



## Nature & Terroir Scrl

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## The Wildlife of Arizona's Sky Islands

Prix - **5333.00€**    Dates - 31/07 au 14/08/21    Guide - *Jane Dixon & Adam Dudley*

The 'Sky Islands' of southern Arizona are isolated mountains set in a 'sea' of desert. The Sky Island region is the most biodiverse in the whole of North America, wedged between four zones: the Rockies, the Sierra Madre range, the Sonoran Desert and the Chihuahuan Desert. In August, a 'second spring' brings a burst of flowering and an equal burst of hummingbird diversity, and many reptiles and mammals benefit too. We will visit the famous Madera Canyon, Huachuca Mountains and Mount Lemmon, enjoying the diverse birds, butterflies and wider natural history, which may include rare specialties such as Elegant Trogon, Violet-crowned Hummingbird, Buff-breasted Flycatcher, Cliff Chipmunk and White-nosed Coati.

South-eastern Arizona's 'Sky Islands' are among the most biodiverse areas in the world and the meeting point of four major North American ecosystems: the Rocky Mountains to the north, the Sierra Madre Mountains to the south, the Sonoran Desert to the south-west and the Chihuahuan Desert to the south-east. These isolated mountain massifs, and the encircling deserts in which they are marooned, offer a wonderful blend of lowland and montane climates and habitats, harbouring a biodiversity unrivalled anywhere else in the United States.

During the late summer rainy season the region's birds, reptiles and mammals benefit from a 'second spring' and a much-needed increase in food availability. Mammals, including Collared Peccary, White-nosed Coati, Cliff Chipmunk and Pronghorn, all take advantage of this season, as do reptiles such as Western Diamondback Rattlesnake and Gila Monster. Since the rains also trigger a second flowering, this is the time to enjoy the greatest diversity of iridescent hummingbirds and colourful butterflies. In total, over 450 bird species (including a variety of Mexican vagrants), 3,000 species of plants, approximately 300 butterfly species and more than 100 species of mammals have been recorded in the Sky Island area.

Arriving in Phoenix, Arizona, we head southeast towards Tucson and the Sky Islands. We begin with a 2-night stay at the beautiful Tanque Verde Ranch, nestled within Saguaro National Park, where the surrounding rocky desert hills are covered in huge Saguaro Cacti. From here we explore the high peak of Mount Lemmon, the highest point in the Santa Catalina Mountains. As we climb in altitude the temperature gradually drops and precipitation increases, creating a gradation of different habitats from the desert scrub of the lowlands to oak woodland and then Ponderosa Pine, fir and spruce forests higher up. Driving up from the Sonoran Desert into the cool Rocky Mountain forests is like travelling from Mexico to Canada in a single morning! Along the way we will look for a variety of different mammals including Harris' Antelope Squirrel, Mule Deer and Cliff Chipmunk, and such birds as Greater Peewee, Yellow-eyed Junco and Zone-tailed Hawk.

Next, we head further south, spending two nights in the Madera Canyon. Here we make a special search for the beautiful Elegant Trogon, and will include a stop at the Santa Rita Lodge, famous for its sugar-water, suet and seed feeders. A

kaleidoscope of hummingbirds is usually seen here, along with Mexican Jays and Acorn Woodpeckers, and, as dusk falls, White-nosed Coati, Ringtail and Northern Raccoon are also attracted to the feeders.

After a night spent close to the Mexican border, allowing us to explore the deserts around Patagonia, we will spend the next four nights in the Huachuca Mountains at a nationally acclaimed 'birding inn', the Casa de San Pedro. Here we will explore the nearby canyons in search of Mexican Spotted Owl, Pyrrhuloxia, Rufous-capped and Grace's Warblers and twelve species of hummingbird! Close-up encounters with such butterflies as the mint-green Arizona Hairstreak and Zela Metalmark are common, whilst Two-tailed Swallowtails and Arizona Sisters dazzle us overhead. Multiple squirrel and rabbit species are possible, and up to three species of skunk are frequently encountered. Rarer sightings include Bobcat, American Black Bear and Mountain Lion.

During our stay in the Huachuca Mountains we will also visit the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area, the best example of the desert riparian ecosystem in the United States. With its 80 recorded species of mammals and 40 reptiles and amphibians, the San Pedro Riparian NCA is one of the most diverse reserves for vertebrates in the whole of the continental United States. Over 180 species of butterfly have also been recorded in this reserve and it was the first 'Important Bird Area' listed in the United States, acting as a migratory corridor for an estimated four million birds each year!

