

Southeast Arizona Sky Island Sampler | April 28-May 7, 2025 | Trip Report | by Dave Mehlman



Guides: Dave Mehlman and Steve Shunk, with participants: Betty, Bob, Ellen, Fran, Jim, Larry, Mary, Mike, Paul, and Sara



Mon., Apr. 28 Sweetwater Wetlands | Tohono Chul | Lake Cochise | Portal

Most of the group had arrived in Tucson by the previous evening, so we decided to get an early start on our tour by heading out after breakfast in the morning. Most of the group was already at the La Quinta, Sara came over from her nearby hotel, and Steve picked up Larry and Fran from the airport. Once loaded up, we headed to Sweetwater Wetlands, a Tucson-area hotspot. Our tour started off with a bang at this lovely area and a mornings-worth of birding produced lots of goodies, including desert specialties such as Phainopepla, Abert's Towhee, Gila Woodpecker, Verdin, and Broad-billed Hummingbird, complemented by a variety of migrants including Vaux's Swift, Cassin's Vireo, Brewer's Sparrow, Lazuli Bunting, Cinnamon Teal, and some flyover White-faced Ibis.

The morning coming to an end, we headed to the lovely Tohono Chul for an excellent lunch on their delightful patio, noting a few things such as Anna's Hummingbird, Bell's Vireo, and Lucy's Warbler in between bites. After lunch, we hit the interstate, driving east to the town of Willcox, where we got gas (luckily finding a flock of



Chihuahuan Ravens at and near the gas station!) and then continued to the famed birding spot of Lake Cochise and the Twin Lakes Golf Course. This site never fails to disappoint and, indeed, it delivered today with a large mass of Barn Swallows and a Bank Swallow, a Chihuahuan Meadowlark and a Killdeer on the greens, and numerous birds in the salt lake, such as American Avocet, Black-necked Stilt, Wilson's Phalarope (performing their incredible "spin cycle"), Cinnamon and Blue-winged Teal, Ruddy Duck, Long-billed Dowitcher, and Least Sandpiper.

We then continued our journey east and south, arriving at our first destination, the Cave Creek Ranch nestled in Cave Creek Canyon outside Portal. Obtaining our room information, Dave and Steve dropped everyone and their bags off at the appropriate cabin and then we convened in the main house for our bird list and an excellent dinner catered by Jackie (and assisted by Christina, one of Naturalist Journeys' local staff members). After that, it was back to our rooms for a nice rest and hopeful thoughts for the following days.

Tues., Apr. 29 George Walker House | High Chiricahuas | Portal | Owling

Early risers this morning found some nice things around the Ranch, aside from the ubiquitous Wild Turkey flock, including Scott's Oriole, Western Tanager, Rivoli's and Broad-billed Hummingbirds, Blue-throated Mountain-Gem, and an apparently nesting Curve-billed Thrasher. However, the start of our full day in the field occurred when we loaded in the vehicles and literally went to Paradise! Paradise, Arizona, that is, where we arrived at the George Walker House to find birds awaiting and breakfast out on the table at back—truly, living the dream!

As we tucked into our breakfasts at seats on the porch, we enjoyed more comfy birding. Highlights included Mexican Jays, Lazuli Buntings, Green-tailed Towhee, an Arizona Woodpecker, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Bridled Titmouse, and a Red-naped Sapsucker busy mining its sap wells on a tree by the house. Meanwhile, Cliff Chipmunks and another flock of turkeys gamboled about this small avian paradise. Once again, Jackie had fed us a wonderful meal; in her case, she also identified numerous birds as she went in and out of the kitchen—a veritable multi-tasker.

