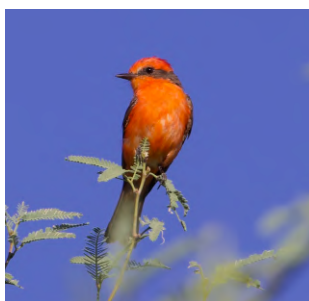
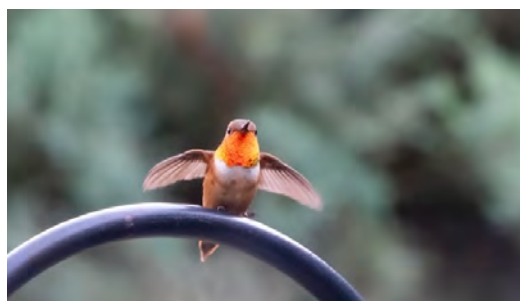


Arizona Monsoon Madness | August 10-17, 2025 | Trip Report | by Bryan Calk



Guide Bryan Calk with guests Ellen, Val, Heather, Sami, Barbara, and Will



Sunday, August 10 – Tucson Arrivals | Willcox | Cave Creek Ranch

Tucson had been baking under record-breaking high temperatures for weeks, hot and dry with little rain to speak of. But as the tour began, fortune seemed to shift. Clouds gathered overhead, a welcome omen for the start of the trip.



After meeting up in Tucson, the group loaded into the van and headed east. The first stop was at Twin Lakes Golf Course in Willcox, a water treatment facility with a wetland pond fringed by shallow water, mudflats, and sandy patches. In the desert, the sudden sight of a reflective pool ringed with birdlife feels almost surreal. The building monsoon clouds mirrored beautifully in the water, making a dramatic backdrop for the hundreds of American Avocets and Black-necked Stilts scattered across the shallows. Other shorebirds included Baird's Sandpipers and Wilson's Phalaropes, while flocks of swallows coursed overhead. A tight flock of Yellow-headed Blackbirds moved along the shoreline, and a Lazuli Bunting dropped into a bush for brief but excellent views.

Grassland edges nearby held a few Chihuahuan Meadowlarks, and the drive in had already produced a family of Chihuahuan Ravens — two adults and two juveniles — perched along roadside poles. It was a perfect chance to study identification features in detail, from their distinctive proportions to unique vocalizations, even catching the white feather bases glinting in the wind.

Leaving Willcox, light rain from the monsoon finally reached us, adding to the sense that the season was turning. Dust storms shimmered in the distance as the road led toward Portal. Nearing the end of the day, the van came to a sudden halt - a young Gila Monster was waddling up the road! Everyone piled out to watch and photograph the striking reptile, an animal many consider a holy grail sighting in the Southwest. Seeing one on the very first day felt like another unmistakable sign of good fortune for the days ahead.

From there, the road wound into the beautiful Cave Creek Canyon, its rocky outcrops draped in colorful lichens and canyon bottom shaded by towering sycamores. Our home for the next stretch, Cave Creek Ranch, was alive with activity. Acorn Woodpeckers chattered from tree to tree and hummingbird feeders buzzed with Blue-throated Mountain-gems and other species. After settling into cabins and rooms, the group gathered for a Mediterranean-themed dinner catered locally, capped off with rich carrot cake for dessert.

The evening wrapped up with the daily species checklist, but the night still had one more treat. On the way back to the rooms, Mexican Long-tongued Bats were visiting one of the feeders, their swift approaches and hovering a reminder that for them, the nectar was breakfast. It was a perfect "changing of the guard" moment — the daytime birds yielding the feeders to their nocturnal counterparts. With that, it was time to rest for the adventures ahead.

Monday, August 11 – Cave Creek Ranch | South Fork of Cave Creek Canyon | Southwestern Research Station | Portal Area Feeders



The morning began right at Cave Creek Ranch, where the feeders were already buzzing with activity. Cactus Wrens and Curve-billed Thrashers darted between perches, Blue-throated Mountain-gems hovered at eye level, and Western Tanagers moved through the trees. Inca Doves scurried about, their “no hope” calls carrying through the air. The highlight came when a Thick-billed Kingbird perched in perfect light, preening at length. A noisy troop of Mexican Jays made its presence known before we sat down to a hearty breakfast of French toast, eggs, and ham.

