A Greater Pewee in the Chiricahua Mountains

Arizona
Exploring the Sky Islands

Tour Leader: Eric Ripma
July 30 - August 6, 2022
July 30 – Mount Lemmon

Our tour officially started on this afternoon when our group headed up into the Santa Catalina Mountains on the north side of Tucson. While driving through Tucson, we had to make a quick stop for a Harris’s Hawk that was perched along the road! Once we’d made it up to around 8,000 feet on Mt. Lemmon, we started looking for some high elevation specialties. Before long, we were enjoying great looks at a singing Band-tailed Pigeon. It was fairly quiet overall, but eventually we connected with a number of other species such as Steller’s Jay, Mountain Chickadee, a huge flock of Pygmy Nuthatches, Yellow-eyed Junco, and a number of Western Tanagers. Before long, we headed back down the mountain for dinner in Tucson and to get some rest before the tour really kicked off the next day.

July 31 – Tucson Mountain Park, Sweetwater Wetlands, and Mount Lemmon

After an early breakfast at our hotel, we headed out to load into the van. However, we were held up by a few birds just outside our hotel! We only spent about five minutes, but we quickly racked up a list that included our only Black-crowned Night-Heron of the whole trip, our first Gila Woodpeckers and Cassin’s Kingbirds, and a beautiful male Hooded Oriole. While on our way to Tucson Mountain Park we made a quick stop at a local park where a Clark’s Grebe had been seen recently. We had great views of the grebe and our first views of a number of other common species. Before long we headed over to Tucson Mountain Park to look for some more specialized Sonoran Desert species. A walk through the desert yielded some nice species such as Gambel’s Quail, Gilded...
July 31 – Continued

Flicker, great looks at Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, Rufous-winged and Black-throated Sparrows, and a Pyrrhuloxia. Afterwards, a brief stop at Sweetwater Wetlands resulted in great views of several Verdin, our first Tropical Kingbirds, and many Yellow Warblers. By the late morning we started our drive across Tucson and up Mt. Lemmon. We had a wonderful lunch at the Iron Door where we were entertained by the buzzing and chipping of many Broad-tailed Hummingbirds visiting their feeders. Afterwards, we headed to another trail where the birding was a bit slow, but we eventually had great views of Red-faced Warblers, Painted Redstarts, Hermit Warbler, and a Cordilleran Flycatcher. We headed down Mt. Lemmon and made a stop at Windy Point to take in the view. The view was great; however a cooperative Zone-tailed Hawk and Rock Wren stole the show. At this point, it was time to head to Tubac where we would be staying for the next two nights.

August 1 – Amado WTP, Montosa, Florida, and Madera Canyons

When you’re staying at Tubac Golf Resort, it’s always difficult to leave in the morning, since it’s so birdy. This morning was no different and in about 15 minutes we had seen 20 species just outside our rooms. Vermilion Flycatcher, Tropical and Cassin’s Kingbirds, and Violet-green Swallow were some of the highlights. We made a quick stop at Amado WTP on our way to Montosa Canyon and picked up a few waterbirds in addition to our first Black Phoebe, Lark Sparrow, and Lazuli Bunting. A few minutes after arriving in
August 1 – Continued

Montosa Canyon, we were listening to a couple of Five-striped Sparrows. We were unable to see the Five-striped Sparrows for a while and instead were enjoying views of White-throated Swifts, Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet, Varied Bunting, and Canyon Wren. It was time to focus on the Five-striped Sparrows and it wasn’t too long before we had long scope views of one singing! In the afternoon, we spent our time birding around the Santa Rita Lodge. We had our first looks at the magnificent Rivoli’s Hummingbird and also enjoyed our first looks at many Mexican Jays. Other highlights consisted of Brown-crested Flycatcher, a male Scott’s Oriole, Hepatic Tanagers, and a female Black-headed Grosbeak. After a short break at the hotel, we enjoyed dinner in Tubac and saw our first Blue Grosbeak on the way in!
August 2 – De Anza Trail, Patagonia Roadside Rest, Paton Center, Las Cienegas NCA

We began our day along the Santa Cruz River on the De Anza Trail. Our first stop was at the Tubac Bridge. Unfortunately, recent rains made the trails slick and muddy, so we didn't make it far before turning around. Before turning around, we had great views at Bridled Titmouse, Northern Rough-winged Swallow, many Phainopepla, Abert's Towhee, and Yellow-breasted Chat. We had planned to visit a Rose-throated Becard nest, but due to the trail conditions, we would have to visit a different nest later in the day. We also stopped by Santa Gertrudis Lane before heading towards Patagonia. The resident Thick-billed Kingbirds put on a show, and we also enjoyed views of Inca Doves, Vermilion Flycatchers, and a Lucy's Warbler.

August 2 – Continued

We made a stop at the Patagonia Roadside Rest to try for Rose-throated Becard again. After a short wait and some walking around the site, we had great views of a female visiting the old nest and collecting nesting material. There was also a Violet-crowned Hummingbird exhibiting the same behavior as the female becard. It's always nice to hummingbirds in their natural habitat, away from feeders! After lunch we headed to the Paton Center in Patagonia where we enjoyed much closer looks at Violet-crowned Hummingbirds and good looks at Yellow-breasted Chats visiting the feeders. We started driving east towards Sierra Vista with a short stop at Las Cienegas NCA. Without too much effort, we enjoyed great views of Cassin’s and Botteri’s Sparrows singing and displaying in the grasslands. A handful of Pronghorn also entertained as we were looking for the sparrows. Afterwards, we made our way to Sierra Vista and a great dinner.
August 3 – Carr Canyon, Ash Canyon

