



## ARIZONA TOUR REPORT

18<sup>th</sup> April to 28<sup>th</sup> April  
2016

### TOUR HIGHLIGHTS

Either for rarity value, excellent views or simply a group favourite.

- Scaled Quail
- Gambel's Quail
- Grey Hawk
- American Avocet
- Wilson's Phalarope
- Greater Roadrunner
- Western Screech Owl
- Whiskered Screech Owl
- Mexican Spotted Owl
- Mountain Pygmy Owl
- Elf Owl
- White-throated Swift
- Violet-crowned Hummingbird
- Magnificent Hummingbird
- Anna's Hummingbird
- Rufous Hummingbird
- Lucifer Hummingbird
- Elegant Trogon
- Arizona Woodpecker
- Gilded Flicker
- Greater Pewee
- Buff-breasted Flycatcher
- Thick-billed Kingbird
- Cassin's Vireo
- Pinyon Jay
- Phainopepla
- Violet-green Swallow
- Black-capped Gnatcatcher
- Bendire's Thrasher
- Crissal Thrasher
- Olive Warbler
- Cassin's Finch
- Lucy's Warbler
- Virginia's Warbler
- Grace's Warbler
- Black-throated Grey Warbler
- Rufous-capped Warbler
- Red-faced Warbler
- Painted Whitestart
- Yellow-headed Blackbird
- Scott's Oriole
- Lark Bunting
- Yellow-eyed Junco
- Rufous-crowned Sparrow
- Abert's Towhee
- Western Tanager
- Black-headed Grosbeak
- Lazuli Bunting

### SUMMARY:

Arizona is home to some of the best birding in the USA with a feast of scarce and localised birds to find and many of them only just creep over the border from Mexico, which makes this an extremely exciting destination. This was a private tour which visited most of the key areas in a relatively short period of time but a slightly later departure or a summer tour in July would have yielded quite a few more great birds. However, we had a fantastic time as we visited the key 'Sky Island' hotspots in the Santa Catalina, Santa Rita, Huachuca and Chiricahua Mountains in search of such delights as Mountain Pygmy Owl, Elegant Trogon, Buff-breasted Flycatcher, Red-faced, Virginia's, Grace's and Olive Warblers, Yellow-eyed Junco and so much more. And of course there's plenty of desert birding to enjoy with Gilded Flicker being a particular favourite. I cannot recommend birding in Arizona enough and look forward to returning sometime soon!

## Day 1 ARRIVAL IN PHOENIX - TUCSON

Following a direct ten and a half hour flight from London we arrived at Phoenix Sky Harbor Airport at 6pm and joined the infuriatingly long Immigration queue. Eventually we were through and after collecting the hire car drove two hours south to Tucson and the excellent Hampton Inn where we would spend the next two nights.

## Day 2 MOUNT LEMMON

The 6am breakfast in the motel was pretty good, although we were more impressed with seeing a few birds around the car park outside. The first lifer of the trip was **Gila Woodpecker**, and we also saw a cracking **Phainopepla** here as well. The drive up to the base of Mount Lemmon took around 40 minutes and as the road began to rise quite steeply we made our first stop at a scenic overlook. The view looking down to a sprawling Tucson was very impressive and the surrounding habitat of arid, rocky hills dotted with cacti looked very interesting but all we saw here was a brief **Lucy's Warbler**, an even briefer **Townsend's Warbler** looking really out of its comfort zone and obviously on migration, a few **Chipping Sparrows** and a pair of **Black-throated Sparrows** attending a nest.



Grace's Warbler at Mount Lemmon

The next stop higher up was more eventful as the steep cliffs above the road had a fine **Canyon Wren** singing away, whilst **Rufous-crowned Sparrow**, **Zone-tailed Hawk**, **Cassin's Vireo** and a **Verdin** all put in an appearance. Further up at the Cypress Picnic Site we saw a number of goodies and in particular our first **Grace's Warbler** showed exceedingly well as it sang from the surrounding pine trees. The first of many **Yellow-eyed Juncos** was also much appreciated, and there was also our first cracking **Painted Redstart** singing its heart out. Other species seen here included **Pygmy** and **White-breasted Nuthatches**, **Cordilleran Flycatcher**, **Broad-tailed Hummingbird**, **Acorn Woodpecker**, **Spotted Towhee**, **House Wren** and **Bridled Titmouse**.

A particularly favourite trail of mine was along Incinerator Road where another much closer **Painted Redstart** was seen, although I totally messed up the very good photo opportunities presented. However, just around the corner our first **Red-faced Warblers** got our pulses racing a bit and what a stunning bird this was. I have to say this bird, the redstart and **Grace's Warbler** were a fine trio of birds to have seen so quickly and we were really loving this Arizona birding already! Anyway, one bird I was a little concerned about finding was **Virginia's Warbler** as it seemed to be the one bird that was missing from many of the tour reports I had been reading. Well I needn't have worried as I found a very confiding bird feeding amongst some low bushes and it lingered here for a while allowing great looks. Also along here were **Hutton's Vireo**, **Brown Creeper**, more **Pygmy Nuthatches**, **Western Bluebird**, **American Robin**, **Violet-green Swallow**, more juncos, and a very confiding **Northern Flicker**.

We had lunch at Rose Canyon and found this site to be rather quiet although a calling **Coopers Hawk** was nice, and there was also a **Western Osprey**, **Audubon's**



Virginia's Warbler at Mount Lemmon

**Warbler** and some **Pine Siskins**. After our picnic we returned to the motel in the late afternoon and enjoyed good looks at a **Cactus Wren**, **Northern Mockingbird**, **Bronzed Cowbird** and the **Phainopepla** again in the car park. After dinner I drove back up to Mount Lemmon for our first owling session of the trip, which turned out to be a dismal failure with heard only **Mexican Whip-Poor-Will** and **Flammulated Owl** – oh dear!

