ROCKJUMPER

Worldwide Birding Adventures

Arizona

Southeast Specialties & Nightbirds

1st May to 8th May 2022 (8 days)



Montezuma Quail by Stephan Lorenz

Arizona boasts the third highest total of bird species by state in the United States, pretty impressive for being completely landlocked. In particular, the southeast corner holds the highest diversity due to the confluence of eastern and western species and many southern species that just spill over the international border here. Southeast Arizona is a land of contrasts, where rugged, forested mountains form "sky islands" within the Sonoran Desert.

Rivers, like the Santa Cruz and San Pedro, flow slowly across arid valleys, creating ribbons of greenery along their banks by supporting cottonwoods and willows. Middle elevations are covered by rich grasslands and juniper-oak woodland while the highest elevations harbour mixed coniferous forests. In between, one finds desert areas dominated by impressive saguaro cacti, dense mesquite thickets, man-made wetlands that are magnets for water birds, and ancient stands of sycamores along creeks and canyons. This variety of habitats packed into a relatively small area is home to the greatest diversity of breeding birds in the United States.

Many species from further south reach their range limits in south-eastern Arizona and occur nowhere else in the country. This tour will focus on these southeast Arizona specialties, southwest desert birds, and the spectacular variety of nocturnal birds that can be found here, including up to eight species of owls and four species of nightjars. Some of the specialty species we seek include Montezuma Quail, Grey and Zone-tailed Hawks, Elegant Trogon, Arizona Woodpecker, Gilded Flicker, Greater Pewee, Buff-breasted, Dusky-capped and Sulphur-bellied Flycatchers, Tropical and Thick-billed Kingbirds, Bendire's and Crissal Thrashers, Olive, Virginia's, Lucy's, Grace's and Red-faced Warblers, Painted Redstart, Hepatic Tanager, Abert's Towhee, Rufous-winged, Five-striped, Cassin's and Botteri's Sparrows, Yellow-eyed Junco, and Varied Bunting. Some rarer possibilities include Short-tailed Hawk, Rose-throated Becard, Black-capped Gnatcatcher, Rufous-capped Warbler, and Flame-colored Tanager. Southeast Arizona is also the hummingbird capital of the United States and we will search for Broad-billed, Violet-crowned, Blue-throated Mountain-Gem, Rivoli's, Black-chinned, Anna's, Broad-tailed and Lucifer Hummingbirds.

