

Arizona Monsoon Madness | Trip Report

August 3-9, 2019 | Written by Pat Lueders



With Guide Pat Lueders, and participants Linda, Abigail, Hilary, Marleigh, Mary, Sue.





Saturday, August 3 | Arrivals in Tucson, Amado WTP, Rancho Santa Cruz

Everyone in the group arrived in Tucson before lunch to begin our tour of Southeast Arizona during monsoon season. While enjoying lunch at Baggins, we introduced ourselves and shared our interests in birding, which species each hoped to see, and some background on our families and travels. Our first birding stop was the Amado Water Treatment Pond that produced two sought-after species, Black-bellied Whistling Ducks, two adults with three chicks, and a surprise Greater Roadrunner! Our first Swainson's Hawk circled above the pond –What a great start to the week!

We arrived at our lodge, the charming Rancho Santa Cruz, where we stayed for two nights. Located near the Santa Cruz River, it was hard to stop looking at the birds as we checked into our rooms. Vermilion Flycatchers, Western Kingbirds, Brown-crested Flycatchers, Eurasian Collared-Doves, White-winged Doves, and very vocal Zone-tailed Hawks with a juvenile couldn't be overlooked! An adult Gray Hawk was spotted sitting on a pole near the entrance. Our introductory dinner at Shelby's Bistro in Tubac was a delicious way to end a long but successful first day!



Sunday, August 4 | Rancho Santa Cruz, Box Canyon, Madera Canyon

Our daily, early morning walk before breakfast produced some great species; numerous Phainopepla families perched on trees and wires, Bell's Vireos and Yellow-breasted Chats vocalized, the Vermilion Flycatchers showed off their colors, the Zone-tailed Hawks gave us good looks, a male Western Tanager was seen through the scope, and Lesser Goldfinch added their vibrant yellows.

After a delicious breakfast, we drove to Box Canyon over a challenging washboard dirt road, but it was worth the bumps when we spotted two Five-striped Sparrows within minutes of our arrival, a life bird for many! One poised and sang from an ocotillo only a few feet from us. After our excitement subsided, we heard the vocalization of the Black-capped Gnatcatcher on the hill above us, and found the bird



feeding in sparse foliage for all to see – Wow! A few Canyon Wrens made great noise on the cliffs, Ash-throated Flycatchers and a Western-wood Pewee perched up on the bushes, and two Five-striped Sparrows returned. As we drove to Madera, another Greater Roadrunner was spotted in a bush along the road.

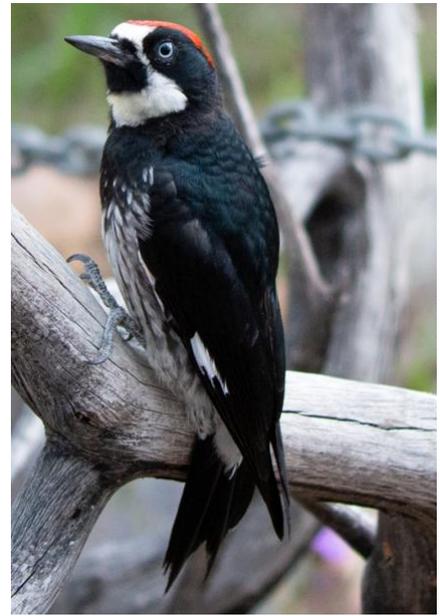
Our short walk on the Proctor Rd. trail in Madera Canyon was productive, with looks at a Bell's Vireo, a pair of Western Tanagers, a Lucy Warbler, and a Varied Bunting. Our next stop, the feeders at the Santa Rita Lodge, started with a successful look at an Arizona Woodpecker feeding on peanut butter, the final U.S. woodpecker needed by Sue. Acorn, Gila, and Ladder-backed Woodpeckers provided us with a four-woodpecker morning. However, the star of the visit was the appearance of a White-nosed Coati that wandered into the area under the feeders and spent a great deal of time posing for pictures. We began our trip's study of hummingbirds with close looks at four species at their feeders.

We next visited the Kubo B&B feeders and were surprised by a visit of a Yellow-eyed Junco. A stop at the Amphitheatre produced good looks at three Painted Redstarts. Dinner that evening at the historical Tubac Golf Club gave us time to marvel at the great luck we enjoyed during our visit to Madera Canyon. When we returned to the Rancho, we heard the begging of a juvenile Great Horned Owl and found it perched in the tree across from the pool. Quite a conclusion to a successful birding day!

Monday, August 5 | De Anza Trail-Tumacacori, Patagonia, Paton's, Casa de San Pedro

This morning we packed the van and left Rancho Santa Cruz after another delicious breakfast. We traveled a short distance to the trailhead of the famous De Anza Trail in Tumacacori. In the parking area we sighted a Greater Roadrunner just inside the fence pursuing a lizard. We heard Rufous-winged Sparrows and Yellow-breasted Chats as we walked to the Santa Cruz River. Along the trail, we found Verdin and Black-tailed Gnatcatchers feeding low in a tree, and a Cooper's Hawk feeding on a lizard. We joined with another small group to find the nest and a calling Rose-throated Becard across the river. This rare visitor to the U.S., a Central American species, has nested in the area for the last few years. On a spot of sand in the river, a Lazuli Bunting, Blue and Black-headed Grosbeaks were bathing and were then joined by a male Painted Bunting to create quite a colorful group!

We drove to Patagonia through Nogales, traveling only a few miles from the Mexican border, and saw many perched Swainson's Hawks along the highway. Lunch at the Gathering Place in Patagonia was delicious as usual,



and we then spent some time at the Paton's feeders, now operated by Tucson Audubon. As we entered, Sue and Abigail got a quick look at a Plain-capped Starthroat that unfortunately did not return. We did enjoy good looks at the large and beautiful Violet-crowned Hummingbird, the only hummingbird in the U.S. with clean white underparts, as well as 6 other hummingbird species.

