Hike Jack’s Peak in the Burro Mountains
Account and photos by David McDonald, October, 2022

How lucky can one get? To live in a place where, by driving less than twenty miles, one arrives at a wonderland of rock and oak and juniper.

A place inhabited by birds that people travel the globe to find. Within a mile from the Continental Divide (CDT) trailhead one can see the elusive and improbable Montezuma Quail, whose face is a black and white swirl of Mimbres pottery. Or the drabber (but restricted-range) Rufous-crowned Sparrow singing away from the top of a juniper. The Continental Divide Trail (CDT) trailhead is along Hwy 90, heading south from Silver City towards Lordsburg. The entry point is on the right, about 0.3 miles after milepost (MP) 22 (just beyond a brown sign for the CDT). Drive in another 0.3 mile through the sandy informal campground and look for a trailhead sign (on the right, partly obscured by two beautiful junipers).

The trail heads north up towards Jack’s Peak, from there on to Burro Peak, and then down Deadman’s Canyon, which ends at the Tyrone-Thompson road (four miles off Hwy 90 just past the mine tailings beyond the railway overpass – more on that, perhaps, in a future story). I will discuss only the first couple of miles, which make a very pleasant morning hike. In my experience, seeing others along the trail is a rarity.

These are the Burro Mountains, and they are, almost certainly, biologically unique. They differ in a multitude of ways from the much more famous Chiricahuas of Arizona, as well as the Peloncillos, which lie mostly south of I-10 and just east of the Chiricahuas. The Burros are an important habitat corridor for mountain flora and fauna. Prominent among these are Buff-breasted Flycatcher and Yellow-eyed Junco. Although Deadman’s Canyon and Jack’s Peak itself (accessible by a very rough road) are described in the excellent guide to bird-finding in New Mexico (Howe 2022), this CDT route from near MP 22 to Jack’s Peak is not.

The flat area around the trailhead is dotted around the entry road. Shortly after you start the trail it becomes rockier, steeper and has more varied vegetation, including mountain mahogany, other shrubs and a variety of cacti.

Along here, bird highlights could include Montezuma Quail, Rufous-crowned, Black-throated and Black-chinned Sparrows, Black-throated Gray Warblers and both species of titmouse. Many or most of the species that are more widely distributed in southwest New Mexico also occur.

After a little more than a mile, one enters a zone of pines and larger trees. Birds along here may include Grace’s Warbler and soaring Zone-tailed Hawks. As you get closer to Jack’s Peak and Burro Peak, you should see Painted Redstarts, and might find Yellow-eyed Junco, Olive Warbler or Northern Goshawk.

May your ears be filled with bird song and your eyes with the endlessly varied tapestry of bird feathers.

The eBird list of the 116 species sighted along Jack’s Peak trail is at: ebird.org/hotspot/L776902.
My 9-9-22 ebird checklist is at: ebird.org/checklist/S118398278