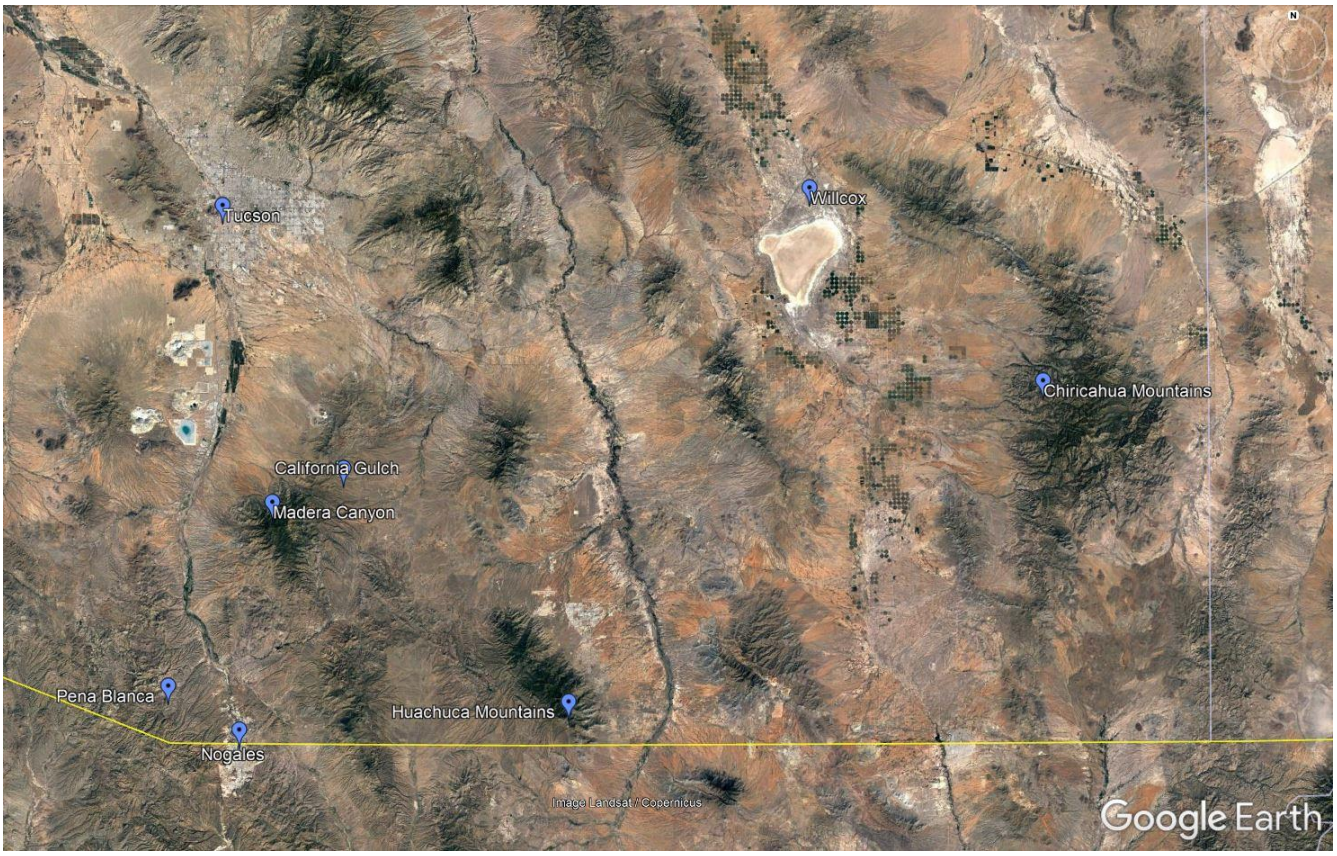
The canyons and mountains here also offer some of the most productive night birding anywhere and we will conduct several evening outings or search for species on day roosts. Possibilities include Whiskered and Western Screech Owls, Northern Pygmy Owl, Flammulated, and the impressive Spotted Owls. Among nightjars, we will look for Mexican Whip-poor-will, Common Poorwill, Lesser Nighthawk, and the exceedingly rare Buff-collared Nightjar. These nocturnal outings can also be productive for mammals, including Collared Peccary, Black Bear, several species of skunks, Ringtail, Bobcat, and even Mountain Lions still roam these wilderness areas. Our itinerary will take us from the desert around Tucson to the famous sky islands of the Santa Rita, Huachuca and Chiricahua Mountains through the Patagonia and Sonoita Creek areas and the unique California Gulch.

THE TOUR AT A GLANCE…

ARIZONA ITINERARY

Day 1	**Arrive in Tucson**
Day 2	**Tucson to Nogales via Box & Madera Canyons, Tubac area in the afternoon**
Day 3	**Pena Blanca, Nogales and California Gulch in the late afternoon**
Day 4	**Nogales area to Huachuca Mountains via Patagonia and Sonoita Creek**
Day 5	**Huachuca Mountains**
Day 6	**Transfer to Willcox via San Pedro River Valley and Coronado**
Day 7	**Chiricahua Mountains**
Day 8	**Transfer from Willcox to Tucson airport and final departures**

TOUR MAP



THE TOUR IN DETAIL…

Day 1: Arrive in Tucson. Today is set aside as an arrival day at the Tucson International Airport and participants can make their way to the hotel conveniently located near the airport. Time permitting, we may meet for a late afternoon outing in the surrounding area of Tucson where we can find a good variety of desert species. Widespread species we may get introduced to include Gambel's Quail, White-winged Dove, Greater Roadrunner, Gila and Ladder-backed Woodpeckers, the unique Verdin, Cactus Wren, Curve-billed Thrasher, and Black-throated Sparrow. A wetland area on the outskirts of town will also add a wide variety of waterbirds and possibly some migrant species.