After breakfast, we set out for the South Fork of Cave Creek Canyon, one of the most celebrated natural areas in the Chiricahua Mountains. The canyon narrows into a shaded corridor carved into volcanic rock, with walls of red, orange, and brown draped in lime-green lichens. Towering Arizona sycamores, oaks, and pines create a layered canopy over a lush understory. The blend of riparian woodland, mid-elevation oak-pine forest, and sheer rock faces supports an exceptional diversity of life. Birding along the trail, we enjoyed close views of Sulphur-bellied Flycatchers calling with their squeaky-toy notes, Painted Redstarts actively foraging and flashing their tails, and a Western Flycatcher holding still long enough for good looks. A Plumbeous Vireo sang from nearby trees, and an Apache Fox Squirrel rummaged methodically through the leaf litter.

By mid-morning we reached the Southwestern Research Station, a biological field station operated by the American Museum of Natural History. Researchers were busy banding hummingbirds, and we were able to watch the process up close and even release a few birds ourselves. Seeing the largest hummingbird in the U.S., the Blue-throated Mountain-gem, alongside the smallest, the Calliope, was a striking comparison. Around the grounds we also found a Warbling Vireo and a female Painted Bunting foraging quietly.

From there, we continued to Portal for more birding, focusing on various feeder set-ups in the community. At one stop, a Western Wood-Pewee perched in a roadside juniper while a couple of bats, one possibly a Hoary Bat, circled in daylight. A male Hooded Oriole brightened the scene at the feeders, joined by Lark Sparrows with bold facial patterns and a brilliant red Summer Tanager. Before leaving, we had unusually good views of a normally skulking Bell’s Vireo, and a Lucy’s Warbler flitted quickly through the sycamores.

We returned to Cave Creek Ranch for lunch, a fresh spread that included sweet, locally sourced watermelon. But just as we were relaxing, another amazing surprise came when a black bear wandered into view just outside the dining room windows! With the ongoing drought, bears have been venturing into areas they would normally avoid in search of food and water. It was exciting to see, though also a reminder of the tough conditions on the landscape.



After a short siesta during the heat of the day, we set out again for feeders in the Portal area. Bob Rodriguez's place sits low in brushy desert habitat where our main target was Crissal Thrasher. Soon enough, one came into view, scratching in the dirt and visiting the water. Male Western Tanagers and a Blue Grosbeak added splashes of color, while Black-throated Sparrows and our first Abert's Towhee of the trip rounded out the scene. Activity remained surprisingly high for the time of day, and clouds continued to build over the mountains. Our last birding stop was at Jasper's feeders, where a male Bullock's Oriole shared the area with a family group in various plumages. A Harris's Antelope Squirrel dashed in for food, and an immature Verdin entertained us by climbing deep into the jelly feeder, nearly disappearing inside to reach the treat. Pyrrhuloxias made several visits, their red accents catching the light.

In the evening we returned to the ranch to freshen up and complete the checklist before heading to the home of Peg Abbott, founder of Naturalist Journeys. She welcomed us to her patio garden for a delicious Southwest-style dinner. Lightning flickered in the distance and cooler air settled in. Over wine and conversation, Peg gave an engaging talk about the Sky Islands, explaining how the convergence of the Chihuahuan and Sonoran deserts, the Sierra Madres, the Rockies, and even influences from the Great Basin creates extraordinary biodiversity. Each elevation supports distinct life zones, and this richness extends far beyond birds to lichens, insects, mammals, and reptiles. She spoke about the Madrean Line, a biogeographic boundary similar to Wallace's Line, which helps define the unique communities found here.

As she spoke, a Common Poorwill began calling nearby, and with that as our cue, we wrapped up the evening. Some of the group ventured out for night birding up Cave Creek Canyon, where we heard Whiskered Screech-Owl, Mexican Whip-poor-will, and, unusually for this late in the season, an Elf Owl. It was a fitting close to a full and memorable day.

