

A Journey to Silver City

In July Kathryn and I decided visit the Silver City area where we had first searched in New Mexico for our retirement dream and almost found it, but luckily we persisted 'till the next year we found Vegas! Bypassing I25 we took the small less traveled roads south with pleasant traveling weather through small rocky ranches of Guadalupe with no beef in sight, then turned to the west in Torrance Co. past much beef and wind turbine power, a sight to drive *don Quijote* mad if he were not so already.



A quick stop for ice cream at Mountainair which I always thought was a mountain town but is on the flats with evening cooling air and a view of distant mountains. That quick stop turned into hours when we met a former English teacher in Poland turned pit firing ceramicist in New Mexico and his friend an avid collector and seller of all things Raven.

After our pleasant interlude, a brief but necessary stint on I25 past Socorro, then west across the southern tip of the Mogollon mountains on narrow twisting roads through the darkening evening with a fair amount of traffic, maybe we should have spent less time in Mountainair. Finally we pulled up to the renovated Palace Hotel, though the atrium is still closed off trapping the day's hot air inside, they have added noisy room air conditioners to the many electric fans. Progress? We take a walk around the old town, it is much the same, though the old Buffalo Bar has finally closed. Diane's is still going strong and we had the best Italian dinner since San Francisco. And so to bed.



Cafe on Yankee St reminds me of North Beach of old

The next morning after a great breakfast on the portal of a new local-produce gluten-free restaurant and a walk-about the old town and the Big Ditch Park, the result of a disastrous flood which took out Main Street and all the buildings on it except the Warren House of 1885 which must have been set back on its lot and so survived the flood, we headed north to to our desert retreat, *Casitas de Gila*, at the confluence of the Gila River and Bear Creek in the Chihuahua desert.

Casitas de Gila

Our *casita* overlooking Bear Creek far below and Turtle Rock had all the standard amenities plus a shaded *portal* looking upon a large juniper and a hummingbird feeder, constantly humming from dawn to dusk with a numerous fractious swarm of Broad Tailed, Calliope, Anna's Hummingbirds, and other fauna. We could sit there with or without book or camera soaking up the ambiance and peace? Well, peace for us, the hummers were a very anxious about their necessary carbs. We saw there an Ornate Tree Lizard sunning himself on the *casita* wall just over Kathryn's head as she was reading, who later moved around the corner by the large iron lizards decorating the wall, I guess that large *paparazzo* and his camera disturbed him; a Grasslands Whip-tailed Lizard disappearing under into the juniper; a Hooded Oriole in the juniper, my first sighting and most likely the last as this is about as far north as they get.



Ornate Tree Lizard
around the corner

The desert heat was a big change for us, though Kathryn found it little too hot at times and tended to stay in the shade with the hummers, I on the other hand donned my desert shirt and straw hat to roam some of the numerous trails, getting acquainted with some of the Chihuahua desert flora and fauna. First I made a survey of the bench, the ancient flood plain, upon which the *casitas* are built overlooking the wide canyon of Bear Creek with its varied *bosque* of cottonwood, ash, maple, etc... While sitting on a rock contemplating the view I was visited by a White-belted Ring-tailed dragonfly from below, I assured him I would return the visit the next day and so I did.



White-belted
Ring-tailed dragonfly

The Milky Way

That night's sky was a clear starry extravaganza. Both Kathryn and I awoke with no bumping into each other, separately we did the same thing, we went outside to look at the stars. There it was, the Milky Way, our galaxy in all its splendor, always there but so seldom seen.

Damn city lights! (but not your's Charlie)

My neck was breaking standing looking up, I laid back onto the car, stared up into that Milky Way, mesmerized, transported into my past, to the late '40s in North Woods of Wisconsin where I first saw the Milky Way, to '69 in *Diné Bikéyah* (Navajo Homeland) when I first came into the west, to January '70 in my sack in the Sonora Desert staring at my first meteor shower, through the '70s and '80s in the deserts and mountains of California Nevada and Arizona, to fall '83 in the Trinity Alps again with my head back star chart in hand looking up crashing into ancient Incense Cedars and Yellow Pines staring into that constellation filled sky with that milky white river running through it.

