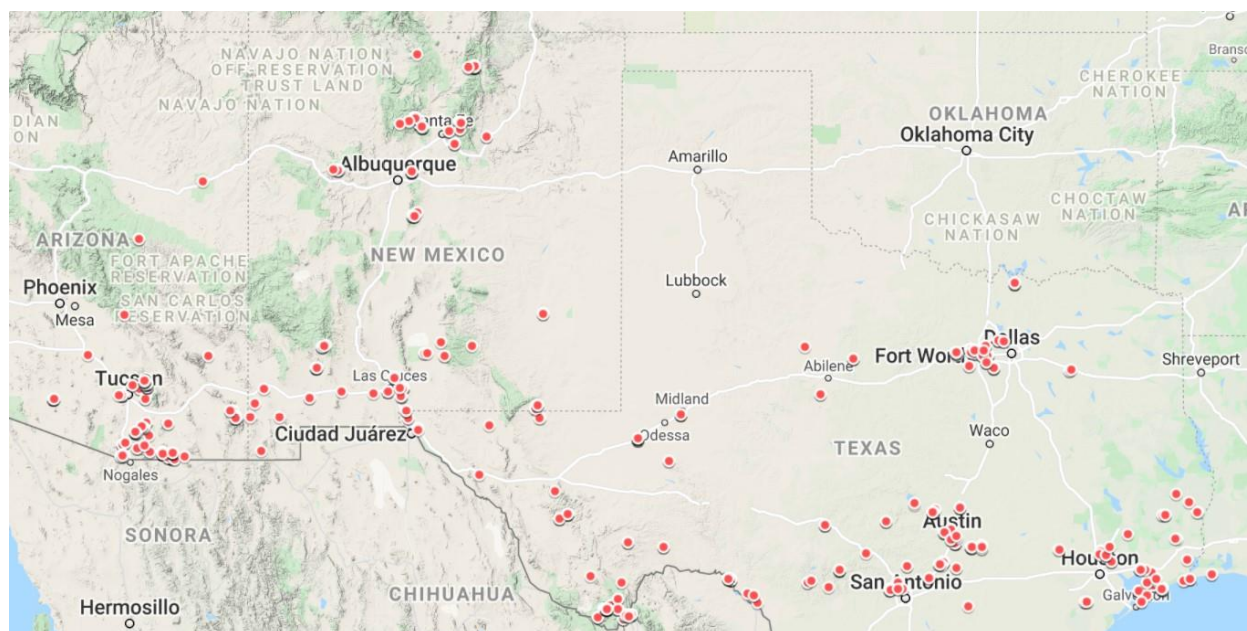
13 January 2022

Dear Friends and Family,

When I wrote last year on Christmas Day, we were camped out in the Everglades, waiting for the COVID situation in El Paso to improve sufficiently that we could return. We finally made it back on Feb. 6, 360 days after starting out in February, 2020. We enjoyed a lot of good paddling in Florida in January, and a highlight was seeing only our second American Flamingo ever in the U.S., a bird originally “imported” by Hurricane Michael in 2018, and migrating back each winter.

On our way from Florida to El Paso, we stopped in Fort Worth, TX to pick up our new truck. The transfer of the camper to the new truck, a fairly complex procedure, went smoothly. We unloaded our truck (filling a motel room), completed the paperwork at Five Star Ford, and dropped off both vehicles at the upfitter, AutoTruck.com. They took 2.5 days to transfer the camper, which involved extending the frame of the new chassis cab; disconnecting the wiring from the camper to the truck; unbolting the flatbed; raising it and the camper off the old truck; driving the old truck away and the new one underneath; attaching the flatbed; and rewiring. They also transferred the front-mounted spare tire to the new truck, all for \$2400. We loaded all our gear in the new truck, and were off five days after arrival in town. As a bonus, we got vaccinated for COVID by a clinic with vaccine left at closing time!

Our original plan for 2021 was to forego a long road trip, so that we could take five international birding tours, some of which fell during the months we’d usually be on the road. We’d instead make shorter forays in Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico, primarily looking for new native plant genera. It turned out that, one after another, the first four of these trips were cancelled due to COVID, though the fifth one, a short trip to Oaxaca, Mexico last month, actually happened. Our unusually limited wanderings for the year are shown in the map below.



We started out eight weeks after getting back to El Paso, heading for High Island on the Gulf Coast east of Houston, where we spent four weeks enjoying spring bird migration. It has been estimated from radar data that two billion birds migrate across the Gulf of Mexico each spring, taking advantage of prevailing southerly winds from the Yucatan Peninsula. When the weather conditions are right, large numbers of migrants will touch down on the coast in the few areas there are trees, sometimes resulting in remarkable concentrations of colorful songbirds. During our stay, we had four days that were excellent, with over twenty species of wood warblers seen. Shorebirds were also very good, the highlight being a flock of 30 Buff-breasted Sandpipers.