Today, we were accompanied on our birding by James Peterson, another Naturalist Journeys guide and the resident naturalist at Cave Creek Ranch; Vernie Aikins, Naturalist Journeys' operations manager; and TJ, a free-lance reporter. Therefore, after finishing breakfast, our convoy of three vehicles headed up into the Chiricahua Mountains for a full day of exploring. Our first stop was at the junction of the road from Paradise and the main Forest Service Road over the mountain at the East Turkey Creek. This short stop was very productive, as we chased down Mexican Chickadee (one of the SE Arizona bird species that is only found in the Chiricahuas, not in any of the other mountain ranges), Steller's Jay, and Yellow-rumped, Grace's (singing), Townsend's, and Hermit



Warbler (the latter a spectacular male). As we proceeded higher, we had great views of a Red-faced Warbler right along the road and a few people in the lead cars got a quick glimpse of a Black-chinned Sparrow.

We then proceeded over Onion Saddle and down the west side of the Chiricahuas to Pinery Canyon where we parked the cars and commenced birding. Highlights here included more views of Red-faced Warbler, Plumbeous Vireo, Hermit Thrush, Greater Pewee, Pygmy Nuthatch, Dusky Flycatcher, and several lovely Mexican Fox Squirrels. While the group birded, James searched constantly, and finally, the cry went up that he had found his target: a Mexican Spotted Owl! We all came over forthwith and, with a bit of help and the use of the scopes, had decent looks at the roosting owl high in an Apache Pine, almost hidden in the needles—what a great find!

We then moved on to the Rustler Park picnic area, where we enjoyed our pre-made sandwiches, though there was a good breeze under sunny skies which lowered the temperatures a bit. The breeze made for challenging birding, though Vernie got everyone on to a Buff-breasted Flycatcher, foraging low in the shrubs, and we found American Robin and a pair of Red-tailed Hawks. Finishing lunch, we moved to the nearby Barfoot Park in search of more high elevation birds. A bit more sheltered, our time here yielded Yellow-eyed Junco, Hammond's Flycatcher, Pygmy Nuthatch, an Olive Warbler extremely high in the canopy of the tall pines, and, for a few, a Band-tailed Pigeon.

We then returned to the Ranch for a short rest before driving over to Peg Abbott's house (the owner of Naturalist Journeys) for another catered dinner by Jackie and some very pleasant conversation. Of course, being a birding group meant that we also birded while eating and we noted many species at Peg's feeders (Lark, White-crowned, Chipping, Lincoln's, and Black-throated Sparrow; Lazuli Bunting; and some fly-over White-throated Swifts). After dinner, about dusk, we returned to the Ranch and then James led us on an owling excursion after dark. The first part of the owling was a short walk around the Ranch itself; this yielded calling and seen Elf Owl and Western Screech-Owl. As we walked back to the vehicles from the latter sightings, someone noticed a bird sitting on a large rock in the dry Cave Creek bed. Careful study and discussion of this bird led to the conclusion that it was none other than a Flammulated Owl, which had stopped in to feed on moths attracted to moist spots in the creek bed! This was an astonishing sighting which none of the guides could recall ever seeing before—an extraordinary piece of birding luck for our group. Most of the group then got in the vehicles and we drove a short way up canyon to do a bit more owling. This final stop yielded two calling Whiskered Screech-Owls and another Western Screech-Owl. All in all, this proved to be one of the most successful and productive owling trips any of had ever had and resulted in a total of five different owl species found in one day! After this, feeling happy and tired, we returned to the Ranch for a well-earned night's rest.



Wed., Apr. 30 Cave Creek Ranch | South Fork, Cave Creek | Southwestern Research Station | Portal feeders