I was home!

A Walk on Bear Creek



Next morning for my reciprocal visit to the creekside of the White-belted Ringtail I once more donned my desert shirt and straw hat, took my lunch and a stick and headed down into that wide canyon carved though the millennia by Bear Creek; past Pincushion and Cane cacti, White thorn Acacia, Soaptree Yucca into the stream-side *bosque* where I found a hammock and from its comfort I spied two birds high in the canopy, a Phainopepla an old acquaintance last seen in Arizona and a Blue-throated Hummingbird seen for the first time and, as the Hooded

Oriole, probably the last.

Upon leaving that idyllic glade I wandered the creekside visiting old flora and fauna friends and meeting new fellow beings such as one I have been looking for, the narrow leafed cattail-> (our northern ones are all wide) and new to me the Seep Willow (not a willow but an *Asteraceae* (we used to say Composite) which might be the willow-like shrub planted on the newly restructured Gallinas River (nature's way with flood was not to the liking of some) I will have to wait for it to bloom for a positive ID.



At noon beneath an ancient *Alamo grande* I and an old acquaintance, a California Pleasing Fungus Beetle, dined on apple, bread and sardines dressed with sherry vinegar and a pinch of salt. I am unsure which flavor attracted Pleasing as he nibbled his way around my hand. Then I found a new lizard friend, a Zebra-tailed in addition to the two I had met yesterday and then today again. After we parted I wandered though the *bosque* with Arizona Walnut, Sycamore and Grapes; fields with many scattered Prickly Poppies; across the creek and home to Kathryn and the hummers.



My Three Lizard Friends



Ornate Tree Lizard
this time on tree

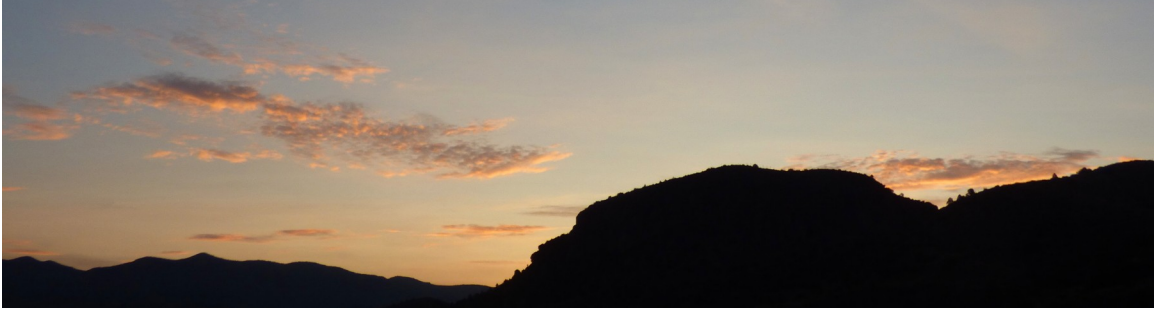


Zebra Tailed Lizard
found only in the Chihuahua Desert



Grasslands Whip Tail

You Can Go Home Again



After just a short three nights and two days stay it was time to head for home to four worried cats. (*where are they ? when will they get back and feed us ? Will we starve ? this other big-being is ok but not as good as our own well trained big-beings*) We had better hurry. Let us say Good-bye to some of our new acquaintances.



unidentified Juvenal



Rufous male



Black Chinned female



*Bird 'o Paradise
Caesalinea gilliesii*



*Sotol
Dasylirion wheeleri*



*Soaptree Yucca
Yucca elata*

We head north with only a few missed turns, then west across the Plains of San Agustin with a lot more beef and wind generators, and as a bonus the VLA (Very Large Array) 27 25-meter radio telescopes arranged on a Y-shaped railroad so that its total size maybe manipulated. The VLA studies the Milky Way differently than I do. Shortly after dark when we pulled up to our very own *casita* the cats were *verry* glad to see us.