



Southeast Arizona Specialties & Nightbirds

May 1-8, 2024

Tour Summary & Sightings List



We packed a lot into our week of mid-spring birding in Southeast Arizona, with full days in the field followed by optional evening outings in search of nightbirds. Along the way we spent time in several of the region's iconic "sky island" mountain ranges – including the Santa Ritas, Huachucas, Chiricahuas and Santa Catalinas – as well as in lower elevations near Tucson, Patagonia, Sierra Vista, Willcox and Portal.

Regarding the birds, we did quite well with owls – recording eight species as a group, included Whiskered Screech, Elf, Northern Pygmy and Spotted. Spring is not known as the peak season for hummingbirds in Southeast Arizona, but by visiting key feeding areas we were still able to enjoy nine species, including Blue-throated Mountain-gem, Lucifer and Violet-crowned.

We also enjoyed a long list of other Southeast Arizona specialties, including Gray and Zone-tailed Hawks, Elegant Trogon, Gilded Flicker, Gila and Arizona Woodpeckers, Greater Pewee, Northern Beardless Tyrannulet, Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher, Thick-billed Kingbird, Mexican Jay, Bridled Titmouse, Bendire's Thrasher, Olive Warbler, Rufous-winged Sparrow, Abert's Towhee, Chihuahuan Meadowlark, Yellow-eyed Junco, Painted Redstart, Red-faced and Grace's Warblers and Hepatic Tanager. A summary of our daily activities and link to a listing of all species seen is included below. Thanks again to all for joining us and we hope to see you in the field again! - Kip Miller

Thursday, May 2 – We kicked off the birding on the tour with a visit to a patch of Sonoran Desert near Tucson where we found Gila Woodpecker, Gilded Flicker, Cactus Wren, Curve-billed Thrasher and the first of the many Purple Martins soon to nest in cavities of the tall Saguaros. From here we pushed south towards Madera Canyon, with stops in mesquite grasslands where we found Costa's Hummingbird, Northern Beardless Tyrannulet, Rufous-winged Sparrow and a pair of crowd-pleasing Vermilion Flycatchers. In the oak woodlands of Madera Canyon, we started with easy birding at the feeders of the Santa Rita Lodge, where Wild Turkey, Acorn Woodpecker, Mexican Jay and Black-headed Grosbeak were among the most abundant species present.



Following a picnic lunch, we moved up the canyon to the Madera Kubo B&B. Here we found Plumbeous Vireo, Bridled Titmouse and Painted Redstart in the adjacent oaks and enjoyed Rivoli's and Broad-billed Hummingbirds, Arizona Woodpecker and Yellow-eyed Junco at the feeders. Continuing south towards Nogales, a pair of Mexican Ducks and multiple Black-necked Stilts were highlights at the Amado water



treatment pond. In Montosa Canyon, our final daylight birding stop, a Canyon Wren teed up nicely on the predicted rock and a Hooded Oriole provided extended scope views. After dinner in Nogales, we concluded the day along Ruby Road, where we heard multiple Elf Owls chattering (and saw one in flight) and enjoyed great views of a pair of Western Screech-Owls.

Friday, May 3 – Our first stop this morning was the famed (in birding circles anyway!) Patagonia roadside rest area where we enjoyed watching a Rock Wren “mousing” along a rock face and a flock of White-throated Swifts flying near the higher cliffs. Following a requested stop at a popular



Patagonia coffee shop, we spent the remainder of the morning casually birding roadsides in Harshaw Canyon, where Gray Hawk, Brown-crested Flycatcher and Thick-billed Kingbirds were some of the highlights.

A restaurant lunch in Patagonia was followed by a couple of hours of siesta time at our Nogales hotel and we gathered again in late afternoon to make the drive to California Gulch, a remote area near the Arizona/Mexico border. A birding stop en route at Pena Blanca Lake added a few more waterbirds to our list, including Ruddy Duck, Pied-billed Grebe and Neotropic Cormorant. After successfully navigating the final few miles of the rough access road, we arrived at the

confluence of California Gulch and Warsaw Canyon shortly before dusk, where Ladder-backed Woodpecker and Phainopepla were some of the species we enjoyed while eating our picnic dinners. At dark, we heard a Great Horned Owl calling nearby and a few soft Elf Owl chatters in the distance, but sadly it was an otherwise unusually quiet night and the Buff-collared Nightjars that typically return by late April did not seem to be yet present. While the lack of nightjars was certainly disappointing, all agreed it was still a worthy adventure with great scenery on the drive in and fantastic stars overhead on the return drive to Nogales.

Saturday, May 4 – After our late return the night before, we made a rather leisurely start today and then spent a full morning birding in the Patagonia area at the Paton's Center for Hummingbirds and along the adjacent Bue Haven Road. Some of the highlights of our time here included Anna's and Violet-crowned Hummingbirds, Dusky-capped Flycatcher, Bushtit; Canyon, Abert's and Green-tailed Towhees, Lark Sparrow, Yellow-breasted Chat and Summer Tanager.

We enjoyed a picnic lunch in the town park and then started traveling east towards the Huachuca Mountains. En route we made a short detour into the Las



Cienegas grasslands preserve, where we found Scott's Oriole and the recently split Chihuahuan Meadowlark. (A Pronghorn along the highway was a mammal highlight as well!) From here we continued on through Sierra Vista to the Ash Canyon Bird Sanctuary. A variety of birds provided close views at the feeders including Bullock's Oriole, Lark Sparrow and Lazuli Bunting – and after an hour wait, the much hoped for Lucifer Hummingbird made an appearance. We then continued on to our comfortable accommodations at the Ramsey Canyon Inn, with a short detour for Scaled and Gambel's Quail en route. Following a dinner prepared on-site by one of the inn's chefs, we wrapped up the day owling along the adjacent road. Here we heard several Whiskered Screech-Owls and located a pair of Elf Owls that seemed to be nesting in a streamside Arizona Sycamore.



