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## ARIZONA: Wild West Birding



*The stunning Red-faced Warbler is one of the major highlights of our trip to Arizona © Chris Charlesworth*

# ARIZONA

## Wild West Birding

**26 April – 8 May 2023**

**Leader: Chris Charlesworth**

### **Trip Diary**

#### **26 April**

I met the group at the Phoenix Sky Harbor Airport late in the afternoon and we made the short transfer to our hotel travelling straight into the setting sun. We had a quick bite to eat, whilst I briefed everyone on the plans for the following morning, and then we headed off to get some sleep as it had been a long day of travelling.

#### **27 April**

It was the first of many blue-sky mornings in Arizona and after breakfast we loaded our luggage into the van and made our way through the network of Phoenix freeways. Our destination was the Riparian Preserve at Gilbert where we spent a couple of hours roaming the trails, checking ponds and brushy areas for birds. A lovely patch of Saguaro Cactus sits near the parking area, so we looked there first, enjoying the antics of a couple of pairs of Gila Woodpeckers that were nesting in the cactus.

A Curve-billed Thrasher popped out from the bushes, as did our first Abert's Towhees. Tiny Verdins tended to their messy nests in the Palo Verde trees and two Black Phoebe were nice to see, as were our first hummingbirds, Black-chinned and Anna's. Song and White-crowned sparrows played shy at first but revealed themselves to us eventually and our first Gambel's Quails were well received, as they called from branches, showing off their flashy 'topknots'. Doves rocketed overhead in good numbers, with Mourning, White-winged and Eurasian Collared Doves all present.

What we were really here to see, however, were the waterbirds since water and waterbirds are precious commodities in the desert. Many Mallards were tending to broods of tiny ducklings, and we saw a few other ducks as well including Northern Shoveler, Ruddy Duck and American Wigeon. A pair of Pied-billed Grebes snoozed near the Ruddy Ducks and a pair of Canada Geese seen shortly after we arrived, flew off, honking loudly as they disappeared behind the trees.

Shorebirds, including Black-necked Stilts, Killdeer, Long-billed Dowitcher and Least Sandpiper were nice additions to the list. A couple of Great Egrets and Snowy Egrets were found, and we had a brief sighting of a Green Heron before it too flew off. A single Great Blue Heron sat

looking somewhat grumpy in a bush next to the water only a few metres from where we stood.

Skimming over the water were Northern Rough-winged Swallows, and there was an Osprey perched on top of a platform. Overhead, three Neotropic Cormorants sailed by, not hanging around for good views.

As we walked the trails and pathways, we found the first mammals of the trip with Rock Squirrels and Desert Cottontails, both of which were quite numerous.

A couple passing by mentioned they had found a baby turtle on the side of the path and we went to take a look, and I figured it was probably a baby slider.

It was getting pretty hot, so we returned to the air-conditioned van and began our drive eastwards towards the town of Globe, where we had lunch at Subway. The locals were quite taken by a group of foreigners visiting their country to look at birds.

South of Globe, and somewhat north of Winkelman, I spotted a Harris's Hawk soaring overhead. As luck would have it, there was a pull-off nearby so we hopped out of the van and had good looks as the hawk circled above us.

The drive to Aravaipa Canyon is quite stunning, with towering cliffs and Saguaro-studded



hillsides, lining the valley walls above the creek. The birding was excellent, even though it was 33 degrees Celsius and mid-afternoon. Our first *myiarchus* flycatcher of the trip, an Ash-throated Flycatcher, sat on a telephone wire next to the road. A Bewick's Wren hopped about in a mesquite tree, but I think the Canyon Wren that arrived shortly thereafter, and belted out its beautiful song, stole the show.

*Northern Cardinal © Chris Charlesworth*

Colourful birds like Northern Cardinals, Hooded Orioles, Yellow Warbler, and the incredible Vermilion Flycatcher were all seen. There were plenty of drabber species around too, such as the subtly beautiful Say's Phoebe, and the rather nondescript Bell's Vireo.

Overhead, Susan spotted a Common Black-Hawk, and we were quite excited since this was our 'target' bird here. The hawk emerged from a hillside with a small lizard in its talons. Moments later, a Red-tailed Hawk and a

Common Black-Hawk tussled with each other in the sky above. Grey Hawks also put on a nice show, as two adults circled above our van.

