

Sabrewing Nature Tours
Southeast Arizona: Exploring the Sky Islands
Trip Leader: Eric Ripma
August 3-11, 2018



A Zone-tailed Hawk we saw in Carr Canyon. This guy really put on a show for the whole group!

August 3 – Sweetwater Wetlands and Saguaro National Park

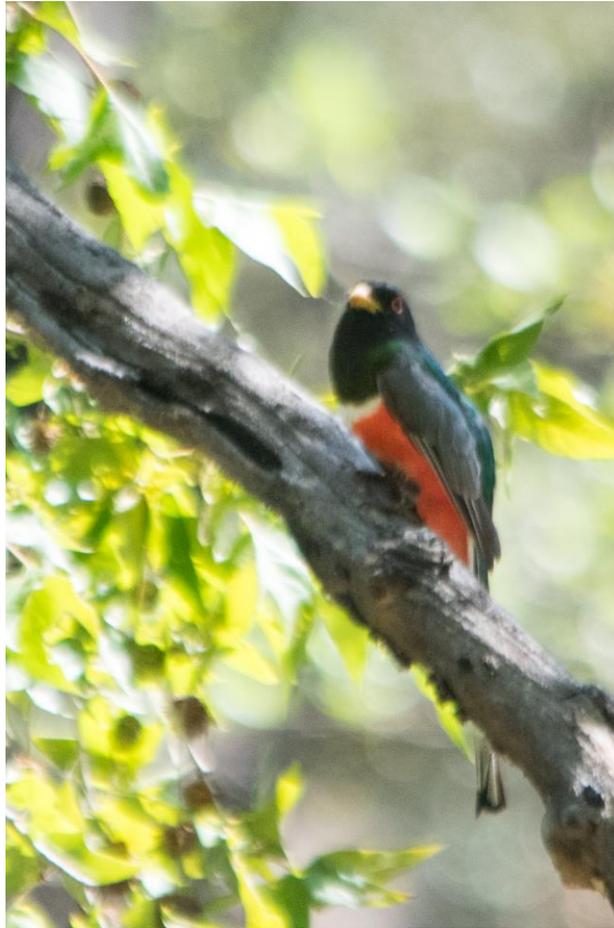
After arriving in Tucson and gathering at the hotel our group headed over to Sweetwater Wetlands for some light afternoon birding. Among many of the common desert/riparian species of the region we saw our first Tropical Kingbird and only Common Gallinules and Green Heron of the trip. There were also a few migrants present such as Western Tanager, Black-headed Grosbeak, and Lazuli Bunting. In the evening we headed over to Saguaro National Park where we enjoyed views of Lesser Nighthawks flying among the saguaros against the backdrop of a setting sun. With just enough light left we headed into town to a location that has Burrowing Owls. We were rewarded with great views of three individuals. It was a great way to end the first evening of birding in Tucson.



The three Burrowing Owls that were seen in Tucson.

August 4 – Saguaro National Park, Tanque Verde Wash, Lake Cochise, and Portal

We started out early this morning to beat some of the desert heat that was sure to come later in the day. Our first stop was in the desert on the northeast side of Tucson. We picked up a few of the desert species we had missed the day before and had good looks at species such as Brown-crested Flycatcher, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, and Curve-billed Thrashers. As the morning proceeded, we dropped into the Tanque Verde Wash to look for some riparian species that nest along this wash. We were able to see our first hummingbirds of the trip: Black-chinned, Anna's, and Broad-billed. We also had good looks at many of the typical riparian species in southeast Arizona. We still hadn't seen a Gilded Flicker, so we headed over to the west side of Tucson and were able to get looks at a couple of individuals. It was starting to get hot at this point, so we grabbed some lunch and started our drive to Portal. We had one stop to make along the way, Lake Cochise. This location can produce practically any water bird you can imagine. The number of shorebirds using the lake on our visit was higher than average and the diversity of ducks was unbelievable for the time of year. American Wigeon, Green-winged Teal, and Redhead were the highlights. In terms of shorebirds, Semipalmated Sandpiper (uncommon migrant) and Willet highlighted a list of 14 species. A Scaled Quail and our only Horned Larks of the trip rounded out a great stop Lake Cochise! After dinner in Portal, we headed out to look for Elf Owls. The singing Common Poorwills at sunset made for a nice backdrop as we waited for dark. After dark, we were able to hear and get glimpses of an Elf Owl in flight, but it never fully cooperated for great looks. On our way back to Portal we found a Western Diamondback Rattlesnake; it was a great way to end the first full day!