We started the day with a tasty breakfast at the ranch cooked personally by Ed and Michelle from Cave Creek Sandwich Company. After breakfast, we gathered our gear, loaded in the vehicles, and set out to explore the South Fork of Cave Creek Canyon, one of the most legendary birding spots in the United States. We first drove to the end of the gravel road and walked a short distance up the trail along the canyon bottom. Oddly, the woods were very quiet, perhaps due to the extreme drought in the area and cool weather. However, we were able to find Black-throated Gray Warbler, Hermit Thrush, Spotted Towhee, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Northern House Wren, and heard-only Arizona Woodpecker and Dusky-capped Flycatcher, before we decided to turn around and look for more productive birding spots. Hiking back to the vehicles, we decided to walk a bit further back down the road to a nearby bridge; there proved to be pools of water under the bridge which was just what we were looking for. The water was attracting a lot of birds close to the bridge, so many were very easy to see. These included many, many Wilson's Warblers, Hammond's Flycatcher, Green-tailed Towhee, Chipping and Lincoln's Sparrow, Black Phoebe, and Black-headed Grosbeak.

This provided a nice ending to our morning in South Fork, so we dashed up to the nearby Southwestern Research Station to see what might be found at their hummingbird feeders. Indeed, there was much activity, allowing us great views of Black-chinned, Rivoli's, Broad-billed, and Anna's Hummingbird plus Blue-throated Mountain-Gem. The surrounding trees had Black-throated Gray Warbler, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, and more Yellow-rumped Warblers to provide additional color. At this point, our morning was finished, so we loaded up and returned to the Ranch for a nice lunch and then a short rest.

In the afternoon, we set out to do some birding in the Portal area, starting at the Jasper/Moisan feeders. Parking at the house, we carefully filed in and took our seats to watch the action. A large number of birds were coming and going and, by paying careful attention, we picked out nice things like Canyon and Green-tailed Towhee, Pyrrhuloxia, Northern Mockingbird, Cactus Wren, Curve-billed Thrasher, Bushtit, and Brewer's Sparrow. After about an hour here, we moved to the Rodriguez feeders, not too far away, and repeated the routine in this different location. Although close by, the species mix here was different; we found many Pine Siskins and Lesser Goldfinches, an Abert's Towhee in addition to Canyon and Green-tailed, Black-throated Sparrow, Bullock's and Scott's Orioles, Lucy's Warbler, and an unusual Crissal Thrasher.

Upon concluding our feeder watching, we then returned to the vehicles and drove down to the Sky Island Grill (actually located just across the state line in Rodeo, New Mexico) for an early dinner. After dinner, we got in our



vans and made the lovely drive back up the bajada into Cave Creek Canyon, admiring the light of the setting sun on the desert landscape. On our way back, we came across a small herd of Javelinas along the road, much to our delight. Arriving back at the ranch, we turned in for an early evening after a great day of exploring the area.

Thur., May 1 Cave Creek Ranch | Whitewater Draw | Bisbee | Casa de San Pedro

Given that today was our last morning at Cave Creek Ranch, we started with a walk around the grounds before breakfast to round out our bird list for the area, with Peg along to provide additional bird-finding ability. In addition to the by-now usual suspects, we found Summer and Western Tanager, Brown-crested Flycatcher, Hermit, Wilson's, and Yellow Warbler, a Swainson's Thrush, Bewick's and Cactus Wren, some Chiricahua Leopard Frogs in the pond, and a Javelina (also apparently looking for breakfast!). After this delightful walk on a beautiful morning, we enjoyed another awesome breakfast cooked by Ed and Michelle and then gathered all our gear and loaded up in the vehicles for the next part of our journey.

Due to the long drive on rough forest roads up and over the Chiricahuas, Dave and Steve made the "executive decision" to re-route the tour to our next destination on the paved road, so we set off on the highway south and then west and ended up at our first birding destination for the morning: Whitewater Draw Wildlife Area a bit north of Douglas and east of Bisbee. The ponds at the wildlife area still had water in them and proved to be a bird magnet; a walk of just over an hour yielded many new species for the tour, including a pair of Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks, Mexican Duck, Solitary, Least, and Spotted Sandpiper, American Avocet, White-faced Ibis, a Great Blue Heron, and several singing Bell's Vireos which proved difficult to actually see well. Another highlight was a repeat performance by the spinning Wilson's Phalaropes, which are almost irresistible to watch. Completing our birding and with the sun overhead getting a bit uncomfortable, we proceed to Bisbee for a very nice (and very fast!) lunch at the Bisbee Breakfast Club followed by a quick peek into the vast copper pit.