We had brief encounters with Lucy's Warbler, which I put down as a 'leader only' and a Black-throated Sparrow, which a few people saw. Kate spotted the first Lesser Goldfinches of the trip, feeding in some plants at the base of a rocky hillside. The highlight, however, was not a bird, but came in the form of a reptile, a Gila Monster! The rather large, yellow and black, venomous reptile climbed slowly up a hill and tried several different routes to get to a big hole on the hillside. He seemed to have trouble finding the proper route and eventually went off into the weeds.

The late afternoon drive into Tucson, took us alongside the rather impressive Catalina Mountains, and through the north side of the city. We arrived at our hotel and had an hour before we made our way out for dinner. Our daily 'tick list' of birds was a very respectable 62 species.

## 28 April

Another lovely sunny Arizona morning greeted us as we met for some early birding before breakfast. We headed to Agua Caliente Park, a fantastic location with manicured lawns and towering palm trees, ponds and wetlands, and desert scrub habitat all in one.

Hooded Orioles sat up in the treetops, enjoying the sun, as did Vermilion Flycatchers, Lesser Goldfinches and Yellow Warblers. We were rewarded for getting up early with the sighting of a brutish female Cooper's Hawk that came down for a drink at the edge of the pond.

Deep booms from American Bullfrogs came from the water's edge, and we saw a couple of these big bruisers.

*Brown-crested Flycatcher © Chris Charlesworth*

In the desert scrub, Lucy's Warblers were common, though a bit elusive. Eventually, we did have excellent looks at a couple of them as they chased one another about in the mesquite trees nearby. Phainopeplas, always looking as though they were having 'a bad hair day', sat atop the mesquites as well. We had our first views of Brown-crested Flycatcher, and excellent views of a pair of Black-throated Sparrows. Our first Ladder-backed Woodpecker, a male, sat up in the sunlight with his red cap flared up.





We returned to our hotel for breakfast and then headed to the supermarket to pick up some provisions for lunch before beginning our ascent of Mount Lemmon, in the Catalina Mountains, north of Tucson. Driving from bottom at about 3,000 feet to the top at over 9,000 feet, is said to be the equivalent of travelling biologically from Mexico to Canada. At the base of the mountains, towering Saguaros cover the hillsides and the temperatures reached 95 Fahrenheit, whereas at the top of the mountain, it was just 61 degrees and we were in a forest of towering pine, spruce and fir trees, with patches of snow, some of which were quite deep in the shade of the trees.

Our first stop was at Cypress Picnic Area and although it was rather quiet, we did have nice views of White-breasted Nuthatch, Wilson's Warbler and Yellow-eyed Junco.

A rather large butterfly, a Two-tailed Swallowtail, was the first butterfly to make it onto our list with our first Cliff Chipmunk of the tour also noted.

Next up, at Chiricahua Pines Picnic Area, we encountered our first troupe of Mexican Jays. An Acorn Woodpecker showed nicely for us, as it let out its maniacal, laughing calls. A beautiful male Black-throated Grey Warbler foraged amongst oak leaves right in front of us, as did a Hutton's Vireo and a pair of Bridled Titmice. A tiny Blue-grey Gnatcatcher played hide and seek and remained mostly hidden by the foliage. John found a couple of Ash-throated Flycatchers in the pine trees, and we had great looks at our first American Robin, as it hopped about on the ground.

At Bear Wallow, beneath the shade of the towering conifers, we strolled up the canyon, and saw about eight gorgeous Red-faced Warblers. When the sun hit their heads, they glowed like embers. We also enjoyed a tiny Orange-crowned Warbler taking a bath in a trickling stream, and high above us in a fir, we spotted a Warbling Vireo. Two Hairy Woodpeckers were tracked down after we heard them drumming in the woods. A Brown Creeper, very much a Treecreeper look-a-like, climbed its way up the trunks of the trees, and we saw a couple of Hermit Thrushes skulking along on the forest floor.



*Red-faced Warbler © Chris Charlesworth*

Two Mourning Cloak butterflies, called Camberwell Beauties by the British, played with one another, either in a territorial or romantic way but we never did decide....

