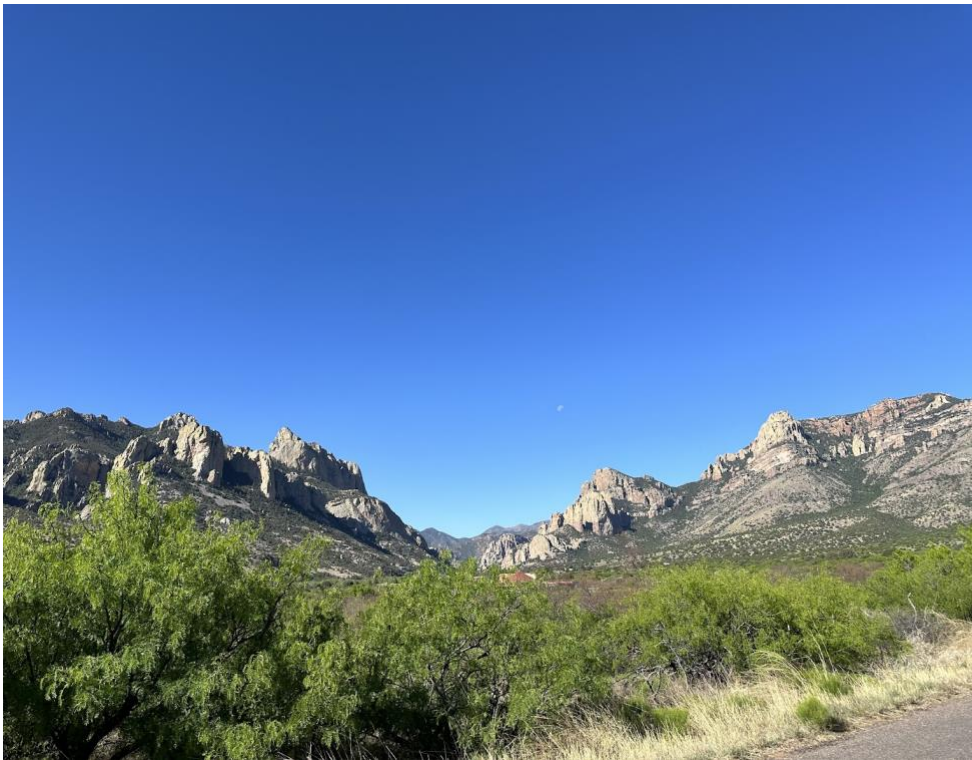


# Southeast Arizona: Sky Island Sampler

## May 2-11, 2023 | Trip Report | by Pat Lueders



With guide Pat Lueders and participants David, Joanne, Karen, Lauren, Pam, Patricia and Steven



### **Tues., May 2                      Gathering in Tucson | Amerind Foundation | Lake Cochise and Twin Lakes | Portal**

We successfully gathered at the Tucson Airport, stopped to pick up lunch and drove east to first visit the Amerind Foundation, a private, nonprofit anthropological and archaeological museum. During our picnic at the museum, we found a great assortment of birds including a soaring Swainson's Hawk, a perched Harris's Hawk, Vermilion Flycatchers, Say's Phoebes, Canyon Towhee, Lark Sparrow, Hooded Orioles and a surprise Bronzed Cowbird. What a great start! We left the interesting museum with a greater knowledge of the early people that lived in the Southwest.

The Twin Lakes in Willcox are an oasis for desert and migrating birds, and we were amazed at the variety and numbers of birds that we found there. A pair of Bendire's Thrashers was spotted first, having returned to breed there after being found last year. We scoped the lakes for ducks, finding Cinnamon, Green-winged, and Blue-winged Teal; Mexican Ducks and American Wigeon. Eared Grebes in breeding plumage swam around numerous Wilson's Phalaropes, Marbled Godwits, American Avocets and Black-necked Stilts. White-faced Ibis, Willet and a rare Wilson's Snipe were also feeding. Wow! What a great start, and we hated to leave, but our lodging at Cave Creek Ranch and dinner were calling.



We enjoyed a delicious welcome dinner at Peg Abbott’s lovely home in Portal. That evening we heard Common Poorwill and Lesser Nighthawks, and became acquainted with each other, sharing our excitement about the week ahead of us.