Tuesday, August 12 – George Walker House | High Elevation Birding in the Chiricahua Mountains

The day began for some with an optional pre-breakfast outing back to the South Fork of Cave Creek Canyon. In the quiet of early morning, the group found a Dusky-capped Flycatcher calling from the canopy, a Grace's Warbler flitting among the pines, and a fleeting glimpse of a Virginia's Warbler moving quickly through the foliage.

We returned to Cave Creek Ranch to meet up with the rest of the group, gather our luggage, and load into the van. From there we made our way north into the foothills to Paradise, a small community on the drier side of



the canyon slope. The habitat here shifts to more pinyon-juniper woodland, and the morning light gave the hillsides a warm glow.

Our destination was the George Walker House, where hosts Jackie and Winston welcomed us with a hearty breakfast. The meal featured a flavorful sausage and mixed potato hash, scrambled eggs, and fresh homemade biscuits and muffins. We enjoyed it all while watching an active lineup of birds at the feeders, from jays to nuthatches to Bridled Titmouse. The highlight was an adult male White-eared Hummingbird visiting regularly, its crisp facial pattern and flashes of iridescent green showing beautifully at close range.

After breakfast we headed up into the higher elevations of the Chiricahuas, beginning in Pinery Canyon. We wandered the forest edge, where Pygmy Nuthatches busily worked the pines and a Red-faced Warbler sang up the canyon. The clear notes of a Northern Pygmy-Owl drifted from across the draw. In the open grassy areas we had our first looks at Yellow-eyed Juncos, their bright eyes standing out as they hopped through the grass. The biggest highlight came when we spotted a downy young Mexican Spotted Owl, perched in a ponderosa pine just a few yards off the road. Fluffy with its juvenile down, but already showing its new flight feathers as it molted into adult plumage, the bird sat quietly and allowed long, close views. Seeing such a rare and protected species was a special moment, made even more memorable by the owl's adorable muppet-like appearance.

From Pinery Canyon we climbed to the top of the range, stopping at Barfoot Park and Rustler Park for a picnic lunch. While we ate, recently fledged Western Bluebirds flitted about, still looking a bit unpolished as they explored life without constant parental care. More Yellow-eyed Juncos worked the grass nearby. The cool, shaded forest here felt worlds away from the desert below, with white firs and Douglas-firs growing in a mixed conifer forest that thrives in the moist microclimates of the upper Chiricahuas. Much of the mountain burned in 2011, but these surviving pockets offer a glimpse of the original habitat, with sweeping vistas stretching across the range in every direction.

We then continued down the west slope into the Sulphur Springs Valley, making a couple of opportunistic stops along the way. Loggerhead Shrikes perched on open fence lines, and Swainson's Hawks soared over the grasslands, classic birds of this open country. We skirted the Mule Mountains and arrived at our next lodging, Casa de San Pedro, where we were warmly greeted and settled into our rooms. Some took the opportunity to cool off with a swim in the pool before gathering for a delicious catered dinner. The meal featured a variety of flavorful dishes made with fresh ingredients, including herbs from the chef's garden.

After dinner we moved into our checklist routine, then welcomed a guest speaker, Elissa from the Naturalist Journeys office staff, who gave an engaging talk about hummingbirds. She explained the process of banding, its



importance to research, and what it has taught us about these birds, from site fidelity to longevity to resource use. The presentation added depth to our recent experiences with hummingbird banding and the many sightings we have enjoyed on this trip.

We ended the evening tucked into our rooms as the monsoons unfolded outside, lightning flashing across the sky in a dramatic display to close out the day.

Wednesday, August 13 – Casa de San Pedro | Carr Canyon | Ash Canyon Bird Sanctuary | Bisbee

The morning began with a bird walk right from Casa de San Pedro, nestled in the San Pedro River Valley and just steps from the riparian corridor. Along the river edge, towering cottonwoods gave way to wide grasslands, and we first explored the open country habitat. Scanning the grass, we found flocks of Lazuli Buntings feeding in the morning light, Blue Grosbeaks flashing cobalt from low perches, and Cassin's Kingbirds calling overhead. Further out, a Botteri's Sparrow stole the show, singing from tall grass and offering the kind of long, unobstructed views that are rare for this monsoon-season specialist. We also enjoyed the vibrant color of a Vermilion Flycatcher before returning to the inn for breakfast, which featured fresh fruit, homemade oatmeal pancakes, sausage, and rich-brewed coffee.