The male Elegant Trogon we saw in South Fork Cave Creek Canyon.

August 5 - Stateline Road, Cave Creek Canyon, Barfoot Park, and Portal

As is the usual for this tour we started in the lowlands and headed up into the highlands for the heat of the day. This meant that we started on Stateline Road in the Chihuahuan Desert. Without much trouble we got great looks at both Crissal and Bendire's Thrashers, both drinking out of a puddle in this desert. We also got more looks at Scaled Quail, lots of Cassin's Sparrows, and a bonus Golden Eagle. It was still fairly early in the morning and we had seen all we could have hoped, so we moved into the mountains to look for Elegant Trogons. On our drive up the south fork of Cave Creek Canyon we were lucky enough to run into a couple who were already watching a pair of trogons. We were able to get great views of both the male and female! We also started picking up some other montane species such as Acorn Woodpecker, Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher, Mexican Jay, Painted Redstart, and Hepatic Tanager. After lunch in Portal we headed for the higher elevations of Barfoot Park and surrounding areas. The afternoon was slow, and it took some effort, but we were able to get good looks at a couple Mexican Chickadees. Other highlights included Calliope Hummingbird, Olive, Grace's, Townsend's and Hermit Warblers among more common high-elevation species such as Pygmy Nuthatch and Steller's Jays. A little owling in the evening netted us both Western and Whiskered Screech-Owls, Striped Skunks, a couple Arizona Blond Tarantulas, and a Black-tailed Rattlesnake!

August 6 – Portal-Paradise Road, Whitewater Draw, St. David, and Ash Canyon B&B

We started out the morning birding just outside of Paradise, on Portal-Paradise Road. We were lucky enough to run into a couple flocks on this road which produced Hutton's, Plumbeous and Warbling Vireos, and Nashville, Virginia's, and Black-throated Gray Warblers. While looking for and finally seeing Juniper Titmouse, we were treated to Montezuma Quail singing from the hillsides, but we were

unable to get a look. We surmised that the quail were just up there teasing us. But, just a quarter mile down the road, a pair of quail popped out and we were able to get great looks at this hard-to-find species. Unfortunately, it was time to head west to the Huachuca Mountains. Unsurprisingly, a mid-day trip to Whitewater Draw, failed to locate a previously reported Groove-billed Ani. But we were treated to a large flock of Lazuli Buntings and our only Sora of the trip. A quick trip up to St. David netted us great views of a couple Mississippi Kites, a local breeder in Arizona. In the evening, after arriving in Sierra Vista, we headed down to the Ash Canyon B&B to watch the feeders. We had great looks at both male and female Lucifer and Rivoli's Hummingbirds among a total of six hummingbird species.



One of the male Lucifer Hummingbirds from Ash Canyon!

August 7 – Carr Canyon and Beatty's Guest Ranch

We spent our first morning in the Huachuca Mountains in Carr Canyon. Carr Canyon Road travels from the deserts around Sierra Vista up to 7200 feet which provides the opportunity to see a great diversity of species. We wanted to make it up to the higher elevations early in the morning, so we quickly made our way up the road with a couple highlights including a perched Band-tailed Pigeon. Once we made it to the Reef Campground. In a couple hours of birding we had great views of a pair of Zone-tailed Hawks, great views of Arizona Woodpecker, Greater Pewee, Buff-breasted Flycatcher, and a number of warblers! We spent a couple hours catching up on some much-needed rest during the mid-day heat before heading up to Beatty's Guest Ranch in Miller Canyon. Watching the feeders at Beatty's is always a highlight of a trip to southeast Arizona and this visit was no different. A couple of Violet-crowned Hummingbirds were the highlight but the numbers of hummingbirds present was also very impressive! A Northern Goshawk and great views at Painted Redstart, Canyon Wren, and Summer Tanager were our non-hummingbird highlights. Unfortunately, some storms were moving through the area in the evening and we had to call off our nocturnal birding for the night.



