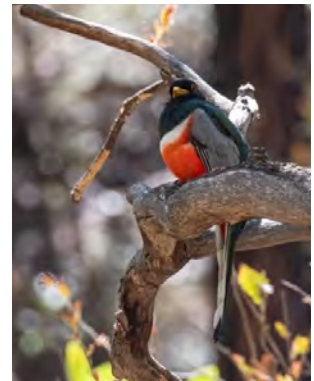


Southeast Arizona Sky Island Sampler Trip Report | May 6-15, 2025 by David Jaffe



Naturalist Journeys Guides: David Jaffe & Mason Flint

Participants: Gail, Marge, Sally, David, Gail, Jay, Mary, Jack, Nancy and Jimmy



Southeast Arizona is known for being one of the most biologically diverse regions in North America. There are several factors contributing to the abundance and biodiversity occurring in the region. One of the main reasons has to do with the idea of the “sky Islands” that occupy the area. Sky Islands are mountain ranges that, similar to oceanic islands, are isolated from surrounding highlands by vast expanses of desert. These vast expanses of desert are dryer and hotter than the cooler, more lush canyons that occur in higher elevations of these mountain systems. The Chiricahua Mountains have an elevation range of approximately 5000 feet, from about 4700 feet to just below 10,000 feet. This is significant because as you gain elevation, temperature drops while moisture increases. Therefore, organisms that can thrive in the warmer lowlands of these areas will not occur at higher elevations. Conversely, the organisms that cannot deal with the drier, warmer conditions of the lowlands can occur at the higher elevations. So, this provides for tremendous biological potential along this elevational gradient. As if this weren’t enough, southeast Arizona occurs at the confluence of four major ecosystems: the Sonoran Desert influences the region from the west while the Chihuahuan Desert influences the region from the east. Plants and animals from the Rocky Mountain region reach their furthest southernmost extent in the Chiricahuas, while plants and animals of the Sierra Madrean forests of Mexico reach their furthest northernmost



extent in southeast Arizona. Therefore, it is possible to observe plants from the Sonoran and Chihuahuan deserts *and* the Rocky Mountains and Sierra Madre Occidental at the same time from on stationary position! This combination of ecological variables makes for a landscape that can support a great variety of plants and animals. For folks that enjoy observing a myriad of wildlife and plants, there is no better place to do this than in southeastern Arizona, and this trip is designed to do exactly that!

Tues., May 6 Arrival in Tucson | Twin Lakes | Portal

Many of our participants arrived in Tucson at least one, if not several days, before the start of the trip. We all shared stories about how we used this 'bonus time' to explore the many beautiful and engaging sights of Tucson. One of the most interesting and educational destinations in the area has to be the Sonoran Desert Museum. This mostly outdoor museum combines signage, bird aviaries, herpetology and outdoor exhibits with a wonderful trail system and ample opportunities for exploring and learning about the Sonoran Desert. Several participants visited this museum before joining the tour.

After this bonus pre-tour exploration, the time would come when we would all join together as a group and begin the process of getting to know each other and the desert landscape through which we would be traveling for the next ten days. Mason and David picked up all the guests at their hotel or met them at the airport. After a quick meet and greet at the airport, we loaded all the luggage into our two vehicles and proceeded to Baggin's Gourmet Sandwich shop for a tasty sandwich or nice salad before leaving the area.

Our adventure began with a beautiful drive through two of the major desert environments that occur in North America. We started in the Sonoran Desert and traveled east into the Chihuahuan Desert and then turned south at Wilcox to visit the lakes at "Twin Lakes Golf Course". This wetland is one of the only major bodies of water in the area and is therefore a magnet for all sorts of birds, including LOTS of waterfowl. This would be the only major waterfowl destination of the trip.

But, again, it wasn't just waterfowl. In addition to Avocets in their beautiful breeding plumage, Long-billed Dowitchers, Least Sandpipers, and a healthy sprinkling of the elegant Black-necked Stilts, there was an abundance of swallows like the Violet Green, Cliff, Northern Rough-winged, Barn and Bank. We also had Cinnamon Teals, American Wigeons, Northern Shovelers, several Franklin's gull, and some American Coots. For flycatchers, we had a female Vermilion Flycatcher at first, but later we were treated to some incredible looks at the male, which is hands down, one of the most brilliant North American flycatchers out there!



We observed both Western and Cassin's Kingbird and a few unidentified empids. After a very productive session at the lake, we made our way over to the pond where we saw a Common Yellowthroat and our first and only White-faced Ibis of the trip. While David was scanning for a Sora that Mason heard, he happened upon a Black-crowned Night Heron hidden deep in the reeds. With some perseverance, everyone had a look at this beauty.

In total, we spent a little more than an hour and a half birding the lake and the pond before pulling ourselves away and heading toward Cave Creek Ranch (CCR). But, not first without searching for Scaled Quail and Bendire's Thrasher on the way out. We found the former, not the latter...yet. Nonetheless, we were very pleased with our first group birding session.

We then made our way to the Safeway in Wilcox for a bathroom and shopping break while David went and got some petrol for the van. After Safeway, we continued our adventure into the mighty Chiricahuas where we would spend the next couple of days at Cave Creek Ranch, infamous amongst the birding community.

But of course, we didn't go straight to CCR for we needed to take a little detour to see if we could find a special hawk that makes its way only up into the very, very southern parts of the United States – a little piece of Arizona, a teeny tiny piece of New Mexico and into the Rio Grande Valley. We're talking about the Harris's Hawk that has been known to nest in the San Simon area. Well, it didn't take long before we found this bird perched on a pole in plain-view for everybody to see the beautiful rufous on its wings in the warm glow of the afternoon sun. The way the bird was sitting gave us good looks at its yellow legs, the white vent, and the yellow cere. What a great way to end our first day of birding... So you would think... However, on our way through the pecan grove a Swainson's Hawk flew right in front of us—adding a cherry to an already delectable cake.

