



2026

EcoTravel

Overnight Natural History Tours and Day Trips

Arizona: Desert Bloom

July 25 – August 2, 2026



Arizona July/August 2026 9 Days!

Overview

Many people picture Arizona as a hot, barren desert especially during the summer months. However, July and August bring monsoon rains that bring second life to the desert, with river beds quickly filling with rushing water, bringing life all around. Cacti begin to bloom, and some birds begin to sing and nest as if it's spring all over again! Combine this with species that are found nowhere else in the United States, and the result is one of the best birding destinations in the nation.

The meeting ground of the Rocky Mountains, Mexican Highlands, Sonoran Desert, and Chihuahuan Desert, we'll travel through cool, shaded canyons to high mountain peaks, and across the sun-scorched lowlands. Along the way, we'll search the sycamores for nesting Coppery-tailed Trogon (a recent split, formerly known as Elegant Trogon) and Sulphur-bellied Flycatchers, while spruce-fir forests are home to Red-faced Warblers and Buff-breasted Flycatchers. In the desert heat, Gilded Flickers and Rufous-winged Sparrows survey from atop saguaros, while at night in the cool canyons the whinnying calls of Whiskered and Western screech-owls can be heard, and with luck these secretive owls can be seen.

Of course, this time of year is also great for hummingbirds! Up to 15 species, including White-eared, Violet-crowned, and Berylline, can be seen in a given year. Some years also offer the opportunity for Plain-capped Starthroat. A good monsoon season also increases the possibility of rare Mexican species, such as Tufted Flycatcher, Aztec Thrush, and Eared Quetzals. you never know what'll appear!

Join us on this adventure to one of America's premier birding destinations, rich in wildlife, history, and scenic landscapes. This opportunity can't be missed!

Special Note: *The birding and travel during Arizona monsoon season can be unpredictable, because rainstorms are completely random in frequency, location, and intensity. Flash-flooding of secondary roads can postpone or even prevent access to areas. Birding a particular location may be delayed by heavy rain, which typically is of short duration but, as experienced in 2021, can go on for hours. Other years may be completely dry with minimal rain. Consequently, last-minute adjustments to the stated itinerary may be required.*



Itinerary

Day 1 – Arrival

D

We'll home depart airports nice and early. Depending on arrival time in Arizona, we'll either head out for some afternoon birding our head right to the hotel and relax after a long day of travel.

Night: Tucson.

Day 2 – Desert Birding

B

We'll hit the ground running, bright and early before the desert heat sets in. Our first destination will be the Tucson Mountains, west of the city. The edge of the Sonoran Desert, the mountainside is dotted with towering saguaros, one of the largest cactus species. Among these towering giants, we'll search for characteristic desert species, including the aptly-named **Cactus Wren**, **Gila Woodpecker**, **Gilded Flicker**, **Costa's Hummingbird**, and **Rufous-winged** and **Black-throated** sparrows.

When the desert heat rises, we'll retreat to the water's edge of the local wastewater treatment plant, known as Sweetwater Wetlands. This reliable source of water provides habitat for waterfowl and other aquatic species, including herons and shorebirds. After we've checked every corner, we'll make a stop for lunch before heading towards Portal, near the New Mexico border.

On the way we'll stop in the small town of Willcox, where a golf course and two nearby ponds are yet another source of water in the dry desert. In recent years, **Bendire's Thrashers** have nested in the shrubs around the course. If we're lucky, we may even run into some **Scaled Quail** as they scurry through the brush.

