

# Southeast Arizona Sky Island Sampler Species List | April 26 – May 5, 2024 with Naturalist Journeys



**Species list compiled by Vernie Aikins and Stephen Grace, with help from James Petersen, a Naturalist Journeys guide based in Portal, AZ. Our 6 wonderful guests were: Marie, Sue, Kathy, Tish, Cheryl and Lucy.**

## Summary

Our group explored three Sky Island mountain ranges of Southeast Arizona: the Chiricahuas, the Huachucas, and the Santa Ritas.

One of the most biodiverse places on the planet, the Sky Islands lie at an ecological crossroads. Here, the subtropical Sierra Madre Occidental Mountains of Mexico meet the temperate biome of the Rocky Mountains and Colorado Plateau. The Sonoran Desert to the west, the Chihuahuan Desert to the east, and the Great Plains also intersect here. As elevation increases in the Sky Islands, temperature decreases, and moisture rises. This creates several distinct bands of habitat on each mountain range, from desert scrub in the lowlands to mixed conifer forest at the summits. These diverse habitats produce the bountiful and varied flora and fauna of the Sky Islands.

The Elegant Trogon is the standout species of this region. We had a remarkable encounter with a male, listening at close range to his strange call, which sounded like a barking dog, and watching his metallic-green and rose-red body with a coppery tail as he moved among sycamores in search of a mate.

The many other avian highlights of this tour included the following:

At Wilcox Playa we watched waterfowl such as Cinnamon Teal and Ruddy Duck, as well as shorebirds like Wilson's Phalarope, Black-necked Stilt, and American Avocet. We spotted an Eared Grebe in breeding plumage at Patagonia Lake. In the Chiricahuas, we glimpsed the notoriously elusive Montezuma Quail. Male Wild Turkeys (Gould's subspecies) strutted just a few feet from us at Cave Creek Ranch. Throughout the tour, White-winged Doves seemed to be everywhere, and we spotted several Inca Doves and one Common Ground Dove. Greater Roadrunners were glimpsed as they streaked alongside roads, and we watched one of these captivating birds at close range as it zigzagged across a field.

We observed ten hummingbird species, including crowd pleasers like Rivoli's and Violet-crowned. Finding a Black-chinned Hummingbird on a nest was a fantastic surprise.

Among the Icterid family, Bullock's Oriole won the prize for most colorful. Of the dozen warbler species we checked off our list, the Painted Redstart, Red-faced Warbler, and Grace's Warbler left lasting impressions of their beauty. At Desert Meadows Park in Green Valley, we loved watching a Lucy's Warbler fly in and out of a nesting nook in a hollow roof beam. At Rustler Park near the top of the Chiricahuas, Vernie worked hard to find an Olive Warbler (not a true warbler and not olive) for our group.

The Arizona Woodpecker was a lifer for many members of our group, and Acorn Woodpeckers delighted everyone with their clownish faces and antics. Summer Tanagers and Western Tanagers were common but never failed to amaze us with their vibrant colors. Seeing Red Crossbills and Pygmy Nuthatches well with a scope was satisfying. The amber staring eye of the Yellow-eyed Junco mesmerized us.

Among flycatchers, watching the Black Phoebes that nest at Cave Creek Ranch was fun, as was hearing the Greater Pewee's song of "José Maria." We worked hard for looks at a Buff-breasted Flycatcher in the Chiricahua high-country and a Northern Beardless Tyrannulet in the brush of Montosa Canyon.

We appreciated seeing a Pyrrhuloxia, the "Desert Cardinal," alongside its close cousin, the Northern Cardinal. The Phainopepla, known as the "Black Cardinal" of the desert, but only distantly related to the Northern Cardinal, wowed us with the white patches on its wings in flight and its spiky crest and ruby eyes when perched. The Verdin, another quintessential desert bird and a busy little creature, also delighted our group. The Bridled Titmouse was a real charmer, and the male Vermilion Flycatcher was a shocking shade of red.

Owl prowls produced memorable views of a Whiskered Screech Owl flying just above our heads and an Elf Owl peeking at us over its shoulder—as if the world's smallest owl wasn't already cute enough.

#### **Favorite Bird of the Tour**

**Marie:** Whichever bird she happened to be looking at.

**Tish:** Bridled Titmouse—so cute!

**Sue:** Vermilion Flycatcher—so eye-catching!

**Cheryl:** Acorn Woodpecker—such a fun clown!

**Kathy:** Olive Warbler—we worked so hard to get it!

**Vernie:** in agreement with Kathy—Olive Warbler.

**Kim** (Vernie's wife): Verdin—had never seen the red on this bird before.

**Stephen:** Black-chinned Hummingbird—found one on a nest just after Elissa gave our group a presentation on her hummingbird banding, as if her talk had come to life!

