Arizona
Bird Photography in the Sky Islands

Tour Leaders: Brian Zwiebel and Jamie Cunningham
April 16-23, 2021

Black-throated Sparrow
We were excited to offer a new photography trip in 2021, Arizona: Bird Photography in the Sky Islands! Our group of 4 arrived in Phoenix and started off the trip with a quick trip to a local park photograph Rosy-faced Lovebirds before heading south towards the lowland desert area around Green Valley.

Our first day we set up at a private feeder set, both morning and afternoon and had an amazing time photographing the desert specialties there! Gambel’s Quail, Pyrrhuloxia, Lark Sparrow, Curve-billed Thrasher, White-winged Doves.. the list could go on and on it seemed. We had so many birds and so many opportunities to photograph them at close range. The added ability to have control over the background and perches made it even better. After our fun day, we set up our cameras to photograph bats overnight. It was incredible to go through images the next morning and see what we all had gotten.
Our next morning was at higher elevation at another private blind location. We had visits from Orange-crowned Warblers, Mexican Jays, and even a Coati! The group split up in the afternoon, with several participants photographing reptiles at the previous day’s photo blind and the other half checking out the feeders at Madera Canyon. Madera can be tough for photographing, but with a little patience, nice images can be made. Acorn Woodpeckers and Rivoili’s Hummingbirds were some of the favorites!

We had an early start the next with a trip to an area which we photographed Cinnamon Teal, Lucy’s Warbler, Cactus Wren, and the stunning Vermillion Flycatcher.
The canyons around Madera are legendary for amazing birds and we spent our next two days exploring the area and photographing birds like Northern Beardless Tyrannulet, Cassin’s Kingbird, Audubon’s Oriole, Black-throated Sparrow, and Ash-throated Flycatcher. Our group had a nice lunch then moved northwards to Mt Lemmon. Our first evening we enjoyed a wonderful meal cooked by leader Brian and scouted around for shooting sites for the next day.

Mt Lemmon is such a change from where we had spent our last few days. The long leaf pines were full of specialties like Grace’s Warbler, Red-faced Warbler and Olive Warbler. We had lots of up close looks at Yellow-eyed Junco and Pygmy Nuthatch. The wind was a challenge at times, so we moved downhill and found lots of new opportunities like Black-throated Gray Warbler and a Black-chinned Sparrow!
All participants were signed up for the Sierra Vista trip extension so we packed up and drove to the lovely Huachuca Mountains. The first morning we had a private photo blind to enjoy Black-headed Grosbeaks, Bridled Titmouse, Lesser Goldfinch, Lazuli Buntings, and Gila Woodpeckers. Later that afternoon we got permission to shoot a feeder at a private residence, where like clockwork, Scaled Quail visit every afternoon. What a great bird to photograph at such close range.
The next morning we looked for Montezuma Quail and headed up the mountain where we found Buff-breasted Flycatcher, Hutton’s Vireo, Bushtit, and Arizona Woodpecker. We spent the afternoon at feeders where we added several new birds to the photo list like Black Phoebe, Violet-crowned Hummingbird, and Inca Dove. The biggest surprise was a Rufous-backed Robin that made a brief appearance.

With our time coming to a close, we made a final stop the next morning for Phainopepppla, Verdin, and Cactus Wren before we said our goodbyes. We always look forward to the next time we get to visit the amazing areas of Southeast Arizona!
Join us for the opportunity to photograph birds in the best spots Arizona has to offer!

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