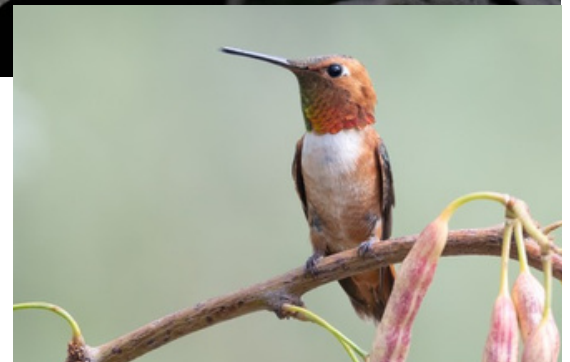
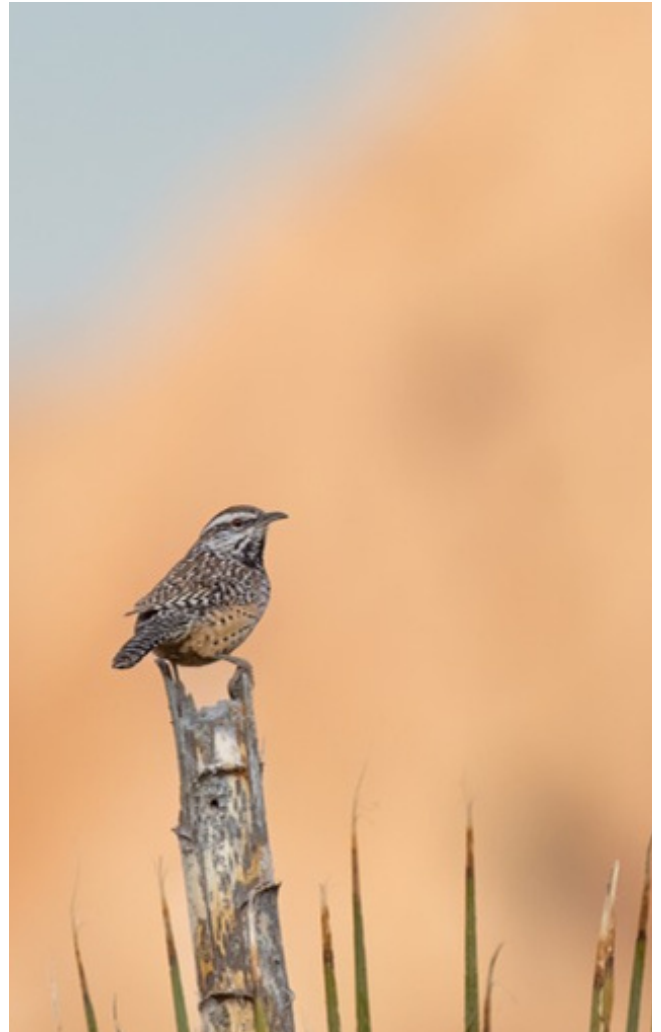
Night: Portal.

Day 3 – The Chiricahuas

B

The whole day will be dedicated to exploring the Chiricahuas, the first of the "sky islands" we'll explore on this trip. As the sun rises, we'll check the surrounding desert and open areas for species such as **Crissal Thrasher**, **Chihuahuan Raven**, and **Loggerhead Shrike**. Some years there's even a nesting pair of **Thick-billed Kingbirds** right in the center of town. We'll retreat into Cave Creek Canyon as the heat sets in, checking one of the fork roads for **Elegant Trogon**, **Arizona Woodpecker**, **Sulphur-bellied Flycatchers**, and our **first Mexican Jays**.

Further up canyon, a research station affiliated with the American Museum of Natural History has hummingbird feeders that will give us our first taste of the diversity of the region, with **Blue-throated Mountain-gem**, **Rufous**, **Black-chinned**, **Rivoli's**, and **Broad-billed** hummingbirds all possible.



As we make our way farther up the canyon, we'll begin to climb in elevation, and enter into the spruce-fir forests that are home to high-elevation species including **Olive Warbler** (not actually a warbler!), **Pygmy Nuthatch**, and **Yellow-eyed Junco**. The main target here will be **Mexican Chickadee**, which is only found here in the United States. Secluded campgrounds may hold roosting **Spotted Owls** of the "Mexican" subspecies, while migrant flocks of warblers silently move through the canopy.

An early evening back at our hotel will allow for optional post-dinner owling, with **Whiskered** and **Western screech-owls**, and **Elf Owls**, being possible. **Common Poorwills** and **Mexican Whip-poor-wills** may also be heard calling from the canyon walls.

Night: Portal.

Day 4 – Portal to Sierra Vista

B

We'll spend the morning targeting any remaining species around Portal before heading west through the mountains to Sierra Vista. Along the way we'll stop at Whitewater Draw Wildlife Area to stretch our legs. With luck, some early migrant shorebirds and ducks might be around.