After lunch, we made a stop at the Bisbee Safeway for needed supplies and then drove directly to our destination for the next three nights: the lovely Casa de San Pedro outside Hereford. Karl, one of our hosts, showed everyone into their room while Steve and Dave retrieved the large bags from the vehicles. We then met in the late afternoon for a short walk around the grounds of the Casa and to the nearby San Pedro River; this walk did not go very far! Right at the start, we admired the countless Lark Sparrows under the feeders, while Gila Woodpeckers commandeered the hummingbird feeders (talk about a sweet tongue!). We noted a Cassin's Kingbird in the trees, along with Yellow Warbler, Gambel's Quail, Vaux's Swift, and Northern Rough-winged Swallow. Arriving at the river, we found it had a few small pools of water left, which were bringing in thirsty



birds. Among the birds easily visible at or in the water were Song Sparrow (here of the local breeding subspecies), Common Yellowthroat, Wilson's Warbler (many, many, many Wilson's Warbler!), Summer Tanager, and Hammond's, Dusky, and Western Flycatcher. We returned to the Casa for a short break, then did our daily checklist followed by an excellent home-cooked Mexican dinner. All this was capped off by an informative and engaging presentation on hummingbirds and hummingbird banding by Elissa Fazio, a Naturalist Journeys staff member based in Tucson.

Fri., May 2 Casa de San Pedro | Ramsey Canyon | Hereford Bridge

The early risers were out and about this morning before breakfast to check out the action around the Casa, its feeders, and the nearby open space. A nicely perched Swainson's Hawk was a highlight and we were entertained by many Cassin's Kingbirds and a few Vermilion Flycatchers perched in the mesquites, along with Townsend's Warbler, Bullock's Oriole, Lazuli Bunting, and a few Abert's Towhees. We soon returned to the casa for its legendary breakfast and then gathered our gear for a day in the field.

Our first stop in the morning was the famous Ramsey Canyon Preserve, owned by The Nature Conservancy, another famous birding destination in the area. Though the preserve's parking lot was full, we were able to park at the nearby Inn and then went through the visitor office to pay our entrance fees and then walk up the beautiful canyon. This was a very productive walk with great opportunities to find and study many of the southeast Arizona specialty species. We broke our Painted Redstart "curse" and everyone had multiple great looks at this lovely species. Hutton's Vireo was found, allowing all to appreciate the differences with its lookalike, the Ruby-crowned Kinglet, which were also quite numerous. Other goodies included Black-throated Gray, Grace's, Hermit, and Townsend's Warbler, Summer and Hepatic Tanager, noisy Mexican Jays, Bridled Titmouse, and the highlight of the morning, a Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher. The latter proved to be the only one of the tour and had presumably just arrived on its spring migration.

After finishing our excellent walk at Ramsey, we attempted to go to Ash Canyon Bird Sanctuary, but had to leave since the parking lot was full. We then returned to the Casa for a "picnic lunch" in the dining room followed by a short break. After break, most in the group headed out again to the nearby Hereford Bridge for a walk along another part of the San Pedro River. On our way to the river, a pair of Common Ground-Doves very helpfully perched in a mesquite so all could add this diminutive dove species to their lists. The river here proved to have been dammed by some beavers and the resulting pool of water attracted numerous birds, including Yellow-breasted Chat, Gray Hawk, Cassin's Vireo, Green-tailed and Abert's Towhee, and Lucy's, Wilson's, Yellow, MacGillivray's, and Black-throated Gray Warblers. After this walk finished, we returned to the Casa in time to participate in a hummingbird banding session conducted by Sheri Williamson and Tom Wood from Southeast



