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Arizona Monsoon Madness: Birding and Nature August (5) 6-12, 2017

Trip Report *(by Bob Meinke)*

Guides Bob Behrstock *and* Bob Meinke, with 10 participants: Edna, Chuck, Gretchen, Ken, Joann, Marie, Ursula, Rudolf, Roslyn, and Nina

Sat., Aug. 5 Early Arrivals / California Gulch

Several participants arrived early, to take advantage of some Saturday birding, or to visit Tucson area attractions. Ursula and Rudolf checked into an airport area hotel on Friday, Aug. 4, and spent Saturday touring the Sonoran Desert Museum. Ken and Gretchen flew into Tucson late Saturday morning, and Chuck had previously driven out from Alabama to bird the Chiricahua Mountains to the east. Those three--plus the guides (Bob and Bob)--rendezvoused for lunch at Baggins, a local gourmet sandwich shop. Prior to leaving, we also picked up sandwiches there for dinner, to cover us during our expected outing to remote canyons west of Nogales, planned for later that evening.

From Tucson the early birders drove south to our lodgings in Amado, arriving about 2:30. After a half-hour stop to don field clothes, we continued south to Rio Rico, turning west on Ruby Road as we headed to California Gulch, famed for its occurrences of Five-striped Sparrow and Buff-collared Nightjar. These exceedingly rare species (in the U.S.) would be life birds for everyone except Bob Behrstock. Passing Peña Blanca Lake, the pavement soon ended, and the impact of recent monsoonal downpours on the vegetation was evident. Wildflowers were abundant, and the hillsides were astonishingly green.



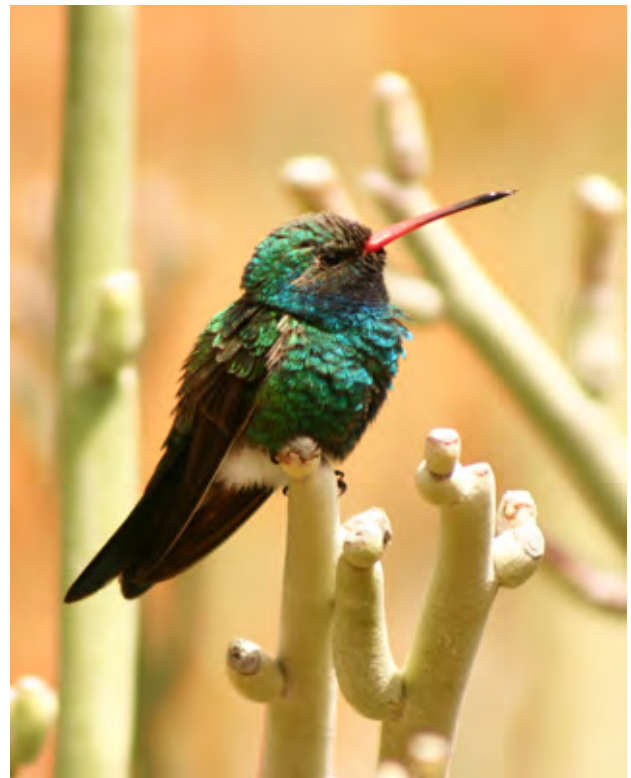
Heading into California Gulch, west of Nogales (photo: Bob Meinke)



Monsoon wildflowers we saw: Firecracker Bush (Bouvardia ternifolia), a member of the Coffee Family that's a favorite with hummingbirds, and Tansyleaf Aster (Machaeranthera tanacetifolia) (photos: Bob Meinke)

It was well after 4:00 as we descended into California Gulch, which dropped us due south towards the Mexican border. Although late in the day, Gambel's Quail, White-winged Dove, Greater Roadrunner, Brown-crested Flycatcher, and Broad-billed Hummingbird were spotted on the drive in. Bob B. knew the area well, and we were soon walking a spur road in search of Five-striped Sparrow. After being distracted by several Black-throated Sparrows we hit paydirt, and came across a very accommodating Five-stripe, which posed in the mesquite and sang for nearly 10 minutes. If you're going to pick up a lifer, it's great when they take the time to let you really get to know them! A Purple Martin flyover was also a pleasant surprise.