After our arrival and settling in at Cave Creek Ranch, we had a wonderful meal catered by Jackie from the George Walker house. Delicious does not say enough to describe the meal we all shared on our first night after a glorious first day in southeast Arizona! With full bellies and warm hearts, we retired to our cabins to get some rest before another big day of birding.

Wed., May 7 High Mountain Birding | Owling

Today, we rose early with excitement and anticipation to explore the high country of the Chiricahua Mountains. The higher elevations of the sky islands in southeast Arizona are home to several species of birds that can only be seen in this part of the country. A few we would be searching for included the Mexican Chickadee, Red-faced and Olive Warblers, Buff-Bellied Flycatcher and the Yellow-eyed Junco.



To start the day, Mason kindly offered to make some 'wake-me-up' coffee. He had a pot ready by 6:15 and much of the group was out birding shortly thereafter. This early start with coffee and birding the land right around Cave Creek Ranch was a great way to start the day. We saw about 30 species...without even leaving the parking lot! After this great early morning birding, but before our 7 AM departure James, our local Cave Creek Ranch/Naturalist Journeys guide, shared with us the names of some of the trees in the front yard, including the Siberian Elm, the Desert Willow, the Pyrocantha, and the Ornamental Pomegranate. It was amongst all of these trees that we saw the great diversity of bird species this morning, including the Lesser's Goldfinch, Broad-billed Hummingbird, Blue-throated Mountain Gem, Black-headed Grosbeak, the Acorn and Ladderbacked Woodpeckers, and the Pyrrhuloxia. On the ground we had several Wild Turkey, Gambel Quail, and a few Curve-Billed Thrashers.

We made our way up the bumpy road to the George Walker house for a delicious breakfast catered, again by Jackie, and again, very colorful, tasty and nourishing. What a great way to start the day: a wonderful breakfast and a superb birding destination! Before breakfast was even done, we observed the Bridled Titmouse, Mexican Jay, more Wild Turkeys, Western Tanager, Green-Tailed Towhee and our first White-crowned Sparrow of the trip.

After breakfast and birding the George Walker House, we drove a short distance to Turkey Creek. At this elevation, we were above the Alligator Juniper, in a forest of Pines and Oaks. This is where we searched for a nesting pair of Mexican Chickadees. While searching for these birds, that occur just barely north of the US border, everyone had some really great looks at several warblers including the Townsend's and the Hermit; a couple of us got on the Graces Warbler. Several of us did get some good looks of the Mexican Chickadee, however, this would not be our only opportunity. We continued to Pinery Canyon for a few of our other target species, of which the Mexican Chickadee was definitely one.

Within moments of leaving our vehicle in Pinery Canyon, we located a major target species for the area: the Mexican Spotted Owl. We didn't just 'kind of' see this bird, we had some incredible looks through both scopes and our binoculars. Then just to add a little more sweetness to the experience, we got some of the best looks of the Red-faced Warbler most of us have ever seen as it was feeding on a very nearby Gambel Oak. We then had some wonderful looks of the Olive Warbler. So, three of our target species...check! Other species we either saw or heard in the area included the Pygmy Nuthatch, and our familiar friend, the Acorn Woodpecker. We got a good look at a Brown Creeper, as well as some nice ground traveling birds like the Hermit Thrush, Spotted Towhee, and some beautiful looks of the Yellow-Eyed Junco, #4 target species! Although we searched valiantly



for the Buff-breasted Flycatcher, we left the area one bird shy of *seeing* all of our high elevation target bird. However, we did *hear* it calling at one point during our session. Our time in Pinery Canyon ended with some really nice looks of the Western Tanager. Perfect!

A short jaunt further up the mountain brought us to Rustler Park, just in time to see a bobcat scurry away from the picnic area where we parked...welcome to Rustler Park! After the 'bobcat excitement' settled a bit, we enjoyed a wonderful picnic lunch prepared for us by Ed and Melissa from Cave Creek Sandwich Company.

After this delicious lunch with a wild landscape as our backdrop, David used visual aids and delivered a short presentation on the significance of the sky islands. You could sense David's excitement when Gail Edie asked about the geology of the area: Open the floodgates. David has a strong interest in geology and was only too happy to discuss more about the incredible geologic history of the Chiricahuas.

We decided to engage with a little post-lunch birding adventure. With a bit of perseverance, we finally got on the Buff-breasted Flycatcher, although it was very high and slightly in shadow. But we got to see it! We had one more look for the Mexican Chickadee and also searched for the Greater Pewee. We were successful with the Chickadee, but not the Pewee. Feeling pretty satisfied at seeing many of our target species at Rustler Park, we slowly made our way down the hill.

After returning to Cave Creek Ranch, we all enjoyed a well-deserved bit of downtime. Then we made our way over to Peg Abbott's, the owner of Naturalist Journeys. She enjoys hosting the groups on this tour for dinner and she has an amazing place for such hosting. Peg lives just outside of the town of Portal in a beautiful setting with another amazing "Portal yard" that attracts the numerous bird species occurring in the area. After traveling the world and collecting art from so many different countries, her house is an extremely engaging treasure trove of beauty and stories waiting to be told. Our dinner was, as expected, exquisite. The company was wonderful. The stories were grand. And the evening was just an overall delight!

After dinner, James took Mary, Jimmy, Nancy, Gayle, Marge, Sally, Mason and David out owling in search of the Elf and Western Screech. Not only did we hear these owls, we also heard the Whiskered Screech and the Great Horned Owls. So, although we didn't see owls, we heard a good diversity. Perhaps as a bonus, we saw a striped skunk! This ended a big, full day in the Chiricahuas. A big, full beautiful day!



