



Red-faced Warbler

Arizona

Exploring the Sky Islands

Tour Leader: Eric Ripma

July 29 - August 6, 2024

July 29 – Mt. Lemmon

After our group met, had lunch, and checked into our hotel near the airport, we started our tour by heading up Mt. Lemmon in the Santa Catalina Mountains, north of Tucson. We started on Mt. Bigelow and as soon as we parked and got out of the car, we had a big mixed flock! Red-faced Warblers surrounded us and over the course of a couple hours we had good looks at many species! Mountain Chickadees, three species of nuthatches, many Yellow-eyed Juncos and six species of warblers including Virginia's, Grace's, Black-throated Gray, Hermit, and Painted Redstarts. Despite our luck, we were unable to find the Short-tailed Hawks that have been in this area for the last couple of years. On our way down the mountain, we made a stop at the Butterfly Trail. There weren't too many birds present, but we did see our only Band-tailed Pigeon of the tour and our first Hepatic Tanager. After dinner in Tucson, we were all ready to get out early the next morning and see some of the birds that live in the Sonoran Desert.



Black-tailed Gnatcatcher

July 30 – Tucson Mountain Park, Sarasota Trailhead, Sweetwater Wetlands, Benson WTP, Willcox

We started early on this morning to beat the heat of the Sonoran Desert. Our first stop was in Tucson Mountain Park where we picked up many of the specialties of this habitat. After a short walk through the desert, we had good looks at Gambel's Quail, Gila Woodpecker, Verdin, Cactus Wren, Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, Curve-billed Thrasher, Black-throated Sparrows, and Pyrrhuloxia. We also had good luck with some of the less common species such as Lesser Nighthawk (not usually active in this late in the morning), several Black-tailed Gnatcatchers, and a Scott's Oriole visiting a pud-

dle in the road! Afterwards we made a stop on the south side of the Tucson Mountains where our target, the Costa's Hummingbird, provided good views. Before lunch, we made a stop at Sweetwater Wetlands. While the birding was fairly slow, we did have great looks at a couple of young Soras and a colorful Vermilion Flycatcher. After a delicious lunch in Tucson, we started our drive to Portal. On the way, we stopped at the Benson Water Treatment Plant and Lake Cochise. We enjoyed many species of waterbirds including nine species of shorebirds and several species of ducks. After checking in to the Portal Peak Lodge and a nice dinner, we headed out for a little owling. We heard some distant Common Poorwills, a very close Elf Owl, and had great views of a pair of Western Screech-Owls!

July 31 – Portal, Stateline Road, Willow Tank, Cave Creek Canyon, George Walker House, Southwestern Research Station

It started out cool, cloudy, and windy on this morning. While spending a few minutes outside our hotel we watched several species of hummingbirds including a Rufous, a flyover Peregrine Falcon, Cassin's Kingbirds, and a pair of Hepatic Tanagers. Birding was rather slow early in the morning in the desert along Stateline Road. Many Black-throated Sparrows and a Lucy's Warbler were among the highlights. Some late morning birding along the South Fork of Cave Creek produced good looks at Painted Redstart, some high-flying White-throated Swifts, and a couple Blue-throated Mountain-gems. As always, the views in this canyon were spectacular! We didn't have time to hike up canyon, so we didn't see any Elegant Trogons. We knew we would be coming back to this location the next morning in search of the trogons.



White-eared Hummingbird

After lunch, we made the scenic drive to Paradise to visit the feeders at the George Walker House. After greeting their dogs and getting situated close to the feeders, it didn't take long for the target, White-eared Hummingbird to arrive at one of the feeders. During our time visiting this great birding yard, the White-eared made several visits providing great views for all. An Arizona Woodpecker also gave our group great views! Afterwards, we headed over to the feeders at the Southwestern Research Station, but we ran into a nice flock on our way. As soon as we heard a Mexican Chickadee, everyone got out of the van and we great views of several chickadees, Hutton's Vireos, and Bridled Titmice! A short wait at the Southwestern Research Station resulted in repeated good, but brief views of the continuing Berylline Hummingbird and great views at Blue-throated Mountain-gems! After dinner, a few of us went out in the evening and had great views at a Whiskered Screech-Owl and heard several Mexican Whip-poor-wills.

