

Southeast Arizona

Trip Report | April 27 – May 6, 2026

with Naturalist Journeys



Guided by Frank Gallo and Kip Miller.

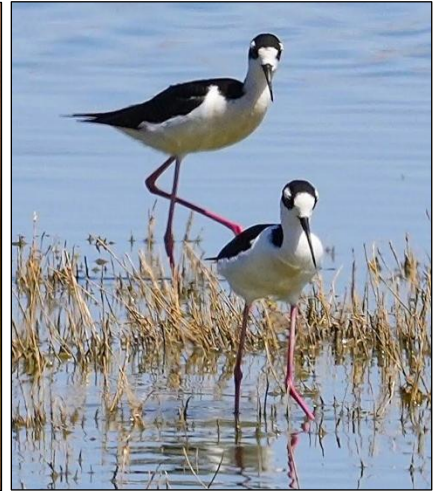
Our group included Ann, Bob, Hal, Karen, Kathleen, Linda, Marty, Neil, Scott, Shelley and Tom.

Beginning and ending in Tucson, our Southeast Arizona tour included time in Sonoran Desert habitat at Saguaro National Park and the San Xavier Mission, at the “shorebird mecca” Lake Cochise near Willcox, in the oak canyons and pine forests of three different “Sky Island” mountain ranges, in riparian forests along the San Pedro and Santa Cruz Rivers, as well as several desert grassland locations and the famed (in the birding world) Patagonia area. Along the way we enjoyed quality views of many widespread western species, as well as a variety of Southeast Arizona specialties – including twelve species of hummingbirds. Below please find a summary of our daily activities and highlights – and thanks again to all for joining us!

Monday, April 27 – Saguaro National Park | Lake Cochise | Cave Creek Ranch

After linking up at our Tucson airport hotels, we started the tour with a visit to Saguaro National Park. Here we explored a trail that allowed us to walk amongst the towering Saguaro cacti, which was reason enough for the visit! As an added bonus though, the birding was good and we started our trip list with widespread desert species such as Verdin, Cactus Wren and Curve-billed Thrasher, along with Gilded Flicker and Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, two species we would not likely encounter later on our tour route.





Following our hike we pushed on towards the Chiricahua Mountains, with a stop in Benson for lunch (and an emergency luggage purchase!) and in Willcox to explore Lake Cochise. Because it is both relatively large and also shallow, Lake Cochise attracts many waterfowl and shorebirds. Here we found waterfowl such as Cinnamon Teal and Mexican Duck; shorebirds such as Black-necked Stilt, American Avocet, Snowy Plover and Wilson’s Phalarope; and wading birds including White-faced Ibis and Black-crowned Night-Heron – all species one does not normally associate with an arid desert region! While here, we also found interesting landbirds around the edges of the adjacent golf course, including Vermilion Flycatcher, Loggerhead Shrike, Bendire’s Thrasher and Green-tailed Towhee.

Eventually, we tore ourselves away from the lake and arrived at the bird-rich Cave Creek Ranch in late afternoon. After locating and settling into our cabins, many gathered by the feeders to enjoy the show that included Gambel’s Quail, Wild Turkey, several hummingbird species and colorful Hooded and Scott’s Orioles. Later, we all gathered in the Ranch House for our first checklist session together, followed by an excellent catered dinner.

Tuesday, April 28 – George Walker House | Chiricahua Mountains

Today we were joined by Cave Creek Ranch guide James Petersen and started the day at the George Walker House in the small community of Paradise, where we enjoyed both breakfast *and* birds. Some of the species we enjoyed between bites and coffee refills included Band-tailed Pigeon, Broad-tailed Hummingbird, Acorn and Arizona Woodpeckers, Mexican Jay and Bridled Titmouse.



From here, we continued higher in the Chiricahuas with James and spent much of the remainder of the day at Pinery Canyon and Rustler Park, where we found higher elevation species such as Greater Pewee, Steller's Jay, Mexican Chickadee, Yellow-eyed Junco, Red-faced Warbler and Hepatic Tanager.

After returning to the lodge for a late afternoon break, we enjoyed a wonderful outdoor dinner in Portal at the home of Peg Abbott, co-owner of Naturalist Journeys. We then concluded the day on a nightbird outing with James that provided excellent views of the tiny Elf Owl and the chance to hear the loud song of the Mexican Whip-poor-will.