Arizona Bird Observatory. Many in the group got to watch the process and release a captured hummingbird; the tally for the afternoon included five Black-chinned and one Rufous Hummingbird, the latter the only one of the tour. Some diligent observers, whom were perhaps not paying as close attention as they should, also noted a Zone-tailed Hawk flying over the treeline nearby. At the end of the day, we drove to the nearby Pizzeria Mimosa for a nice Italian dinner on the patio. As we ate, we discovered that a Say's Phoebe had built a nest on a speaker right above our table—how appropriate! We returned to the Casa after dark and, to finish the day, enjoyed a couple of Lesser Nighthawks flying around the parking lot's lights, foraging for insects.

Sat., May 3 Ash Canyon Bird Sanctuary | Beatty's Guest Ranch | San Pedro House | Hereford Bridge

Since we had failed to get to Ash Canyon the previous day, Steve and Dave made an executive decision to make an early morning, pre-breakfast trip there today before we departed. Up early, we were on our way and at Ash Canyon before 7:00 AM and there was plenty of parking. Unfortunately, this morning Larry and Fran had to leave the tour early due to a family emergency, so Dave took those participating in the birding to Ash Canyon while Steve took Larry and Fran to the airport in Tucson. The outstanding highlight of the morning was a male Lucifer Hummingbird, which drank from some of the feeders as we sat and watched—a true highlight of the tour and the species for which Ash Canyon is best known for (at least among birders!). Other sightings during the morning included Bullock's and Scott's Oriole, numerous Lesser Goldfinches, Pine Siskin, Northern Mockingbird, and another Swainson's Thrush.

We then returned to the Casa for an eagerly awaited and outstanding breakfast and then Dave took the group to Miller Canyon and the "hummingbird bleachers" at Beatty's Guest Ranch. After parking, as we walked to the seats, the owner of the Ranch joined us and, proving quite talkative, told the group some of the history of the area and what life was like living up in the canyon. As we talked, his pack of hounds wandered around, one time joining in a very noisy chorus as they detected someone else walking a dog in "their" territory. As usual, the Beatty's feeders did not disappoint, providing some of the closest viewing of many hummingbird feeders all at once—exactly what one needs to improve one's identification skills. Present were Broad-billed, Rivoli's, Broad-tailed, Anna's, and Black-chinned Hummingbirds, including both sexes of all. Also present were Lincoln's Sparrow, a Spotted Towhee, Hermit Thrush, and Painted Redstart.

At this point, Dave learned that Steve had returned from his trip to Tucson, so the group loaded up in the van and drove to San Pedro House to meet him and do a bit of additional birding before lunch. Although mid-day, the trees and feeders around the House attracted quite a few birds. Perhaps most interesting were decent views of Bell's Vireo, supplemented by Canyon, Abert's, and Green-tailed Towhee, White-crowned Sparrow, Brown-



headed Cowbird, Red-winged Blackbird, and a few Violet-green Swallows. After finishing here, we drove to nearby Urbano Bar & Bistro outside Sierra Vista for lunch in their cool, shady dining room. We then returned to the Casa for a short rest and optional free afternoon; for those wanting more birding, we returned to Hereford Bridge to explore this productive area further a bit later in the afternoon.

We had time to walk a bit further along the San Pedro River and it continued to be a very rewarding birding area. Highlights included a fly-over Common Black-Hawk, a pair of Gray Hawks, incredible numbers of Wilson's Warblers and Hammond's Flycatchers, Northern House Wren, and a pair of Mexican Ducks in the water. Upon our return to the Casa, we had a short rest, met to do our daily bird list, and then enjoyed a lovely final dinner in the Casa's dining room.