Thurs., May 8 Bob Rodriguez Feeders | Cave Creek Canyon | Portal | Four Bar Cottages

Eight of our 10 went to Bob Rodriguez's feeders before breakfast. Marge and Sally decided to have a casual morning at the ranch and bird locally. Once we settled in to watching birds at Bob's, we observed a few new species for the trip including the Abert's Towhee, Bullock's Oriole and a special treat for the area: the Clay-colored Sparrow! The range maps don't even show this bird has a population in Arizona. The maps show it as 'rare'. So, that was exciting. Before we loaded the vehicles for our departure, we birded just off Bob's property on the quiet street in front of his house. Here we looked skyward towards a couple White-throated Swifts and searched a large kettle of what appeared to be all Turkey Vultures. Sometimes Zone-tailed Hawks mingle with Turkey Vultures and since they look very similar, one must always search the kettles! You might just get lucky...we did not! No hawks...this time! However, we were hopeful... We saw a Lucy's Warbler in the desert scrub before we finally pulled ourselves away from the birds and left the area. In total, we spent about 45 minutes at Bob's before we returned to Cave Creek Ranch for a delicious breakfast prepared by the Ed and Melissa (Cave Creek Ranch Sandwich Company).

Following breakfast, a little break and some birding around the ranch house, we headed out towards South Fork. We stopped briefly so David could jump out of the van, run down to the creek and do a quick scout for some Montezuma Quail, but alas, he did not find the birds. From here we went to the bridge which crosses the creek. We picked up a few new species from the bridge including the Painted Redstart and a Band-tailed Pigeon. Once on the trail, we saw the Dusky Flycatcher for the first time this trip. As we continued up the canyon, we passed Arizona Sycamores, Apache Pines, Alligator Junipers, Arizona Cypress, various species of Agave, and other representatives from the four major ecosystems that converge in the Chiricahuas. A little further up canyon in wide clearing, we had some incredible looks of the steep canyon walls rising 2,000 to 3,000 feet above the valley floor. The orange rock, bright lime lichen, rich blue sky and puffy white clouds was very dramatic!

After a little time on the trail, our group naturally and comfortably split into the "hikers" and the "amblers". The hikers went ahead on the trail with James and Mason in search of probably the most sought-after bird in the United States. Cave Creek Canyon is one of, if not the best place to look for it! Of course, we're talking about the Elegant Trogon. The Elegant Trogon was first spotted in the USA in 1884, but wasn't spotted in Cave Creek Canyon until 1942. At that time, expert birders thought there may be about 20 in Arizona with 2 or 3 pairs in the Chiricahuas. Although the population waxes and wanes over the years, this canyon provides one of the best chances of spotting this beautiful member of the Trogonidae family, which also includes the well-known Quetzals, which have not made it into the states with any regularity. The hikers were successful! They got some great looks at the Trogon and had the photos to prove it.



Meanwhile, David and Peg stayed with the amblers. In addition to some of our old friends, including the Bridled Titmouse, Mexican Jay, and the Acorn Woodpecker, we got an incredible look at a Northern Pygmy Owl feeding on a chipmunk in an Alligator Juniper. Although it was a little tricky to find at first, once we got on it, it did not move and we all got good looks of it. When the two groups reconnected, we shared stories about what the other group experienced. It was really nice to have different, but equally inspiring and engaging experiences in that beautiful canyon.

On the way out of the canyon, we stopped for a quick bathroom break and then to look at some pictographs on an overhung rock that date from the Mogollon People, between 200 and 1400 CE.

Following this brief but fascinating stop at the pictographs, we headed back to Cave Creek Ranch for a delightful lunch followed by going over our bird list from yesterday. Following this, David shared a reading about maintaining our sense of awareness and wonder in wild places.

We then enjoyed a short siesta before reengaging with the birding adventure and heading out 'on the town' to see what we could see! Our first stop for the afternoon was a steak-out for the Thick-billed Kingbird. As soon as we got out of the car, we observed the bird sallie-ing from a large branch of a prominent Arizona Sycamore. Not only was the tree beautiful, but to see this southeastern Arizona specialty flying to and from the large, brilliant green canopy was a treat. After some good looks through both the scopes and our binoculars, we reloaded the vans and headed towards downtown Portal. We parked at the post office, took our obligatory group shot and then walked into the little community of Portal where we saw many of our old friends as well as our first Eurasian-collared Dove for the trip.

After our exploration of downtown Portal, we reloaded the vans and headed down to Four Bar Cottages in search of one of our missed target birds: the Bendire's Thrasher.

Not only did we see the Thrasher, but we also got the MacGillivray's Warbler! Two really good species and both new for the trip. Following this short, but productive adventure, we drove all the way to New Mexico, which took all of eight minutes and then had a really nice dinner at the Sky Island Café. Another big day that ended with good conversation and positive energy!



Fri., May 9 Southwest Research Station | Chiricahua National Monument | Casa De San Pedro

Today was our final day in the Chiricahuas, but a splendid day it would be! After some early morning birding at Cave Creek Ranch, the Cave Creek Ranch Sandwich Company served us up a delicious breakfast of French toast, eggs, pear compote, yogurt, berries and granola, all accompanied with a very positive attitude, lots of smiles and really nice energy. Just after breakfast, Mason and David drove the vehicles around to the various cabins to pick up the luggage so we could begin our trip up to the Southwest Research Station. This Field Station was established in the 1950's and provides scientists, educators and students from around the world the opportunity to participate in research, workshops and classes in one of the most biologically rich environments in the United States. These people play a major role in contributing to the knowledge we have of the area and its conservation. Both are so very important these days!!

