

Arizona: Sky Island Winter Birding With Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures



January 9 – 15, 2021

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Arizona is a region marked by spectacular scenery and sharp contrasts. Towering saguaro cactus, sandy washes, and granite outcroppings typify the Sonoran Desert, while creosote and yucca dominate the Chihuahuan Desert landscape. These beautiful deserts are home to iconic desert species such as Greater Roadrunner, Cactus Wren, and Verdin. Rising from the desert like green islands, mountain ranges clad in Madrean pine-oak woodlands provide a habitat unique within the United States; between these fault-block mountain ranges expansive valleys provide prime winter habitat for sparrows and numerous birds of prey. Lakes and ponds attract wintering waterfowl, hummingbirds are present at feeders while woodpeckers delight in tall saguaro cactus forests as well as cottonwood groves where local rivers wind through the valleys. From two comfortable lodges we enjoy winter birding highlights of the region, taking in sunshine and scenic beauty. Where else in the United States can you take a time out from watching so many dazzling birds to simply enjoy the scenery? All of these factors contribute to Arizona being one of the most exciting regions for birding in the United States! All four seasons are good here, and different.

January hosts excellent winter birding, the mix of habitats we visit provide food and shelter for resident and overwintering species. Sandhill Cranes occur in the tens of thousands and a high diversity of raptors gather for fine viewing on power lines, ranch tree plantings and irrigation equipment in the agriculturally rich Sulphur Springs Valley. Enjoy a wonderful escape from cold weather that's timed for you to relax after the holidays.

What could be more rejuvenating than a stay at the welcoming Casa de San Pedro? A beautiful bed and

Tour Highlights

- ✓ Visit hotspots like Ramsey and Miller Canyons, the feeders at Ash Canyon, 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 finding a good number and variety of wintering raptors in the Sulphur Springs Valley around Whitewater Draw, including Ferruginous Hawk and up to four species of falcons.
- ✓ Sparrows abound; one a small pond had three species of longspurs!
- ✓ Find hummingbirds, including Rivoli's, Costa's, Broad-billed, Anna's, Blue-throated Mountain Gem and hopes for the Violet-crowned Hummingbird that often overwinters at Audubon's Paton Center for Birds
- ✓ Meet local experts from the Southeastern Arizona Bird Observatory and learn about their research
- ✓ Visit Saguaro National Park
- ✓ 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

Tour Summary

7-Day / 6-Night Arizona Nature Tour w/ local guides and Naturalist Journey's owner, Peg Abbott
 \$2690 from Tucson
 Airport is Tucson International (TUS)



breakfast which is built around a courtyard with a central fountain and numerous bird feeders. New this year, we feature two nights at a hacienda-style lodge in Tucson at the end of our stay, to soak up some sunshine and time in saguaros where on scenic drives and trails, we find additional species.

In addition to birding, learn a bit of history in the mining town of Bisbee and at the Amerind Foundation near Dripping Springs. Sample regional wines as we enjoy fun local restaurants. While we can't promise to be back for the Casa's famous pies every afternoon, it is certainly our intention! We aim for great birding days afield, but this tour is paced so you can enjoy the inn and all its charms.

You can do as much or as little as you wish! If you would like a longer break, we suggest you add on some extra time in Tucson to continue to enjoy the area's saguaros, sunshine, Mexican restaurants, art galleries, and museums.

Itinerary

Sat., Jan. 9 Arrival in Tucson | Amerind Foundation

Our tour starts at 1:00 PM in Tucson where we can pick you up at the airport or a nearby airport hotel. We head east, leaving the city behind, and immediately the shapes of multiple Sky Islands appear — we are surrounded by a series of small, but fascinating mountain ranges.

We stop at a place of wonder, both for its dramatic rock features and its fine exhibits of American Indian artifacts from all over the new world, including important regional collections. We have time to view the museum, then walk the grounds with hopes to find Canyon Wren, Cactus Wren, Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, Western Bluebirds, perhaps an overwintering Scott's Oriole, and more.