The Chiricahua Mountains — the largest of the Sky Island ranges — will be our final stop on this tour, and we will spend two nights there at the wildlife-focused Cave Creek Ranch. This mountain range is home to six different plant communities, including high-elevation Mexican pine-oak woodlands, the only place in the United States where this habitat exists. Each of these six communities support a unique subset of wildlife, marking, for some, the northernmost limits of their range. We will spend these last two days exploring the many trails here in search of Mexican Chickadee, Montezuma Quail and Lucifer Hummingbird, and relaxing whilst we enjoy the busy hummingbird feeders and bird tables. Finally, we must start our journey back north to Phoenix, stopping for a night in Oracle en route, and from there fly home.

### Highlights

- Incredible biodiversity in a small area, with 450 bird species, 300 butterflies and 100 mammals recorded!
- Great wildlife watching from harsh deserts to high mountains
- Stay in the glorious Saguaro National Park, with famous eponymous cacti
- Look for Elegant Trogon in Madera Canyon
- Four nights at Casa de San Pedro Inn in the Huachuca Mountains, with hummingbird feeders and butterfly garden
- Look for specialities such as Mexican Spotted Owl, Mexican Jay and Montezuma Quail
- Great for butterflies such as Arizona Sister, Zela Metalmark and Great Purple Hairstreak
- Excellent range of mammals possible

## Responsible destination

### Colette

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## Dates & Prix

5333.00€

Sat 31st Jul - Sat 14th Aug 2021- 5333€

### What's Included?

- Flights from London

- Accommodation: We stay in comfortable accommodation throughout, including the beautiful Tanque Verde Ranch in Saguaro National Park and the nationally acclaimed birding inn, Casa de San Pedro Inn, in the Huachuca Mountains. All rooms have en-suite facilities. Single occupancy is available at a supplement, though many rooms do have two queen sized beds, making sharing a room a comfortable experience! The inns are well set up for birders and natural history enthusiasts, with easy trails, feeders and sometimes butterfly gardens too. Some of the inns also have swimming pools.

- Food: We will enjoy breakfast at our accommodation each morning, and eat dinner either here or a nearby restaurant in the evening. All breakfasts are included in the tour cost. Lunches and dinners are excluded. Allow approximately \$50 per day.

\* These tours are operated by Naturetrek (ABTA Y6206) for which Nature et Terroir acts as agent.

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## Journalier

### Itinerary

Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

#### Day 1 Fly Phoenix

We depart London Heathrow on a direct British Airways flight to Phoenix, Arizona. On arrival in Phoenix we will transfer a short distance to a convenient hotel for the night. There is a restaurant for dinner and breakfast.

#### Day 2 Phoenix to Tucson (Saguaro National Park)

We'll spend our first day getting acquainted with the common wildlife and habitats of this desert state. We begin our trip in Phoenix, Arizona's capital, where we will visit Gilbert Water Ranch, a local nature reserve that is home to Desert Cottontail, Arizona Rock Squirrel, Round-tailed Ground Squirrel, and butterflies including Ceraunus Blue, American Snout, Empress Leilia and Fiery Skipper. We will also enjoy getting to know some of the birds of this desert area, including Gambel's Quail, Inca and White-winged Doves, Phainopepla, Cactus Wren, Greatailled Grackle, Verdin, Curve-Billed Thrasher, and our first hummingbirds are all possible! Next, we will drive south with lunch along the way, and making a stop at the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum in Tucson which provides an excellent introduction to the wildlife of this unique habitat. We aim to arrive at the beautiful Tanque Verde Ranch, nestled in the Saguaro National Park near Tucson, in the late afternoon. This wonderful ranch, our base for the next two nights, boasts an indoor and outdoor swimming pool as well as a nature center and evening campfires.

#### Day 3 Tucson and Mount Lemmon

We spend today exploring the highest peak in the Santa Catalina Mountains, Mount Lemmon. Our drive from the Sonoran Desert at the base, to cool, shady Rocky Mountain forest near the top at 9,157 feet, is like traveling from Mexico to Canada! We will look for Steller's and Mexican Jays, Pygmy Nuthatch, Yellow-eyed Junco, Greater Pewee, Grace's, Red-faced and Olive warblers, Painted Redstart and Hepatic Tanager. We will also check the feeders at various points along the road to look for up to 5 species of hummingbird. Mammals are well represented on this mountain, and we will be on the lookout for Arizona Grey, Rock and Abert's Squirrels, Cliff Chipmunk, plus Arizona White-tailed and Mule Deer. Butterflies too are plentiful, with each elevation hosting a variety of different species including Texan Crescent, Empress Leilia, Arizona Powdered-Skipper and Violetclouded Skipper. We will have lunch on the mountain, and dinner back at the lodge.

#### Day 4 – 5 Santa Rita Mountains

After our final night in Tucson we continue further south to the Santa Rita Mountains and our base for the next two nights, Madera Canyon. This Sky Island traverses 4 life zones and many habitats between the desert floor and the mountaintops. The zones are home to an array of unique and abundant flora, from Prickly-Pear cactus in the lower Canyon to Douglas Fir and Quaking Aspen on Mount Wrightson, and hence a diverse associated fauna.