We did a little bit of birding around the research station but spent most of our time at the hummingbird feeders, getting to know the hummingbirds more intimately. The nice thing about feeders like these is that it gives us birders the opportunity to really just watch them...over and over again as they return to the feeders for as long as we are present. One could imagine they are there during the entirety of daylight hours! In addition to seeing five species of hummingbirds, the Broad-billed, Broad-tailed, Black-chinned, Rivoli's and Blue-throated Mountain Gem, we got some good looks of the Say's Phoebe and several robustly-colorful Audubon's Yellow-rumped Warblers. After a splendid time at the feeders, we continued our journey up and *OVER* the mountains. As we climbed, the view of Cave Creek became more and more dramatic until we finally crested the ridgeline and began our descent through Pinery Canyon, where we saw so many of our target species two days ago. Not only is this a beautiful drive, but it set us up perfectly to visit the incredibly dramatic Chiricahua National Monument.

Known for its incredible geology and exquisite scenery, this is a place not to be missed. After a picnic lunch in the foothills, David shared a short reading on interconnections called 'The Great Kern County Mouse War'. This story told the tale of the efforts of the 'good citizens of Kern County' to eradicate their county of all the 'nasty predators' like owls, bobcats, coyotes, skunks and so on...Little did they know they were setting themselves up for a tremendous infestation of *about 100 million* mice! They eventually handled the situation with lots of effort, money and poisoned alfalfa. We briefly discussed the lesson and the importance of predator-prey relationships that was made explicitly clear in this reading. After packing up, we traveled up the canyon via East Bonita



Canyon Road. “Bonita” means ‘pretty’ in Spanish and this road surely lives up to its name. We took it all the way to its end at 6870 feet, Massai Point.

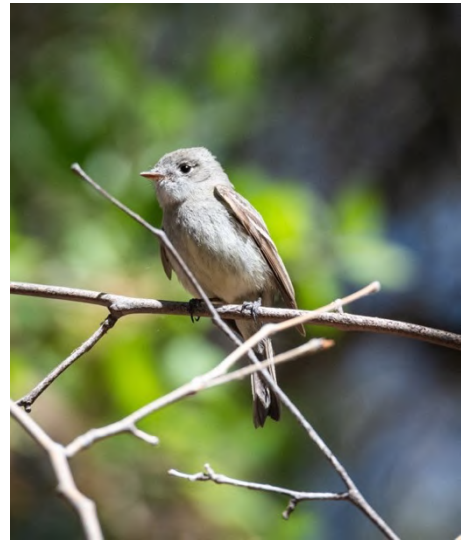
It was a short and beautiful drive up the canyon to Massai point. Here, everybody spent some time enjoying the expansive landscape on the nature trail walk which offered spectacular views over the immense Basin and Range landscape. We all marveled at the pedestals and spires before us.

We enjoyed about an hour at the top of the Chiricahua Mountains, before getting back into the vans and descending down into the Sulphur Springs Valley. We made a quick stop at Safeway for bathrooms and other items folks needed for the next couple days before heading to Naco. Naco is the best place on this itinerary to get could get an up close and personal look at the border patrol wall. Many Americans have *heard* about this wall, but unless you have seen it in person, it really is difficult to get a sense of the magnitude of this project. We had a look, took some pictures and briefly discussed the implications to wildlife and habitat fragmentation caused by such a physical structure. We then made our way to Casa de San Pedro. This place is a glorious oasis away from the busyness of Sierra Vista. It’s calm and peaceful. The owners/operators Patrick and Karl are wonderful people. The staff are superb...and just when you thought the food on this trip couldn’t get any better...WOW! They served us up a delicious dinner of salmon, tasty chicken, two kinds of salad, a delicious corn dish AND garlic bread. For dessert, oh my! An ice-cream bar *plus* Patrick’s famous pies. These pies are unbelievable... needless to say we were well fed! After dinner we finished our bird list that we started before dinner, discussed the plans for tomorrow and retired to our very comfortable rooms here at ‘Casa’.

Sat., May 10 Ramsey Canyon | Ash Canyon

Carl and Patrick fixed us an amazing breakfast at Casa de San Pedro. They kindly started it early so we could leave by seven to arrive at the Ramsey Canyon gate by 7:30. Although we were the first ones in line at the gate, it was barely 1 minute before there were several cars behind us. They opened the gate a little bit early, but the actual reserve didn’t open until eight so we birded around the parking lot for about 20 minutes. Before we even entered the reserve a little before 8 am, the parking lot was almost completely full. Thanks Carl and Patrick for the early start!! While we waited for the reserve to open, we got some more good looks at the Townsend’s and Black-throated Gray Warblers as well as several other species that we have already seen on the trip. Always nice to get more familiar with these birds...

It wasn’t long before the center opened, we paid our entrance fee and were on the trail looking at Rivoli and Broad-billed hummingbirds and American Redstarts. We slowly made our way up past the first huge Sycamore in



Ramsey Creek in search of more southeastern Arizona specialty birds.

As we slowly hiked up canyon, we were successful in seeing a few new species, including the Warbling Vireo and the Brown-crested Flycatcher. We got numerous good looks at both Dusky and Hammond's Flycatchers. Upon reaching the top of the loop, we spent some time looking at the Leopard Frogs basking in the ponds. Then we spent a little time listening for the Trogon, hoping for a second look. No luck today. However, it was lovely just to spend time in the comfort of the cool shade provided by large Oaks and numerous Big Leaf Maples.