Red-faced Warbler by Stephan Lorenz

Day 2: Tucson to Nogales via Box & Madera Canyons, Tubac area in the afternoon. After an early breakfast, we will travel south of Tucson and make some early



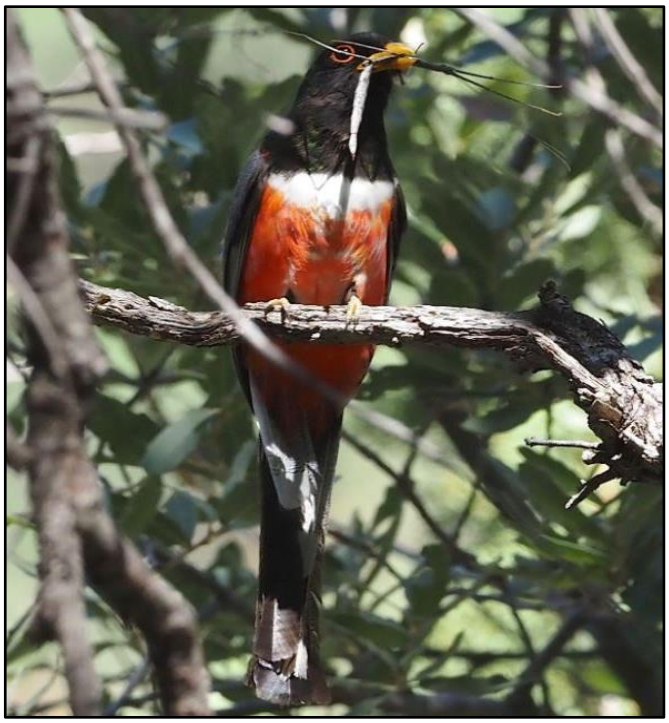
Five-striped Sparrow by Stephan Lorenz

stops in the desert. If we did not have the chance the previous afternoon, this will be a great opportunity to familiarize ourselves with some of the more common desert birds, including ubiquitous Gambel's Quail, Mourning Dove, Greater Roadrunner, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Say's Phoebe, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Verdin, Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, Abert's Towhee, Crissal and even Curve-billed Thrashers. Temperatures rise quickly in the low-lying desert and after a successful early morning, we will transfer south towards the Santa Rita Mountains, the first of Arizona's well-known "sky island" that we will visit. The scenic Madera Canyon is one of the finest and most accessible birding sites here and hosts an excellent selection of southeast Arizona specialties. We can begin our search for Acorn and Arizona Woodpeckers, Cordilleran and Dusky-capped Flycatchers, Cassin's Kingbird, Bell's and Hutton's Vireos, the raucous Mexican Jay, Hooded and Scott's Orioles, Black-throated Grey and Townsend's Warblers, and Painted Redstart. In addition, three tanagers species can be present including Hepatic, Summer and the gorgeous Western Tanager. A productive feeder setup is attended by rather tame Wild Turkey's, represented by the Gould's subspecies here, bold Bridled Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, Pine Siskin, and Lesser Goldfinch. We will enjoy a picnic lunch in the mountains. At lower elevations, we can make some forays for Northern Beardless Tyrannulet, Black-capped Gnatcatcher, Bewick's Wren, Botteri's and Rufous-winged Sparrows, Lucy's Warbler, Blue Grosbeak, Varied Bunting, and Phainopepla. If birds are present, we may explore Florida Canyon where Rufous-capped Warblers have been resident in recent years. During the afternoon, we continue south towards Nogales and will make stops along the Santa Cruz River to look for riparian specialties and possibly Rose-throated Becard if the species has been reported. After a full first day, we settle into our comfortable accommodations in Nogales.