Wednesday, April 29 – Cave Creek Canyon | Portal Area

We started birding as a group along the South Fork of Cave Creek Canyon this morning, where all enjoyed great views of a Coppery-tailed Trogon, one of the highlight species of Southeast Arizona's mountain canyons. Although this was a hard act to follow, nobody suggested quitting, so we continued on to the nearby Southwestern Research Ranch where the hummingbird feeders were busy with four species including Blue-throated Mountain-gem and Rivoli's Hummingbird. We then concluded the morning with some in and around town birding in Portal. Here we found less conspicuous species such as Bewick's Wren and Lucy's Warbler, along with flashier species such as Bullock's Oriole and Western Tanager.

After a break for lunch, we returned to Portal to visit a couple of popular feeding stations that provided close views of many species. Feeder visitors we enjoyed included Black-throated and Lark Sparrows, Canyon and Abert's Towhees, Pyrrhuloxia, Lazuli Bunting, Black-headed Grosbeak and many others. Later, after dinner just across the state-line in New Mexico, we concluded the day with an optional night outing along the Portal-Paradise Road that yielded views of Common Poorwill and Western Screech-Owl, along with a pair of Elf Owls at a nest cavity.

Thursday, April 30 – Chiricahua Mountains | Transfer to Casa de San Pedro

This morning, we packed up to (sadly!) depart the Cave Creek Ranch in order to move on to the next stop on our itinerary. Our route took us back up and over the Chiricahuas, which provided another opportunity to search for and enjoy some of the species of the higher elevations. Our first stop was along the roadside on the east slope of the mountains, where we found both Black-chinned and Rufous-crowned Sparrow. We then continued up to Barfoot Park and in the tall pines we had views of Hairy Woodpecker, Mexican Chickadee, Olive Warbler and multiple Yellow-eyed Juncos. Next, we made a repeat stop in Pinery Canyon on the Chiricahua's west slope, where highlights included another view of

a crowd-pleasing Red-faced Warbler and views of an adult Mexican Chickadee feeding a fledging. (Our best view yet of this range-restricted species in the U.S.)

We then continued downhill to the entrance to Chiricahua National Monument. Here we had a picnic lunch adjacent to the visitor center and then walked a trail that provided views of the impressive rock formations. From here we continued east, arriving at our next lodge, Casa de San Pedro on the banks of the San Pedro River in the desert grasslands east of the Huachuca Mountains. After getting settled into our rooms and exploring the grounds a bit, we met for dinner and then enjoyed a wonderful presentation on hummingbird banding by Naturalist Journeys' own Elissa Fazio.

Friday, May 1 – Miller Canyon | Ash Canyon | Hereford Area

We began our exploration of Huachuca Mountains with a hike up Miller Canyon, where we hoped to find the rare (in the U.S.) Flame-colored Tanager. With a bit of patience in the area of an old cabin, all enjoyed views of a colorful male, along with a female tucked in a nest high in a tree. We found other birds during our hike as well, including a couple of Zone-tailed Hawks overhead and a handsome Black-throated Gray Warbler in the oaks along the trail. Back down at the tailhead, we took a birding rest stop and enjoyed the “stadium seating” at the Betty’s hummingbird feeders. At least seven species were present, including Anna’s, Calliope and Rufous, all new species for our tour. Then to conclude our Miller Canyon visit, we made a stop in the lower canyon at the home of a friend of Frank’s. Here we enjoyed our lunch on his patio, along with more hummingbirds, including our first Violet-crowned, a species with a U.S. range that is restricted to southeast Arizona.





After lunch we made the short drive to the Ash Canyon Bird Sanctuary, another location with feeders that attract many birds. This is known as the best location in the U.S. to see Lucifer Hummingbird and with patience, many in the group were successful. We also enjoyed views of other species here, including Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Mexican Jay, Lesser Goldfinch, Western Tanager and Lazuli Bunting. We then spent the rest of the afternoon in the Hereford area, where highlights included Spotted Sandpiper, Gray Hawk, Botteri’s Sparrow and Chihuahuan Meadowlark.

To conclude the day, we enjoyed a dinner in a local Italian restaurant and then made a drive into nearby Carr Canyon, where we had excellent views of a cooperative Whiskered Screech-Owl.

