

Utah: Birding & National Parks

With Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures



May 14 – 22, 2021

With 2-night pre-tour Birding the
Great Salt Lake

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Naturalist Journeys, LLC





Renew your spirits in the mountains and beautiful red rock canyons of Utah. Discover a beautiful and intriguing terrain rich in scenic and geological wonders and some great birds! While not on the birding hotspot route, this area we liken the birding experience among such beauty to a finding hidden jewel. Birds of the Rocky Mountains blend with those of the Great Basin to provide wonderful variety. Plants and animals of the region are fascinating as well.

Birding and the wonders of Utah's great national parks make up the theme of our journey as we enjoy scenic walks, landscape-rich drives, and time to explore, and photograph. In the evenings, relax in the ambience of rustic lodges at the parks or in charming accommodations in nearby towns.

The Grand Canyon, Bryce and Zion are internationally-renowned national parks. Capital Reef is less well-known but outstanding. There is no close airport to these famed parks, so on this adventure we begin and end in Salt Lake City. Here there are wetlands of International importance very active at this time of year – join our short pre-tour extension to bird hotspots surrounding the Great Salt Lake!

Tour Highlights

- Visit four of Utah's most most stunning national parks; experience red-rock canyon country at its best
- Find Gambel's Quail, Roadrunner, Lewis' Woodpecker and Vermilion Flycatcher at Grafton, an historic Mormon settlement in Zion
- Watch California Condors spread their massive wings in flight
- Search out American Dipper where the river comes through the famous "Narrows" of Zion
- Hike amid the magical spires of Bryce Canyon listening to Canyon Wren and Townsend's Solitaire
- Enjoy wildflowers and fun local dining
- Cross a sea of sandstone on the scenic drive up Boulder Mountain where Steller's Jay, and Wild Turkey roam
- Among the colorful domes of Capitol Reef, watch for flocks of Pinyon Jay and along streams Wilson's and MacGillivray's Warblers
- Stand at the edge of Grand Canyon – in AWE
- Add a fabulous array of species in the wetlands surround Salt Lake City on our 2-night Great Salt Lake extension – 4 species of grebes, Wilson's and Red-necked Phalarope, American Avocet, Black-necked Stilt and more!

Tour Summary

9-Day / 8-Night Utah Birding & National Park Tour w/Pat Lueders
\$3290, from Salt Lake City

2-Day Pre-Tour Extension: Birding the Great Salt Lake
Airport is Salt Lake City International Airport (SLC)



Itinerary

Fri., May 14 Arrival in Salt Lake City | Drive to Springdale

Plan to arrive in Salt Lake City (SLC) for the main tour no later than Noon today. If you prefer to arrive the night before (suggested!), we can pick you up at an airport hotel location, or return by shuttle to meet us. Please note that we drive quite a way today to Zion, so a delayed flight would be a problem for you to catch up to the group without a rental car, or booking a flight to St. George.

Our plan by 1PM is to be on the road to a treasured Southwest national park – Zion, which is also an excellent birding site with its wide range of elevations and the Virgin River running through. Zion National Park is a fantastic realm of steep canyon walls, great domes and towers. Our lodgings will be in Springdale, the gateway community to the park, where we get a great overview of the “temples”, natural domes that inspired the early Mormon pioneers of the region.

Driving into Zion, we stop at a birding hotspot along the Virgin River which provides easy passage for migrants and breeding home for colorful species such as Western Tanager and Lazuli Bunting. This is the lowest elevation and most arid section of Zion National Park and vicinity. We settle into our lodgings in the artisan town of Springdale and have dinner at a favorite local restaurant.

Accommodations in SL, UT (D)

Sat., May 15 Zion National Park, UT

While at Zion, we use a convenient and environmentally friendly shuttle bus system to see the park, with the opportunity to walk short vista point trails. Here we look up to witness the bold power of erosion and the Earth's movement. Local highlights are the Narrows of the Virgin River, the Emerald Pools, and the Weeping Wall. The deep chasm of Zion Canyon displays a palette of reds, oranges, deep salmon, pink, yellow, and cream. Across these rocks we watch for hunting Peregrine Falcon or a majestic Golden Eagle.

Along the trails you may find Black-throated Gray and Yellow-rumped warblers; Black-headed Grosbeak; a lizard sunning itself; a secretive Ring-tailed Cat; or other local wildlife. Along the Virgin River we may find American Dipper, Black Phoebe, and both Rock and Canyon wrens. One stop may have soaring California Condor, which frequent the park. We take sack lunches with us to enjoy in the shade of large cottonwoods. Time passes



quickly! With the handy shuttle system, those that wish can return to town to sample the shops or relax, while others continue to bird and enjoy the vista points.