Elf Owl by Stephan Lorenz

Day 3: Pena Blanca, Nogales and California Gulch in the late afternoon. After breakfast, we will travel west of Nogales towards the Pena Blanca area, one of the better spots to look for the scarce and shy Montezuma Quail. We will need a good dose of luck to spot this secretive species, but



Elegant Trogon by Stephan Lorenz

a great variety of additional mesquite scrub and grassland species will keep us entertained during our search. After lunch, we will continue towards the remote Atascosa and Pajarito Mountains, particularly the well-known California Gulch if the road is passable, which is one of the best sites for Five-striped Sparrow, a species with a very tenuous hold in the United States. The California Gulch forms a southward drainage and supports a unique sparse thorn scrub more typical of northern Mexico. In addition to the localized Five-striped Sparrow here, we can also look for Varied Bunting, Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet, Bell's Vireo, and Yellow-breasted Chat. After a picnic dinner, we will stake out the very rare and difficult Buff-collared Nightjar that is known to occur here. Alongside the nightjar, Common Poorwills are also vocal here and we have our first chance for the diminutive Elf Owl. Driving back to our accommodations in the Nogales area after sunset, we will keep an eye out for the many mammal possibilities.

Day 4: Nogales area to Huachuca Mountains via Patagonia and Sonoita Creek. After a leisurely breakfast, we drive to the Patagonia and Sonoita Creek Area, which is a strip of critical riparian habitat with massive Fremont Cottonwoods and Arizona Sycamores. The diversity of nesting birds here is very high and different from what we have encountered in the mountains and desert so far. Some of the highlights could include Zone-tailed Hawk, Thick-billed Kingbird, Brown-crested and Vermilion Flycatchers, Yellow-breasted Chat, and many other species. The Sonoita Creek area is an excellent place for Grey Hawk, which often soars above midmorning. More uncommon species in nearby hills covered in grassland and scattered oaks include Eastern Bluebird, Rock Wren, and Rufous-crowned and Lark Sparrows. A fantastic feeder setup nearby will offer us good views of Inca and Common Ground Doves, Black-chinned, Anna's, Broad-tailed, Broad-billed, and the localized Violet-crowned Hummingbirds. Time permitting, we may stop at a small wetland in Nogales which could add Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, Tropical Kingbird, Varied Bunting, and migrant species. We will then embark on the drive east towards the second "sky island" of the tour, the rugged and beautiful



Lucifer Hummingbird by Stephan Lorenz



Mexican Jay by Stephan Lorenz

Huachuca Mountains. During the journey, we may stop at any birding site for species we still need, the Las Cienegas grasslands for example. We will then retire to our comfortable lodgings within striking distance of the best birding sites in Huachucas and enjoy a delicious dinner.

Day 5: Huachuca Mountains. The Huachuca Mountains hold nearly all of Arizona's specialty birds and also provide some of the best hummingbird viewing opportunities. We will wake up in the scenically stunning Ramsey Canyon where feeders teem with Black-headed Grosbeaks, hummingbirds zip back and forth in the gardens, and even the scarce Elegant Trogon could make an appearance. We plan to visit feeder setups in Ramsey Canyon, Miller Canyon, and Ash Canyon. Especially Beatty's Guest Ranch in Miller Canyon has proven to be very productive for hummingbirds where Rivoli's, Blue-throated Mountain-gem, Broad-tailed, Anna's, and Black-chinned are regulars at this time of year, and there is a chance for a migrant Calliope as well, while the very rare Berylline and White-eared Hummingbirds have visited the feeders in the past. Ash Canyon is usually a great place to find the uncommon Lucifer Hummingbird. Of course, the Huachucas do not only hold hummingbirds and during our full day here we will have chances to catch up with any specialty species and migrants we still need. We will travel to various canyons and take advantage of the wide range of elevations and habitats available. Notable possibilities include Northern Goshawk, Golden Eagle, the very local Buff-breasted Flycatcher, Canyon Wren, Red-faced Warbler, Spotted Towhee, and Red Crossbill. These species could all be encountered during a dedicated walk to look for the rare Spotted Owl. Occasionally, the owls are present on day roosts in one or two of the canyons and we will search carefully for this magnificent species. We may even find the diurnal Northern Pygmy Owl during our search. This evening's session of night birding could end with Elf, Whiskered and Western Screech-owls, Lesser Nighthawk, and Mexican Whip-poor-will which are all possible. After what will have been a long



Yellow-eyed Junco by Stephan Lorenz

and productive day, we will happily retire to our accommodations in the lovely Ramsey Canyon.



