

Southeast Arizona Birding & Wildlife With Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures



April 28 - May 5, 2021

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Naturalist Journeys, LLC



Join James P. Smith at the peak of spring migration in one of North America's most treasured birding hotspots—small-group tour limited to 7 persons.

Few places in the U.S. offer the remarkable combination of scenery, biological diversity, and experience like the Sky Island mountain ranges of Southeastern Arizona. These ranges rise from deserts and grasslands; the elevation changes afford rich biodiversity, rare in such a small geographic area.

This tour coincides with spring migration, which peaks from late April through mid-May. Spectacular residents like Elegant Trogon, Red-faced Warbler, and Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher range north here from Mexico and Central America. They arrive keen to set up breeding in this almost subtropical realm. On cool, shaded trails, walk between yucca, tall pines, and a host of plants more commonly seen on the Mexican plateau.

Begin with a scenic drive from Tucson, Arizona, to the southeast corner of the state, with a stop at the oasis of Twin Lakes ponds near Willcox for migrating shorebirds. Spend two nights in the magical Chiricahua Mountains, where Mexican species breed in cool mountain canyons below spires of welded volcanic tuff.

Next, stay three nights at the delightful Casa de San Pedro from which we explore cool, lush canyons of the Huachuca Mountains in search of Mexican Spotted Owl, Olive Warbler, Greater Pewee, and more. We often find Elegant Trogon at The Nature Conservancy's Ramsey Canyon Preserve, and ahead of dining in historic Bisbee, we explore an excellent wetland at Whitewater Draw.

Finally, explore the corridor south of Tucson, Madera, Box and Florida Canyons, Kino Springs, Patagonia State Park, and The Paton Center for Hummingbirds. Our base is the delightful Amado Territory Inn with a fabulous view of the Santa Rita Mountains, situated on the Santa Cruz River.

Discover the regions birding hotspots, scenic vistas, and local restaurants. Enjoy the flexibility of a small group, limited to just 7 persons.



Tour Summary

8-Day / 7-Night Tour with James P. Smith
\$2890, from Tucson, Arizona
Airport is Tucson International (TUS)



Wed., April 28 Arrive in Tucson | Willcox Playa | Portal

From the Tucson airport, we leave the urban setting behind, and drive towards the southeast corner of the state, stopping at the Twin Lakes Golf Course ponds near Willcox, which should be teeming with migrant shorebirds and waders. American Avocet, White-faced Ibis, Black-crowned Night-Heron, Western and Eared Grebes, and various phalaropes and sandpipers are often present.

We then continue on to the charming village of Portal with stunning views of the Chiricahua Mountains. Settle in and enjoy a catered dinner and an overview of the week to come. For those that wish, we start right in with some night birding tonight, with hopes of finding Elf, Whiskered Screech Owl, Poorwill and Northern Pygmy Owls.

Accommodations at Cave Creek Ranch, Portal (D)

Thurs., April 29 Cave Creek Canyon | Southwestern Research Station | Grasslands | Portal

Enjoy dawn in a magical realm. Bird calls echo through the canyons. Dusky-capped and Brown-crested Flycatchers nest in the area, as do a host of interesting warblers such as Grace's, Virginia's, Lucy's, Olive, and Red-faced. Woodhouse's Scrub Jay quickly makes their presence known in the lower grassland reaches, while the highly-social Mexican Jay holds its own amid the oaks.

Cave Creek Canyon is one of the most biologically diverse places in the United States; here the ecosystems of the Rocky Mountains, the Sierra Madres, the Chihuahuan Desert, and the Sonoran Desert intricately combine. In the maze of volcanic rock pinnacles with crenellated walls of orange tuff, you see contrasts like yuccas standing above bracken ferns, and Douglas Fir entwined with Arizona Sycamore. Several pairs of Elegant Trogon have nested in the canyon for many years; their ecological story is closely tied to neighboring Mexico and the Sierra Madres. While walking the cool and shaded paths of the canyon, we're also likely to see Painted Redstart, Cordilleran Flycatcher, Acorn Woodpecker, and Arizona Woodpecker—just to name a few highlights!

Visit the American Museum's Southwestern Research Station and learn more about research and programs conducted by biologists from around the world that recognize the special biodiversity of the area. Portal is a birder's Mecca, and this afternoon we walk the streets of this picturesque village, seeking out tanagers, orioles, and other species that use the verdant oasis. We also stop at two local feeders that can be very productive. We then visit State Line Road looking for grassland specialties such as Scaled Quail, several thrashers, and Greater Roadrunner, and take a peek at what migrants abound at Willow Tank, a birding hotspot.

Tonight, enjoy dinner at a local restaurant and indulge in fabulous views of the Chiricahuas.

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



Fri., April 30 High Mountain Birding | Owling

Today we pack up and head to the top of the Chiricahuas, on a dramatic mountain road from which we witness the epic drama of fires that roared through the Chiricahua and Huachuca Mountains in May and June of 2011 and 2012. Between dramatic views of the peaks and surrounding desert, we find still lovely conifer forest to hunt for Mexican Chickadee, a specialty of the Chiricahuas. Look for Red-faced and Olive Warblers, as well as Greater Pewee. Explore beautiful mountain streams, picnic in high mountain meadows, and enjoy the peaceful setting while you discover new birds, wildflowers, and mammals like Apache Fox Squirrel, possible Coatimundi, Javelina, Coue's White-tailed Deer—even Black Bear is possible!

