

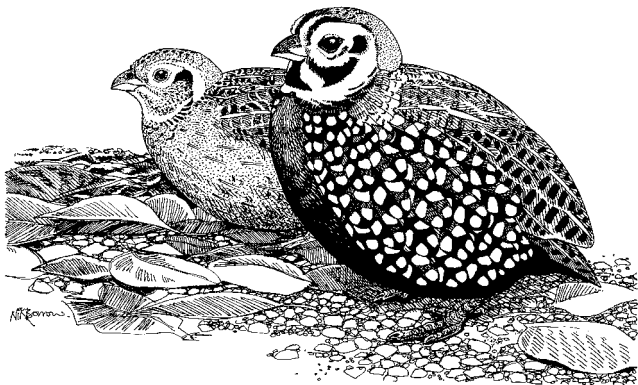
## ARIZONA

**Saturday 11th May – Monday 20th May 2013 (11 days)**  
**Northern Arizona Post-Tour Extension to Thursday 23rd May (3 days)**

**Leader: To be confirmed**

**Group Size Limit: 9**

**Tour Category: Easy for the most part, occasionally Moderate**



*Montezuma Quails (Nik Borrow)*

The southwestern United States ranks amongst the most scenically varied and spectacular regions on earth. Featured for very good reason in hundreds if not thousands of 'westerns', its landscapes epitomize the 'Wild West' and, thanks to the efforts of the National Parks Service and many others, vast unspoilt tracts can still be enjoyed by the outdoors-conscious visitor today.

Arizona is a classic North American bird tour that samples the very best the continent has to offer, made especially pleasurable by the addition of spectacular scenery, excellent roads and comfortable accommodations. This itinerary is the most comprehensive Arizona bird tour available, designed to seek out more of these superb states' specialities than any other. (It should be noted that tours in May are better for owls and nightjars than those later in the year.)

Arizona is a state of stark and contrasting landscapes: a harsh desert spattered with candlestick-shaped cacti is punctuated by oak and pine-clad hills and wild mountains with atmospheric names like

Huachuca and Chiricahua. This was once Apache country, with lonely forts dotting the frontier and renegade bands of Indian warriors under shrewd chiefs like Geronimo causing mayhem and disruption amongst the white soldiers and settlers who had taken their land. In the north of the state is one of the natural wonders of the world, the immense Grand Canyon, a groove carved out of the Earth's surface of truly awesome majesty.

From a birding viewpoint Arizona not only possesses the richest assemblage of desert and mountain species in North America but also boasts a large number of Mexican species that, north of the so-called 'tortilla curtain', can only be found here. Indeed, some of the latter cannot be seen on standard Mexico tours, making a visit to Arizona even more appealing.

We will begin our journey in Tucson, the largest city in southeastern Arizona, where we shall investigate the arid, saguaro-studded landscapes of the Sonoran Desert, home of Gambel's Quail, Greater Roadrunner, Gila Woodpecker, the strange

Pyrrhuloxia and Rufous-winged Sparrow.

From the hot lowlands we head for the hills, first exploring famous Madera Canyon where we should find such specialities as the lovely Elegant Trogon, surely the bird that epitomizes Arizona's tropical influences, Whiskered Screech-Owl, the delightful Elf Owl, Arizona Woodpecker, Mexican Jay, Lucy's Warbler, the beautiful Painted Redstart and Yellow-eyed Junco. Back in the lowlands at California Gulch and at Patagonia, we will look for the rare Five-striped Sparrow in desert shrubbery and Gray Hawk, Western Screech-Owl, Violet-crowned and Broad-billed Hummingbirds, Rose-throated Becard and Thick-billed Kingbird amongst the cottonwoods, but more montane excitements await us in the Huachuca Mountains, notably Blue-throated, Anna's and Broad-tailed Hummingbirds, Grace's, Virginia and Red-faced Warblers, and the saturnine Spotted Owl.

Our travels through southeast Arizona will culminate in some exciting birding in the dramatic Chiricahua Mountains, last stronghold of Cochise, where we should see a wide

spectrum of birds ranging from woodland species like Flammulated Owl, Mexican Chickadee, Juniper Titmouse and Olive Warbler to desert specialists such as Scaled Quail, Crissal and Bendire's Thrashers, and Black-chinned Sparrow. We will finish off the main tour with a visit to the San Pedro River valley and Aravaipa Canyon with their Mississippi Kites and Common Black-Hawks.