We'll continue on towards Sierra Vista, stopping at the Ash Canyon Bird Sanctuary feeders along the way. This is the most reliable spot to find **Lucifer Hummingbirds**, fighting for a spot on one of the dozens of feeders scattered around the property. Depending on the time, we may visit Beatty's Guest Ranch to see if there's any **Flame-colored Tanagers** around, as this is the most reliable spot for them. If we missed any owls the previous night, we may go out again tonight to check some of the new canyons.

Night: Sierra Vista

Day 5 – The Huachucas

B

We'll begin the morning bright and early, heading up the rough road to the top of Carr Canyon. This is the most reliable spot in the state for **Buff-breasted Flycatcher**, along with additional chances for **Red-faced Warbler** and **Olive Warbler**. On the drive up, we may encounter **Rock** and **Canyon wrens** calling from the sheer cliff face. **Greater Pewee** is also possible at this elevation, if we missed it previously.

In the heat of the afternoon, after lunch, we'll take a guided tour of Kartchner Caverns State Park. Discovered in 1974 by amateur cavers, the caverns were kept secret until 1988 when the state agreed to open them up as a state park. The caverns remains nearly pristine, and represent a stunning look into the geology and unique habitat of underground environments.

Night: Sierra Vista.



Day 6 – Sierra Vista to Green Valley B

An early start will ensure that we get a head start on the heat, as we once again head east towards another sky island. Our first stop of the day will be at Las Cienegas National Conservation Area, an extensive grassland that's home to **Chihuahuan Meadowlark**, **Botteri's**, **Cassin's**, and **Grasshopper sparrows**, and more. The grasslands are also an important reintroduction site for black-tailed prairie-dogs, which were extirpated in the 1960s with reintroduction only beginning in 2008.

Once we're done scouring the fields, we'll head towards the small town of Patagonia. In the cottonwoods of the surrounding roads, **Rose-throated Becards** have historically nested. We'll also visit the Paton Center for Hummingbirds, a former residence that was donated to Tucson Bird Alliance and remains an important birding destination. Here we'll have a chance at finding **Violet-crowned Hummingbird**, along with many others. If time allows, we may check the lake and see if there's any waterfowl we haven't seen yet!

Night: Green Valley

Day 7 – The Santa Ritas B

We'll start the day checking out Santa Gertrudis Lane, to see if we can find any of the resident **Green Kingfishers** or any other birds that are coming in to the seasonal river for water in the morning. After, we'll head towards the Santa Rita mountains, another sky island and home to the famous Madera Canyon. At the lower elevations, we'll search for **Varied Bunting**, while the feeders at Santa Rita lodge are regularly visited by "Gould's" **Wild Turkey**, the largest subspecies. We may also hike some of the trails at the end of the road, giving us additional chances at high-elevation species, in case we've missed them previously.

Night: Green Valley.

Day 8 – Box Canyon and Mt. Lemmon BD

In the morning we'll leave bright and early and head to Box Canyon, which in recent years has been home to a pair of **Five-striped Sparrows**, a Mexican species that has slowly increased in range in the United States.

Later, we'll journey towards Mount Lemmon on the northern edge of Tucson. This, our final sky island, is a popular location for locals to escape the summer heat. It's also home to a wide population of birds, including **Mountain Chickadee**, **Red-breasted Nuthatch**, **Greater Pewee**, and **Olive Warbler**, although the latter two have been more difficult in recent years.

Night: Tucson area.

Day 9 – Final Birding and Departures

We'll start today looking for any species we may have missed, either at elevation or in the desert. In the mid-morning, we'll head to the airport for afternoon flights home, full of memories!



General Information

Tour Cost: \$4,298.
Members: \$3,698.

The above cost is based upon a minimum number of five paying participants traveling together. If there are fewer participants, there will be a small group supplement. Per person Tour Cost is based on two people sharing a room.

Single Room Supplement: \$800.

All rates are calculated at the time of publication and are subject to change due to conditions out of our control (i.e. hotel rates). All passengers will be notified if changes in pricing occur.

Tour Includes:

Accommodations are based on double occupancy, one or two beds. Meals are included as outlined in the itinerary section (B=Breakfast/L=Lunch/D=Dinner). Additional charges for meals may apply if needs are out of the standard offerings. Entrance fees to national parks and sightseeing as specified in the itinerary.

