

Southeast Arizona Birding & Wildlife with Naturalist Journeys



May 2 – 11, 2023

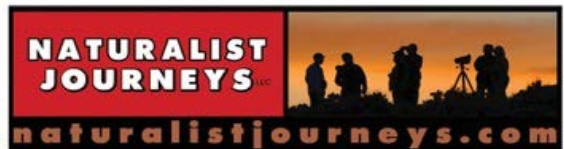
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Naturalist Journeys, LLC



One of our best! Enjoy 3 nights each at prime birding lodges during the peak of spring migration. This is one of North America's most treasured birding hotspots.

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, exploring the remarkable Amerind Foundation Museum and the oasis Twin Lakes ponds near Willcox for migrating shorebirds. Spend three days 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, all from wonderful digs at the Amado Territory Inn. All hotels selected offer premium location and hospitality. Join us to discover the region's birding hotspots, scenic vistas, and local restaurants.

Tour Summary

10-Day / 9-Night Tour

\$3490, from Tucson, Arizona

Airport is Tucson International (TUS)

Tour Highlights

- ✓ Explore Southeastern Arizona's Sky Island Mountains at the peak of spring migration
- ✓ Enjoy delightful lodges; feel a bit pampered with special meals and hospitality
- ✓ Visit Old Bisbee, with its mining history and eclectic locals
- ✓ Experience many photo opportunities — colorful birds and other wildlife abound
- ✓ Get an up close and personal study on hummingbirds – over a dozen species!
- ✓ Join an owl-prowl to find Whiskered Screech Owl, Elf Owl, and more

Day-to-Day Itinerary

Tues., May 2 Arrival in Tucson | Amerind Foundation | Willcox Playa | Portal

Welcome to Southeast Arizona! You arrive today in Tucson, a vibrant city surrounded by mountain ranges that rise dramatically from the Sonoran Desert floor. Please plan to arrive no later than 1:00 PM.

We leave the urban setting behind, and drive towards the southeast corner of the state, making several stops en route. The renowned Amerind Foundation is a private, non-profit anthropological and archaeological museum and research center, established in 1937. It is situated in Texas Canyon, a fascinating geologic area of colorful granite monoliths. Enjoy exhibits of Native American cultures, near and far. Their gift store is a wonderful place to pick up authentic jewelry, basketry, and pottery.

We stop next 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.

Tonight, we stay in the charming village of Portal with stunning views of the Chiricahua Mountains. Settle in and enjoy dinner and an overview of the week to come. Enjoyed a leisurely catered meal with mountain vistas all around.

Accommodations at Cave Creek Ranch, Portal (D)

Wed., May 3 High Mountain Birding | Owling

Today we 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. 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!

Tonight, we return for an early dinner at our lodgings. Learn more about the region's small owls; afterwards we venture out to hear and see them.

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

Thurs., May 4

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 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., May 5 Chiricahua National Monument | Bisbee | The San Pedro River

Today we say farewell to Portal and retrace our route up and over the mountains to the rock wonderland of the Chiricahua National Monument. In this area of spectacular rock pillars, formed by volcanic activity and erosion, famous Apache leaders Cochise and Geronimo and their followers once hid from American troops. Today, Zone-tailed Hawk and Peregrine Falcon patrol the rugged rock landscape. Learn more about the geological processes that formed the park and walk the trails between the rock formations, looking for Rock and Canyon Wrens, Painted Redstart, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Red-faced Warbler, and Mexican Jay. With luck, we may spot an inquisitive Coatiundi, a relative of the raccoon. Claret-cup Cacti and Yucca should be in bloom and we enjoy a picnic lunch.

Then we head west across extensive grasslands under the shadow of the Dos Cabezas Mountains, watching for raptors and Lark Bunting. Visit the famous old west town of Bisbee to stretch our legs and look around, get a coffee or an ice-cream.

We then head to our most delightful lodgings at the Casa de San Pedro, on the San Pedro River south of Sierra Vista. 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.

After a full day of learning and exploring, we enjoy a catered dinner at the Casa.
Accommodations at the Casa de San Pedro (B,L,D)

Sat., May 6 Carr Canyon | Ash Canyon Feeders & Favorite Local Spots

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 at Ash Canyon 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. We visit a few more favorite local spots before returning to the Casa with our sights set on the B&B's famous pie!

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

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

Sun., May 7 Ramsey Canyon | San Pedro River Walk

This morning 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 Coaticundis, 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.

We return to the Casa this afternoon and enjoy some walking time along the San Pedro River. 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.

Dinner tonight is catered at the Casa.

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

Mon., May 8 Patagonia | Patagonia Lake | Roadside Rest | Amado

After breakfast, we head 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 rare Black-capped Gnatcatcher, seen on a regular basis.

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 cottonweed 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.

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

Tues., May 9 Florida, Box, & Madera Canyons

Florida, Box and Madera Canyons are carved out of the Santa Rita Mountains. 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 two 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.

In grasslands adjacent to the Santa Rita Mountains, we look for Botteri's, Rufous-winged, and Rufous-collared Sparrows, as well as other specialties of the area. As the afternoon draws to a close, we drive east, crossing a lush grassland area with Pronghorn.

Enjoy dinner in Tubac, an artisan's village where good restaurants abound.

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

Wed., May 10 Canoa Ponds | Tumacacori | Pena Blanca Lake

The corridor south of Tucson is replete with birds, some of the migrants arriving here first due to the river area's lower elevation. Along the Santa Cruz River we may find specialties such as Rose-throated Becard, Gray Hawk, or even the rare Sinaloa Wren.

Canoa Ranch Conservation Park has a very productive pond where we add water bird species to our growing tally of Southeast Arizona's avifauna. The Santa Rita Mountains loom behind and we watch the sky for Golden Eagle and other raptors.

Going south to Rio Rico, we take in a few more birding hotspots close to the historic mission at Tumacacori, an impressive site. Pena Blanca Lake is a delightful final stop.

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

Thurs., May 11 Departures from Tucson

We offer an optional bird walk along the Santa Cruz River early in the morning, or a chance to visit a very special local feeder site that has an excellent pollination garden. We then pack up and drive to Tucson for flights out after 12:00 PM. (B)

Tour Details

Plan Ahead!

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

Cost of the Journey

Cost of the Journey is **\$3490 DBL / \$4280 SGL** based on double occupancy from Tucson, AZ. The tour price includes airport transfers, 9 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.

Travel Information

Airport is Tucson International Airport (TUS). Plan to arrive no later than 1:00 PM on May 2. Departures from Tucson can be planned from 12:00 PM onward on May 11. 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!

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.

Photo Credits

Elegant Trogon, Peg Abbott (PA); Mexican Spotted Owl, Greg Smith (GS); Cave Creek Canyon, Steve Wolfe (SW); Coati, PA; Golden Eagle, GS.

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