

## Teens and Birds

It was a daunting task. I was taking 9 teen-agers birding . I have been around young people all of my life and I couldn't remember being with more than one or two at a time who were actually interested in watching the birds. I knew I had a challenging morning ahead of me but I did have an ace up my sleeve: I had studied ornithology with a great ornithologist and I was hoping to capture the enthusiasm of the students using the tricks of the trade he had taught me.

One of those tricks was to find the absolutely best place to see the most dramatic birds. I chose well. As my students walked along with limited enthusiasm we saw a vermilion flycatcher dashing through the air, performing aerobatics any pilot would be jealous of. They couldn't see the critters the bird was chasing so, at first, it seemed like the bird was performing some elegant ritual. We talked about its niche in the ecosystem so the kids looked closer and saw the "flies" the flycatcher chased. The flame colors on the bird enhanced the moment, causing one student to describe the bird as on fire.

Leaving the spectacular flycatcher behind us we walked on, finally finding a shady spot to pause and watch. There were doves, both white wing and Inca, a lesser goldfinch caught their attention with its color. And then a painted bunting came into view. No one could contain the enthusiasm of the group and the bunting flew off but not before everyone had had a chance to marvel at its colors. In Spanish the bird is called "Colorin de Siete Colores", which the students thought was a perfect name. But only for the male, I commented, the female is a greenish color and then we saw her. This time the students remained calm as they watched her flitting through the grasses. Eventually, the male returned and we watched silently as they fed for several minutes before finally disappearing.

We saw lots of beautiful birds including numerous hummingbirds, orioles and an indigo bunting before calling it quits. Our walk back to the van was more energized as the students constantly looked around for more birds.

It was a great morning with all of the students seeing beautiful birds. The talk during both lunch and dinner was about when we could go birding again. I pointed out that birding did not require a specific time or place, that is was something to do anytime! They proved that true when they went for a walk after dinner and marveled at the different birds they saw. As I kicked back that night to relax I thought about my "challenging" morning and gave a little smile of thanks to the birders who taught me the pleasure of looking at birds.



*Colorin de Siete Colores  
aka: Painted Bunting*

**Posted by Patt Sims - July 4, 2012**