Not Included:

Taxes; costs of obtaining passports and visas; airfare; baggage fees; personal expenses such as room service, beverages, laundry, gratuities for the local guide and housekeeping; personal communications; airport taxes; tax increases or new taxes charged for services that were not taxed at the time the booking was made; excess mileage carried out at the request of the passenger; sightseeing or meals not specified in the itinerary; personal insurance coverage (strongly recommended); and transfers to and from your home airport.



Matt Bell is a graduate of the Ohio State University with BS degrees in both earth sciences and evolution/ ecology. He started birding in May 2013 and became more seriously involved after a trip to Costa Rica. Since then, he helped revive The Ornithology Club at Ohio State and assisted as a volunteer guide for The Biggest Week in American Birding and the Yellow Rails and Rice Festival. He absolutely loves participating in citizen science, tour guiding, chasing rare birds in his free time, and meeting fellow birders from around the globe. Most of all, Matt enjoys sharing his passion for birds and conservation with others and never shies away at taking the time to help beginners start their explorations of the avian world. Matt is the EcoTravel travel specialist and leads day trips and overnight tours.



General Terms & Conditions

Reservations

Early reservations with deposit are essential to guarantee your booking. A **\$1,000 deposit**, per person, applicable to final payment, is required to reserve space on this trip. Reservations made within 120 days of departure require full payment along with the formal Registration Forms. Final payment for programs is due 120 days prior to departure. Payments can be made by personal check, money order, certified check, or a cashier's check.

Rates and Fares

Prices are accurate as available at the time of publication. Prices do not include airfare unless otherwise stated. The Connecticut Audubon Society (CAS) reserves the right to alter quoted prices to reflect changes in airline fares, land service, or currency exchange rates. In the event that the number of participants is below the minimum required for the quoted price, a small group surcharge may be added.

Cancellation and Insurance

At the time the EcoTravel Office receives written notice that you must cancel your trip, the following cancellation fees will apply: Prior to 120 days from departure, your payments will be refunded minus **\$350 per person**. At 120 days and less, no refund is granted.

NOTE: In addition to cancellation fees, airline tickets and deposits required to guarantee hotel rooms may be nonrefundable. The purchase of a general travel insurance plan covering baggage, accident/life, and trip cancellation is highly recommended. Give us a call and we can put you in touch with those providers. CAS reserve the right, if registration is insufficient or other reasons out of our control, to cancel, postpone, or offer the trip with a small group supplement. In the event that CAS cancels or postpones, those with reservations will be notified as soon as possible and a credit of payments will be held on file. The Connecticut Audubon Society is not responsible for the refund or credit of additional expenses incurred in preparation for a trip. Any "delay" or "postponing" of departure by tour participants is considered a cancellation and cancellation parameters will be apply relative to the 120-day window. There are no exceptions.

Responsibility

Payment of deposit represents and acceptance of the following terms and conditions by the purchaser: The Connecticut Audubon Society, its affiliates, and all cooperating airlines and agencies act only in the capacity of agents in all matters of transportation and tour operations, and their liability is limited to the terms of the airline tickets and land accommodation contracts. They are not responsible for any delays, inconveniences, accidents, expense, or mishap of any kind whatsoever resulting entirely or in part from the negligence of others or from causes beyond their control. They can accept no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, riot, war, pandemic, quarantine, or other causes. All such losses or expenses must be borne by the passengers, as the tour rate provides for arrangements only as describe in the tour brochure. The right is reserved to change tour leaders, substitute hotels, of similar category, and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by unforeseen circumstances. Baggage is at the owner's risk entirely. No refund can be made for unused hotel rooms, meals, and sightseeing tours unless arrangements are made at time of booking. The right is reserved to decline any person as a tour member for any reason which affects the operation of the tour or the rights, welfare, or enjoyment of the other tour members. Any refund of the recoverable land tour services in the limit of The Connecticut Audubon Society and its affiliates' liability.

To make a Reservation:

Send the above stated deposit to hold your reservation. Nonmembers, please add \$45 (single) or \$58 (family) for your annual membership and to take advantage of the member discount.

Send your name(s), address, phone number, email address, name of the trip, your deposit, and membership fee (if applicable) to:

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