We will spend the next two days exploring these habitats, hiking the trails and driving along some of the roads looking for the special wildlife that makes this area their home. In particular, we will search for Elegant Trogon; with its brilliant metallic colours and odd croaking call, this is likely to be one of the highlights of our visit to the Santa Ritas. We will also seek out hummingbirds: five species are common (Broadbilled, Rivoli's, Black-chinned, Anna's and Broad-tailed) and there is a chance of an overshooting Mexican vagrant. Over 50 species of butterflies, including the Arizona Sister, have been recorded in a day in Madera Canyon. Mammals also find the feeders appealing: as dusk falls, we will look for Whitenosed Coati, Ringtail, and Northern Raccoon. Night birds (Whiskered-Screech and Great-horned Owls and Mexican Whip-poor Will) and mammals such as Arizona White-tailed and Mule Deer, Gray Fox, Collared Peccary (known locally as Javelina) and Coyote can be seen. American Black Bear, Bobcat, and Mountain Lion, although very rare, have been seen in this area.

Our accommodation for the next 2 nights is a comfortable Bed and Breakfast, Amado Territory Inn, surrounded by open vistas of multiple mountain ranges and cattle land. Lunch will be at a local bistro and dinner will be at an American-style restaurant next door to our accommodation.

#### Day 6

## Patagonia

Today we journey further south, to within a few miles of the Mexican border. Our destination, Patagonia, lies within a transition zone between the Sonoran and Chihuahuan Deserts. On the way we will visit several excellent wildlife viewing areas, including the world-famous Patagonia Lake State Park and Paton Center for Hummingbirds, a unique opportunity to relax while looking for up to 10 species of Hummingbirds at close quarters as they visit the huge variety of feeders. We will look for the Violet-crowned Hummingbird: this is the only place in the USA in which this distinctive species can be regularly found. Mammals in this area include White-nosed Coati and a variety of squirrels. Butterflies include Tiny Checkerspot, Tropical Least Skipper, Arizona Metalmark, Golden-headed Scallopwing, Arizona Viceroy and Queen. Marine Blues may be abundant, and Arizona's 3 species of Emperors are often seen in hackberry trees. Our base for tonight is the Hacienda Corona de Guevavi Bed and Breakfast, near Nogales, which is located within the 36 acres of the historic Guevavi Ranch, along the banks of the Santa Cruz River. On a clear night, this spot is fantastic for stargazing, and the cool desert location and large swimming pool were popular with Hollywood luminaries including John Wayne! We will have lunch in Patagonia at a Mexican café, and dinner at our accommodation.

## Day 7 – 10 Huachuca Mountains

After breakfast today, we head east towards the Huachuca Mountains, via one of the most significant grasslands left in southeastern Arizona, Las Cienegas National Conservation Area. This landscape of desert grasslands and rolling oak-studded hills connects the Sky Island mountain ranges. Cienega Creek, with its perennial flow and lush riparian corridor, is a rare resource in a state where most desert washes and stream beds remain bone-dry for much of the year. Over 60 species of mammal have been recorded here: mammals include Mule and Arizona White-tailed Deer, Collared Peccary, Black-tailed Prairie Dog and Pronghorn – the fastest antelope in the world. Birds include Zone-tailed, Swainson's and Gray Hawks, Vermilion Flycatcher, Chihuahuan Raven, Northern Beardless Tyrannulet, Lesser and Common Nighthawks and possibly up to 13 species of sparrow.

After lunch at a local café, we will drive to our base in the Huachuca Mountains, and aim to arrive by mid-afternoon at the nationally-acclaimed birding inn, Casa de San Pedro Inn, for a 4-night stay. This charming Bed and Breakfast has a pool, butterfly garden and hummingbird feeders located on 10 acres adjacent to the San Pedro River.

This small Sky Island mountain range is one of the most famous of all locations in south eastern Arizona, and our days here will be spent walking trails in the many canyons of the Huachuca Mountains, driving the roads and relaxing while watching feeders. Unique species of birds that can be seen here include: Mexican Spotted Owl, Pyrrhuloxia, Grace's Warbler, Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay, up to 10 species of flycatcher including Sulphur-Bellied and Buff-breasted Flycatcher, Greater Roadrunner, and up to 8 species of hummingbird. Seasonal and annual changes in hummingbird activity will influence the choice of feeders we visit, as will latest sightings. Multiple squirrel and rabbit species are possible, and up to three species of skunk could be encountered. Rarer sightings include Bobcat, American Black Bear, and Mountain Lion. Close-up looks at mintgreen Arizona Hairstreak, Juniper Hairstreak and Zela Metalmark are common, and Two-tailed Swallowtail and Arizona Sister will dazzle us as they sail overhead. Pacuvius Duskywing may fly with a white-fringed population of Juvenal's Duskywing and the local Scudder's Duskywing. We will visit local restaurants and cafes for lunches, and dinners will be either at the Inn or a local restaurant.