Lunch was enjoyed as we sat on a log next to a pile of snow! A female Broad-tailed Hummingbird, the first of her kind we had seen, kept us entertained for a few moments, and Mountain Chickadees called all around us. A Botha's Pocket Gopher poked its head out of a freshly dug hole several times, eliciting clicks from cameras each time it appeared.

After lunch, we had a pit stop at Box Elder Picnic Area where we were treated to nice views of Western Bluebirds, Grace's Warbler and Steller's Jays.

At the Iron Door Restaurant, across the road from the Mount Lemmon Ski Hill, we watched for hummingbirds, spotting one each of Broad-tailed and Rivoli's. A kettle of fifteen or so Common Ravens played in the winds and at the top of the mountain, we enjoyed amazing views of Tucson below. Male Broad-tailed Hummingbirds were feeding hungrily on nectar in tiny yellow flowers in a gooseberry bush near our van. A short walk yielded great views of a pair of Olive Warblers, a species that sits alone as the sole member in its genus.

On our way back down the mountain, we saw a couple of 'Coue's' White-tailed Deer alongside the road. We stopped at Windy Point to take in the amazing rock formations and the view finding a pair of Rock Wrens hopping in and out of view amongst the boulders.

After a short break back at the hotel, during which time some folks cooled off in the pool, we went for dinner at Applebee's.

## **29 April**

Our first stop this morning was at Sabino Canyon and by the time we arrived, it was already hot. We took a stroll on a trail through the Sonoran Desert habitat finding Brown-crested Flycatcher, Verdin, White-winged Dove, Phainopepla, House Finch, and our first Cactus Wrens of the tour. There were perhaps four of them, chasing one another through the cactus, wagging their long tails.

I heard a Greater Roadrunner giving its bill snapping call and spotted the bird deep within a bush with dense foliage. We could just see bits of his head and bill.

When Anne shouted, 'Snake!', we saw a Western Diamondback Rattlesnake slither slowly across the sandy ground and out of sight. In addition to this, there were all sorts of speedy little lizards, including a Zebra-tailed Lizard.

We took the tram ride up into the canyon, which is extremely scenic, and listening on earbuds, we could hear the narration about the wildlife and history of the canyon.

On our way back down, some of us hopped off the tram to walk down a bit and see what we could find, while others rode back down to the cool shady areas around the headquarters.



*Cactus Wren © Chris Charlesworth*

Those who walked saw Northern Cardinals, Brown-crested Flycatcher, Lucy's Warbler, singing Bell's Vireos, and our first Costa's Hummingbird of the trip. The temperature was hotter than average today, so we found shade as often as possible.

After we met the rest of the group, we headed for lunch at Subway, then made our way to the west side of Tucson, and to the Sonoran Desert Museum. As we pulled into the museum parking lot, the temperature had reached 99 degrees so we didn't spend as much time here as we might have. Walking some of the trails, we did see several Cactus Wrens, which is Arizona's state bird, as well as Hooded Oriole, Abert's Towhee, Wilson's Warbler, Lesser Goldfinch, and overhead, our first Black Vultures of the trip. Anne added Pyrrhuloxia to our trip list, as she saw one that nobody else managed to get eyes onto.

One of the staff members at the museum pointed out a wild Sonoran Spiny-tailed Iguana to us and we also added another mammal to the trip list, a Round-tailed Ground-Squirrel.

We met inside the café and enjoyed some refreshing ice cream before heading towards Green Valley, our home base for the next two nights.

### **30 April**

After breakfast, we visited a neighbourhood of Green Valley, hoping to perhaps catch a glimpse of a Gilded Flicker. Along the way, John spotted a Greater Roadrunner sitting up in a bush by the road. Unfortunately, no Gilded Flicker was to be seen this morning, however, the

area was quite rich in bird life with our first Rufous-winged Sparrow of the tour which sang from a treetop. A Cooper's Hawk circled overhead and paused for a moment atop a telephone pole. Other species seen included Lark Sparrow, Curve-billed Thrasher, Gila Woodpecker, Northern Cardinal and Brown-crested Flycatcher.

