

Birding To The Top of Mt. Hamilton!

Spring birding, May 17, 2009

For 2009, **Let's Go Birding** has partnered with other organizations to provide exciting opportunities to take people birding. On this day I partnered with the Los Gatos Wild Bird Center to bird our way up to the historic Lick Observatory. The Lick Observatory sits a top Mount Hamilton within the Mt. Diablo Mountain Range found along the east edge of San Jose. The bright white observatory is clearly visible to those of us living in the Bay Area, but I have learned that few venture to the top to visit. It's a fantastic birding destination because the open spaces leading to the top offer ideal habitats for many species of birds. It's also a beautiful trip along incredible winding roads. This happened to be a day where they predicted RECORD temperatures so we decided to take the trip slowly. Staying in the shade and offering plenty of water allowed us to successfully deal with the 103 degrees encountered! We spent the first part of the day birding the areas around Joseph Grant County Park and then headed to the top. **Below includes a post sent to the "South Bay Birding" group.**

- ★ **Washburn Trail to the White Barn** - Nesting TREE SWALLOWS and HOUSE WREN. Watched one female AMERICAN KESTREL fly circles around the barn. Also had our first YELLOW BILLED MAGPIE here along with one female WESTERN Tanager. Also heard a CASSIN'S VIREO and CALIFORNIA QUAIL.
- ★ **West of San Felipe Creek & the Ranch house where the road ends at the Hotel Trail** - There is one large Oak Tree that stands at this spot. Janna Pauser heard them first and we soon found several LAWRENCE'S GOLDFINCH in the tree. Both males and females demonstrating nesting activities. WESTERN KINGBIRDS were also quite active here.
- ★ **Walking around the Ranch House** - We found more LAWRENCE'S GOLDFINCH in the Oak Trees within the courtyard of the ranch house. Also had CEDAR WAXWINGS here and a heard only PACIFIC SLOPE FLYCATCHER. We heard BLACK HEADED GROSBEAK throughout the day, but this was the first spot where they were seen.
- ★ **Parking lot at Snell Trail** - We ate lunch in the shade of the Sycamore Trees located at the edge of the large parking lot. Although we found orioles all day, directly above us were nesting BULLOCK'S ORIOLES. Also a pair of YELLOW BILLED MAGPIES were staying close and drinking from the water fountain located at the bathrooms.
- ★ **Smith Creek Fire station** - Found a persistent male LAZULI BUNTING singing in the trees above the creek. Also had our first of the day NORTHERN ROUGH WING SWALLOWS here.

At the top Lick Observatory - It was about 6 degrees cooler at the top of the mountain than in Santa Clara Valley. There was a welcome breeze but little bird activity. We spent time at the top learning more about the history here and shopping in the gift store!

Lick Observatory Cool Facts!

- James Lick instigated its construction in 1876
- In 1887, James Lick himself was buried there
- Its the first permanently occupied mountain top observatory
- The observatory sits at an elevation of over 4300 feet.
- SR 130 follows the same path taken by the mule drawn wagons
- Asteroid "452 Hamiltonia" discovered in 1899 is named after the mountain.
- The observatory is now owned and operated by the University of California
- To learn more please visit <http://www.ucolick.org/>



The group at the top!