Sun., May 4 Paton Center for Hummingbirds | Patagonia-Sonoita Creek Preserve | Patagonia Roadside Rest Area | Tubac

We started today, our next travel day, with a final excellent breakfast at Casa de San Pedro. All our gear was then loaded into the vehicles and we set off for our next destination with a quick stop for a few minor supplies in Sierra Vista on our way north and then west. We drove through the magnificent desert grasslands around the town of Sonoita, alas failing to spot any Pronghorn on the way. Therefore, without issue, we arrived at our first destination for the morning, the Paton Center for Hummingbirds in the town of Patagonia. The Center was full of both birds and birders and it certainly lived up to its name, with the group spotting Broad-billed, Black-chinned, Anna's, and a single Violet-crowned Hummingbird at the nectar feeders. The latter species is the one for which this place is especially known for and we were not disappointed. Other things found in and around the Center included Northern Beardless Tyrannulet (great views of this interesting, though rather bland, flycatcher), Warbling Vireo, Summer and Western Tanager, and Ladder-backed Woodpecker.

Finishing here, we drove to the nearby Patagonia-Sonoita Creek Preserve of The Nature Conservancy (another of TNC's legendary birding preserves in southeastern Arizona) for a short walk from the visitor center to the railroad trail along the creek and back. Although activity was a bit slow, we picked up Western Wood-Pewee, Vermilion Flycatcher, MacGillivray's Warbler, Cassin's Vireo, and a Red-tailed Hawk during this walk. At this point the morning was nearly over and it was time for lunch. As we drove back into the town of Patagonia to our lunch restaurant, Dave's van spotted a Mississippi Kite perched on its tree (the famed MIKI Tree) right in town, so we called the other van over and went in for a closer look with the scopes. As we watched, the kite periodically flew around town, hunting for insects, and then returned to its perch—a dramatic sighting to conclude the morning! At this point, truly famished, we went to the nice Gathering Grounds Café in town for lunch.



After lunch, we continued our travels, this time to the southwest, and stopped at the Patagonia Roadside Rest Area, a legendary birding spot right along the road. The highlight here was Steve working his bird-finding magic and causing a Canyon Wren, new for the tour, to appear on a cliff right in front of us. A pair of Rufous-crowned Sparrows briefly appeared, but only offered disappointingly short looks before flying off. The skies had periodic White-throated Swifts and Violet-green Swallows flying by and a small warbler flock in the trees yielded Wilson's, Yellow, Lucy's, Hermit, Orange-crowned, and Yellow-rumped Warblers—a very nice mix. Upon completing our birding here, we drove straight to the town of Tubac, with a stop for gas in Rio Rico, to our elegant lodgings for the final night of the tour: the Tubac Golf Resort. After getting everyone arranged in the rooms, we met in a small outdoor courtyard to do our daily checklist, then headed over to the Italian Peasant in the close-by town itself for dinner.

Mon., May 5 Madera Canyon | Desert Meadows Park | Historic Canoa Ranch

We began today by heading over to the nearby Tubac Deli for breakfast and to pick up our pre-ordered lunches. After finishing our morning's food procurement, we drove north and then east to (yet another) legendary birding destination: Madera Canyon in the Santa Rita Mountains. We drove all the way to the end of the paved road, parked the cars, and got out to commence birding. To our incredible luck, as we got out, an Elegant Trogon was calling from the sycamores in the canyon bottom right next to the parking lot! Hearing this, a mild scramble ensued as we chased the trogon and it proceeded to move down-canyon. Unfortunately, there were limited trails in this area, so we picked our way down the slope among the rocks and trees carefully, attempting to find and see the bird—probably the number one “target bird” for most in the group. After spending nearly 20 minutes, the bird finally continued down-canyon and was no longer heard; however, most in the group got some sort of glimpse and a few had a great view of this singing male trogon. We then returned to the parking lot and hiked a short way up-canyon to the wilderness boundary, noting a variety of species along the way, such as a pair of Dusky-capped Flycatcher, Hutton's Vireo, Black-throated Gray and Townsend's Warbler, numerous Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Painted Restart, and the omnipresent Mexican Jays.