We picked up lunch at the supermarket and headed up into the Santa Rita Mountains and Madera Canyon. A short hike up the Carrie Nation Trail proved to be very productive with one of the major highlights being a pair of Elegant Trogons, one of Arizona's most sought-after bird species. These were inspecting a nest cavity in a large sycamore tree and the male gave his barking call from a nearby branch, while the female stuck her head inside the cavity to take a look. When she flew off, he entered the cavity and called several times from inside.

Mexican Jays accompanied us as we walked along, and a pair of Painted Redstarts appeared for a few moments before disappearing. House Wrens gave us a particularly good showing, as did a pair of Hepatic Tanagers, our first for the tour.

We explored areas along the creek further down in the canyon, finding more good birds such as Brown-crested Flycatcher, many Acorn Woodpeckers and a single Arizona Woodpecker. Our first "Audubon's" Yellow-rumped Warblers were found, along with Bridled Titmouse, and Arizona Grey Squirrel which was a new addition to the trip's mammal list.

We had a picnic lunch under the shade of the Mexican Blue Oak trees, and then visited feeders at Santa Rita Lodge where there were many birds coming to feed, including Rivoli's, Black-chinned and Broad-tailed Hummingbirds. There were a number of Mexican Jays, as well as half a dozen or so Wild Turkeys! Acorn Woodpeckers seemed to be everywhere and a young male Bronzed Cowbird was our first one for the tour.

We headed back down to Green Valley for a 'siesta' before having an early dinner and then headed back to Madera Canyon. We waited patiently, with about a dozen other people, outside of the home of the owner of the Santa Rita Lodge, as he had an Elf Owl that was nesting in a telephone pole on his property. Eventually, the female owl poked her head out of the nest and took a long look at us. As it got darker, the male flew in, and we had fantastic views as he perched on a branch with a caterpillar in his bill.

To finish off the night, we had a good look at another owl species, a Whiskered Screech-Owl, although we had to be satisfied with just hearing a Mexican Whip-poor-will which called several times from further up the canyon.

## **May 1**

We checked out of our hotel in Green Valley and headed up towards the Santa Rita Mountains stopping first at Florida Wash, where we walked a short distance along the mostly dry creek bed. Vermilion Flycatchers kept us entertained as we strolled up through the mesquite woodland, however, the real highlight was a somewhat out of place Townsend's Solitaire.



In a bit of grassland nearby, we watched a Botteri's Sparrow singing as we spied on him through the telescope. A stroll along the path in lower Madera Canyon produced several nice sightings including a colourful male Western Tanager. On a hillside, an Olive-sided Flycatcher sat atop a tall yucca, and we also glimpsed our first Canyon Towhee. As we were leaving, a 'Turkey Vulture' metamorphosed into our one and only Zone-tailed Hawk of the trip.

We picked up lunch at the supermarket and then made our way to Montosa Canyon, where we hoped to find Five-striped Sparrow, a rare and local species found only in a couple of locations north of the Mexican border.

We had lunch as we waited for the sparrow and whilst it did appear, unfortunately, this was only for a moment, and I was the only person who saw it. There were, however, other more cooperative birds included White-throated Swifts, Costa's Hummingbird, a lovely male Hooded Oriole and our one and only Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay of the tour.

On our way down, we paused in the desert to look at our first Pyrrhuloxias and were also treated to nice views of a Greater Roadrunner.



*Pyrrhuloxia © Chris Charlesworth*

A quick stop at the Amado Wastewater Treatment Plant produced some more birds for the daily list with Ruddy Ducks, Mexican Ducks, Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks and a single male Ring-necked Duck all seen, along with several Spotted Sandpipers and a Killdeer, whilst overhead there was a Black Vulture and Swainson's Hawk.

A walk up the Santa Cruz River did not produce the hoped for Rose-throated Becard as the birds' nest had apparently blown down in the wind and they had become tricky to find after that. Still, we found over thirty species on our walk, including Abert's Towhee, Summer Tanager, a Common Yellowthroat, and best of all, a Green Kingfisher, although

the kingfisher was only seen by some of the group. Carrying on, we ended up in the 'one horse town' of Patagonia, where we checked into our accommodation and went for dinner at the Wagon Wheel Saloon.