### Day 3 SONORAN DESERT – MADERA CANYON

One bird I was sort of concerned about seeing was **Gilded Flicker** as you have to get to the Sonoran Desert to find the Saguaro cactus that this bird inhabits. I think that there wasn't much info as it is generally common in the correct habitat and you'd have to be a dummy to miss it....? Well, just after first light I tried to find Tucson Mountain Park and stupidly relied on my satnav that took me to an address out in the middle of nowhere, fortunately in perfect habitat next to the Desert Museum. A singing **Curve-billed Thrasher** got the ball rolling, and we followed that with scope views of **Cactus Wren** and **Gila Woodpecker**, watched a few **Bullock's Orioles** fly past and saw a **Canyon Towhee**. All of a sudden I heard a sharp "keek keek" call and frantically scanned the surrounding saguaros and sure enough it was a **Gilded Flicker**. Oh boy. It was a little distant to begin with but after walking closer another bird appeared and promptly flew towards us and landed in a nearby dead tree. Needless to say I was very pleased to nail this bird. Delighted with this and with rumbling stomachs we returned to the hire car, seeing **Black-tailed Gnatcatcher** and a **Verdin** along the way, and drove some 40 minutes back to the motel for breakfast.



Broad-billed Hummingbird

We left the wonderful Hampton Inn and hit the freeway for what turned out to be an hours drive south to the fabled Madera Canyon. The drive from the freeway took us across an open range of grassland and bushes with the towering Santa Rita Mountains forming a stunning backdrop. Once at the mouth of the canyon the road wound uphill through lovely forest a few miles to Santa Rita Lodge. We parked in the Madera Picnic Area and walked a few hundred metres, trying to ignore numerous **Bridled Titmouse**, **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** and a **Painted Redstart** as we wanted to get to the feeding station quickly. There's a shop here and a viewing area overlooking bird tables, humming feeder and a pond where numerous birds were on show. We ticked off the common **Broad-billed**, as well as **Magnificent** and **Blue-throated Hummingbirds** in rapid succession and must admit my former indifference to this family now seems a little silly. So yes, my name is Nick and I love hummers!!! There were also crowds of **Pine Siskins**, **House Finches**, **Black-headed Grosbeaks**, **Mexican Jays** and even a gang of **Wild Turkeys** present.



Rufous-winged Sparrow

Leaving here we drove to the top car park and set off up the Carrie Nation Trail in search of the recently arrived **Elegant Trogon** (now split as **Coppery-tailed Trogon** from the Mexican birds) but after several hours hiking up into the hills we drew a blank. Yet we did get **Townsend's Warbler**, **Plumbeous** and **Hutton's Vireos**, **Hepatic Tanager**, **Ash-throated** and **Dusky-capped Flycatchers**, **Hermit Thrush**, **Cassin's Finch** and more **Painted Redstarts**. But the best bird was our first **Arizona Woodpecker** feeding next to the path.

Driving towards our next motel at Rio Rico I stopped the car when an **American Kestrel** flew over and landed on a telegraph pole. This turned out to be very fortunate as we found a pair of **Rufous-winged**



**Sparrows**, a bird I was very keen to see. Little did I know how common this bird is in the right habitat as well! We eventually ended up at the not-so-splendid Esplendor Resort an hour later and ate a poor meal at a restaurant recommended to us by the receptionist. Oh well!

#### Day 4 MADERA CANYON

Began the day along Proctor Road at the base of Madera Canyon, an area that has some decent Riparian woodland with a small stream and lots of bushes and scrub. In the recent past this has been the place for **Buff-collared Nightjar** but there hasn't been any news so far this year. So we took a walk here for an hour and saw our second and third **Greater Roadrunners** of the day – the first one was in the driveway of the Esplendor Resort. I'm not going to talk about this motel as it is currently being renovated, and boy does it need it. Maybe when the refurbishment has been done it will look something like it does on their website..!!!! Anyway, yes nice views of **Roadrunner** along Proctor Road, as well as **Phainopepla**, **Blue-grey Gnatcatcher**, a fine **Zone-tailed Hawk** flying overhead, **Hooded Oriole**, **Ladder-backed Woodpecker** and several **Wilson's Warblers**.

So afterwards we drove up into Madera Canyon and walked along the Super Trail that took us high up into the hills in search of trogons. Again we bumped into people who had heard them but we didn't get a sniff again. However, it was a lovely walk and we thoroughly enjoyed a singing **Black-throated Grey Warbler** that patrolled an area of oaks and conifers next to the path. A pair of **Hutton's Vireos** were also confiding, a pair of **Rufous-crowned Sparrows** posed nicely and I sussed out a call that had been bothering me for a few days – **Dusky-capped Flycatcher** being the culprit. Oh and our first **Hammond's Flycatcher** was well and truly nailed this morning. These flycatchers are really tricky and we've let a few go already without identifying them but this one did call and the long primaries, tail and bill length all pointed to this species.



Black-throated Grey Warbler at Madera Canyon

We checked out the feeders at Santa Rita Lodge, seeing much the same as yesterday before heading to Ruby Road. The idea was to check out the road to California Gulch for **Five-striped Sparrow** despite the dearth of recent sightings. However, part of this road is closed for construction so we ended up heading to Arivaca Lake, stopping for lunch in a little diner along the way in the middle of nowhere. As we turned off the main road onto a dirt track we drove across rolling grass-covered hills and stopped along a line of small trees and found a **Western Wood Pewee**, yet more **Rufous-crowned Sparrows** and saw our first **Vermillion Flycatchers**. A small pond in a valley below the road held a pair of **Lesser Scaups** – the only ones of the trip. The main lake was very picturesque and we quickly notched up **American Coots**, **Pied-billed Grebes**, **Ruddy Duck**, and both **Green & Great Blue Herons**. The surrounding trees held **Summer Tanager**, **Western Kingbird**, **Audubon's Warblers**, **Lark Sparrows**, **Lazuli Bunting**, **Black Phoebe**, **Belted Kingfisher**, and just before we left a **Killdeer** flew in.