### **Wed., May 3                      Portal area | Southwestern Research Station | Owling**

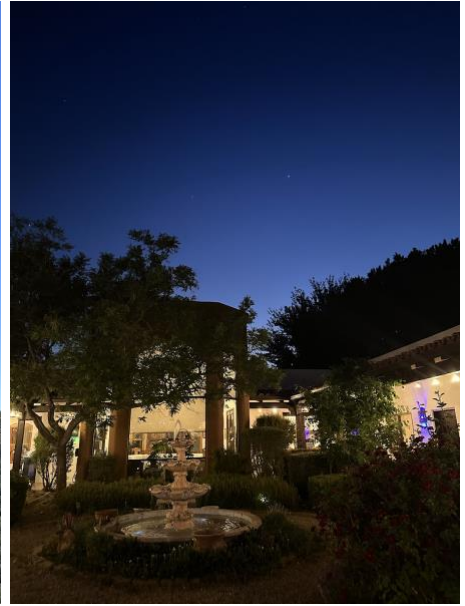
We spent this first full day birding around Cave Creek Ranch, visiting the Jasper/Moisan feeders and the town of Portal. At Cave Creek, we watched four species of hummingbirds at close range including Blue-throated Mountain-gems and Black-chinned, Costa’s and Broad-billed Hummingbirds. Four woodpecker species were coming to the feeders including Acorn, Gila, Ladder-backed and Arizona. Seeing these birds at close range was a great introduction to the Chiricahuas. At Dave Jasper’s feeders, many new birds were added including Cactus Wren, Rufous-winged Sparrow, Green-tailed Towhee and good looks at Pyrrhuloxia with Northern Cardinals for nice comparisons.

After lunch at the Portal Café, we heard Bell’s Vireos, saw Black-headed Grosbeaks and both male and female Western Tanagers and had good looks at Lucy’s and Wilson’s Warblers. A visit to the Southwestern Research Station gave us more good looks at Yellow-eyed Juncos, Say’s Phoebes and a Rock Wren. After a delicious dinner, we went owling with James Petersen, hearing Elf Owl and Mexican Whip-poor-will, and getting good looks at a Whiskered Screech-Owl near South Fork. We slept well after spending such a productive day birding the Portal area.

### **Thur., May 4                      South Fork | East Turkey Creek | Barfoot Park**

Before driving up into the cool highlands of the Chiricahuas, we made an early visit to South Fork to hopefully find the reported Elegant Trogons. As we left the van on our first stop, we immediately heard the distinctive “barking” vocalizations of Elegant Trogons! We followed the vocals up the canyon and spotted the male across the creek from us, perched low on the bank. Success! We walked up the road, hearing at least three more Trogons, and then had good looks at a female. We also saw Plumbeous Vireo, Lucy’s Warbler and Blue Grosbeak.

After we celebrated at breakfast, we drove the dramatic mountain road, stopping first at East Turkey Creek. We walked the road and heard, then spotted, a Buff-breasted Flycatcher. What we termed a “magical” tree held many species including Mexican Chickadees; Orange-crowned, Grace’s and Black-throated Gray Warblers and



both Hepatic and Western Tanagers. We enjoyed our picnic lunch at Barfoot Park and added Pygmy Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Greater Pewee and Steller's Jays to our very successful day.

## **Fri., May 5**                      **Portal | Pinery Canyon | Chiricahua National Monument Casa de San Pedro**

We were moving today to the Huachucas, leaving behind the Chiricahuas, so we made one last visit to the Portal area, adding Botteri's Sparrow, Black Phoebe, Brown-crested Flycatcher and Cassin's Kingbird to our list. We drove over the pass and visited Pinery Canyon where we found and had great looks at vocalizing Red-faced Warblers, Hutton's Vireos, Painted Redstarts and Ruby-crowned Kinglets. Around the camping area, we all were happy to finally see an Olive Warbler!

At the Chiricahua National Monument, we enjoyed a tasty picnic at the headquarters and then ventured to the pinnacle of the monument, not discouraged by probably over 25 mph winds. We drove through the copper mining town of Bisbee and arrived at Casa de San Pedro in time to settle into our new rooms and enjoy the delicious catered dinner awaiting us!

## **Sat., May 6**                      **Casa de San Pedro | Carr Canyon | Ash Canyon Bird Sanctuary**

We enjoyed an early morning walk before breakfast on the fruitful Casa property. Besides the variety of birds at the feeders, we spotted a Greater Roadrunner, a Loggerhead Shrike, a Chihuahuan Meadowlark, Yellow-breasted Chats and Yellow Warblers. We drove up the picturesque Carr Canyon Road with breathtaking views of the Huachuca Valley at each turn in the road. Beautiful Carr Canyon was very busy with a large variety of flycatchers including Greater Pewee and Dusky, Pacific-slope, Ash-throated and Buff-breasted Flycatchers. Good looks at Black-throated, Townsend's and Grace's Warblers were exciting! During our picnic lunch, we found Bushtits and a Swainson's Thrush.