## May 2

Cool temperatures, sunny skies and noisy Barn Swallows welcomed us as we emerged for some pre-breakfast birding at the famous Patagonia Roadside Rest Stop. As soon as we arrived, I could hear a Rufous-capped Warbler singing on the hillside above us. This rare visitor from Mexico had been found a day or two before and we were more than happy to connect with it. We enjoyed lovely views of the warbler as it foraged and sang.

*Rufous-capped Warbler © Chris Charlesworth*

A Rock Wren also showed itself nicely, and we had good views of our only Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet along the Sonoita Creek.



Back in Patagonia, we had a lovely breakfast at the Gathering Grounds before heading out once again, this time to Patagonia Lake State Park. We spent the rest of the morning here, racking up an impressive list of nearly sixty species! On the lake were Ruddy Ducks and a couple of Pied-billed Grebes, as well as Neotropical Cormorants, a Double-crested Cormorant and American Coots. A Great Blue Heron, and a Snowy Egret were also found.

The area was excellent for raptors, and we saw both Turkey and Black Vultures, as well as Grey Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk and a Common Black Hawk. Vermilion Flycatchers kept us entertained, and we found our first Cassin's Kingbird, Inca Dove and Common Ground-Dove of the trip.

Yellow-breasted Chats were singing all over the place in the riparian woodlands, and we were lucky to catch views of one or two of them. Our first Bullock's Oriole also appeared in a treetop, alongside a male Yellow Warbler, whilst along the river, we saw a couple of new butterflies, a Fatal Metalmark and a group of Marine Blues.

After a siesta, we gathered and headed over to the Paton's Center for hummingbirds, where we spent the rest of the afternoon watching feeders. The highlight was the center's signature bird, a Violet-crowned Hummingbird, but there were plenty of other species to see as well. Gambel's Quail posed for the photographers, as did White-breasted Nuthatches, Bewick's Wren, Curve-billed Thrasher, Lark Sparrows, White-crowned Sparrows and a single White-throated Sparrow.

We enjoyed great looks at male and female Lazuli Buntings, as well as Black-headed Grosbeaks and the usual, but beautiful Northern Cardinals and Summer Tanagers.

Dinner was at the Wildhorse Saloon.



*Gambel's Quail © Chris Charlesworth*

### **3 May**

Before breakfast, we made the 45-minute drive to Pena Blanca Lake, west of Nogales where we hoped to find another local rarity, a Least Grebe. As we searched for the grebe, we found other goodies including Green Heron, Black Phoebe, Brown-crested Flycatcher and Violet-green Swallow. Once we reached a viewpoint, I spotted the grebe in the distance, so we drove over to take a look. It showed nicely, giving us views of its grey plumage, thin black bill, and staring yellow eye.

We had breakfast at our favourite establishment in Patagonia, the Gathering Grounds, and whilst we waited for our 'to-go' lunches, we explored a little stretch of Sonoita Creek along Blue Haven Road.

After picking up lunch, we drove east to the Sonoita Grasslands at Las Cienegas where, we explored the grassland habitat, picking up some nice birds such as Loggerhead Shrike, Horned Lark, Western Kingbird, Chihuahuan Raven, loads of Lark Sparrows, and perhaps the highlight, a pair of lovely Chihuahuan Meadowlarks. Several Pronghorn Antelope, North America's fastest land mammal, were also seen.

Once we made it to Sierra Vista, we checked into our hotel and then made our way to the edge of the Huachuca Mountains at Ash Canyon Bird Sanctuary. Here, we were given a private tour by hummingbird expert, Sheri Williamson. Hummingbirds included Black-chinned, Anna's, Broad-tailed, Broad-billed, a Rufous, and the star attraction, a male Lucifer Hummingbird. Other species came in to feed as well, such as Bullock's, Scott's and Hooded Orioles, Gila Woodpecker, Canyon Towhee, Lesser Goldfinch and Lazuli Bunting.

A cotton rat peeked out from a brush pile, and Sheri explained there were three species of cotton rat that can be found in the area. Dinner this evening was at the Olive Garden.