We left here in the late afternoon and called in to Safeway to purchase a picnic for our evening excursion back in Madera Canyon. After overindulging in yoghurt, cheese, fruit and gorgeous brown bread we walked back up to Santa Rita Lodge and waited until 6.50pm before an obliging **Elf Owl** popped its head out of its nest hole in a telegraph post. Afterwards, we took all of 10 minutes before spotlighting a **Whiskered Screech-Owl** perched on a bare branch at the edge of the car park. I didn't expect this much-wanted bird to be so easy, if only I could say the same about the **Mexican Whip-Poor-Wills** calling at the top of the canyon. Well, they just called and called and never left the shelter of their section of forest at the top of a steep slope. I was wondering if they are a bit easier later in the season? Anyway, we managed to get back to the motel at a reasonable time as we needed to get packed and ready for an early morning departure to Patagonia.

## Day 5 PATAGONIA

Having a SatNav really helps and we found our way to Patagonia Lake State Park via a series of 'back roads' early this morning. Oh we had another cracking breakfast in a diner close to the motel although having to choose between 4 different types of bread and which one of a million ways to have my eggs was a little taxing so early in the day..!! Anyway, upon arrival we paid our entrance fee and parked at the far end of the camping area right at the start of the well-signposted Birding Trail. Our main target was the rare **Black-capped Gnatcatcher** that had been reported here for several days, but the only directions we had was that the bird was about halfway along the trail somewhere.....

So we followed the path, scanning the lake where our first **Spotted Sandpiper** and **Double-crested Cormorants** were scoped, a **Common Yellowthroat** showed briefly and there was a bunch of other common stuff I don't really recall. The first patch of tall mesquite held a **Cassin's Vireo**, which showed up just as we were watching a **Warbling Vireo**. There was also **Wilson's** and **Yellow Warblers**, as well as **Song**, **Lincoln's** and some **White-crowned Sparrows** here. The path dropped down to the lakeside where several **Summer Tanagers** and **Vermilion Flycatchers** were displaying and then went across an open area and into another tall patch of Mesquite. It was here that I found the **Black-capped Gnatcatcher** and spent several enjoyable minutes watching it feed above us. I did spot a **Macgillivray's Warbler** skulking under a bush on the hillside behind us just at the moment that

the gnatcatcher appeared but focussed on the tiny grey and black sprite bobbing about the canopy right next to us. Good views of **Lucy's Warbler**, **Verdin** and **Bell's Vireo** at the same spot were also much appreciated. We did walk out onto the hillside to look for the warbler but failed relocate it, although the gnatcatcher gave further views, this time incredibly close and almost too close to focus our bins and cameras on. So what a result and with the day warming up we decided to return to the car. Along the way we had a nice close **Sora**, some **Mexican Ducks**, **Cinnamon** and **Blue-winged Teal**, and a weird-looking **Antelope Jackrabbit**. Driving out of the park we spotted a **Grey Hawk** perched in a bare tree.



Black-capped Gnatcatcher at Patagonia Lake SP



Violet-crowned Hummingbird

From here we headed the short distance to Patagonia and made the pilgrimage to the Paton Centre for Hummingbirds where we hoped to see the reported **Violet-crowned Hummingbird**, here at its only known stakeout in the U.S. Well we hadn't sat down in the seating area for more than 5 minutes before a fine male appeared and began feeding at one of the red hummer feeders set out in a nearby tree. We saw him a couple more times during our stay and he sure was a stunner. From the seating area you can watch a variety of feeders, bird tables, some brush piles and open grass where we were astounded by the sheer numbers of birds. The hummer feeders were also attracting **Anna's** and **Black-chinned Hummingbirds** as well. Our first **Abert's Towhee** was rather cool skulking around a pile of branches laid out on the floor, and there were also **Inca Doves**, **Lark Sparrows** and a bunch of **Gambel's Quails** feeding on some seed on the floor. On the other feeders flocks of **Pine Siskins**, **House Finches**, **Black-headed Grosbeak** and even a few

**Lazuli Buntings** were present, with **Acorn Woodpecker** and a **Curve-billed Thrasher** joining in the fun. Surrounding trees held **Audubon's Warbler**, **Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet**, **Western Kingbird** and others but after an hour or so we needed food and retired to the nearby Gathering Grounds Restaurant. The sleepy hamlet of Patagonia has a lovely, quaint old town feel about it and the food was outstanding.

Afterwards we drove just a few minutes away to Sonoita Creek Preserve, checked in and walked along the trails, finding another male **Violet-crowned Hummer** on their feeders. Along the creek we hoped to find a reported **Thick-billed Kingbird** but the wind was picking up and I wasn't that confident. A 'needle in a haystack' sprang to mind but fortunately we found it calling from its perch high up in a huge tree after a short walk. We had great views in the scope and I was mightily relieved, but as luck would have it the bird flew towards us and perched right overhead as we were sitting in the shade on a well positioned bench. The only other birds of note were **Green-tailed Towhee** and **Dark-eyed Junco** so we headed out, calling back in at the Paton's for one final look. With nothing new on offer our drive took us maybe an hour across rolling grasslands to the modern town of Sierra Vista, which is nestled at the base of the Huachuca Mountains where we were booked in at the Hampton Inn for 3 nights.

## Day 6 MILLER CANYON – ASH CANYON

The great thing about being based at Sierra Vista is that all of the birding sites are pretty close and within a 30 minute drive of motel. And one of our major target birds we were keen to nail straight away was **Spotted Owl**. So we drove just 20 minutes or so to the turn off to Miller Canyon and headed up a dirt track to the end of the road.



