Southeast Arizona
Exploring the Sky Islands

Tour Leader: Eric Ripma  August 4-11, 2017
**August 4 - Saguaro National Park**

After meeting at the Tucson International Airport, our group headed over to Saguaro National Park to enjoy the typical birds of the Sonoran Desert. It was a beautiful evening to enjoy the sights and sounds of the desert. The usual suspects, such as Gambel’s Quail, Gila Woodpecker, Brown-crested Flycatcher, Verdin, Black-tailed Gnatcatcher and many more, showed themselves in quick succession. And, we had many great views of Rufous-winged Sparrows, a specialty of the region.

![Red-faced Warbler](image)

**August 5 – Tucson, Saguaro National Park, Sweetwater Wetlands, Lake Cochise, Portal**

We started out this morning looking for Burrowing Owls within the city limits. We had great views of 3 individuals, all while parked at a Circle K! We had more time scheduled to bird the Sonoran Desert so we headed back to Saguaro National Park. We were able to pick up a couple of Harris’s Hawks and most of the regulars of this desert region. It was starting to get hot at this point in the morning, but we had one more spot to bird before leaving Tucson, Sweetwater Wetlands. Here we found our rarest bird for the area, a Gray Catbird. We were also able to study a Tropical Kingbird and many of the common riparian species of southeast Arizona. It was time for our longest drive of the trip at this point. We were headed to the Chiricahua Mountains! We also had some time scheduled for a stop at Lake Coshise in Willcox. This location is great for waterbirds and almost any species is possible. Among the 8 shorebird species present, a Semipalmated Sandpiper (an uncommon migrant in AZ) was the highlight. Other highlights included Cinnamon Teal, Scaled Quail, and Cassin’s Sparrow. It was time to continue our drive to Portal where we arrived in the late afternoon which allowed for some down time and a bit of birding around town including some owling which produced Western-Screech and Elf Owls.

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**August 6 – Chiricahua Mountains, Stateline Road**

We started out this morning in Cave Creek Canyon which proved to be a bit slow, but we did encounter our first Bridled Titmice, Grace’s Warblers, and Painted Redstarts of the trip. We slowly made our way up the mountains to a spot for Mexican Chickadees. In addition to great looks at Mexican Chickadees we also had spectacular looks at a Red-faced Warbler. We also saw some other specialties such as Arizona Woodpecker, Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher, Yellow-eyed Junco, and Hepatic Tanager. In the afternoon we headed back to Cave Creek Canyon to look for the beautiful Elegant Trogon. While the canyon was very quiet on this evening, we did luck into good views of one trogon! In the evening we headed down into the desert. Great views of a Barn Owl made this night venture well worth it.

**August 7 – Stateline Road, Barfoot Park, Cochise Lake, Miller Canyon**

We began our birding this morning in the desert below Portal. Due to a record summer of rains in the region, the numbers of Botteri’s and Cassin’s Sparrows was much higher than is typical. We enjoyed many individuals of both species. We were also lucky enough to see a family group of Greater Roadrunners. Watching the young roadrunners was a blast! Good looks at Scaled Quails and Swainson’s Hawks added to a great morning of birding. From here we were headed up to the high Chiricahuas. We spent most of the afternoon birding in the pleasant temperatures of this high elevation location. Great looks at Greater Pewees, Mexican Chickadees, Pygmy Nuthatch, Townsend’s and Hermit Warblers, and Hepatic Tanagers made us enjoy the cool temperatures even more. Unfortunately, it was time to leave the Chiricahuas but we had a chance to make another stop at Cochise Lake. There is always a quick turnover of birds at this location and it was no different this time. We had a number of different species (from our first stop a couple days prior) including Baird’s Sandpipers, Wilson’s Phalaropes, Solitary Sandpiper, Say’s Phoebe, and Bank Swallow. We arrived in Sierra Vista in time for a great dinner and a little nocturnal birding in Miller Canyon which provided spectacular views of Whiskered Screech-Owls.
August 8 – Carr, Miller, Hunter, and Ash Canyons