## May 4

After picking up our lunch, we headed to Carr Canyon Road and began the ascent of the only road that travels up into the higher elevations of the Huachuca Mountains. The road was rough, winding and steep, but well worth the effort and along the way up, we had wonderful views of Sierra Vista.

We spent the next couple of hours birding at the Reef Townsite Campground, at over 8,000 feet and it didn't take us long to find our target bird for the morning, the Buff-breasted Flycatcher. The only place in the USA where this species, the smallest of the *Empidonax* flycatchers, can be found is in the Huachuca Mountains and we saw several of these tiny buffy-fronted flycatchers in the forests, along with another of our target species, the Greater Pewee. We watched a couple of these larger, slightly crested flycatchers, for several minutes as they foraged for insects.



*Buff-breasted Flycatcher © Chris Charlesworth*

We also saw our first Plumbeous Vireos, along with another new bird, Virginia's Warbler, which played a little hard-to-get, but we eventually saw it.

We had more sightings of birds like Painted Redstart, Red-faced and Grace's Warblers, Hermit Thrush and Bushtit and then began the trek back down the mountain, seeing a Sonoran Whipsnake cross the dirt road as we drove.

Stopping near the bottom at the Carr Canyon Picnic site, the Mexican Jays tried to snatch our lunches before one final stop produced the only Eastern Bluebird of the tour.

At Ramsey Canyon Preserve, we enjoyed a nice hike to the top of the Bledsoe Loop and although we didn't find the Northern Pygmy-Owls we had hoped to see, we did see some other interesting birds including a lovely Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher and a brief encounter with another Elegant Trogon. More Plumbeous Vireos were seen, along with Hutton's Vireo and we also watched a Painted Redstart tend to its nest on the ground on a hillside near the path.

A butterfly, the Nabokov's Satyr, and a lizard, the Clark's Spiny Lizard, were added to the burgeoning list of critters we had seen.

We enjoyed dinner at Applebee's before heading off to get a good night's rest.



## 5 May

After picking up lunch at Subway, we made our way to Miller Canyon where we paid a visit to the Beatty's Guest Ranch. The hummingbird feeders here were abuzz with activity with Rivoli's, Black-chinned, Broad-tailed, Broad-billed and Anna's Hummingbirds all in attendance. Some of us walked up the canyon, finding several interesting species including Hepatic Tanager, Painted Redstart, Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher and we heard, but did not see, a Cordilleran Flycatcher. Our one and only Arizona Sister butterfly was seen and in the ponds on the property, we saw several Lowland (Chiricahua) Leopard Frogs, and a Black-necked Garter-Snake.

We drove to the San Pedro River, a little to the east of Sierra Vista, and had lunch at the San Pedro House beneath the shade of a massive cottonwood tree. Feeders around the house had some good birds, including Pyrrhuloxia and our only Blue Grosbeak of the tour. There were other species about as well, including Gila Woodpecker, Black-chinned Hummingbirds, Curve-billed Thrasher, House Finches and more.

The drive to Portal was briefly interrupted by a stop to fuel up the van in the border town of Douglas. Once we arrived in Portal, we checked into the lodge and then took a stroll along the street to see what we could find. Portal is a tiny hamlet with only a few homes, the lodge, and a post office along the main street.

Many of the residents put out bird feeders and allow birders to peer into their gardens. We found such a place and happily connected with our first, and only, Blue-throated Mountain-gems of the tour. Other feeder birds included Inca Dove, Black-headed Grosbeak, Pine Siskin, Northern Cardinal, Lesser Goldfinch, Lazuli Bunting, Acorn Woodpecker and Western Tanager to name a few.

After dinner, some of us took a walk along the street to see if we could find any owls. There was a Cinco de Mayo celebration happening, so it was rather action packed, but a short distance down the street, it was nice and quiet. Several Elf Owls were calling, and we found an adult Great Horned Owl as it hooted loudly from the chimney of one of the houses, before seeing two fluffy Great Horned Owl babies peering out of a known nest in a large sycamore tree near the lodge. It had been another fantastic day.