Our next target was Buff-collared Nightjar, and we snaked our way down canyon to within a kilometer or so of the border. Although the skies were blue, it had been a rainy week, and the draws were wet. Each one we passed had a solid bottom and just an inch or two of water, and we easily drove through.



Male Broad-billed Hummingbird (photo: Evelyn Earlougher)

But as we reached the Nightjar site, we tried to ford a final creekbed and unexpectedly hit a deep pocket of slurrified gravel--we were stuck! Bob M., Gretchen, and Ken volunteered to hike to higher ground to try and reach cell coverage, and made it about 3 miles when we got word from Bob B. (on our two-way radio) that help had arrived, so we headed back. Considering the isolated nature of the site, we figured if anyone appeared (other than Border Patrol) it would likely be another group of birders. And sure enough, a bird guide friend of Bob B. from Sierra Vista had showed up. He was accompanied by Dorian Anderson--our first celebrity birder of the trip--well known for his grueling, year-long birding quest via bicycle and kayak across the continental U.S. (see <http://hikingforbirds.blogspot.com>).



Assessing our situation as the sun sets (left), and Dorian Anderson (right), readying his gear for a possible encounter with the Buff-collared Nightjar (photos: Bob Meinke)

Bob B. headed out with his friend and his truck, while Bob M. and the group (including Dorian) stayed with the vehicle, enjoyed our sandwiches, and waited for dusk and a shot at the Buff-collared Nightjar. As luck would have it, we were right at the location where the birds had been seen off and on over the summer. But although we gave it a very good go, the nightjars remained elusive. We settled in and waited, and were serenaded by a family of Elf Owls as the moon rose above the canyon walls. Our circumstances notwithstanding, the evening was warm and pleasant, and we had the good fortune to be sharing the creekside habitat with a substantial population of fireflies (*Photinus knulli*), very rarely found in Arizona, much less the western U.S. This particular species happens to be the only known "lekking" firefly in the New World, gathering together in congregations (leks) as males synchronize their flashes as part of a complex mate-location strategy. The twinkling lights contributed to the rather surreal atmosphere as we waited, but soon Bob B. returned with a helpful rancher who quickly had us on the road again. We were back to Amado later than expected, yet all in all, a fascinating day.

Sun., Aug. 6 Santa Cruz River / Main Group Arrives / Montosa Canyon

After our late night, the sunrise wasn't long in coming, and we were up by 6:00 to check the feeders at the Amado Territorial Inn. Doves (White-winged, Mourning, and Inca), Vermilion Flycatchers, House Finches, Lark Sparrows, and Gambel's Quail dominated the birdscape, with a Tropical Kingbird a very nice find near the parking area of the lodge. After a filling breakfast, Chuck, Gretchen, and Ken (and the Bobs) departed at 7:00 for a walk along the Santa Cruz River at Tumacácori, where we hoped to see the Rose-throated Becard and a Yellow-green Vireo, both very rare species for the U.S. that are principally found in Mexico and Central America. The Becards had been nesting in the area since spring, and we had high hopes of locating them, while the Vireo was a recent sighting.



A first-of-the-morning Black-chinned Hummingbird heads for the feeders at the Amado Territorial Inn (photo: Bob Meinke)

We had a short walk down to the Santa Cruz riparian zone, which was dominated by Fremont Cottonwood (*Populus fremontii*) and Arizona Sycamore (*Plantanus wrightii*). Within half an hour we'd pinpointed the active Becard nest, high in a cottonwood, where it hung suspended like a football-shaped piñata. Both male (with rose throat fully visible) and female birds were present, and we had good views. A nearby pair of Brown-crested Flycatchers was also nesting, and the birds were raiding the Becard nest for their own construction materials. Other species here (and on the walk in) included Western and Cassin's Kingbirds, Bell's Vireo (very vocal), Blue Grosbeak, Gila Woodpecker, Abert's Towhee, Lesser Goldfinch, Bewick's Wren, and Chihuahuan Raven, among others. Regrettably, we (and everyone else that morning) struck out on the Vireo, which in any case would have been a real bonus if we'd found it.