We spent three and a half engaging hours exploring the canyon, talking about plants in the riparian zone, looking for specialty birds and enjoying whatever it was that presented itself to us. Back at the visitor center we had a bathroom break, a quick shop and, of course, a little more birding at the feeders at the Ramsey Canyon Inn just down canyon from the reserve. The comfortable benches and shade-providing trees coupled with the lovely breeze made for a very pleasant birdwatching experience! We left there adding one more species to our list for the trip: Anna's hummingbird. The sun hit this male hummer just right and the brilliant red crown and gorget was such a treat to see. Overall, it was a wonderfully relaxed, but productive morning at Ramsey Canyon Nature Reserve! Our next stop would be a picnic lunch at the Ash Canyon Bird Sanctuary, where we would dine in view of multiple birdfeeders. This place is known for the potential to see the Lucifer's Hummingbird.

So, after a short twenty-minute drive, we found ourselves at the Ash Canyon Feeders, with some nice shaded seats for us to eat lunch and watch. Everybody was feeding—birds, squirrels and people! As we dined, we watched several species of birds also dine including: Ladder-backed Woodpeckers, Bridled Titmouse, Verdin, Bewick's Wren and Scott's Orioles. We all got good looks at here-to-fore elusive Zone-tailed Hawk. However, the bird we were seeking, the Lucifer's Hummingbird, eluded all of us...except Jack that is! Upon returning to Casa de San Pedro, Jack showed some pictures to Mason asking about a particular hummingbird...Sure enough: it was our target for the session- the Lucifer's! We would return later that evening to see if we could *all* get some looks at this Specialty Bird.

So, after our siesta and doing our bird list for the day, up to that point, we headed back to Ash Canyon in search of the Lucifer's Hummingbird. We were not the only ones with this idea as there were about 20 others that also wanted to see this special bird. After we sat down, every seat was taken...standing room only! Several people observed the Lucifer's Hummingbird on this second visit. And after about a half an hour at Ash Canyon, we departed to meet a reservation at Pizza Mimosa. So, while many of us were successful at seeing this target species, some of us still have this target bird on our list. They say "leave them wanting more!"



Being that it was Saturday and 'ere of Mother's Day', Pizza Mimosa was exceptionally busy and we did have a long wait for dinner, but the food was really good and it gave us a lot of time for nice conversations and time to further get to know each other. After dinner, we returned to the Casa de San Pedro parking lot and had a good look several Lesser Nighthawks hawking insects in the light of the lamps. We watched these amazing hunting machines for a few minutes before bidding each other a fond good evening. We then returned to the comforts of our rooms at Casa de San Pedro full of stories and excitement, ready for a well-deserved rest.

Sun., May 11 Mother's Day | Casa de San Pedro | San Pedro House | Miller Canyon

To start Mother's Day, Jimmy, Gail, Marge, Mary, Sally, and Nancy joined Mason and David for a pre-breakfast birding excursion along the San Pedro River. Walking amongst these old Cottonwood Trees in the riparian zone of the river is so soothing and very beautiful. As we strolled along, we all got some wonderful views of Vermilion Flycatchers in the sun. Several of us made comments on how enjoyable it was to explore in the coolness of the morning with the birds singing and the huge Cottonwoods providing so much shade: lots of habitat for us to explore. A great way to start Mother's Day!

At about 7:50, we decided we reached our final point on the morning excursion and turned around to make our way back to Casa de San Pedro for breakfast. However, before we reached the Casa, many folks got a good look at a Northern Beardless Tyrannulet. This was a new species for the trip and a life-bird for many of us!

Shortly after another delicious breakfast of pancakes, sausage, fresh fruit, a small pastry and orange juice, we loaded up the vans and made our way to the San Pedro House on the San Pedro River. Just before we loaded up the vans, we spotted a Swainsons Hawk soaring over the grasslands in the distance. Its beautiful patterns make for an unmistakable identification.

Although this was another stretch of the same river near the Casa, it was different than what we had experienced in the morning. This stretch of river abuts a diversity of habitat such as broad open grasslands, an old oxbow that is now a pond, and the river itself with massive Cottonwood Trees. Just outside the visitor center we were welcomed to our adventure with a couple of those massive Cottonwoods, a few feeders, and our first look at Hedgehog cactus in flower.

As we hiked the loop from San Pedro House, we started in an open grassland habitat, which led us to the riparian



zone of the San Pedro River, eventually to the old Oxbow that is now the pond, and then eventually back through some grasslands with more large Cottonwood. By 11:30 am, the heat of the day was noticeable and the bird activity began to quiet. However, that did not stop our group from continuing to seek the few active birds as we headed back to the San Pedro House Visitor Center. Once there, we enjoyed a little bit of shopping, a bathroom break, and a bit of a reprieve from the bright, hot sun. In all, we spent a very enjoyable three hours birding this stretch of the San Pedro River. So far as new species for the trip, we got some really good looks at the Northern Waterthrush. We also got some more great looks of various flycatchers and several species of swallows flying over the pond: Northern Rough-winged, Cave and Tree, the latter being new for the trip.

Lunch was supposed to be at the quaint Urbano Café a little bit south of Sierra Vista. However, being Mother's Day Sunday, we were amongst another 70 or so folks that also wanted to dine at the Café. Due to the projected hour and a half wait time for food, we opted to move our lunch spot to another restaurant with less of a wait time. This was not a problem, and we all understood the circumstances were what they were...no need to get upset about the fact that many people were enjoying a Mother's Day Lunch!

After lunch, which was the hottest part of the day, we took our siesta. Following this short break, we headed back out for some more hummingbird observation at Beatty's Ranch in Miller Canyon. Upon arrival at the end of the road, we took the short walk up to the hummingbird feeding station and immediately began seeing the diversity of species including Rivoli's, Broad-billed, Broad-tailed, Black-chinned, and Anna's. Any time one can see five hummingbird species at one time from one place is quite special! After our session, we descended to the vans passing a couple patches of beautiful bright, yellow columbine, and the pink blooms of the New Mexican Locust. Before our final return to Casa, we had a quick stake out for the scaled quail, without success.