En route to Sierra Vista through the grasslands, a few Pronghorn were grazing near the road. After a quick stop for credentials to enter Fort Huachuca, we arrived at our lodge for the remainder of the tour, the famous Casa de San Pedro. We unpacked quickly so that we could bird on their grounds and at their feeders, spotting an adult Gambil's Quail with chicks, Pyrrhuloxia, Curved-billed Thrashers, Lesser Goldfinches, and many House Finches. We enjoyed our introductory Mexican-themed dinner, completed our checklists, and settled for the night in our comfortable rooms.

Tuesday, August 6 | Whitewater Draw MA, Bisbee, Ash Canyon B&B

Our early morning walk before breakfast was very productive with Sue spotting a Barn Owl and the group getting good looks at a Great Horned Owl. We walked the road and found a Cassin's Sparrow singing in the field. The drive to our first destination, Whitewater Draw MA, took us parallel to the border, and many Red-tailed and Swainson's Hawks were perched on the utility poles. As we approached the management area, home to thousands of Sandhill Cranes in the winter, we spotted a raven sitting on a cactus; as the wind blew its neck feathers, we saw white—a Chihuahuan Raven for sure! At Whitewater Draw, the marsh area serves as an oasis in the desert. Low in the reeds we found hundreds of migrating Lazuli Buntings, all colors, ages, and sexes, a memorable sight indeed! A Sora vocalized in the marsh, and four species of swallows were feeding over the water. The white wing patches of the Lark Bunting were spotted flying over the levee where Lark Sparrows were feeding on the ground.

We had lunch in the architecturally interesting mining town of Bisbee at Café Cornucopia and then visited the Bisbee Mining & Historical Museum, learning about this area renowned for its diverse minerals and wealth of copper. We ended the day at the feeders at Ash Canyon B&B, famous for attracting many of the rare hummingbirds of the southwest. We weren't disappointed getting great looks at male and female Lucifer Hummingbirds as well as 8 other hummingbird species, a flock of Bushtits, and our first Mexican Jays.

After dinner at Pizzeria Mimosa, we returned to Casa driving thru an intense monsoon desert thunderstorm with very impressive lightning – awesome!

Wednesday, August 7 | Huachuca Canyon & San Pedro House

Our early Casa walk included additional Barn and Great Horned Owl sightings. Along the road we heard, and then saw, two Botteri’s Sparrows singing from a bush top. A Loggerhead Shrike was found in the field for good scope views. Common Yellowthroat and Yellow Warblers were feeding near the pond as was a family of Abert’s Towhees.

We drove through Fort Huachuca and hiked Huachuca Canyon in search of the Elegant Trogon, and we weren’t disappointed. We heard the distinct vocalization and found two juveniles waiting to be fed. The adult never appeared but continued vocalizing a warning. We saw and heard numerous colorful Sulphur-bellied Flycatchers, only a summer breeder in southeast Arizona, and a Plumbeous Vireo. We got a tip that there was a Thick-billed Kingbird near the Huachuca playground, and found it as well as a family of Say’s Phoebes and Eastern Bluebirds.

Lunch at San Pedro House added Northern Flickers, Inca and Common Ground Doves, and Rufous-crowned Sparrows to our list, as well as a shopping opportunity in their unique visitor’s center. A local, western-themed restaurant, Brite Spot, was our dinner destination, and we spotted Lesser Nighthawks feeding over the fields upon our return to Casa.



Thursday, August 8 | Miller Canyon/Beatty's, Bob Behrstock's yard, Ramsey Canyon, Ash Canyon B&B

Sadly, this was our last day of the tour. We arrived at Beatty's in Miller Canyon in time to catch a Rufous and Rivoli's Hummingbird at the lower feeders. Our hike of Miller Canyon was breathtaking, and Spotted Towhees were numerous along the trail. We sat at the hummingbird feeders while renowned expert Sherry Williamson explained the field marks of the 9 different species seen there. Lunch at Bob's yard provided us with looks at our first Scott's Oriole, and we heard the distinctive vocalization of Montezuma Quail.

As we approached Ramsey Canyon, we found a Wild Turkey near the entrance. This Nature Conservancy Preserve is in a lush canyon with a perennial stream offering a wide diversity of birds. Even though it was afternoon, we found additional Sulphur-bellied Flycatchers, a Dusky Flycatcher, and pairs of Hepatic and Summer Tanagers. On one last visit to Ash Canyon B&B, we again heard but did not see the elusive Montezuma Quail. Our farewell dinner was delicious, and our final checklist session bittersweet, knowing our enjoyable week together was coming to an end.

Friday, August 9 | Return to Tucson & departures

A few of our group had planned to continue their holiday in Arizona, the remainder of the group said their goodbyes and returned to Tucson to travel home. We agreed that the interested, enthusiastic, and friendly attitude of all the members of the group resulted in a week of "monsoon madness in the desert" that we all enjoyed and would never forget!

Photo Credits:

Turkey Vulture, Marleigh Fletcher (MF); Mexican Jay, MF; Lesser Goldfinch, MF; White-nosed Coati, MF; Black-headed Grosbeak, MF; Flame Skimmer, MF; Common Ground Dove, MF; Swainson Hawk & Northern Mockingbird, MF; Vermillion Flycatcher, MF; Zone-tailed Hawk, MF; Greater Roadrunner, MF; Swainsons Hawk, MF; Broad-billed Hummingbird, MF; Acorn Woodpecker, MF; Great Horned Owl, MF; Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher, MF; Aberts Towhee, MF; Anna's Hummingbird, MF; Wild Turkey, MF.