We began this morning by driving south to Carr Canyon. The best birding, at the higher elevations, had to wait while we picked up a handful of good birds on our way up. Our first Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher perched out in the open for great views and while we were watching a male and female Scott’s Oriole perched up on the opposite side of the road! A family group of Bewick’s also put on a show and allowed great looks. We slowly made our way up this narrow, mountain road to the Reef Townsite Campground at 7,200 feet. Before long we were surrounded by a large mixed flock that included Hutton’s and Plumbeous Vireos, Bridled Titmouse, Bushtit, White-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, and Virginia’s and Grace’s Warblers. Also in the area, we had good looks at Calliope and Rufous Hummingbirds, Zone-tailed Hawk, Arizona and Hairy Woodpeckers, Western Wood-Pewee, Buff-breasted Flycatcher, and Woodhouse’s Scrub-Jay. A short walk up the road resulted in great looks at Painted Redstart and two Greater Pewees. It was a great morning of birding! After lunch, we spend the afternoon relaxing and watching the feeders at the Ash Canyon Bird Sanctuary. A male Lucifer Hummingbird was the main highlight, but our only sighting of Wild Turkeys on the trip was also a highlight.
August 4 – Miller Canyon, Benson, Lake Cochise, Chiricahuas

Heading out this morning, one of our big misses thus far was Greater Roadrunner. Our first stop, the lower parts of Miller Canyon Road, tend to be a good spot to see this species, so we were hopeful. Before long, a bird ran across the road, almost a roadrunner, but it turned out there was a flock of Gambel’s Quail. But, within another minute we were watching not one, but two Greater Roadrunners. And, just down the road, one more Greater Roadrunner allowed close views. We headed up the road to Beatty’s Guest Ranch where we spent a short time watching the feeders where we saw six species of hummingbirds. Afterwards, we hiked up the canyon to look for White-eared Hummingbird. Unfortunately, the hummingbirds weren’t around on this day, but we did see Arizona Woodpecker, Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher, and Virginia’s Warblers among quite a few other species. It was time to start our drive over to Portal. We stopped for lunch in Benson at the San Pedro Golf Course where we added Cinnamon Teal and Green Heron. After lunch, a quick stop at the Benson STP added a several waterbird species such as Wood Duck, Redhead, Black-necked Stilt, and Wilson’s Phalaropes as well as a Gray Hawk. And, on our way to the Chiricahuas, a stop at Lake Cochise added a handful of shorebirds including American Avocet, both yellowlegs species, Stilt Sandpipers, and a few others. The rest of our drive to Portal resulted in brief views of Scaled Quail and stunning views. After dinner, we headed out for some nocturnal birding. Thus far, weather had prevented us from looking for any owls and nightjars. We spent a couple hours in the mountains and heard a couple of Whiskered Screech-Owls and a Mexican Whip-poor-will, but neither species cooperated for good views. It was a nice night out though!

August 5 – Stateline Road, South Fork of Cave Creek, Barfoot Area

In order to beat the heat, we started on Stateline Road in the lower elevation desert below Portal. As we were driving there, we had a few Scaled Quail right along the road! Once on Stateline, we picked up our first Chihuahuan Ravens and many Cassin’s Sparrows! We also had Chihuahuan Meadowlarks, which had just been announced were split from Eastern Meadowlarks. On Sulphur Canyon Road we found our target, when we had good looks at multiple Bendire’s Thrashers and added our only Dusky Flycatcher, an uncommon migrant through the area. By this time, it was warming up, so we headed to Cave Creek to look for Elegant Trogons. As we were slowly driving up South Fork, a trogon flew up! As soon as we hopped out of the van, we were watching a juvenile and an adult female. Unfortunately, no male was around, but we spent our time enjoying these birds and even came back to the same spot later and watched some more. The canyon also provided great views of Blue-throated Mountain-gem, Grace’s, Black-throated Gray,
August 5 – Continued

and Red-faced Warbler, and Painted Redstart! After lunch in Portal, we headed to the higher elevations of the Chiricahuas. Our first stop at Barfoot Junction resulted in a nice flock that contained our first Western Bluebirds, a couple Greater Pewees, and many Pygmy Nuthatches. We enjoyed the cool weather throughout the afternoon and continued seeing some nice birds including another Greater Pewee, Violet-green Swallows, and great looks at Steller’s Jays. After dinner, a couple of us went out for some nocturnal birding along the Portal-Paradise Road. Vocalizing Common Poorwills, great views of Western Screech-Owl, and a kangaroo rat made it a nice evening!
On our last full day of the tour, we had a handful of species that we still needed to spend some time looking for. So, we took a route through the Chiricahuas that would give us the best chance at many of these species. Our first birding while driving the Portal-Paradise Road resulted in some nice variety including our first Say’s Phoebes, Gray Flycatcher, and another Virginia’s Warbler. We stopped at the George Walker House where a White-eared Hummingbird had been regular in recent weeks. We enjoyed good looks at Juniper and Bridled Titmice, and Hepatic Tanager among others, but the White-eared wasn’t coming in. As we got up to go, one last look back revealed it! The White-eared

had finally arrived! We all enjoyed great, long looks before heading back to the van. Our drive out of Paradise and into more forested habitats finally yielded our first Mexican Chickadees. We had surprisingly not seen a single one at the high elevations the previous day. A quick stop at the Southwestern Research Station on our way back down to Portal resulted in good views of the previously reported Berylline Hummingbird. After lunch, we headed up and over the Chiricahuas, made a quick stop at Lake Cochise, and ended with a delicious dinner in Tucson. The birding throughout the afternoon was a bit slow but the views and company made the time pass all too quickly.

Our tour ended with a total of 180 species, several species below our average, but the great views of many species and almost all of the specialties made for a great tour!