During our stay in the Huachuca Mountains we will also visit the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area (NCA), the best example of desert riparian ecosystem in the United States. With its 80 recorded species of mammals and 40 reptiles and amphibians, the San Pedro NCA is at the top of the list for diversity in vertebrate species in the continental United States, and second in the world for the highest diversity of land mammals. And not to be outdone, over 180 species of butterfly have been recorded in this reserve. It is also the first Globally Important Bird Area in the United States, creating a migratory corridor for an estimated 4 million migrating birds each year. We will spend our time here walking trails along the river and exploring the various habitats in the reserve. Common mammals include White-nosed Coati, Collared Peccary, deer and squirrel species, but we could see almost any of the mammals of the region at this special reserve; even Jaguar and Ocelot have been seen. Common bird species of conservation concern that occur here include Lucy's Warbler, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Botteri's and Cassin's Sparrow, Gilded Flicker, Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet, Tropical Kingbird, Crissal Thrasher, Bell's Vireo, Mississippi Kite and Varied Bunting. We may also encounter up to 10 species of hummingbird during our visit.

During our explorations of the area, we will also visit historical Tombstone, the most authentic Western town left in the United States. We'll step back in time and walk the streets that were home of the famous gunfight at the O.K. Corral, whiskey and Faro games, Wyatt Earp, and Doc Holliday.

## Day 11 – 12 Chiricahua Mountains

Our destination today is the largest of the Sky Island mountain ranges, the Chiricahua Mountains, where we will be based for the next two nights. This mountain range supports six basic plant communities, including the only place in the United States to find high-elevation Mexican pine-oak woodlands. The six areas support a unique subset of wildlife, and mark the northern limits for several species of Mexican birds and butterflies. We will spend our two days exploring the multiple trails, feeders and roads in this remote corner of Arizona and New Mexico. We will look for Elegant Trogon (this is the only other site in the United States where they occur) as well as other speciality birds such as Mexican Chickadee, Painted Redstart, Buff-breasted Flycatcher, Red-faced Warbler and Bullock's Oriole. Hooded, Striped and Spotted Skunks join White-nosed Coati and Ringtail as mammalian visitors to feeders in several locations, and other mammal species include Squirrels (including the range-limited Mexican Fox Squirrel, Spotted Ground-Squirrel and Harris's Antelope Squirrel), Collared Peccary, Grey Fox, and Bobcat. Over 140 species of butterfly have been recorded in the area, including Mormon Metalmark, Elada Checkerspot, Tropical and Common Buckeyes and Great Purple Hairstreak. We will also have the option of doing night drives to search for Elf Owl, Whiskered and Western Screech-Owls, and Great Horned Owl. Mexican Spotted Owl is also seen on occasion. We may also find Poorwill and Mexican Whip-poor-will. Our two nights in the Chiricahua Mountains will be spent at the wildlife-centric Cave Creek Ranch, near Portal. We will visit local restaurants and cafes for lunches, and dinners will be at a local restaurant too.

## Day 13

## Steins Ghost Town, Willcox and Oracle

On our last full day in Arizona we will descend the Chiricahua Mountains and continue towards Tucson. We will stop at Steins Ghost Town and the ponds in Willcox, where we may find a variety of migrant shorebirds including Baird's Sandpiper and Wilson's Phalarope. A local monastery with a nature trail could produce breeding Mississippi Kites. Our final night in Arizona will be spent back in pristine Sonoran Desert at the Fairfield Inn and Suites near Oracle.

### Day 14

#### Catalina State Park, then Fly London

After a relaxing night and breakfast at our accommodation, we will spend our last morning in Arizona either relaxing around the pool in the hotel or exploring the scenic Catalina State Park as part of an optional morning stroll. This park in the high desert slopes of the Santa Catalina Mountains is one of the premier high-desert birding sites around Tucson. It combines dense thickets along washes with beautiful, saguaro-studded vistas. We will walk paths through mesquites looking for birds like Ladder-backed Woodpeckers and Crissal Thrashers, but just about the entire variety of desert birds is found along the trails in this fantastic park! Whatever our morning activity, after freshening up and lunch at the hotel, we will drive north to Phoenix International airport in time to check in for our flight home.

### Day 15

#### Arrive London

We are due to arrive back in London in the early afternoon.



## Quelques photos...



### Envie d'en voir plus ?

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## Formalités

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## Responsable destination

### Colette

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