Flammulated Owl by Stephan Lorenz

Day 6: Transfer to Willcox via San Pedro River Valley and Coronado. Depending on what species we still need, we could elect to travel to lower elevations east of the Huachucas to offer us another opportunity for desert species. If we have already been lucky with these species, we will return to the mountains to seek anything we still need. After wrapping up our time among the stunning Huachuca Mountains, we will begin the transfer towards Willcox. We bird our way east slowly and birding stops could include the San Pedro River or hotspots in the Willcox area, Lake Cochise for example which may hold an excellent variety of shorebirds during this time of year. We will settle into our comfortable accommodations in Willcox in preparation for the next full day.

Day 7: Chiricahua Mountains. We will leave after an early breakfast for the famed Chiricahua Mountains that lie in a remote area in the southeastern corner of Arizona. We will start at lower elevations where we scour the desert grasslands for the scarce Bendire's Thrasher. We then work our way slowly to the highest elevations around Rustler and Barfoot Parks to seek the uncommon Mexican Chickadee. This species occurs in only two locations in the United States and the Chiricahua Mountains offer the best chances to see this distinctive chickadee. It is never common, but during our search, we can also look for Band-tailed Pigeons, Greater Pewees, and a variety of warblers, including migrant Hermit Warblers. Another species high on our priority list is the beautiful Elegant Trogon, which nests in the lush canyons here. Other species best found in these canyons or at higher elevations include Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher, Bushtit, Pygmy Nuthatch, Eastern Bluebird, Buff-breasted Flycatcher, Plumbeous Vireo, the canopy dwelling Olive Warbler (a monotypic family), Evening Grosbeak, and Yellow-eyed Junco. In the late afternoon and early evening, we will search for the scarce Northern Pygmy Owl, Mexican Whip-poor-will, and, of course, we will venture forth after dark, trying to track down the very difficult Flammulated Owl.



Varied Bunting by Stephan Lorenz

The drive back to Willcox could be punctuated by an interesting nocturnal mammal as a variety of skunk species and the beautiful Ringtail occur here.

Day 8: Transfer from Willcox to Tucson airport and final departures. After some final birding in the Willcox area, we will transfer towards Tucson where the tour ends after lunch for afternoon departures.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS

Tour dates, prices, single supplement rates, approximate flight costs and spaces available for these tours are displayed on our website. Please see under IMPORTANT NOTES below.

The tour price includes:

- All meals from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 8;
- All accommodations;
- Ground transportation;
- All reserve entrance fees;
- Tips for local guides and services; and
- All guiding services.

…and excludes:

- Any airfares, taxes and visa costs;
- Any beverages;
- Special gratuities; and
- Telephone calls, laundry and items of a personal nature.

Single Supplement: The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

IMPORTANT NOTES:

a) Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is however fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing (usually 4 months before the tour.) The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates, which are also quoted in the respective fixed currency.

b) Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration a small party supplement will have to be charged.

c) Furthermore, these costs are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.

d) Lastly, we may be forced to change or alter the itinerary and / or the designated Rockjumper leader at short or no notice due to unforeseen circumstances; please be aware that we will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.

Tipping: As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, porters and restaurants) are included on this tour. However, this does NOT include your Rockjumper leader/s. If, therefore, you feel that he/they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE DETAILS

This tour **does not** include ANY international airfares. The tour will commence with dinner at our lodgings on day 1. Late afternoon birding may be possible, further details in terms of timing will be confirmed closer to the tour. The tour will conclude after breakfast on day 8 with a transfer back to Tucson International Airport.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your **Tour Confirmation** package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

FLIGHTS

Tucson International Airport, Tucson (IATA: TUS) is the main port of entry and exit for this tour. **Please DO NOT book your international flights until you have consulted the Rockjumper office for confirmation on the status of the tour.**