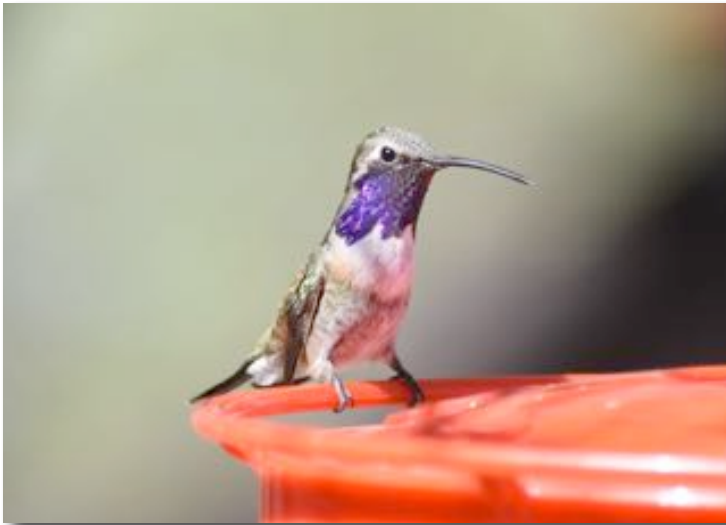
Mexican Spotted Owl

It seems that most people tick off this owl here and with a world population of just 15,000 individuals and a declining western USA population this is an important bird to find. The birds in SE Arizona are of the southern *S. o. lucida* race known as **Mexican Spotted Owl** and a potential split. I must admit I've seen one before in California, so this was just an 'insurance' tick for me but a lifer for everyone else. So we entered Beatty's Guest Ranch where Tom Beatty snr gave us directions to the usual roosting sites, although the high winds are a potential problem as the birds tends to move into denser cover in these conditions. So we hiked up the canyon, which is quite steep but the rocky trail eventually levelled out and we reached the first owl spot after about a mile's walk. Well there was nothing here except some droppings showing where the birds roost was, so we continued walking upwards to the next spot. Here too we drew a blank until Tom Beatty Snr appeared and asked if we've seen the owl. Apparently we've walked right past it and drop back down the trail where sure enough there's the owl, perched in a reasonably leafless tree right beside the track! How the heck did we miss that? To be fair we were looking in the denser trees away from the trail and not right on the trail and another couple of British birders have also walked past it, so it wasn't just us!! But what a bird and we soak up every detail as it lounges on an exposed branch.

With that done we hiked higher but the wind wasn't making it easy yet we enjoyed nice looks at the usual Sky Island species such as **Painted Redstart**, **Red-faced Warbler** and **Plumbeous Vireo** etc. Some roving flocks held several **Townsend's**, **Black-throated Grey** and a skulking **Virginia's Warbler**, as well as **Hepatic Tanager**. A fine **Arizona Woodpecker** showed well and is only our second sighting of the trip and is the last bird seen before we decide to return back down the trail. A **White-nosed Coati** was a surprising sighting, and we also saw **Canyon Wren**, **Cordilleran Flycatcher**, and two lifers eventually appeared – **Greater Pewee** and **Buff-breasted Flycatcher**. Once we reached the ranch we had a look at the feeders, took a seat and waited a while. Several



**Magnificent Hummingbirds** are joined by the common **Broad-billed Hummer**, and after a while we saw **Broad-tailed** and **Black-chinned Hummers**, then an **Anna's** appears, followed by my lifer **Rufous Hummingbird**. Sadly we are too early for **White-eared Hummer** so leave and head over to Ash Canyon and yet more feeders, seeing **Rock Wren** along the way.



Lucifer Hummingbird at Ash Canyon

Some people do not like the idea of ticking birds off at feeding stations but I've got no problem at all with it. It's no different to having a bird table in your garden is it? And with the lure of a **Lucifer Hummingbird** on offer were certainly 'up for it'. Once we find the right place, we take a seat and within 10 minutes the bird flies in and begins to feed – a crackling male **Lucifer Hummingbird**. Wow! It isn't here long and is soon just a memory so we move to the other seating area overlooking a number of bird tables and feeding apparatus. Here we enjoyed **Scott's Orioles**, **Bushtit**, more commoner hummers, **Mexican Jays**, **Acorn Woodpecker**, **Black-headed Grosbeak**, **Bewick's Wren** and other common species. It's a lovely way to while away an hour

or so in the lovely sunshine, and we also spot a female **Lucifer Hummer** as well as the male again. With all targets met we decided to head back to Sierra Vista for an early finish.

## Day 7 RAMSEY CANYON – TOMBSTONE – SAN PEDRO HOUSE

So today was the day we went to Ramsey Canyon and our best shot at **Elegant Trogon**. This site isn't open to visitors until 8am so we drove around the lower roads through a small housing area (rather surreptitiously I have to say) mainly to fill in some time but also to see if there was anything about. Carpets of **Lark Sparrows**

and some **Chipping Sparrows** were feeding on the lawns in people's gardens and a pair of **Western Kingbirds** were calling from the telegraph wires as well but nothing spectacular was on offer. As we rounded a corner a pair of **Greater Roadrunners** appeared and one of them ran in front of our car, whilst the other one ran into a field next to us. I managed some decent photos (at last) as one bird paused his 'run' and didn't seem to know what to do. So he ran up a lone tree in the middle of the field and looked rather lost before re-joining his mate. This



Greater Roadrunner at Ramsey Canyon

was probably the closest and most prolonged view of this cool bird I've ever had and a nice way to start what would be a great day's birding.

Then we drove up to the entrance gate and joined a small queue waiting to get in. We'd heard that there was limited parking so wanted to make sure of our spot and after a few minutes the gates opened actually around 20 minutes early and we drove in. Having already got our ticket back at Sonoita Creek a few days ago we

skipped the delights of the tempting retail outlet and began walking. The path is really easy and well maintained here and not steep at all – in fact a joy to be here. We hadn't walked long before an **Elegant Trogon** began calling and we were quickly at the right spot trying to find it. It was calling up the densely forested hillside above us and we spent a while trying to locate it without any luck. Fortunately it began to move and we eventually tracked it down when it somehow began calling behind us, so we crossed the tiny stream and had decent if not that close looks across a grassy clearing. Luckily it then flew right at us and landed high overhead, although rubbish for photos it was a great relief to finally nail this bird. Oh yes baby!