Tonight, we dine together at another great local restaurant in Springdale and review our species list and plans for the next day.

Accommodations in Springdale, UT (B,L,D)

Sun., May 16 Kanab | California Condors at Navajo Ridge

Enjoy some early birding at a Mormon pioneer homestead at Grafton where we often find species of the Southwest such as Gambel's Quail, Vermilion Flycatcher, Rock Wren, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Lewis's Woodpecker and Greater Roadrunner. We also find stunning vistas and a personal sense of history.

After breakfast, spend much of the morning in Zion as we drive to the east entrance, crossing Checkerboard Mesa where we often have a chance to spot Desert Bighorn Sheep. At scenic Highway 89, we turn south to surprisingly well-watered town of Kanab, checking local birding hotspots along the way.

Kanab is well situated to finding California Condors, which have taken to nesting at Navajo Bridge in recent years. These are birds of the fascinating restoration effort based from the Vermilion Cliffs, a dramatic landscape feature visible for miles around. This is a good day to look for species we may have missed, a few that come to mind include Black-throated Sparrow, Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay, Prairie Falcon and Broad-tailed Hummingbird. If by lucky chance we've already had good condor sightings in Zion, we may go instead to Pipe Springs National Monument, a fascinating historic site with a spring that creates good conditions for finding migrants at times.

Accommodations at Canyon Lodge, Kanab (B,L,D)

Mon., May 17 North Rim Grand Granyon National Park

This weekend is the traditional opening of the North Rim of Grand Canyon guest facilities, and we hope for no late snowstorms that could block our way in – this rim sits at 8000 feet, and we pass through huge pine forests along the way. After sun and heat in the valley – bundle up today! They will have been busy plowing the road, and along the margins green vegetation is breaking through. Birds we may find at our stops include Williamson's



Sapsucker, Townsend's Solitaire, Juniper Titmice, Western Bluebird, Mountain Chickadee, or an elusive flock of Pinyon Jay. Finding big groups of Wild Turkey is almost a certainty, along with some impressive Mule Deer and possibly Golden Eagle.

The canyon is GRAND, a realm of rock, and the main attraction here is the play of light and rock and sky. Throughout the day, colors of the canyon change. The canyon is approximately 10 miles wide, and over a mile deep. Vivid panoramas reveal a fantastic geologic history. Weathering and erosion have created fantastic buttes and mesas within the canyon, while water and wind have sculptured the canyon walls. We take in as many of the vista points as possible before returning to Kanab for the evening.

The drive back affords one of the grandest views in the Southwest, you look off to layer after layer of colored rocks, the sequence that comprises the region's Grand Staircase. Dinner is in Kanab upon return.

Please note: if we cannot get into the North Rim, it's a bit of a longer drive but we will go instead to the South Rim, so you do not miss out!

Accommodations at Canyon Lodge, Kanab (B,L,D)

Tues., May 18 Sevier River Corridor | Bryce Canyon National Park

This morning, we pack up and head north, following the Sevier River through Hatch, Long Valley and Orderville, small and historic Mormon communities. Orderville, created in 1874, was a socialistic experiment by Brigham Young for all to share resources and work. Riparian vegetation occurs along much of our route, a bonus for finding Bullocks Oriole, Lesser Goldfinch, Green-tailed Towhee, Black-chinned Hummingbird and a mix of tanagers, swallows and warblers.

Watch for colorful Mountain Bluebirds to be sitting on western buck and rail fence posts as we travel or for flocks of Pinyon Jay to be on the wing overhead. Willows lining the river corridor make great resting spots for



warblers and sparrows moving through the region. Black-billed Magpies are now common among the sagebrush hills.

Our destination today is Bryce Canyon National Park. Our lodgings at Bryce are near the park, so we can settle in, and time dinner early so that we can watch sunset over a panorama of rock features that have no equal. Bryce provides fanciful rock formations in every color of the rainbow and is completely different in character from either Grand Canyon or Zion. It is higher in elevation and allows us to explore a variety of forests with a mixture of birds and mammals. We look for Utah Prairie Dogs in the Bryce Canyon entrance area and Mule Deer and Elk can both be found here. The Visitor's Center provides a wonderful orientation to the park, with excellent displays and an extensive collection of natural history books on the region.