Birding Montosa Canyon (photo: Bob Meinke)

As lunch approached, Ken and Gretchen elected to stay in the Tubac area and bird a bit more, and then grab a bite. Chuck birded the area around our lodgings in Amado, and the guides returned to the Tucson Airport to fetch the remaining 7 members of the tour group. We hit Baggins again for lunch, then two vans transported the group down to Amado for check-in. After some freshening up from the day's travels, the now complete group (Ken and Gretchen had returned from Tubac) boarded the vans and drove north for an initial foray into the thorn-scrub habitat characterized by Velvet Mesquite (*Prosopis velutina*), Whitethorn Acacia (*Acacia constricta*), and

other woody members of the legume family. Driving a short distance from the inn, we stopped briefly at the Amado waste water treatment pond for Black-bellied Whistling Duck, Ruddy Duck, American Coot, and Mexican Duck (a race of the Mallard, previously a separate species). An unexpected sight here was a single, rather lethargic, Brown Pelican. While not the most exciting find for many members of the group, they nonetheless appreciated the novelty of seeing the species in SE Arizona. How it ended up in Amado is anyone's guess. The remainder of the day was spent in and near Montosa Canyon, in the foothills of the Santa Rita Mtns., where we located (and learned the song of) Rufous-winged Sparrow, Canyon Wren, Varied Bunting, Black-throated Sparrow, and Black-tailed Gnatcatcher. The Rufous-winged Sparrow is a southern Arizona specialty, with its limited nesting range restricted to just three counties in the U.S. Flowering Barrel Cactus (*Ferocactus* sp.) and other native succulents were evident here, and Desert Cottontail and Antelope Jackrabbit were observed, as well.

We returned late afternoon, and left the inn at about 6:30 for dinner at The Italian Peasant, a neighborhood-style bar and bistro in nearby Tubac. The group enjoyed drinks, salad, and what might best be described as some very generous servings of pasta. The table was still groaning from the weight of the leftovers when we walked out.

Mon., Aug. 7 Madera Canyon / Santa Cruz River Riparian Area

The following morning many members of the group gathered on the back plaza of the Territorial Inn for coffee and some feeder watching before breakfast at 6:30. Lesser Nighthawks were out at dawn, and one of the few Bronzed Cowbirds of the trip was discovered by Chuck, as well as our only sighting of Javelina. Northern Cardinal, its sister species the Pyrrhuloxia, and Hooded Oriole were observed as well. The group was also starting to get keyed into the Hummingbirds, and quickly learned to distinguish Broad-billed and Black-chinned (the males, at least).

After breakfast we stopped again at the nearby water treatment pond, and the accidental Brown Pelican remained, having moved perhaps 3 feet from its perch of the previous day. We also picked up Neotropic Cormorant, as well as the earlier seen duck species. We then drove north and east to explore Madera Canyon in the Santa Rita Mtns. On the drive up we stopped in mixed mesquite-cactus habitats, with several Cholla and Prickly-Pear species. Rufous-winged sparrows were again abundant, as well as Loggerhead Shrike, Cassin's and Lark Sparrows, and Vermillion Flycatchers. The unusual Unicorn Plant (*Proboscidea althaeifolia*) was blooming along the roadsides.



Jumping cholla (Cylindropuntia fulgida) and the Santa Rita Mountains in the background (photo: Bob Meinke)

Madera Canyon is an iconic destination for birders visiting SE Arizona, and our first stop was the Proctor Trailhead. The morning was already heating up, and we initially focused on hearing and seeing Cassin's and Botteri's sparrows, two similar-appearing Arizona grassland-breeding species that are very vocal during monsoon. We had luck with Cassin's, with males demonstrating their unusual (for sparrows) "skylarking" displays from the shrubtops, but would have to wait until later in the trip to get good looks at Botteri's. We heard (but did not see) Varied Bunting, and also picked up several Blue Grosbeaks, many Acorn Woodpeckers, Mexican Jay, Bewick's Wren, Phainopepla, and Canyon Towhee.