The pair of Rufous-capped Warblers in Hunter Canyon.

August 8 – Hunter Canyon, Patagonia, Amado WTP, and Madera Canyon

We headed to Hunter Canyon first thing in the morning to look for Rufous-capped Warblers. It was a drizzly, cool morning which decreased the bird activity in the canyon. Once we arrived at the Rufous-capped Warbler spot we heard one singing but were unable to get a look. It looked like we were going to have to wait the birds out on this morning. During our wait, another group found a Northern Pygmy-Owl, that provided some great looks. And, a Virginia's Warbler came by for some quick views. At some point we were going to have to leave without seeing the warblers, so we decided that if we didn't see them by 11, we were going to have to leave. But at 10:45 the birds started singing again and eventually came by for some outstanding views! Luckily these birds showed up just in the nick of time. We were all in good spirits on our hike back to the car! It was time for our drive to Green Valley. We had a couple stops on the way over including in Patagonia for Thick-billed Kingbirds which provided great views and at the Amado WTP. Amado proved to be a great stop where we saw a Forster's and Black Tern as well as a Great Egret. This little pond is always worth a visit; you never know what you may see there. In the evening we headed into Madera Canyon. With a little light left we stopped by Proctor Road where we had great views at Varied Bunting. While waiting for dark we heard a couple of Mexican Whip-poor-wills and after dark we quickly heard both screech-owl species. After moving down the road a bit we also got spectacular views of a family group of Whiskered Screech-Owls.



One of the Five-striped Sparrows we saw in Box Canyon.

August 9 – Florida Canyon, Box Canyon, Arivaca Cienega, and Brown Canyon

We spent this morning birding both Florida and Box Canyons. After a slow start at Florida we headed over to Box Canyon. Box Canyon was fantastic and provided great views of Costa's Hummingbird, Five-striped Sparrows and Varied Buntings. We also got looks at Scott's Oriole, our first Rock Wren, and a female Lucifer Hummingbird. We moved east along Box Canyon Road to the grasslands on the east side of the Santa Ritas. We had good looks at many sparrows including Botteri's, Cassin's, and Grasshopper, as well as our first Say's Phoebe of the trip. A couple Greater Roadrunners also put on a great show for us. We were still missing Black-capped Gnatcatcher, so we headed back to Florida Canyon to give this species another shot. It didn't take long before we heard one and then eventually got nice looks at two individuals. Since we were heading over to Brown Canyon in the evening, we stopped at Arivaca Cienega on the way over. It was alive with birds including a Lucy's Warbler (our first of the trip), nesting Thick-billed Kingbirds, and Yellow-billed Cuckoo among many others. We arrived in Brown Canyon just in time to hear the evening chorus of Common Poorwills. We never heard a Buff-collared Nightjar, but we got lucky when we spotted one sitting on the road!



A surprise Brown Pelican that flew over our group!

August 10 – De Anza Trail and Mt. Lemmon

Our last day of the tour started off with a bang while we were birding along the De Anza trail when a Brown Pelican flew over! We then headed up to the north side of Tumacocori NHP, still birding along the De Anza trail. We were quickly rewarded with a pair of Rose-throated Becards that were attending a known nest at this location. Some other highlights included Gray Hawk, Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet, both Common Ground and Inca Doves and more Lucy's Warblers. It was time to head back up to Tucson, but our birding was not over yet. We still hadn't come across a Red-faced Warbler, one of the major targets when birding southeastern Arizona. So, the afternoon was slated to bird on Mt. Lemmon on the north side of Tucson. As soon as we arrived, we ran into a nice flock, but no Red-faced Warbler was to be seen. Unfortunately, rain and wind were moving in, so we spent some time birding from the car without much luck. We had one more gap in the rain before sunset, so we birded up Incinerator Ridge Road. As we got out of the car to bird a small flock, two Red-faced Warblers popped up in the tree right next to us! We were able to enjoy these birds for the next 5 minutes as they slowly foraged low in an oak. This was a great way to end our very successful tour of southeast Arizona.

We ended up recording 208 species, including all the specialties of the region. We were also fortunate enough to see a great diversity of non-avian wildlife including a couple species of rattlesnakes and a White-nosed Coati. It was a great tour!