

# Southeast Arizona: Sky Island Fall Sampler With Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures



**November 9 – 15, 2020**

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Fall is a stunning time to visit Southeast Arizona's Sky Island mountain ranges, when fall color decorates the stunning Chiricahua and Huachuca Mountains' canyons. As other parts of the continent turn towards winter, November here still boasts warm days as maples turn red, cottonwoods yellow, and sycamores shine burnt sienna. Nights are crisp and host dark skies with inspiring star views. This tour takes in time at two premier birding lodges.

Southeast Arizona is home terrain for Naturalist Journeys and we're excited to share our favorite places. This is also an emerging wine region, so you may want to try some local varietals as we feast in complement to our blend of Southwestern birding, geology, history, hiking, archeology, and more!

This is a week-long birding trip based out of two lodges, and we add some local sightseeing to take in the scenic beauty which accompanies our birding.

Visit the Amerind Foundation, Chiricahua National Monument, the historic mining town of Bisbee (now an artist's haven) and Cave Creek Canyon at Portal, one of the most scenic canyons in the state. Color surrounds us on walking excursions up Cave Creek, Ramsey, and Miller Canyons. Hummingbirds still linger at several popular feeder sites — let the birds come to you!

Winter birding in Southeast Arizona can be terrific. Wintering Sandhill Cranes number in the tens of thousands; we watch them fly-in at sunset to Whitewater Draw. We also watch them field in fields, alongside wintering raptors in the Sulphur Springs Valley. Sparrows and allies winter in profusion, many from the Great Plains region. Specialties we look for include Baird's Sparrow, Chestnut-collared Longspur and Sprague's Pipit. Raptors abound: Red-tailed Hawks of varied color phases, Ferruginous Hawk, Prairie Falcon, Peregrine, Merlin and more. Throughout our travels, we enjoy delicious, catered meals and dining at our favorite local restaurants.

## Tour Highlights

- ✓ Visit two famous birding lodges of Southeast Arizona.
- ✓ Find great fall birding at hotspots like Ramsey and Miller Canyons, the feeders at Ash Canyon, along the San Pedro River, and more
- ✓ Marvel at the spectacle of tens of thousands of overwintering Sandhill Cranes! Watch them fly-in to roost at sunset and also observe them feeding during the day
- ✓ Experience prime time for wintering raptors in the Sulphur Springs Valley.
- ✓ Let an expert teach you ID skills for sparrows which abound; last year a small pond had three species of longspurs!
- ✓ Explore extensive grasslands in Arizona's emerging wine country, in search of longspurs, sparrows and pipits.
- ✓ Find winter hummingbirds, Vermilion Flycatcher and several species of quail.
- ✓ Explore Bisbee, a colorful, historic mining town; enjoy lunch and the chance to shop or check out the Smithsonian-affiliated museum
- ✓ Find camaraderie at catered meals and dining at our favorite local restaurants (if you have room after homemade pie at the Casa)

## Tour Summary

7-Day / 6-Night Arizona Nature Tour  
with Michael Marsden  
\$2490 from Tucson  
Airport is Tucson International (TUS)

## Itinerary



### **Mon., Nov. 9 Arrival in Tucson | Benson Sewage Ponds | Willcox Playa**

Our tour starts at 9:00 AM in Tucson, where we can pick you up at the airport or a nearby airport hotel. We head east, leaving the city behind, and the shapes of multiple Sky Islands immediately appear—we are surrounded by a series of small but fascinating mountain ranges. We kick off our trip with a bang—what birding trip would be complete without a trip to the local wastewater treatment plant? Our first stop is at Benson Sewage Ponds where we are on the lookout for ducks like Northern Pintail, Canvasback, Hooded and Common Mergansers, and perhaps even the beautiful little Bufflehead, Sandhill Cranes, and other waterfowl.

We have lunch at a local restaurant in Willcox, where you can pick up some local wines if you wish to sample them. Just out of town we bird at the Twin Lakes Golf Course ponds, remnants of a once larger playa lake. This place is a magnet for birds, and we should find numerous ducks, some lingering shorebirds, Scaled Quail perhaps and more. After this little birding blitz, we head on to Portal, Arizona, taking a scenic back road that runs adjacent to the Chiricahua Mountains.

Tonight, we enjoy a catered dinner at our lodgings, with time to relax and settle in.  
*Accommodations at Cave Creek Ranch, Portal (L,D)*

### **Tues., Nov. 10 Chiricahua Mountains | Cave Creek Canyon**

Situated adjacent to the small village of Portal, population 300, Cave Creek presents a magical realm of massive, colorful cliffs that rise over 1,000 feet. Its vegetation is rich and diverse — here yuccas mix with pine. Thick stands of maple decorate the stream, while shrubs turn colors of the rainbow. Hummingbirds linger, some for the winter, and we may find late-season flowers, raccoon-like Coatimundi, or a herd of curious Javelina. Enjoy early birding right around your lovely lodgings where feeders bring in good activity. With luck Javelina or Coatimundi may join the bird show.