We then opted for some hummingbird watching at the Santa Rita Lodge feeders, and also visited their gift shop. The species diversity here was unfortunately low, and we were largely limited to the territorial squabbling of Broad-billed and Black-chinned hummers, although a Rivoli's Hummingbird (*formerly Magnificent*) put in a few appearances. That said, everyone had the chance to work on their female hummingbird ID skills before we ventured further up canyon.

We stopped next at the terminus of the Madera Canyon Road, and checked out the picnic area there. Yellow-eyed Juncos made their initial appearance of the trip here, as well as Ladder-backed Woodpecker, and White-breasted Nuthatch. But overall it was quiet. On the way down we stopped at the unique Kubo B & B, and saw our first Painted Redstart at their feeders.



Female Broad-billed Hummingbird (photo: Bob Meinke)



Stalking the Rose-throated Becard (photo: Bob Meinke)

We stopped for lunch in Green Valley (Italian), and then drove south to Tuma-cácori and walked the Anza trail, to give the rest of the group the chance to see the Rose-throated Becard. The birds were not nearly as cooperative as the previous day, and the group waited some time before finally getting a decent glimpse at the nest. Birds recorded on the walk in and out included Dusky-capped Flycatcher, Verdin (their insistent chip was hard to miss), a bright male Summer Tanager, Black Phoebe, Bridled Titmouse, Bell's Vireo, Abert's Towhee, Gila Woodpecker, Greater Roadrunner, and a singing Yellow-breasted Chat.

Our Mexican dinner was at the nearby Wisdom's Cafe--outstanding guacamole!

Tues., Aug. 8 Kino Springs / Patagonia & Paton's Hummingbird Center / Las Cienegas NCA

The group was up again today having an early coffee, and Bob B. pointed out the only Lucy's Warbler we would see on the trip. A Bewick's Wren was taking a dust bath, and Common Ground-dove, Northern Mockingbird, and Phainopepla were all out, along with the omnipresent House Finches, Gambel's Quail, and Lesser Goldfinches. After our well-received 6:30 breakfast, we bid adieu to the Amado Territorial Inn, and headed south to the Kino Springs Golf Course (east of Nogales), to check out their ponds. A landscape guy with a weed whacker put the kibosh on a quiet birding stop, but most of us still saw Common Yellowthroat (the only sighting of the trip), Song Sparrow, Black Phoebe, and Swainson's Hawk, and we had the chance to study the differences between Cassin's and Western Kingbirds in the scope. On the way back to the cars, a Cooper's Hawk whipped by Ken and Bob M. in hot pursuit of (most likely) a House Sparrow.

We then drove east to Patagonia, where we planned to stop in at the renowned (to birders, at least) Patagonia Roadside Rest on the way into town. While Guadalupe Canyon (well east of Douglas, in the extreme SE corner of Arizona) is the supposed sure bet for locating Thick-billed Kingbird in the U.S., we had reasonable expectations of finding a pair here, and sure enough we did (adults and juvenile), with everyone getting great looks. As with most Kingbirds, Thick-billed is a bird of open habitats and treetops, which forages for insects during



Gretchen and Ken at 'The Table' (photo: Bob Meinke)

aerial hawking maneuvers. However, despite its notoriety in Arizona, this largely Mexican species is understudied, and much has yet to be learned about its life history. We also located Blue-grey Gnatcatcher, Hooded Oriole, and Brown-headed Cowbird in the trees here, and a single Zone-tailed Hawk was seen with some Turkey Vultures. Before leaving, several of us were photographed with the now famous Patagonia Roadside Rest Picnic Table (see <http://seanmurthaart.com/blog/34903/the-picnic-table-effect> for further discussion).

