

Arizona Sweetheart Birding | Feb. 12-16, 2022 | by Bryan Calk



With guide Bryan Calk and participants Ann, Christine, Gary, Israel, Kate, Miriam, and Rich.



Sat., Feb. 12 Arrivals Tucson | Patagonia | Hereford

We were able to get an early start to kick off our tour from Tucson on a warm and gorgeous winter day. Driving south, our first stop was lunch at the Gathering Grounds in Patagonia, and with a hearty meal in our bellies, we headed over to Tucson Audubon's Paton Center for Hummingbirds. Walking around the grounds here, we quickly started finding some great things. Our very first sightings included Arizona specialty species like Gila Woodpecker and Broad-billed Hummingbird, as well as other fun things like Lazuli Bunting and Gambel's Quail. After, we headed over to the Patagonia roadside rest area where we learned about the famous "Patagonia Picnic Table Effect" and had a flyover Black Vulture. The scenic route through the grasslands around the Huachuca Mountains led us to Casa de San Pedro B&B where we settled in, had a brief welcome message from Peg Abbott, and then enjoyed our first of many delicious catered dinners.



Sun., Feb. 13 Casa de San Pedro | Whitewater Draw

Each morning of the tour began with a walk around grounds of Casa de San Pedro at sunrise. This morning, we found some fantastic birds including Lawrence's Goldfinches (an irregular winter visitor here), a "Prairie" Merlin, and Eastern Meadowlarks singing away. Back inside, we warmed up and enjoyed breakfast from the Casa's kitchen and prepared our things as we were heading east out to the Sulphur Springs Valley for rest of the day. Upon arrival at Whitewater Draw, we were immediately greeted by the sight and sound of an incredible assembly of Sandhill Cranes. Masses of them swirled in the sky like ripples on water, and thousands more were loafing on the ground. Once we could finally pull our eyes away from this spectacle, we found many other great birds around the wetlands, including Loggerhead Shrikes, Vermilion Flycatchers in an array of plumages, Snow and Ross's Geese, and more. When the cranes finally settled in for their midday rest, we had a picnic lunch and headed out explore more of the scrub, grasslands, and agricultural fields to the north. After a little searching, we found Bendire's Thrasher, Cactus Wren, Lark Bunting, and the star of the show, a stunning dark morph Ferruginous Hawk.

After this plethora of incredible birds, we headed back to Whitewater Draw a couple hours before sunset. When we arrived, the show had somehow gotten even more intense, from the cranes and geese to a murmuration of hundreds of Yellow-headed Blackbirds. The sound was deafening, and the sky was almost constantly filled with birds. On our way back to the Casa, we were lucky enough to find a Great Horned Owl perched up on a telephone pole that called out into the evening, did a silent fly-by, and gave us incredible close views. It almost made us late for dinner, but it was totally worth it! The cherry on top of an amazing day of birding.



Mon., ♡Feb. 14 Casa de San Pedro | Hereford Bridge | Ramsey Canyon

Our daily sunrise bird walk took us through the fields and scrub around the Casa. Here, we enjoyed excellent sparrow diversity with common species like Savannah, Vesper, and Brewer's, as well as a couple rarities like Clay-colored and White-throated. And after giving us the runaround all day yesterday, we finally got fantastic views of male and female Pyrrhuloxias. We then headed just a short distance north to the Hereford bridge crossing of the San Pedro River. Strolling through these winding trails, we walked through grasses as tall as us, stood amongst the willows, and soaked up the rays of another peaceful sunny day. Some of the bird highlights included Abert's and Green-tailed Towhees and a few brief glimpses of a Bewick's Wren. After lunch at the Mimosa Pizzeria, we headed up to Ramsey Canyon Preserve and hiked through the stunningly beautiful Madrean evergreen oak woodlands here. Birds were a little tricky to find, but we did stumble upon some real gems like Bridled Titmouse, Hutton's Vireo, Acorn Woodpecker, Rivoli's and Anna's Hummingbirds, and a couple of folks even got to see an Arizona Woodpecker. When we return to the Casa for dinner, we were treated to a real Valentine's Day treat... wine, lobster dinner, and cheesecake!

Tue., Feb. 15 Casa de San Pedro | Ash Canyon | Historical Bisbee

On our last full day of the tour, we started once again by birding around the grounds of Casa, this time towards the river. We stumbled upon several Mexican Ducks sitting along the banks of the water early in the morning, and enjoyed the quiet, serene walk through the towering cottonwood trees as the sun rose. We ate another filling breakfast at the Casa, and then headed over to SABO's Ash Canyon Bird Sanctuary. Here we sat and enjoyed some feeder watching while wind speeds really picked up. Activity was never-ending despite the wind, with highlights including very close views of Mexican Jays, Bridled Titmouse, Orange-crowned Warbler, Acorn Woodpeckers at eye-level, Pine Siskins, and the first signs of spring: "Audubon's" and "Myrtle" Yellow-rumped



Warblers molting into their breeding plumage. Once we had our fill of birds and admitting defeat to the incredibly strong winds, we returned for lunch at the Casa and met Tamara from the Naturalist Journeys office staff and her husband Rich, and then headed over to the historical town of Bisbee. Here we wandered through some fascinating shops and learned about the history of this region and about the mining process for copper. It was a fun change of pace to spend time exploring this time-warp of a town. With great souvenirs and memories acquired, we headed back for a delicious dinner and wrapped up another fantastic day in southeast Arizona.

Wed., Feb. 16 Casa de San Pedro | Tucson Departures

This morning's walk rewarded us with nice views of Common Ground Doves and some more accommodating sparrows, including a lone Lark Bunting. One of the resident Red-tailed Hawks gave us a nice show in the morning light, and we watched clouds rolling in over the crests of the Huachuca Mountains. But all too soon, it was time to head back in and start loading up to head back to Tucson to say our goodbyes, but not before one last gourmet meal put out by Casa de San Pedro, and a gentle winter rain shower!

Photo Credits to Bryan Calk: Scenic, Group Photo, Geese in flight, Sandhill Cranes, Canyon Towhee, Snow and Ross's Geese, Cranes and moon, Bridled Titmouse, Mexican Jay, Bewick's Wren, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Group birding