After breakfast, we take a scenic ramble up South Fork, one of the Chiricahuas' most spectacular canyons. You may want to linger along the creek reveling in the maples' fall colors while others may want to ascend the trail to reach outstanding vistas.

We enjoy lunch at our lodge, a siesta, and in the afternoon head down to the grasslands of Stateline Road in search of Bendire's and Crissal Thrasher, a variety of sparrows, Scaled Quail and other species. Dinner is at a favorite local restaurant with a fine view of the Chiricahuas. In the evening, we return to Cave Creek Ranch where our casitas stand among the shadows cast by the imposing, colorful rhyolite cliffs. Portal is also known for its dark skies and fabulous night sky viewing.

*Accommodations at Cave Creek Ranch, Portal (B,L,D)*



**Wed., Nov. 11**

**Chiricahua High Country | Chiricahua National Monument | Casa de San Pedro**

Early this morning we offer an optional birding walk down the main street of Portal, a simple walk with stunning vistas, bird feeding stations, and a picturesque library and post office. Then, enjoy a hearty breakfast at the Portal Café.

Today we discover a wonderland of rock at Chiricahua National Monument. We reach the high country by crossing the spine of the range on a winding road with spectacular views amid patches of fir, spruce, and Ponderosa Pine. This is the realm of the Mexican Chickadee, Yellow-eyed Junco, and other bird specialties. Listen for raucous Steller's Jay and look for the small resident Coue's Whitetail Deer.

On the other side of the mountain, we enter the Monument's rugged terrain, where the Apache leaders Cochise and Geronimo took their last stand until the late 1800s, when cattle ranching became a way of life. Today we gawk at huge pillars of rock in the realm of Rock and Canyon Wrens, a jagged rock landscape that was born of explosive volcanic activity. We have a picnic lunch near the visitor center, then you can choose to do a loop walk through the wonderland of rock or to visit the historic Faraway Ranch and do some birding.

We then head back across the grasslands, watching for flocks of longspurs, wintering Lark Bunting, Horned Lark, and various sparrows, as well as raptors as we drive.

In the late afternoon we arrive at the Casa de San Pedro — a delightful B&B on the west bank of the San Pedro River. The Casa de San Pedro is a nationally acclaimed inn, described as “90 miles from Tucson and inches from heaven.” Guests have labeled it the most upscale bed and breakfast in Southeast Arizona. We find it the ideal location for our group, with meeting space, incredible hospitality, active bird feeders, a pond, and the San Pedro River right outside our door. From the Casa we can explore cottonwoods that fringe the river, perhaps flaunting a little fall color, as well as surrounding grasslands and tall peaks of the nearby Huachuca Mountains, a mecca for hummingbird enthusiasts. You soon find out why so many guests return here again and again.

Dinner tonight is catered at the inn.

Accommodations at [Casa de San Pedro](#), Hereford (B,L,D)



**Thurs., Nov. 12**

### **Ramsey Canyon | Ash Canyon and other local feeders**

In the morning we head to Ramsey Canyon, a place of great fall color and always a birding favorite. This is a major drainage of the Huachucas, sitting directly under Miller Peak, highest in the range. Set your pace to hike on up the trail or go at a birder's pace after some time at the hummingbird feeders. We return to the Casa for lunch and a break.

In the afternoon, those that wish can visit local feeder sites, where hummingbirds linger through the winter. Often, we find Arizona Woodpecker, Woodhouse's Scrub Jay, possibly Wild Turkey and a host of resident species.

Dinner tonight is at a nearby favorite local restaurant.

*Accommodations at the Casa de San Pedro (B,L,D)*

**Fri., Nov. 13**

### **Whitewater Draw | Sulphur Springs Valley & Sandhill Cranes | Bisbee**

This morning, after a scrumptious Casa de San Pedro breakfast, those that enjoy birding can head out to Whitewater Draw Wildlife Area. Many of the wintering Sandhill Cranes have arrived (numbering some 35,000 birds at the peak of winter!), and we look for them in ponds and in farm fields where they feed on corn.

Depending on water levels, Whitewater may be one of the only local sites hosting shorebirds and with luck we see the area's resident Great-Horned Owl. The entire valley is a major wintering group for raptors and some of the northern species, like Ferruginous Hawk, can be found.