After returning from the hike, we drove down to the Santa Rita Lodge for some feeder watching. Though a large flock of Wild Turkeys was dominating the grounds, other traffic noted included Acorn and Arizona Woodpecker, Swainson's and Hermit Thrush, Black-headed Grosbeak, Yellow-eyed Junco, and Pine Siskin. In late morning, Steve and Dave organized a quick vehicle shuttle to take the group up to the Madera Kubo B&B feeders, where there is very limited parking. The feeder-watching here was excellent, with Painted Redstart, a pair of Hepatic Tanagers, Northern House Wren, and Bridled Titmouse all easily observable at close range. As we kept a close eye on the hummingbird feeders, however, the star of the show, a Berylline Hummingbird, intermittently came and went, fighting for drinks with the more common Rivoli's and Broad-billed Hummingbirds. The action was

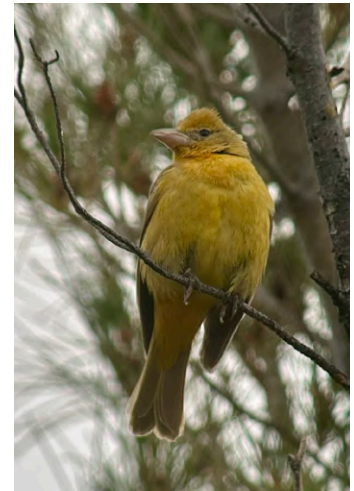


great until a Cooper's Hawk swept in to ruin the party! We then went back to the vehicles and drove to a closeby picnic area for our sandwich lunches. After lunch, we deemed our time in Madera Canyon complete and we started back down to the lowlands. Our first stop on the return trip was the lovely Desert Meadows Park outside Green Valley. This attractively landscaped park had numerous hummingbird feeders scattered about and proved to be a great birding spot. Highlights included several male Costa's Hummingbirds showing their outrageous purple gorgets, a brood of Gambel's Quail with over a dozen young, nesting Verdin, Hooded Oriole, Plumbeous Vireo, Phainopepla, and Inca Dove. After a short walk here, we continued our way back to Tubac with a stop at the Historic Canoa Ranch pond for one final shot at some birding. The pond itself had a few coots and one Piedbilled Grebe, but the air above the pond was filled with Violet-green, Barn, Bank, and Northern Rough-winged Swallows, while the trees held Yellow and Wilson's Warblers, and a few Common Yellowthroats and Green Herons lurked at the margins. A walk around the pond yielded a Northern Mockingbird and an Olive-sided Flycatcher to complete our list for the day. We then returned to the Resort for a rest, then walked over to the Resort's restaurant for dinner and our daily checklist in their nice dining room.

Tues., May 6 Tubac Golf Resort | Montosa Canyon | Amado WTP | Tubac |

Santa Gertrudis Lane We began today, our last full field day of the tour, with an extensive walk around the grounds of the Resort. Although we did not know it when we began, this walk proved to be the most productive single birding outing of the tour (in terms of species sighted) with our checklist for the walk recording 59 species! In the area right around our rooms, the Northern Cardinals, Song Sparrows, and Bewick's Wrens were in full morning chorus; hordes of Phainopeplas constantly flew overhead or clustered in some of the trees; a fruiting mulberry was a bird magnet, with Western Tanager, Black-headed Grosbeak, and Lesser Goldfinches adding to the color scheme; the golf course itself was loaded with Lark and Chipping Sparrows; and huge numbers of swallows were flying back and forth across the main lake, with careful observation noting Barn, Tree, Bank, Violet-green, Northern Rough-wing, and a single Cliff among them to make a full set of North American swallows for the morning! A fly-by flock of Cedar Waxwings added to the diversity, as did Common Raven, a Great Blue Heron, Warbling Vireo, and Swainson's Thrush—what a memorable morning of birding! Conveniently, our walk ended right at the Resort restaurant, where we were able to secure patio tables to continue enjoying the show. Finally, as if to put an exclamation point on it, as Dave waited to pay the bill, a pair of displaying male Bronzed Cowbirds landed right in front of the restaurant—the only ones of the tour!

