

# Utah: Birding & National Parks

## with Naturalist Journeys



**Sept. 18 – 26, 2022**

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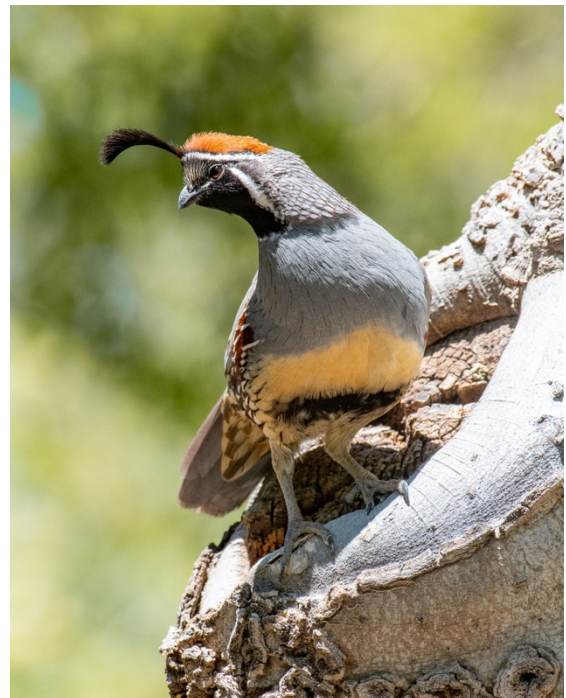
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Naturalist Journeys, LLC





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 jewels. 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.

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 in Las Vegas and end in Salt Lake City.

### Tour Highlights

- Visit four of Utah's 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 Condor 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 in awe at the edge of the Grand Canyon
- Add a fabulous array of species in the wetlands surround Salt Lake City by opting to join the Salt Lake City Birding festival—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  
\$3390, from Las Vegas, departing Salt Lake City  
Arrival airport is Las Vegas McCarran International (LAS),  
Departure is Salt Lake City (SLC)



## Itinerary

### **Sun., Sept. 18    Arrival in Las Vegas | Drive to Springdale**

Plan to arrive in Las Vegas for the main tour no later than 12:30 PM today. If you prefer to arrive the night before (encouraged), we suggest choosing an airport hotel location. Please note that we drive 2.5 hours 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 1:00 PM 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 is 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 a 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 Springdale, Utah (D)*

### **Mon., Sept. 19    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 even a majestic Golden Eagle.

Along the trails you may find Black-throated Gray and Yellow-rumped Warblers, Black-headed Grosbeak, lizards sunning, secretive Ring-tailed Cat, and 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 can 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, Utah (B,L,D)*

## **Tues., Sept. 20 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 the surprisingly well-watered town of Kanab, checking local birding hotspots along the way.

Kanab is well situated to finding California Condor, 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.

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

## **Wed., Sept. 21 North Rim, Grand Canyon 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—the north rim sits at 8000 feet and we pass through huge pine forests along the way. After sun and heat in the valley, be sure to bundle up today! They 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, the 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 instead go to the South Rim, so you don't miss out!

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

### **Thurs., Sept. 22   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 Magpie 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 both the 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 Dog in the Bryce Canyon entrance area and Mule Deer and Elk can both be found here, too. The visitor center provides a wonderful orientation to the park, with excellent displays and an extensive collection of natural history books about the region.

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

## **Fri., Sept. 23 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 Chickadee. 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)*

### **Sat., Sept. 24 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, framing photos and finding songbirds in the willows and possibly fledged young of the canyon's nesting Peregrines. Watch for American Dipper 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 (B,L,D)*

### **Sun., Sept. 25 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 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 (B,L,D)*



## Mon., Sept. 26 Departures from Salt Lake City

Today we pack up after an early breakfast for the return to Salt Lake City. This is just over a three-hour drive, and we do 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 Phalaropes. We arrive in time for flights out after 1:00 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

Plan to arrive in Las Vegas, Nevada (LAS) by 12:30 PM on or before September 18. 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. Departures are from Salt Lake City (SLC) after 1:00 PM on September 26.

*Naturalist Journeys, LLC is an equal opportunity service provider and committed to the goal of ensuring equal opportunity for all in employment and program delivery.*

### Cost of the Journey

The cost of the journey is \$3390 DBL / \$4195 SGL, per person based on double occupancy.

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, or items of a personal nature such as laundry, telephone calls, or beverages from the bar or gratuities for portage or personal services.

### 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.