We had time for a quick break and time to freshen up before being served a 'smorgasbord' of pizza options by Karl and Patrick at Casa de San Pedro. After dinner and dessert, Elissa from the Naturalist Journeys office presented a short lecture on hummingbirds and how banding informs science and conservation efforts. What a perfect ending to a day full of hummingbird observations! After some Q&A with Elissa, we retired to our rooms for another night of rest and rejuvenation.

Mon., May 12 Casa de San Pedro | Patagonia

Eight of us went out for a pre-breakfast birding excursion down to the river and then along the road to bird grassland habitat. The morning chorus was in full swing and it was nice to be in this expansive habitat, one that we haven't spent much time in on this trip. We enjoyed the looking more closely at the Prickly Poppy that we



have been seeing along the roadsides as we've been driving from place to place. Following another nice morning of birding we moved into the restaurant for breakfast. Carl, Patrick, and his staff not surprisingly met our expectations for a delicious breakfast, again! Not surprising, but most appreciated. After we all finished breakfast, we packed up, retrieved our cold beverages from the refrigerator, and said our thank yous to our hosts at Casa de San Pedro. Then we made our way west towards Patagonia.

Departing a place like Casa De San Pedro is a sweet-sorrow kind of deal. It's sad to leave, but so wonderful to think about all that we were able to share and experience with each other. PLUS, the joy of exploration beckoned us as we made our way out of the valley, around the Huachucas and over to Patagonia. Clearly, this is not the Patagonia of South America and Torres del Paine, but the northern Patagonia of Arizona with incredible birding.

Our first stop in Patagonia was a quaint local restaurant called The Gathering Grounds. We put in an order for lunch that we planned to pick up after our visit to Paton's Center for Hummingbirds. From the restaurant, we went to Paton's, and explored the grounds with the good fortune of having Elissa join us for the morning. Her knowledge and positive energy from last night extended into the morning and it was such a pleasure to have her with us. It didn't take long at the hummingbird feeders for us to see the Violet-crowned Hummingbird, which was new for the trip.

The Center recently acquired land adjacent to the old house and we walked this new trail through a bit of open Mesquite Forest and right up to Sonoita Creek. This gave us another opportunity to see the Thick-billed Kingbird, Inca Doves up close and personal, and some really nice looks at the Common Yellowthroat.

After about two hours of active birding, Mason kindly offered to pick up the lunch from The Gathering Grounds and return to Paton's so we could dine with the wildlife. We were able to dine in the shade of the canopy structure as well as the shade of the building clouds which made for a very pleasant afternoon. After lunch and a few more last-minute bird sightings, we left Paton's to try and make a quick run through Sonoita Nature Reserve which turned out to be closed on Mondays. So, we went on a stake-out for a Mississippi Kite that was reported in one of the Patagonia neighborhoods. While we got some good looks at the Great-tailed Grackle and other town birds, we did not see the Kite. So, we gathered in the vehicles and moved on to the Patagonia Rest Area to see what we could see.

This area first became known for sighting of the Rose-throated Beccard and as more and more people birded the



area looking for the Beccard, more specialties were observed. So, it has become known to be a bit of a hot spot. No Beccard for us, but we did get our first looks at Black Vultures and the Canyon Wren. Jack did get a shot of the Canyon Wren a few days earlier, but he was the only one that saw that bird!! So, this was a nice opportunity for the group to have a look...And then, off to Patagonia Lake...

We explored the birding trail at the lake for about an hour. We birded through Mesquite trees, some Ocotillo and a few Prickly Pear cacti. At our first overlook, we got some good looks of our first Phainopeplas for the trip. Once we obtained a nice view of the lake, we saw our first Blue-winged Teals, a Pie-billed Grebe, and a Cormorant that was so far away, we didn't feel comfortable with a positive identification. From this point on, Sally, Jay, David Buhaly and both Gail's decided to relax in the shade on a bench overlooking the lake while Mary, Marge, Nancy, and Jimmy continued with David and Mason down the trail for another 10 minutes or so. This group traveled on and got some good looks at the Cassin's Kingbird, and shortly thereafter the Western Kingbird, which provided a great opportunity to compare and contrast the two Kingbirds. After some photo opportunities with the Western Kingbird, we all turned around to meet up with the party that remained on the bench. Now the large group walked back up the trail and met up with Jack who had stopped on one of the first benches to take more pictures of the Phainopepla. As soon as the 12 of us got back together at "Jack's bench", we saw a Green Heron, first of the trip, takeoff from the reeds for a very quick view. And just to add a little more sugar to the goodness, we ended this excursion with a really good look at a Common Blackhawk. How Wonderful!! We celebrated a bit by the vehicles and then made the journey to our hotel in Tubac.