During the optional extension we head northwards, The last part of this marvellous journey through wild Arizona will see us exploring the area around Phoenix for Gray Vireo and Le Conte's Thrasher, standing on the spectacular rim of the Grand Canyon as reintroduced California Condors sweep past, and exploring the montane woodlands and canyons around Flagstaff in search of Gray Flycatcher, Clark's Nutcracker and American Dipper.

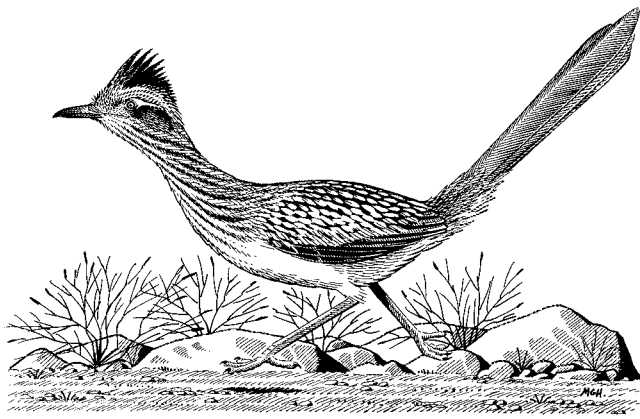
Birdquest has operated tours to Arizona since 1992.

### Itinerary

**Day 1** The tour begins this evening in Tucson, where we will stay overnight.

**Day 2** This morning there





*Greater Roadrunner (Michael Hodgson)*

will be a pre-dawn excursion by road to the summit area of Mount Lemmon, a 9157ft (2791m) peak in the Santa Catalina Mountains that tower above Tucson, in search of Flammulated Owl and, with luck, the delightful Northern Saw-whet Owl. After first light we may encounter Golden-crowned Kinglet and Orange-crowned Warbler in the high altitude coniferous forest and scrubby meadows, species we will not come across elsewhere. After returning to Tucson we will explore a desert area on the outskirts where the restricted-range Rufous-winged Sparrow, one of the prime specialties of southeast Arizona, can be found. Harris's Hawks perch on telephone poles and the tall and evocative saguaro cacti punctuate the area, Gila Woodpeckers trim holes in the saguaro boughs, Cactus Wrens build their spherical nests in the prickly chollas whilst Gambel's Quails forage underneath, Verdins and Pyrrhuloxias hunt for food in the mesquite and Curve-billed Thrashers come right out into the open, unlike their shyer cousins. Other resident birds species include Turkey Vulture, American Kestrel, Mourning, White-winged and Inca Doves, Common Ground-Dove, the rather bizarre Greater Roadrunner, Costa's Hummingbird,

Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Gilded and Northern Flickers, Brown-crested and Ash-throated Flycatchers, Western Kingbird, Black Phoebe, the exquisite Phainopepla, Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, Northern Mockingbird, the smart Black-throated Sparrow, beautiful Scott's and Hooded Orioles, Bronzed and Brown-headed Cowbirds, Great-tailed Grackle, the ubiquitous House Finch and possibly Purple Martin. We can also expect to see Desert Cottontail and Black-tailed Jackrabbit. Later we will travel southwards to Green Valley and the Santa Rita mountains for a two nights stay.

**Day 3** We will spend the whole day exploring the different habitats of lovely Madera Canyon. The Santa Rita Mountains (and several of the other mountainous areas we will visit) possess a distinctly 'Mexican' avifauna, for in this southeastern corner of Arizona are a good number of otherwise Central American species that cannot be found anywhere else in the United States. The open, cactus-studded grasslands and dense areas of scrub at lower altitudes are best visited in the early morning and amongst the prickly pears, skeleton-like ocotillos and mesquite we should find Swainson's Hawk, Say's Phoebe, Lucy's

