



Rio Mesa Banding Station

Spring 2025

April 20-26th

Weekly Summary

This week was a little slower than our first week. We started out the week with a delayed opening due to below freezing temperatures and ended the week with having to close early due to the heat! It seems like the sunrise is quickly moving earlier and earlier as well since our open time is now before 6:00am. Our capture rate is still low with an average of 4.33 birds per day, but we did add a new species for the season (see 4/26)! A few less birds each day gave us more time to practice our extraction and banding skills, which will be useful as we head into May and hopefully an increase in bird activity.

We caught a total of **26** birds of **8** species with 18 newly banded birds, 7 recaptures, and 1 unbanded bird (a sneaky SOSP). Highlights from this week were 3 more Lucy's Warblers, a lot of Song Sparrow action, and an early MacGillivray's Warbler. Song Sparrows were our most caught bird this week with 8 captures. See summary table for weekly species totals.



Sunday April 20th

Opening/Closing Temp: 34.5°/63.1°

Hours Station Operated: 4.7

Number of birds banded: 2

Number of recaptures: 3

Number of species: 3

Species Banded: Gambel's White-crowned Sparrow (1) and Spotted Towhee (1)

Recaptured Species: Gambel's White-crowned Sparrow (1), Lucy's Warbler (1), and Spotted Towhee (1)

Notes: Below freezing temperatures delayed opening for a little over an hour, and it stayed chilly for most of the morning. A slower day overall but we did manage to catch a pair of Spotted Towhees together in the same net.

Pictured: Spotted Towhee

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Eye color is helpful for ageing Spotted Towhees. Older birds (AHY/ASY/DCB), like the one in the top photo have a bright red iris while younger birds (HY/SY/FCF) have a duller red or orange iris, like the bird in the bottom photo.

Monday April 21st

Opening/Closing Temp: 43.3° / 72.3°

Hours Station Operated: 6

Number of birds banded: 4

Number of recaptures: 1

Number of species: 3

Species Banded: Gambel's White-crowned Sparrow (1), Lincoln's Sparrow (1), and Lucy's Warbler (2)

Recaptured Species: Lincoln's Sparrow (1)

Notes: A chilly, windy morning and we ended up closing two nets after a few hours due to wind. An increase in the capture rate of Lucy's Warbler could mean they are moving back in and getting ready to breed! Check out the photo for an appearance of unusual molt in one of the individuals we caught. This photo also highlights why we take photos when banding. It allows us to spend more time examining a bird and could lead to learning more about a species, especially those like Lucy's Warbler that need more study.

Pictured: Lucy's Warbler

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Lucy's Warblers are one of only two warbler species that nest in cavities. They prefer densely wooded riparian areas, often nesting in non-native tamarisk, which happens to be one of the dominant plants throughout our station. After breeding, they will seek out wet areas during monsoon season, to molt and prepare for migration.



Tuesday April 22nd

Opening/Closing Temp: 46.2°/74.7°

Hours Station Operated: 6

Number of birds banded: 4

Number of recaptures: 1

Number of unbanded: 1

Number of species: 2

Species Banded: Song Sparrow (4)

Recaptured Species: Gambel's White-crowned Sparrow (1)

Unbanded Species: Song Sparrow (1)

Notes: The weather was lovely and there were birds in the area singing, just not flying into the nets. Even though we only captured Song Sparrows, we noticed something exciting...we may have caught two different subspecies. The bird in the top photo is what you might expect of the typical southwestern subspecies, pale and gray overall with light red streaking on both the chest and back. We noticed the bird in the bottom photo had a darker gray back with heavier brown streaking. We may never know exactly which subspecies this bird is, but we took a few extra measurements like beak width/depth and tarsus length that could help us narrow it down!

Pictured: Song Sparrow (above) and Song Sparrow (below)

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Wednesday April 23rd

Opening/Closing Temp: 45.8°/75.5°

Hours Station Operated: 6

Number of birds banded: 4

Number of recaptures: 1

Number of species: 4

Species Banded: Spotted Towhee (1), Lincoln's Sparrow (1), and Ruby-crowned Kinglet (2)

Recaptured Species: Song Sparrow (1)

Notes: While our capture rate is still low, the weather was lovely and we found two more kinglets in the nets. We also heard two new species singing in the area: Orange-crowned Warbler and Virginia's Warbler. As we are fast-approaching May, hopefully this means more birds are beginning their migration and will soon be arriving at our site. A noticeable increase in insect activity means that there will be plenty of food to fuel them on their journey.

Pictured: Ruby-crowned Kinglet

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These wing and tail photos show the characteristics used to age kinglets (both of ours were aged after second year or ASY). The middle photo shows high quality primary coverts that are truncate with broad olive-green edging, indicating an older bird. The outer tail feathers are broad with a rounded edge vs pointy and tapered in a younger bird.



Male MGWA's have a darker slate gray head that contrasts with their green back. Also look for a bright gray to slate breast with heavy black mottling

Thursday April 24th

Opening/Closing Temp: 50° /75.7°

Hours Station Operated: 6

Number of birds banded: 4

Number of species: 4

Species Banded: Song Sparrow (1), Gambel's White-crowned Sparrow (1), Hermit Thrush (1), and MacGillivray's Warbler

Notes: A mild morning turned into a hot afternoon. Most of the birds were caught on the opening round today, one of those being a stunning new species. We were all quite in awe of this beautiful male MacGillivray's. They are distinguished from the very similar Mourning Warbler (found mostly east of the Rockies) by their bold white eye arcs.

Pictured: MacGillivray's Warbler

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Saturday April 26th

Opening/Closing Temp: 54.6° /80.9°

Hours Station Operated: 5.66

Number of birds banded: 0

Number of recaptures: 1

Number of species: 1

Recaptured Species: Song Sparrow (1)

Notes: Our first and hopefully only day with no newly banded birds. A pleasant morning quickly escalated into hot temperatures. The high temps, along with the gusty winds kept our capture rates low. On the bright side, we did have sightings near



the station of two new species for the spring, Loggerhead Shrike and Lark Sparrow. Fingers crossed we catch one or both of those species in the upcoming weeks!

Pictured: Lark Sparrow seen by Julia near net 15

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Summary Table for 4/20 - 4/26

New		Recaptures		Unbanded	
SOSP	5	GWCS	2	SOSP	1
GWCS	3	SOSP	2		
RCKI	2	SPTO	1		
LISP	2	LUWA	1		
SPTO	2	LISP	1		
LUWA	2				
HETH	1				
MGWA	1				
Total	18		7		1