Tues., May 13 Montosa Canyon | Ron Morriss County Park Tubac

Our morning started in the lovely little artistic community of Tubac at the Tubac Deli and coffee Company where we had an early breakfast and ordered our lunch for tomorrow's picnic. After a breakfast of pastries for some, quiche for others, and a few breakfast sandwiches for the remaining, we headed out to Montosa Canyon, near the Smithsonian Whipple Observatory. There are fewer and fewer locations in this country where the skies are dark enough to warrant the expense and effort of a telescope. But Southeastern Arizona is still one of them. However, because we searched for our target species in the early morning sunlight, we would have no problems with seeing anything! Upon arrival, Vernie Aikins from the Naturalist Journeys office (and a guide) was waiting to meet us and share a piece of the morning with us. We immediately heard some Cactus Wrens calling and Bell's Vireo singing. We got some more good looks of the Phainopepla. We hiked up a dirt road on the south side of the canyon in search of a few more species. After a valiant, but unsuccessful search for the Five-striped Sparrow, we walked up the paved road about 100 feet and turn right into a little side drainage. What was that?! We all



heard it. It was the Northern Beardless Tyrannulet calling. It wasn't long before all of us got some really good looks at this bird, which was a lifer for those of us that didn't see it the other day on the river near Casa. Then Vernie took us to see a North American sweat lodge just up the trail. Vernie has met members of the tribe that have granted us permission to look at and photograph the lodge. Seeing and being so close to this authentic site provided a nice cultural piece to our story here in Montosa Canyon.

After a little more time back on the paved road, we all journeyed by vehicle up the road to look for the Rufus-crowned Sparrow. Success!! It was another lifer for a lot of folks and the first one for the trip. After we got some really great unobstructed views of this bird, we continued up the dirt road in search of the Rock Wren, which would be a first for the trip. En route, we had some gorgeous views of the surrounding mountains and desert landscape. We saw Baboquivari Peak to the west and just north of this pyramid shaped peak, we could make out the white buildings of Kitt Peak Observatory. As soon as we got out of the car, we listened for the Rock Wren. Nothing. However, we did get a look at our second Zone-tailed Hawk for the trip. After a few moments of listening and searching for the Rock Wren, we decided to head back towards the vans. But as we were heading into the vans, Vernie thought he heard the Wren so we moved on up the road a bit by foot and sure enough everyone got a really good view of the Rock Wren. Very nice! After viewing most of our target species, we found a spot wide enough in the road to turn around and headed back down the hill to where we left Vernie's truck. We thanked Vernie for his kindness and appreciated his contributions to the morning!

From Vernie's truck, the Naturalist Journeys team headed down the hill to the Ron Morris County Park just south of Tubac. Here we explored the Santa Cruz River. We got lucky with good views of an immature Gray Hawk as well as many others with whom we have now become quite familiar. On our way back to our vehicles, we spotted a Kingbird. It looked a little different than the Western and the Cassin's we had been seeing. It was a little more green-olive on the back and didn't have any obvious white markings on its tail. We received confirmation it was indeed the Tropical Kingbird when it called for us. First for the trip! Since we were working with fly catchers, why not throw in a Western Wood-pewee just before we left! We got really good looks of it facing us and facing away from us. We could see its crest, the little vest on its chest and other features of this somewhat challenging bird to identify.

After a productive morning in both Montosa Canyon and Ron Morris Park, we made our way down to Nichol's Diner in Rio Tico, about 15 miles from the Mexico border. We did our bird list here and enjoyed stories and a nice meal before returning to our hotel for a little siesta.



At about 4 PM, Sally, Gail, Marge, Nancy, Jimmy, Mason and David all went to Tumacácori National Historic Park. The Tumacácori National Historic Park. This park protects the ruins of three Spanish mission communities and sits at a cultural crossroads in the Santa Cruz River Valley where O'odham, Yaqui, and Apache people met and mingled with European Jesuit and Franciscan missionaries, settlers, and soldiers, sometimes in conflict and sometimes in cooperation. After a brief tour of the Historical Park, we walked the Juan Bautista de Anza Trail towards Santa Gertrudis Lane.

On this walk of about a mile, we got some really good looks of some late migrating Cedar Waxwings in all their glory and beauty, as well as an Olive-sided Flycatcher with perfect late afternoon sunlight on it. Both of these species were new for the trip. Once we got to the trailhead, we walked east about 100 feet to where the Santa Cruz River crosses the road and looked for the Green Kingfisher. No luck with this endeavor. David then walked back to the Tumacácori parking area to retrieve the van and drove back and picked up the group. Everyone expressed how much they enjoyed the afternoon stroll through the forest along the river. We made our way back to the resort where we got ourselves ready for dinner at Elvira's. Elvira's has a fun atmosphere with what must be hundreds of glass blown 'teardrops' of different colors hanging from the ceiling. Its specialty is Moles from Mexico and we all really enjoyed the meals we were served. Being very well sated with no need for dessert, we returned to the Tubac Resort for another night of well-deserved rest before our final full day in Southeast Arizona.

Wed., May 14 Madera Canyon | Desert Meadows Park

Another early start and a tasty breakfast at the Tubac Deli and Coffee Company put us on the road to Madera Canyon by 7:30 AM. This first excursion of the day brought us through the foothills of the Santa Rita's and passed Mesquite, Agaves, and other Sonoran Desert Scrub vegetation as we drove up the canyon.

During our first hike in the canyon on the Proctor Trail, we talked about the different plants that we saw as well as the different rock types observed. David shared information about bedrock mortars that the native people created in the granite that were used to process different food sources like acorns. At the high point of the loop everybody but Jack, David and Mason continued up to Whitehouse picnic table while the three continued around the loop and back to the vans. As soon as the two groups separated, we heard a Gray Hawk calling. Then we got our first really good looks of the adult Gray Hawk.

The group reconvened at Whitehouse picnic area and quickly gathered to try and see a Sulfur-bellied Flycatcher we heard calling. Everybody saw the movement, and most of us actually saw the bird through our binoculars.



This is a great bird for the trip and we think it was the first time it was reported for Madera Canyon this year! Following this wonderful start to our Madera Canyon adventure we moved on up the hill to the Santa Rita Lodge where we spent some time at the feeders. A couple folks took advantage of the gift shop to acquire some gifts for grandkids and other loved ones. From here we went up to The Madera Kubo house to search for the Berylline Hummingbird. It didn't take long before one came in and we all got really good looks at the rufous wings and the green belly. We also saw some of our usual friends, including the Bridled Titmouse, an American Redstart, and a suite of other familiar species. The gardens at this house are just so lovely to be around and the owner came out, said hello and wished us a very good day.