After this outing, we loaded in the vehicles and drove up into the Santa Rita foothills to explore Montosa Canyon, a well-known birding spot. Unfortunately, the cool, cloudy morning appeared to depress bird activity, though we were able to find Bell's Vireo, Cactus Wren, Northern Beardless Tyrannulet, Hooded Oriole, a singing Rock Wren (which, despite much effort, would not show itself), and brief glimpses of our only Nashville and



Virginia's Warblers of the tour. As we drove back down from the foothills, we made a stop in the desert scrublands which proved to be quite fortuitous. A Black-tailed Gnatcatcher provided great views right next to the road and, thanks to Steve's alert birding, we were all able to get fabulous views (including through the scope) of a singing Rufous-winged Sparrow at this spot—great additions to the tour bird list. We then headed back to Tubac for lunch with a quick stop at the Amado Wastewater Treatment Plant. This pond yielded a large flock of Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks, along with a few Ruddy Ducks, Mexican Ducks, and a Spotted Sandpiper. Finished with our morning birding, we went into Tubac and had a great lunch at Shelby's Bistro.

After lunch, a few remained behind in Tubac for some shopping while the rest returned to the Resort for a short rest and a start on organizing gear for tomorrow's departure. Nevertheless, our intrepid group (at least those up for it!) gathered in late afternoon for one last outing, this one to Santa Gertrudis Lane, a spot just south of Tubac with access to the Santa Cruz River. This area had a superb tree canopy and the river held a bit of water, so we enjoyed a lovely final afternoon of riparian birding. The undoubted highlight birds of this outing were a pair of Thick-billed Kingbirds which made a lot of noise as they flew about high in the canopy of some very tall cottonwoods. Another SE Arizona specialty on our list! We also found Gray Hawk, Abert's Towhee, Lucy's, Yellow, and Wilson's Warbler, Swainson's Thrush, and Warbling Vireo. We then returned to the resort, had a short break, and then the whole group reconvened for our farewell dinner at Elvira's Restaurant in Tubac (famed for its quirky décor!).

Wed., May 7 Tubac Golf Resort | Departures from Tucson

We started the day by walking over to the Resort restaurant for breakfast, of course birding along the way. Amazingly enough, during this final, final walk, we added our last trip bird species: Tropical Kingbird! A pair of these kingbirds were in the trees along our walking route, along with a seemingly infinite number of Phainopeplas and more of the usual suspects which grace this lovely property. We had a nice final breakfast, inside this time since it was early and still cool, then returned to our rooms to pull together all our gear and do final inspections. Loading up the vehicles, we drove directly from Tubac to the Tucson airport and dropped everyone off for their flights, except for Betty and Jim, who had parked their car at a nearby hotel. After dropping them off and bidding a fond farewell to all, our tour ended with fond memories of a southeastern Arizona adventure.

Photos: Summer Tanager (David Mehlman - DM), Western Screech-Owl (Larry Armstrong - LA), Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay (LA), Gambel's Quail (DM), Pied-billed Grebe (LA), Cooper's Hawk (LA), Bridled Titmouse (LA), Cliff Chipmunk (LA), Western Tanager (LA), Ladder-backed Woodpecker (LA), Townsend's Warbler (LA), Group birding (DM), Broad-billed Hummingbird (LA), Patagonia-Sonoita Creek Preserve (DM), Canyon Wren (DM), group birding (DM), Hepatic Tanager (DM), Canoa Ranch (DM), Cooper's Hawk (DM), Killdeer (DM), Violet-crowned Hummingbird (DM), Group (Ellen Seidman), Summer Tanager female (DM)