## 6 May

First thing this morning we made our way from Portal to the New Mexico state line hoping to find a few interesting desert birds before breakfast. As we drove, we saw several Scaled Quails and once at Gin Road, began looking and listening for our main target, Bendire's Thrasher. First, we spotted a Curve-billed Thrasher singing from the top of a tree in the distance and then found a Cactus Wren singing from atop a yucca. Finally, I spotted a Bendire's Thrasher singing on another tall yucca, and we enjoyed scope views of this rather rare and uncommon species.



New for the mammal list was an Antelope Jackrabbit sitting quietly in the shade beneath a mesquite tree and with three Coyotes also seen early this morning, we felt we had earned our breakfast, so off we went to the Rodeo Store and Café in New Mexico.

After breakfast, we returned to Portal, picked up our bagged lunches and began the journey up into the Chiricahua Mountains. The road was bumpy and twisty, but still in better condition than the one at Carr Canyon we had driven along a couple of days earlier. We headed straight up to over 8,000 feet elevation, enjoying lovely views along the way.

Our target bird was Mexican Chickadee, a species that can be found in the USA only in the Chiricahua Mountains, and it didn't take us too long to find one, up in the boughs of firs and pine trees. Other species here included House Wren, Yellow-eyed Junco, Steller's Jay, Northern Flicker (Red-shafted), and a Ruby-crowned Kinglet.

We had lunch near Rustler Park and Steller's Jays kept us entertained as they came in to pick up scraps from beneath the tables. A Greater Pewee, and a pair of lovely Western Tanagers were also busily foraging in the little gully below as we ate, and Sue and I spotted a Hairy Woodpecker pecking away at the base of a burned tree.



*Steller's Jay © Chris Charlesworth*

We descended via a slightly different route, that took us down through the south fork of Cave Creek Canyon. We spent a little time here and although it was a bit quiet (which wasn't too surprising given the time of day), Anne spotted a male Elegant Trogon, our fourth for the trip!

Back in Portal, some decided to take a siesta, while the rest of us headed over to another set of feeders off Foothills Road. Here, we hoped to spot another rare and elusive thrasher,

Crissal Thrasher. We sat comfortably in seats near the feeders and watched the bonanza of birds coming in. There were Black-throated Sparrows, Pyrrhuloxias, Northern Cardinals, Scott's, Hooded and Bullock's Orioles, House Finches, Lesser Goldfinches, Gambel's Quail (with babies), and Lazuli Buntings. Hummingbirds included Black-chinned and Broad-billed, and we also had a good look at a Common Ground-Dove as it called nearby.

It was nearly time to return to town for dinner, and I stated, 'We'll give the thrasher fifteen more minutes to come in before we have to leave.' Pretty much on the fifteenth minute, two Crissal Thrashers, which appeared to be young birds, appeared and put on a nice show for us.

Our final dinner at the Portal Lodge was, as usual, good and we then headed off to get some rest before the long travel day ahead.

## **7 May**

It was our last morning in Arizona, and we headed out bright and early to look for Juniper Titmouse at the Paradise Cemetery. It didn't take long to locate a couple of these rather drab, but charismatic birds, calling away amongst the juniper trees. We also had our first good looks at a couple of Black-tailed Gnatcatchers, as they harassed a gorgeous male American Kestrel.



*American Kestrel © Chris Charlesworth*

Back at the lodge, we collected our belongings and checked out. It was a five hour drive from Portal to Phoenix but we stopped at the Willcox Water Treatment Plant where we found fifteen new species.

There were a variety of waders including Western Sandpiper, Semipalmated Plover, Lesser Yellowlegs, Wilson's and Red-necked Phalaropes, and a number of lovely American Avocets.

A young Peregrine Falcon put on a nice show as it tried to catch shorebirds and swallows and at least three White-faced Ibis foraged along the shore of the ponds. We also saw a lone Cattle Egret, as well as Eared Grebe, Ruddy Duck, Mexican Duck, Gadwall, American Wigeon, Cinnamon Teal, Green-winged Teal and Blue-winged Teal.

Our only Savannah Sparrow of the trip foraged along the edge of the pond, and we had our second sighting of Chihuahuan Meadowlark as well.

We stopped at Benson for lunch, before continuing on to Phoenix, arriving at the airport at around 4pm where we said our farewells.

It has been a highly successful tour with over 180 species being seen.