Warbler, Bell's Vireo, Varied Bunting, Canyon Towhee and Rufous-crowned Sparrow, as well as Botteri's Sparrow (a grassland species that is hard to find before the birds start displaying and breeding during the summer rains). Higher up we first come to open, grassy, pine-oak woodland with scattered smooth-barked sycamores. Rocky outcrops and rivulets further enliven the beautiful scene. Mexican Jay, Bridled Tit and Painted Redstart are the more obvious inhabitants, but pride of place goes to the striking Elegant Trogon, which gives this area a distinctly Neotropical flavour. This will be our first chance to look for this gorgeous but unobtrusive bird, which we could also encounter in the Huachuclas and the Chiricahuas. Along the ridges we will watch for Zone-tailed Hawks amongst the much more common but rather similar Turkey Vultures. The many feeders at the famous Santa Rita Lodge attract good numbers of hummingbirds. Black-chinned, Broad-billed and Magnificent Hummingbirds are usually present, but we will also keep an eye open for rarities. Acorn Woodpeckers (which sometimes behave more like flycatchers as they hawk insects) and White-breasted Nuthatches also raid the feeders. Other species we may well encounter here include Cooper's and Red-tailed Hawks, Band-tailed Pigeon, White-throated Swift, the localized and uncommon Arizona Woodpecker, Cassin's Kingbird, Sulphur-bellied and Dusky-capped Flycatchers, Common Raven, Northern Rough-winged and Cliff Swallows, Bushtit, Bewick's Wren, American Robin, Warbling, Plumbeous and Hutton's Vireos, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Black-headed Grosbeak, Spotted Towhee and Northern Hepatic-Tanager. Still higher up the canyon, mature pine forest dominates and here Yellow-eyed Junco deserves our special attention. Mammals

are not conspicuous but include Coyote, Mule Deer and Rock and Arizona Gray Squirrels. At dusk we will make a special effort to find some of southeast Arizona's most exciting nightbirds. The diminutive Elf Owl (one of the smallest owls in the world!) and the Whiskered Screech Owl both live here, as do Whip-poor-will (the local form of which is sometimes split as Mexican Whip-poor-will) and Common Poorwill. In particular, we should enjoy fantastic views of Elf Owls at their nest hole in a power pylon!

**Day 4** We will set off very early this morning in order to visit famous California Gulch, situated on the border with Mexico to the west of Nogales, before the heat of the day. It is a long and, towards the end, bumpy journey to this remote location, but often worth it as this is the home of a rare and little-known bird. The canyon has dense shrubbery on its slopes and is currently a fairly reliable place to find the intriguing Five-striped Sparrow, a species which barely extends into Arizona from Mexico (where it is only rarely encountered). Later we will head for Nogales and then, after stopping to look for Black-bellied Whistling-Duck and, with luck, Tropical Kingbird at Kino Springs, we will continue to the small town of Patagonia for a two nights stay. We may arrive in time for some initial exploration along Sonoita Creek.

**Day 5** The Patagonia-Sonoita Creek Sanctuary preserves an extensive tract of willow and cottonwood grove situated along an almost permanent stream (a rarity in these parts). Some magnificent riparian woodland and dense mesquite thickets lie in an open valley bordered by low rock-faces and scrubland where we shall explore both the sanctuary itself and the famous Patagonia 'roadside rest area'. Gray Hawks can

often be seen soaring over the creek, as this is one of their favourite breeding grounds in the United States, and the arresting Rose-throated Becard is another speciality (although sometimes hard to find), as are the striking Violet-crowned Hummingbird, Thick-billed Kingbird and Northern Beardless Tyrannulet. We can also expect to see Great Blue Heron, Black Vulture, Lesser Nighthawk, the dazzling Vermilion Flycatcher, Barn Swallow, Rock Wren, Loggerhead Shrike, Wilson's and Yellow Warblers, Common Yellowthroat, the retiring Yellow-breasted Chat (with its almost nightingale-like song), the glowing Summer Tanager, Song and White-crowned Sparrows, Blue Grosbeak, the beautiful Lazuli Bunting, Red-winged Blackbird, the smart Bullock's Oriole and Lesser Goldfinch. At dusk we should encounter a Western Screech-Owl and perhaps a Great Horned Owl. During our stay at Patagonia we shall also visit the Patons' home with its many bird feeders. These unusually hospitable folk have invited thousands of visiting birders into their 'yard' over the years and here one can enjoy truly gripping views of the local birdlife, ranging from close up encounters with numerous hummingbirds to squabbling orioles and buntings.