From there we headed toward Carr Canyon, climbing the winding road into the upper Huachuca Mountains. The landscape shifted in patches from burn-scarred slopes to dense ponderosa pine groves, manzanita thickets, and stands of oak and madrone, each harboring its own community of birds. Cool mountain air and the scent of pine set the scene as a Buff-breasted Flycatcher, the canyon's most famous specialty, perched long enough for careful study. Black-throated Gray Warblers moved through the canopy, a Red-breasted Nuthatch worked the trunk of a pine, and a Zone-tailed Hawk circled overhead before calling loudly to erase any doubt about its identity. We descended for a relaxed lunch at a local bistro with fresh food, good coffee, and a chance to trade morning highlights.

In the afternoon we visited Ash Canyon Bird Sanctuary, founded in 2002 by Mary Jo Ballator, who opened her home and gardens to birders from around the world. Her dedication made the site famous for its regular Lucifer Hummingbird sightings, and after her passing in 2019, the Southeastern Arizona Bird Observatory acquired the property, ensuring its future as a public sanctuary. Today it is managed as a welcoming space with shaded benches, abundant feeders, and native gardens that attract a wide range of species.



Our visit delivered exactly what we had come for. We enjoyed both an immature and adult male Lucifer Hummingbird after some patience and diligence at the feeders. Just as exciting were an immature male and adult male Costa's Hummingbird, a species not guaranteed here, and our guide's favorite bird of the day, a hybrid between the two nicknamed a "Costifer." This bird combined the Costa's shimmering purple gorget that extended over the crown with the curved bill and elongated outer tail feathers of a Lucifer, an unusual and fascinating sight. Other hummingbirds included Anna's in various plumages and a surprising number of female Calliope Hummingbirds, their tiny size even more striking when seen alongside the others. All this while chatting with friendly volunteers who keep the sanctuary running smoothly.

Later we returned to Casa de San Pedro for a short rest before heading to Bisbee. We began the evening with a driving tour of the historic district, winding past colorful hillside houses and old brick buildings, while learning about the town's mining history. Then dinner was at the Copper Pig, one of Bisbee's standout restaurants, where the lively atmosphere and rich flavors made for a perfect ending to the day. As we stepped outside, Lesser Nighthawks swept through the streetlights, looping and diving for insects!

Thursday, August 14 – Casa de San Pedro | Ramsey Canyon Preserve | Miller Canyon

The day began with a calm, overcast morning walk from Casa de San Pedro down toward the cottonwoods along the San Pedro River. In the high canopy, Summer Tanager and Yellow Warbler moved between the branches, their calls carrying through the stillness. The soft gray light and cooler air were welcome after a couple days of sun. Out in the fields, a Chihuahuan Meadowlark sang from the top of a small mesquite, and a Loggerhead Shrike perched neatly before we returned for another hearty breakfast at the inn.

From there we drove into the Huachuca Mountains to visit Ramsey Canyon Preserve, a 380-acre Nature Conservancy property protected since 1974. The approach alone sets the tone — a steep, narrow canyon hemmed in by towering slopes, the air cooler and fresher as you step into deep shade. Massive Arizona sycamores are joined by big tooth maples, filling the canopy with rich green. The stream that typically runs through the canyon nourishes an oasis of life in the middle of the Sky Islands, where pine-oak woodland blends seamlessly with riparian forest. The effect is both dramatic and peaceful, with birdsong carrying through a place that feels untouched by time.



Before we even left the visitor center, a Violet-crowned Hummingbird appeared at a feeder for crisp, close views. Along the shaded trail, Painted Redstarts flashed black-and-crimson plumage and fanned their white outer tails to startle insects, while Plumbeous Vireos sang overhead. Stops along the trail revealed the differences between Apache and Chiricahua pines, as well as the elevational range overlap of Perry's and Palmer's agaves. Higher up, the deep call of an Elegant Trogon drifted across the slope, an unexpected and thrilling sound in such a dry year. At our turnaround point we spotted a female Berylline Hummingbird on her nest in a tall sycamore, a rare sight!