Red-faced Warbler at Ramsey Canyon

After our good fortune here we continued walking higher and left the stream with its huge trees for the steeper trail and headed toward where a **Tufted Flycatcher** had been reported. It was much steeper and the day was warming up, and to be honest this bird wasn't a lifer for any of us so we decided on the softer option of birding the lower slopes. A good move as it turned out as we found the stream area to be very active with our first **Dusky Flycatcher** showing quite well, along with **Hepatic Tanager**, **Audubon's**, **Black-throated Grey**, **Townsend's** and **Red-faced Warblers** all appearing. Both **Greater Pewee** and **Buff-breasted Flycatcher** were seen on several occasions and seemingly commoner and more easy to see here than other canyons we had visited. Or maybe it was the fact there was no wind today. Anyway we checked out some side trails for a reported **Flame-coloured Tanager** but only managed to find **Bushtit**, **American Robin**, **Hermit Thrush** and other common species. That was until a **Mountain Pygmy Owl** began calling and after a little search we got really lucky with excellent close views as it stared angrily back at us from a nearby conifer. Wow!

With the lure of a well stacked shop we headed down the trail, but our luck was in when our one and only **Hermit Warbler** was seen at the top of a nearby tree - thanks to the couple of bird photographers that put us on to it. So we returned to Sierra Vista for lunch before heading to Tombstone. Now I am culturally shallow but it was too good an opportunity to resist and it was pretty cool to visit the O.K Coral and Boot Hill, oh and to have a beer in a saloon. Yeehaaa!

Leaving here we drove to San Pedro House, despite my SatNav trying to send us in the wrong direction, but some old fashioned map reading got us to the right spot. My intention was to stay until dark and try and call in a **Western Screech-Owl**, but luck was really on our side today as there was already a bunch of



Mountain Pygmy Owl at Ramsey Canyon

other birders here scoping one of these beauties at a day roost high up in a big tree. The feeders here were alive with plenty of commoner birds, but also **Green-tailed Towhee**, **Pyrrhuloxia** and **Curve-billed Thrasher**. A walk along the trails revealed yet another **Rufous-winged Sparrow**, as well as many **Black-throated Sparrows**



but on returning to the feeders we saw our first **Common Ground Dove** and **Western Tanagers** of the trip. And with the sun dipping towards the horizon we returned to the motel.

### Day 8 HUNTER CANYON - PORTAL

Today we were heading to Portal in the Chiricahua Mountains, but not before calling in to Hunter Canyon where a **Rufous-capped Warbler** had been reported. It was a bit tricky to find this place as its not signposted off the main road out of Sierra Vista, but we got there eventually and then began walking up the trail. It was quite a rough trail and took a while to reach the trees where the bird had been reported the day before. We were really feeling the altitude this morning for some reason although it was just around 6,000 feet so not too high, but we were battling a high wind and an uneven and in places steep trail. Well, within a few minutes the **Rufous-capped Warbler** appeared in the creek below us and began singing and what a beautiful vision of red, yellow and olive it was. No photos unfortunately but just go look in the Sibley Guide to see what a cracker it is. Not a lifer, as I've seen one in Texas but a really cool bird. The same spot also had another **Buff-breasted Flycatcher**, as well as **Cassin's Finch**, **Cassin's Vireo**, **Greater Pewee**, **Dusky Flycatcher**, **Brown-crested Flycatcher**, **Virginia's**, **Black-throated Grey** and **Townsend's Warblers** and other common Sky Island goodies.

So that was us done here and we walked back to the car, seeing a few **Bell's Vireos** along the way. From here we headed to Portal, a journey of a couple of hours and one thing I noticed was the wind seemed to be picking up with gale force gusts once we reached the open plains. I screeched to a halt at one point as some movement along the fence adjacent to the road looked interesting. There's absolutely no traffic here so a quick turnaround and we were looking at a bunch of **Lark Buntings** – a bird I haven't seen for many years. A little further on we pulled in to look at one of those Historical Markers that are dotted around the state – this one marked the place of Geronimo's surrender.



Scaled Quail – Stateline Road.

Anyway, we drove on to Portal, checked in to our cabins behind the café, ate lunch and then had to drive some 20 miles to fill up with gas. Along the way a few **White-throated Swifts** flew over but we were soon back in Portal and despite the wind headed up the road to check out the area. We stopped at Paradise and then up to Barfoot Park, which is just under something like 10,000 feet, but there was a distinct lack of **Mexican Chickadees** (a bird we were fated not to find). In fact there was a dearth of any kind of bird due to the foul weather apart from a few **Violet-green Swallows**.

So on returning to the cabins we had dinner and then walked around after dark, seeing a **Great Horned Owl** perched at the top of a large tree. A drive up the road resulted in two different **Ringtails** (also known as **Ring-tailed Cat**), a member of the raccoon family, a **Striped Skunk**, and a cute **Grey Fox**. But no owls were calling so we called it a day and returned to the cabins.

### Day 9 PORTAL

Daybreak saw us trundling along Stateline Road that borders New Mexico which traverses excellent desert habitat and we picked up our first **Scaled Quails** quite easily here. Our other major target bird was **Bendire's Thrasher**, and as luck would have it we bumped into another birder along here who gave us some valuable info. In fact as we were talking to this birder, a **Bendire's Thrasher** hopped up onto a wood pile and onto our life lists! We got really nice views of this bird before driving on a little further and seeing **Brewer's Sparrows**, another **Greater Roadrunner**, **American Kestrel**, **Loggerhead Shrike**, **Bell's Vireo**, **Verdin** and others.