**Day 6** This morning we will head towards Sierra Vista, where we will stay overnight. The grasslands around the town are home to the hard-to-identify Chihuahuan Raven. After arranging our permit for tomorrow's visit to the Fort Huachuca military reservation, we will visit famous Miller Canyon and Ramsey Canyon in the Huachuca Mountains. The latter is the property of the Nature Conservancy and the two canyons are together one of the best spots in the United States to study hummingbirds. There are lots of feeders and Black-chinned, Broad-tailed, Broad-billed, Blue-throated, Magnificent

and Anna's Hummingbirds are usually about. With a lot of luck one of the rarer visitors from Mexico, such as White-eared Hummingbird, will be observed. In the late afternoon we will visit Carr Canyon where we may find a Mountain Pygmy-Owl (split from Northern).

**Day 7** Today we will return to the shady canyons and grassy pine-oak woodlands of the wild Huachuca Mountains. A large part of this chain is a military area, but luckily several of the scenically and ornithologically more rewarding areas are readily accessible to visitors. Amongst the towering pines we hope to observe that easiest of *Empidonax* flycatchers to identify, the gaudy Buff-breasted Flycatcher. It lives in small colonies and is another one of those 'Mexican' birds with a toehold in Arizona. Elegant Trogons bark away and with persistence we should be able to locate a remarkably confiding pair of Spotted Owls roosting in a shady part of a narrow canyon (this owl is one of North America's most endangered birds and is only found in areas lacking Great Horned Owls). Warblers are well represented and we should see Grace's, Virginia's and Red-faced Warblers, and also the Audubon's form of the Yellow-rumped Warbler. Other likely birds here include Western Wood-Pewee, Greater Pewee, Steller's Jay, Violet-green Swallow and Canyon Wren (a bird with a most beautiful piping song). In the late afternoon we will drive to Portal for a three nights stay.

**Days 8-9** Portal, a tiny hamlet at the foot of the imposing Chiricahua Mountains, is the gateway to this scenically exceptional area where, little over a century ago, an Apache tribe led by the famous Cochise lived. The tops of the mountains are clothed mainly in Ponderosa pine forest interspersed with lovely open meadows

invaded by blue irises. Birds we will look for here include Hairy Woodpecker, Mexican Chickadee, Pygmy and Red-breasted Nuthatches, Brown Creeper, the interesting local subspecies of the House Wren (sometimes split as Brown-throated Wren), Eastern Bluebird, Hermit Thrush, the peculiar Olive Warbler (currently thought to represent a monotypic family, rather than just another American wood-warbler), Western Tanager and Chipping Sparrow. Lower down we return to the now familiar pine-oak woodland and chaparral where we will search for any species we may have missed previously, as well as Juniper Titmouse and Black-chinned Sparrow. The shy, harlequin-like Montezuma Quail lives in areas where grassland with scattered oaks prevails. We will make a special effort to find this intriguing bird, but it is mostly a question of luck. The Portal area has a series of homes with hummingbird feeders, some of which are open to visiting birders, so we will yet again enjoy the 'hummerfest' courtesy of some very hospitable locals. We can always dream about finding a rarity such as Lucifer Hummingbird while enjoying the regulars squabbling at the bar. The feeders invariably attract other species and Northern Cardinals and both Scott's and Hooded Orioles really have a field day here. The shrubby plains close to the New Mexico border seem rather featureless and desolate at first, but in the early morning we have a good chance to locate the highly secretive Bendire's Thrasher, as well as Scaled Quail, Horned Lark, the skulking Crissal Thrasher, Cassin's Sparrow and Eastern Meadowlark. If we failed to see it well on Mount Lemmon, we will look here for the unobtrusive little Flammulated Owl, which we should be able to track down with a bit of persistence.