Our next stop was the Paton Center for Hummingbirds in Patagonia. Originally a private home whose owners welcomed birders to their many feeders, the Center is now a Tucson Audubon Society facility. As in Madera, species diversity was not high here, but we were fortunate to get clear views of at least two Violet-crowned Hummingbirds, sought after by birders and one of the most range-restricted humming-birds in the U.S. We also got our first good looks at Anna's Hummingbird, with its brilliant coppery-red gorget and head feathers. Other birds were present as well, including heard (but not seen) Curve-billed Thrasher, Ladder-backed and Gila Woodpeckers, countless Lesser Goldfinches, Verdin, and Great-tailed Grackles. We left for lunch at the Gathering Grounds Cafe, and welcomed the excellent sandwiches and salad, cold drinks, and scrumptious cookies (several of which made their way into the vans). A final stop before leaving town got everyone great looks at several vocalizing Lucy's Warblers!

Our last birding stop of the day was further east at the Las Cienegas National Conservation Area, which features native savannah habitats administered by the Bureau of Land Management. This would be our chance to really see some of the grassland bird species that characterize the monsoon breeding season. After a short drive, and some listening from the open windows of the vans, we pulled over and quickly located singing Botteri's and Cassin's sparrows, and got decent looks in the scope. Although not easy to distinguish visually, especially at a distance, the two species have very dissimilar songs. Also singing from several shrubs were examples of *Lilian's race* of the Eastern Meadowlark, which some authorities feel may warrant splitting out as a new species. Not quite finished, on the drive back to the highway, Bob B. watched (and listened) carefully for Grasshopper Sparrow. Both vans ended up with nice views of this typically secretive species, perched on a stunted mesquite.

Back on the road, we made a beeline for Fort Huachuca at Sierra Vista, to pick up our visitor passes for birding on the base the next day. During check-in, Joann amused her processing officer by asking him to pass her an insect she saw crawling up the inside of the glass partition that separated them. Quite used to visiting biologists, he happily obliged her.

Our final destination today was Casa de San Pedro, our lodging for the next 4 nights. Our dinner this evening was catered for us at the Casa by local chef Elvia-- Mexican shrimp cocktail, fabulous tamales, chile rellenos, and flan! It was outstanding!



Bob Behrstock offering some pointers on the biota of the Las Cienegas NCA (photo: Bob Meinke)

Wed., Aug. 9 Huachuca Canyon / Behrstock Feeders / Whitewater Draw Wildlife Area

Following a well-deserved rest, after the driving of the previous day, most of us were up by 6:00 to bird the grounds of Casa de San Pedro. Another Bronzed Cowbird was picked up by Chuck, and a Yellow-billed Cuckoo was added to the list by Gretchen and Ken, while the feeders were surrounded by the usual suspects (i.e., Doves, Finches, Gila Woodpeckers, and families of Gambel's Quail). Breakfast was ready at 6:30, starting with fruit, coffee, and biscuits. A couple of us (after the Mexican feast the night before) opted to stop there, but most went on to enjoy the main course--all was delicious.

We then loaded up the vans and headed for Huachuca Canyon on U.S. Army property. This would be our first look at the mesic, montane chasms frequented by birders in the Huachuca Mountains, characterized by Arizona Sycamore (*Plantanus wrightii*), various Oaks (*Quercus* spp.), Alligator Juniper (*Juniperus deppeana*), Arizona Walnut (*Juglans major*), and Bigtooth Maple (*Acer grandidentatum*).

After passing through Fort Huachuca and its fascinating historic architecture, we proceeded up the road into the canyon. The drive was a bit rough, but certainly passable, and we soon came to a picnic area where a Berylline Hummingbird had recently been reported. Not knowing just where to look, we moved on after a quick stop, and reached a shaded area where the vans were parked.