On the way back down we stopped at a small pond where the threatened Chiricahua Leopard Frog still survives. Once widespread, it has disappeared from most of its historical range in Arizona due to habitat loss, drought, and non-native predators. Here in the quiet shallows, we discussed habitat restoration and captive breeding efforts that are helping the species recover. Back at the visitor center, a Broad-billed Hummingbird nest held two gaping chicks, and the mother returned repeatedly to feed them, giving a close look at the speed and precision of hummingbird parenting.

After a bit of downtime in the afternoon with some guests checking on the resident Great Horned Owls we regrouped for a visit to Miller Canyon. Here, private property owners maintain an array of hummingbird feeders that have earned the site a place on the birding map for decades. Under cloudy, cool conditions, we watched Violet-crowned Hummingbirds linger for long views, studied female hummingbirds for subtle field marks and behavior, and admired a Rivoli's Hummingbird shimmering in turquoise and purple as it caught the light. We met the property's owner at Beatty's Guest Ranch, heard a bit about the history of the place, and were introduced to his hunting dogs. The afternoon felt unhurried and relaxed, a perfect setting to soak in the spectacle. Back at Casa de San Pedro, we completed our daily checklist over another delicious dinner, then gathered in the lounge where one of our guest guides, Sharon, treated us to a fabulous mini concert on the fiddle and taught us a bit about Irish folk music — an unexpected and memorable end to the day!

Friday, August 15 – Patagonia Lake State Park | Paton's Center for Hummingbirds | Tubac Golf Resort and Spa

We began the day heading to Patagonia, stopping along the way to check out a small herd of Pronghorn in the grasslands near Sonoita. Our first birding stop of the day was at Patagonia Lake State Park, a narrow reservoir tucked among rolling hills and mesquite grasslands with ribbons of riparian vegetation. Right away we connected with one of our top targets, the tiny Northern Beardless Tyrannulet. With its little poofy crest and cheerful song, it gave us excellent looks and a chance to study its behavior. Further along the trail we came



across Phainopeplas and then two of the region's most conservation-sensitive birds: the endangered Southwestern Willow Flycatcher and the threatened western population of the Yellow-billed Cuckoo. The flycatcher's population now numbers in only the low hundreds of pairs, and the cuckoo's numbers are likewise a fraction of their historical abundance, making both sightings especially poignant in this lush, vulnerable habitat.

By late morning we returned to the town of Patagonia for lunch at one of its long-standing cafés. Afterwards, we took a leisurely stroll through the town's galleries and shops, and while wandering we were pleasantly greeted by a Mississippi Kite soaring overhead. They're a relatively new breeding presence in the area, reminding us of how dynamic ranges can be.

In the afternoon we visited the Paton's Center for Hummingbirds, one of southeastern Arizona's legendary birding destinations. What began when Wally and Marion Paton welcomed birders into their yard to see Violet-crowned Hummingbirds now continues under Tucson Audubon's care, still retaining its warm backyard feel. We were rewarded with excellent views of Violet-crowned Hummingbirds, plus large flocks of Lazuli Buntings, Blue Grosbeaks, another Yellow-billed Cuckoo, and a pair of Thin-billed Kingbird. Next, we pulled into the Patagonia roadside rest area, a simple pull-off, but one that gave its name to the "Patagonia Picnic Table Effect." The idea that one rare bird brings in more eyes to find other nearby rarities has become a beloved birding legend. Here we watched an immature male Varied Bunting singing boldly nearby, and overhead a colony of White-throated Swifts performed aerial acrobatics.

From there, we drove through Nogales, a border city split in two by the United States and Mexico, known collectively as Ambos Nogales. Founded in the late 1800s as a trading post, the town has grown into an economic crossroads, with a vibrant mix of cultures, architecture, and commerce. Seeing the border wall stretch along the highway and imagining the days when people crossed freely on International Street offered a moment of reflection on how borders shape lives.