Accommodations near Bryce Canyon National Park. (B,L,D)

Wed., May 19 Bryce National Park

Bryce Canyon, established in 1905 by Theodore Roosevelt, is often the favorite of the parks among our travelers as it is small, intimate, and presents a real playground of light. Perhaps more than the other parks it appeals to the imagination, with its intricate pinnacles and hoodoo rocks that appear to take on human form. The multi-hued rocks of the large amphitheaters (eroded plateau edges) that comprise Bryce seem to glow in the early morning light. Thousands of colorful spires rise and join in a panorama like no other.

After breakfast, enjoy a great hike that makes a loop down through Bryce's fanciful features. Experience first-hand the myriad, wonderful creations in siltstone, sandstone, limestone, and dolomite. Those that do not want to hike can enjoy birding and relaxing at the rim.

We return in time for lunch, and then take a scenic drive along the rim for varied views of this wonderland of rock. Townsend's Solitaire sing from atop Bristlecone Pine, and Clark's Nutcracker often call in flight overhead, busy caching their winter supply of seeds. We may find a group of migrant Townsend's and Yellow-rumped



warblers mingling with resident Mountain Chickadees. In brushy areas look for Bushtit, Mountain Bluebird and Juniper Titmouse. We often see both Mountain and Western bluebirds, and if the Pinyon Pines have a good cone crop, we may find flocks of Pinyon Jay.

Accommodations in Bryce Canyon National Park (B,L,D)

Thurs., May 20 Escalante Grand Staircase | Boulder Mountain | Torrey

Today's journey provides expansive vistas as we drive up and over Boulder Mountain, one of the top scenic drives in Utah. We leave Bryce, passing through Escalante, seeing some of the vistas that comprise the Grand Staircase National Monument. At Calf Creek we enjoy a picnic, and hike for a few hours. Avid walkers may reach the Falls at the end; naturalists can amble finding songbirds in the willows, framing scenic photos, and possibly fledged young of the canyon's nesting Peregrines. Watch for American Dippers in the creek.

From here the road gets wild, crossing massive sandstone features and climbing in elevation. Enjoy some photo stops that are memorable – perhaps spy Golden Eagle or soaring Northern Goshawk!

The small town of Boulder was the last place in the US to have mail delivered by horseback; a paved road has only allowed us to traverse this route for a few decades. We stop for coffee, time to see some local art, and then head on to Torrey, climbing higher in elevation and passing through lush forests. Watch for Wild Turkey, Wilson's Warbler, Pine Siskin, Steller's Jay, and Mule Deer.

What goes up must come down, and our scenic road winds its way to Torrey. More red rocks await us in one of the hidden gems of Utah – Capitol Reef National Park.

Accommodations at Capitol Reef Resort, UT (B,L,D)

Fri., May 21 Capitol Reef National Park

Today passes quickly for we have much to see and savor. The park's formations vary in color and texture, weaving a tale of geologic history reaching back millions of years. Away from the river, the landscape is arid, allowing for unbroken views of the vibrant rock. There are natural bridges and arches to see; black volcanic boulders washed down from neighboring plateaus and cliffs called the Fluted Wall.

Our picnic is near some of the park's fruit orchards where some of the trees should be in bloom – striking against the red rock backdrop. We enjoy some walks, birding, time at vista points and an excellent petroglyph panel, and towards the beautiful soft light of day's end we drive the scenic road of the park with stops for admiration and photography. We should find Gray Flycatcher, flocks of Pinyon Jay and more Wild Turkey.

Our final dinner is at a favorite local restaurant and afterwards we tally up our final list.

Accommodations at Capitol Reef Resort, UT (B,L,D)



Sat., May 22 Departures from Salt Lake City

Today we pack up after an early breakfast for the return to Salt Lake, arriving in time for flights out after 1:00PM. This is about a little over a three-hour drive, and we will take a few breaks, always looking for one more bird! At Koosharen Reservoir we may find four species of grebes, and Wilson's and Red-necked Phalarope (B)

Pre-Tour Extension: Birding the Great Salt Lake

Wed., May 12 Arrivals in Salt Lake City

Enjoy views of the fertile, wide valley framed by mountains that Salt Lake City lies within. The Great Salt Lake is stark and imposing on the landscape. Plan to arrive no later than 1PM so we have the afternoon for local birding. Several canyons emerge from the Wasatch Mountains with rushing streams and flowering shrubs and trees lining them. They are great places to see Lazuli Bunting, Western Tanager, MacGillivray's Warbler and other colorful songbirds. Also keep an eye out for American Dipper!

Enjoy dinner at a favorite local restaurant and review plans for tomorrow's birding, sort of a local "big day" as there are so many wonderful hotspots to visit – in May it is just teeming with birds.