August 1 – South Fork of Cave Creek Canyon, Stateline Road, Barfoot Junction

While everyone was getting ready in the morning, a few of us spent some time birding from the parking lot of the hotel. An adult male Calliope Hummingbird visited the feeders several times and a pair of Hepatic Tanagers spent some time feeding in the tree above the hotel. Before long, we were ready to head up to Cave Creek in search of the spectacular Elegant Trogon. After a short hike up canyon, we began to hear the distinctive barking song of two trogons! Eventually we found one and had great views as it preened and sang from a low perch. While in the canyon we also had good views of another specialty, the Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher. It was a great morning in the canyon! Since we had seen our targets quickly, we headed back to Stateline Road where we had missed two



Botteri's Sparrow

species of thrashers the day before. We had much better results on this morning with scope views of one Crissal Thrasher. It looked like we would miss seeing Bendire's Thrasher, but just a little ways up the road, one Bendire's flew across the road and perched up for good views for our group!

After lunch packing up and lunch at Portal Peak Lodge, we drove up to the high elevations of the Chiricahuas. After a quick shopping stop at the Southwester Research Station Gift Shop, we made our way to Barfoot Junction. The birding was great, and it didn't take long until we had a singing Red Crossbill in the scope! Other highlights included Violet-green Swallow, Western Bluebird, and several close Grace's Warblers. On our way out of the east side of the Chiricahuas, we made a brief stop and had great looks at Botteri's and Cassin's Sparrows. By the early evening, we had made our way to Sierra Vista where we would be staying for the next two nights.

August 2 – Carr Canyon, Ash Canyon Bird Sanctuary, Coronado National Memorial

Our first stop on this morning was Carr Canyon. As usual, the road up to the high elevations here was rather rough and we were unable to make it all the way to the top (the first time I haven't been able to make it up)! Luckily, we were close enough to make a short hike to the Reef Townsite Campground where we spent the morning birding. On the way we had good looks at Eastern Bluebird and we quickly found a Buff-breasted Flycatcher, but it wasn't all that cooperative and we were hopeful we would have better looks. Soon after a Greater Pewee perched in the open, but quickly took off before the whole group could see it. We would definitely need some more cooperative birds! A walk further up the road found us watching a female Olive Warbler feeding a fledgling! We were able to watch these two for a long time before we decided to head back to the campground. This next pass through the campground resulted in much better looks at both Buff-breasted Flycatcher and Greater Pewee! We also had good looks at Plumbeous Vireo and brief views of Bushtit and Virginia's Warbler.

By the late morning, it was time to head down the mountain and back to Sierra Vista for lunch. After lunch, we headed to Ash Canyon Bird Sanctuary to look for Lucifer Hummingbirds. After we arrived and settled into some shaded seats, it didn't take long for a Lucifer to visit the feeders. During our time an adult male made multiple visits and allowed for some great views. While watching and waiting for the Lucifer, we had a good chance to study and become familiar with a few other hummingbird species as well including Anna's, Black-chinned, and Broad-billed. The other highlight during our visit was a very cooperative Lucy's Warbler that visited one of the water features for a bath.

In the early evening, we made a drive through Coronado National Monument to look for Montezuma Quails. Unfortunately, we didn't get lucky with the quail, but we did have some great views of the surrounding mountains and the border. On the way back down, we had great looks at a Greater roadrunner! It was a great way to end a day of birding in the Huachucas!



Greater Roadrunner

August 3 – Miller Canyon, Las Cienegas NCA, Harshaw Canyon, Paton Center for Hummingbirds

On our way to Miller Canyon, we made a quick stop on a side street to look for Scaled Quail. We had already had brief views of this species, but we were hoping for better views and photos. It didn't take long before we found a couple in one of the yards along the road. We continued on to Miller Canyon so we would beat the heat for our hike up the canyon. Our target along the trail was a continuing Flame-colored Tanager. A birder that was heading back down canyon, let us know they had just had a tanager a little further up. We heard one as soon as we arrived at the spot and had great views of this rarity! On our way back down, we visited Beatty's Guest Ranch to watch their hummingbird feeders. While the activity level at the feeders was rather slow, we had great looks at our first Violet-crowned Hummingbirds of the tour. This was our 13th species of hummingbird for the trip!