By late afternoon, we arrived at the Tubac Golf Resort and Spa, nestled among cottonwoods along the Santa Cruz River. The resort blends historic ranch architecture with lush courtyards and terracotta tile floors, offering a peaceful retreat. Some of us swam in the pool, others wandered the grounds or relaxed in rooms with charming adobe-style fireplaces. As distant monsoon thunder rolled in, we gathered for dinner and listened to the storm build while recounting the day.



Saturday, August 16th Box Canyon | Madera Canyon | Tubac

Our first destination was Box Canyon, a rugged and beautiful spot in the northern Santa Rita Mountains. The canyon begins as a dry, rocky wash and gradually narrows into steep walls lined with striking rock outcrops, ocotillo, and scattered mesquite. It's a landscape that feels both harsh and alive, with birdlife drawn to the sycamores and cottonwoods where the drainage cuts deeper into the mountains. One of the biggest highlights was the Five-striped Sparrow, a bird with a very limited range in the U.S., restricted almost entirely to a few canyons in southern Arizona. Getting to see it so well in its rugged desert canyon home made the encounter especially memorable. We also enjoyed close views of a brilliant adult male Varied Bunting, which lingered long enough for photographs, flashing its mix of purples and blues in the morning light. In one large sycamore, we found an impressive concentration of nesting activity: a recently fledged family of Thick-billed Kingbirds, a pair of Hooded Orioles actively feeding young, a Cassin's Kingbird on its nest, and a Blue Grosbeak carrying material to build one. It was a striking reminder of how much life a single tree can support. Other highlights included a pair of Orange-crowned Warblers moving through on early migration, a Rock Wren perched high on the canyon's tallest outcrop looking tiny against the sky, and a Rufous-crowned Sparrow that gave us excellent views after some effort. Butterflies were also active, with many Queens on the wing along with a Ceraunus Blue and a Variegated Fritillary nectaring on the sparse blooms.

From there, we continued on to Madera Canyon, one of Arizona's most celebrated birding destinations. Nestled in the Coronado National Forest, the canyon climbs from desert scrub through oak and pine-oak woodland up to mixed conifer forests. This dramatic elevation gradient makes Madera Canyon another hotspot for biodiversity. The higher elevation also meant cooler, cloudier weather, a refreshing change from the increasing desert heat below. At the Santa Rita Lodge, we settled into the shade and watched the well-stocked feeders. The activity was constant, with Acorn Woodpeckers clattering in, Black-headed Grosbeaks dropping down, and Hepatic Tanagers making brief appearances. A Bridled Titmouse darted in several times, showing off its sharp black-and-white face pattern. And of course, the ever-present hummingbirds buzzed the feeders in a dizzying display of color and speed. Among them were two extraordinary highlights: first, a rare hybrid between a Broad-billed Hummingbird and a Berylline Hummingbird, showing a fascinating mix of traits, and then, not long after, a pure Berylline Hummingbird, one of the most sought-after species in the region and remarkably our second for the trip. Seeing the hybrid and the pure bird back-to-back gave us a rare opportunity for comparison. After enjoying the show, we headed to a shaded picnic site to enjoy our packed lunches surrounded by the sounds of the canyon.



In the afternoon, some of us chose to rest, swim, or explore the grounds of the resort, while others visited the arts and shopping district of Tubac. Tubac has become a thriving destination for visitors, with galleries, artisan shops, and restaurants that highlight local crafts, jewelry, and Native and Mexican-influenced art. Those who ventured into town came back with stories of meeting artists and even purchasing locally made jewelry, a cultural counterpart to the natural richness of the day.

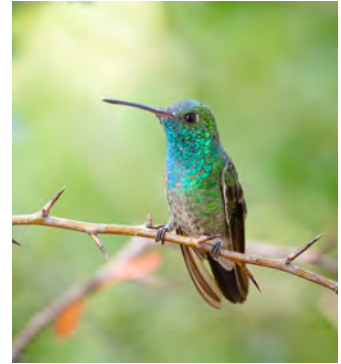
Later, a group of us set out for more birding along Tubac's De Anza Trail, named after Spanish explorer Juan Bautista de Anza, who led expeditions through this region in the 18th century and helped establish the route from Tubac to California. The trail follows the Santa Cruz River, and here the cottonwoods towered above us, providing shade and habitat for a wide array of birds. Evidence of the monsoon rains was everywhere, with debris piled along the banks showing how dynamic and changeable this river system can be.