When we returned to the valley, we visited the historic Ash Canyon Bird Sanctuary and added Lucifer, Broad-tailed and Anna's Hummingbirds to our now lengthy list. Elissa Fazio met us for dinner at Pizzeria Mimosa and presented an interesting evening program on hummingbird banding after we had watched the Barn Owls, Lesser Nighthawks and bats at Casa at sunset. What a wonderful day!



**Sun., May 7**

**Casa de San Pedro | Miller Canyon | Ramsey Canyon  
Ash Canyon Bird Sanctuary**

Our early morning walk took us to the San Pedro River where we found Abert's Towhee, Common Yellowthroat, Song Sparrows and a Gray Hawk. We visited Miller Canyon and hiked the Miller Canyon Trail enjoying additional looks at Red-faced Warblers, Painted Redstarts and Townsend's Warblers. At the hummingbird feeders, we added Rivoli's Hummingbird and studied four other species more carefully, especially the females. After lunch we walked the scenic trail at the Ramsey Canyon Preserve, operated by the Nature Conservancy. Wild Turkeys were seen nearby, as usual. One last visit to Ash Canyon provided good looks at a male Lazuli Bunting! After our final catered dinner at Casa, we again watched the Barn Owls emerge from the Barn Owl box to begin their hunting over the field. What a great conclusion to our wonderful stay at the delightful Casa de San Pedro!

**Mon., May 8**

**Patagonia Lake State Park | Paton Center for  
Hummingbirds | Amado Waste Treatment Plant**

We departed Casa after a memorable stay and drove to Patagonia Lake State Park where we found Neotropical Cormorants and an American Coot with an odd, yellow shield. Our walk produced Verdin, Phainopepla, and several Northern Beardless-Tyrannulets. David spotted a flyover Golden Eagle, and Black Vultures were also soaring. After lunch in Patagonia, we spent some time at the famous Paton Center for Hummingbirds, now operated by Tucson Audubon. We added Violet-crowned Hummingbird to our growing list and Rufous-crowned Sparrow for a few.

On the way to Tubac, we stopped at the Amado Waste Treatment Plant and happily found Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks, a Great Egret and Ruddy Ducks in breeding plumage. Arriving at the Tubac Country Club, we checked into our rooms and enjoyed a delicious meal at the Italian Peasant.

**Tue., May 9**

**Montosa Canyon | Madera Canyon | De Anza Trail**

After breakfast, we drove to Montosa Canyon and found more Phainopepla, Scott's and Hooded Orioles and, finally, heard a Canyon Wren. Driving up Madera Canyon, we walked a trail and visited the Santa Rita Lodge's feeders. Returning to Tubac, we walked the De Anza Trail near the bridge where we had great looks at a Gray Hawk as well as nesting Common Raven and Summer Tanagers. Dinner at the unique Elvira's was the perfect ending to an enjoyable day.



### **Wed., May 10                      Box Canyon | De Anza Trail**

This morning we drove the rough dirt road to Box Canyon. Our patience was rewarded with close-up looks at a Five-striped Sparrow, vocalizing as it flew up from the floor of the canyon. Our good luck continued when a pair of Golden Eagles flew to a nearby cliff. A Brown-crested Flycatcher kept our interest as we waited for the sparrow. As we exited the canyon, we stopped along the dirt road for close looks at a pair of Black-throated Sparrows. Unfortunately, the van had a flat tire that delayed us for over an hour, but it didn't dampen our excitement at seeing the sparrow!

We returned to the De Anza Trail for a final walk in this interesting area. This evening was our farewell dinner, and we enjoyed it at the Country Club, reminiscing over all the exciting events that we had shared together during the week.

### **Thu., May 11                      Canoa Ranch Conservation Area | Departures**

We had time this morning for one last stop at the Canoa Ranch Conservation Area. The well-maintained trail around the pond provided the opportunity for one last look at Vermilion Flycatchers, Western and Cassin's Kingbirds, Lesser Goldfinch and Lucy's and Wilson's Warblers. What a perfect way to spend our last morning together in the Southeast Arizona Sky Islands!

*Photo Credits: Portal Arizona Canyon Scenic (Amelia Morrow), Broad-billed Hummingbird (NJ Stock), Whiskered Screech-Owl (NJ Stock), Vermillion Flycatcher (NJ Stock), Black-chinned Hummingbird (NJ Stock), Pyrrhuloxia (NJ Stock), Elegant Trogon (NJ Stock), Arizona Woodpecker (NJ Stock), Chiricahua National Monument Scenic (Amelia Morrow), Casa de San Pedro at night (Amelia Morrow), Painted Redstart (NJ Stock), Golden Eagle (NJ Stock), Western Tanager (NJ Stock)*