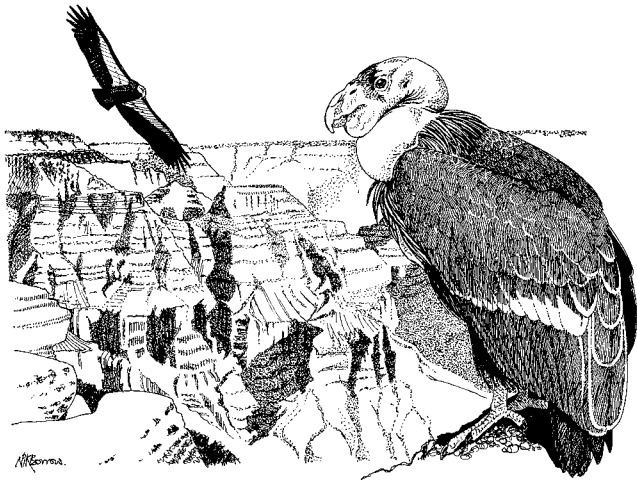
**Day 10** We will stop briefly

at a large lagoon where Mallards of the aberrant and drab Mexican race dabble and where we could well turn up some other waterbirds, perhaps including Cinnamon Teal, Ruddy Duck, American Coot, the very vocal Killdeer and Spotted Sandpiper. Afterwards we will explore the San Pedro River and Aravaipa Canyon. The combination of riverside forest, agricultural fields and nearby desert scrub provides an ideal habitat for some interesting raptors. The dainty Mississippi Kite is regularly found here, well west of its normal breeding range, and another sought-after species, confined to this riparian habitat, is Common Black-Hawk (the term 'common' belies its real status, as it is a rare and declining species in the United States). Afterwards we will head for Tucson airport, where the tour ends in the early afternoon.

#### **Northern Arizona Post-Tour Extension Itinerary**

**Day 10** We will continue to Phoenix for an overnight stay, stopping in a good area for Burrowing Owls en route..

**Day 11** Early this morning we will explore some scrub-covered slopes amidst attractive mountain scenery near Phoenix where we have an excellent chance of finding the uncommon, localized and declining Gray Vireo, one of the American Southwest's most sought-after birds. We should also encounter Blue-gray Gnatcatcher. From here we will head northwards, past the state capital of Flagstaff and the dramatic San Francisco Peaks that rise as an isolated massif from the desert plains, to the South Rim of the world-famous Grand Canyon. Nearly 280 miles (450 kilometres) in length, over 10 miles (16 kilometres) wide and 5,600ft (1700m) deep, the Grand Canyon is one of the best known natural features on earth, and surely one of the most awesome World Heritage Sites on our planet.



*California Condors (Nik Borrow)*

It is not just the sheer size of the canyon that makes it so impressive, but the dramatic, sculpted scenery of the canyon walls and pinnacles and the varied colours of the many different strata exposed over many millions of years – red, ochre, buff, gray and purple. In recent years California Condors have been reintroduced at the Grand Canyon, where they once occurred naturally, and the programme has been more

successful than in California itself (where the much higher intensity of human development places constant pressures on the condors). Here these magnificent birds are doing relatively well and we could have marvellous views of them flying along the canyon rim at eye-level or sailing past below us before banking and alighting on their favourite roosting rocks directly below a busy souvenir shop! We can expect some

stunning views of these huge creatures, and with a bit of luck we will even see one of the wild-born youngsters. The plateau country at the South Rim is covered in a mixture of ponderosa pine, pinyon pine and junipers, giving way to more stunted pinyon pines and junipers on the canyon sides. As well as the fantastic condors, we should also encounter such species as Pinyon Jay, Mountain Chickadee and Western Bluebird. After watching the sun going down over the canyon, and the lengthening shadows making the scenery even more of a photographer's dream, we will backtrack to Flagstaff for an overnight stay.

**Day 12** This morning we will drive high onto the San Francisco Peaks above Flagstaff to an area where we should find the smart Clark's Nutcracker, American Crow and Pine Siskin. Subsequently we will check areas of aspens for Red-naped Sapsucker and, if we are in luck, Williamson's Sapsucker, and then explore some dry scrubland in search of Gray Flycatcher. Later we will make our way back to the Phoenix area for an overnight stay, stopping along the way to look for American Dipper.

**Day 13** Early this morning we will explore an area of low desert shrubland west of Phoenix where the localized Le Conte's Thrasher can be found. The birds like to run and hide between the shrubs, only rarely flying up and perching on a taller bush, so obtaining a good view can sometimes take a while. Later we will head for Phoenix airport where the extension ends in the late morning.

**Accommodation & Road Transport:** The motels are of normal Birdquest standard throughout. Road transport is by minibus/passenger van.

**Walking:** The walking effort is mostly easy, with a few moderate walks (and possibly one optional harder walk in search of Spotted Owl if the birds are roosting unusually far up the canyon).

**Climate:** Predominantly warm or hot, dry and sunny. Overcast conditions are likely at times, but rain is rather unlikely (although the occasional shower cannot be ruled out).

**Bird Photography:** Opportunities are good.