Saturday, May 2 – Casa de San Pedro | Carr Canyon | Ramsey Canyon

After a second night at Casa e San Pedro, we started the day with pre-breakfast birding on the grounds. Gila Woodpeckers and Cassin’s Kingbirds were conspicuous, along with Vermilion Flycatchers that entertained us with their overhead display flights. We then made a daylight return to Carr Canyon, following the twisting and scenic road up to a campground in an area of montane forest. Here we enjoyed views of Grace’s and Black-throated Gray Warblers, Spotted Towhee and the small, but attractive Buff-breasted Flycatcher. Returning to lower elevations, we made a targeted stop for Rufous-winged Sparrow and were rewarded with views of a singing male within seconds!

Following lunch in a local café, we made our way to the Ramsey Canyon Preserve to take a walk up the canyon. It was rather quiet overall, but we were treated to a another view of a male Coppery-tailed Trogon. (This one seemed to be advertising a potential nest cavity to any females that might have been watching.) After our walk, we returned to a location along the San Pedro River where we saw Gray and Swainson’s Hawks, Bullock’s Oriole and more Vermilion Flycatchers. (Nobody complained!)

Later, we finished the day with another wonderful dinner at Casa de San Pedro, followed by an owling adventure that provided views of American Barn Owl (feeding young!) and Western Screech-Owl.

Sunday, May 3 – Brown Canyon Ranch | Paton Center | Santa Gertrudis Lane

Our final birding stop in the Huachuca Mountains region was at Brown Canyon Ranch, where we walked the nature loop and found Ash-throated Flycatcher, Cassin’s Vireo, Bushtit and a variety of other birds previously seen during the tour. We then continued west to the Patagonia area, where we spent the remainder of the morning at the Paton Center for Hummingbirds, a former private residence that is now owned by the Tucson Bird Alliance. Shortly after exiting the vehicles, we noticed a pair of Thick-billed Kingbirds in the tall trees next to the road and several Phainopeplas feeding on fruits in another roadside tree. Other species seen at the feeders and along the trails during our visit included Violet-crowned Hummingbird, Dusky-capped Flycatcher, Lesser Goldfinch, Abert’s Towhee and Summer Tanager.

After our time at the Paton Center, we enjoyed a pleasant picnic lunch in the Patagonia town park that included bird sightings such as Black Vulture (uncommon in southeast Arizona) and Zone-tailed Hawk. We then continued on towards Tubac, with a stop to walk a trail along the Santa Cruz River, where we found another pair of Thick-billed Kingbirds, along with Yellow-breasted Chat, Green-tailed Towhee and others. After this, we continued on to the Tubac Golf Resort, where we checked in for our final three nights of the tour. While golf (not birding) was clearly the primary theme here, the rooms were spacious and comfortable and birds were quite abundant on the grounds.

Monday, May 4 – Box Canyon | Madera Canyon | Desert Meadows Park

We started birding today in Box Canyon, a small, but scenic canyon on the edge of the Santa Rita Mountains. One of the first birds we saw was a Five-striped Sparrow, a species mostly restricted to Mexico. This was one of the birds we most hoped to find here, so it was great start! Of course, the canyon was host to other birds as well and by the time we left, we had also added Golden Eagle and Rock Wren to our trip list and enjoyed views of previously seen species such as Black-throated Sparrow, Scott’s and Hooded Orioles, Western Tanager and Black-headed Grosbeak.





After exploring Box Canyon, we continued deeper into the Santa Rita Mountains with a visit to Madera Canyon. After lunch in a Forest Service picnic area, we made a stop at the Santa Rita Lodge, another well-known feeder location in Southeast Arizona. By this point in the tour, most of the species seen here were familiar, but one never complains about the chance to see birds up close, so we enjoyed them all and some even had the chance to see a rare Berylline Hummingbird make a quick visit to the feeders.

From here, we started working our way back to Tubac, making a couple of fun and productive stops on the way. The first was at Desert Meadows Park in Green Valley. The mix of desert plants and eclectic art here was worth the visit alone, but there were also many birds to enjoy, including Gambel's Quail, Costa's Hummingbird, Rufous-winged Sparrow and Abert's Towhee. Another stop was at the Amado water treatment facility, where we were able to see several waterbird species including Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, Ruddy Duck and Neotropic Cormorant. We then continued back to the Tubac Golf Resort, where we took a break before gathering for an outdoor checklist session (during which we added Vaux's Swift and Tropical Kingbird to our list!) and dinner at the resort restaurant.