Sunday, May 5 – We started our birding today with an optional early morning visit to the nearby Brown Canyon Ranch, where we found Gray and Ash-throated Flycatchers, Verdin, Eastern Bluebird and many others. After a return to the inn for breakfast, we simply walked into the adjacent Ramsey Canyon Preserve to continue our morning's birding and were quickly rewarded with scope views of an Elegant Trogon near the visitor center. From here we continued up the trail to the Bledsoe Loop, where a pair of Northern Pygmy-Owls provided another significant highlight of our time in the preserve.

Later in the morning we traveled by van to the nearby Carr Canyon, where we drove the twisty, but scenic road up to the pine forests in higher elevations. Windy conditions made for challenging birding, but with persistence we located several species of interest, including Spotted Towhee and Grace's, Black-throated Gray and Red-faced Warblers. Following another excellent dinner at the inn, we returned to Carr Canyon for nocturnal birding. Here we found Common Poorwills on the rocky slope adjacent to a lower picnic area and an Elf Owl provided excellent views

adjacent to the parking area. Continue up a little higher, we enjoyed close views of a confiding Whiskered Screech-Owl to wrap up another great day of Southeast Arizona birding.

Monday, May 6 – With Box Canyon as our destination, we departed the Ramsey Canyon Inn this morning. Impromptu stops en route yielded views of Zone-tailed Hawk, Pyrrhuloxia and the very handsome Black-throated Sparrow. Once in the scenic canyon we explored several locations that have been reliable for Five-striped Sparrow in recent years. While we enjoyed views of Rock Wren and both Scott's and Hooded Orioles, it seemed the sparrows were later in arriving this



year, as none were detected by us or others also searching. From here we headed east towards Willcox with stops to enjoy a pair of roadside Greater Roadrunners and at the Benson water treatment ponds, where we added American Wigeon and Eared Grebe to our trip list.

Following lunch and an early check-in at our hotel, we set out for a few hours of birding at the nearby Lake Cochise. A strategic stop along the entrance road yielded our first Western Kingbird, A Chihuahuan Raven showing its white neck feathers and a family group of Bendire's Thrashers. We then slowly circled the "lake" and made a stop at a small adjacent wetland where we found

many new birds for the trip, including Cinnamon Teal, American Avocet, Long-billed Dowitcher, Wilson's and Red-necked Phalaropes, an unexpected Sanderling, Black-crowned Night Heron and White-faced Ibis. Later, after an early dinner at a local Mexican restaurant, we made an optional drive up to the west side of the Chiricahua Mountains at dusk and successfully found Mexican Whip-poor-will and heard a calling Flammulated Owl.

Tuesday, May 7 – Our final full day of the tour was dedicated to birding in the Chiricahua Mountains. Birds seen as we approached the east side included Swainson's Hawk and Loggerhead Shrike. Following a few stops in the lower parts

of Cave Creek Canyon, we started up the road to higher elevations – only to come to a quick halt when Richard noticed a pair of Montezuma Quail on a hillside directly adjacent to the road. After that excitement, we continued up to the junction with Paradise Road, where time spent roadside birding yielded Greater Pewee, Grace's and Red-faced Warblers, Hepatic and Western Tanagers and a pair of Mexican Chickadees. We then continued up and over Onion Saddle and down to Pinery Canyon on the west side of the mountains. Here with the kind assistance of an Arizona birder, we located a day-roosting Spotted Owl in a roadside tree – certainly one of the highlights of the tour! A variety of other birds were also present, including House Wren, Western Flycatcher, Hermit Thrush, Red Crossbill and Yellow-rumped and Townsend's Warblers – all new species for the tour.



Following a picnic lunch at Rustler Park we worked some of the higher locations, where despite the breezy conditions we were able to add new species such as Steller's Jay, Violet-green Swallow, Pygmy Nuthatch and Western Bluebird. We then opted to get out of the wind and returned towards Portal via Paradise Road,



where we made a stop at the George Walker House. Here we enjoyed a variety of birds at the feeders, including the only Juniper Titmouse of the tour. We then continued on to Portal and wrapped up the afternoon with more relaxed birding at Dave Jasper's feeders. A variety of species provided close views, including Blue-throated Mountain-gem, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Bullock's Oriole, Western Tanager and Pyrrhuloxia. Later, after an enjoyable dinner at the Portal Peak Café, we wrapped up the birding for the day with sightings of Western Screech-Owl and Prairie Falcon in Portal and multiple Lesser Nighthawks on the return drive to Willcox.

Wednesday, May 8 – For our final morning together, we planned our departure for the Tucson Airport with enough time to allow for a visit to Mt. Lemmon in the Catalina Mountains. The drive from the lower desert hillsides up to pine forests was worth it for the scenery alone, but an hour of birding at Rose Canyon also allowed us to conclude with a nice mix of montane species. Some of the highlights in the mixed flocks we found here included Plumbeous and Warbling Vireos, Mountain Chickadee, Brown Creeper, Olive Warbler and more Grace's and Red-faced Warblers, two species we had enjoyed multiple times during the tour. Then it was sadly time to pack the binoculars away and we returned to the Tucson airport to say our good-byes after a productive and enjoyable week in the field together.

Bird Sightings List: <https://ebird.org/tripreport/230541>

Tour Summary Photos

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Kip Miller photos

