



Southeast Arizona (Monsoon) Trip Report (Jul 25 - Aug 4, 2026)

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Varied Bunting © Skye Haas

After pulling ourselves away from the Greater Roadrunner and hummingbirds on the grounds of our Tucson hotel, we began the tour in earnest with an exploration of the different altitudinal life zones featured in southeast Arizona with a trip up Mount Lemmon in the Santa Catalina mountains. Before

the morning was over, southwestern desert specialties such as Black-throated Sparrow and Verdin gave way to oak and juniper forest denizens such as Acorn Woodpecker, Mexican Jay, Spotted Towhee and Black-throated Gray Warbler.



Black-throated Gray Warbler © Skye Haas

By the time we had a picnic lunch under Ponderosa pines a bit higher up the mountain, we had great views of Greater Pewee, Hutton's Vireo, Yellow-eyed Junco, Mountain Chickadee and White-throated Swift.



White-throated Swift © Skye Haas



Greater Pewee © Skye Haas

After passing the 8000 foot elevation mark, we added Western Flycatcher, Steller's Jay and Red-faced Warbler to our list before descending back to Tucson. We began our second day of birding with a visit to a Sonoran desert location dominated by the otherworldly forms of saguaro cacti. In addition to Black-throated Sparrow, Gila Woodpecker and Curve-billed Thrasher we had good luck with our main target species, the habitat-restricted Gilded Flicker.



Our group © J Gresham

Our destination for this day was the town of Portal in the spectacular Chiricahua Mountains. But first we made a stop for waterbirds at Willcox where we enjoyed views of Black-necked Stilts, American Avocets, Wilson's Phalaropes and Baird's Sandpipers. From our base in Portal we spent two days exploring the mountain canyons of the Chiricahuas. The Coppery-tailed Trogon was a high priority here, and after hearing their distinctive vocalizations several times we eventually spotted a male of this iconic Sierra Madrean specialty. A rare White-eared Hummingbird cooperated nicely at the yard it had been visiting.



White-eared Hummingbird © Skye Haas



Coppery-tailed Trogon © Skye Haas

Our evening attempts at nightbirds resulted in us hearing Mexican Whip-poor-will and Western Screech-Owl and getting good looks at a Whiskered Screech-Owl.



Whiskered Screech-Owl © Skye Haas

Black-headed Grosbeaks, Blue-throated Mountain Gems and Painted Redstarts were numerous, and we even lucked into a pair of Montezuma Quail crossing a dirt road right in front of us. We saw good numbers of Band-tailed Pigeons, Pygmy Nuthatches and Red Crossbills, but were especially impressed with the number of Mexican Chickadees, which we encountered in more locations and higher numbers than on any previous tour.



Mexican Chickadee © Skye Haas



Montezuma Quail © Skye Haas

After three nights in the Chiricahua Mountains, we headed to the town of Sierra Vista at the foot of another storied Sky Island mountain range, the Huachucas. We spent a morning in Miller Canyon, where highlights included Hutton's, Plumbeous, and Western Warbling Vireos, and Western and Hepatic Tanagers. After more than an hour's vigil, a stunning male Flame-colored Tanager we'd been staking out finally showed up and rewarded us with extensive views. After this hike we spent

some time relaxing at hummingbird feeders, stopping on the way to look up at a low-flying Zone-tailed Hawk.



Zone-tailed Hawk © Skye Haas



Swainson's Hawk © Skye Haas

Having successfully sought out Scaled Quail, Swainson's Hawk, Say's Phoebe, Chihuahuan Meadowlark and Botteri's Sparrow the previous afternoon, we departed early the next morning for

the Patagonia Mountains where we caught up with a female Rose-throated Becard and a Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet.



Botteri's Sparrow © Skye Haas



Rose-throated Becard © Skye Haas

At Tucson Bird Alliance's Paton Center for Hummingbirds just outside the town of Patagonia we enjoyed seeing Black-chinned, Broad-billed and Violet-crowned Hummingbirds, Thick-billed

Kingbird, Abert's Towhee and Bronzed Cowbird.



Broad-billed Hummingbird © Skye Haas

A brief stop at a small Wastewater Treatment Plant gave us looks at Mexican Duck, a family group of Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks, Neotropic Cormorants and some beautiful but skittish Lazuli Buntings. After checking into our hotel in Green Valley and having dinner, we went out looking for nightbirds, dipping on the Buff-collared Nightjar, but hearing Elf Owl and Common Poorwill and seeing Lesser Nighthawk and Great Horned Owl. Our hotel location in Green Valley gave us easy access to our fourth Sky Island mountain range, the Santa Ritas. In one scenic foothill canyon we had great looks at Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, Five-striped Sparrow and Varied Bunting. In just over an hour's visit to a park at the edge of Green Valley we had great looks at Gambel's Quail, Cactus Wren, Curve-billed Thrasher, Abert's Towhee and a singing Rufous-winged Sparrow.



Five-striped Sparrow © Skye Haas



Rufous-winged Sparrow © Skye Haas

In many ways we were saving the best for last: Madera Canyon. We had lunch at the top of the road and hiked up from there, enjoying the explosive squeaks of Sulphur-bellied Flycatchers along the way. A few Coppery-tailed Trogons called as well, but did not show themselves. We encountered good numbers of Brown Creepers, Bridled Titmice, Spotted Towhees, Painted Redstarts and Black-headed Grosbeaks and at one point a group of three Zone-tailed Hawks appeared overhead.



Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher © Skye Haas

Before heading back to the Tucson hotel where the tour began, we relaxed in front of the array of feeders at the famed Santa Rita Lodge and enjoyed avian eye-candy such as Rivoli's Hummingbird, Bullock's Oriole, and Western, Summer and Hepatic Tanagers, and (a bit unexpected at this high an elevation) an adult male Costa's Hummingbird. We capped off the tour at a fantastic Mexican restaurant in Tucson, while a male Vermilion Flycatcher foraged just outside our window!



Photographing a Vermillon Flycatcher that joined us for our farewell dinner © Louie Dombroski



Our group