Accommodation Hilton Garden Inn, Layton. (D)

Thurs., May 13 Antelope Island State Park | Bear River NWR | Farmington Bay Waterfowl Management Area

Large shallow lakes fill a valley surrounded by mountains, and we start our birding at the spectacular Antelope Island causeway, a road leading to this famous state park known for hosting a herd of buffalo – but also just great for birds!

We should see tens of thousands of Wilson's Phalaropes and Eared Grebes along with smaller numbers of resident Black-necked Stilt and American Avocet, Marbled Godwit and Long-billed Dowitcher. This is shorebird heaven, a vast inland sea rich with brine shrimp; an excellent place for resident species to breed, and for migrants already returning from the Arctic to refuel. Peregrine Falcon hunt the large flocks. On Antelope Island, we look for Chukar Partridge and perhaps a day-roosting Great Horned Owl.



We have lunch at a local restaurant, and a short break, and then drive north to expansive freshwater marshes formed by the emptying of the Bear River into the Great Salt Lake. Depending on where the birds are, and how far we want to drive today, we choose one of two locations. Concentrations of waders and waterfowl at either can be significant. We may also find secretive Virginia Rail, Sora Rail, Marsh Wren and possibly Short-eared Owl.

Driving along the back roads with mountain vistas all around, we look for White-faced Ibis as well as American White Pelican, California and Franklin's Gulls, Caspian Tern, and a variety of herons, egrets, American Avocet and Black-necked Stilt. We may also see Sharp-shinned Hawk, Belted Kingfisher, Common Nighthawk, Common Yellowthroat, Yellow-headed Blackbird, and both Western and Clark's Grebes.

After a full day we return to freshen up, get dinner nearby and tally up our sightings on a daily checklist with your guide.

Accommodations at the Hilton Garden Inn. (B,L,D)

Fri., May 14 Local Salt Lake Hotspots

If you are not familiar with eBird, guide Pat Lueders is a great teacher. She will also be checking several local parks to determine our route today – a mix of woodland and wetland settings. We go out early, then return mid-morning to pack up, freshen and be ready to meet the group before driving on to Zion National Park on our main Utah journey (B).

Meet Guide Pat Lueders



Pat Lueders has been leading birding trips in the St. Louis area and Midwest for over 10 years. A love of traveling has taken her to many countries of the world and most of the US, often with Naturalist Journeys' trips. When not out birding, she is the coordinator of volunteers for a number of Citizen Science projects partnering with many agencies including U.S. Fish & Wildlife, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, National Audubon, National Trumpeter Swan Society, and Missouri Department of Conservation. Pat serves on the boards of St. Louis Audubon & Audubon Society of Missouri and is on a bird banding team



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

Plan to arrive in Salt Lake City by 1:00 PM on or before May 14, 2021. We suggest you come in a night early if you are coming from any distance, and we can recommend airport hotels with convenient shuttle service. For the pre-tour extension, arrive by 1 PM on or before May 12. Plan on flights out after 1PM from Salt Lake City on March 22, 2021

Cost of the Journey

The cost of the journey is \$3290 DBL / \$4095 SGL, per person based on double occupancy. Cost of the 2-night Great Salt Lake extension is \$690 DBL / \$850 SGL

This cost includes accommodations for 8 nights, meals as specified in the itinerary (B=breakfast, L=lunch, and D=dinner), airport welcome and transfers, professional guide services, local park and other area entrance fees, and miscellaneous program costs.

The cost does not include transportation to or from your home city to Salt Lake City, or items of a personal nature such as laundry, telephone calls, or beverages from the bar or gratuities for portage or personal services.

Additional Information

Your guide for this journey will be Pat Lueders, with 9 or more in the group we add a second leader and vehicle. Minimum group size is 5, maximum is 12

Photo Credits

Grand Canyon Rim, Carol Simon (CS); Black-throated Gray Warbler, Peg Abbott (PA); Black-headed Grosbeak, Naturalist Journeys Stock (NJS); Wynne Brown by Rainbow Bridge, Jill Rowley; Lewis' Woodpecker, Steve Wolfe (SW); Western Bluebird, Greg Smith (GS); Gambel's Quail, Homer Gardin (HG); California Condor, GS; Calf Creek Falls, NJS; Bighorn Ewe, SW; Bullock's Oriole, GS; Hooded Oriole, HG; Steller's Jay, HG; Green-tailed Towhee, Sandy Sorkin (SS); Wilson's Warbler, Rebecca Steinmann; Hiking in Bryson, NJS; Pronghorn, GS; Cedar Breaks, NJS.

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