Mid-day, we spend time exploring Bisbee. Then, we go back into the valley, driving a series of dirt back roads where raptors congregate. In previous years, we have seen four species of falcons this day: Prairie, Peregrine, Merlin, and American Kestrel. In some years, acrobatic White-tailed Kite can be around. The surrounding shrubby flats are home to Bendire's Thrasher, Black-throated Sparrow, Cactus Wren, Scaled and Gambel's Quails, Roadrunner, and Pyrrhuloxia. We also watch for Lark, Brewer's, and Vesper Sparrows.

We plan to watch the Sandhill Cranes come in to roost; this is typically active from about 4 to 5:30 PM. We then go to dinner in Bisbee, at the wonderful Café Roka.

*Accommodations at Casa de San Pedro, Hereford (B,L,D)*



## **Sat., Nov. 14 Sonoita & Patagonia: Grasslands and Local Feeders**

Our early birds can check the Casa's backyard of riparian cottonwoods and mesquite grassland for species such as Scaled Quail, Greater Roadrunner and Abert's Towhee, while others may enjoy a more leisurely lie-in.

We drive west this morning to a grassland area usually very productive. Following local sightings of previous weeks, we plan our route. A dedicated following of local birders is always on the lookout for Sprague's Pipit and three species of longspurs and our guides are in the know for recent news.

Enjoy lunch in the small town of Patagonia, followed by a visit the popular feeders at the Patton's former home, now run by the Tucson Audubon Society. Violet-crowned Hummingbirds often linger year-round here. Adjacent to the feeder area is The Nature Conservancy's Sonoita Creek Preserve, where tall trees line Sonoita Creek providing habitat for a variety of species. Depending on recent sightings we will work our way back, passing through wine country near Elgin, continuing the quest for grassland species. With luck we should find Pronghorn as well as wintering meadowlarks, Horned Lark, Chihuahuan Raven and raptors.

Tonight, enjoy a final dinner at the Casa.

*Accommodations at Casa de San Pedro, Hereford (B,L,D)*

## **Sun., Nov. 15 Departures from Tucson**

After a final delicious breakfast, we head to the airport, with plans to arrive by 10:30 AM for flights out after 12:00 PM. (B)

## Guide Michael Marsden



Michael has been an avid birder since childhood in England but decided, for reasons that now escape him, on a career in law. Meeting Donna Knox on a birding trip, however, changed all that and, in 1996, he gave up his work as solicitor general to the Cayman Islands Government to start a new venture as a birding guide. Michael and Donna initially moved to Cayman House in Rockport, then to the San Pedro River Inn and the Paton Birders' Haven in S.E. Arizona. They are now enjoying life in Texas: this time in San Benito, an ideal base for Michael's interest in the wildlife and history of South Texas. As well as regular tours in the U.S./Mexico borderlands, Michael has guided birding trips to Cuba, Belize, Costa Rica, and Panama and has travelled extensively in Europe and the Americas. He enjoys a return to Arizona with this tour on very familiar ground.

## Cost of the Journey

### Plan Ahead!

Protect yourself with Allianz Travel Insurance. Their website will show a grid of tour cost and your age category for you to make selections. As of January 2017, Naturalist Journeys pays 100% of your flight carbon offset.

### Group Size

Maximum of 12, minimum four participants.

### Cost of the Journey

Cost of the journey is **\$2,490 DBL / \$2,925 SGL** from Tucson, AZ. This cost includes accommodations for six nights, meals as specified in the itinerary (B=breakfast, L=lunch and D=dinner), professional guide services, other park and program entrance fees and miscellaneous program expenses.

Cost does not include: round-trip airfare to and from Tucson, items of a personal nature such as laundry, telephone, drinks from the bar, or gratuities for luggage handling or personal services.

### Travel Information

The airport for this tour is Tucson International (TUS). Our tour starts 9:00 AM on November 9; we can pick you up at any of the airport hotels if you have opted to come in early, or we will pick you up at the airport. On November 15 we plan to have a nice breakfast, then head to the airport arriving there by 10:30 AM for flights out after noon.

### Photo Credits

Cave Creek Canyon, Steve Wolfe (SW); Rivoli's (Magnificent) Hummingbird; Greg Smith (GS); Gambel's Quail, Peg Abbott (PA); Gila Woodpecker, Janice Petko, Gila Monster, John Roser; Burrowing Owl, GS; Sandhill Cranes & Snow Geese, PA; Chiricahua Mountains, SW; Broad-billed Hummingbird, Evelyn Earllougher (EE); Harris's Hawk, PA; Roadrunner, EE; Montezuma Quail, PA; Black-throated Gray Warbler, PA; Group, Naturalist Journeys Stock (NJS); Grassland Hike, NJS; Vermilion Flycatcher, SW; Coati, PA; Black-throated Sparrow, PA; Crested Caracara, PA; Cactus Wren, PA; Saguaro Scenic, NJS.