We then continue over the mountain, with birding stops en route to our next delightful lodgings at the upscale Casa de San Pedro.

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

Sat., May 1 Huachuca Mountains and Canyons & the San Pedro River

We start the day with a gourmet breakfast after some optional early morning birding along the river.

Casa de San Pedro is a nationally acclaimed inn; they say it is 90 miles from Tucson and inches from heaven. We agree! 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, as well as surrounding grasslands and the nearby Huachuca Mountains, a Mecca for hummingbird enthusiasts. You soon discover why so many guests return here again and again.





Birds of interest here include Swainson's and Gray Hawks, Black Phoebe, Cassin's Kingbird, Abert's Towhee, Summer Tanager, Blue Grosbeak, Bell's Vireo, Lucy's Warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat, and several species of grassland sparrows. Rarely, a Green Kingfisher is present along the river or at a nearby pond.

After a full day of birding and exploring, we enjoy a catered dinner at the Casa.

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



Sun., May 2 Carr Canyon | Ramsey Canyon | Casa de San Pedro

After a delicious (some say outrageous!) breakfast at Casa de San Pedro, we head out to upper Carr Canyon, driving switchbacks up a mountain road to search for the birds of the high pine forest. Here we may find Steller's Jay, Hairy Woodpecker, Greater Pewee, Buff-breasted Flycatcher (extremely local in the U.S.), Hutton's Vireo, Black-throated Gray, Olive and Grace's Warblers, Yellow-eyed Junco, and—with luck—a Northern Goshawk. Beautiful Ponderosa Pines dominate our trail, which is punctuated by exhibits about the silver mines run here over 100 years ago on a geologically dramatic cliff known as "The Reef."



We enjoy a picnic lunch near local feeders where we hope to see Lucifer Hummingbird, as well as more regular Anna's, Black-chinned, and possibly migrant Rufous Hummingbirds. Acorn, Ladder-backed, and Arizona Woodpeckers, Mexican Jay, White-winged Dove, and up to three species of orioles (including Scott's Oriole) are all expected at the feeders.



Mid-afternoon, we visit 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 Arizona Sycamores, the favored nesting trees of Elegant Trogon. We also hope to see Coatimundis, Wild Turkey, Strickland's Woodpecker, Golden Eagle, Black-throated Gray, and other warblers, and a variety of colorful hummingbirds at close range. 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! Butterflies occur here in abundance, as do a number of reptiles, amphibians, and dragonflies.



This evening's dinner is at a favorite local restaurant.

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

Mon., May 3 Sonoita | Elgin | Patagonia

After breakfast, we head to extensive grasslands near Sonoita and Elgin, visiting a seasonal wetland area and some hotspots we know of for sparrows and also Pronghorn Antelope. We then continue on to the little hamlet of Patagonia, site of one of The Nature Conservancy's very first preserves. As we enter Patagonia, we stop at the municipal butterfly garden—close enough to the Mexican border to host an unusual stray. Learn more about native plants that frequent the area's butterfly gardens. We drive through extensive grasslands near Sonoita, where we look for Pronghorn and Chihuahuan Raven.

In Patagonia we visit hummingbird feeders at the Tucson Audubon Society's Paton Center for Hummingbirds. The former home of the late Wally and Marion Paton, who invited visitors to their backyard feeders, the property was purchased in 2015 by the Chapter to protect it for posterity. In addition to their usually reliable Violet-crowned Hummingbird, 211 other species have been recorded onsite.

The Nature Conservancy has a preserve here with very similar habitat to that of the San Pedro River. We make a short visit to their Visitor site so you can learn more about their conservation work, and we always network for recent bird sightings. After lunch in town, and depending on our time today, we may bird the riparian shoreline of Patagonia Lake State Park, a hidden treasure in the rolling hills. A beautiful creek trail provides a home for many species, including Canyon Towhee, Inca Dove, Vermilion Flycatcher, Black Vulture, and several species of hummingbirds. It is a good place to try for Black-capped Gnatcatcher.

A visit to the famous Patagonia Roadside Rest shows off some stunning geology and can reward us with views of Thick-billed Kingbird, Black Vulture, and Yellow-breasted Chat flitting among ash, walnut, and cottonwood trees. Then it's on to our lodgings in Green Valley, a retirement community south of Tucson close to some very birdy canyons of the Santa Rita Mountains.

We then continue on to our third featured lodge, the Amado Territory Inn, with dinner to be enjoyed at a nearby restaurant.

Accommodations at the Amado Territory Inn, Amado (B,L,D)



Tues., May 4 Florida, Box, & Madera Canyons

This morning we explore a couple of wonderful birding areas. Florida and Box Canyons are carved out of the Santa Rita Mountains and offer cooler, shaded oasis for birds in the otherwise arid landscape. Florida Canyon gives us the chance to look for Rufous-capped Warbler along with Broad-tailed, Broad-billed, and Anna's Hummingbirds, Cactus Wren, and Black-headed Grosbeak. Box Canyon for the last few years have had Five-striped sparrow and recently, there have been Black-capped Gnatcatchers here as well!