The walk up from there was an easy gradient, but required several brief stream crossings that everyone managed well. Almost immediately we heard the hooting of Elegant Trogon and the squeaks of Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher (the latter species watched briefly by some earlier in Madera Canyon, but seen much better here). Both species are destination birds for many visitors to SE Arizona, and it was gratifying to see them so well so quickly. As we walked we also recorded Black-throated Gray Warbler, Dusky-capped Flycatcher, Hutton's and Plumbeous Vireos, Painted Redstart, Summer Tanager, Black-headed Grosbeak, and our only view of the trip of Wilson's Warbler. There was also a quick glimpse by a few of us of Arizona Woodpecker, the only brown-backed woodpecker in the U.S.

Although the unifying theme of the trip was birding, it was apparent that the group had many diverse interests, including mammals, wildflowers, and arthropods as well. So in addition to birds, Bob B. did a great job of pointing out various insects,



Arizona Woodpecker (photo: Peg Abbott)

especially butterflies, beetles, and dragonflies, and also provided information on local plant species and communities. We enjoyed visiting Bob's home, where we had lunch (pizza), while looking at the native plants being grown there for pollinators. It was very informative, and it was here that we had our first (brief) look at Lucifer Hummingbird.

After lunch we drove east into looming monsoon thunderheads toward Whitewater Draw state wildlife area, our only real opportunity to see wading birds during the trip. It was getting late in the day, but we did find a swimming Sora, Lesser Yellowlegs, Cinnamon Teal, Ruddy Ducks, White-faced Ibis, and American Avocets (the latter seen at a great distance).



Cactus Long-horned Beetle (Moneilema gigas) (photo: Bob Meinke)

With thunder booming and lightning approaching, we beat a hasty retreat to the vans, but on the way back picked up both Red-winged and Yellow-headed Blackbirds, as well as Tree, Northern Rough-winged, and Violet-green Swallows. And adding color were several dozen migrating Lazuli's Buntings, which peppered the willows and reeds with splashes of turquoise.

We got back to Casa de San Pedro in time to watch local hummingbird banders Sheri Williamson and Tom Wood at work, before heading over to Hereford for an Italian dinner. Upon returning, several of us ventured out to scan for owls (Barn and Great Horned), and others headed to bed. On her way, Edna found a large toad blocking her door, but it was humanely transferred to a more appropriate location, and the incident had a happy ending.



Thur., Aug. 10 Carr Canyon / Ash Canyon B&B Feeders / Burrowing Owls

The morning was bright and sunny, and once again we were met with a gourmet breakfast, with pancakes the main attraction. At the feeders while we ate were Northern Cardinals, a.k.a. the "Arizona Cardinal" (*Cardinalis cardinalis superbus*), which may be the most spectacular cardinal subspecies in the U.S. according to many, with its intense coloration and bushier crest. We weren't distracted for long, however, as we were busying ourselves for a trip back to the Huachuca Mountains, this time up to Carr Canyon (in the Coronado National Forest) and the highest elevations we would reach on the trip.

The narrow road up to Carr is loaded with switchbacks, and it was difficult for the drivers to do anything but watch the road! But that paid off as we neared the top, when those in both vehicles got great views of two adult White-nosed Coatis crossing the road just ahead. They then perched on the bank above the vans as we approached, and sat there staring. Best mammal of the trip. Once up top, we made our way to the Reef Townsite Campground to search for yet another of the recent rarities that have lately made their way to SE Arizona from Mexico, the Tufted Flycatcher.



Hepatic Tanager (photo: Peg Abbott)

Upon arrival we met another small party of birders, and in short order were steered to the vicinity of the flycatchers. Soon we had both the Tufted as well as Buff-bellied Flycatchers in sight, with the birds occasionally holding still long enough for quick scope views. After maybe 30 minutes with the flycatchers, we moved off to see what else was available. The forest here had a coniferous element we had not seen before on the trip, with Douglas Fir (*Psuedotsuga menziesii*) and pines (*Pinus* spp.) among the co-dominants. We were eventually able to locate Black-throated Gray and Grace's Warblers (the latter a pine dependent species), Woodhouse's Scrub-jay, Yellow-eyed Junco, Northern Flicker, Hepatic Tanager, Spotted Towhee, Hermit Thrush, and Eastern Bluebird (the race here now referred to as *Azure Bluebird*, a patchily distributed and localized Arizona subspecies that may be split off as a full species in the future).