After breakfast we head up to the mountains and birded around Onion Saddle and Rustler Park with the intention of finding the elusive chickadee and **Olive Warbler**. Well, despite the strong wind we found several **Olive Warblers** after a couple hours of walking around in really cold conditions. What a great little bird, and apparently not a warbler and not olive – go figure! We also saw **Red-breasted Nuthatch**, **Pygmy Nuthatch**, **Yellow-eyed Junco**, **Western Bluebird**, **Steller's Jay**, **Brown Creeper** and a few **Red Crossbills**.

So we were resigned to the fact we weren't going to get **Mexican Chickadee** and decided to cut our losses and drove down to a feeding station at the edge of the desert. Sitting in some chairs in the shade of a large tree we watched **Lazuli Bunting**, **Green-tailed Towhee**, **Woodhouse's Scrub Jay** and other commoner species feeding just a few metres away. At one point a **Cooper's Hawk** flew in and scared everything to death, so we left and



**Olive Warbler at Rustler Park, Portal.**

drove back into New Mexico to top up with fuel. Afterwards we drove back along Stateline Road to Willow Pond, a recently established little reserve that holds the only water for miles around. There had been a number of good reports recently but the only shorebirds on offer were **Killdeer** and **Least Sandpiper**, and there was a flock of **Mexican Ducks** as well. But there were lots of **Violet-green Swallows** and a **Bank Swallow** (**Sand Martin** for us Brits). Driving back through the desert we found a **Crissal Thrasher**, **Western Meadowlark**, **Say's Phoebe** and at dusk flocks of **Barn** and **Cliff Swallows** flew over.

I did make a visit back up to Rustler Park but no owls were ever going to be calling in the cold wind so I gave up after an hour and drove back, but did see another **Ringtail Cat** on the way down.

#### **Day 10 27<sup>th</sup> April WILLCOX – FLAGSTAFF – GRAND CANYON**

Left early doors and drove in darkness back to civilisation and headed to Willcox where we surprisingly found Twin Lakes & Cochise Lakes quite easily. Well, what a great place this was to bird and I only wish we had more time as these two lakes were choc full of birds. The good thing is you can drive right the way around and make the best use of the light as the sun was still quite low and in our eyes to begin with. But as soon as we pulled up we could see **Wilson's Phalaropes** everywhere and I guesstimated around 100+ with birds spinning in circles literally everywhere you looked. There were also a few **Red-necked Phalaropes** mixed in with them as well. It's a bit tricky to get good pics here as you're not that close to the birds but they are feeding up avidly on their northward migration and really should be left alone.

We also saw flocks of **Yellow-headed Blackbirds** here, **Western Meadowlark**, **Horned Lark**, **Western Kingbird**, **Brewer's Sparrows** etc. Shorebirds were amazing and we racked up **Long-billed Dowitchers**, **Semipalmated Plover**, **Semipalmated**, **Least** and **Western Sandpipers**, **American Avocet**, **Spotted Sandpiper**, **Killdeer**, **Wilson's Snipe** and **Willet**. There was also **Mallard**, **Ruddy Duck**, **Blue-winged Teal**, **Shoveller**, **Mexican Mallard**, and a female scaup that had the right headshape for a **Greater Scaup**.....

We literally had to tear ourselves away from here and hit the road, a long journey of some 400+ miles via Tucson and Phoenix before driving through the desert and eventually arriving at our motel in Flagstaff. After checking in we immediately headed back out onto the open road and on to the Grand Canyon (another 100+ miles away), arriving around 5pm where we found it to be a bit on the chilly side but the views were worth all

the driving. The forecast was for heavy rain tomorrow so this was our best shot at seeing the canyon in all its glory. And what a place huh?



What a great way to end a fantastic tour: the incomparable Grand Canyon

#### **Day 11 FLAGSTAFF – PHOENIX – END OF TOUR**

We had a few hours to check out a woodland site near Flagstaff but couldn't locate any woodpeckers, so after checking out of the motel we drove back to Phoenix where we caught the evening flight back to the UK.



American Avocet at Cochise Lake and Black-headed Grosbeak in Madera Canyon

All photos in this report are copyright Nick Bray/Zoothera Birding





Some more random photos. Top: Painted Whitestart & Yellow-eyed Junco. Middle: Gilded Flicker & Buff-breasted Flycatcher. Bottom: Cactus Wren & Elf Owl.





Some scenery photos. Top: Madera Canyon & Mount Lemmon. Middle: Proctor Road & the road to Portal. Bottom: Sonoran Desert & Tombstone.

## SYSTEMATIC LIST – ARIZONA APRIL 2016

H – Heard Only

### ANSERIFORMES: Anatidae

Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>
Mexican Duck	<i>Anas diazi</i>
Blue-winged Teal	<i>Anas discors</i>
Cinnamon Teal	<i>Anas cyanoptera</i>
Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>
Lesser Scaup	<i>Aythya affinis</i>
Ruddy Duck	<i>Oxyura jamaicensis</i>

### GALLIFORMES: Odontophoridae

Scaled Quail	<i>Callipepla squamata</i>
Gambel's Quail	<i>Callipepla gambelii</i>

### GALLIFORMES: Phasianidae

Wild Turkey	<i>Meleagris gallopavo</i>
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### PODICIPEDIFORMES: Podicipedidae

Pied-billed Grebe	<i>Podilymbus podiceps</i>
Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>

### PELECANIFORMES: Threskiornithidae

White-faced Ibis	<i>Plegadis chihi</i>
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### PELECANIFORMES: Ardeidae

Green Heron	<i>Butorides virescens</i>
Great Blue Heron	<i>Ardea herodias</i>

### SULIFORMES: Phalacrocoracidae

Neotropic Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax brasilianus</i>
Double-crested Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax auritus</i>

### ACCIPITRIFORMES: Cathartidae

Turkey Vulture	<i>Cathartes aura</i>
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### ACCIPITRIFORMES: Pandionidae

Western Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>
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### ACCIPITRIFORMES: Accipitridae

Cooper's Hawk	<i>Accipiter cooperii</i>
Grey Hawk	<i>Buteo plagiatus</i>
Swainson's Hawk	<i>Buteo swainsoni</i>
Zone-tailed Hawk	<i>Buteo albonotatus</i>
Red-tailed Hawk	<i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>