Madera Canyon, one of the most famous birding areas in the United States, is a north-facing valley in the Santa Rita Mountains with riparian woodland along an intermittent stream, bordered by mesquite, juniper-oak woodlands, and pine forests. Madera Canyon is home to over 250 species of birds, including 15 hummingbird species, as well as avian specialties like Elegant Trogon, Elf Owl, Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher, and Painted Redstart. Arizona Gray Squirrel can be found here, and Black-tailed Jackrabbit are found in the grasslands surrounding the peaks. It is also a great place to spy nesting Elegant Trogons.

We walk Madera Canyon trails along the creek beneath white-barked Arizona Sycamore trees, where a pair of Cooper's Hawk is likely nesting and where we can learn about plant communities. Flame-colored Tanager have been seen for a number of years here — a colorful highlight! Acorn Woodpecker call from their food-storage trees and even visit local feeders to join the array of hummingbirds. In the lush Madrean-oak woodlands, Painted Redstart appear almost tame; we may also see Common Bushtit and Hutton's Vireo. At local feeders, we are likely to find Black-headed Grosbeak, Scott's and Hooded Orioles, and Mexican Jay.

Accommodations at the Amado Territory Inn, Amado (B,L,D)

Wed., May 5 Departures from Tucson

We offer an optional bird walk to a nearby and often very productive pond near to our lodgings. We then pack up and drive to Tucson, planning to be at the airport by 10:30 AM for flights out after 12:00 PM. (B)

Guide: James P. Smith



James brings some twenty five years of guiding experience to Naturalist Journeys. Originally from Sheffield in the United Kingdom, he discovered a love for guiding in Israel in 1995 where he helped establish the Kibbutz Lotan Center for Birdwatching in the Southern Arava Valley. Since then, he's led hundreds of tours throughout the Northern Hemisphere for a number of UK-based tour companies. His trips to Israel and North America are especially close to his heart but he's also led or co-led tours to Mexico (Veracruz), The Gambia, Kenya, Iceland, Scottish

Highlands, Spanish Pyrenees, Central/Southern France, Greece (Lesvos), and India (Goa). An accomplished illustrator, James placed runner-up in the British Birds “Bird Illustrator of the Year” competition in 1992 and went on to have his work published in numerous birding magazines and journals. He also co-authored the two volume set A Guide to the Birding Hotspots of Israel (Published in 2000 by the Israel Ornithological Center and the S.P.N.I.). He returns to Israel every year to lead trips and remains an active member of the Israel Rarities and Distribution Committee. When not leading tours he can be found at home in Western Massachusetts with his wife Susannah and their young son Matan.

Cost of the Journey

Plan Ahead!

Protect yourself with Allianz Travel Insurance. Offset your carbon footprint on one of the many online programs available.

Travel Information

Airport is Tucson International Airport (TUS). Plan to arrive no later than 1:00 PM on April 28.

Departures from Tucson can be planned from 12:00 PM onward on May 5. We plan to be back at the airport by 10:30 AM. We can pick-up and drop-off at hotels within a few miles of the airport — there are many!

Group Size & Guides

This is a birding and wildlife trip, with just 7 participants & guide James P. Smith.

Cost of the Journey

Cost of the Journey is **\$2890 DBL / \$3450 SGL** based on double occupancy from Tucson, AZ. The tour price includes airport transfers, 7 nights’ accommodation, ground transportation in vans, professional guide services, park and other entrance fees, and miscellaneous program expenses.

The tour price does not include Round-trip airfare to and from Tucson, personal expenses such as laundry, telephone, drinks from the bar, and gratuities for luggage handling or other services. Guide gratuities are at your discretion.

Photo Credits:

Elegant Trogon, Peg Abbott (PA); Mexican Spotted Owl, Greg Smith (GS); Cave Creek Canyon, Steve Wolfe (SW); Coati, PA; Golden Eagle, GS; Antelope Ground Squirrel, Richard Becker; Claret Cup, PA, Olive Warbler, PA; Costa Hummingbird, Lynn Feryus (LF); Roadrunner, PA; Painted Redstart, PA; Acorn Woodpecker, Barry Ramdass (BR); Black-crowned Night Heron, Sandy Sorkin; Screech-Owl, GS; Chiricahua High Mountain Meadow, SW; Cactus Wren, PA; Road to Portal, SW; Montezuma Quail, PA; Patrick Dome of the Casa, PA; Scott’s Oriole, Woody Wheeler; Summer Tanager, TD; Casa de San Pedro, courtesy of the Inn; Red-faced Warbler, PA.

Tour Notes & Pace

PACE: Moderate, with full days of birding and walks on quiet roads and trails. A typical walk is less than two miles and often we have a series of walks at different spots that are a half-mile each, several times a day.

DINING: Casual, a mix of local restaurants and both restaurant and picnic lunches.

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