

Arizona: Sweetheart Birding

With Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures



February 11 – 15, 2023

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Arizona is a region marked by spectacular scenery and sharp contrasts. Towering saguaro cactus, sandy washes, and granite outcroppings lie in contrast to lush riparian corridors and forested mountain terrain. While the deserts are home to Greater Roadrunner, Cactus Wren, and Verdin, Golden Eagle and other raptors soar over peaks and grasslands. 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 cottonwood groves where local rivers wind through the valleys. Treat yourself to some 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 winter birding in the United States!

A true highlight of this trip, Sandhill Crane occur in the tens of thousands and we have time to hear their haunting calls and to study their antics and behaviors. Learn new skills from your guides as you seek out a high diversity of raptors that 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 over a special holiday than a stay at the welcoming Casa de San Pedro? In addition to birding, learn a bit of history in the mining towns of Bisbee, or visit Kartchner Caverns. Sample regional wines as we enjoy fun local restaurants and indulge at special catered dining. 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 vacation, 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. Or check out the famous gem and mineral show.

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 Crane! 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 falcon
- ✓ Sparrows abound; recently a small local pond had three species of longspur!
- ✓ 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 Hummingbirds
- ✓ Meet local experts from the Southeastern Arizona Bird Observatory and learn about their research
- ✓ 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
- ✓ Extend your stay in Tucson among sunshine and saguaros

Tour Summary

5-Day / 4-Night Arizona Birding & Nature Tour

\$1750, from Tucson

Airport is Tucson International (TUS)

Day-to-Day Itinerary

Sat., Feb. 11 Arrival in Tucson | South to Casa de San Pedro

Our tour starts at 1:00 PM in Tucson where we can pick you up at the airport or a nearby airport hotel. If you are driving you can meet us either at the airport or at the Paton Center or the Casa de San Pedro. We start right in with a great afternoon of birding.

We wind down scenic highway 83 to Sonoita, passing through lovely grasslands. We take a short detour over to the hamlet of Patagonia, where Tucson Audubon has an excellent sanctuary, the Paton Center for Hummingbirds. Here we may see the beautiful Violet-crowned Hummingbird, the vibrant Broad-billed, and the electric Anna's Hummingbird among other species.

We then drive through the grasslands near Sonoita as we head on to the Casa de San Pedro, watching for Pronghorn that frequent the area, as well as Chihuahuan Raven.

Upon arrival, we settle into our wonderful lodgings where hosts Patrick Dome and Karl Schmitt are waiting to check us in at the Casa de San Pedro. Casa de San Pedro is a nationally acclaimed inn; they say it's 90 miles from Tucson and inches from heaven. We agree! We find it the ideal location for our groups, with meeting space, incredible hospitality, active bird feeders, a pond, and the San Pedro River right outside our door.

Tonight is a treat, dinner in historic Bisbee at the Café Roka, one of Arizona's best restaurants. What a way to begin!

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

Sun., Feb. 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!

Within this expansive valley is a wildlife area that wintering cranes use extensively called Whitewater Draw. We stop mid-morning when they come back in from feeding to take in the spectacle of seeing them by the thousands and to watch their behavior. There is a good variety of waterfowl here, shorebirds such as Wilson's Snipe, Long-billed Dowitcher, Least Sandpiper, and other species. There is often a Vermilion Flycatcher perched up for inspection, perhaps a Say's Phoebe, and with luck a covey of Scaled Quail.

Plan for a long day, but this should be an excellent birding day on all accounts. Tonight, enjoy dinner catered for us back at the Casa, and for those that wish, a chance to catch up our species list around the fireplace.

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

Mon., Feb. 13 Ramsey Canyon | Local Feeders of the Huachuca Mountains

Happy Valentine's Day to all! Enjoy a lovely breakfast at the inn today. Then we 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! We may also stop at another favorite spot nearby if we hear of good bird activity there in shrubs that can be loaded with berries.

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 come in, and Woodhouse's Scrub Jay. Our photographers are always happy here!

Tonight, we have a special celebratory dinner planned for you. Afterwards, 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)

Tues., Feb. 14

Kartchner Cavern or Birding the River | Bisbee | 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 leisurely sleep in.

This morning (please confirm your choice when registering) enjoy a guided tour of one of Arizona's true gems, Kartchner Caverns. This State Park houses one of the most comfortable and beautiful caves you can experience, plus an excellent series of exhibits on geology of the cave and surrounding area. If you prefer to continue birding, 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 has liked to sunbath from his cottonwood-tree home.

This afternoon, after a nice break back at the inn (fresh-baked pies ...) we return to Whitewater Draw for sunset with Sandhill Crane pouring in to roost in the ponds there — an unforgettable sight!

Our final dinner is at a steakhouse close to the Casa, one with true western style.

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

Wed., Feb. 15 Birding & Breakfast | Departures from Tucson

Our plan is to offer optional birding along the river early this morning, enjoy a nice breakfast, pack, and to return to the airport by 11:00 AM for flights out after 12:30 PM. If you are driving you can leave today at leisure. (B)

Tour Details

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.

Cost of the Journey

Cost of the journey is **\$1750 DBL / \$2150 SGL** from Tucson, AZ. This cost includes accommodations for 4 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 1:00 PM on February 11; 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 February 15, after morning birding we head to the airport, arriving there by 11:00 AM for flights out after NOON.

Photo Credits

Group Hiking, Hugh Simmons Photography; 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.

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