### GRUIFORMES: Rallidae

Sora	<i>Porzana carolina</i>
American Coot	<i>Fulica americana</i>



**CHARADRIIFORMES: Recurvirostridae**

Black-necked Stilt  
American Avocet

*Himantopus mexicanus*  
*Recurvirostra americana*

**CHARADRIIFORMES: Charadriidae**

Semipalmated Plover  
Killdeer

*Charadrius semipalmatus*  
*Charadrius vociferus*

**CHARADRIIFORMES: Scolopacidae**

Wilson's Snipe  
Long-billed Dowitcher  
Willet  
Spotted Sandpiper  
Semipalmated Sandpiper  
Western Sandpiper  
Least Sandpiper  
Wilson's Phalarope  
Red-necked Phalarope

*Gallinago delicata*  
*Limnodromus scolopaceus*  
*Tringa semipalmata*  
*Actitis macularius*  
*Calidris pusilla*  
*Calidris mauri*  
*Calidris minutilla*  
*Phalaropus tricolor*  
*Phalaropus lobatus*

**CHARADRIIFORMES: Laridae**

Bonaparte's Gull  
Ring-billed Gull

*Chroicocephalus philadelphia*  
*Larus delawarensis*

**COLUMBIFORMES: Columbidae**

Rock Dove  
Band-tailed Pigeon  
Eurasian Collared Dove  
Inca Dove  
Common Ground Dove  
Mourning Dove  
White-winged Dove

*Columba livia*  
*Patagioenas fasciata*  
*Streptopelia decaocto*  
*Columbina inca*  
*Columbina passerina*  
*Zenaida macroura*  
*Zenaida asiatica*

**CUCULIFORMES: Cuculidae**

Greater Roadrunner

*Geococcyx californianus*

**STRIGIFORMES: Strigidae**

Flammulated Owl (H)  
Western Screech Owl  
Whiskered Screech Owl  
Great Horned Owl  
Mexican Spotted Owl  
Mountain Pygmy Owl  
Elf Owl

*Psilosops flammeolus*  
*Megascops kennicottii*  
*Megascops trichopsis*  
*Bubo virginianus*  
*Strix occidentalis lucida*  
*Glaucidium gnoma*  
*Micrathene whitneyi*

**CAPRIMULGIFORMES: Caprimulgidae**

Lesser Nighthawk  
Mexican Whip-poor-will (H)

*Chordeiles acutipennis*  
*Antrostomus arizonae*

**APODIFORMES: Apodidae**

White-throated Swift

*Aeronautes saxatalis*

**APODIFORMES: Trochilidae**

Broad-billed Hummingbird  
Violet-crowned Hummingbird  
Blue-throated Mountain-gem  
Rivoli's (Magnificent) Hummingbird  
Black-chinned Hummingbird  
Anna's Hummingbird  
Costa's Hummingbird  
Broad-tailed Hummingbird  
Rufous Hummingbird  
Lucifer Hummingbird (Sheartail)

*Cynanthus latirostris*  
*Amazilia violiceps*  
*Lampornis clemenciae*  
*Eugenes fulgens*  
*Archilochus alexandri*  
*Calypte anna*  
*Calypte costae*  
*Selasphorus platycercus*  
*Selasphorus rufus*  
*Calothorax lucifer*

**TROGONIFORMES: Trogonidae**

Elegant Trogon

*Trogon elegans canescens*

**CORACIIFORMES: Alcedinidae**

Belted Kingfisher

*Megasceryle alcyon*

**PICIFORMES: Picidae**

Acorn Woodpecker  
Gila Woodpecker  
Ladder-backed Woodpecker  
Arizona Woodpecker  
Northern Flicker  
Gilded Flicker

*Melanerpes formicivorus*  
*Melanerpes uropygialis*  
*Picoides scalaris*  
*Picoides arizonae*  
*Colaptes auratus*  
*Colaptes chrysoides*

**FALCONIFORMES: Falconidae**

American Kestrel

*Falco sparverius*

**PASSERIFORMES: Tyrannidae**

Northern Beardless Tyrannulet  
Black Phoebe  
Say's Phoebe  
Greater Pewee  
Western Wood Pewee  
Hammond's Flycatcher  
American Dusky Flycatcher  
American Grey Flycatcher  
Cordilleran Flycatcher  
Buff-breasted Flycatcher  
Vermilion Flycatcher  
Cassin's Kingbird  
Thick-billed Kingbird  
Western Kingbird  
Dusky-capped Flycatcher  
Ash-throated Flycatcher  
Brown-crested Flycatcher

*Camptostoma imberbe*  
*Sayornis nigricans*  
*Sayornis saya*  
*Contopus pertinax*  
*Contopus sordidulus*  
*Empidonax hammondi*  
*Empidonax oberholseri*  
*Empidonax wrightii*  
*Empidonax occidentalis*  
*Empidonax fulvifrons*  
*Pyrocephalus rubinus*  
*Tyrannus vociferans*  
*Tyrannus crassirostris*  
*Tyrannus verticalis*  
*Myiarchus tuberculifer*  
*Myiarchus cinerascens*  
*Myiarchus tyrannulus*

**PASSERIFORMES: Laniidae**

Loggerhead Shrike

*Lanius ludovicianus*

**PASSERIFORMES: Vireonidae**

Bell's Vireo  
Plumbeous Vireo  
Cassin's Vireo  
Hutton's Vireo  
Warbling Vireo

*Vireo bellii*  
*Vireo plumbeus*  
*Vireo cassinii*  
*Vireo huttoni*  
*Vireo gilvus*

**PASSERIFORMES: Corvidae**

Steller's Jay  
Mexican Jay  
Woodhouse's Scrub Jay  
Pinyon Jay  
American Crow  
Northern Raven  
Chihuahuan Raven