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. Our highlights on the way up included Woodhouse’s Scrub-Jay, Painted Redstarts, and great looks at a pair of Scott’s Orioles! However, the most interesting birds were seen once we reached the top of the road. Tufted Flycatcher, a species that is only known from a couple locations north of the US/Mexico border, was the main target. Shortly after arriving, we heard one and within a few minutes had great views of one Tufted Flycatcher. We also saw many other species including Zone-tailed Hawk, Band-tailed Pigeon, Buff-breasted Flycatchers, Olive Warbler, and Hepatic Tanagers. After Carr Canyon, it was on to Miller Canyon and the hummingbird feeders at Beatty’s Guest Ranch. Other than the eight species of hummingbirds coming to the feeders, highlights included Gray Hawk and Black-throated Gray Warblers. After a quick stop for lunch in town, we headed up Hunter Canyon. Our target here was Rufous-capped Warbler which we were fortunate enough to hear but were not able to see. The mid-day heat dissuaded us from spending too much time at this location, so we headed to the Ash Canyon Bed and Breakfast. It was a pleasant evening sitting in the shade and watching the feeders and our target, the Lucifer Hummingbird, made several appearances.
August 9 – San Pedro River, Sierra Vista EOP, Patagonia, Amado WTP, Florida Canyon

Our morning started along the San Pedro River where migrants were starting to trickle back south and many of the typical riparian species were still showing well. Many Lazuli Buntings and a Pacific-slope Flycatcher were the most interesting migrants while birds such as Vermilion Flycatcher, Yellow-breasted Chat, and Blue Grosbeak added color to the morning. After leaving the San Pedro we made a quick stop by the Sierra Vista EOP where we had great views of Say’s Phoebe and a Yellow-headed Blackbird. It was time to head west towards the Santa Rita Mountains, with a few stops on the way. Some of the birds along the way included Violet-crowned Hummingbird, Thick-billed Kingbird, and a continuing Brown Pelican at Amado WTP. After checking in to the Santa Rita Lodge, we had one more stop at Florida Canyon where we connected on a few species such as Montezuma Quail, Varied Bunting, and Hooded Oriole.

August 10 – Montosa Canyon, Amado WTP, Santa Cruz River

We had a change of plans on this morning due to a Five-striped Sparrow being seen in Montosa Canyon. So, obviously our starting point had to be the Five-striped Sparrow. As soon as we stepped out of the car, we heard one singing and over the next couple hours we had great views. While watching the sparrow we also had our best looks at Black-capped Gnatcatchers on the trip. Another quick stop at Amado WTP netted a family group of Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks and a couple Tropical Kingbirds. Our next target was a nesting pair of Rose-throated Becards on the De Anza trail.
August 10 – Continued

watching the pair for as long as we wanted, we started heading out. Unexpectedly, a Common Black-Hawk flew over the road and we were able to pull over for some great looks at this beautiful raptor. The rest of the afternoon was spent birding locations in the Santa Cruz River valley. We ran in to quite a few migrants including Cassin’s Vireo, Wilson’s Warbler, Lazuli Bunting, and Western Tanagers.

August 11 – Madera Canyon, Florida Canyon, De Anza Trail, Saguaro National Park

This was our last day of birding before everyone headed home. We started out in Madera Canyon where we were able to hear Elegant Trogon and had great views at 50+ White-throated Swifts. We then headed over to Florida Canyon where we had our best views of Northern Beardless-Tyrannulets, Black-capped Gnatcatcher, MacGillivray’s, Nashville, and Black-throated Gray Warblers, and a few Varied Buntings. Surprisingly, we still hadn’t seen Lucy’s Warbler, so we headed back to the De Anza trail where we ran into one after much searching but still didn’t get a good look at the bird. It was mid-day at this point, so we headed back north towards Tucson. Another species we still hadn’t seen was Gilded Flicker, so we spent the evening in Saguaro National Park. The Gilded Flickers didn’t make it easy, but we eventually got good views of one individual. The sun setting over the saguaros made for a great ending to this bird-filled trip!