Cactus Wren nest (photo: Bob Meinke)

We also stopped for a few minutes at a group of homes we'd visited earlier in the day, in hopes of seeing some Scaled Quail that had been reported there. We whiffed on the quail, but did end up with a nice Cactus Wren, which had oddly managed to elude us thus far on the trip. The mesquite grassland habitat here also supported Blue Grosbeak and Lark Sparrow.

Heading back to Casa de San Pedro (innkeepers Patrick and Karl were to be our chefs for the evening), we first ducked into a local ranch where we visited a Burrowing Owl relocation site, for owls displaced by a Phoenix development. Both adults and young were visible, and the owner (a truly dedicated conservationist) was quite informative. While there, we also scoped an immature Gray Hawk (initially heard by Bob B.), while Botteri's Sparrows were singing intensely as a lightning storm approached! An amazing visit! On return to the Casa, some of us birded the grounds or visited the inn's butterfly garden. We then sat down to an outstanding dinner, with soup, grilled chicken salad, and a rich chocolate mousse! A fine finish to a very nice day!

While driving the road beyond the campground, those in the van with Bob M. (Nina, Roslyn, Ken, Gretchen, and Marie) observed a Greater Pewee about 50 meters down slope on a bare snag. The bird sat motionless, and there was ample time (despite the lack of any vocalization) to ensure this was not Olive-sided Flycatcher or Western Wood-pewee, as we noted (in addition to the bird's stature) the large bill and orange lower mandible, crested head, and plain breast lacking a dark vest. It was a nice find to end our birding in Carr Canyon. We ate a picnic lunch on site, and then headed down to the valley floor.

The day by this time had become seriously warm and muggy, what with the billowing monsoon clouds and threat of rain. Rather than endure the discomfort of an afternoon walk, we elected to sit in the shade and visit the feeders at the Ash Canyon Bed and Breakfast, not far from Bob Behrstock's house in Hereford. It was a good choice, as we got the best ever close-up views of rare Lucifer Hummingbirds, as well as Anna's, Rufous, Rivoli's, Black-chinned, and Broad-billed. And all from our yard chairs! Curve-billed thrashers were also very active here, and everyone finally got clear views of this species, which can be a bit of a skulker in late summer.



A Queen butterfly (*Danaus gilippus*) visits its host plant, the Climbing Milkweed (*Funastrum cynanchoides*) (photo: Bob Meinke)

Our last complete day in Arizona was a full one, featuring a trip to Ramsey Canyon, one of The Nature Conservancy's showcase properties, a stop at the hummingbird feeders at Beatty's Guest Ranch in Miller Canyon (holder of the record for hummingbird species seen in a single day in the U.S. at 14), and a drive out to the historic mining community of Bisbee for dinner. The day started in customary fashion at 6:30 with yet another of the breakfasts the Casa is famous for. But with no time to dawdle, we were on the road shortly after 7:00.

Today was a day when the diverse really shone through. Joann was milkweeds (she is writing a book on were enjoying the ants and reptiles, to figure out some of the flowers he then everyone was completely taken Deer (called the "Coues Whitetail" of SE Arizona) with the tiniest fawn

And of course there were plenty of the day's birding, we had divided into Chuck, Ken, and Gretchen electing to at Flame-colored Tanager, while the below. The stay-behind bunch took a leisurely stroll up the canyon, hearing Trogons again, and seeing more Sulphur-bellied Flycatchers, Steller's Jays, Bridled Titmouse, Brown Creeper (the Mexican race, and a possible future split), Western Tanager, and Cordilleran Flycatcher.