Almost immediately, we heard the calls of Gray Hawks and soon saw adults circling overhead along with a recently fledged young bird. Watching them sail low through the canopy and scream from the treetops was a thrilling experience. One of the more surprising sightings here was a Brown Creeper moving up the trunk of a massive cottonwood, unusual for this elevation and season. We also enjoyed close views of Bewick's Wren and Bell's Vireo in the thickets. At one point, a Tropical Kingbird aggressively mobbed an adult Gray Hawk, diving repeatedly at it in midair, which made for quite a dramatic scene. Other highlights included the local Song Sparrow subspecies, distinctive in its lighter plumage, and, just as we were wrapping up, a pair of Rufous-winged Sparrows came chittering and fluttering out of a patch of mesquite.

After returning to the resort for a little downtime, we gathered for our final dinner together where some high-quality food and relaxed atmosphere gave us the perfect setting to reminisce about the trip. We shared highlights, compared favorite moments, and laughed over stories. Walking back to our rooms, we listened to the rumble of distant monsoon storms and watched the darkness of night settle in over the mountains. It was a wonderful way to close out our last full day in the field.

Sunday, August 17th Tubac Golf Resort and Spa

On our final morning together, we began with a birding walk around the grounds of the Tubac Golf Resort before breakfast. The resort's setting along the Santa Cruz River corridor makes it a surprisingly bird-rich spot, with a mix of manicured lawns, ponds, and riparian vegetation. Mature cottonwoods and mesquites line parts of the property, giving shelter to a variety of desert and riparian species, while the open water and grassy fairways



attract others. The combination makes it an enjoyable place to spend the early hours, with bird activity at its peak before the heat of the day.

We enjoyed watching the Barn Swallows nesting around the eaves, with babies in various states of maturity, some nearly ready to fledge and others still tiny. Mexican Ducks were on one of the golf course ponds, and we had another nice encounter with Gray Hawks calling and flying among the tall Cottonwoods. Tropical Kingbirds showed beautifully in the morning light, giving us a chance to compare them with Cassin's Kingbirds and work on their identification side by side. A Verdin glowed against the morning sun, its yellow head catching the light. Phainopeplas were busy feeding on berries nearby, and we had Lucy's Warblers moving through the willows. It was a peaceful sunrise walk, the weather was pleasant, and it felt like the perfect way to get one more round of birding in before the trip came to an end.

After breakfast, we loaded up the van and made our way back to Tucson. At the airport we said our goodbyes, reflecting on the week that had just passed. It had been a trip full of discoveries, from rare hummingbirds in the canyons to sparrows of the desert grasslands, from monsoon skies rolling across the mountains to quiet moments in shaded Cottonwood groves. Along the way, we learned not just about birds, but also about the landscapes, history, and people of southeast Arizona. Just as importantly, we shared those moments together, making new connections and friendships along the way. A week of birding well spent, rich in memories to take home.

Photos: Group (Bryan Calk - BC), Mexican Jay (Ellen Lowery - EL), Rufous Hummingbird (Barbara Hamilton - BH), Chihuahuan Meadowlark (Heather Warm - HW), Monsoon (BC), American Avocets (HW), Gila Monster (BC), Blue-throated Mountain Gem (HW), Black-chinned Hummingbird (HW), Gambel's Quail (HW), Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher (BC), Pyrrhuloxia (BH), White-eared Hummingbird (BC), "Costifer" Hummingbird (Costa's x Lucifer hybrid) (BC), Photographing the Shrike - Huachuca Mountains behind (BC), Loggerhead Shrike (HW), Black-throated Gray Warbler (BH), Swainson's Hawk, juvenile (Sharon Goldwasser - SG), Chiricahua Leopard Frog (HW), Violet-crowned Hummingbird (BC), Blue Grosbeak (HW), American Kestrel (HW), Group Birding (BC), Varied Bunting (BC), Five-striped Sparrow (BC), Thick-billed Kingbirds (HW), Broad-billed Hummingbird (BH), Berylline x Broad-billed Hummingbird hybrid (BC)