We then slowly returned west through Austin, San Antonio, the Edwards Plateau, and Big Bend National Park. This was our best trip ever for cacti, as many species were in flower and five of the genera we found were new ones. Even better, we located two new plant families in the Trans-Pecos, Talinaceae and Nitrariaceae, the latter of extremely limited occurrence in the U.S. A low point was having our yearly flat tire around noon in 107°F heat on a remote road in Big Bend. With a spare tire weighing about 100 lbs., and 3000 lbs. of lift required to raise a rear wheel off the ground, this was actually quite an ordeal. We then continued on for nine extremely hot but productive days in southeast Arizona. The best birds were a pair of Lucifer Hummingbirds, but they were topped by our finally finding, on our fourth or fifth attempt, White-sided Jackrabbit! There are only about 60 individuals remaining in the U.S., in a single valley in southwest New Mexico. With the arrival of the botanically less interesting summer, we took a month off in El Paso to cool down.

Returning to the road July 9, we headed to Big Bend again to try for Mexican Long-nosed Bat, which comes north out of Mexico in some years to feed on flowering agaves in the Chisos Mountains. We were not successful, but had better luck after heading north to central New Mexico, where we found the taxonomically contentious Manzanita Mountain Cottontail. We then continued to the mountainous portions of northern New Mexico, where we spent over two weeks exploring and got rained on an awful lot. In Storrie Lake State Park, we finally recorded Arizona Myotis, a challenging bat to identify acoustically. This leaves us just three bats to go out of about 47 species that regularly occur in the U.S. and Canada. In the striking Valles Caldera, we watched in amazement for 45 minutes while a Badger and two Coyotes hunted together! Although rarely seen, this behavior has been documented; both species probably benefit from the arrangement.

I had been checking precipitation maps frequently since the end of June, hoping for a good monsoonal season in Arizona and New Mexico, and things were looking very promising. By the first week of August, most areas had experienced at least 50% more rain than average, and some areas had received several times their average. We arrived in southeast Arizona on Aug. 6 and the next three weeks were simply amazing! The deserts were green and the foothills were vibrant with floral displays, most notably of *Kallstroemia grandiflora*, with its fluorescent orange flowers. Although known as Arizona Poppy, this species is not a poppy but rather is related to creosote bush. We saw a remarkable diversity of species, many of which only flower after monsoonal rains. At the first stop we made, west of Sells, we found eight new species of plants in a roadside area only about 10 yards wide and 100 yards long! Highlights of this segment included Berylline

Hummingbird, a lifer for Eileen; a new plant family, Bixaceae; and most unexpectedly, a Western Spotted Skunk popping up just seven feet away from Eileen as she enjoyed her evening coffee!

After a 10-day break in El Paso, we took off on the last loop of the year, through southeast New Mexico, then east to Fort Worth, and south to Austin, after which we basically retraced our spring route back to El Paso, visiting many of the same locations, but now looking for fall flowers. We had good success, finding many new plant genera, perhaps the rarest being *Batesimalva*, a lovely mallow known in the U.S. only from one site in the Chisos Mountains. But our greatest triumph, perhaps of the whole year, was locating *Talinopsis frutescens*, the sole U.S. representative of family Anacampserotaceae, at an imprecise site where it was seen 33 years ago! This species and family are very challenging to find because the range is small, the flowering period is short, and most sites are in remote areas with difficult terrain and have only a small number of plants. With this family in the bag, we have only three remaining vascular plant families left to see in the continental U.S. and Canada, out of 239. We arrived back in El Paso on Oct. 1.

Our only field work during the last three months of the year was a week back in Big Bend – it’s a hard place to stay away from – and a short birding tour to Oaxaca, Mexico, with Field Guides, Inc. Oaxaca is situated in a high valley ringed by mountains, in southern Mexico. The tour visited elevations from about 3000 feet to 10,000 feet, sampling habitats from deserts to pine-oak woodland. Our personal list for the trip was 167 species of birds, of which 35 were lifers. We had another 14 new non-avian species, mostly plants. Some of our favorite birds from the trip were Red Warbler, Gray Silky-Flycatcher, Mexican Violetear, Collared Towhee, Tufted Flycatcher, Bridled Sparrow, Golden-browed Warbler, and Cinnamon-bellied Flowerpiercer.

Some statistics: in total, we spent six months on the road in 2021, traveling about 20,000 miles. We saw about 484 new species, mostly plants (435 spp.), finishing the year with 10,994 species worldwide, all-time. Our primary goal this year was to track down new native vascular plant genera in North America north of Mexico. We performed 247 searches, of which 146 (59%) were successful. We also found 42 genera while not explicitly searching for them. This gave a total of 188 new genera during the year, bringing us to 1687 of ca. 2108 possible native genera (80%), a fine milestone. We missed 40 genera, so we found 82% of our target genera, a very satisfying result.

Our contact info, which has not changed, is given below. We’d love to hear from you! Happy holidays –

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