#### **BIRDS: 176 species were recorded, of which 3 are introduced species.**

The eBird link below details the 176 species of birds our group observed during the tour. If you're new to eBird, be sure to click "Show All Details" on the right side of the list to expand the report and reveal where and when each of the birds were seen and how many.

[Southeast Arizona Sky Island Sampler | April 26 – May 5, 2024 | eBird Trip Report](#)

#### **MAMMALS (17):**

**Pronghorn** *Antilocapra americana* – We saw herds running across the grasslands near Sonita, and one handsome male was observed and photographed for several minutes at close range.

**Mule Deer** *Odocoileus hemionus* – We watched these animals during early mornings in the fields near Casa de San Pedro.

**White-tailed Deer** *Odocoileus virginianus* – The Coues white-tailed deer subspecies—with a smaller body than other white-tailed populations and larger ears for dissipating heat—were commonly encountered.

**Collared Peccary** *Pecari tajacu* – Also known as javelina, these creatures that resemble pigs walked past us while we were birding at Cave Creek Ranch.

**White-nosed Coati** *Nasua narica* – Nicknamed Juanito, one of these beguiling racoon relatives came close to the Casa de San Pedro porch to eat peanut butter that a caretaker smears on a tree each morning.

**Hooded Skunk** *Mephitis macroura* – Tish encountered a skunk trying to cross the same bridge she was crossing at Cave Creek Ranch; the creature turned and went the other way. Several of us on a morning walk at Case de San Pedro had superb looks at a large fluffy black-and-white rug moving across the forest floor.

**Desert Cottontail** *Sylvilagus audubonii* – Seen often with their large ears that help radiate body heat into the desert air.

**Black-tailed Jackrabbit** *Lepus californicus* – One enormous individual—the size of a small deer, members of our group said—was seen on the grounds of the Tubac Golf Resort & Spa when we had our farewell dinner.

**Rock Squirrel** *Otospermophilus variegatus* – We enjoyed good looks at this bushy-tailed ground squirrel on several days.

**Arizona Gray Squirrel** *Sciurus arizonensis* – Less closely related to other gray squirrels than it is to the fox squirrel, this species endemic to the forested canyons of eastern Arizona and northern Mexico was spotted in Miller Canyon.

**Bobcat** *Lynx rufus* – This gorgeous and elusive wildcat was glimpsed in the headlights of our van in Cave Creek Canyon when we drove to an owl prowl destination one evening.

**Black-tailed Prairie Dog** *Cynomys ludovicianus* – Near Sonoita, we observed a bustling prairie dog town, a veritable metropolis of these charming rodents—one of the non-avian highlights of this tour.

**Bat Species Identified at Casa de San Pedro by Echo Meter** (This device made by Wildlife Acoustics plugs into a smartphone and analyzes the biosonar of bats to identify them.)

**Big Brown Bat** *Eptesicus fuscus*

**Western Small-footed Myotis** *Myotis ciliolabrum*

**Canyon Bat** *Parastrellus hesperus*

**Long-legged Myotis** *Myotis volans*

**Lesser Long-nosed Bat** *Leptonycteris yerbabuenae*

#### **REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS (5):**

Spiny lizards and whiptails were seen daily. We identified to species level the following:

**Clark's Spiny Lizard** *Sceloporus clarkia* – While birdwatching at Ash Canyon we observed one of these reptiles on a tree trunk.

**Desert Spiny Lizard** *Sceloporus magister* – This creature with gorgeous greens and blues on its throat was seen doing a push-up display at Desert Meadows Park in Green Valley

**Zebra-tailed Lizard** *Callisaurus draconoides* – This beguiling creature that raises its striped tail to distract predators was seen at close range at Desert Meadows Park in Green Valley

**Gophersnake** *Pituophis catenifer* – This handsome, nonvenomous serpent that resembles a rattlesnake was seen at close range on a river walk at San Pedro House.

**Canyon Tree Frog** *Dryophytes arenicolor* – We found these desert-dwelling amphibians on boulders in Madera Creek.

#### **INSECTS (4):**

Among the many butterflies we observed, the following were identified to the species level:

**Arizona Sister** *Adelpha eulalia* – The lepidoptery highlight of this tour, this species was seen both perched and flying in Miller Canyon.

**Red-spotted Purple** *Limenitis arthemis* – This stunning butterfly that has evolved to mimic the noxious Pipevine Swallowtail was observed on several occasions.

**Queen** *Danaus gilippus* – This pretty Monarch mimic delighted our group.

**Funereal Duskywing** *Erynnis funeralis* – The somber color scheme lends this butterfly a staid beauty.

**ARACHNIDS (1):**

Trapdoor spider – This common name refers to various spiders from several different groups. They create burrows with a silk-hinged trapdoor that helps them ambush prey. Observing one of these creatures on its trap next to a trail along Patagonia Lake stopped us in our tracks and provided endless intrigue.