By the late morning, we started our drive to Sonoita with a stop at the grasslands of Las Cienegas NCA. One of our first birds once we arrived was an Ash-throated Flycatcher, our first of the tour. Over the next half hour or so we added several new birds for the trip including a Solitary Sandpiper and a pair of Lark Buntings. After lunch in Sonoita, we continued west to Patagonia and on to Harshaw Canyon to visit a Rose-throated Becard nest. With storms passing to our north, we had clear, but hot weather for our visit. A pair of Thick-billed Kingbirds entertained, and a Yellow-billed Cuckoo hid behind the leaves as we watched for the becards. After a bit of a wait, the becard called and popped out for a clear view! Unfortunately, it didn't stay long and wasn't seen again.



Flame-colored Tanager

In the late afternoon, we visited the Paton Center in Patagonia. On our way, we saw our only Mississippi Kites of the trip and our first Black Vulture (although Jim had a photo of one from Harshaw!). We crossed a dry wash to arrive at the Paton Center and enjoyed good looks at many species visiting the feeders such as Violet-crowned Hummingbirds, Yellow-breasted Chats, and a couple of Abert's Towhees. It was time to make our way to Tubac where we would be staying for the next couple of nights. However, the wash was far from dry and unsafe to cross! We had about an hour's wait at the Paton Center until the water had lowered enough to cross!



The Flooded Wash

August 4 – Box Canyon, Florida Canyon, Amado WTP, Tubac Golf Resort, Santa Rita Lodge

Our first stop on this morning was Box Canyon, located in the northern foothills of the Santa Rita Mountains. On the way, we ran into a large migrant flock of Bullock's Oriole! Once we arrived in Box Canyon we heard our target, Five-striped Sparrows, as soon as we got out of the car. After a short wait, we had good looks at a singing Five-striped! As we walked up the canyon we also came across a couple of Varied Buntings! These buntings are one of the most beautiful birds in this area so it's always nice to see them at close range. Our next stop in Box was at the old dam area. It was rather birdy, and we enjoyed good views of a family of Thick-billed Kingbirds, many Hooded Orioles and Vermilion Flycatchers, and a flyover Gray Hawk! As we were heading back for lunch we made a brief stop at Florida Canyon, but it was rather warm by late morning and the birding was a bit slow. We also made a brief stop at Amado WTP on our way back to Tubac and enjoyed good views of Lazuli Buntings, Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks, and several species of swallows!



Gray Hawk

After lunch at our hotel, the Tubac Golf Resort, we had a little break, before a couple of us met up for some birding around the grounds. A couple Tropical Kingbirds and a Bronzed Cowbird were our highlights. Once the whole group had gathered, we spent the afternoon around and at the feeders of the Santa Rita Lodge. We enjoyed good looks at several species of hummingbirds including the Rivoli's, a flyover Zone-tailed Hawk, and a few Black-headed Grosbeaks.

August 5 – De Anza Trail, Tubac Golf Resort, Iron Door, Mt. Lemmon

We started this day along the Santa Cruz River where we were unsuccessful in finding a Green Kingfisher, but we did see many other species including Bewick's Wrens, Abert's Towhees, Bronzed Cowbird, and a pair of Summer Tanagers. We also spent some time birding from the Tubac Bridge and enjoyed a long list of species coming in for a bath in the river! Common Ground Dove, Song Sparrow, Yellow-breasted Chat, and Lucy's and Yellow Warblers all visited, while many other species were seen in the trees overhead.

After picking up some breakfast, we returned to our hotel to pack up and to take a walk around the property. Some of the group hadn't seen a Tropical Kingbird yet, so it was great to have good looks at two. We decided to spend the afternoon on Mt. Lemmon to look for a few new species including the Short-tailed Hawk we had missed on the first afternoon. We headed up to the high elevations to go to lunch at the Iron Door Restaurant. While enjoying a delicious lunch, we watched the many hummingbirds visiting the feeders. Many Broad-tailed and Anna's visited along with several Rufous and one Rivoli's. We even had a brief flyover Zone-tailed Hawk. After lunch we visited a nearby spot and saw several Black-chinned Sparrows. Our last stop on Mt. Bigelow Road was very productive. A Yellow-rumped Warbler foraged at eye level, a Red-faced Warbler showed off, five Red-tailed Hawks played in the wind at eye level, and two Peregrine Falcons interacting in flight! Eventually we ran into a mixed flock and added our first Townsend's Warbler. While watching the flock we heard the Short-tailed Hawk and eventually found it for great perched views! It was a great way to end our tour. Afterwards we enjoyed a great dinner at El Charro Cafe, one of the best restaurants in Tucson!



Short-tailed Hawk