*Cyanocitta stelleri*  
*Aphelocoma wollweberi*  
*Aphelocoma woodhouseii*  
*Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus*  
*Corvus brachyrhynchos*  
*Corvus corax*  
*Corvus cryptoleucus*

**PASSERIFORMES: Ptiliogonatidae**

Phainopepla

*Phainopepla nitens*

**PASSERIFORMES: Paridae**

Bridled Titmouse

*Baeolophus wollweberi*

**PASSERIFORMES: Remizidae**

Verdin

*Auriparus flaviceps*

**PASSERIFORMES: Alaudidae**

Horned Lark

*Eremophila alpestris*

**PASSERIFORMES: Hirundinidae**

Sand Martin  
Violet-green Swallow  
Barn Swallow  
American Cliff Swallow

*Riparia riparia*  
*Tachycineta thalassina*  
*Hirundo rustica*  
*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*

**PASSERIFORMES: Aegithalidae**

American Bushtit

*Psaltiriparus minimus*

**PASSERIFORMES: Regulidae**

Ruby-crowned Kinglet

*Regulus calendula*

**PASSERIFORMES: Troglodytidae**

Cactus Wren  
Rock Wren  
Canyon Wren  
Bewick's Wren  
House Wren  
Brown-throated Wren

*Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus*  
*Salpinctes obsoletus*  
*Catherpes mexicanus*  
*Thryomanes bewickii*  
*Troglodytes aedon*  
*Troglodytes brunneicollis*

**PASSERIFORMES: Polioptilidae**

Blue-grey Gnatcatcher  
Black-tailed Gnatcatcher  
Black-capped Gnatcatcher

*Polioptila caerulea*  
*Polioptila melanura*  
*Polioptila nigriceps*



**PASSERIFORMES: Sittidae**

Pygmy Nuthatch  
Red-breasted Nuthatch  
White-breasted Nuthatch

*Sitta pygmaea*  
*Sitta canadensis*  
*Sitta carolinensis*

**PASSERIFORMES: Certhiidae**

Brown Creeper

*Certhia americana*

**PASSERIFORMES: Mimidae**

Northern Mockingbird  
Bendire's Thrasher  
Curve-billed Thrasher  
Crissal Thrasher

*Mimus polyglottos*  
*Toxostoma bendirei*  
*Toxostoma curvirostre*  
*Toxostoma crissale*

**PASSERIFORMES: Sturnidae**

Common Starling

*Sturnus vulgaris*

**PASSERIFORMES: Turdidae**

Western Bluebird  
Hermit Thrush  
American Robin

*Sialia mexicana*  
*Catharus guttatus*  
*Turdus migratorius*

**PASSERIFORMES: Passeridae**

House Sparrow

*Passer domesticus*

**PASSERIFORMES: Peucedramidae**

Olive Warbler

*Peucedramus taeniatus*

**PASSERIFORMES: Fringillidae**

Cassin's Finch  
House Finch  
Red Crossbill  
Lesser Goldfinch  
Pine Siskin

*Haemorhous cassinii*  
*Haemorhous mexicanus*  
*Loxia curvirostra*  
*Spinus psaltria*  
*Spinus pinus*

**PASSERIFORMES: Parulidae**

Lucy's Warbler  
Virginia's Warbler  
MacGillivray's Warbler  
Common Yellowthroat  
Audubon's Warbler  
Grace's Warbler  
Black-throated Grey Warbler  
Townsend's Warbler  
Hermit Warbler  
Rufous-capped Warbler  
Wilson's Warbler  
Red-faced Warbler  
Painted Whitestart

*Leiothlypis luciae*  
*Leiothlypis virginiae*  
*Geothlypis tolmiei*  
*Geothlypis trichas*  
*Setophaga auduboni*  
*Setophaga graciae*  
*Setophaga nigrescens*  
*Setophaga townsendi*  
*Setophaga occidentalis*  
*Basileuterus rufifrons*  
*Cardellina pusilla*  
*Cardellina rubrifrons*  
*Myioborus pictus*

**PASSERIFORMES: Icteridae**

Yellow-headed Blackbird

*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*

Western Meadowlark  
Scott's Oriole  
Bullock's Oriole  
Hooded Oriole  
Red-winged Blackbird  
Bronzed Cowbird  
Brown-headed Cowbird  
Great-tailed Grackle

**PASSERIFORMES: Emberizidae**

Lark Bunting  
Song Sparrow  
Lincoln's Sparrow  
White-crowned Sparrow  
Yellow-eyed Junco  
Chipping Sparrow  
Brewer's Sparrow  
Lark Sparrow  
Black-throated Sparrow  
Rufous-winged Sparrow  
Rufous-crowned Sparrow  
Green-tailed Towhee  
Spotted Towhee  
Canyon Towhee  
Abert's Towhee

**PASSERIFORMES: Cardinalidae**

Hepatic Tanager  
Summer Tanager  
Western Tanager  
Black-headed Grosbeak  
Northern Cardinal  
Pyrrhuloxia  
Lazuli Bunting

*Sturnella neglecta*  
*Icterus parisorum*  
*Icterus bullockii*  
*Icterus cucullatus*  
*Agelaius phoeniceus*  
*Molothrus aeneus*  
*Molothrus ater*  
*Quiscalus mexicanus*

*Calamospiza melanocorys*  
*Melospiza melodia*  
*Melospiza lincolnii*  
*Zonotrichia leucophrys*  
*Junco phaeonotus*  
*Spizella passerina*  
*Spizella breweri*  
*Chondestes grammacus*  
*Amphispiza bilineata*  
*Peucaea carpalis*  
*Aimophila ruficeps*  
*Pipilo chlorurus*  
*Pipilo maculatus*  
*Melospiza fusca*  
*Melospiza aberti*

*Piranga hepatica*  
*Piranga rubra*  
*Piranga ludoviciana*  
*Pheucticus melanocephalus*  
*Cardinalis cardinalis*  
*Cardinalis sinuatus*  
*Passerina amoena*



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