During the walk in Ramsey we ran into Sandy Komito, a friend of Bob B., and former record holder for the most birds seen in North America in a single year--748 species in 1998. In real life, Sandy (*see picture on the following page*) was one of the 3 birders depicted in the film *The Big Year* (his character was played by Owen Wilson). So along with Dorian Anderson, we ran into two celebrity birders during our trip. Who would have thought...

Meanwhile, the Flame-colored Tanager chasers were not back by lunch, so we headed for Sierra Vista and a Vietnamese cafe. A good recommendation by Bob B. We then ventured back out and up Miller Canyon to the Beatty Guest Ranch hummingbird feeders and apple farm. It was getting warm, but there was decent shade.



interests of the group intent on focusing on her them), Rudolf and Ursula and Bob M. was trying was unfamiliar with. And by a mother Whitetail here in the Mtn. ranges imaginable (maybe 3 lbs.)

birds, as well. Regarding two groups early on, with hike up Ramsey for a shot rest of us stayed down



Joann investigates the Nodding Milkweed (*Asclepias glaucescens*) (photos: Bob Meinke)



Big Year guy Sandy Komito (far left) entertains Rudolf, Ursula, and Marie with witty birding banter in Ramsey Canyon (photo: Bob Meinke)

Beatty's feeders proved to be the best site for hummingbirds on the trip--Bob M., Nina, and Edna sat in the shade in a tiny gazebo and watched (in some cases no more than 2-3 feet away) 6 species come and go, including Lucifer, Broad-billed, Black-chinned, Rivoli's, Anna's, and Rufous (and maybe Allen's, though that's open to debate). Well worth the stop.

We eventually hooked back up with the Flame-colored Tanager crowd, and tragically, despite their best efforts, they heard the bird but never saw it. They did add to our overall list, however, with their reports of Orange-crowned, Yellow-rumped, and Red-faced Warblers, and also Band-tailed Pigeon. We then moved on for a brief, final stop at the historic Brown Canyon Ranch, to check their small pond. To our amazement, this tiny (less than an acre) impoundment held 3 Soras (that we saw), as well as a very tame Black Phoebe, and our first Yellow Warbler and Say's Phoebe.

We returned to Casa de San Pedro a little earlier than usual, to take some time to rest up a bit ahead of our drive to Bisbee for dinner. But before pulling in, we took a spin around a few local roads on a hunch, and we finally located our Scaled Quail! A lifer for just about everyone. It's remarkable they are so closely related to Gambel's Quail, considering their plumage. We assumed we were done with good birds at that point, but upon pulling into the Casa, Bob M.'s group drove right up on a Yellow-billed Cuckoo, perched in the open by the parking lot. Nice. We cleaned up (some of us also had pie...), and then left about 6:15 for dinner at Café Roka, a very nice, up-scale restaurant in Bisbee, approximately 20 miles from Casa de San Pedro. Although the jazz quintet (who were excellent musicians) was a bit too close to the table, we nonetheless had great conversation and an enjoyable final evening. And waiting for us on our return to the Casa was a family of Great Horned Owls! Not bad...

Sat., Aug. 12 Morning Birding at Casa de San Pedro / Travel home

Breakfast was at 7:00 this morning, and those with early flights or other business in Tucson (i.e., Edna, Rudolf, Ursula, and Joann) left with Bob B. for the city shortly thereafter. Roslyn went birding along the San Pedro River with a private guide for the day (Nina and Roslyn stayed behind for an extra evening at Casa de San Pedro), and Ken and Gretchen birded nearby for a couple hours after breakfast. Chuck said his farewells and took off on his road trip back to Alabama, and then Marie, Gretchen, and Ken left with Bob M. for the airport at 10:30 to catch our mid-afternoon departures.

We'll await the final tally, but somewhere in the vicinity of 150 birds were seen on the trip, a very respectable total for 6 days in SE Arizona.



Bug of the trip: Giant Mesquite Bug (Thasus neocalifornicus)--hard to believe they don't bite! Scale = Life Size (photo: Bob Meinke)