Tuesday, May 5 – Montosa Canyon | Canoa Ranch | Tumacacori

To start our final full day together, we met with Vernie Aikens, a Tucson area birder and Naturalist Journeys guide who showed us some of his favorite locations in Montosa Canyon. Like Box Canyon, Montosa is a smaller, scenic canyon with steep, rocky hillsides and we found a variety of species while birding the roadsides and wider trails. Some of the highlights here included a Canyon Wren that perched nicely on an exposed rock and our first good views of Bell's Vireo, a species that had been rather elusive so far in the tour. After parting ways with Vernie in mid-morning, we continued on to the Canoa Ranch Conservation Park where we walked a loop around the small lake. A few Pied-billed Grebes and American Coots were present in the lake and landbirds we saw along the trail included Broad-billed and Costa's Hummingbirds, Bewick's Wren, White-crowned Sparrow and Yellow-rumped Warbler.

After lunch at a fun Mexican restaurant in Tumacacori, we visited the nearby Tumacacori National Historical Park, where the birding on the grounds and near the Santa Cruz River was very productive. Here we saw Gray Hawk, lots of Vermilion Flycatchers, Abert's Towhee and Yellow-breasted Chat. Perhaps the best part about our visit though, was a tip from staff person about where to look for Green

Kingfisher at a nearby road crossing on the Santa Cruz River. After wrapping up at the historical park, we quickly made our way to the recommend location and sure enough, after a few minutes of searching and repositioning for the best angle, there was a Green Kingfisher perched over a small pool in the river and we were able to get it in the scopes for everyone to see. (And as all will surely recall, this was a species Frank had been looking for unsuccessfully in Arizona for many years and his enthusiasm over finally finding one was more than a little contagious!)

Following this fun ending to our last afternoon of birding together, we made our way back to Tubac, where we later met for a happy checklist session (Frank was still smiling!) and then a final dinner together at Elvira's, a wonderful local restaurant that was much enjoyed by all.

Wednesday, May 6 - San Xavier del Bac Mission | Departures for Home

The primary objective of our final morning was to make it back to the Tucson airport by late morning for afternoon departure flights, but we weren't quite finished yet.... Greater Roadrunner was a much-wanted species by most in the group and so far, we had only had glimpses of one that darted across the road a few days earlier. So, with this in mind, we planned a last-ditch effort stop at the San Xavier del Bac Mission en route. The desert scrub around the parking lot has historically been a good location for this species – and sure enough, within minutes, we had a calling Greater Roadrunner walking in the open in front of us, a wonderful conclusion to our tour and time together!

Tour Sightings: As a group we saw 176 species of birds. A full list of our sightings can be viewed [here](#).

Tour Photos: More photos of birds, places and people from the tour can be viewed [here](#)



Trip Report Photos – Page 1: Gilded Flicker on Saguaro “bones” (Shelley), Yellow-eyed Junco (Neil), Elf Owl (Ann) **Page 2:** Group at Saguaro NP (Kip), Western Tanager (Hal), Steller’s Jay (Neil), Bridled Titmouse (Frank), Black-necked Stilts (Ann) **Page 3:** Nest building Red-faced Warbler (Ann), Group in Pinery Canyon (Frank) **Page 4:** Group at Chiricahua National Monument (Kip), Black-headed Grosbeak (Shelley), Vermilion Flycatcher (Neil), Gambell’s Quail (Hal), Costa’s Hummingbird (Frank) **Page 5:** Flame-colored Tanager (Ann), Interesting Patagonia news! (Linda), Broad-billed Hummingbird (Shelley), Curve-billed Thrasher (Frank), Whiskered Screech-Owl (Ann) **Page 6:** Coppery-tailed Trogon (Ann), Greater Roadrunner (Ann) **Page 7:** Band-tailed Pigeon (Neil), Lazuli Bunting (Shelley), Ladder-backed Woodpecker (Hal) **Page 8:** Our fun group!, Five-striped Sparrow (Shelley).