We reach the Casa de San Pedro in time to settle into our rooms, and then enjoy some social time with refreshments and a catered dinner at the Inn. Those driving may wish to just meet us at the Inn today.
Accommodations at Casa de San Pedro (D)



Sun., Jan. 10 San Pedro River | Local Feeders of the Huachuca Mountains

Enjoy a lovely breakfast at the Inn and rest up from your travels. Mid-morning, we drive a short way downriver to the Bureau of Land Management's San Pedro House, a Visitor Center with walking trails north of the inn on the San Pedro River. Here we search for birds of the cottonwood riparian areas, adjacent mesquite woodlands and grasslands—Northern Harrier, Loggerhead Shrike, Crissal Thrasher, Lark Bunting, Lark Sparrow, Abert's Towhee, and other species occur here. Some years a Western Screech Owl likes to sunbath from his cottonwood-tree home.

We enjoy our lunch with the birds at some local feeders, then continue to the Southeastern Arizona Bird Observatory's Ash Canyon property to meet some of their staff and to look for hummingbirds such as Rivoli's, Anna's, and Broad-billed, as well as other specialties of the pine-oak woodlands. With luck Arizona Woodpecker will come in, and Woodhouse's Scrub Jay. Our photographers are always happy here!

Tonight, enjoy dinner at a favorite local restaurant. Those that wish can tally up sightings of the day with your guide once back at the Casa.

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

Mon., Jan. 11 Ramsey Canyon | Guide's Choice | Sunset with Cranes

Our early birds can check the Casa's backyard of riparian cottonwoods and mesquite grassland for species like Scaled Quail, Gila Woodpecker, Pyrrhuloxia and Abert's Towhee, while others can enjoy a more leisurely sleep in.

We have breakfast at 8:00 AM and then head off to The Nature Conservancy Preserve at Ramsey Canyon—one of the first well-known birding sites in Southeast Arizona. Here, Ramsey Creek descends through oak woodlands, its banks lined with massive sculptured trunks of Arizona Sycamores. We hope to see Wild Turkey, some wintering warblers such as Townsend's and Painted Redstart, perhaps Red-naped Sapsucker and Hutton's Vireo. Hummingbird feeders may delight us with a sighting of Blue-throated Mountain-gem, the largest hummingbird species in the United States. Walk the trails, browse the bookstore and gift shop, or park yourself under a tall, bending sycamore to wait for the birds to come to you!



This afternoon we take advantage of having as our main guide, a local expert that works with the Casa de San Pedro. We will go where the species are – perhaps some White-tailed Kites are hanging out over by Tombstone, perhaps a grassland pond is hosting good numbers of longspurs, or we may find an active colony of Burrowing Owl. Either way we go, we head to Whitewater Draw for sunset with Sandhill Cranes pouring in to roost in the ponds there – an unforgettable sight!

As we pass through Bisbee coming back from the cranes, we choose a favorite restaurant here to enjoy as we head back to the Casa.

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

Tues., Jan. 12 Sulphur Springs Valley | Whitewater Draw

Our focus today is on the grassland habitats of the Sulphur Springs Valley and the low wetland area of Whitewater Draw. After breakfast, we depart to explore areas productive for sparrows, longspurs, and raptors around Elfrida and north to Kansas Settlement. The entire valley is a major wintering ground for raptors, including Prairie Falcon, Ferruginous Hawk, and Golden Eagle – we may see ten or so raptor species today, with hundreds of individuals. With searching we could also find Long-billed Curlew feeding in agricultural fields and perhaps Mountain Plover, though over the years their numbers have declined – we will be watching!