After about a half hour or so from the first sighting of the hummingbird, we decided that it was time to head on up the hill. We made our way to the end of the road and parked at the Mount Wrightson Picnic Area and Trailhead where we planned to do a little more exploring before lunch. After a quick bathroom break, we made our way up the trail on the hunt for the Elegant Trogon. No Trogon, but some great looks at the Red-faced warbler. After a little more searching for the Trogon and the Greater Pewee, we returned to the parking lot, loaded up the vans, and headed down to Whitehouse picnic area where we enjoyed a nice lunch in the shade of the gazebo. When we finished lunch, we walked around the area for about 30 minutes before making our final descent out of the beautiful and bird rich Madera Canyon.

Our next destination was Desert Meadows Park. This community park is a magical acre or two of Sonoran Desert all packed into a very discreet little area. Saguaro cactus, varieties of Prickly Pear cacti, Cane Cholla cacti, and different shrubs of the desert are all well taken care of in this park. It attracts a tremendous diversity of bird species, as well as humans from all walks of life, enjoying time with their pets, with each other, or just some quiet time in the desert. One gentleman was practicing harmonica on one of the benches. As soon as we arrived and entered the park, we all had some good views of the MacGillivray's Warbler. We saw a Verdin return to its nest and got some wonderful looks at the Costa's Hummingbird, perhaps our last new bird for the trip...we'll see tomorrow!

Before leaving the park, David set up some tables and enough chairs for everyone and facilitated a closing ceremony: an appreciation circle where each participant picked a small bird pin (either a Vermillion Flycatcher, Mexican Chickadee, Elegant Trogon or Red-faced Warbler) and presented it to another member of the group, expressing something about that person they appreciated or something they learned from that person. Then that person would pick a pin and present it to another...and so on until all the pins were picked and all the members showed appreciation *and* were appreciated. The group really enjoyed this activity and it was lovely to



hear all the very nice comments folks wished to share. Following this, David read a piece about the value of sharing experiences in nature, which also sparked a bit of conversation.

Following this heartfelt closing, we loaded the vehicles and made our way back to Tubac. Mason's vehicle made a quick stop at the Amado Water Treatment Plant and found some Black-Bellied Whistling and Mexican Ducks before making his return to the Resort.

Folks had a little down time before gathering for a 'pre-dinner' cocktail-social hour. A good part of this gathering was spent discussing how this exact group could get together again for another Naturalist Journeys trip with David and Mason as their guides. Some of their ideas included a trip to Alaska, the Rio Grande Valley in South Texas and the Maritime Provinces of Canada. This discussion carried us into dinner that was on-site and was revisited and fine-tuned a bit through the course of yet another exceptional meal here in southeast Arizona. Follow dinner and with plans made for tomorrow and bills paid, we all made our way back to our rooms under the stars of the dark sky and welcomed another evening's rest, our last of the trip.

Thurs., May 15 Departures from Tucson

Our final morning started with a really tasty breakfast at the resort restaurant. Shortly, there after we headed north to Tucson Mountain Park to get a little time in the Saguaros of the Sonoran Desert. Upon arrival, David ran a shuttle over to the Gilbert Ray Campground for a bathroom break for those that needed it while the rest of the group slowly ambled down the trail in search of the Black-capped Gnatcatcher and the Gilded Flicker.

As soon as we got on the trail, Gail pointed to large flock of very large white and black birds in the distance. Over 50 of them. They turned out to be White Pelicans! Nobody expected to see that over Saguaros in the desert.

I think everybody really enjoyed ambling through a desert we hadn't spent much time in. Many Saguaros were in flower. We got to look closely the Teddy-bear Cholla, more Prickly Pear Cacti, and had an opportunity to get close and personal to the green stems of the Palo Verde.

We spent a little time trying to call in the Black-capped Gnatcatcher and the Gilded Flicker. No luck with our target species. But we did get to see the Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, which was new for the trip...along with the Pelicans! Having some relaxed time in the Sonoran Desert is just such a treat. Before we headed back into town, we made one final stop at the scenic viewpoint just downhill and west of Gates pass.

Here we took a few more pictures of the group and folks that did not see the Black-tailed Gnatcatcher had another chance here, with good success! This was a great way to end our trip and from here we headed to the airport. But first, David took Sally and Marge to their hotel and then dropped everybody off at the airport. We all parted ways with much gratitude for the times we shared, the stories we developed and the memories we created! Perhaps, we can all get together and do it again...In Alaska!

Photos: Group photo (David Jaffe - DJ), Coati (Mary Ramsey - MR), Western Tanager (MR), Juniper Titmouse (MR), Bridled Titmouse (MR), Birding Turkey Creek (DJ), Mexican Spotted Owl (MR), Yellow eyed Junco (MR), Wilson's Warbler (MR), Yellow-breasted Chat (MR), Gambel's Quail (MR), Group birding (DJ), Arizona Woodpecker (MR), Black-throated Hummingbird (DJ), Birding the River (DJ), Dusky Flycatcher (MR), Curve-billed Thrasher (MR), Bullfrog (MR), Red-winged Blackbird (MR), Feeder (MR), Western Kingbird (MR), Tumacacori National Historic Park (DJ), Vernie with us in Montosa Canyon (DJ), Spiny lizard (MR), Madera Kubo House (DJ), Group birding (MR), Gambel's Quail (MR), Appreciation Circle (DJ), Birding and Visiting Brown Mountain Park (DJ), last day! (MR)