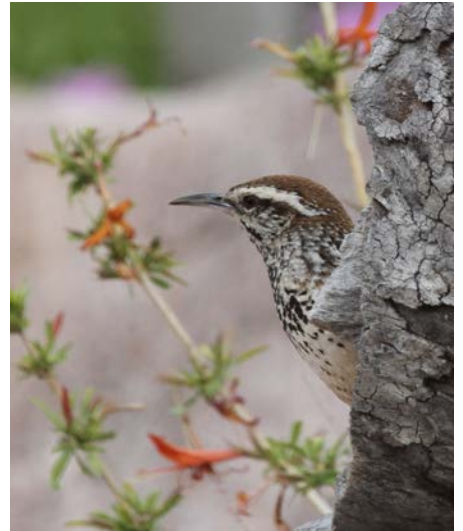
We have lunch in a small-town café, then venture back for some daytime birding at Whitewater Draw where we can sometimes find roosting Great Horned or even Long-eared Owl. There is often a Vermilion Flycatcher hanging around, Say's Phoebe and with luck a flock of Scaled Quail. Large numbers and variety of waterfowl use the ponds: shorebirds, and sparrows round out what should be an excellent birding day.

Tonight, enjoy dinner with time to relax at the Casa.

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

Wed., Jan. 13 Elgin Grasslands | Patagonia | Sonoita

After a great breakfast at the Casa de San Pedro, we pack up our gear, and head towards Tucson, routing our way through the hamlet of Patagonia and the Sonoita-areas lush grasslands. Here there are a number of areas good for wintering sparrows such as Vesper, Grasshopper, Black-throated, and, with luck, Baird's. Horned Lark and various raptors such as Red-tailed Hawk and Northern Harrier also occur here.



We have lunch at a café in Patagonia. We then check out what's happening at feeders at the Paton Center for Hummingbirds and other sites of interest. There is a nature trail winding through mesquite woodlands and riparian areas that connects to the local Nature Conservancy Reserve for those that wish to wander. Species we may see here include Violet-crowned Hummingbird, Cassin's Finch, Rufous-winged Sparrow, Canyon Towhee, and Lazuli Bunting.

Then it's on to Tucson and our most comfortable lodgings there, with dinner at a favorite restaurant.

Accommodations at La Posada, Tucson (B,L,D)

Thurs., Jan. 14 Saguaro National Park | Arizona Sonoran Desert Museum

Today is a highlight, with the chance to bird and explore a forest of cacti at Saguaro National Park (West Side). On the way, we stop at a local pond that is excellent for birding, and then enter the park at its fabulous Visitor Center at Red Hills. After a stop there, we drive the roads to several viewpoints, taking a series of short walks into the cactus forest. We should find numerous Gila Woodpecker and among them with some searching, Gilded Flicker. On mistletoe clusters we should find Phainopepla and Verdin.

Adjacent to the park is one of Tucson's star attractions, the Arizona-Sonoran Desert Museum. We have lunch here in their nice café, then wander through the exhibits, from the aviaries to cliffs made for Desert Bighorn and a variety of wild cats, including Mountain Lion, Margay and Jaguarundi. There is a surprising number of wild birds flying in the lush vegetation, so be on the lookout for tiny Costa's Hummingbird and scolding Cactus Wrens.

We return to the Inn, and once again have the chance to sample one of Tucson's many fine restaurants nearby.

Accommodations at La Posada, Tucson (B,L,D)

Fri., Jan. 15 Birding Local Hotspots | Departures from Tucson

If you must leave on a morning flight, we can arrange a taxi for you from La Posada. Our plan is to visit a couple of Tucson city parks, where each winter rarities show up, such as Lewis' Woodpecker or Least Grebe or species known as migrants simply stay the winter. It's a fun way to end a great birding tour. We will drop you at the airport by 11:30AM for flights out after 1 PM (B)



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.

Travel Information

The airport for this tour is Tucson International (TUS). Our tour starts 1:00 PM on Sat., Jan. 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 Fri., Jan. 15, after morning birding we head to the airport, arriving there by 11:30 AM for flights out after 1PM.

Cost of the Journey

Cost of the journey is **\$2,690 DBL / \$3,250 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.

Group Size

Maximum of 8, minimum four participants.

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, Bridled Titmouse, Barry Ramdass (BR); Burrowing Owl, GS; Sandhill Cranes & Snow Geese, PA; Chiricahua Mountains, SW; Casa de San Pedro, PA; Broad-billed Hummingbird, Evelyn Earlougher (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; Inca Dove, BR.

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